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CHRISTA WOLF:

THE MAKING OF AN INTELLECTUAL WOMAN

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German

by

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ABSTRACT

Christa Wolf, a GDR intellectual, was discredited as a writer after German Unification. In 1990, she was at the center of a controversy that started around her publication of a novel titled *Was bleibt* (What remains). The controversy expanded to consider more generally the role of the *Stasi* (secret police) in GDR culture and affected in particular the generation of GDR writers born around 1930, who were not dissidents, and had not left the country in the 40 years of its existence. Prior to the demise of the GDR, Wolf's stories, novels and essays, as well as her political interventions during 1989, were highly considered for their moral and political standing and she was regarded, especially by feminist and progressive intellectuals, as one of the few women intellectuals of the 20th century, among the likes of Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt.

As a response to the controversy around Christa Wolf, my dissertation attempts to understand Wolf less as an isolated "writer" than as an "effect" of political and cultural discourse about the GDR in the Federal Republic of Germany prior to unification and in united Germany after 1989. However, my investigations also take into consideration Wolf's own opinions about her role as intellectual active in the GDR, as well as her explicit pacifist and feminist positions, which she enunciated in both essays and her literature. Thus, I play the writer's own 'self-reflective' texts over and against the texts that made Wolf first into the banner of an alternative socialism and second, after the *Wende*, into the target of conservative accusations. Her literature was suddenly regarded as bad, moralistic, writing. In short, I try to answer the question: how is it possible that one writer's literature is praised universally as "critical" one moment, and denigrated as banal and simply moralistic the next?

David Bathrick's *The Powers of Speech* deals with similar issues from a Foucaultian perspective. In particular, Bathrick engages language and discourse in the GDR. He focuses on the notion of a literary public sphere in the GDR, the meaning of socialist public intellectuals, and the distinctions between dissidence and the GDR intellectuals' opposition to a stultified party system. Bathrick's study helped me elaborate the main framework of my dissertation.

Two questions specifically guide my approach to Wolf: i.) How could Wolf's texts operate within and without the GDR as critical while at the same time be socialist - and thus have the approval of the state? ii.) How and to what extent could Wolf's dissidence be constructed in non-socialist countries and, also, to a limited extent, within the GDR State? Accordingly, my dissertation has two parts. Part One deals with Wolf's own understanding of the function of literature and its relation to socialism. As a case in point I analyze her 1968 novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Part Two studies literary critical responses to Wolf's work more extensively, including more recent texts, in different time periods and different places. In particular I look at the GDR, the FRG, the USA and post 1989 Germany. Here, I look specifically at the role and function of feminism in both Wolf's texts and the reception of Wolf. My dissertation, unlike Bathrick's work, focuses

on the specificity of the case of a woman intellectual, both a socialist and a feminist. Ultimately, the dissertation makes a point that this is the difference that constitutes the case “Wolf.”

The dissertation argues that Wolf understood literature as a means to uncover “the blind spot” of the subject first and of culture second. This act of “uncovering” is the first step on the way to find healing for past traumas (fascism, for example) and, hence, to make changes (improve real existing socialism). In Wolf’s notion of “the blind spot”, priority is given to the repression and exclusion of values associated with the feminine “space,” a space left out of dominant culture or the history of the victors. This could be seen as Wolf’s feminist critique of universal (bourgeois) values, including the notions of the theoretical intellectual proposed by Julien Benda and Pierre Bourdieu. Moreover, Wolf’s focus on a feminine space of culture from which to critique instrumental reason, the blind spot of Western civilization, and from which to imagine an alternative mythology, also helps expose the insufficiency of Bathrick’s mode of analysis. For example, I argue that no matter how exhaustive his analysis of the socialist public intellectual in the GDR is, his work (like Foucault’s) does not do justice to Wolf’s case due to its lack of a gender perspective.

In Wolf’s case, a feminist/gendered approach does enrich our understanding of the concept of the intellectual. In effect, her critical involvement with society was always the product of socialism with a feminist accent. However, it seems that in the reception of her texts, feminism and socialism have been dissociated. Wolf’s commitment to socialism - an important aspect in Wolf’s political engagement as an intellectual - was largely ignored by feminist critics in the FRG and the US. Wolf is very often put into a Western theoretical discourse about feminism and her works are read only as embodiment of the wide-ranging power of certain Western feminist theories. The tension existing between Wolf’s own understanding of feminism and the feminist literary responses to her texts seems to suggest that in defining Wolf’s oeuvre from a feminist perspective, not only is gendered difference given priority over other modes of difference, but socialism has been totally ignored. Wolf’s reluctance to call herself a feminist might be understood as her resistance to distinguish between feminism and socialism, or rather, her critique of Western liberal feminism. My dissertation, by considering Wolf’s own intellectual positions, alongside the discourse that constructed her as either a feminist writer/intellectual or a dissident writer, corrects this blind spot in the reception of Wolf.

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Chapter 1

Gendering the intellectual, or does being a woman intellectual make any difference?

Christa Wolf, a GDR intellectual, best known for her writing and for her political engagement, was discredited after German unification. Prior to the demise of the GDR, Wolf's stories, novels and essays, as well as her political interventions during 1989, were highly considered for their moral and political standing and she was regarded, especially by feminist and progressive intellectuals, as one of the few women intellectuals of the 20th century, among the likes of Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt. However, in 1990, a controversy in regard to the role played by the prominent GDR intellectuals including Wolf in the collapse of the regime started around the publication of her novel *Was bleibt (What remains)*. This controversy later expanded to the role of the *Stasi* (secret police) in the GDR and affected in particular the generation of GDR writers born around 1930, who were not dissidents, and had not left the country in the 40 years of its existence. Under the severe attack coming mainly from journalists, Wolf's reputation not only as a moral and political spokesperson but also as a writer was called into question. Especially her literature, praised before the *Wende* as "critical", was suddenly regarded as bad, moralistic, writing.

Alongside Wolf's loss of reputation, as a person and an author, her reception among feminists, especially feminist literary critics in the United States, was extremely favorable. Beginning at the end of the seventies, the appeal of Wolf to feminists continues after the German unification. It seems that Wolf as a public intellectual has lost her significance in her own country after the *Wende*. Or in other words, after

unification Wolf has been marginalized or sometimes even excluded from the German public sphere, while international feminists remained interested in her perspective on issues of public concern, particularly those pertaining to women's interests. However, it is her discrediting as an ethical intellectual by the crowd of the "neutral" Western critics that caused Wolf to lose power as intellectual overall. Contrary to her male contemporaries, such as writers Günter Grass and Michael Walser, philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and Karl Heinz Bohrer - the literary theorist and editor of the major journal *Merkur* - etc., Wolf's voice has been largely discredited in Germany. Wolf does not seem to write only for feminists after the unification. Instead, she continues to produce a wide range of works addressing broader issues, such as German unification, western civilization, peace and war, along with women's questions. However, her followers now seem to be restricted only to feminist circles.

How did it happen that Wolf has lost her credibility with her own people in Germany while her attraction among international feminists, albeit mainly in the United States, continued after the unification? Where did Wolf's empowerment as both politically engaged intellectual and feminist writer before the *Wende* come from? How was it possible that one writer's literature was praised universally as "critical" one moment, and denigrated as banal and simply moralistic the next? What could this disparity before and after the *Wende* tell us about the role of women intellectuals? All in all, what can Wolf's case tell us about intellectual women nowadays who want to address themselves to matters of public concern beyond women's questions and who want to be taken seriously and therefore partake in the process of defining public policy, like our male counterparts do? My dissertation is an attempt to answer these questions.

I want to begin with Wolf's own words about the history of women intellectuals:

Zu leicht vergessen wir: Die Frau als Intellektuelle gibt es in nennenswerter Zahl erst seit sechzig, siebzig Jahren. Geschichten von ihr, über sie kennen wir, doch ihre Geschichte – eine Geschichte unglaublicher Anstrengung und Tapferkeit, aber auch unglaublicher Selbstverleugnung und Entsagung gegenüber den Ansprüchen ihrer Natur wäre noch zu schreiben. Es wäre zugleich die Geschichte einer der Kehrseite unserer Kultur.¹

Wolf wrote this in her fourth Frankfurt lecture in 1981 when she “officially” expressed her feminist position, although already since the seventies she had written on women and celebrated values often associated with the feminine, such as love, imagination and intimacy, etc. Her writings on Karoline von Günderrode and Bettina von Arnim in the 1970s and her fictionalized account of Cassandra in the 1980s were her early attempts to write a different history about women intellectuals: different in the sense that values, which were denied and rejected in mainstream culture, were deployed and celebrated by Wolf at this time in her career.² Two points are important in the above quotation. One is that according to Wolf it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the number of women intellectuals increased to such an extent that the notion of women as intellectuals was accepted by the public. The other is that the history of women intellectuals is characterized by women's unbelievable efforts, braveness, and at the same time self-denial and failure caused by conflicts brought forth by the social roles prescribed by our patriarchal society. However, both women intellectuals' brief history and their “true” history are ignored or distorted and need to be re-discovered or rewritten, which, as Wolf points out in the end, is a difficult task, since women intellectuals' history

¹ Christa Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1993) 168.

² Here mainstream culture refers mainly to western culture and civilization defined by Wolf as patriarchy where economic rationalism and utilitarianism predominate.

is the “Kehrseite” (other side) of our culture. Therefore writing women intellectuals’ “true” history is like going against the grain, different values other than dominant ones should be deployed so that the other side of our culture – usually the repressed and excluded one - could be exposed and re-evaluated.

If we stick to Wolf’s own understanding of the history of women intellectuals and her insistence on the necessity of rediscovering and rewriting women intellectuals’ history, one interesting question we might be compelled to ask ourselves is how we could write a history of Wolf herself – a prominent woman intellectual of the 20th Century. Are there any moments in her own history, which have been ignored or distorted and therefore need to be rediscovered? As a literary critic, unlike a historian, a full account of Wolf’s history is beyond my scope. What I am trying to do here is to identify some aspects of Wolf’s being a woman intellectual which until now do not seem to have received enough attention among Wolf’s scholars. In some sense, my attempt to identify the “Kehrseite”(other side) of Wolf’s being an intellectual is consistent with Wolf’s understanding of writing women intellectuals’ history. My main concern here is the process through which Wolf becomes and at the same time is constructed into a prominent woman intellectual in different social and historical contexts. That is, as a response to the controversy around Christa Wolf, my dissertation attempts to understand Wolf less as an isolated “writer” than as an “effect” of political and cultural discourse about the GDR in the Federal Republic of Germany prior to unification and in United Germany after 1989. However, my investigations also take into consideration Wolf’s own opinions about her role as intellectual active in the GDR, as well as her explicit pacifist and feminist positions, which she enunciated in both her essays and literature.

Thus, I play the writer's own 'self-reflective' texts over and against the texts that made Wolf first into the banner of an alternative socialism and second, after the *Wende*, into the target of conservative accusations.

Accordingly, my dissertation has two parts. Part One addresses Wolf's self-understanding of being a woman intellectual. In doing this, emphasis is put on her works dealing mainly with the role of writer, the function of literature and its relation to socialism. Part Two studies literary critical responses to Wolf's work more extensively, including more recent texts, in different time periods and different places. In particular I look at the GDR, the FRG, the USA and post 1989 Germany. As a case in point I analyze her 1968 novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* The reason for choosing this work is that *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is a turning point in Wolf's writing career, when she got recognized positively in West Germany while criticized, yet tolerated in East Germany. And its reception can serve as a prototype of Wolf's reception up until the collapse of the GDR, as Myra Love points out.³ Moreover, even after the collapse of the GDR, similar models in the critical responses to Wolf's later works including *Was Bleibt* still can be discerned.

The study of the tensions and contradictions which exist among varying readings in different social and political contexts illustrates that, in some sense, Wolf's work is used as a site of political, aesthetical and feminist debates and her being an intellectual, including her failure and success, is constructed as an "effect" of a complex network of different discourses. In this context, when we come back to Wolf's quote about the history of female intellectuals, although I am not writing a history of Wolf as a female intellectual, I am attempting to go to the other side ("Kehrseite") of Wolf's significance

³ Myra N. Love, *Christa Wolf Literature and the Conscience of History* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) 171.

as a woman intellectual, that is, to investigate the construction of such a “subject”. I believe that only after exposing this “effect” as “Kehrseite” can we go beyond it and identify the positive aspects or insights which Wolf as a public intellectual can offer to us. In doing this, I do not want to underestimate or even discredit Wolf’s significance, like some journalists did during the *Literaturstreit*.⁴ Contrary to frequent ahistorical readings and evaluations, both my study of Wolf’s reception at different time periods and in different places and my reading of her own work are attempts to put Wolf in a concrete social and historical context to understand why and how she responds to different cultural and political crises in the GDR and in the world. By studying her reception alongside her own work, I am to show that in the process of becoming a prominent woman intellectual, Wolf had to utilize the same efforts, braveness, self-denial, and confront the possibility of failure that she speaks of in relation to other women’s histories. In the end, this dissertation then reaches the question whether Wolf’s model of a woman intellectual, which is largely defined by a deep commitment to political intervention, i. e. seeing intellectuals’ responsibility in making changes, is passé or not and whether our times may call for different styles of women intellectuals than in the past.

Since one of the most important aspects of Wolf is her political engagement, a brief history of the term “intellectual” is necessary: who are the intellectuals? And what is their role in politics? Are those models put forward by Julien Benda, Antonio Gramsci and

⁴ Frank Schirrmacher, “Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten,” *FAZ* 2 June 1990. Ulrich Greiner, „Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik,“ *Zeit* (amerikanische Ausgabe) 2 Nov. 1990. Jürgen Serke, “Was bleibt ist die Scham,” *Welt* 23 June 1990. etc.

Pierre Bourdieu, for example, sufficient in understanding Wolf's role as a female intellectual?⁵

I. Intellectuals and Politics

The modern notion of “intellectuals” playing an important role in modern politics truly come into being at the end of the 19th century in France during the “Affaire Dreyfus”. There the author Emile Zola showed his public support of the Jewish general Alfred Dreyfus.⁶ According to Pierre Bourdieu, the “Affaire Dreyfus” was the moment when French writers, artists and scientists asserted themselves as intellectuals, not just cultural professionals of one sort or other, through their intervention in political life.⁷ What was new in the “Affaire Dreyfus” was the recognition of the role of the intellectual as a figure or a political/public intellectual. Due to the important role played by writers, such as Zola, in the “Affaire Dreyfus”, Georg Jäger also identifies the “Affaire Dreyfus” as the moment when writers were seen as intellectuals: “Die Intervention Zolas kann als Gründungsakt der Figur des Schriftstellers als Intellektueller gelten.”⁸ The open letter of

⁵ By Wolf's role as a female intellectual, I not only mean her self image, that is, her own conception of the woman intellectual demonstrated in her writing, which will be dealt with in chapter 2, but also critical responses engendered by her intellectual undertakings, in other words, critics' understanding of Wolf's being a woman intellectual. I will discuss Wolf's reception in chapter 3, 4, and 5.

⁶ Werner Mittenzwei, Die Intellektuellen: Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland von 1945 bis 2000 (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2001) 18.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “Fourth lecture. Universal Corporatism: the role if intellectuals in the modern world,” Poetics Today 12. 4 (1991): 655-669.

⁸ Georg Jäger, „Der Schriftsteller als Intellektueller. Ein Problemaufriß,“ Schriftsteller als Intellektuelle: Politik und Literatur im Kalten Krieg, ed. Sven Hanuschek, Therese Hörnigk und Christine Malende (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000) 15.

Zola to the French President has become a “Prototyp engagierten schriftstellerischen Handelns.”⁹

For Bourdieu, the writers’ or intellectuals’ political intervention has become one of the most important characteristics to define the modern intellectual. According to him, the intellectual is a “paradoxical” and “bidimensional”¹⁰ being. In order to be worthy of the name of intellectual, two conditions must be fulfilled: on the one hand, the intellectual must belong to an autonomous intellectual world such as that of art, science or literature, she/he must be independent from religious, political and economic powers and therefore should be defined by values that are associated with intellectuals’ autonomy – that is purity; on the other hand, the intellectual must invest the competence and authority he has acquired in the intellectual field in a political action – that is engagement. The new type of political interventions, according to Bourdieu, should tend to maximize both the purity and engagement that define intellectual identity. Emile Zola’s support of Dreyfus exemplified this new type of political intervention in the best sense.

Bourdieu’s two-dimensional intellectual is at odds with the traditional conception of intellectuals defined by Julien Benda. In his *The treason of the Intellectuals*, published in 1927, Benda argued that intellectuals should serve only the truth and nothing else. According to Benda, the notion of truth was defined by some eternal standards or abstract principles beyond all kinds of practical passions, such as political passions associated with nationalism, race, and class etc. Benda’s notion of the intellectual was reduced to the small category of the clergy, defined by their indifference to the pursuit of practical

⁹ Quoted in Jäger, Der Schriftsteller als Intellektueller. Ein Problemaufriß 14.

¹⁰ Bourdieu 656.

aims, who therefore formed a quite different world from that of laymen. The strict dichotomy, proposed by Benda, between clerks and laymen, between reason and political passion, between the spiritual world and the practical world is an ideal beyond any possibility of realization in modern times. Benda himself had to acknowledge the fact that “the present age is essentially the age of politics”¹¹ and that the clerks’ “play[ing] the game of political passions”¹² is an unavoidable situation. Therefore he talked about the great betrayal of the intellectuals.

Not unlike Benda, Bourdieu argues for the emergence of the struggle to defend autonomy, since nowadays confronted with the growing influence of bureaucratic administration, commercial interests, and the rise of journalism, intellectuals have been deprived of their ability to evaluate themselves according to their own criteria and have been made much more dependent on external economic, political or religious power. However, as opposed to Benda, Bourdieu insists that the action of guaranteeing or defending autonomy “cannot be an end in itself”.¹³ It is a political action: “And one should investigate how this action might be extended to political intervention on the part of intellectuals, and how such intervention might be made maximally effective.”¹⁴

Bourdieu suggests that the intellectuals’ most effective intervention in the modern world will result from universal cooperation among them. He speaks of “a collective intellectual” or borrows the terminology of “an International of intellectuals”, a model of intellectual organization of socialism. The main purpose of this kind of organization is

¹¹ Julien Benda, The Treason of the Intellectuals (New York: 1969) 28.

¹² Benda 45.

¹³ Bourdieu 665.

¹⁴ Bourdieu 665.

to mobilize all competent intellectuals in all fields so that the qualifications and talents of all specific intellectuals could be combined and in each specific case those most competent among them could be chosen to address the given problems. In this sense, Bourdieu seems to acknowledge the inability of modern intellectuals to address all issues based on their intellect, since each one has his or her domain of knowledge and experience. At the same time, however, in spite of the particular or specific talent of each intellectual, Bourdieu does not want to deny the possibility of any collective action based on universal values. That is the reason why he differentiates his notion of “a collective intellectual” from Sartre’s notion of “the total intellectual”, who, as a committed intellectual, takes positions on all the problems of his time. Bourdieu also sets himself apart from Foucault’s notion of “the specific intellectual”, who limits his intervention only to a particular domain of knowledge and experience. Unlike Foucault, who, consistent with poststructuralist thinking, denies the existence of universal values and truth, Bourdieu seems to believe in “the universal intellectual implying duties”.¹⁵ In this context, Bourdieu also criticizes Gramsci’s “organic intellectual” who represents and defends the interests of the proletariat instead of his/her own interest as an intellectual, that is, to fight for universal causes.

The term “organic intellectual” comes from the Italian socialist thinker Antonio Gramsci. He suggested that all men were intellectuals since everybody engaged him/herself in intellectual activities in some sense; yet, if everybody could cook a meal, not everyone could be called a chef.¹⁶ Therefore Gramsci defined intellectuals through

¹⁵ Bourdieu 669.

¹⁶ Antonio Gramsci, Modern Prince and other writings (New York: International Publishers, 1967) 121.

their particular social functions and differentiated between traditional and organic intellectuals. The former, like teachers and priests, had a sense of independence and autonomy since they had “their own uninterrupted historical continuity”¹⁷ while the latter were created by each new class and therefore represented a new type of intellectuals with class interests. According to Gramsci, this new type of intellectual was directly connected to class interest. If each new class wants to grasp power it should try to “assimilate and conquer ‘ideologically’ the traditional intellectuals”¹⁸ and the means for this assimilation was to produce its own organic intellectuals: “Assimilations and conquests are the more rapid and effective the more the given social class puts forward simultaneously its own organic intellectuals.”¹⁹ Gramsci combined the fate of intellectuals with that of the working class. In modern industrial society, in order to win over the masses, he advocated that the “organic intellectuals” of the subordinated class, the proletariat, should do battle with those of the dominant class.²⁰

Bourdieu refuses Gramsci’s notion of “organic intellectuals,” who are reduced to the role of “fellow travelers” of and spokespeople for the proletariat and therefore are prevented from fighting for universal causes (except that Gramsci, following Marx, saw the proletariat as a universal class). For him, intellectuals should be free from all ideologies and act only on the universal values, such as freedom, justice, human rights etc. However, in my view, Bourdieu does not acknowledge the class-origin or interests of such values. In other words, he does not acknowledge these values as specific to the

¹⁷ Gramsci, Modern Prince and other writings 120.

¹⁸ Gramsci, Modern Prince and other writings 122.

¹⁹ Gramsci, Modern Prince and other writings 122.

²⁰ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison notebooks (New York: International Publishers, 1971). 5-23.

bourgeoisie. In this sense, Bourdieu agrees with Benda on the responsibility of intellectuals to uphold universal values. However, by insisting that in the modern world, intellectuals ought to apply their knowledge and competence to the political field, and by insisting that autonomy (the intellectuals' integrity judged by universal values) and politics (the intellectuals' political action based on universal values) are not mutually exclusive, Bourdieu improves greatly on Benda's argument. His conception is also more relevant to my study, in so far as he avoids the traditional notion of intellectuals, like Benda's, according to which intellectuals are always in opposition to politics.

Moreover, Bourdieu defines the intellectual's ability to combine purity and engagement historically. He identifies the intellectuals' entrance into the political landscape with an authority derived from the autonomy of their own field at the end of the 19th century and argues that, instead of being static, the paradoxical relationship between engagement and autonomy goes through an unstable process: "The paradoxical synthesis of the contraries of autonomy and political engagement, which characterizes the intellectual, was not invented all at once and was not established once and for all; it has in it something unstable and unsettled."²¹ Under different historical circumstances with different power relationships involved, intellectuals can act either as pure artists and scientists or as politicians and journalists, or somewhere in-between. Therefore, the definition of intellectuals and the claim of autonomy should take the temporal situation into consideration.

Bourdieu's historical understanding of intellectuals' autonomy and engagement and his argument for the necessity of the intellectuals' political intervention are important in my investigation of Wolf as a politically engaged intellectual. I reject the idea that any

²¹ Bourdieu 658.

political engagement of intellectuals is a betrayal of the purity of intellectual life. Moreover, in my reading of Wolf, including her reception in different social and historical contexts, I will attempt to highlight her intellectual integrity and her political engagement in specific historical circumstances. However, in spite of Bourdieu's dual emphasis on the necessity of the intellectuals' political engagement and of historical contextualization of the principles of autonomy and engagement, his notion of intellectuals fails to offer any practical suggestions for how one can remain engaged without sacrificing one's independence. In other words, he does not seem to give answers to questions such as: how can intellectuals intervene politically if they are free from all ideologies and act only on universal values? Is it possible that there can be anything like an independently and autonomously functioning intellectual totally free from all ideologies?

If the "correct" political intervention of intellectuals is based only on some abstract and unspecific notion of universal values, such as freedom, justice and truth, not only the GDR intellectuals' autonomy but also their ability to be critical are put into question, since many of them were members of the Communist Party and defined themselves as socialist utopians. Some critics even go so far as to say that GDR writers or artists were not entitled to the name of intellectuals due to their inability to be openly/publicly critical of the system in which they lived.²² Here intellectuals are defined through their function as being critics, or "Kritik als Beruf" (criticism as occupation),²³ and the judgment about

²² Wolfgang Jäger, „Die Intellektuellen und die Wiedervereinigung, “Die Überwindung der Teilung, ed. Jäger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1998). Here Jäger argues that in the case of the GDR it is not about intellectuals but about “Intelligenz” (intelligence).

²³ Quoted in Mittenzwei, Die Intellektuellen: Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland von 1945 bis 2000 (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2001) 18.

their ability to be critical is based only on some abstract and unspecific universal values. It seems that any political engagement based on certain ideologies is therefore wrong and a betrayal of intellectuals. If we recognize that political intervention is one responsibility of intellectuals in our modern time, and therefore refuse Benda's notion of betrayal to discredit intellectuals' political activities, is Bourdieu's understanding of intellectuals' engagements, based only on universal values, sufficient to understand Wolf as a politically engaged intellectual?

In addition, in arguing that the intellectuals' defense of or fight for universal values transcends any specific class interest, Bourdieu does not recognize that the so-called universal values have often masked the class interests of the bourgeoisie. For feminist postcolonial critics, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, such a notion of universal values, as Bourdieu's, is just another ideology. There is an affinity between those representing so-called universal values - very often European, bourgeois, and male subjects - and the imperialist subjects, since universal values, such as human rights, are very often deployed by them as justification for colonialism and postcolonialism. In the process of colonization, any differences between European and non-European cultures are erased. Those outside European culture are deprived of any agency and subjected to so-called universal values. Women in the third world are in the foreground of victimization. In this respect I will argue that Wolf's feminist critique of the bourgeois universal values - the repression and exclusion of female qualities - and her celebration of difference can be seen implicitly as a critical response to Bourdieu's notion of the intellectual.

Being a party member and yet committed to utopian socialism, Wolf seems to be excluded from Bourdieu's notion of intellectuals, if intellectuals /writers representing a certain ideology, in this case, socialism, and those representing only universal values are placed in opposition to each other. However, it is too simplistic to label Wolf as a "fellow traveler" or spokesperson for the Party, and even for the proletariat in Gramsci's sense, and thus discredit her status as a politically engaged intellectual. We need to account for Wolf's understanding of socialism, which is largely based on humanism, and for her interests in human beings in general, instead of in certain classes or certain institutions per se. Deeply rooted in Marxism, Wolf's project of socialism also aims at universal values, such as emancipation and equality. However, her specific interests in human beings, in particular, in individual subjects, allow her to take individual differences into consideration, thus distinguishing her position on universal values from Gramsci's and Marx's positions. That is, her commitment to utopian socialism and to universal values goes hand in hand with her recognition and appreciation of "differences", which do not seem to play an important role in Gramsci's and Marx's notion of socialist universal values. I will discuss this in detail in chapter 5 (the section about socialism and feminism) and chapter 6. It seems that the models of intellectual put forward by Bourdieu, Benda and Gramsci cannot sufficiently describe the case of Wolf. Other definitions of intellectuals, which go beyond the binary oppositions of universal values versus ideology or writers /intellectuals versus political spokesperson seem to be necessary to understand Wolf as a politically engaged intellectual.

Robert von Hallberg does not dismiss the ability of GDR intellectuals to be critical. Like Bourdieu, Hallberg argues that autonomy and engagement should not be considered

absolute opposites and it is possible to preserve opportunities for engagement without sacrificing independence. He emphasizes the intellectuals' social significance, which is derived from their intervention in social and political issues, and the necessity of keeping their autonomy: "What one wants from intellectuals is not that they be unwilling or unable to speak to political, economic, or social issues but, rather, that what they do say about such issues will be irreducible to a familiar interest or partisan perspective. By this account, autonomy is a precondition, as Bourdieu implies, to a proper engagement."²⁴

What is more, Hallberg points out the fact that the traditional or transcendental intellectual, about whom Benda was talking, has disappeared only as a social group. It continues to exist as "an idea", "an ideological force".²⁵ For this reason, even if modern intellectuals have been instrumentalized (Julien Benda) or professionalized (Edward Said²⁶) in some sense, they are still moved by this idea of the transcendental intellectual and therefore are able to keep their relative autonomy.

Based on Hallberg's understanding, the GDR intellectuals' ability to be critical cannot be denied since even when they were seen as spokespeople for the Party or the state, their being intellectuals made them different from politicians. "Haunted" by the idea or the memory of the transcendental intellectual, which influences even the fully professionalized intellectuals nowadays, they could assert and keep their relative

²⁴ Robert von Hallberg, Literary intellectuals and the dissolution of the state: Professionalism and Conformity in the GDR (Chicago & London: the University of Chicago Press, 1996) 321.

²⁵ Hallberg 18.

²⁶ In *Representation of the Intellectual*, Edward Said talks about the particular threat to the intellectuals today that is posed by professionalism, that is, by what they do for a living. As Said points out, modern professionalization such as a profession specialization, expertise of the certified expert etc. results in the individual's powerlessness to challenge power and authority. However, intellectuals should not pretend that there is no such kind of thing as modern professionalization. Instead, confronted by its influence, intellectuals should represent a different set of values and prerogatives, which is called "amateurism" by Said, as he states: "an activity that is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization" (New York: Pantheon Books 1994) 82.

independence and therefore their ability to criticize. However, Hallberg denies Wolf the ability to be a critical intellectual just because, according to his understanding, she is an “official” intellectual.²⁷ Should this memory of the transcendental intellectual only have its power over “unofficial” intellectuals? If so, how can we explain the involvement of the Prenzlauer Berg poets - the so-called “outsiders” or “unofficial” intellectuals - with the Stasi, such as Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski? Their collaboration with the Stasi was very often voluntary and for their own interest, usually lasted longer and caused more damage than that of established writers of the older generation.²⁸ The distinction made by Hallberg between “official” and “unofficial” intellectuals together with the latter obsessed by the memory of the transcendental intellectual seem to be nullified in the case of the Prenzlauer Berg poets.

David Bathrick approaches the critical ability of the GDR intellectuals from the perspective of the power of poetic language in this country. According to him, literary discourse has its own characteristics and structural functions despite the fact that in the GDR literary discourse had been integrated as a part of cultural policy. Different from official discourse, such as Marxism-Leninism, literary discourse can offer a kind of “authenticity” since poetic language has the potential to refuse to partake in the language of power and it can produce alternative meanings despite the fact that some alternative

²⁷ According to Hallberg, “official” means a spokesperson for the particular interests of those who govern the party in the GDR.

²⁸ Bathrick talks about the differences between the Stasi connections and activities of Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller on the one hand and those of Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski on the other in the article “Language and Power”: “In the cases of Anderson and Schedlinski, it is clear that they both took an active and damaging role in reporting on the activities and views of friends and colleagues, some of whom were on the front lines of political resistance in the GDR” (140).

meanings could be unintended by their author.²⁹ Compared to the official monolithic mode of discourse, the multiple meanings offered by literary discourse are without doubt a challenge to and critique of the dominant ideology, as Bathrick points out:

Literary dissidence in the GDR often began not as a philosophical or political challenge to the ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism but as a sometimes unintended fall into 'polysemic' modes of address that, by virtue of their multiplicity of meaning, were perforce understood and evaluated as negative, that is, as subversive of the official, 'monosemic' mode of discourse.³⁰

Therefore, according to Bathrick, the opposition in the GDR comes mostly from literary discourse.³¹ Thus the important role played by literary intellectuals, especially prominent ones such as Wolf and Heiner Müller, is Bathrick's main concern. Understood in this way, the significance of the role of poetic language, instead of certain universal values or certain ideologies that the individual intellectual represents, is what defines intellectual critique in Bathrick's work.

Besides the critical potential of literary discourse, Bathrick points out the necessity for critical writers to partake in the paradigm of official discourse such as foundational narratives and major stories etc.: "One might choose to parody, critique, destabilize, or even attempt to transform them, as many writers did, but in order even to mock one had to partake in the paradigm."³² Using his notion that the dissident writers cannot escape the heavily encoded linguistic network and that they were "rewrit(ing) the master code

²⁹ David Bathrick, The Powers of Speech The Politics of Culture in the Gdr (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995) 44.

³⁰ Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 16.

³¹ Helen Bridge shares this view when she compares literature and historiography in the GDR in her book "Women's writing and Historiography in the GDR". But her emphasis is more on the significance of women's writing as an example of a "counter-discourse capable of transforming the cultural and intellectual spheres under state socialism" (33). In doing so she compares literary discourse with historiography and investigates the reason why literature has more possibilities to be subversive than historiography.

³² Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 17.

from within the code itself”,³³ Wolf’s and other critical writers’ complex position in the GDR can be understood in a better and more sophisticated way, compared to those too simplistic and too author-orientated interpretations, which use the binary logic: either resistant or compliant to judge GDR intellectuals’ relationship to the state and their ability to criticize.

In addition, Bathrick points out that in the GDR, the critical intellectual is a “highly complicated and ambivalent”³⁴ term, since critical intellectual activities went through different periods due to the generational differences. For example, the initial period - from 1949 to the mid-1960s – was defined mostly by the intellectuals’ commitment to real socialism and Marxism-Leninism. Those intellectuals were among others Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers etc. The period from the mid-1960s to the Biermann expulsion in 1976 marked a significant turning point in the nature of literary dissidence and opposition in the GDR. During this period the dominant ideological values, such as historical progress, scientific rationalism and the primacy of production were questioned in works of Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, Irmtraud Morgner and Volker Braun, etc. Bathrick continues to point out that one important feature for the literary dissidence in this period is that the intellectuals mentioned above “drew on a discourse that they hoped would at once be acceptable to and yet subversive of the language of power itself.”³⁵ In other words, critiques were launched from within the framework of Marxism. Prenzlauer Berg dissidents in the 1980s, according to Bathrick, represented the last generation of literary

³³ Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 19.

³⁴ Bathrick, “Language and Power,” The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 143. There he outlines a history of literary opposition in the GDR from its emergence until the 1980s.

³⁵ Bathrick, Language and Power 145.

opposition. For the Prenzlauer Berg writers who were born in the 1950s, the antifascist component of the GDR's anticapitalist project, which was important in the older generations, has lost its significance. The older generation's attempt to fight from within to reform socialism was viewed as naïve and ineffective by the younger generation. In their eyes dissident writers like Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller could not be called genuine opposition since their resistance came from within and therefore, instead of making changes, their fight ultimately ended up in the confirmation of the old existing system. Instead of revisionist Marxism, the younger generation turned to French post-structuralism and post-modernism. In order to go beyond the constraints of the official code, they chose to ignore it or refused to use it. One way to be "outside" was to move to the margins of the social order, like the Bohemian slum sections of major cities such as Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig, since according to the Prenzlauer Berg poets, authenticity could only be achieved from the margins of society. Therefore they gave up communication within the public domain; as Rainer Schedlinski said: "I thought about forbidden language, ... about the distance of public rhetoric, about the impossibility of speaking with public officials and functionaries, ... about the general speechlessness."³⁶ In a similar manner, Frank Trommler talks about the change in the language of political commitment of the GDR intellectuals.³⁷ Due to the generational differences, different

³⁶ Quoted in Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 21.

³⁷ Frank Trommler, „German Intellectuals: Public Roles and the Rise of the Therapeutic,“ The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 35-58.

The language of the earlier generation or the generation of exiles (Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, Johannes R. Becher) was defined by simple binary right/wrong; after Biermann's affair in the 1970s the language became less simple. Instead, it was defined by contradictions and ambiguities; at the end of 1980s the

means and strategies were deployed in the intellectuals' critique of, or opposition to, the regime. Therefore the clearly articulated binary between the regime on the one hand, and the opposition on the other, cannot account for the complexity and ambivalence of intellectual dissidence in the GDR.

Following Bathrick's understanding of intellectual critique in the GDR, an understanding that foregrounds the literary intelligentsia, I shall interpret Wolf's prominence as a moral and political spokesperson for the East German public in the context of the GDR literary public sphere, which I describe below.

II. The GDR literary intellectuals and the literary public sphere

*People needed me, people needed something to give them strength.*³⁸ (Christa Wolf)

*Readers of contemporary literature in the GDR understood texts as aids to life. In letters to me and in conversations they would comment on and extend the texts with their own experiences and stories.*³⁹ (Helga Schütz)

In these two quotes, both Wolf and Helga Schütz saw GDR writers and GDR literature's function as "an aid to life" (Lebenshilfe) for their readers. For intellectuals in West Germany or in the United States, it is difficult to imagine such significance of writers and their works in the eyes of their readers. In order to understand the central and crucial position that literary intellectuals occupied in the public, we need to investigate

language of 1970s seemed to have exhausted itself, which was exemplified in the younger generation of writers such as the Prenzlauer Berg poets.

³⁸ Quoted in Hafner Katie, "A nation of readers dumps its writers," New York Times Magazine 10 Jan. 1993: 25.

³⁹ Helga Schütz, „Ein Stück der täglichen Wahrheit zur Sprache bringen,“ Mein Deutschland findet sich in keinem Atlas, ed. Françoise Barthélemy and Lutz Winkler (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 22.

the significant role played by the literary public sphere in the GDR. According to Bathrick, literature became an Ersatz for the public sphere⁴⁰ in the GDR.

Bathrick differentiates three major public spheres in the GDR until 1989: the official public sphere under the Party's control, including the press, which functioned as an educational organ instead of "organ of sensation";⁴¹ the media coming from West Germany; and the various unofficial public spheres, such as the church, the literary public sphere, the feminist, peace and gay movements etc.⁴² He argues that literature provided space for discussions which were not allowed in the official public sphere; therefore literature became an ersatz for the public sphere. Besides political issues, which were denied any possibility for critical discussion in the official discourse, many vital issues of everyday life, which concerned the readers the most but used to be discussed only among friends, were included in the discussion within the literary public sphere and therefore brought into the public domain. The contents of public discussions were expanded. In

⁴⁰ The public sphere, a term developed by Jürgen Habermas in his theory of bourgeois liberalism, has become the modern critical intellectuals' field of action. In his classical work *The structural transformation of the public sphere* Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere as a place where matters of public significance are discussed: "the institutionalization of public space situated between the competing realms of state, the economy, and society, in which reasoned and critical discourse about all aspects of life can transpire"(Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, 46). In this definition Habermas emphasizes the separation of the public space from the state and the economy as a condition for its legitimization as locus for critical Raisonement.

The values embodied by the concept of the public sphere seem to be at odds with the theory and practice of totalitarian socialism with its all-pervasive system of surveillance and control. However, a lot of intellectuals in the GDR including Wolf (for example, in her *Letters to Gerti Tetzner*) have argued for the importance of critical and open discussions in the public under socialism. Robert Weimann (According to Bathrick, Weimann is the first GDR writer to employ the Habermasian concept of the public sphere for a discussion of public life under socialism), for example, attempts to re-appropriate Habermas' notion of public sphere for Marxism-Leninism, instead of simply dismissing it. Defining the socialist public sphere as "an agent of socialization" (in Bathrick, 48) rather than as a locus for critical Raisonement, Weimann argues for the emergence of discussion of public life within the domain of official ideology in the GDR. Understood in this way, the term "public sphere" still can be used in the GDR context, although with different connotations. See also Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge *Public sphere and experience : toward an analysis of the bourgeois and proletarian public sphere*.

⁴¹ Quoted in Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech* 34.

⁴² Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech* 34.

this context, literature functioned not only as a mode of political opposition in the sense that it offered an ersatz space for interpretive plurality about political issues, but also as an aid to life (*Lebenshilfe*) to readers, since literature including writers' public readings and readers' letters etc. provided the space for all kinds of debates concerning social, political and moral issues and very often could serve as a model for how people think and speak in all areas of social life. Günter Kunert for example wrote: "Literature is a unique playground for deviant views about the world and the only place where readers find things that move and really affect them. In this way, literature has become in the GDR an ersatz for information..."⁴³

The significant role played by the literary public sphere explains the great importance of literary intellectuals in the GDR to the public. Writers functioned as unofficial voices in the sense that alternative and subversive meanings or critical voices concerning politics, social and moral issues, which were denied in the official discourse, found their places in literary works and in the reception of these works among the readers. Therefore critical writers were always censored and questioned by the state. But censorship coexisted with privileges and empowerment coming from the intellectuals' function as mediator between the state and the people or as educator.

Compared to the FRG, economically supported by its Western allies, the GDR depended largely on ideology and culture for its legitimization as the "better German state"; as Hallberg claims, "the GDR rested not on wealth, force, or accident, but on a bedrock of ideology."⁴⁴ In the legitimization of the "better German state", the antifascist myth - the coupling of the founding of the GDR and the fight against fascism – played a

⁴³ Günter Kunert, *Diesseits des Erinnerns* (München und Wien: Hanser, 1982) 185.

⁴⁴ Hallberg 7.

significant role. Unlike other Eastern European countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union, socialism in the GDR did not come from revolution but directly from Nazi Germany, which was exemplified in Franz Fühmann's famous statement: "I came by way of Auschwitz into the new social order."⁴⁵ Socialism in the GDR was therefore directly connected with antifascism. In the SBZ/GDR during the process of "antifascist democratic transformation", East German socialists and communists (after 1946 the SED) took the leading role in reshaping the whole social structure including the elimination of capitalist property relations, the large-scale collectivization of agriculture during the 1950s (land reform) and the nationalization of industry etc. The old material and political ground for capitalism was eliminated through reorganization or denazification in economic, political and cultural fields. For most GDR intellectuals who had terrible War experiences and saw fascism as the most developed stage of capitalism, the founding of the GDR represented the overcoming of the horrible Nazi past and a new beginning with its socialist alternative to capitalist West Germany. In a sense, antifascism in the GDR contained anticapitalist elements. For ordinary people, including those not in the resistance during the Nazi-period, the coupling of the GDR state with antifascism made it difficult to doubt the legitimacy of a socialist Germany, since the rejection of this new state means automatically the rejection of antifascism. What is more, the founding of a socialist state as a form of overcoming the past made everybody the winner of history. Considering the destruction and humiliation caused by the defeat of Nazi Germany, this feeling of a new beginning was without doubt appealing to every citizen of the GDR. Compared to the relative laxity of denazification in West Germany, East Germany thus legitimized its existence as a better German state through the coupling

⁴⁵ Quoted in Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 12.

of the existence of the GDR and the fight against fascism. And the antifascist myth with its anticapitalist elements explains GDR intellectuals' deep commitment to Marxism and socialism and therefore their difference from those in other East European countries.

Besides the antifascist myth as a way to justify the GDR as a "better German state", the state claimed to be the only successor to the humanistic and progressive traditions in the German past. The Enlightenment (Kant, Hegel and Marx etc.) and German Classicism (Goethe, Schiller and Lessing etc.) with their progressive, rational and optimistic thinking were identified as the proper cultural heritage for socialism. In doing so, socialism was understood as a necessity, i. e. as a higher stage of human development. Meanwhile German Romanticism, the philosophy of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Expressionism, various forms of modernism and avant-gardism were seen as reactionary, decadent and could only find their place in West Germany.

From the examples mentioned above - the coupling of the founding of the GDR and antifascism and the claim to be the only successor to the humanistic and progressive traditions in the German past -, we can see how culture, especially literature, became an important instrument in the legitimization of the existence of the "better German state" and therefore gained profound ideological significance. In this context, as spokespeople for the Party and the state and as an integrated part of the cultural policy, intellectuals, especially writers, acted as guardian and educator and played a significant role in the legitimization of the existence of the GDR as "the better German state" on ideological grounds. Being an official voice granted them a political power that was denied to West European and American writers. Rudolf Bartsch's words illustrate very vividly the central or integral position of GDR writers in politics:

*What were they once, the poets and writers? Eulogists, court fools, entertainers some, spoiled and never taken seriously; prophets, Cassandras, critics, rebels and revolutionaries, the others, persecuted and feared – but all finally, homeless in their society, decoration or threat. And what are they today? ‘Engineers of the soul.’ Or master builders. Or inner architects. Or whatever. All metaphors fail in some way.*⁴⁶

However, Bartsch seemed to be too simplistic in labeling writers only as “engineers of the soul” and ignoring the critical function of many intellectuals. Intellectuals of Wolf’s generation, for example, are characterized through their double roles of both being insiders and outsiders, as Bathrick argues: “Indeed, it was precisely their function on both sides of the power divide, as official and nonofficial voices within the whole, that defined a particular kind of intellectual in the GDR.”⁴⁷ And their contradictory double roles could not function without the great significance granted to the literary public sphere in the GDR. People talked about the GDR as a “reading nation” or “a literary society.”⁴⁸ Although the question about whether this “reading nation” was only utopia and therefore never realized is still open, the vital roles played by the literary public sphere as an agent of socialization in the articulation of alternative views on the one hand, and in the ideological legitimization of the state on the other, cannot be denied.

Situated in this context with the double function of the literary public sphere, writers of Wolf’s generation are mostly defined by their critique of the official cultural policy and at the same time their acknowledgement of the legitimacy of socialism. How Wolf and her work speak to this issue of the intellectuals’ critical stance while representing certain ideology – socialism – will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech* 35.

⁴⁷ Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech* 11.

⁴⁸ Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, “The German Democratic Republic as a ‘Reading nation’: Utopia, Planning, Reality, and Ideology,” *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 88-112.

Beside the GDR intellectuals' ability to critique within the framework of socialism- a theme that runs through Bathrick's discussion of the GDR intellectuals -, what is important in my discussion here is his emphasis on the constructed nature of GDR dissidence. He talks about the investment of the West in the emergence of a dissident culture in the GDR in detail. For anti-communist intellectuals in the West, for example, a critical voice from within the socialist state, especially from within the Party, was greeted as a way to show the failure of socialism; for the left-liberal intellectuals, they could project their own ideal of utopian socialism on to the major cultural but socialist figures in the GDR. In this context, Bathrick points out that the GDR dissident culture not only meant "creating an Eastern Kulturpolitik", but it was also "promoted by a Western GDR industry".⁴⁹ He even goes as far as to say that "given the evolving structures of ideological détente, it should be clear that if there had not been a Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym ... , we would have had to invent them!"⁵⁰ Understood in this way, Bathrick argues for the necessity of assessing the culture of GDR dissidence "in conjunction with the changing political climates of the entire postwar period".⁵¹ Based on Bathrick's understanding that the "dissident bonus" of the most established GDR writers, including Wolf, are in some sense constructed in the opposition of two different political systems, Wolf – who was not really a dissident but was constructed as one by the western critics etc. – functions only as a "vehicle" during the Cold War and the politics of Blocks. I will deal with this kind of construction in detail in chapter 3 and chapter 4, using the critical responses to Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in East and West Germany as example.

⁴⁹ Bathrick, The powers of speech 4.

⁵⁰ Bathrick, The powers of speech 5.

⁵¹ Bathrick, The powers of speech 5.

As we have discussed before, in Bathrick's understanding of the GDR literary intellectuals, emphasis is put on the role of poetic language, instead of on certain universal values or certain ideologies that the individual intellectual represents. Bathrick's moving away from writer to text and language makes it possible to understand GDR intellectuals' critical sense in a more sophisticated way. In my dissertation I will use Bathrick's study as the main framework. In doing so, two questions specifically guide my approach to Wolf: i.) How could Wolf's texts operate within and without the GDR as both critical and socialist –and thus have the approval of the state? ii.) How and to what extent could Wolf's dissidence be constructed in non-socialist countries and, also, to a limited extent, within the GDR state? I will deal with these two questions in chapter 2 and 3/4 respectively.

However, I also distance myself from Bathrick by underscoring the role of gender in the specific case of Wolf. In effect, I would argue this writer's gendered identity plays an important role in her intellectual activities and her political engagement. Unlike other women intellectuals, such as Rosa Luxemburg⁵² (1870 -- 1919), or Hannah Arendt⁵³

⁵² Raya Dunayevskaya, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

There Dunayevskaya is trying to grant Luxemburg the name of feminist and arguing that Luxemburg's theory of revolution had a hidden feminist dimension. Like her friend Clara Zetkin - leader of the SPD's women's liberation – Luxemburg saw women as part of the exploited population, therefore women's liberation could get realized only after the triumph of the social revolution. But unlike Zetkin, Luxemburg chose another political area in which to be active. That does not mean that Luxemburg had nothing to say about women. She had been writing and speaking on women's emancipation and women's suffrage. It was on the eve of organizing an international women's antiwar conference with Zetkin that she was arrested, as Dunayevskaya argues: "far from Luxemburg having no interest in the so-called 'woman Question', and far from Zetkin having no interest outside of that question, ... both of them ... were determined to build a women's liberation movement that concentrated not only on organizing women workers but on having them develop as leaders, as decision-makers and as independent Marxist revolutionaries" (13).

Although Dunayevskaya's granting Luxemburg the name of feminist and her argument that Luxemburg's theory of revolution had a hidden feminist dimension were controversial (Dunayevskaya did emphasize that Luxemburg's interest on women's question was not for the purpose of the "woman Question" per se but as always for revolution (96)), it does indeed not do justice to Luxemburg saying that she had absolutely no interest in the women's question. It would appear that she just refused to be pigeonholed as feminist

(1906-1975), for example, who downplayed their femininity and spoke as neutral human beings not gendered types, in Wolf's writing, the gendered dimension plays an important role.

In order to show the significance of gender in the case of Wolf, I look specifically at the role and function of feminism in both Wolf's texts and the reception of Wolf. In chapter 2 dealing mainly with Wolf's self construction of her role as a woman intellectual, one of my focal points will be her own understanding of feminism including the place of women's writing within the feminist tradition. I will argue that Wolf's critical involvement with society is always the product of socialism with a feminist accent. Then I will devote Chapter 5 to feminist literary critical responses to Wolf's

simply because she was a woman. She refused to assume the stereotypical roles women usually fill in a political organization. Instead of going to the SPD's organization for women, she went to the mainstream of the party's political life and fought for social justice. Moreover, she was always in the spotlight in the public, like her male counterparts.

⁵³ As a political thinker, Arendt spoke as a neutral human being and gendered identity did not play any role in Arendt's intellectual life. Arendt's reluctance to identify herself as a woman and her opposition to feminism have made her an awkward topic in feminism. For most feminists, sex and/or gendered identity play a primary role: any woman intellectual should speak from perspective of women and address women's issues, that is, every woman intellectual should be a feminist or potential feminist because she is a woman. Therefore Arendt, who as a major political philosopher downplayed her gender, was criticized for behaving like a man. Adrienne Rich, for example, claims that Arendt exemplifies "the tragedy of a female mind nourished on male ideologies" (qtd. in Benhabib, Seyla. The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996. P. 2). Only very recently have feminists begun to recognize her relevance for feminist theories today, since they are suspicious of identity politics in the guise of a feminist standpoint (difference). Instead they embrace diversity for the possibility of plural identities. Honig thus argues: "Arendt offers an important reassurance and challenge: she theorizes a democratic politics built not on already existing identities or shared experiences but on contingent sites of principled coalescence and shared practices of citizenship" (Bonnie Honig, Introduction: The Arendt Question in Feminism 3). In this sense, Arendt's reluctance to identify herself as a woman and to address women's issues in particular can be understood as resistance towards categorization, definition and stabilization through any essential terms.

Mary G. Dietz argues in her *Feminist receptions of Hannah Arendt* (in Feminist interpretations of Hannah Arendt. Ed. Honig, Bonnie. University Park: The Penn State University, 1995. 17-41.) that, like Rosa Luxemburg and Simone de Beauvoir who saw women's liberation as one part of emancipation of human being, Arendt was "unsympathetic to a politics that divorced 'women's issues' from a broader range of emancipatory concerns" (19). Like these two famous women intellectuals of the twentieth century, Arendt could not transcend conventional and patriarchal attitude toward women. As Young-Bruehl points out, she was "suspicious of women who 'give orders', skeptical about whether women should be political leaders and steadfastly opposed to the social dimensions of Women's Liberation" (quoted in Dietz 19).

work, focusing primarily on *Nachdenken*. My main questions will be: what does gender do to the concept of the intellectual, and especially to Wolf; how is the entwinement of socialism and feminism in Wolf's critical involvement with society registered in the feminist reception to her person and her work? In other words, is a gender/feminist approach to her work compatible with socialism? If there is a disassociation of feminism from socialism, how does it happen and what could it tell us about feminism and socialism? From the study of the role and function of feminism in both Wolf's texts and their reception, I will point out that the combination of woman intellectual and writer, on the one hand, blended with socialism and feminism, on the other hand, makes Wolf into an especially relevant figure in order to comprehend the role of the intellectual in the 20th century.

III. Gendered dimension of intellectuals: Do women intellectuals make any difference?

In the different attempts to define the term "intellectual" during the past century, no particular attention is put on the gendered dimension of intellectuals.⁵⁴ Only Said points out the fact that women are not included when Benda defines real intellectuals who should risk being burned at the stake or crucified⁵⁵. The absence of women in the discussion of intellectuals, especially of public intellectuals, has a lot to do with women's

⁵⁴ About the discussion of the term "intellectual", besides Benda, Boureau and Gramsci, see Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and utopia: an introduction to the sociology of knowledge* and *The problem of the intelligentsia. An inquiry into its past and present role*, Edward W. Said's *Representation of the Intellectual* etc. About the German intellectuals after the unification, see Michael Geyer: *The power of intellectuals in contemporary Germany* (2001); Jan-Werner Müller: *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and national identity* (2000); John C. Torpey: *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent: The East German Opposition and Its Legacy* (1995) etc.

⁵⁵ Edward W. Said, *Representation of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994) 7.

exclusion from education and from the public sphere. It was not until the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century that educational opportunities began to open up to women and women became increasingly active in political and intellectual spheres. Even when women enjoy the same social, legal and economic rights as men do nowadays, the traditional patriarchal division between mind and body or *Geist* and *Natur* still persists. Intellectuality, as the life of mind, is associated with masculine activities, which, as men's field, usually stands in opposition to the female body and femininity. Therefore, according to this logic, women's engagement in intellectual activities means their entering into men's province. The questions here are: what kind of role women's gendered identity could play in their pursuit of a life of mind nowadays? If women intellectuals do not want to restrict themselves only to women's questions and want to speak about other issues beyond women's questions, such as philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis and so on, which were seen as typical men's fields, how can they reconcile the life of mind and femininity?

Biddy Martin points out in *Women and Modernity: The (Life) Styles of Lou Andreas-Salomé* that in the late 19th century in Germany women could pursue a life of mind only at the expense of their femininity.⁵⁶ That is, if women pursued an intellectual life, they had to give up their femininity and take up a masculine position. But there were exceptions too, for example, Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861-1937), a Russian-German

⁵⁶ Martin states that "The few women intellectuals in the late nineteenth century in Germany were caught in the bind that allowed women to pursue an intellectual life only by opening themselves up to suspicions of what Judith Butler calls 'gender trouble', in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. To take up intellectual pursuits was to take up a masculine, thus castrating, position in the terms of one language and to arouse the suspicion of deviance in another. In biomedical discourse the woman who engaged in 'masculine activities' was often subject to categorization as a 'contrary sexual type,' and in psychoanalytic terms she was considered either asexual or homosexual by virtue of her masculine complex. The attribution to women of an unnatural 'masculinity' or 'frigidity' reinscribed intellectuality as well as active sexual desire as man's province" (Biddy Martin 232).

novelist, essayist, and psychoanalyst. According to Martin, Salomé took a significant role in the scene of women intellectuals at that time since she had to overcome the disjunction between a life of mind and femininity. Instead of imitating man and becoming a mannish woman, she deployed “affirmative femininity” for the purpose of the possibility of having intellectual exchanges with the male-dominated circle of intellectual and cultural elites of turn-of-the-century Europe.

Under “affirmative femininity”, Martin’s understanding is that Salomé’s skill of reasoning and her great intelligence were accompanied by her deployment of certain female qualities, for example, her reluctance to participate in debates and contests in Viennese psychoanalytic circles at Freud’s, Tausk’s and Adler’s lectures. Those female qualities seemed to draw on and repeat essentialist and romantic conceptions of femininity: women’s being modest and the refusal of a competition with men etc. But Martin argues for the necessity of Salomé’s deployment of femininity, which is seen as a kind of strategy so that Salomé was able to move freely within different male intellectual circles and could be accepted and admired as an equal partner by male intellectual elites instead of being ridiculed and rejected as a mannish woman.

By the beginning of the 20th century, women in Europe have gained access to major educational institutions and are able to pursue intellectual life and careers, which used to be male privileges. However, as in Salomé’s time, conflicts and contradictions caused by widespread assumptions about the division of mind and body still operated to undermine women’s entry into intellectual life. In the book *Simone De Beauvoir: the making of an intellectual woman*, one of the questions Toril Moi deals with is how de Beauvoir, a woman who came of age in the 1920s and 1930s, reconciled the life of the mind and her

femininity in pursuing her intellectual activities. Moi begins her book with a conversation between Beauvoir and Sartre in the Luxembourg Gardens. In this scene Beauvoir expressed her philosophical inferiority to Sartre despite the fact that she was only the ninth woman in France who has passed the prestigious agrégation examination in philosophy, and despite his failure (he had to repeat the exam) and her success on the first try. According to Moi, her declaration of being second to Sartre could be understood as “a compromise between the wish to fascinate as a woman and the wish to fascinate as an intellectual”.⁵⁷ That is to say that she needs to show some traditional feminine side of herself, which is her modesty and her choice to play the role of disciple to Sartre; but at the same time she was confident enough about her own ability in philosophy since she was second only to Sartre, not to anyone else. It is through the compromise she made of being a woman and an intellectual that made her not only gain respect from Sartre as a philosopher but also gain love as a woman. Moi continues to point out “the dominant patriarchal ideology of ‘femininity’”⁵⁸ Beauvoir as an intellectual woman was faced with. Under patriarchal ideology at that time Beauvoir’s second place to Sartre was perhaps the only way for her to be able to attract Sartre both as an intellectual and as a woman.

Both Beauvoir’s and Salomé’s modesty might be ascribed to their attachments to male elites of their era. Compared to them, Wolf’s gendered identity does not seem to have any negative effects on her speaking up in public. Being a moral and political spokesperson in the GDR and having the ability to speak on gendered and non-gendered issues in public, Wolf’s empowerment is to be understood within the GDR context,

⁵⁷ Toril Moi, *Simone De Beauvoir: the making of an intellectual woman* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994) 23.

⁵⁸ Moi 23.

where women's participation in building socialism, which included going out to work in different fields including the literary, was encouraged by the state and where the literary public sphere and literary intellectual were granted a great significance in the public sphere.

Despite her empowerment as a woman intellectual, Wolf is conscious of the division of mind and body and all the difficulties and contradictions caused by such a division. In *Kassandra Dritte Vorlesung* Wolf addresses the disjunction of male / mind / humanity and female / nature: "Aus dem erklärenden Beitext scheint mir hervorzugehen, daß Kerényi das Weibliche mit der ‚wesentlich stummen Natur‘ identifiziert, den ‚Geist‘ hingegen und auch die ‚bewußte Humanität‘ mit dem Männlichen."⁵⁹ Her works, such as *Selbstversuch* and *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, deal specifically with the conflicts and contradictions experienced by women intellectuals, be it scientist or writer, in a patriarchal society. Wolf's attempts to go back to history – to the beginning of the 19th century in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* or even to prehistory in *Cassandra* – are to explore the origins / roots of this division of male / female and mind / body and, what is more, the exclusion or repression of values associated usually with femininity, such as feelings, fantasies, and intimacy. In the exclusion and repression of those qualities, Wolf sees the most important reason for human alienation and human destruction. Therefore Wolf insists on the re-evaluation and renewed appreciation of those qualities as the basis for an "alternative" way of life. In chapter 2 I will discuss in detail how Wolf cherishes women's differences and identifies in women's "sensibility" and "authenticity" the potential of both critique of instrumental rationality and for "alternative" way of life.

⁵⁹ Wolf, „Dritte Vorlesung,“ Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2000) 118.

Like Salomé and Beauvoir, Wolf deploys femininity as a strategy of resistance to the division of mind and body in Western culture and to its associated devaluation or exclusion of femininity. Not unlike Salomé and Beauvoir, however, Wolf's notion of femininity very often draws on essentialist conceptions of femininity. As a result, her work has become vulnerable to criticism, even by feminists, who have labeled Wolf as well as Salomé and Beauvoir essentialist or even anti-feminist.

It seems that in the reception of women intellectuals who address issues beyond women's questions, sex and gendered identity usually plays an essential, very often negative role.⁶⁰ Women's intellectual activities are usually reduced to their personality. In doing so, their intellect is downplayed and their ability to pursue intellectual life is discredited. Martin has pointed out that Salomé's work was reduced to the impact of her personality by some critics and therefore her intellectual work was subordinated to her personality. In Beauvoir we can see the similar reduction of works to personality too. One of the clichés and gender commonplaces Moi details concerning the reception of Simone de Beauvoir is the reduction of both Beauvoir's books and her politics to her own persona, so that her status as a speaker was discredited and any true discussions with her was made impossible, as Moi claims: "It is as if the very fact of her femaleness blocks any further discussion of issues at stake, be they literary, theoretical or political."⁶¹

The subordination of intellectual engagement to personality - a pattern very often observed in female intellectuals - seems to be identified in Wolf too, when we think of

⁶⁰ For example, Arendt, who as a major political philosopher downplayed her gender, was criticized for behaving like a man by most feminists, since for them gendered identity play a primary role: any woman intellectual should speak from perspective of women and address women's issues. See Feminist interpretations of Hannah Arendt. Ed. Honig, Bonnie. University Park: The Penn State University, 1995.

⁶¹ Moi 78.

the *Literaturstreit* around the late publication of *Was Bleibt* during the *Wende*, as von Ankum points out: “Die Diskussion um den literarischen Text rückt daher auch schnell in den Hintergrund. Im Vordergrund steht die Person Christa Wolfs, die entweder als Staatsdichterin oder als Innere Emigrantin bezeichnet und deren gesamtes Werk aufgrund ihrer politischen Position abgewertet wird.”⁶² Wolf’s political standpoint, especially her choice of staying in the GDR, has become the primary element in the evaluation of Wolf’s whole literary engagement. However, compared to Salomé’s and Beauvoir’s generation, a sense of progress seems to be identified in Wolf. Unlike Beauvoir, who spoke to women’s issues but whose pursuit of intellectual activities in the field of feminism made her other interests and publications, for example in the fields of philosophy and politics, of lesser or no importance at all,⁶³ Wolf has managed to speak on both gendered and non-gendered issues publicly, and despite her sex, she occupied a place of moral and political standing, at least before the demise of the GDR. In addition, the feminist reception of Wolf has enriched greatly our understanding of her presence as a female intellectual.

However, do feminist literary critics do justice to Wolf’s complexity, especially to her commitment to socialism? In feminist approaches, Wolf is very often put into a western theoretical discourse about feminism and her works are read only as embodiment of the wide ranging power of certain Western feminist theories, such as “difference feminism”, which is dominant in the feminist theoretical debates in the States from late

⁶² Katharina Von Ankum, *Die Rezeption von Christa Wolf in Ost und West* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992) 4.

⁶³ From the 1980s on, the place of Beauvoir studies moved from France to America and Britain where her major audience were feminists. Beauvoir’s other aspects of intellectual engagement such as philosophy and politics were neglected and she was viewed only as a feminist theorist for her book *The Second sex*. It seems that her talents to address herself to matters of intellectual concerns are reduced to women’s questions. See Moi, *Simone De Beauvoir: the making of an intellectual woman*.

1970s to 1980s, or French feminism represented by Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray etc.

All her political and social responsibilities and engagements, which are largely based on

her commitment to socialism, seem to be filtered through women's questions. In chapter

5, I will focus on feminist critical responses to Wolf and to *Nachdenken über Christa T.*

as an attempt to show how the feminist/gendered approach could enrich our

understanding of the concept of the intellectual, or in Wolf's case, that of a female

intellectual. Moreover, I aim to expose the tension between Wolf's own understanding of

feminism and that within feminist literary responses to her texts. In doing so, we can see

that in defining Wolf's oeuvre from the feminist perspective, not only is gendered

difference given priority over other modes of differences, but the latter, mainly socialism,

has been totally ignored. What is more, the "westernized" form of feminism is

privileged. Wolf's reluctance to call herself a feminist might be understood as her

resistance to distinguish between feminism and socialism, or rather, her critique of

Western liberal feminism. My dissertation, by considering Wolf's own intellectual

positions, alongside the discourse that constructed her as either a feminist

writer/intellectual or a dissident writer, corrects the blind spot in the reception of Wolf.

Chapter 2 SELBSTVERSUCH

---Wolf's self-construction as a female intellectual

In this chapter I set out to study Wolf's own work that "made" her into an intellectual woman. I will use Wolf's own interpretation of *Nachdenken* as my point of departure and expand my discussion of it to her other works, mainly essays, where she enunciates her role as intellectual active in the GDR explicitly. I will argue that Wolf's critical involvement with society is always the product of socialism with a feminist accent.

My discussion in this chapter proceeds in five parts. In the first section, I will briefly introduce *Nachdenken*. Based on Wolf's own interpretation of her work, in the second section, I propose that Wolf understands literature as a means to uncover "the blind spot" of the subject and of culture. This act of "uncovering" is the first step on the way to find healing for past traumas and, hence, to make changes (improve real existing socialism). Wolf identifies "the blind spot" or the unknown always in a historical and social context. For example, she sees the integration of the repressed (Nazi) past as crucial for the present and future. In the third section I will deal specifically with the notion of the past as the other. In addition, in Wolf's notion of "the blind spot", priority is given to the repression and exclusion of values associated with the feminine "space," a space left out of dominant culture or the history of the victors. The next section investigates the role of feminism in Wolf's critical involvement in society. Moreover, in the fourth section, reading Wolf along with other contemporary feminist theorists, I shall demonstrate Wolf's relevance to readers including feminists nowadays. In the last

section the focus is on Wolf's commitment to socialism. I will conclude that Wolf's understanding of the function of literature and writer in her particular circumstance is to critique real existing socialism in the name of an alternative (third) way.¹

I. A Brief introduction of *Nachdenken über Christa T.*

The manuscript of *Nachdenken* was finished in March 1967. Although the Berliner Rundfunk announced the new novel of Wolf already in 1966, and part of her manuscript was published in 1968 in *Sinn und Form* and in *Sonntag*, the work was unknown to the public until early summer 1969 when it was first published by Mitteldeutscher Verlag.² The exact number of copies was unclear due to the halfway interruptions of the printing process caused by the negative responses coming from the Party.

What is this book about? Why did it arouse so much debate in both East and West Germany? The story of the book goes: Christa T. – a dear friend of the narrator - died of leukemia. Her death spurred the narrator's process of remembering and thinking about her. However, writing a biography of her friend did not seem to be the goal of the narrator. In this context, Wolf left the genre of the work undefined, unlike she had done in her previous novel *Der Geteilte Himmel* (Erzählung) and *Kindheitsmuster* (Roman).

¹ A new and democratic socialism which stands in opposition to capitalism defined by alienation and exploitation and which is also different from real existing socialism defined by the authoritarian post-Stalinism, as Stefan Heym stated: "Socialism, not the Stalinist kind, the true socialism that we finally want to build for our benefit and the benefit of all Germany". (quoted in *When the Wall came down: reactions to German Unification*, ed. Harold James and Marla Stone (New York: Routledge, 1992) 126.) In Grass's novel *Ein weites Feld* (1995), he mentions a "third path", a utopian social and economic concept which rejects both western exploitation and eastern authoritarianism.

² For detailed information see Angela Drescher's *Dokumentation zu Christa Wolf *Nachdenken über Christa T.** (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1991).

In the narrator's attempt to reconstruct the life of her dear friend as a way to resist forgetting, she could not trust her own memory since she believed memory was never entirely reliable. Hence she referred to all kinds of documents left by C.T.: diaries, short notes, unfinished and fragmented literary works and dissertation etc. She even went to interview friends, classmates and teachers of C.T. in order to get a clear view of her friend. However, ambiguities and uncertainties involved in the whole book seem to tell us that the narrator did not reach her goal, or a clear view of her friend was not even her goal.

In spite of the ambiguities and uncertainties, this book offers possibilities, hypotheses, and ideas about Christa T., e.g. the main character of the story told here. Both she and the narrator belonged to the same generation, and spent their childhood under the Nazi regime. Furthermore, their adulthood was connected with the building of a new socialist society, the GDR. Just like the narrator, she went to Leipziger University to study German literature. After graduation she became a teacher. Then she married a veterinarian, became a housewife and mother of three children and lived with her husband in a rural area in Mecklenburg. Before she gave birth to her third child, she was diagnosed with leukemia and died right after the birth of her child. At first glance, C.T. had a very normal life just like many others her age. However, she was unusual in many ways. Her uniqueness was first realized by the narrator when she heard C.T. blowing a trumpet made of a piece of newspaper. They were both children at that time. That blow drew the narrator's attention to this girl, a child of a schoolteacher in a village in Eichholz. At the university, C.T. was not a model student. Unlike other students including the narrator, she did not spend too much time on preparing for exams in order

to get good grades. Her unwillingness to settle down and her desire to try everything new made her different from the so-called *Hopp-Hopp-people*, or *Tatsachenmenschen*, *Phantasielose*, who saw adaptation as the only highest goal in life. In her work as a teacher, her insistence on the truth and her seeming inability to fit in with society gave her a sense of naivety even in the eyes of her students. After getting married, C.T. gave up her occupation. Besides doing housework, she went out to communicate with people living around: listening to their stories and sharing their grief and happiness. She selected histories about the lake located in the vicinity of her hometown. She was going to write a book about it in an attempt to search for a different kind of truth and history. Writing had been an important part of her life since she was a child. However, she did not have a chance to realize her plan. Like her other writings, this book remained fragmentary and incomplete. Her last project before she died was a house on the lake that she intended to build all by herself. But due to her illness she could not get her work entirely done in the end.

Wolf's novel came out in a moment of GDR history, when the function of literature or socialist realism had just been defined, namely at the VI. Parteitag of the SED in 1963. With the implementation of the Neue Ökonomische Politik der Planung und Leitung (NÖSPL), socialist development in the GDR went through a new phase.³ The development of economics, science and technology predominated. Literature was supposed to reflect this new economic phase of development that came to be known as "Ankunft" – arrival at socialism. C.T., Wolf's friend and the character in this book,

³ The official titles for different phases of development are: From 1945 to 1949: "antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung"; from 1950 to 1961: „Übergangsphase vom Kapitalismus zum Sozialismus“; from 1962 on the phase „umfassender Aufbau des Sozialismus“. (Christa Thomassen, Der lange Weg zu uns selbst, Christa Wolfs Roman "Nachdenken über Christa T." als Erfahrungs- u. Handlungsmuster (Kronberg/Ts.: Scriptor-Verlag, 1977).)

instead of devoting herself to the economic construction of the socialist society, kept questioning the meaning of what she believed was a one-sided development of socialism. The values this figure embodied and pursued were seen as an anomaly running counter to the new phase of socialist development, not to mention the motive of death and the modern narrative technique Wolf deployed.

The sense of uncertainty and confusion Wolf's work generated among the GDR literary critics and politicians was accompanied by approval coming from West Germany. In spite of the limited access to and the lack of public debates on this book (readers' discussions in the newspaper and magazines), as had happened when Wolf had published *Der Geteilte Himmel* (1963), Wolf's work was so provocative that controversial discussions both in the GDR and FRG had begun long before its publication. In the next two chapters I will deal with those critical responses in detail. Here, instead I focus on Wolf's own interpretation of her work.

In 1966 foreseeing the controversy her work might stir, Wolf had given her own interpretation of *Nachdenken* in an essay entitled *Selbstinterview (Self-interview)*. The author asked herself several questions dealing with her new work. Some of these questions were picked up later by literary critics and became crucial in the debate, for example the role of literature and writer, the values embodied by C.T. and the author's standpoint towards socialism etc. In what follows I address the above-mentioned issues in order to present Wolf's understanding of her own work. I contrast her own approach to literary critical responses to her work, which I discuss in the following chapters. In addition in this chapter, I include Wolf's other essays and fiction and extend her

discussion of *Nachdenken* to her more general understanding of the function of literature / writer, and of the role of female intellectuals.

II. The function of literature and writer

In Wolf's essay *Selbstinterview*, Wolf at first talks about the reason for her writing the novel. As she states, it is a subjective impulse, since C.T. – a close friend of hers – died young. Wolf does not want to accept this fact. Instead, she is trying to find a way to work through her friend's early death. Writing seems to be an effective way, in some sense, a therapy to fight against loss and incoherence in life. In her writing, she tries to navigate her process of mourning. She reads, immerses herself in the myriad of different incomplete texts left behind by her friend. There is thus a direct "literalization" and fragmentation of the friend into writings which then is reproduced, reworked in Christa Wolf's own. The process of doubling is mirrored in their shared names. As a mirror image of C.T., Wolf also serves as a substitute or supplement for C.T., a very similar relationship to that between Ra (father) and Theuth (son) described by Derrida in his *Plato's Pharmacy*: "the figure of [Theuth] is opposed to its other (father, sun, life, speech, origin, . . . etc.) but as that which at once supplements and supplants it. . . . the god of writing is . . . at once his father, his son, and himself".⁴ In this context, we can say that Wolf's writing here is at once about her friend, C.T., the narrator and herself.

Wolf addresses this kind of doubling in the sense that she does not give a straightforward answer to the question whether the narrator is Wolf herself and C.T. Wolf's friend in real life. The relationship among her, the narrator and C.T. (as both her

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's pharmacy," trans. Barbara Johnson, *Dissemination* (University of Chicago Press, 1981) 92-93.

real friend and the protagonist in the novel) is far more complicated than a simple denial or affirmation of their identification with one another. However, Wolf does point out that along with her writing, she realizes that the main focus of her work is not C.T. alone but the relationship between her and C.T., between the narrator and the character C.T., as she states:

Später merkte ich, dass das Objekt meiner Erzählung gar nicht so eindeutig sei, Christa T., war oder blieb. Ich stand auf einmal mir selbst gegenüber, das hatte ich nicht vorhergesehen. Die Beziehungen zwischen ‚uns‘ – der Christa T. und dem Ich-Erzähler – rückten ganz von selbst in den Mittelpunkt: die Verschiedenheit der Charaktere und ihre Berührungspunkte, die Spannungen zwischen ‚uns‘ und ihre Auflösung, oder das Ausbleiben der Auflösung. Wäre ich Mathematiker, würde ich wahrscheinlich von einer ‚Funktion‘ sprechen: Nichts mit Händen Greifbares, nichts Sichtbares, Materielles, aber etwas ungemein Wirksames.⁵

Here the relationship between „us“ – Wolf and her friend, the narrator and the character C.T. – is understood as their differences and commonness, the conflicts existing between them and the possibility or even impossibility of solving these conflicts. It is this relationship rather than C.T. alone that draws Wolf’s attention. Moreover, Wolf defines the relation between those subject positions as a function, as something monstrously effective. In other words, rather than saving the dead, C.T., from being forgotten, this Nachdenken, thinking about C.T., is more for the purpose of those yet living including the author Christa Wolf herself. In her encounter with C.T., she faces herself unexpectedly. Her reflection about their relationship and her writing on her friend serve mainly as a way to establish the connection with the other, mostly hidden, dimension of the self. So the ultimate self-knowledge is the function Wolf talks about.

The unknown part of self is called by Wolf “the blind spot”. The notion of the “blind spot” was first introduced by Wolf in her essay *Von Büchner sprechen* in 1980,

⁵ Wolf, „Selbstinterview,” *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 32.

hence many years after *Nachdenken über Christa T.* There Wolf identified Büchner's great achievement on his exposure of "den blinden Fleck dieser Kultur" (the blind spot of this culture), as she stated: "Wenn einer, muß Büchner das Verlangen gekannt haben, das Unmögliche zu leisten: den blinden Fleck dieser Kultur sichtbar werden zu lassen. Er umkreist ihn mit seinen Figuren, die er bis an die Grenzen des Sagbaren treibt."⁶ The main function of the writer and literature is thereafter defined by Wolf in its uncovering "the blind spot" in the subject (figure) and also in each culture, which, however, remains impossible due to "die Grenzen des Sagbaren". In spite of this, Wolf praises Büchner highly for his getting to the limits / boundaries of the speakable. It seems that for Wolf the attempt to uncover the blind spot cannot be settled once for all. There is limit there, but in order to make possible changes, the writers need to be pushed to the limit each time.

In *Wiener Rede 1985* Wolf reiterated that the function of literature and writing was to identify and expose the inaccessible field or the repressed and excluded other of the subject:

*Daher wird Literatur, wird jedenfalls für mich das Schreiben immer mehr ein Instrument zur Öffnung unbewußter Bereiche, der Weg zu dem Depot des Verbotenen, von früh an Ausgesonderten, nicht Zugelassenen, Verdrängten; zu den Quellen des Traums, der Imagination und der Subjektivität.*⁷

In sum, literature or writing is understood by Wolf as a means to uncover the repressed and excluded part of culture, history and of the self, the unconscious. This act of "uncovering" is the first step on the way to find healing for past traumas (fascism, for

⁶ Wolf, „Von Büchner sprechen,“ *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 617.

⁷ Wolf, "Wiener Rede," *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 79.

example) and, hence, to effect changes. In this sense being a writer / an intellectual is being critical (identifying the wounds) and political (making social changes) at the same time. Both aspects: critical and political define a writer's responsibility.

Understood in this way, writing becomes a *Selbstversuch* (self-essay, experiment of the self), since it offers a way to find "the blind spot" of the self and to make changes, as Wolf states: "Insofern ist Schreiben für mich eine Art Selbstversuch. ... Ich, für mein Leben, brauche die Verbindung mit einer anderen Dimension in mir, um nicht das Gefühl von Da-Sein zu verlieren. Und darum schreibe ich."⁸ Here Wolf points out that the motive of the self-essay is not to lose the feeling of Da-Sein or Being-there, a concept examined in detail by Martin Heidegger in his book *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, "there" means the world; *being-there* is being-in-the-world. A full explanation of what Heidegger means by 'Being-in-the-world' is beyond my scope here.⁹ What is important in my discussion is Heidegger's emphasis on the human being's embeddedness in the world or reality. The intertwinement of subjectivity with society is also crucial in Wolf. In addition, the significance Wolf grants to one's self-knowledge stands in accordance with Heidegger's notion of "the authentic Self"¹⁰ or authentic existence, which comes into being on the ground of individual's realization of who they are.

⁸ Christa Wolf, „Warum schreiben Sie (1985)“, C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985 Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 76.

⁹ See Roy Hornsby, What Heidegger Means by Being-in-the-World Oct. 2002. 12 Dec.2005
<<http://www.royby.com/philosophy/pages/dasein.html>>

¹⁰ Heidegger differentiates "the authentic Self" from "the they-self": "The self of everyday Da-sein is the *they-self* which we distinguish from the *authentic self*, the self which has explicitly grasped itself. As the they-self, Da-sein is *dispersed in the they* and must first find itself. ." (Being and time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996) 121.

Wolf's anxiety of losing the feeling of being there is best illustrated in her concept of "subjective authenticity", in which the author's Da-Sein (presence) becomes the fourth dimension of modern prose besides time, place and plot, as she states in *Lesen und Schreiben* (1968): "Dass der erzählerische Raum vier Dimensionen hat; die drei fiktiven Koordinaten der erfundenen Figuren und die vierte, ‚wirkliche‘ des Erzählers."¹¹ In Wolf's later essay *Subjektive Authentizität. Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann* (1973), she develops the notion of "subjective authenticity" to a great extent:

*Dies ist 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. Plötzlich hängt alles mit allem zusammen und ist in Bewegung; Für 'gegebene' eingenommene Objekte werden auflösbar und offenbaren die in ihnen vergegenständlichte Beziehung; es wird viel schwerer, 'ich' zu sagen, und doch zugleich oft unerlässlich. 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 ihre Existenz der objektiven Realität nicht nur nicht bestreitet, sondern gerade eine Bemühung darstellt, sich mit ihr produktiv auseinanderzusetzen.*¹²

First of all, Wolf points out that this "eingreifende" (gripping) way of writing is not identical with the so-called subjective writing. Instead, it is based on objective existence and aims to deal with reality productively. However, as Wolf then indicates, this new way of writing does call for a high degree of subjective authenticity. This call for subjectivity sets Wolf apart from socialist realism, a dominant literary form since the

¹¹ Christa Wolf, „Lesen und Schreiben (1968)“, *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 487.

¹² Christa Wolf, „Subjektive Authentizität. Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann“, *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 780-781.

1950s.¹³ Unlike the orthodox socialist realism where literature is supposed to reflect the reality passively like a mirror and where the function of the author exists only in mechanic re-assembly of “der zum Klischee erstarrten, aus Versatzstücken gefertigten ‚Fabel‘ alter Provenienz”,¹⁴ the author becomes an important person in the sense that his/her own experience plays an important role in writing. In other words, the author becomes a “character” in the text, with whom the other characters stand in a function or relationship. Moreover, the author has to put him/herself out there, to be exposed to all kinds of unknown elements, conflicts, unexpected changes. In doing so, the author’s authority – to know everything, to have everything under control and to be able to do whatever he/she wants with the text, like a mechanic does with pieces of a machine – is put into question. He/she has to face the danger of losing her/his identity and autonomy (the difficulty of saying “I”) due to changes or challenges coming from getting to know the text that is woven by these relations that unfold in through it unexpectedly. The writer’s authority as a creator is deconstructed here. As the one who produces the text, the writer is also mutually constructed through what he/she is producing, through his/her text. In this context, Helen Fehervary argues that alone this

¹³ Parallel to Aufbau in economy and politics in the 1950s, in the field of art socialist realism predominated. Combined with George Lukács’s concept of realism, socialist realism insisted on literature’s expressing totality of life, as Emmerich depicts: „Auf dem Wege der Typisierung der Erscheinungen sollte das ‚Allgemeine‘, das Wesen, die ‚Gesetzlichkeit‘ der Wirklichkeit unter der Form der ‚Besonderheit‘ widerspiegelt werden. Formalästhetisch hatte das Kunstwerk, da es ja selbst ‚eine Totalität des Lebens‘ in sich sein sollte, organisch und geschlossen zu sein“ (Wolfgang Emmerich, Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1997) 120.)

¹⁴ Christa Wolf, „Lesen und Schreiben“, C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985 Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 496 and 484.

understanding of the author as experiential person instead of producer has differentiated Wolf from Brecht, for whom the author's authority is still a matter of fact.¹⁵

Two seemingly paradoxical aspects are crucial here. On the one hand, the role of the author – his/her presence or involvement in the process of writing – is foregrounded; on the other hand, the writer's significance has nothing to do with authenticity. What his/her presence can bring as a result is the exposure of the difficulty of saying "I". Only through the author's Da-sein (being there) with the possibility of losing him/herself, can he/she see a different reality and deal with reality productively. That is to say that rather than reflecting reality passively, the author is supposed to partake in the construction of a new and different reality.

Wolf's notion of "subjective authenticity" with her insistence on the author's Da-Sein as the fourth dimension of modern prose and with her rejection of the author's authority is in some sense similar to the notion of the "speaking subject" put forward by French feminist Julia Kristeva. In *The ethics of Linguistics* Kristeva at first criticizes the Saussurian concept of language as a closed, monolithic and homogeneous system, in which focus is only put on *langue* as object of study and the historical subject is precluded. The way out of this concept of language is the re-establishment of the "speaking subject" as an object of linguistics. Only thus, can linguistics approach language as a heterogeneous process rather than as a monolithic and homogenous system; the ethical and political implications of the latter are seen by Kristeva as fundamentally authoritarian and oppressive. Moreover, as Kristeva points out, the speaking subjects are not masters of their speech. Rather, the speaking subject is posited as "the place, not only

¹⁵ Helen Fehervary, "Christa Wolf's Prose. A Landscape of Masks," New German Critique 27 Fall (1982): 57.

of structure and its regulated transformation, but especially, of its loss, its outlay".¹⁶ That is, the speaking subject is not a transcendental ego but is constructed in language, understood as a complex signifying process.

What is more, Kristeva stresses the necessity of establishing poetic language as the object of linguistics' attention.¹⁷ In this context, she differentiates the semiotic from the symbolic. Quite different from the symbolic order, the semiotic is defined by heterogeneity and is always linked to the pre-social origin - the mother and the body of the mother. Following Lacan, Kristeva points out that once the subject has entered into the symbolic order, the difference from the mother figure (She used *chora* to describe it) will be more or less successfully repressed. For Kristeva, the poetic language offers the possibility of resistance to the authoritarian and oppressive language system, since the poetic language is the place, where the differences stemming in the mother figure's relation to the not-yet-subject erupt in the symbolic.

Besides their insistence on the presence of the speaking subject/author and their rejection of the speaking subject/author as authority, both Kristeva and Wolf consider the establishment of the connection to the repressed and excluded other to be crucial. In addition, both see the possibility of retracing this repressed other through poetic language (in Wolf through writing). However, for Wolf the ultimate goal of getting to the unknown through writing is to deal with reality productively, that is, to make social changes, while Kristeva's approach seems to be limited only to the discourse of aesthetics. As Rosemary Hennessy points out in her critique of Kristeva, instead of social

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, "The ethics of linguistics," Desire in language. A semiotic approach to literature and art (New York: Columbia University, 1980) 24.

¹⁷ Kristeva 24-25.

change as the practical goal of ethics, the discourse of aesthetics is privileged in Kristeva's celebration of poetic language.¹⁸

Hennessy continues to say that due to Kristeva's positing differences in a pre-symbolic space (the space of the semiotic), the possibility of making any connection between subject and social spheres is therefore foreclosed. In this respect, Nancy Fraser also points out the danger of the disconnection of the speaking subject from society in Kristeva. She argues that one of the reasons for the inability of Kristeva's speaking subject, especially her "semiotic" subject, to act as an agent of feminist practice is its location "beneath, rather than within, culture and society".¹⁹ Unlike Kristeva, Wolf's notion of "subjective authenticity" is ultimately a notion of the tight intertwining of subjectivity with culture or society. Wolf's difference is to a great extent attributed to hopes attached to writing and to writers' different status in the GDR culture. In Wolf there are moments of collapse of subject and society, when she talks about "the blind spot". It can be the unknown part of self or the repressed and excluded elements of society or culture. In addition, Wolf always attempts to define "the blind spot" in a social and historical context. In the following two sections, I will give a detailed analysis of Wolf's understanding of "the blind spot". That is, what exactly is repressed or excluded from the subject's consciousness or from our culture? Attention will be given to the notions of the past and the feminine space. Both are crucial in Wolf's project of uncovering "the blind spot". Both are connected to each other in some ways. In order to locate the feminine space, a space left out of dominant culture, Wolf always turns to the

¹⁸ Rosemary Hennessy, Materialist feminism and the politics of discourse (New York/London: Routledge, 1993) 46-55.

¹⁹ Nancy Fraser, Justice Interruptus: critical reflections on the "postsocialist" condition (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) 164.

past. Most importantly, in Wolf's drawing on the social and historical context in her understanding of "the blind spot" we can see the political nature of her project and of her understanding of a female intellectual.

III. The blind spot – the repressed past

Having spent their childhood and adolescence under the Nazi regime, Wolf and her contemporaries bear the burden of the War and the Holocaust, although at that time they were very young. How to deal with this German past has provoked reflections and discussions among intellectuals in her generation. In his essay *Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* (What does it mean to come to terms with the past?) published in 1959 Theodor Adorno at first criticizes the suspect use of *Aufarbeitung* as Schlagwort, that is "...einen Schlußstrich darunter ziehen und womöglich es selbst aus der Erinnerung wegwischen".²⁰ In opposition to this mere working up of the past – getting away from it or wiping it off from the memory -, Adorno insists on a genuine working through of the past in the psychoanalytic sense, as he states: "dass man das Vergangene im Ernst **verarbeite**, seinen Bann breche durch helles Bewußtsein."²¹ Adorno bestows great significance upon the subject, including increased self-consciousness or subjective enlightenment on the part of individuals, in his notion of the working through of the past.²² Besides Adorno, Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich, for example, also base their perspective on Freud's differentiation between mourning

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II Eingriffe. Stichworte. Anhang (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977) 555.

²¹ Adorno 555.

²² Adorno 571. "Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit als Aufklärung ist wesentlich solche Wendung aufs Subjekt, Verstärkung von dessen Selbstbewußtsein und damit auch von dessen selbst."

and melancholy and put forward the thesis about the Germans' inability to mourn.²³ Their psychological account of the Germans' breaking from the Nazi past after the War („Derealisation“ in their words) is quite influential.

The repression and denial of the past on the part of individuals is dealt with in Wolf's autobiographical novel *Kindheitsmuster*. Using the third person “Nelly”, instead of “I”, to describe her own childhood, the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* expresses the great difficulty to identify herself with that ideal “German girl” during the Nazi regime. Writing serves as a way to overcome alienation: to expose the repressed other, to build a connection with it, and ultimately to integrate the repressed part into the self for the purpose of a better future. Although the writing subject's attempt to recover her wholeness does not end in a success – the uncertainty of saying “I” shows the limits/boundaries of the speakable –, she has made her first step toward awareness of her past as a part of her present self and toward her willingness to accept it. Using Adorno's words, what the narrator achieves in the end is her increased self-consciousness or “subjective enlightenment”, which is crucial in the working through of the past.

The idea that the past exists in the present and the integration of the repressed past in the present serves for a better future can be found in Benjamin's understanding of history. Benjamin rejects the classical model of the philosophy of history, which sees history as progress, as a homogeneous and continuous process. For Benjamin, history is a discontinuous process, a process of permanent interruption. In Benjamin's view of history as interruption of time, the notion of the past plays a significant role, as his image of Angelus Novus (the "Angel of History") suggests:

²³ Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich, Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens (München: Piper, 1967).

*A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*²⁴

The gaze of the angel is turned toward the past, the past as a catastrophe. He is terrified by what he is seeing. Moreover, he would like to stop to save the dead; however, a strong storm from paradise with the name of progress forces him to move toward the future, a future to which the angel turns his back on. It seems that two kinds of philosophy of history are discussed here: one represented by the angel, the other by the storm/progress. Different from the latter, the angel of history does not divert his gaze away from the past, no matter how terrifying the past can be. Moreover, he cannot be satisfied only by staring at the past or even saving the dead; he is about to move away from the past to the future, a future other than the one promised by progress.

Important in my discussion here is Benjamin's idea of seeking the future in the past. In Benjamin's understanding, the past is not the price we must pay for the future, nor what legitimates the present; instead, the past is the unknown side of reality (what has been) which can rise in the light of the present, as he states:

*The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.*²⁵

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history," trans. Harry Zohn, *W.B., Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969) 257-258.

²⁵ Benjamin 255.

The past makes its appearance in the present only as a flash interrupting the flow of time. It is through that clash of a moment of the past and a moment of the present that the unknown and repressed part in the past (what was lost) is awakened through the present. In reverse, new insight into the present is to be gained through our experience of the past. There arise a new reality from the clash of the past and the present. This new reality takes the form of a “dialectical image”, in which Benjamin identified the political nature of his new concept of history, that is, the potential of a revolutionary change for the present.

In *Kindheitsmuster* the narrator’s trip to her hometown seems to be a perfect example for the flash Benjamin discusses. Through that clash of past and present, Nelly, a self-estranged part of the narrator, emerges unexpectedly. Changes occur in the narrator from that moment on. The narrator has to face her other and make efforts to integrate the repressed other into the present self. It is in her never-ending efforts that Wolf identifies the possibility of making changes.

In a similar manner with Benjamin, Wolf stresses the role of the past in our understanding of the presence and future. Not unlike Benjamin, she puts the historical subject – a subject in flesh and blood – in the foreground and pays attention to his/her everyday life, his/her misery, which has been viewed as insignificant and therefore ignored by historians and literary authors for a long time. (Christa T. and Nelly in *Kindheitsmuster* for example as historical subjects.)

Until now we have seen what an important role the past plays in Wolf’s understanding of a writer’s responsibility. The writer needs to uncover the repressed past, no matter how terrible it could be, in order to make social changes. Even after being

discredited totally as a politically engaged writer during the *Wende*, Wolf does not shun the responsibility of a writer. She reiterates the significance of the notion of “the blind spot” in writing and the necessity of exposing the repressed past in order to have a better future: „Kurz: Die Literatur wird leisten müssen, was sie immer und überall leisten muß, wird die blinden Flecken in unserer **Vergangenheit** erkunden müssen und die Menschen in den neuen Verhältnissen begleiten.“²⁶

Wolf uttered the above words in a speech after the demise of the GDR in 1990. When she looks back on history, yet another dimension of the past must be considered besides the Nazi past, that is, the 40 years of the socialist state. When talking about the estrangement of East Germans after unification: unemployment, disappointments, discrimination in the job market etc., one of Wolf’s biggest concerns is the repression and exclusion of the whole history of the GDR:

Aber es könnte sein, dass dieser Prozeß einer Entfremdung sich unter der Oberfläche massenhafter, äußerer, äußerlicher Annäherung, ja, Verbrüderung wider allen Augenschein sogar noch ausbreitet; dann nämlich, wenn im Zuge des als „Vereinigung“, gar „Wiedervereinigung“ beschriebenen schnellen Anschlusses der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik an die Bundesrepublik Deutschland die Geschichte des einen, dann nicht mehr existierenden Nachkriegsstaates auf deutschen Boden aus hingebungsvollem Anpassungsstreben auf der einen, aus Überlegenheits- und Siegesgefühl auf der anderen Seite öffentlich beschwiegen und in die Menschen zurückgedrängt würde, die sie gemacht, erlebt und erlitten haben.²⁷

²⁶ Wolf, “Zwischenrede,” *C.W. Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1999) 21.

²⁷ Wolf, *Zwischenrede* 17.

“But it could be that this process of estrangement will continue to grow below the surface, beneath the outer layer of brotherliness and rapprochement. This could happen if, in the rapid annexation of the GDR by the German Federal Republic- an Anschluss that is being described as a ‘unification’ or even a ‘reunification’ – East Germany’s history is publicly suppressed, once our nation ceases to exist, and is driven back inside the people who made, experienced, and endured it. This could happen if East Germans self-sacrificially devote themselves to trying to fit in, while West Germans act out feelings of superiority and victory.” (*Parting from Phantoms, selected writings, 1990-1994*, trans. Jan van Heurck (The university of Chicago press, 1997) 9-10.)

Here Wolf attributes the estrangement of the East- and West Germans from one another to the process of repression of the socialist state's history. The denial or demonization of the former GDR has forced East Germans to adopt an attitude of "Rechtfertigungs- und Verteidigungshaltung" (defensiveness and self-justification). Thus it has prevented the former GDR citizens to engage in "Selbstprüfung und Selbstkenntnis" (self-examination and self-knowledge).²⁸ Self-knowledge, according to Wolf, is crucial in the communication with other people. The lack of it undermines true communication and understanding between East Germans and West Germans. For Wolf, to gain self-knowledge means to acknowledge one's "blind spot" and one's country's blind spots. This means to be alert and have critical and therapeutical eye open in dealing with the GDR past. According to Wolf, a clear and differentiated picture of the life situation in the GDR, instead of seeing it as a phantom, benefits West Germans too.²⁹

Several years later, in her collection of essays *Hierzulande Andernorts – Erzählungen und andere Texte 1994-1998* Wolf outlines the function of a writer/intellectual as follows: "...ein Sich-Herarbeiten an jene Grenzlinien, die das innerste Geheimnis um sich zieht [...] sich nach und nach von dem Verdikt des Unaussprechlichen zu befreien, also nicht Selbstzerstörung, sondern Selbsterlösung zu betreiben".³⁰ Through working on the borderline between the known and unknown ("Grenzlinien") for the purpose of getting to know the deepest secret ("das innerste

²⁸ Wolf, "Zwei Briefe. I. An eine Akademie," (1991) Auf dem Weg nach Tabou (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999) 74.

²⁹ Wolf, "Abschied von Phantomen: Zur Sache ‚Deutschland‘," (1994) Auf dem Weg nach Tabou (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999) 332-333.

³⁰ Wolf, *Hierzulande Andernorts – Erzählungen und andere Texte 1994-1998* (München: Luchterhand, 1999) 29.

Geheimnis”) or for the purpose of the exposure of “the blind spot”, the ultimate objective of writing/literature is to heal, to make changes.

Besides the repressed past, the repression and exclusion of feminine values from the male dominated culture is also crucial in Wolf’s understanding of “the blind spot”. It is this aspect of “the blind spot” that put Wolf side by side with feminism. If we understand the notion of the feminine as time, as Kristeva points out in her article titled *women’s time*, there is a connection that also ties the blind spot about the past in general with the blind spot about the feminine as time. In *women’s time* Kristeva differentiates two different kinds of time: linear time and monumental time. Linear time is identified by Kristeva as masculine and therefore rejected by her, since it, as the time of linear history, suggests power relationships dominating western civilization; while the latter, cyclical or monumental time is associated with female subjectivity, because both of them are characterized by “circles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature...”.³¹ Especially monumental time, for its eternity, is linked by Kristeva to myths. In other words, it is in mythology that monumental time gets realized. In the mythic accounts of monumental temporality, Kristeva wants to reclaim the feminine impulse, therefore she shows particular interest in resurrection myths, which is very often ignored or distorted by patriarchy. In this context, the mythic past is essentially feminine. Kristeva’s location of the feminine in the mythic past can also find its parallel in Wolf, who turns to prehistory in her re-writing or re-imagination of myth in order to identify the blind spot associated with the repression and exclusion of feminine values.

³¹ Julia Kristeva, “women’s time,” *Signs* 7 (1981): 16.

IV. The blind spot – the feminine space (Wolf and feminism)

In Wolf's own understanding of "the blind spots", roughly conceived as the repressed and excluded other, priority is given to the repression and exclusion of values associated with the feminine "space," a space left out of dominant culture or the history of the victors. From that "space" Wolf not only criticizes instrumental reason but also imagines an alternative world (different from the real existing socialism and from capitalism). However, it seems that Wolf's feminist accent in her critical engagement in society did not play much of a role in Bathrick's analysis of the GDR intellectuals. Unlike Bathrick, I will keep both Wolf's socialism and feminism in the foreground in my understanding of her being a woman intellectual. In some sense, Wolf's critique of the repression and exclusion of female values in the modern industry society can be seen not only as her feminist critique of universal (bourgeois) values, but also as her indirect critique of the notion of intellectual purported in the theories of Julien Benda and Pierre Bourdieu. Both of them argue that intellectuals ought to or do represent universal values. But neither of them recognized that in their so-called universal values, the underrepresented groups, be it proletariats or women and "others" in general, are totally ignored.

According to Wolf, those excluded values associated with femininity are best represented by the marginalized groups or outsiders, who, because of their exclusion from dominant culture, cherish and practice a different set of values. In the community Mount Ida in the mountain in *Cassandra*, in the tragic outsiders like Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von Günderrode, and above all in the "Freundeskreis Gleichgesinnte" around Günderrode and Bettina von Arnim etc., an alternative to man's world is

identified by Wolf, in which different values such as love, dialogue, touch, openness and sensibility predominate. Especially the friendship among women is highly praised by Wolf as attempts to bring in female qualities to patriarchal culture and as a way to overcome alienation in the modern industry society, as she points out in *Der Schatten eines Traumes*.³²

Wolf's special interest in women and femininity and her celebration of women's difference can be already discerned in the late sixties and seventies, in her novel *Nachdenken*, her story *Selbstversuch* and in some of her essays published in *Lesen und Schreiben*. However, she did not express her concern about feminism explicitly in public until the eighties when she wrote *Cassandra and the four essays*. There in the fourth essay she pointed out for the first time that both Marxism and feminism had exerted great influence on her.³³ She was quite familiar with Western feminist theories including those of French feminists.³⁴ Compared to her essays in the 1970s (*Berührung, Die Dimension des Autors: Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann* etc.), these later essays in the 1980s,

³² Wolf, „Der Schatten eines Traumes“, C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985 Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 540-541.

³³ „Mit der Erweiterung des Blick-Winkels, der Neueinstellung der Tiefenschärfe hat mein Seh-Raster, durch den ich unsere Zeit, uns alle, dich, mich selber wahrnehme, sich entschieden verändert, vergleichbar jener frühen entschiedenen Veränderung, die mein Denken, meine Sicht und mein Selbst-Gefühl und Selbst-Anspruch vor mehr als dreißig Jahren durch die erste befreiende und erhellende Bekanntschaft mit der marxistischen Theorie und Sehweise erfuhren.“ („Vierte Vorlesung“, C.W. Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000) 151-152.)

³⁴ Wolf, Vierte Vorlesung 147. There she mentioned books such as „Am Anfang war die Frau“, „Mütter und Amazonen“, „Göttinnen“, „Das Patriarchat“, „Amazonen, Kriegerinnen und Kraftfrauen“, „Frauen – das verrückte Geschlecht?“, „Frauen in der Kunst“, „Götterzeichen, Liebeszauber, Satanskult“, „Männerphantasien“, „Weibliche Utopien - männliche Verluste“, „Weib und Macht“, „Das Geschlecht, das nicht eins ist“, „Das Geheimnis der Orakel“, „Utopische Vergangenheit“, „Außenseiter“, „Kulturgeschichtliche Spuren einer verdrängten Weiblichkeit“. „Mutterrecht“, „Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats“, „Die Wilden Früchte der Frau“, „Die weiße Göttin“, „Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit“, „Ein Zimmer für mich allein“, „Weiblichkeit in der Schrift“.

particularly the third one, downplayed class differences and foregrounded gendered differences, or the conflicts between men and women.

Like Friedrich Engels, Wolf saw a parallel between class opposition and the development of antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage;³⁵ she also saw a parallel between women's marginalization / objectification and the formation of the state.³⁶ Similarly, Wolf identified the beginning of Western civilization or the beginning of the history of Europe with the replacement of goddesses by gods. Western civilization started with men's violence upon women:

*Europa, die Tochter des phönikischen Königs, die der Gott Zeus in Stiergestalt von Phönikien nach Kreta entführte, wo sie ihm unter anderen Kindern den späteren König Minos gebar. Ein Gewaltakt an einer Frau begründet im griechischen Mythos die Geschichte Europas.*³⁷

With the collapse of Troy, a patriarchal mode of thinking and ruling, defined by "Machtstreben" and "Gewalt", had gained controlling power.³⁸ In this context, Wolf attributed the increasing arms race on both sides of the Wall in the 1980s to the patriarchal mode of thinking, other than to the Cold War as the climax of the ideological conflicts between socialism and capitalism.³⁹ In other words, for Wolf, the Cold War was the consequence of the patriarchal mode of thinking. In some sense, the class conflicts between bourgeois and proletarian exemplified in the arms race retreated to the

³⁵ Christa Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000) 103.

³⁶ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 166. „Parallel zum Prozeß der Staatenbildung unterliegen die alten Stammesgöttinnen den neuen staatlich anerkannten Göttern“.

³⁷ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 105-106.

³⁸ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 112.

³⁹ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 141. „Zusammenhang ... der exzessiven Rüstungsanstrengung auf allen Seiten mit den patriarchalischen Strukturen des Denkens und Regierens.“

background; instead, gendered conflicts were foregrounded by Wolf in her understanding of the status quo.

In the Frankfurter lectures Wolf focused her critique of the patriarchal mode of thinking on her critique of Western literature and aesthetics. According to Wolf, the whole Western literature is literature by white men, where there is no place for women. Aesthetics, based on authority of the so-called objective rules, according to which a work of art is to be recognized and evaluated, functions in the same way as philosophy and science. Wolf states:

Die Ästhetik, soweit sie ein Gattungs- und Regelwerk, und besonders, wo und wenn sie bestimmte Anschauungen über den Gegenstand der verschiedenen Gattungen, also die "Wirklichkeit" vertritt (die, ich merke es selbst, aber kann mir nicht helfen, immer häufiger zwischen meine Führungsstriche gerät): die Ästhetik, sage ich, ist wie Philosophie und Wissenschaft, mindestens im gleichen Maß, zu dem Zweck erfunden, sich Wirklichkeit vom Leib zu halten, sich vor ihr zu schützen, wie zu dem Ziel, der Wirklichkeit näherzukommen.⁴⁰

In the field of aesthetics, like in philosophy and science, classification, abstraction, assimilation etc. are employed in dealing with the reality, so that everything in the world can be subjected to man's calculation and domination. The pay off is alienation. For the sake of knowing and controlling, diversity, complexity, and openness of reality are abandoned in favor of dualistic modes of thinking and in favor of closeness and so-called objectivity.⁴¹ Subjective elements, which cannot be explained away "objectively" and therefore cannot be brought under the control of reason, are repressed or seen as unimportant. Wolf continues to say that women belong to these incomprehensible and

⁴⁰ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 174.

"Aesthetics, to the extent that it is a system of categorization and control. And especially where it advocates certain views about the subject matter of the various genres, namely, 'reality' – aesthetics, I say, like philosophy and science, is invented not so much to enable us to get closer to reality as for the purpose of warding it off, of protecting against it." (Wolf, Cassandra: a novel and four essays, trans. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984) 300.)

⁴¹ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 161.

uncontrollable elements. For this reason men feel threatened by women. Men's horror of women or goddess can be seen in male writers, such as Homer, Hesiod, and later D. H. Lawrence as Wolf points out.

Wolf's insistence on women's difference as an alternative to the patriarchal mode of thinking, which dominates aesthetics, manifests itself in her notion of women's writing. In regard to women's silence, objectification and even demonization in Western literature, Wolf rejects aesthetics as a manifestation of men's need for norms. Instead she argues that women's specific experience calls for a different kind of writing:

Inwieweit gibt es wirklich "weibliches" Schreiben? Insoweit Frauen aus historischen und biologischen Gründen eine andre Wirklichkeit erleben als Männer. Wirklichkeit anders erleben als Männer und dies ausdrücken. Insoweit Frauen nicht zu den Herrschenden, sondern zu den Beherrschten gehören, jahrhundertlang, zu den Objekten der Objekte. Objekte zweiten Grades, oft genug Objekte von Männern, die selbst Objekte sind, also, ihrer sozialen Lage nach, unbedingt Angehörige der zweiten Kultur; insoweit sie aufhören, sich an dem Versuch abzuarbeiten, sich in die herrschenden Wahnsysteme zu integrieren. Insoweit sie, schreibend und lebend, auf Autonomie aus sind.⁴²

Here Wolf justifies different ways of writing for women through her belief in women's specific experiences caused by their biological difference, and above all, by their different historical experiences, that is, their particular experience of objectification. In a similar manner with Wolf, Simone de Beauvoir also stresses the significance of social context in the formation of women's difference in her famous statement: "One is not

⁴² Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 133.

"To what extent is there really such a thing as 'women's writing'? To the extent that women, for historical and biological reasons, experience a different reality than men and express it. To the extent that women belong not to the rulers but to the ruled, and have done so for centuries. To the extent that they are the objects of objects, second-degree objects, frequently the objects of men who are themselves objects, and so, in terms of their social position, unqualified members of the subculture. To the extent that they stop wearing themselves out trying to integrate themselves into the prevailing delusional systems. To the extent that, writing and living, they aim at autonomy." (Wolf, Cassandra: a novel and four essays, trans. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984) 259.)

born, but rather becomes, a woman.”⁴³ Both of them put women’s objectification, or in de Beauvoir, woman as man’s other, to the foreground in their understanding of women’s difference. And in both of them there is the collapse of nature and women for their common objectification.⁴⁴ However, de Beauvoir, as representative of liberal feminism, struggles for woman’s having the same equality with man, while Wolf of the later generation insists on positive values of woman’s difference. According to Wolf, women’s objectified status makes them experience the world differently and cherish different values and norms. That is why their not having any “*authentischen Muster*” (authentic models) in literature could still be an advantage for them, in spite of the fact that beginning anew without models costs “*Zeit, Umwege, Irrtümer*” (time, detours, mistakes).⁴⁵ Yet this long-winded route is precisely the route of subjective authenticity, a route which is crucial to writing in modern times.

Wolf’s critique of the western mode of thinking together with her understanding of women’s difference and women’s writing brings her alongside the French feminists’ critique of Western philosophical and theoretical discourse, such as Hélène Cixous⁴⁶ and Luce Irigaray⁴⁷. In their critique of Western mode of thinking as patriarchal, the binary principle, that is, the hierarchical opposition between man and woman, reason and feeling etc. is put under critical scrutiny and rejected by them as the foundation of

⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir, The second sex (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 267.

⁴⁴ de Beauvoir 73.

⁴⁵ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung* 169.

⁴⁶ Hélène Cixous, “The laugh of the Medusa,” New French Feminism. An anthology, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken books, 1981) 245-264.

⁴⁷ Luce Irigaray, This sex which is not one, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1985).

Western thought. As resistance to men's binary logic, women's differences are re-appreciated. Not unlike them, values cherished by Wolf draw upon an essentialist notion of femininity. However, for Cixous and Irigaray, women's difference lies mainly in multiplicity and plurality, which comes either from women's sexual organs (Irigaray) or from women's multiple libidinal energy (Cixous). While unlike them, Wolf does not situate women's difference totally in a woman's body (though she does mention the biological difference). Rather, women's difference in Wolf is always associated with women's specific experience caused mainly by their objectification.

Wolf's understanding of women's difference as "the blind spot"- the repressed and excluded other – based on a historical and social context manifests itself for example in how she locates the source of such kind of exclusion. In order to identify this "feminine space", Wolf turns to the past to chose some significant historical moments, or turning points, such as the Trojan War in *Cassandra* and the beginning of the 19th century in *Kein Ort. Nirgends*. The former signals the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, when women's rights to take part in public affairs were not totally denied, however, the increase of male power and female marginalization in the public sphere can be discerned. The latter, the time period between the French Revolution and the following Restoration indicated for Wolf the beginning of industrialization/capitalism when economic rationalism was gaining control. Empowered by the development of science and technique, human beings searched for all kinds of resources to satisfy their desire for progress. In doing so, economic rationalism, utilitarianism and pragmatism predominated, while other elements, mostly associated with femininity, such as feelings, fantasies and self-reflection, which could not be explained by the modern technology and

could get in the way of economic progress, were rejected. This time around 1800 was for Wolf “die Geburtsstunde der modernen Entfremdung”,⁴⁸ when the notion of organic was destroyed. Instead, alienation, “Spaltung” or “Zerrissenheit” began to define the modern human being.

The early romantic writers, such as Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von Günderrode and many others too, suffered from this kind of alienation. But at the same time they tried to find an alternative world, where art and science, feelings and reason, human being and nature were not separated from each other. According to Wolf, alienation and the destruction of the organic self are caused by the separation or the hierarchical opposition between man and woman, reason and feeling etc. Although those romantic writers, seen as “Außenseiter” and “Abweichler”, failed in the end to get their ideal of wholeness realized in the real world, in the values they embodied, Wolf identifies a potential for an alternative history. Their struggle and their failure provide Wolf with the means not only to criticize the course taken by modern civilization but also to explore a possible solution. In this sense, her turning back to Romanticism has a political nature.

Moreover, at the beginning of the 19th century Wolf sees a “negatives Analogiemodell zur Gegenwart”.⁴⁹ During the Aufbau-period of the GDR, a socialist state’s emphasis was put on the notion of production and economic progress. In this sense, the GDR, although defined by socialism, was still a modern industrial society, with no difference from other Western industrial countries, as Wolf indicated already in her *Büchner-Preis Rede* in October 1980:

⁴⁸ Michael Schenkel, Fortschritts – und Modernitätskritik in der DDR-Literatur. Prosatexte der achtziger Jahre (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1995) 205.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Schenkel, Fortschritts – und Modernitätskritik in der DDR-Literatur 205.

Wir, ernüchtern bis auf die Knochen, stehen entgeistert vor den Vergegenständlichten Träumen jenes instrumentalen Denkens, das sich immer noch Vernunft nennt, aber dem aufklärerischen Ansatz auf Emanzipation, auf Mündigkeit hin, längst entglitt und als blanker Nützlichkeitswahn in das Industriezeitalter eingetreten ist.⁵⁰

In Wolf's statement she shows her great concern about the reduction of reason to instrumental reason in modern industry societies including the GDR. In this reduction reason has lost its positive qualities bestowed upon it by the Enlightenment.

Wolf's critique of instrumental reason within the GDR context parallels the dialectic of Enlightenment theorized by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in the 1940s. In the preface to the 1969 edition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno address the book's (first published in 1947) continued relevance to the postwar era. Rather than aiming only at the advanced capitalist society, their critique is also directed to socialist society, since the development of socialism is included by them within the Enlightenment tradition. These two intellectuals' concern about the potentially destructive nature of modern science and technology is also shared by Wolf and other GDR writers in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵¹ However, unlike her male counterparts, Wolf questions the project of Enlightenment through the lens of gender.⁵²

⁵⁰ Wolf, „Von Büchner sprechen,“ *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 612.

⁵¹ Wolfgang Emmerich argues that the literature of the late 1970s and 1980s in the GDR is characterized by “Zivilisationskritik”, which resonates with the critique of enlightenment articulated by Frankfurt School theorists Horkheimer and Adorno. (*Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1997) 274ff.)

⁵² See Brigitte Rossbacher's *Illusions of progress: Christa Wolf and the critique of science in GDR women's literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000). There she deals with the critique of science in GDR women's literature. She discusses Wolf, Monika Maron and Helga Königsdorf and argues how these women writers express the dialectic of enlightenment in gendered terms.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno examine the project of Enlightenment in its failure to achieve its goal of human liberation. And one of their main foci is the critique of instrumental reason. Unlike objective reason, instrumental reason does not care for what kind of ends we should have; instead, its concern is to offer us means to our ends, no matter what our ends happen to be. Therefore there is a lack of reflections on real needs, and people just accept what has already been there. In other words, enlightened people fail to define their own ends. In this sense, the so-called enlightened human being stands in contrast to Kant's ideal of enlightenment which is defined by "Mündigkeit" (maturity) or autonomy, that is human being's independence and ability to choose and set ends for themselves.⁵³ Adorno addresses conformist tendencies of instrumental reason as follows:

*The individual is reduced to the nodal point of the conventional responses and modes of operation expected of him. ...Through the countless agencies of mass production and its culture the conventionalized modes of behavior are impressed on the individual as the only natural, respectable, and rational ones. He defined himself only as a thing, as a static element, as success or failure. His yardstick is self-preservation, successful or unsuccessful approximation to the objectivity of his function and the models established for it.*⁵⁴

In some sense, the best exemplification for his description of "conventionalized modes of behavior" are the so-called *Hopp-Hopp-people*, *Tatsachenmenschen*, or *Phantasielose* in *Nachdenken*, whom Christa T. cannot get along with. Christa T. with her sensitivity and imagination and with her various attempts to try everything new in life critiques

⁵³ Kant: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its causes lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without further guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [Dare to know!] "Have courage to use your own understanding!" – that is the motto of enlightenment." („An answer to the question: what is Enlightenment?" Perpetual peace and other essays, trans. and ed. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983) 41.)

⁵⁴ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the Dialectic of enlightenment (New York: Continuum, 2001) 28.

instrumental reason. She, even with her early death, sets up a model for another type of progress, a real one in opposition to the “progress” guided by instrumental reason which results in “the impoverishment of thought and of experience” or “regression”.⁵⁵

Like Adorno, Wolf criticizes the reduction of reason to instrumental reason in modern industrial society including the GDR. Unlike Adorno, Wolf criticizes instrumental reason from a feminist perspective. In her critique, she foregrounds the opposition of reason and feeling, men and women and the exclusion and repression of femininity as a result of such kind of reduction. It is in this exclusion of female qualities that Wolf senses the danger of destruction of human beings. It becomes therefore important to recognize the value of those excluded female qualities. For this reason one of the important tasks of literature is to expose and re-appropriate these excluded values - the blind spot - to save the subject, or to prevent the human being’s self-destruction.

In Wolf’s celebration of women’s difference, she rejects the idea of women’s identification with power or the replacement of patriarchal mode of thinking with matriarchal one.⁵⁶ Women’s celebration of their difference from men does not mean their rejection of any values associated with men, such as reason. For Wolf that difference plays a role means more in the sense of changing perspectives on the world. For example, instead of competition and violence, cooperation and sharing of all resources should predominate in our world. In this context, Wolf emphasizes particularly the importance of the communicative aspects of social relationships. For Wolf women’s

⁵⁵ Adorno, the Dialectic of enlightenment 36.

⁵⁶ “But it does not make it any easier to achieve maturity if a masculinity mania is replaced by a femininity mania, and if women throw over the achievements of rational thought simply because men produced them, in order to substitute an idealization of prerational stages in human history, ... “(Wolf, Cassandra: a novel and four essays, trans. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984) 260-261.)

self-fulfillment only happens within a community through communication or dialogue with the others: Günderrode within her circle of female friends, Cassandra within Mount Ida, the narrator in her dialogic relationship with Christa T.⁵⁷ etc. Wolf states:

Es gibt keinen Weg vorbei an der Persönlichkeitsbildung, an rationalen Modellen der Konfliktlösung, das heißt auch an der Auseinandersetzung und Zusammenarbeit mit Andersdenkenden und, selbstverständlich, Andersgeschlechtlichen. Autonomie ist eine Aufgabe für jedermann, und Frauen, die sich auf ihre Weiblichkeit als einen Wert zurückziehen, handeln im Grunde, wie es ihnen adressiert wurde: Sie reagieren mit einem großangelegten Ausweichmanöver auf die Herausforderung der Realität an ihre ganze Person.⁵⁸

Here Wolf rejects the idea of women's only making use of female values and their rejection of reason and a mode of rational thinking. However, in Wolf's recognition of reason in its solving conflicts, she stresses the significance of communication and cooperation with *Andersdenkenden* (people, who think differently), including *Andersgeschlechtlichen* (people with different gender). In other words, the communicative or dialogic aspect of reason come to the foreground in Wolf's description of social life. In this regard, similarities can be identified between Wolf and Habermas.

Like Wolf, Habermas also emphasizes the important role played by communication in the formation of social relationships. His notion of the public sphere functions as a place where matters of public significance are discussed among citizens without regard to their social status. Through public discussion, a rational consensus about common good should be reached. In his communicative ethics, Habermas argues for the necessity of the participants' resolving conflicts through communication in our modern and pluralistic

⁵⁷ See The dialogic and difference: an/other woman in Virginia Woolf and C.W. Thore Anne Hermann argues for a dialogic relationship between the narrator and Christa T. based on Bakhtin's term "the dialogic"

⁵⁸ Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung 134.

society.⁵⁹ After pointing out that nowadays there is a lack of “substantive background consensus on the underlying moral norms”⁶⁰ in people’s making moral judgments, Habermas states: “... morality derives a genuine meaning, independent of the various conceptions of the good, from the form and perspective structure of unimpaired, intersubjective socialization.”⁶¹ In other words, moral judgment is the product of communicative interaction which involves a plurality of subjects. Habermas continues to say that no subject who is capable of speech and action should be excluded from the community and deprived of the right of making relevant contributions.⁶² Moreover, Habermas stresses the role played by solidarity and justice in people’s communication with one another. That is, each participant in communication, as a member of a community, shows solidarity to one another. At the same time, he/she, as individual, has differences and therefore needs to show respect for everyone’s difference. That is justice. Not unlike Wolf, the inclusive nature of a community is stressed by Habermas. However, in public spheres as we know it, there are always exclusion and power hierarchies. Therefore Habermas’s mode of communication is only an ideal situation, as his critics later point out.⁶³ The difficulty or impossibility of getting this idealized mode of communication realized under real conditions can also be seen in Wolf’s mode of communication, which I will discuss in the next part dealing specifically with Wolf and

⁵⁹ Jürgen Habermas, The inclusion of the other (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998) 39-40.

⁶⁰ Habermas 39.

⁶¹ Habermas 40.

⁶² Habermas 41.

⁶³ For gender exclusions see Joan Landes’s Women and the public sphere in the age of the French revolution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); other exclusions, such as class, see Geoff Eley’s “Nations, publics, and political cultures: placing Habermas in the nineteenth century,” Habermas and the public sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT press, 1992) 289-339.

socialism including the socialist public sphere. Until now we can see the similarities between Wolf and Habermas in their emphasis on the communicative aspect of reason. However, differences do exist between them. And these differences put Wolf side by side with those Frankfurt School feminist thinkers, such as Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young, who criticize and rewrite Habermas's communicative ethics from a feminist perspective.

In Habermas's mode of communication he foregrounds the significance of reason, as he states:

If everyone who engages in argumentation must make at least these pragmatic presuppositions, then in virtue of (i) the public character of practical discourses and the inclusion of all concerned and (ii) the equal communicative rights of all participants, only reasons that give equal weight to the interests and evaluative orientations of everybody can influence the outcome of practical discourses; and because of the absence of (iii) deception and (iv) coercion, nothing but reasons can tip the balance in favor of the acceptance of a controversial norm.⁶⁴

What is more, Habermas relies on "rational force of arguments",⁶⁵ rather than moral feelings, including empathy, in the justification of moral point of view through communication. His notion of dialogic reason mostly contains features of a universal normative reason, as both Benhabib and Young point out. That is, in Habermas's notion of reason, a neutral and impartial standpoint is privileged, while feelings or specific needs of individual, which might damage neutral judgment, are devalued and excluded. For example, due to the lack of a traditional grounding for a normative consensus (mainly the religious one which has been undermined nowadays), Habermas points out that a possible substitute for the traditional grounding could be found only if "the form of communication in which joint practical deliberation takes place were such that it makes

⁶⁴ Habermas 44.

⁶⁵ Habermas 44.

possible a justification of moral norms convincing to all participants because of its **impartiality**”.⁶⁶

One aspect that sets Wolf and Habermas apart is Wolf’s feminist critique/understanding of reason. As we have discussed before, Wolf shows great concern about the division of reason and feeling and association of these traits with male and female. She attributes human alienation and human destruction to the hierarchical opposition of reason and feeling, man and woman, mind and body etc. As alternative to this dichotomy, Wolf expands the notion of reason to include subjective elements, such as emotion and intuition, which are defined in patriarchy as irrational and excluded from moral judgment. The dichotomy between reason and feeling is deconstructed. In this context, Myra Love states: “Wolf has more confidence in the possibility of reconstituting morality by counteracting the repression of moral feelings than in the potential for a universalist morality based on abstract principle and arrived at solely through intellectually defensible argumentation.”⁶⁷ Love’s comment here also contains her critique of Habermas who stresses universalist morality based on abstract principles in the construction of new kinds of human relationships.

Along with this understanding of reason based mainly on universalist principles, Habermas opposes the public as a realm of reason to the private as a realm of desire/feeling. In doing so, important features of the universalist ideal of the civic public still can be discerned, as Young argues: “Habermas retains vestiges of a dichotomy between reason and affectivity. He rather firmly separates discourse about feelings from

⁶⁶ Habermas 41.

⁶⁷ Myra Love, Christa Wolf. Literature and the Conscience of History (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) 76.

discourse about norms.”⁶⁸ Benhabib in her critique of Habermas also points out the distinction Habermas makes between a public realm of rights and principles and a private realm of contextualized need.⁶⁹ In his division of public and private with the corresponding opposition between reason and feeling, Habermas abstracts the reasoning subject from her or his own concrete needs, desires, and considers others also from this generalized standpoint, as he claims: “...the reasons presented in discourse cast off their **agent-relative meaning** and take on an epistemic meaning from the standpoint of symmetrical consideration.”⁷⁰

As a result, Habermas seems to turn away from the possibilities offered by communicative ethics, as Young argues. Young interprets communicative ethics as follows:

*... one possible interpretation of communicative ethics is that normative claims are the outcome of the expression of needs, feelings, and desires which individuals claim to have met and recognized by others under conditions where all have an equal voice in the expression of their needs and desires. This interpretation thus tends to collapse the distinction between public reason and a private realm of desire, need, and feeling.*⁷¹

Subjective elements such as need and feeling, once expressed first and second “recognized” in public, are pinpointed here in Young’s understanding of communicative ethic as collapse to the division of public/reason and private/feeling. Young rejects the association of public with reason and private with desire and the resulting hierarchical division. In a similar manner, in her rethinking the public sphere, Nancy Fraser points out

⁶⁸ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 118.

⁶⁹ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 348-51.

⁷⁰ Habermas 43.

⁷¹ Young 118.

that this division, or the differentiation of the public and private is in fact “cultural classifications and rhetorical labels”.⁷² She reasons that in the limitation of the scope of debate to issues counted as a matter of common good and in assigning some issues as private, therefore excluding them from the discussion, specific view and interests are legitimated while others are excluded. For this reason, Fraser argues for the necessity of taking private interests or private issues into account.

In some sense, Wolf with her insistence on subjective dimension of reason and her emphasis on subjective knowledge rather than abstract universal values in social communication goes hand in hand with Young and Fraser in their feminist critique of Habermas. Wolf’s stress on subjective knowledge in communication began already in the 1960s when she wrote *Nachdenken* and continues after German unification. Through the depiction of Christa T. and the relationship between her and the narrator, Wolf introduced the so-called private issues (specific feelings of individuals and their desire etc.) into the realm of public debates. In *Nachdenken* we can discern Wolf’s ideal mode of communication, in which another subject (Christa T.) is always included in the formation of subjectivity (the narrator). After German unification, one of the solutions Wolf put forward to difficulties and problems faced by both East and West Germans after unification is communication with one another, even if the communication on an equal base requires much effort, as she states: “Da helfen nur mühsame, schmerzhaft, oft verletzend Sprachübungen in kleineren und größeren Kreisen, aus denen wir alle

⁷² Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: critical reflections on the “postsocialist” condition* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) 88.

vielleicht verändert herauskommen.”⁷³ In addition, she stresses the importance of feelings in the communication, as she asked: “Käme es jetzt aber nicht auf gegenseitiges Eingeweihtsein an – nicht nur in Politik, Wirtschaft, Finanzen, Wissenschaft und Umweltzerstörung - sondern auch in die innere Verfassung der Menschen?”⁷⁴ For Wolf, one of the important aspects of the East Germans’ “inner state” after the Wende is the anxiety caused by their second coming to terms with the past – the 40 years’ history of the GDR –, which is crucial in gaining one’s self-knowledge. As Love points out, for Wolf, subjective knowledge including self-recognition and self-knowledge is “the necessary precondition for reason and for intersubjective knowledge and communication”.⁷⁵ That is to say that subjective knowledge does not exclude reason, rather, as prerequisite of reason, it increases the possibilities of an open discussion or social communication.

Moreover, those feminist cultural theorists also criticize Habermas’s notion of consensus. According to Habermas, participants in dialogue should aim at consensus. As Young points out, in a society defined by differences, notion of consensus in fact denies difference, therefore “the perception of anything like a common good can only be an outcome of public interaction that expresses rather than submerges particularities.”⁷⁶

Unlike Habermas, as Love points out, through social communication, Wolf wants to

⁷³ Wolf, “Wo ist euer Lächeln geblieben? Brachland Berlin 1990,” *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999) 57.

⁷⁴ Wolf, “Zwischenrede,” *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999) 17.

“Oughtn’t we rather to concentrate on a mutual exchange of information-not just about politics, economics, finance, science, and the destruction of the environment, but about our inner state and feelings, too.” (Wolf, *Parting from Phantoms, selected writings, 1990-1994*, trans. Jan van Heurck (The university of Chicago press, 1997) 9-10.)

⁷⁵ Love, *Christa Wolf. Literature and the Conscience of History* 167.

⁷⁶ Young 119.

achieve the co-existence of differences rather than consensus. Wolf's depiction of the imagined community on Mount Ida in *Cassandra* embodies the co-existence of difference to a great extent. On Mount Ida, an alternative or competing public sphere is formed where differences are affirmed positively, instead of being submerged. There, different groups of people transcending social class, gender and national boundaries are living peacefully together. However, like Habermas idealizes the bourgeois public sphere in the 18th century England, Wolf's depiction of Mount Ida is also an idealized community, which is fragile and destined to fail in the end.

Until now we can see that there are certain similarities between Wolf's mode of communication and contemporary feminist discussions around Habermas's theories represented by Young, Benhabib and Fraser etc. This connection makes Wolf's work relevant to readers nowadays, including feminists. In her mode of communication, Wolf foregrounds the significance of subjective elements associated very often with femininity, a feminine "space", excluded from dominant culture. The exposure of that "space" is given priority in Wolf's project of uncovering "the blind spot" and defines Wolf's responsibility as a woman writer / intellectual. Yet, besides feminism, socialism also plays a significant role in Wolf's critical involvement with society. In some sense we can say that Wolf's re-appreciation of feminine values aims at a new form of socialist organization, or socialism as alternative to the real existing socialism and capitalism.

V. *Wolf and socialism*

In Wolf's interpretation of *Nachdenken*, besides the clarification of some issues with respect to possible difficulties in understanding, such as the relationship between the narrator and Christa T., the focus is put on the elaboration of her standpoint toward socialism. Anticipating all kinds of controversies regarding her attitude towards the Party and the socialist state aroused by the publication of *Nachdenken*, Wolf expresses her deep commitment to socialism.

She begins with a quote from Johannes Becher (a literary émigré who returned from exile like Anna Seghers and Bertolt Brecht) „Was ist das: Dieses Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen?“ She points out in the *Selbstinterview* that only after finding one self could people have their inner contentment. In this context, there is accordance between literature and a socialist society. Both share a common objective, that is, to help people come to their self-realization.⁷⁷

Besides the common goals shared by both literature and socialist society, Wolf reiterates the advantages granted to writers by socialism (She addressed this issue in *Einiges über meine Arbeit als Schriftsteller* in 1965). She stresses the feeling of responsibility coming from the significant role played by the writer in a socialist society and the communication with her audiences. Disappointed by the critical review written by the Swedish publisher Thomas von Vegesack, who, not unlike the critics in West Germany, interprets *Nachdenken* mainly as Wolf's complaint about socialism, Wolf reiterates her commitment to socialism in her letter to Vegesack. There she states:

⁷⁷ Wolf, „Selbstinterview,“ *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 33.

*Ich kann mir nicht erklären, dass in Ihrer Kritik nicht einmal in einem Nebensatz diese meine grundsätzliche Haltung angedeutet wird – eine Haltung, die aus fast fünfundzwanzig Jahren engagierten Lebens in diesem Land erwachsen ist. Unmöglich können Sie überhört haben, was ich öfter sagte: dass es mir nicht in den Sinn kommen würde, die Unverbindlichkeit, die man im Westen häufig mit Freiheit verwechselt, gegen die Verantwortung einzutauschen, die ich hier zu tragen habe. Dass nicht Stipendien und Preise und Narrenfreiheit das wichtigste ist, was eine Gesellschaft ihren Autoren zu geben hat, sondern das Gefühl, ernst genommen zu werden, und der immer erneute Anstoß zu Produktivität. Dass ich beides finde, da, wo ich lebe, und dass ich keinen Grund sehe, mich darüber zu beklagen.*⁷⁸

Wolf shows her surprise and incomprehension about why her political standpoint toward socialism and her 25 years of political engagement within the state are totally ignored in the interpretation of her work both in the GDR and in the West, including Western countries outside of the FRG. She compares the freedom and prosperity enjoyed by a writer in the West with the responsibility, the importance and thus the motivation felt by a writer in the socialist society, and expresses her preference explicitly.

The question is how we can understand the responsibility of a writer addressed by Wolf here? It seems that for Wolf one important aspect of being a writer is to educate and to raise consciousness among the others. This role of the intellectual is consistent with the belief that writers have a clearer consciousness than all the others. In other words, not all people are yet equal. Otherwise everyone would have acquired true consciousness and there is no responsibility of the few. This seems to contradict Wolf's ideal mode of communication expressed in her depiction of Mount Ida in *Cassandra*, in which, like Habermas's communicative ethics, everyone has an equal say irrespective of their differences. One explanation is that unlike the idealized and utopian vision Wolf paints of Mount Ida, actual social life as we know is also about conflict. Furthermore,

⁷⁸ Wolf, „C.W. an den schwedischen Verleger Thomas von Vegesack,“ *C.W. Ein Arbeitsbuch*, ed. Angela Drescher (Berlin Weimar: Aufbau, 1989) 135.

differences between persons and groups are not so easily reconcilable nor is the goal of living peacefully with others so easily attainable. There is a gap between the ideal and real life situation.

Put it in the context of the socialist state, this real life situation is that some people (writers or intellectuals) seem to be first among equals to acquire consciousness, therefore they take position of an intellectual authority and view educating people as their responsibility. Underlying this argument is the assumption that real-life socialism has not yet achieved the kind of emancipation, where everyone is capable of making equal contributions. Moreover, due to the invasion of the state power in nearly every aspect of social life and the resulting lack of a critical public sphere, above all, a critical press, the GDR citizens did not have a chance to speak for their own needs and thoughts in public. This explains why the literary public sphere and literary intellectuals took on the important role of an ersatz public sphere to articulate broader social aspirations or to give voice to the broader population. In this context, Wolf could and would not give up her elite role to speak for the others. The peculiar history of Germany, especially during the period of fascism, might also explain Wolf's lack of confidence in the masses' ability of taking an active role in the changing of society.⁷⁹ However, in her public speeches,

⁷⁹ This lack of confidence in the ordinary people due to the specific situation of German history can also be seen in Brecht. Brecht, whose epic theater suggested the active involvement of the audience, questioned the audience's ability of taking an active role in the changing of a society: "The cleansing process of revolution was not granted to Germany. The great transformation that otherwise follows a revolution arrived without it...[I]n the context of a new way of life which was changing daily and for which substantial sections of the population still lacked appropriately new ways of thinking and feeling, art cannot appeal simply to the instinct and emotions of its motley audience. It cannot allow itself to be led by the audience's applause or displeasure; on the other hand, representing the interests of the new vanguard class, art cannot allow itself to be cut off from the audience it must lead" (qtd. in Loren Kruger. „Wir treten aus unseren Rollen heraus: Theater Intellectuals and Public Spheres,“ *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 188-189.). Here Brecht showed the contradictions between artists' attachment to the critical audience on the one hand and the audience's lack of „new ways of thinking and feeling“ on the other hand due to the lack of revolution in the founding of East Germany. As Kruger points out, the “new determining public” is figured here as a

public readings – a face-to-face communication with her audience - and in her letter exchanges with her loyal readers, in particular in her writing defined by “subjective authenticity”, we can see her attempts to abandon her role as authority and to have intensive and various communications with her ambitious audience.

In her letter to the German Writers’ Union, when Wolf is asked to take a firm stand on the western critics, she shows her deep appreciation of having the possibility of being able to have communication with her readers: „einer der wichtigsten Vorteile, die ein Autor in unserer Gesellschaft wahrnehmen kann, ist die Möglichkeit intensiver und vielfältiger Kontakte mit anspruchsvollen Lesern.“⁸⁰ The encouragement and the feeling of responsibility engendered by such kind of communication means a great deal for Wolf as a writer. Because she feels she represents them, she is given the power to do so. There is in this sense a reciprocity – that of representative democracy – that emerges here. However, while a political representative empties himself of his own situation and becomes the vessel of other people, the writer who acts in authentic manner must situate herself more strongly in her ground, precisely to speak to the others. Despite her explicit expression of her political standpoint toward socialism, Wolf’s own voice was totally submerged in the ideological war generated by *Nachdenken* at the end of the 1960s. I will deal with this in the next two chapters.

Wolf’s commitment to socialism and Marxism - an important aspect of her political

“passive audience”, whose role is to endorse new ways of thinking and feeling put forward by intellectuals and great transformation of society led by intellectuals rather than to challenge it (189).

⁸⁰ Wolf, „C.W. an den Deutschen Schriftstellerverband (den 8. November 69), “ *C.W. Ein Arbeitsbuch*, ed. Angela Drescher (Berlin Weimar: Aufbau, 1989) 175-176.

engagement as an intellectual - is to be understood along with the unique situation of the GDR writers of her generation, as Bathrick points out.⁸¹ In the first chapter dealing with the significance of the literary public sphere in the GDR, I have talked about the role played by the anti-fascist myth, i.e. the coupling of socialism established in the GDR state with anti-fascism, in the understanding by Wolf's generation of socialism. Seen as overcoming the Nazi past and as beginning anew, the building of a new socialist state attracts not only Wolf's generation within Germany (those born around 1930s) but also a large number of literary émigrés coming from exile such as Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher etc. In addition, the feeling of responsibility and of being taken seriously deriving mainly from the significance of the literary public sphere as ersatz public sphere reinforces the writers' attachment to socialism to a great extent. This unique situation of the GDR intellectuals explains their insistence on socialist alternative up until the collapse of the regime.

As one of the most established writers, Wolf is not an exception in her commitment to socialism. Her earlier works in the 1950s and early 1960s including those written by her as a literary critic clearly show the influence of socialist realism. *Der geteilte Himmel* is one of the most successful products of the "Bitterfeld Way".⁸² There an optimistic view about modern socialist production can be discerned, which goes hand in hand with the Neue Ökonomische System (der Planung und Leitung) put forward at the VI. Parteitag of the SED in 1963. The NÖS set modernization and rationalization of the economic system as its goal and stood in a tight connection with the project of the

⁸¹ Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 13.

⁸² At the Bitterfeld conference held in 1959, a "socialist realist" aesthetic was established which intended to bridge the gap between writers and workers.

„Wissenschaftlich-Technischen Revolution“ (WTR). However, this simple celebration of industrial production came to a stop not long after the implementation of the NÖS. Scepticism and critique were generated by writers such as Wolf, Günter Kunert, Heiner Müller, Irmtraud Morgner, Volker Braun, Ulrich Plenzdorf and Günter de Bruyn etc., since the one-sided struggle for economic development brought alienation and the predominance of instrumental reason as results and seemed to turn away from the real goal of Marxism and socialism. Through its emphasis on subjectivity and deployment of different modern narrative techniques, literature from the mid-1960s to the 1970s became the main place where a critique of real existing socialism was generated. Wolf's *Nachdenken* together with Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1972) and Brauen's *Unvollendete Geschichte* (1975) were representatives of the emerging trend defined by the new subjectivity. By putting the self and individual view in the foreground in the process of historical construction, those writers challenged the official Marxist-Leninist historiography with its universalized and objective (party) view of history. Moreover, historical progress, scientific rationalism and the primacy of production – the core of the guiding official policy – were put into question too in the literary public sphere. However, even in these writers' increasing critical tendency, or radicality in understanding history and aesthetic modernity, the notion of a writer as a political engaged, antifascist and ideal-socialist still persisted. There was always a sense of hope for a better future in those writers' works, such as in Plenzdorf's and Wolf's, even when they let their heroes die in the end. For this reason, in Wolf's self-interpretation of *Nachdenken*, C.T.'s death was not a failure, Wolf stated that: „sie in der Zeit, die ihr gegeben war, voll gelebt hat.“⁸³ Therefore instead of doubts and resignation,

⁸³ Wolf, „Selbstinterview,“ C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze. Reden und Gespräche

what Wolf felt was only sadness. For Wolf, sadness and hope do not preclude each other. Rather, they create contradictions, which aims at movements and changes.

The legitimacy of the SED-regime was seen as reformable and never questioned. The Czechoslovakian reform movement of 1968, seen as an approach to “reconcile socialism and democracy”⁸⁴ generated great enthusiasm among East Germany’s intellectuals and demonstrated their optimism towards a reformed socialism. Even in Biermann’s expulsion in 1976, seen as a turning point by many critics, Wolf and other intellectuals never gave up their hope towards a reformed socialism. Biermann’s expulsion caused unprecedented public response. Over 150 prominent artists including Wolf signed a petition of protest. However, despite great disappointments of intellectuals, only some of them left for the West, while most critical intellectuals were against the emigration option. They stayed for their project to reform socialism. In this context, the Western media’s comments about Biermann’s expatriation were seen by most established GDR intellectuals as slandering of East Germany. Volker Braun for example pointed out that the aim of Western commentators was to “drive a wedge between us and our party”.⁸⁵

The commitment to socialism other than the real existing socialism by Wolf and other GDR established intellectuals reaches its climax when they reject unification and insist on a “third way” – a reformed and democratic socialism – as an alternative to capitalism in West Germany. Distressed by the outflow of East Germans to the Federal

1959-1985 Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 33.

⁸⁴ Robert Havemann, quoted in John C. Torpey Intellectuals, Socialism and Dissent (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 60.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Torpey 69.

Republic, on 8 November 1989 – the day before the opening of the Berlin Wall – Wolf, Christoph Hein, Braun, Stefan Heym and a number of others made a call for democratic socialism in the GDR. On the same day Wolf made an appeal on East German television and asked the GDR citizens not to emigrate. Three weeks after the opening of the Berlin Wall, Wolf, Braun and others signed a manifesto “For Our Country”. In the manifesto the reform intellectuals reiterated antifascism and humanism as the founding principles of the GDR and appealed to these principles as a source of inspiration and legitimation for the continuing existence of the GDR: “We still have the chance as a state with equal rights to all of our neighboring states in Europe to develop a socialist alternative to the FRG. We can still recall the antifascist and humanistic ideals with which we started.”⁸⁶

In this context, in the discussion of Wolf’s deployment of modernist narrative techniques, critic Fries points out the danger of labeling Wolf as modernist or even postmodernist writer only based on her style; instead, we should “probe the motivation for the use of these techniques before setting Wolf firmly into the modernist or postmodernist tradition”.⁸⁷ The motivation, as I have discussed before, cannot be separated from the project to reform socialism. Similarly, Fries sees Wolf’s commitment to socialism as “a major precondition of Wolf’s narrative”.⁸⁸ In a similar manner, Anna Kuhn argues for Wolf’s commitment to Marxism and sees the combination of prose and essays, for example, as an expression of Wolf’s Marxist understanding of writer and literature.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Hallberg 5.

⁸⁷ Fries, “Locating Christa Wolf. An Introduction,” *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays*, ed. Marilyn Sibley Fries (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) 31.

⁸⁸ Fries, *Locating Christa Wolf* 25.

After unification, one of Wolf's concerns is the loss of the significance of the literary public sphere and literary intellectuals in the public. In *Zwischenrede* she talks about the marginalization of intellectuals and literature after the *Wende*: „Aber was ist inzwischen mit der Kunst? Der Posten ist vakant, den sie so lange besetzt hielt.“⁸⁹ Disappointed by these “kunst- und künstlerfeindliche Stimmungen“⁹⁰ in united Germany, Wolf, however, still insists on the critical function of literature, namely, to expose the blind spots and to help people to make changes. It seems that there is continuity before and after the *Wende* in Wolf's understanding of the function of literature and of the writer. However, Wolf's ideas of “subjective authenticity” and “blind spot” do not seem to work in the capitalist post-1989 German society. In a liberal market economy the subtext is that everyone is free. This is supposedly a world free of ideology where no writer is endowed with a superior, truer consciousness and has no proselytizing mission. Besides, after unification the GDR citizens have gained access to the public sphere such as critical journalism, although how much freedom of speech they can acquire in a unified Germany is still disputable; and literary intellectuals have lost their significance in the public. Along with this, there seems to be a tendency to go back to the notion of literature as pure aesthetics after the *Wende*. I will deal with this so-called conservative turn in chapter 4. A writer's social function and responsibility represented mostly by the left wing and liberal intellectuals are rejected. However, it is this marginalization of the writer within a bourgeois society that makes Wolf's continuing project of interpretation of “the blind spot” still relevant nowadays. As long as writers continue to be marginalized, as they did at the beginning of the 19th century; as long as this blind spot

⁸⁹ Wolf, „Zwischenrede,“ *Auf dem Weg nach dem Tabou* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1999) 20.

⁹⁰ Wolf, *Zwischenrede* 21.

continues to exist, there is always a need for writers to take the responsibility (to expose the blind spot and to effect changes) upon themselves, no matter how difficult and even impossible it sounds at first.

Advantages of women in socialism

Wolf's commitment to socialism manifests itself also in her understanding of women's advantaged position within socialism. One of the possible reasons for Wolf's reluctance to identify herself with feminism could be that feminism is a term coming from the bourgeois women's movements. For Wolf there are differences between women in capitalism and in socialism. In her essay *Berührung*, an introduction to Maxie Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, Wolf deals with these differences in detail. According to her, only in a socialist society, where class struggle doesn't exist any more, can women have the real opportunity to be emancipated. Compared to women in capitalism, GDR women's participation in social production and their economic independence are recognized by Wolf as the first step towards women's emancipation.⁹¹ In this sense her feminism – if we use this term to generalize Wolf's concern about women's questions - is largely based on Marxist Feminism.

Although Wolf does acknowledge the strong points of Western women's movements, she still considers GDR women to be in an advantaged position:

⁹¹ „Ökonomisch und juristisch sind wir den Männern gleichgestellt, durch gleiche Ausbildungschancen und die Freiheit, über Schwangerschaft und Geburt selbst zu entscheiden, weitgehend unabhängig, nicht mehr durch Standes- und Klassenschranken von dem Mann unserer Wahl getrennt; und nun erfahren wir (wenn es wirklich Liebe ist, was wir meinen, nicht Besitz und Dienstleistung auf Gegenseitigkeit), bis zu welchem Grad die Geschichte der Klassengesellschaft, das Patriarchat, ihre Objekte deformiert hat und welche Zeiträume das Subjektwerden des Menschen – von Mann und Frau – erfordern wird. Immer noch müssen viele Frauen sich verstellen, damit ihre Liebe zum Tauschwert für das unreife Liebesverlangen vieler Männer werden kann („Man muß den Männern etwas vorspielen, sonst verschreckt man sie“). (“*Berührung*,” *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 202-203.)

*Unsere Verhältnisse haben es Frauen ermöglicht, ein Selbstbewußtsein zu entwickeln, das nicht zugleich Wille zum Herrschen, zum Dominieren, zum Unterwerfen bedeutet, sondern Fähigkeit zur Kooperation. Zum erstenmal in ihrer Geschichte definieren sie – ein enormer Fortschritt – ihr Anderssein; zum Erstenmal entfalten sie nicht nur schöpferische Phantasie: Sie haben auch jenen nüchternen Blick entwickelt, den Männer für eine typisch männliche Eigenschaft hielten.*⁹²

Unlike women in capitalism who are still struggling for economical independence and see men as their enemy, socialism has enabled GDR women to develop a sense of self-confidence and ability to cooperate with others, including cooperation with men.

Moreover, according to Wolf, for the first time in history, GDR women are able to celebrate their difference from men, since their changed economic condition has enabled them to make the most of their difference and society at large. However, economic emancipation is only the first, though necessary, step towards women's full emancipation, hence, Christa T.'s unfulfilled wishes and desires in a new socialist state. Wolf's standpoint towards the GDR women's advantaged position is also shared by the other GDR women writers, such as Brigitte Reimann and Irmtraud Morgner etc. Women protagonists in all these writers' works are defined by their struggle for "die große Utopie einer umfassenden Selbstverwirklichung", as Emmerich argues,⁹³ which cannot be separated from their deep commitment to socialist project.

In Wolf's discussion about women's writing, she refers to Ingeborg Bachmann as a perfect example for women's writing. Like Wolf, Bachmann believes in the critical function of poetry, that is literature as an instrument of utopia or as a means to effect change. Bachmann states in her fifth Frankfurt Lecture *Literatur als Utopie*: "Die Literatur aber braucht kein Pantheon, sie versteht sich nicht aufs Sterben, auf den

⁹² Wolf, *Berührung* 207.

⁹³ Emmerich 300.

Himmel, auf keine Erlösung, sondern auf die stärkste Absicht, zu wirken in jeder Gegenwart, in dieser order der nächsten.”⁹⁴ Both Wolf and Bachman insist on the transformative force of literature. In Bachmann, Wolf sees a mentor, and a companion. However, their different background – Bachmann as a product of Western European post-War capitalism while Wolf that of East German socialism – determines the difference between them.⁹⁵ For example, in her praise of Bachmann for her attempts to fight against the destructive tendency of late capitalist society through writing in order to preserve humanistic values, Wolf points out the disadvantages Bachmann has to face as a writer, because she lives under capitalism. Destined to be an outsider due to a woman’s powerlessness in bourgeois society, she has no hope to change the status quo only through poetry. For Wolf, socialism is a totally new social foundation. Socialism is the prerequisite for the true realization of the critical function of poetry; she states:

*Sie markiert damit eine äußerste Position in der heutigen bürgerlichen Literatur, den Versuch, humanistische Werte gegenüber dem totalen Zerstörungstrieb der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft zu verteidigen. Nach unserer Erfahrung kann der Dichter diese Einkreisung nicht allein und nicht nur im Reich der Dichtung durchbrechen; die höchst fragwürdige bürgerliche Gesellschaft tatsächlich, das heißt durch Tatsachen, in Frage zu stellen, setzt voraus, den „Rahmen der Gegebenen“ zu sprengen. Dann erst, auf neuer gesellschaftlicher Grundlage, beginnt wirklich die „Verteidigung der Poesie“.*⁹⁶

Due to the lack of this precondition, Bachmann or the literary figures in her works have no other choices but “aus der Gesellschaft herauszutreten, in verzweifelter Isolierung die

⁹⁴ Ingeborg Bachmann, “Literatur als Utopie,” Ingeborg Bachmann Werke, Vol. 4. ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum and Clemens Munster (München, R.Piper Verlag & Co., 1978) 261.

⁹⁵ See Sara Lennox, “Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann: Difficulties of Writing the Truth,” Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays, ed. Marilyn Sibley Fries (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) 128-148. and Irma Jacqueline Ozer, “The utopian function of literature according to Ingeborg Bachmann and Christa Wolf,” Modern Language Studies 18 (1988): 81-90.

⁹⁶ Wolf, „Die zumutbare Wahrheit: Prosa der Ingeborg Bachmann,“ C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze. Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985 Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 99.

Bedingungen aufzuspüren, die ihre Gesellschaft dem einzelnen diktiert, den Preis herauszufinden, den das nackte Leben kostet und der millionenfach gezahlt wird“.⁹⁷ Here we can see the difference between modernist feminist defeatism (the destroying of hope in capitalism) and optimistic or at least hopeful socialist feminism on the horizon.

Until now I have argued that Wolf very often draws a borderline between socialism and capitalism and is convinced about the advantages brought forth by socialism to women. Her interest in gender goes hand in hand with her commitment to socialism. In other words, her project of uncovering “the blind spot” – a feminine space excluded from the dominant culture – aims at restructuring social organizations within the framework of socialism, socialism, as an alternative to capitalism rather than real existing socialism in the GDR; or using Bathrick’s word, socialism “as a rhetorical terrain within which they (the literary artists and other members of the oppositional intelligentsia) could generate a position of critique and change”.⁹⁸ Understood in this way, we can make sense of Wolf’s continuing insistence on a socialist alternative even after the demise of the GDR or the defeat of socialism globally. In a post-1989 Germany Wolf’s attachment to socialism and her refusal of being incorporated into capitalism, although with a touch of Ostalgie, is in fact a position from which she can perform her critical function as an intellectual. However, her roots in socialism are either ignored or distorted by critics. Using *Nachdenken* as an example, in the following three chapters I shall show how misrepresentation happens in different time periods and places. Chapter 3 and 4 will deal

⁹⁷ Wolf, Die zumutbare Wahrheit: Prosa der Ingeborg Bachmann 98.

⁹⁸ Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 20.

with the literary critical responses to *Nachdenken* before and after the Wende respectively. Chapter 5 concentrates on the feminist critical responses engendered by *Nachdenken*. We shall see how Christa T. was either politicized, that is, read only as the author's political statement towards socialism, or was read in a universal way whereby socialism is totally left out. Most feminist readings belong to the second category. Both ways of reading do not do justice to Wolf's critical involvement in society as a woman intellectual.

Chapter 3 Christa Wolf as a dissident

-- Critical responses to *Nachdenken über Christa T.* before the Wende in the GDR and FRG

In this chapter I will study the critical responses engendered by *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in the GDR and the FRG before the German Unification in an attempt to show how and to what extent Wolf's identity as a dissident could be constructed in non-socialist countries and, also, to a limited extent, within the GDR State.

Proceeding chronologically, I shall divide Wolf's reception in both Germanys before the demise of the GDR roughly in three different phases: during the first phase at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies, Wolf gained her reputation as a dissident writer for her exposure of the failing or inadequacy of socialism, as critics claimed, in *Nachdenken*. The mutual influences of critics on both sides of the wall in their interpretation of *Nachdenken* in this phase demonstrated the constructed nature of Wolf's dissidence in the best sense. This "making" of Wolf's dissidence illustrated itself also in the other phases when the notion of dissidence was either evaluated differently or receded into the background. In the second phase (in the 1970s) in the GDR, different from undifferentiated rejection in the first phase, *Nachdenken* was read in a positive way as a contribution to socialist literature. While in the FRG Wolf was unceasingly read positively, however, the socialist character of the text and the author was recognized. Wolf was seen as a committed socialist or Marxist who aimed at the redemption of the revolutionary potential of Marxism. From the end of the seventies and beginning of the eighties, a tendency to read *Nachdenken* in a universal and humanistic way could be

discerned in the FRG, in which the specific context of the GDR was very often not taken into consideration. And Wolf became a critic of Western civilization. Her commitment to socialism retreated to the background or was totally left out. Through detailed analysis of these various interpretations of Wolf's one work in different time periods and places in this chapter, I intend to show how social identity, in Wolf's case, her identity as a dissident, is discursively constructed in historically specific social contexts.

I. The emergence of Wolf as a dissident - The first phase: from 1968 to 1971

The reception of *Nachdenken* in the first phase illustrated quite well how a literary work was instrumentalized as a way to show the author's attitude towards the socialist society. In this sense, the critics totally subordinated the literary work to the author's personality. Read in a highly politicized ideological context, *Nachdenken* came to be seen in both Germanys as a deviation from socialist realism and foremost as a critique of GDR society. Either the book was criticized and totally rejected among East German critics for its so-called anti-socialist elements or it was highly praised by Western critics for exactly the same elements. Wolf gained her reputation as a dissident writer from her critique of or even the so-called refusal of socialism.

Wolf finished the manuscript in 1967. After several negative reviews, including the one from the *Leiter des Fachgebiets Deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur* (the section head of German contemporary literature), who was asked to write a review in private by the *Cheflektor des Mitteldeutschen Verlags* (chief lector of the German publisher *Mitteldeutscher Verlag*), Wolf made changes, including adding the 19th chapter. In spite of that, a publishing permit was not granted until 1968. Furthermore, the printing process

was interrupted due to negative responses coming from the Party. The difficulties in the publication of the book and the negative reactions in the GDR aroused great interest among the Western critics. The Western press followed the whole process of publication in the GDR very closely. For many conservatives in the West, with her new book Wolf stood for the failure of the integration of individual and society and eventually for the failure of socialism. Reich-Ranicki's review essay in *Zeit* represented such kind of voice. His much-cited conclusion „C.T. stirbt an Leukämie, aber sie leidet an der DDR”¹ (C. T. dies of Leukemia, but she suffers from the GDR) affected the GDR critics greatly. In consequence of his review, Wolf was asked to withdraw from the candidacy of the *Vorstand des Schriftstellerverbandes* (the board of management of the Writers' Union), which she refused to do. And the further distribution of the already printed copies was discontinued. Moreover, the GDR critics were compelled to distance themselves from Wolf's work. The head of the Mitteldeutscher Verlag Heinz Sachs, for example, showed his regret for publishing this book in public in his *Self-Critique*, which was published in *Neues Deutschland* in May 1969. There he claimed that the publication of the book implied “eine inkonsequente Haltung” (an inconsistent attitude) of the publishing house and such kind of position violated the tradition and task of the publishing company.² In other words, the book deviated from the definition of socialist literature.

The severe attacks made against Wolf at the VI. Schriftstellerkongreß from the 28th to the 30th in May in 1969 could be seen as East German critics' collective responses to western critics. Compared to the 10th Plenum of the ZK der SED one month before (on

¹ Reich-Ranicki, „Christa Wolfs unruhige Elegie,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 62.

² Heinz Sachs, „Verleger sein heißt ideologisch kämpfen,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 55.

the 28th and the 29th in April in 1969), where positive feedback from Wolf's friends, such as Brigitte Reimann, Sarah Kirsch, Rainer Kunze, Volker Braun and Hans Kaufmann etc., had coexisted with negative voices, at the VI. Schriftstellerkongreß nobody showed his/her public support to Wolf and her work. Max Walter Schulz, the director of the Leipziger Schriftstellerschule "Johannes R. Becher" and Eberhard Röhrer distanced themselves from Wolf's aesthetic conception and questioned the publication of the work. Schulz, for example, showed his great disappointment toward Wolf's new book. In his argumentation he put the highly sensitive political situation in the foreground, that is, the Cold War politics of the fifties and sixties defined by the binary opposition: we versus they. He compared Reich-Ranicki's different positions towards Anna Seghers' new novel and Wolf's *Nachdenken*. The former was severely blamed by Reich-Ranicki for the author's party-spirited writing; while the latter was highly praised for Wolf's superficial dissatisfaction with the socialist state, in which, as Schulz indicated, the GDR writers were "gegeneinander auszuspielen"³ (play off against one another) and the literary quality of the work was totally disregarded. To some extent, Schulz did not see any anti-socialist elements in Wolf's work. Instead, he pinpointed the danger caused by contradictions and ambiguities of Wolf's book due to the adversarial relationship of East and West German literary criticism. In the opposition between "good" critical literature and "bad" affirmative propaganda dominating West German literary criticism, any ambiguities, as Schulz pointed out, could be used as an alibi by the other side for the purpose of political manipulation. Although Wolf's commitment to socialism and the GDR was recognized by Schulz, in his view her work had made her own political

³ Max Walter Schulz, „Das Neue und das Bleibende in unserer Literatur,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 71.

position meaningless, therefore after asking “Wem nützt das?” (What’s the use anyhow?), Schulz appealed to Wolf: „In dieser Verantwortung rufen wir C.W. zu: Besinn dich auf dein Herkommen, besinn dich auf unser Fortkommen, wenn du mit deiner klugen Feder der deutschen Arbeiterklasse, ihrer Partei und der Sache des Sozialismus dienen willst.“⁴

Although Schulz asked Wolf to “restrain” herself when writing and always consider the political impact of her work in a divided Germany, his response was not off the mark. The reaction of the Western critics to this book confirmed his worry. Besides Reich-Ranicki’s „Elegie”, Günter Zehm’s story of a “Melancholiker”⁵, Rolf Michaelis’s “der sanfte Protest”⁶ and Fritz J. Raddatz’s “Klage um das Individuum”⁷ etc. all emphasized C.T.’s opposition to socialist society. Her decision to be a wife and mother in the end was seen as her retreat from political engagement to the tradition of German *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness). Her death suggested the irreconcilable conflict between individual and socialist society. Both the content – the anti-socialist meaning ascribed to the novel at first by the media and literary critics in the FRG and reinforced by the GDR critics – and the artistic form – the use of the modern narrative technique – in Wolf’s new work indicated the violation of the norms of socialist realism. Because of this violation, Wolf’s identity as a dissident writer both in the GDR and in the FRG was established.

⁴ Schulz 72.

⁵ Günter Zehm, „Nachdenken über Christa W.“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf’s “Nachdenken über Christa T.”, ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 39.

⁶ Rolf Michaelis, „Der doppelte Himmel,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf’s “Nachdenken über Christa T.”, ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 66.

⁷ Fritz J Raddatz, „Mein Name sei Tonio K.“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf’s “Nachdenken über Christa T.”, ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 76.

Unlike most GDR literary critics, such as Heinz Adamek⁸, Heinz Sachs, Max Walter Schulz and Eberhard Röhner, who denied any positive meaning of *Nachdenken* to the socialist society at the end of the 1960s, GDR critics Hermann Kähler and Horst Haase legitimated Wolf's new book within socialist realism. However, even their legitimization was accompanied by ambivalence and contradictions.

Kähler at first read Christa T. in a quite positive way. He recognized C.T.'s trying different roles and longing for changes and challenges as an expression of her creativity and granted those qualities of much importance to a socialist society. However, Kähler attributed C.T.'s failure to her reducing her creativity to the isolated self "im bürgerlichen Sinne" (in the bourgeois sense) instead of applying it to a social context, as he claimed: "Eine autonome Persönlichkeit ohne soziale Funktion ist eine, im Falle C.T., tragische Illusion."⁹ Similar to other critics, C.T.'s development was read by Kähler as a retreat to the private. According to him, her attempt to the so-called ivory-towered self-realization was destined to fail, therefore she represented a tragic illusion and Wolf was writing an elegy about her.¹⁰

Compared to the other fully negative readings, Kähler did manage to identify some positive aspects of the book for a socialist society. He pointed out that "nachdenken", instead of C.T., was the main issue here. Therefore in place of a lonely and isolated

⁸ Heinz Adamek "Kunstwerke entstehen nicht im Selbstlauf," Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 52-53. There he mentioned Wolf's „Nachdenken“, Rudolf Bartsch's „Zerreiβprobe“, Kunert's „Kramen in Fächern“ and Claudius' „Ruhelose Jahre“ and questioned not only those authors' ideological conception but also that of the responsible publishers (Lektoren und Verlagsdirektoren) in Mitteldeutscher Verlag and Aufbau-Verlag.

⁹ Hermann Kähler, „Christa Wolfs Elegie,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 33. „An autonomous personality without social function is, in the case of C.T., a tragic illusion.“

¹⁰ Kähler, Christa Wolfs Elegie 34.

tragic figure, C.T.'s friendship and communication with the other people including the narrator was put in the foreground by Wolf. This "Miteinander- und Füreinander-Verantwortlichsein" (being responsible for one another) and this „Nachdenken über den Mitmenschen“ (think about the fellow human being) was, as he pointed out, „eine sozialistische Pflicht“¹¹ (a socialist obligation). However, after indicating the significance of this "Nachdenken über den Mitmenschen" – a gesture of showing love and concern to fellow members of a socialist society – Kähler criticized the narrator for her not being able to help C. T. earlier enough: "Dieses Nachdenken der Freundin begann für C. T. zu spat."¹² In his view, if the narrator had helped C.T. earlier, C.T. could have avoided death. In the end, he drew the conclusion that Christa Wolf should have shown more distance to the figure, which would have made room for critique:

*Hätte C. W. nicht doch mehr Distanz, Überlegenheit, Filter für ihre C. T. gebraucht? Muss man nicht von ihr fordern, dass sie, wenn sie einen Menschen gestaltet, der kaum mit dem Leben zu Rande kommt, eine prägnantere Wertung gibt, zum Beispiel durch die stärkere Profilierung der Ich-Erzählerin?*¹³

The use of the questions and subjunctive here made Kähler's conclusion sound more like a suggestion than polemic, in which his approval together with his unsureness caused by *Nachdenken* was displayed.

Like Kähler, Haase tried to legitimate C.T. within socialist realism. He identified the thesis of the work in the individual self-realization within a socialist society: "Die Dialektik zwischen dem Gesellschaftlichen und dem Individuellen bei der Aufhebung der Entfremdung durch den Sozialismus, die Geburtswehen des neuen freien Menschen, sein

¹¹ Kähler, Christa Wolfs Elegie 35.

¹² Kähler, Christa Wolfs Elegie 36.

¹³ Kähler, Christa Wolfs Elegie 37.

Wachsen und Reifen- das versucht dieses Buch zu beschreiben.”¹⁴ C.T.’s commitment to socialism was thus pinpointed.¹⁵ Her longing for perfection was also recognized by Haase as in accordance with the new socialist society.¹⁶ Unlike Kähler, Haase did not see C.T.’s choice of being a mother and housewife as a retreat to the private life. Instead, he interpreted it as a way to carry out the mutual help between C.T. and her husband, her friends including farmers in the country. Understood in this way, C.T.’s death after her becoming a mother and housewife represented the moment when she had reached a high level in her self-realization, therefore her death was not even a failure.

In his support to C.T.’s attempts to self-actualization including her longing for the truth, Haase emphasized the important role played by socialism or the new social condition in C.T.’s endeavor. What is more, he pointed out that both the development of society and that of the individual are a difficult process full of contradictions. The conclusion Haase drew here was that we needed this Christa T. now, since the consciousness of responsibility towards the society and self, moral decision in thinking and doing and creativity of subjectivity, embodied in C.T., were seen by him as the condition for the socialist development:

*Deshalb brauchen wir diese Christa T., brauchen wir sie jetzt, wie die Erzählerin formuliert, weil humanistisches Verantwortungsbewußtsein gegenüber der Gesellschaft und vor sich selbst, moralische Entschiedenheit im Denken und Tun und die differenzierte Empfindung der schöpferischen Subjektivität des Menschen immer stärker zur Bedingung unserer sozialistischen Entwicklung werden. C. W. will uns in der Gestalt der C.T. dafür anbieten. Von den Stärken und Schwächen dieses Beispiels soll gelernt werden.*¹⁷

¹⁴ Horst Haase, „Nachdenken über ein Buch,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf’s “Nachdenken über Christa T.”, ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 43.

¹⁵ Haase 41.

¹⁶ Haase 42.

¹⁷ Haase 45.

Haase continued to say that although the reader was supposed to learn from C.T., from both her virtue and shortcoming, the didactic effect was called off through the emotional investment of the narrator. In this context, learning process was individualized and the readers could learn from their own life experience: “Es wird individualisiert, so dass gelernt wird, ‘wie aus dem Leben’.”¹⁸

However, Haase’s positive reading was not without contradictions. After identifying positive aspects which Wolf’s new book could offer to the socialist society, Haase claimed, in the end, that the narrator’s too close relationship to C.T. resulted in her inability to show her critical stance to C.T.¹⁹ This is a conclusion that permeates nearly all the interpretations of the GDR critics during the first phase of the reception. Haase continued to say that given the harsh side of reality defined by power and violence, the ideal of C.T. had the suspicion of “Schöngestei”²⁰ whereby too much “Empfindsamkeit” (emotionalism) and “Güte” (kindness) and too little facts about the objective reality were reflected. Besides this, Haase questioned the exclusive opposition of morality and reality in *Nachdenken*, in which the latter was denied only as “Anpassungstriebe” (impulse to adaptation). In addition, the critic argued that Wolf evaluated science and technique too negatively for the sake of moral feelings and doubted too much language.

In sum, the reception of *Nachdenken* in the first phase is mainly determined by an ideological bias. The over-emphasis of Wolf’s critical standpoint toward the GDR by the

¹⁸ Haase 45.

¹⁹ Haase 45-46.

²⁰ Haase 47.

East German politicians and literary critics and all kinds of critiques of Wolf invite and reinforce the Western approval of Wolf's dissidence. In contrast, praises from the Western side strengthen the doubts and insecurities among the GDR critics.²¹ Kähler and Haase might be exceptions in the sense that they attempt to identify positive aspects in *Nachdenken* for the socialist society. However, even their positive reading is accompanied by uncertainty and contradictions. In this ideological campaign caused by *Nachdenken*, Wolf's loyalty to her state and to socialism are downplayed or totally ignored both in the GDR and the FRG. No critics mention her *Selbstinterview* (1966) and *Lesen und Schreiben* (1968), where her political standpoint is expressed explicitly. Wolf's own voice is totally submerged in this ideological war. In other socialist countries, such as in Soviet Union, where such kind of direct opposition between East/socialism and West/capitalism does not exist, *Nachdenken* is read in a quite positive way. C. T. is interpreted as a model with social responsibilities and faith in the future of socialism.²² To a great extent, Wolf's dissidence is first constructed in the ideological war based on the antagonism of capitalism and socialism in the two Germanys.

Despite the ideological campaign caused by *Nachdenken*, the distribution of the book through Mitteldeutscher Verlag – a publisher of texts mainly intended for export – was still permitted by the cultural ministry at the VI. Schriftstellerkongreß. The permit was yet granted to the publisher Luchterhand and other publishers in the West (the book was first published in West Germany in 1969). In some sense, even the seemingly openness of the GDR regime to let the book be published in the West was part of the

²¹ Therese Hörnigk, Katharina von Ankum and Anna Kuhn have all addressed this mutual influence of the reception in both Germanys.

²² Anonym: "Istorija Kristy T.," Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978)

ideological campaign. As Monika Papenfuß points out, the GDR used Wolf to demonstrate the existence of a public sphere for debate in the country.²³

II. A dissident within the framework of socialism and Marxism - The second phase: the seventies

As I discussed before, in the first phase, Wolf was celebrated as a dissident in the West while criticized in East Germany for her exposure of the so-called deficiency or even failure of socialism. In the seventies, because of the changing political climate, there was a fundamentally changing attitude in the reception of *Nachdenken* in the GDR. *Nachdenken* was recognized as a part of socialist realism. In the FRG critics' attention was also turned to the socialist character of Wolf's work.

GDR

At the eighth Party conference in 1971, the goal of socialism was redefined. In place of the optimistic view of seeing the GDR as "entwickeltes gesellschaftliches System des Sozialismus"²⁴ (developed societal system of socialism), the goal of socialism was understood as not yet reached and contradictions and conflicts within socialism were acknowledged. Along with the new understanding of socialism in the GDR, the function of cultural policy was newly defined. In Erich Honecker's speech, he pointed out that cultural policy should serve for the "Herausbildung der allseitig entwickelten

²³ Monika Papenfuß, Die Literaturkritik zu Christa Wolf's Werk im Feuilleton (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1998) 72.

²⁴ Quoted in Thomassen 14.

Persönlichkeit“²⁵ (development into all-sided personality). And his much cited words „Wenn man von festen Positionen des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Achtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben“²⁶ had positive impact on both writers and literary critics as well.

The changing cultural policy resulted in a re-definition of the role and function of literature. At the Seventh Writer's Conference in November 1973, Kurt Batt addressed the development of a new type of realism in literature. Quite unlike a simple reproduction of the outside world represented by the dogmatic socialist realism of the 1950s or unlike agitational literature, the new trend of socialist literature should focus on the partially very personal suffering and hope of people, which used to be denounced as the private; which, however, could in no case be separated from the public or the social.²⁷ In other words, the social character of the seemingly very individual or personal problems was recognized. In this context, Wolf's *Nachdenken* became a perfect example in its subjective dimension and its reflection of ordinary people's life in socialism. Wolf's *Nachdenken* now was viewed as having anticipated this new trend of socialist literature in the best sense.

With the new edition of 80 000 copies in 1973/74 in the GDR, *Nachdenken* became accessible to a broader audience. In addition, instead of the undifferentiated rejection in the first phase, *Nachdenken* was read in a positive way as a contribution to socialist literature; however, negative voices caused by its ambiguity still could be heard. In order

²⁵ Erich Honecker, „Rede auf dem VIII. Parteitag 1971,“ Neue deutsche Literatur 8 (1971): 70.

²⁶ Erich Honecker, „Zu aktuellen Fragen bei der Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des VII. Parteitags,“ Neues Deutschland 18. Dec. 1971.

²⁷ Kurt Batt, „Realität und Phantasie,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's "Nachdenken über Christa T.", ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 163.

to draw a clear line between a socialist literature and a non-socialist one, emphasis was very often put on the identification of the socialist elements in Wolf's work.

In Hermann Kähler's article of 1975 *C.W. erzählt*, we can see the changing attitude of literary critics under the influence of the changing political situation. Seeing socialism only as a transitional period (interim), Kähler gained a new positive access to the work. He saw the story about C.T. as a contribution to the discussion of humanism and the scientific and technological revolution in socialism.²⁸ Despite the new perspective gained through the changing cultural policies, Kähler's main focus was still put on the identification of elements that distinguished Wolf's work from Western modernist literature. As a result, he ended by reiterating the main points of his earlier review.

Renate Reschke approached Wolf's work in a positive unusual way using the concept of the beautiful. In *Ästhetik – Wissenschaft vom Schönen?* (1976) Reschke defined the concept of the beautiful within socialism as follows: "Er faßt in sich das Bewußtsein der fortschreitenden Bewältigung der ästhetischen Seite der grundlegenden Lebensprozesse der sozialistischen Gesellschaft, aber er faßt sie als Moment notwendig widersprüchlichen Fortschreitens."²⁹ In Reschke's understanding of the concept of the beautiful, a stress is put on the necessity of the existence of conflicts and contradictions in the development of socialist society, and more importantly, commitment to socialism in spite of those conflicts. Using her own words, this moment of the beautiful was "Die

²⁸ Hermann Kähler, "C.W. erzählt," *Weggenossen 15 Schriftsteller der DDR*, ed. Jarmatz and Berger (Frankfurt a. M.: Röderberg-Verl., 1975) 228.

²⁹ Renate Reschke, „Ästhetik – Wissenschaft vom Schönen?“ *Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's „Nachdenken über Christa T.“*, ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 169.

Bestätigung im Widerspruch”.³⁰ According to her, Wolf’s *Nachdenken* did not give up her hope for a new and better world and expressed her refusal of capitalism explicitly. Therefore Reschke praised Wolf’s work highly: “Christa Wolf hat in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in der Beschreibung der grundlegenden Gesellschaftsbeziehung ihrer Hauptheldin poetisch gestaltet, was die Ästhetik als Theorie noch nicht genügend auf den Begriff gebracht hat.”³¹ Understood in this way, Wolf’s literary praxis went beyond aesthetic theories with regard to the understanding of the concept of the beautiful; but at the same time, the beautiful was being considered as essential literary quality of/in socialist literature.

In spite of many positive interpretations of *Nachdenken* in the seventies, such as those by Karin Hirdina, John Kurt Batt and Renate Reschke etc., *Nachdenken* did not get too much critical attention in the seventies in the GDR. One of the reasons was that it was too controversial to express the progress of GDR literature along with the progress of GDR society, as von Ankum indicated.³² Negative voices still could be heard.

The coexistence of recognition and reservation in the 1970s continued in the 1980s among the GDR critics with regard to *Nachdenken*. Their uncertainty made them tend to overemphasize the socialist elements in their reading of Wolf’s work, as if Wolf’s work were not socialist enough. This tendency can be found in the more detailed and sophisticated readings with quite positive attitudes of the reviewers, represented for example by Therese Hörnigk in the 1980s. Because of the continuity between the 1970s and 1980s in the East German critics’ interpretations, I will include my discussion of

³⁰ Reschke 169.

³¹ Reschke 169.

³² Katharina von Ankum, Die Rezeption von C.W. in Ost und West (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1992) 119.

Wolf's reception in the third phase in the GDR in what follows. After that I will deal with FRG critics' responses to *Nachdenken* in the seventies.

Continuity in the eighties in the GDR

Hörnigk read *Nachdenken* as „einen als Lernbeispiel konstruierten Nachdenkenswertes“³³ in *Ein Buch des Erinnerns, das zum Nachdenken anregte* (1987). Influenced by Wolf's own understanding of the function of literature in *Lesen und Schreiben*, i.e. to encourage people (readers) to search for self-fulfillment, Hörnigk saw *Nachdenken* or *Gedächtnisarbeit* as the object of literary analysis and interpreted it as a learning process for the readers. In doing so, the importance of the reader and of the communication between the author and the reader was pinpointed. C.T. functioned only as a medium between C.W. and the reader, through whom the author's own experience, her doubts and knowledge were handed over to the readers: “Vielmehr ist sie von Anfang an eine Art Medium für die Nachdenkende, durch das die Autorin ihre eigenen Erfahrungen und Fragen, Zweifel und Erkenntnisse an den Leser weitergeben kann.”³⁴ The reader, as *der Nachdenkende* besides the author, was required to follow this *Gedächtnisarbeit* and to integrate his/her experience into this process and to gain self-knowledge and self-actualization. Hörnigk continued to say that *Nachdenken* and the exchange of experience served for breaking the social taboo; therefore the achieved

³³ Therese Hörnigk, „Ein Buch des Erinnerns, das zum Nachdenken anregte Christa Wolfs ‚Nachdenken über Christa T.‘“ *Werke und Wirkungen: DDR Literatur in der Diskussion*, ed. Ingeborg Münz-Koenen (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1987) 178.

³⁴ Hörnigk 179.

knowledge of individual with the help of open discussions could be used as a basis for social changes.³⁵

The significance of subjective knowledge in communication in a socialist society, pointed out by Hörnigk in her reading of *Nachdenken*, fits in well with Wolf's model of communication, as I discussed in the previous chapter. In this sense, I find nothing wrong in the attempts of East German critics, such as Kähler and Hörnigk, to understand the subjective dimension of Wolf's work within the framework of the socialist society, in which subjective elements are always channeled to social ones, that is, they all contain a social dimension. Von Ankum points out this mode in the GDR critics' reading of Wolf, however, she seems to speak with disapproval of this mode.³⁶ It is true that there was not too much breakthrough in the readings among the GDR critics. In her review two years later in 1989, Hörnigk gave a more careful and detailed analysis with more empathy and understanding, which could be contributed to her personal and direct contact with Wolf. However, as Ankum argues, although Hörnigk tries to distance herself from some of her earlier misreadings of *Nachdenken*, her main arguments are nearly the same as the earlier ones.³⁷ I agree with Ankum in her attributing the limited possibility of interpretations to the fact that too much focus is put on the identification of the socialist elements in Wolf's work. In doing so, other aspects of the text were overlooked. However, considering Wolf's own project for changing the social relations within socialism through the integration of the excluded elements, mostly subjective ones, those East German critics' interpretations stand closer to Wolf's project.

³⁵ Hörnigk 180.

³⁶ von Ankum 117.

³⁷ von Ankum 118.

FRG

In the 1970s, unlike in the GDR, there were no fundamental changes of attitude towards the work in the FRG: *Nachdenken* continued to be read quite positively. With more than 250 000 copies until 1978, *Nachdenken* became the most read and discussed literary work from the GDR. However, the change of the frame of reception still could be identified. That is, the socialist character of the text and the author was put on the main focus. The author's commitment to socialism was emphasized. In this context, instead of underscoring anti-socialist elements in the work, focus was put on how Wolf was indeed socialist in her critique of real existing socialism.

As seen, the West German critics were trying to correct the misinterpretations in the first phase of the reception too. The highly ideological character of the first phase of reception was recognized. As corrections, the concrete social and historical condition in Wolf's work was taken into account. Heinrich Mohr and Manfred Jäger, for example, made the first attempts to read C.T. within the framework of socialist literature.

In *Produktive Sehnsucht* in 1971 Mohr stressed C.T.'s faith to the new socialist society.³⁸ He based his reading on Wolf's own understanding of the function of literature. That is, as a socialist writer, Wolf saw literature as an unsettling force, as a force of movement and change, aiming toward an open future.³⁹ In this context, idyllic elements including building a house by C.T., which were understood in a purely ideological context as an escape from social responsibilities and a retreat to the private,

³⁸ Heinrich Mohr, "Produktive Sehnsucht," *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays*, ed. Marilyn Sibley Fries (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1989) 208.

³⁹ Mohr 224.

were granted a new and positive meaning, i.e. they were interpreted by Mohr as longing for and anticipation of the future. Likewise, in Christa T.'s death he saw "an 'unrepeatable and unfulfilled' promise, not as a failure",⁴⁰ therefore he argued: "Her death is sad rather than tragic."⁴¹ In other words, through her death hope for an unknown future was evoked. The utopian character of the work, indicated by Mohr, was examined fully by Andreas Huyssen later (1975).

Mohr recognized the significance the narrator granted to the reader in the process of thinking about C.T. and ultimately in the process of producing the "truth" or "essence" and understood the relationship between the narrator and the reader as partnership: "Thus the narrator appeals to the imagination and intelligence of the reader, makes him/her a partner – almost, in fact, an accomplice."⁴² But he did not want to go too far to negate the pedagogic function of literature, since the framework for his interpretation was socialist literature which could not be separated from its pedagogic function. Therefore besides partnership, the pedagogic relation between the narrator / Wolf⁴³ and the reader was emphasized by Mohr too. However, he pointed out that different from the official literature of socialist realism, this pedagogic relation was progressive, since the reader was deprived of any security and was required to "make discoveries and experience the serious game with reality and possibility in her relationship to the truth."⁴⁴ He even went

⁴⁰ Mohr 213.

⁴¹ Mohr 213.

⁴² Mohr 202.

⁴³ Mohr 197. There he suggested that the narrator and the author were the same and he argued that "The anonymity of the narrator is the price C.W. pays for her own presence in the novel, suggesting a direct commitment of the author".

⁴⁴ Mohr 202.

far to claim that Wolf's deployment of modern narrative technique had a pedagogic function assuming that the GDR public needed to "'catch up' on such things".⁴⁵ In this sense, according to Mohr, *Nachdenken* offered readers a chance to learn and practice their knowledge of modernist literature. This of course stresses the view that any literature that is not modernist is not modern, hence, it is backward – strong vision of history as progress, progress toward western capitalist society.

Reading *Nachdenken* within the context of the GDR, Mohr pointed out the significance of the work for the public: "The narration comprehends itself, rather, as a process to 'make public'. C.T. becomes a public figure. She is 'pointed to', she is 'introduced': 'So that people may see her'."⁴⁶ Then Mohr continued to argue that the public here was restricted only to the GDR public, "The reader, ... is regarded as a compatriot and contemporary",⁴⁷ that is, as the citizen of the GDR (compatriot) who is now living there (in a broader sense of contemporary). In doing so, the shared experience between C.T, the narrator and the reader, which connected them closely to one another, was put on the focus.

Although Mohr insisted on the socialist character of *Nachdenken*, he did see Wolf's deviation from the official concept of socialist literature.⁴⁸ However, Mohr seems to go too far in his discussion of Wolf's deviation. His argument that Wolf saw the social position of literature in "a critical and warning opposition"⁴⁹ to "the 'established

⁴⁵ Mohr 203.

⁴⁶ Mohr 224.

⁴⁷ Mohr 204.

⁴⁸ Mohr 222.

⁴⁹ Mohr 225.

cooperative system of socialism”⁵⁰, instead of as an integrated part of that system, does not agree with Wolf’s own understanding of literature and socialism, in which socialism and literature are compatible since both of them have the same objective, that is, to help people to their self-actualization, as we have discussed in the second chapter.⁵¹

Unlike Mohr, Jäger totally rejected the notion of deviation in his interpretation of Wolf’s work. In *Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit* (1973) he pointed out the similarities in the reception of *Nachdenken* both in the GDR and FRG, that is, both sides interpreted the work as deviation from the norms of the socialist literature. In doing so, they used socialist realism as criteria and moreover, they based their reading on their own expectation or understanding of what socialist realism should be like: “Dabei spielt auch eine Rolle, dass die schematisierten Vorstellungen dessen, was ‘sozialistischer Realismus’ sein soll und oft auch war, im Westen bewußter oder unbewußter Maßstab geblieben sind – genau so wie für die Dogmatiker in der DDR.“⁵² In order to distance himself from these dogmatic readings, which saw *Nachdenken* as deviation or anomaly, Jäger went the other way round and argued for the continuity of Wolf’s work. He based his argumentation on the concept of “truth”, as a theme running through *Moskauer Novelle, der geteilte Himmel, Nachdenken* and Wolf’s other theoretical essays. He seemed to suggest that the continuity of a certain theme would rule out any major changes. His understanding of continuity is without doubt too rigid. Moreover, too

⁵⁰ Mohr 225.

⁵¹ Wolf, Selbstinterview 33: “Die tiefe Wurzel der Übereinstimmung zwischen echter Literatur und der sozialistischen Gesellschaft sehe ich eben darin: Beide haben das Ziel, dem Menschen zu seiner Selbstverwirklichung zu verhelfen.“

⁵² Manfred Jäger, „Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit,“ Sozialliteraten: Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR, ed. Jäger (Düsseldorf: Bertelmann, 1973) 12.

much emphasis on continuity makes him ignore the significant developments of Wolf in *Nachdenken*.

In order to transcend categories based only on ideology, Jäger focused on Wolf's personality as reflected in her writing. His highly personalizing reading seems to go too far to account for the existence of ideological struggle. For example, his understanding of "socialist realism" as only a "Leerformel, die auszufüllen Sache der Künstler ist"⁵³ grants too much subjectivity to the artists and fails to take the social and political context into account.

Andreas Huyssen, Frauke Meyer and Karl Robert Mandelkow etc. continued to interpret *Nachdenken* as Wolf's direct response to the concrete social and political problems within the real existing socialism. All of them based their interpretation on Marxism and attributed those problems to the deviation of the socialist development in the GDR from the original goal of Marxism. In other words, for them C.T. or C.W was a committed socialist or Marxist who commented on the reductionist understanding of Marxism prevailing among the GDR cadres and on the consequent problems, and most importantly, who aimed at the redemption, not abolishment, of the revolutionary potential of Marxism.

Huyssen (*Auf dem Spuren Ernst Blochs* 1975) discussed in detail the utopian character of *Nachdenken*. He read C.T. as a committed socialist with the "Hope in the becoming-concrete of utopia as a means to overcome alienation".⁵⁴ In this context, he

⁵³ Jäger, *Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit* 13.

⁵⁴ Huyssen 235.

discerned a synchronicity of *Nachdenken* with Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope.⁵⁵ For him, *Nachdenken* was the application of Bloch's principle of hope to the field of literature. Huysen's article is influential in the sense that he is the first to point out explicitly the affinity between the philosopher Ernst Bloch and Wolf's literary texts. This affinity has become the subject matter among many liberal and left literary critics in West Germany.⁵⁶ However, as Ankum points out, there is no direct response to Huysen among the GDR critics for the reason that the utopian character of Marxist theory implicated a critique of real existing socialism and therefore had always been denied in the GDR until its collapse.⁵⁷

In *Zur Rezeption von C.W's Nachdenken* (1975) Meyer argued against the pessimistic reading, which dominated the reception both in East and West at the end of 1960s. According to the critic, the book was not about the failure of C.T. but about the alienation existing within socialism and what could happen due to this alienation: "es geht darum, festzustellen, was geschieht, wenn in einer Gesellschaft, die sich die Entfaltung des Menschen zum Menschen zum Ziel gesetzt hat, Menschen zu Vehikeln der Planerfüllung entfremdet werden."⁵⁸ Meyer situated the notion of alienation within the context of the GDR, that is, alienation caused by the one-sided development of

⁵⁵ See Bloch's Das Prinzip Hoffnung (Frankfurt, 1959) or The Principle of Hope (MIT Press, 1986).

⁵⁶ von Ankum 126.

⁵⁷ von Ankum 128.

⁵⁸ Frauke Meyer, „Zur Rezeption von C.W's *Nachdenken*,“ Wirkungsgeschichte von Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, ed. Manfred Behn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1978) 142.

economics, science and technique during the Aufbau period. This, in her view, deviated from the original goal of socialism - "die Entfaltung des Menschen zum Menschen".⁵⁹

Unlike Manfred Jäger, who argued for the work's accessibility to readers outside the GDR, Mandelkow (1976) put emphasis on the specific GDR context of this work and pointed out the danger of reducing the specific problem to general humanistic questions:

*Natürlich hat Jäger recht, ..., es hieß jedoch die Stoßkraft der Polemik dieses Buches verharmlosen, wollte man seine zentrale Aussage, die Bewahrung und Rückgewinnung eines revolutionären Bewußtseins unter den von Verdinglichung und Prosaisierung bedrohten Verhältnissen eines sich in der Alltäglichkeit etablierenden Sozialismus, auf die obengenannten allgemeinhenschlichen und ideologie-indifferenten Probleme reduzieren und nivellieren.*⁶⁰

The main focus of the work was identified by him as the guarding and recovering of revolutionary consciousness embodied in Marxism as resistance to the real existing socialism.

Mandelkow's main focus was on the innovative character of the novel, that is, „die Transzendentalisierung des Erzählvorgangs“.⁶¹ In other words, what made the novel revolutionary was the fact that Wolf had made narration itself the object of her narration. In doing so, reality was understood as a construction through the problematic possibility of its representability. The concept of truth, objective and knowable through science and technology, was put into question.⁶² However, the critic did not want to transcend the GDR context in his understanding of Wolf's questioning truth. He continued to say that

⁵⁹ Meyer 142.

⁶⁰ Karl Robert Mandelkow, „Neuer und sozialistischer Realismus: Zu Fragen der Rezeption der DDR-Literatur in der Bundesrepublik,“ *Kontext 1: Literatur und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Uwe Timm and Gerd Fuchs (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1976) 174.

⁶¹ Mandelkow 173.

⁶² Mandelkow 173.

on the level of content, this questioning of objective truth or reality through the novel's self-reflexivity was consistent with Wolf's critique of the reductionist understanding of Marxism. This kind of understanding saw the socialist development as a mechanic and automatic process without taking the involvement of individuals, as *handelnde* subjectivity, into consideration.⁶³

Unlike conservatives at the end of the 1960s, for whom Wolf's *Nachdenken* served as their project of anti-communism, from the beginning of the 1970s left-wing and liberal intellectuals in the FRG found in Wolf and other major figures of resistance the best place onto which they could project their own ideal of utopian socialism. The emergence of utopian socialism among the western intellectuals had a lot to do with the political damages occurring in the FRG in the late seventies. The 1968 student revolts, the resulting politicization of society, critique of the state and terrorism etc., all these factors contributed to intellectuals' growing doubts and critique of capitalism. In their neighborhood with a totally different political system and ideology at work, they seemed to find a more promising alternative. In this context, Wolf's dissidence was read by those western critics as her critique of real existing socialism in her attempt to recover the revolutionary potential of Marxism, rather than in her refusal of socialism, as claimed in the first phase.

From the above discussions, we can discern a tendency toward reading Wolf in a more universal and humanistic way at this time than in the previous years. Meyer's emphasis on alienation caused by the one-sided development of the real existing

⁶³ Mandelkow 173. "Dieser Transzendentalisierung des Erzählvorgangs entspricht inhaltlich die Opposition gegen einen von der Verdinglichung bedrohten Begriff des Gesellschaft-Allgemeinen des Marxismus, das nicht als automatischer ‚Vorlauf‘ immer schon vorhanden, sondern in der gesellschaftlichen Praxis handelnder Individuen jeweils erneut hergestellt werden muß".

socialism and Mandelkow's focus on the concept of truth/reality and representability, together with the relationship between Wolf and Bloch put forward by Huysen, make it easy for Western critics to approach Wolf's work without consideration of the GDR context.

III. A critic of western civilization? - The third phase: from the end of the 1970s to the 1980s

In the literary critics' positions discussed above, despite the fading away of the specific GDR contextual aspects in their readings of *Nachdenken*, attempts to read it within the GDR can still be discerned. With Wolf's increasing accessibility to Western readership, Western critics started disregarding the GDR critical aspects of Wolf's work. Wolf is read more in parallel with other Western modernist writers or intellectuals, who showed great concern about the crisis of the Western civilization. Problems which the novel underscored, such as alienation, are understood mainly as crisis caused by the modern industrial society. In this context, Monika Papenfuß argues in her examination of Wolf's reception in the feuilleton that in the eighties, Wolf's image as critical GDR writer has retreated totally to the background. Instead, Wolf is seen more as a "moralische Instanz" and "Zivilisationskritikerin"⁶⁴ in the FRG.

Wolf's becoming a critic of western civilization is determined by several factors. One of them is the changing political climate. In the 1980s German two-state status was accepted by both sides of the wall. As a result, the tension between two opposing powers relaxed. Moreover, facing the danger caused by the nuclear war, any cultural and

⁶⁴ Monika Papenfuß, Die Literaturkritik zu Christa Wolf's Werk im Feuilleton (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1998) 169.

political differences became unimportant. The whole of humanity was facing the danger of destruction. The situation seemed to be more imperative for both East- and West Germans due to the geo-political location of Germany (as the foreground of West-East conflicts). This explains Wolf's increasing concern with peace and war in general sense. Besides, from the seventies on, due to the alienation caused by the one-sided economic development in the GDR, Wolf identifies similarities between real existing socialism and other Western capitalist societies. Seeing the GDR also as a modern industrial society, Wolf's critique of the GDR can be very easily generalized as her critique of western civilization and industrialization. Together with the changing political climate, Wolf's increasing concern with the crisis of western civilization and of the modern industrial society play an important role in the retreat of the GDR context from the critics' reviews.

*In Zwei deutsche Literaturen? Zu G. Grass, U. Johnson, H.Kant, U. Plenzdorf und C.Wolf mit einer Bibliographie der schönen Literatur in der DDR (1968-1974)*⁶⁵

Eberhard Mannack pointed out at first the mistakes made by Western and Eastern critics in their generalization of certain scenes and theses as a result of their "Wunschvorstellungen". He suggested that a careful analysis of the textual material should be done. However, he himself seems to make the same mistake in his reading of C.T. Using *Nachdenken* and Johnson's *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* (1959) as examples to argue for the convergence of two German literatures, Mannack's focus was put on the identification of the similarities between *Nachdenken* and *Mutmaßungen*. C.T. was read by him as an outsider in the eyes of the narrator, who failed in her self-realization in a society defined by alienation, violence and routine of family life. Her taking the role of

⁶⁵ Eberhard Mannack, *Zwei deutsche Literaturen? Zu G. Grass, U. Johnson, H.Kant, U. Plenzdorf und C.Wolf mit einer Bibliographie der schönen Literatur in der DDR (1968-1974)* (Kronberg: Athenäum, 1977).

housewife was interpreted as a retreat to the Innerlichkeit. All these themes, he argued, could be found in the younger West German literature; therefore the view of seeing two German literatures as different was rejected by him. In his attempts to prove the convergence of two German literatures – his own “Wunschvorstellungen” –, Mannack’s reading did not differ extensively from the Western and Eastern critics he criticized. His attributing C.T.’s failure to alienation in a modern industry society illustrates quite well the universal and humanistic tendency in the reception of Wolf’s work beginning at the end of the seventies.

In a similar manner with Mannack, Roman S. Struc attempted to bring Wolf with other German but non-GDR writers together. Other than for the convergence of two German literature, like Mannack did, Struc argued for the similarities between *Nachdenken* and the tradition of the German Bildungsroman at the level of both content and form.⁶⁶ In the critic’s view, *Nachdenken* contains important features of the Bildungsroman, such as, the process of life itself rather than a happy ending as the goal of Bildung, the participation of the reader in the process of Bildung etc.

Refusing reading Christa T.’s illness as illness with the GDR (a subject dominating the critics both in the GDR and the FRG at the end of the 1960s), Struc pointed out that the conflicts between individual and society and the structure in Wolf’s work could be found in 19th century literature; he mentioned for example *Der grüne Heinrich*.⁶⁷

However, in his generalization of C.T.’s conflicts as conflicts between personal

⁶⁶ Roman S. Struc, “Nachdenken über Christa T. and the Bildungsroman,” Echoes and Influences of German Romanticism, ed. Michael S. Batts (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

⁶⁷ Gottfried Keller’s novel *Der grüne Heinrich* was first published in 1854/55. It is about the narrator Heinrich Lee who wants to be a famous painter. The story is about how he develops into an artist. Together with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* und Stifter’s *Nachsommer*, Keller’s novel belongs to the most famous German-speaking Entwicklungsroman.

imperatives and the demands of necessity (such as conformity to society, to certain regulations), he seems to go too far. In other words, for him, *Nachdenken* was mainly about Christa T.'s struggle for a life free from constraints coming from both the social and political sphere and the sphere of personal and intimate relations. In this context, poetry or C.T.'s writing was read by Struc mainly as a way to realize her personal freedom without any kind of constraints. To some extent, *Nachdenken* became for the critic a story about "The dreaming poet and the dance of necessity".⁶⁸ This is a too generalizing way of reading, since the struggle for personal freedom could happen anytime and anywhere in the world. C.T.'s specificity, her deep connection to socialist project, goes out of view.

Not satisfied with the similarities between *Nachdenken* and the traditional Bildungsroman, Struc pointed out in the end the deviation of the former from the latter. For example, C.T. was in pursuit of a here and now: "longing is for life here and now; not as a slow, organic process implied in the classical concept of Bildung, but as an imperative: "Wann, wenn nicht jetzt?"⁶⁹ For this reason, Struc suggested a better comparison of *Nachdenken* with Thomas Mann's *the Magic Mountain*, since Mann's novel was within the tradition of the Bildungsroman but at the same time contained its critique. It seems that for Struc the relationship between *Nachdenken* and the Bildungsroman illustrated very well the similarities and differences between the modern German novel and the old tradition of the Bildungsroman. In this sense, Wolf's work belonged to modern German literature.

As I pointed out in the last chapter, Wolf and the other so-called modernist writers in

⁶⁸ Struc 203.

⁶⁹ Struc 208.

the GDR, such as Heiner Müller, should be understood within the specific historical and social context. That is, the emergence of modernity in the GDR cannot be separated from the development of socialist society in a certain historical period and from the GDR intellectuals' project of alternative socialism. However, in the universal and humanistic reading of *Nachdenken* from the end of the 1970s to the 1980s in West Germany with the emphasis on the similarities between Wolf and the other modernist Western writers or between Wolf and the German tradition, Wolf's specificity as a GDR or socialist writer – her commitment to socialism – is kept out of sight.

The disregard of the GDR context and the concentration only on the structure of the text can be also seen in Herbert Kaiser⁷⁰ and Lothar Köhn⁷¹ etc. In this context, Ankum argues that both these critics signal a new relationship of western critics to the GDR literature.⁷²

In accordance with this new relationship of western critics to the GDR literature, Bernhard Greiner's two articles *Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form: Zur Erinnerung Frühromantischer Tradition im Roman der DDR (C.W., Fritz Rudolf Fries,*

⁷⁰ Herbert Kaiser, "C.W.: Nachdenken über Christa T.: Erzählen als Modell geschichtlichen Interpretierens," *Literatur für Leser* 3 (1978). Kaiser's main focus was the dialectical structure demonstrated in C.T.'s understanding of reality, of language and time / history. The relationship of the narrator to C.T. (including the structure of the narration) was defined by a similar dialectical structure too. Since the narrator in the novel interpreted C.T., a model of historical and hermeneutical interpretations could also be generalized. Although Kaiser emphasized C.T.'s identification with socialism, his reading of C.T. as a critique of the violence of language and of the exclusion of subjective elements from the so-called objective facts in the end overlooked the specific GDR context.

Kaiser identified the reason for C.T.'s sickness and death in her childhood, namely, her experience of fascism. Therefore her death gained "große geschichtliche Wirkkraft" (202). Moreover, it seems for Kaiser that what combined the narrator, C.T. and the reader with one another was general and humanistic values such as fantasy and consciousness, instead of their common social and historical background. The GDR context has thereby receded into the background.

⁷¹ Lothar Köhn, "Christa Wolf. Nachdenken über Christa T.," *Deutsche Romane des 20. Jahrhunderts: Neue Interpretationen*, ed. Lützel, Paul Michael (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1983) 340-355.

⁷² von Ankum 129.

Johannes Bobrowski) (1981) and *Die Schwierigkeit, "ich" zu sagen: C.W.s psychologische Orientierung des Erzählens* (1981) are noteworthy. They not only exemplify the trend in the Western reception of *Nachdenken*, but also demonstrate a new way of reading, which transcends the frame of socialist realism totally. In Kaiser and Köhn, the social dimension of the work still played a significant role. Both of them understood *Nachdenken* as a critique to the society, though their understanding of the society was generalized as a modern industry society other than a socialist one. Unlike them, Greiner attempted to read C.T. from a psychological perspective. In doing so, concepts like consciousness and repression take the place of alienation, whereby social factors do not play a role.

C.T. was seen as a projection of the narrator in the sense that she was understood as the repressed other of the narrator that was forgotten and excluded by the consciousness: „Projektionsgestalt für einen selbstständigen Anteil des Erzähler-Ich“. ⁷³ Greiner argued that *Nachdenken* was one of those works since the middle 60s that demonstrated a new trend in GDR literature. That is, they turned away from the French and Russian Realism of the 19th century and moved towards the early Romanticism represented by the Jena circle and Jean Paul as the new paradigm. In this context, Greiner identified the purpose of the novel, as a “Gedächtnisarbeit”, in the exposure of the limitation of the self only as consciousness and in the attempt to break up that limitation. With the help of contemplation of the narrator, the separation of consciousness and memory (as a part of unconsciousness) was broken, and along with that, the condition for a new self, which

⁷³ Bernhard Greiner, „'Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form': Zur Erinnerung Frühromantischer Tradition im Roman der DDR (C.W., Fritz Rudolf Fries, Johannes Bobrowski)“, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik 11 Dec. 1981: 267.

integrated the repressed part of self, in other words, unconsciousness, was created, as he argued

Richtig ist der Roman als ‚literarisierte Gedächtnisarbeit‘ zu umschreiben, die sich aufbaut auf dem Spannungsfeld zwischen Ich als Bewußtsein und Gedächtnis als System, dem Unbewußtsein zugehörig. Zielvorstellung solcher Gedächtnisarbeit ist nicht Ich-Bildung in schaffender Auseinandersetzung mit der Welt, sondern Aufheben der Grenzen des Ich als Bewußtsein.⁷⁴

Here Greiner stressed the difference between the traditional reflection of the self in realism and the *flexion* of the self in Romanticism. Instead of setting up a boundary between the self and the other (including nature) in the traditional sense of the self, the notion of the self in Romanticism aimed to break up and to go beyond that boundary so that the repressed other could be included.

In his psychological reading, Greiner criticized those misunderstandings which had put the narrator as a pattern and C.T. as a negative example in an opposite position. According to him, both the interpretations of utopia represented by Mohr and Huysen and those of elegy by Hermann Kähler were wrong too, since those readings saw the narrator in the traditional sense as “ein fest umrissenes Ich, das entweder antizipatorisch eingebracht oder als verlorenes beklagt wird”.⁷⁵

As for the question whether the narrator could integrate C.T., the repressed other, into herself successfully under the condition of socialism, Greiner’s answer seemed negative since C.T. died and was excluded in the end. However, he was not satisfied with this pessimistic reading. Instead, he thought highly of the narrator’s recognition of her repressed other and her Gedächtnisarbeit as an attempt to go beyond the limitation of self only as consciousness: “Das Nachdenken aber führt das Erzähler-Ich zur

⁷⁴ Greiner, Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form 265.

⁷⁵ Greiner, Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form 265.

Identifikation mit C.T. Im Überschreiten der bisherigen Ich-Grenze des Erzähler-ich hat der Roman seinen Höhepunkt.⁷⁶ Understood in this way, C.T. ended in failure while the narrator in success.⁷⁷

Greiner's psychological perspective made it easy to read *Nachdenken* totally outside of the GDR context. As he pointed out, instead of blaming the society for the failure of self-realization, the focus was put mainly on self-censorship or the mechanism of repression, whereby consciousness, as part of the psychic process, functioned as a guard against memory (unconsciousness). In this context, instead of self-realization in a society, for Greiner, the work was about producing a new self that could overcome the separation of consciousness and memory and ultimately was capable of experience.⁷⁸ Greiner addressed the retreat of the GDR context in the reception of GDR literature too and attributed this new way of reading to those works' (including *Nachdenken*) new orientation towards early Romanticism: "Es scheint daher nicht zufällig, dass gerade mit diesen Werken im Westen eine Rezeption der DDR-Literatur einsetzt, die sich um produktive Beziehungen zwischen Werk und Leser bemüht, statt die Werke immer nur auf ihre spezifischen DDR-Voraussetzungen zurückzuweisen."⁷⁹ However, he did not want to displace *Nachdenken* in a western context; therefore he pointed out in the end that only in a socialist society was there a possibility of overcoming the separation of consciousness and memory, a quite positive conclusion in favor of socialism, which, however, was drawn too abruptly to be convincing.

⁷⁶ Greiner, Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form 271.

⁷⁷ Greiner, Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form 272.

⁷⁸ Greiner, „Die Schwierigkeit, „ich“ zu sagen: C.W.s psychologische Orientierung des Erzählens,“ Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 2 (1981): 339.

⁷⁹ Greiner, Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form 328.

From the critics mentioned above we can see that Wolf's dissidence in the 1980s in West Germany went independent of her commitment to socialism. Unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, when Wolf's dissidence in western critics' view was still deeply connected with socialism – either understood as opposition to socialism at the end of 1960s or as critique to real existing socialism in the 1970s –, in critics' universal and humanistic reading of *Nachdenken* in the 1980s, socialism passed out of sight. Focus was put on the searching for an affinity between Wolf and German literature: either West or traditional German literature. Greiner's psychological approach and some critics' focus only on the structure of the text also facilitated the disregard of the GDR context.

Conclusion

What, then, should we conclude from this discussion of the various critical responses to *Nachdenken* among German literary critics before the Wende? First of all, I hope that my discussion has clearly demonstrated that Wolf's identity as a dissident is actually a product of the ideological war carried out in the field of literary criticism. Especially in the first phase at the end of the 1960s, Wolf's work was treated as a political issue and served mainly for the identification of the author's political standpoint toward socialism and ultimately for the campaign between socialism and capitalism. In this war, binary systems of value predominated. Doubts, uncertainty or even refusal engendered by *Nachdenken* in the GDR caused and reinforced praises and celebrations coming from the FRG, or quite the reverse. Even in the seventies and eighties with the changing cultural policy in the GDR and a relaxed relationship between the two Germanys, the influences from the other side on the East German critics could still be

discerned. Uncertainty about or even rejection of *Nachdenken* continued among the GDR literary critics. In contrast, in the FRG, Wolf's popularity continued either for her utopian socialism (in the first half of the seventies) or for her critique of Western civilization (in the 1980s). The notion of Wolf's dissidence obtained a different nature. The process of "making" Wolf into a dissident shows clearly how GDR cultural policy and Western culture industry worked hand in hand in the creation of the GDR dissidence, as Bathrick points out.⁸⁰

In addition, the critical responses to *Nachdenken* among West German literary critics exemplify the predominance of an ideology of modernism. That is, the separation of ethics from aesthetics and the priority given to modernist aesthetics over ethics/politics are seen as one of the most important features of modernism. Using this "westernized" standard of modernism, western critics always devalue or dismiss GDR literature based on socialist realism, which, through its privileging of politics or ethics, falls short of the western aesthetic standards. Emmerich's division of the GDR literature in three phases: pre-modern, modern and post-modern, as pointed out by Julia Hell,⁸¹ and his privileging the "golden age" (from 70s to 80s) is one example of this ideology of modernism. According to him and other western critics, the appealing of Wolf's work *Nachdenken* lies in its deviation from socialist realism with its deployment of modern narrative techniques. This "aesthetic emancipation", using Emmerich's own words,⁸² makes them celebrate Wolf as a dissident in the first place. In the later period, seen as a modern

⁸⁰ Bathrick, The Powers of Speech 4.

⁸¹ Julia Hell, Psychoanalysis, history, and the literature of East Germany: Post-Fascist-Fantasies (Durham & London: Duke University, 1997) 11-13.

⁸² Emmerich 26.

writer engaging in the critique of western civilization, Wolf seems to have finished her trajectory from realism to modernism.

However, this celebration of Wolf as a modernist writer did not last long. With the demise of the GDR in 1989, Wolf's status as a modern writer or intellectual who had the ability to criticize modern industrial society was largely discredited. In addition, mainly because of her insistence on an alternative socialism and refusal of unification, Wolf became the target of conservative accusations and was condemned as a poet of the state mostly by journalists. Her political standpoint towards the GDR and socialism, which was downplayed in the 1980s, became the main focus of discussion again. In the next chapter I will concentrate on the reception of *Nachdenken* after the Wende. In my discussion I will include Wolf's other works, such as *Was Bleibt*. Parallels can be drawn between those works in their reception among the western critics. We can see that the same mechanism works even after the end of the cold war.

Chapter 4 Was bleibt?

--- critical responses to *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and Wolf's other works after the Wende

Since the Wende Wolf's reputation as a dissident has been questioned. Wolf's dissidence, a term with a variety of meanings in different social and historical contexts before the collapse of the GDR, as I have demonstrated in the last chapter, is totally rejected or it is subject to a new scrutiny. Along with the questioning of Wolf's dissidence, her literature, once praised as "critical" – either critical of the GDR state or of matters of general interest – is suddenly denigrated as banal and simply moralistic.

In this chapter, focusing mainly on the critical responses to Wolf's *Nachdenken* and other works in unified Germany, I will continue to show the constructed nature of Wolf's dissidence. However, I will underscore the changes in the new interpretations of her dissidence, changes which I argue are due to the novel political situation. My discussion in this chapter pivots around the four different identities ascribed to Wolf after 1989 by prominent German critics. As a transition to the next chapter dealing specifically with Wolf's reception among feminists, this chapter ends with a brief analysis of the gendered dimension involved in the critique of Wolf during the Wende.

I. Wolf as a poet of the state?- Literaturstreit during the Wende

A brief introduction of *Was Bleibt*

During the so-called *Literaturstreit* (literary controversy) in 1990, Wolf's reputation as a dissident writer was brought into discredit mainly by journalists. The controversy started around the late publication of Wolf's novel *Was Bleibt* (What remains).

This novel recounts one day in March of a female writer under the surveillance of the Stasi (secret police). A seemingly routine day is permeated by the narrator's anxiety of being observed by three men in a car in front of her house. This state of being observed, the narrator tells us, had begun two years before and ever since the narrator's life had changed. She cannot say what she wants at home or with her friends on the phone. She begins to feel a sense of isolation or alienation from other people. However, at the same time, the narrator seems to have accustomed herself to being observed all the time. She continues her daily life as usual, enjoys her breakfast coffee and good quality bread. She even tries to make friends with those observers.

The story consists of the narrator's monologue, interspersed by few instances of dialogue. In her monologue, the narrator addressed her fear; her fear is not only caused by the observers outside, but also by an invisible "observer" – her self-censorship. As a writer, the narrator feels the urge to go beyond "die Grenzen des Sagbaren" (the boundaries of the expressible); however, at the same time, she knows for sure that such kind of act – going beyond the boundaries – will be punished. And she feels guilty for her longing for "Ruhe" (quiet) too. This explains her uneasiness or even anger after she reads the poems sent to her by a young man. In this young poet, she sees the courage to go beyond that boundary between the spoken and the unspoken, a quality which she knows she lacks but, which at the same time, she longs for. Therefore she feels resentment at him and even more so at herself. Her anxiety culminates in an unexpected visit from a young woman. This visitor asks the narrator about her own manuscript. The narrator must face up to this girl, who, having told the truth, is now suffering from an illness caused by her imprisonment. The woman does not want to give up her integrity

and the narrator feels her own cowardice when she becomes aware that she cannot but warn the woman about the possible dangers caused by the manuscript. After the visit, the narrator symptomatically loses her vision temporarily. The meeting with the girl forces her to confront her own self-censorship physically.

The life crisis caused by surveillance and self-censorship is accompanied by a language crisis. Already at the beginning of the novel, the narrator talks about a new language, the narrator does not yet possess. However, she seems to find hope in those young people in the end. During one of her routine readings in the evening, a young courageous woman asks her questions about the possibility of a “Lebbare Zukunft”¹ (a livable future) in the GDR. Young audience responds to these questions optimistically. It is thanks to those young people that the narrator regains her hope to find a new language one day in the near future.

Wolf, a poet of the state? - Literaturstreit

Wolf wrote *Was Bleibt* in 1979 and chose to publish it ten years later in 1989. Its late publication was at the roots of the first *Literaturstreit* in 1990, when several journalists questioned Wolf’s integrity as dissident intellectual. Ulrich Greiner, for example, severely attacked the narrator in a review article in *Die Zeit*.² He ignored the fictional character of the text and identified the narrator with Wolf. For seeing herself as a victim of the terror of the state in the novel while enjoying all kinds of privileges, Wolf was called by Greiner a “Staatsdichterin” (the poet of the state/an official poet), who lacked feelings for those suffering under the GDR regime.

¹ Christa Wolf, Was Bleibt (München, Luchterhand, 2002) 90.

² Ulrich Greiner, “Was bleibt. Bleibt Was? Pro und Contra: eine ZEIT-Kontroverse über C.W und ihre neue Erzählung,” Die Zeit 1 June 1990.

Along with Greiner, Frank Schirmmacher pointed out that the late publication of the novel made Wolf's critique of the Stasi pointless: "Dieses Buch (...) hätte vor zehn, ja vor fünf Jahren der Staatssicherheit wohl Schaden zufügen können. Jetzt ist es bedeutungslos, anachronistisch und dumm und hat Züge des Lächerlichen ...".³ He claimed that if the public had had access to *Was bleibt* ten years earlier, Wolf could have contributed to the breaking down of the regime. However, the delayed publication made Wolf's initial courageous gesture totally meaningless and even ridiculous. Schirmmacher particularly addressed Wolf's loyalty towards the GDR state and attributed it not only to privileges Wolf enjoyed but also to psychological influences exerted on Wolf by the Nazi regime when she was a child. If Greiner's arguments about Wolf's privileged position were still somewhat based on the content of *Was bleibt*, in Schirmmacher's reading, there was nearly no mention of Wolf's work. Instead, Schirmmacher used Wolf only as an alibi to denounce the GDR left intellectuals and their relationship to the state.

Schirmmacher's critique of the GDR intellectuals was also shared by Günter Kunert⁴ and Wolf Biermann⁵ – former GDR writers⁶ who left the country in the 1970s –,

³ Frank Schirmmacher, "Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten," FAZ 2 June 1990.

⁴ Günter Kunert, "Weltfremd und blind. Zum Streit um die Literatur der DDR," FAZ 30 June 1990.

⁵ Wolf Biermann, "Nur wer sich ändert, bleibt sich true," die Zeit 24 August 1990.

⁶ Former GDR writers Reiner Kunze and Monika Maron also accused those GDR writers including Wolf of their choosing to stay in the GDR. Maron's critique of those writers staying in the GDR began already in 1989 before the Literaturstreit (see Karoline von Oppen, The role of the writer and the press in the unification of Germany, 1989-1990 (New York: Peter Lang, 2000))
However, not all GDR writers who had been expatriated or arrested stood on the same side of West German journalists. Lew Kopelew ("Für Christa Wolf: Ein Brief an die *Zeit*, die *Faz*, und die *Welt*," Tageszeitung 14 Juni 1990), Walter Janka, and Martin Ahrends (younger generation) etc. protested against those journalists' attack on Wolf.

Johannes Willms⁷, Werner Fuld⁸ and Jürgen Serke⁹ etc. These writers and journalists claimed that Wolf and other established GDR intellectuals stayed on in the GDR because of the privileges, especially of material nature they enjoyed. In their view, these GDR intellectuals, for example, had never questioned the legitimacy of the GDR regime. Instead, in their idealization of GDR identity, real damages or terror caused by the regime had been weakened or neutralized in their works. In short, according to these critics, Wolf's and other GDR intellectuals' conformity to the regime not only endangered the development of the GDR literature but also the development of the GDR towards openness and democracy. In this context, guilt or failure of the GDR intellectuals became a dominant theme in the *Literaturstreit*. And newspapers such as *FAZ*, *Die Welt* and *Die Zeit* stood in the foreground in condemning GDR intellectuals.¹⁰

The writer Karin Struck was the only positive voice which could be heard in *Die Welt*.¹¹ She insisted on Wolf's literary achievements and her significance to the GDR reader. Refusing the idea that Wolf helped to sustain the regime, Struck affirmed the critical function of Wolf's literature and saw it as example: "für die sanfte, aber stetige Erosionswirkung von Literatur".¹² Unlike *FAZ*, *Die Welt* and *Die Zeit* mentioned above,

⁷ Johannes Willms, "Die maßlose Empörung. Das deutsche PEN-Präsidium meldet sich zu Wort," *FAZ* 4 July 1990.

⁸ Werner Fuld, "Kleinere Brötchen. Walter Jens, gegen sich selbst verteidigt," *FAZ* 20 July 1990.

⁹ Jürgen Serke, "Mit Steinen auf den Engel der Geschichte," *Die Welt* 2 July 1990. and "Was bleibt, das ist Scham," *Die Welt* 23 June 1990 etc.

¹⁰ See Papenfuß, *Die Literaturkritik zu Christa Wolfs Werk im Feuilleton* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1998).

¹¹ Karin Struck, "Im Sozialismus durfte keiner traurig sein. Christa Wolfs langsamer Abschied vom Kommunismus," *Die Welt* 10 November 1990.

¹² Struck.

die *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Rundschau* published several articles which showed sympathy with Wolf.¹³ However, compared to the condemnation by conservative journalists, those sympathizing voices seemed to be too weak to be heard.

What is more, beginning in the fall 1990, the target of the journalists' critique went beyond the GDR intellectuals. Intellectuals in West Germany – mainly those left-wing intellectuals quite prominent on the post-War literary scene – were also condemned for their political intervention. The *Literaturstreit* that had started with *Was Bleibt* obtained thereafter a new dimension. Greiner, for example, defined both GDR and FRG literature after the War as “Gesinnungsästhetik”¹⁴:

*Die Gesinnungsästhetik [...] ist das gemeinsame Dritte der glücklicherweise zu Ende gehenden Literaturen von BRD und DDR. Glücklicherweise: Denn allzu sehr waren die Schriftsteller in beiden deutschen Hälften mit außerliterarischen Themen beauftragt, mit dem Kampf gegen Restauration, Faschismus, Klerikalismus, Stalinismus et cetera. ... Es war dies eine Literatur des politischen Engagements und der Opportunität des Augenblicks. ... Die Gesinnungsästhetik war das herrschende Merkmal des deutschen Literaturbetriebes, in der DDR sowieso, aber auch in der Bundesrepublik.*¹⁵

The attack upon the political role of writers in both the GDR and the FRG was also shared by Schirmacher¹⁶ and Kunert¹⁷ etc.¹⁸ With the end of the cold war and of the

¹³ Günter Grass, “Bericht aus Altdöbern,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* 30 June 1990; Christa Dericum, “Arbeit an der neuen Sprache. Nachtstelle zwischen den Zeiten – Christa Wolfs umstrittene Erzählung ‘Was Bleibt’,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 21 June 1990; Klaus Podak, “Geeint miteinander streiten. Schriftsteller in der DDR: Waren sie nur Mitläufer und Opportunisten? – Eine Umfrage,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 25 July 1990. etc.

¹⁴ Ulrich Greiner, “Deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik, noch einmal Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit/ Eine Zwischenbilanz von Ulrich Greiner,” *Die Zeit* 2 November 1990.

¹⁵ Greiner, *Deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik*.

¹⁶ Frank Schirmacher, “Abschied von der Literatur der Bundesrepublik. Neue Pässe, neue Identitäten, neue Lebensläufe: Über die Kündigung einiger Mythen des west-deutschen Bewußtseins,” *FAZ* 2 October 1990.

¹⁷ G. Kunert: “Der Sturz von Sockel. Zum Streit der deutschen Autoren,” *FAZ* 3 September 1990.

German separation Kunert announced the return of literature as *l'art pour l'art*, a literature that is without any political and moral commitment: "Kurz gesagt: Der Bedarf nach politischer Aktivität von Schriftstellern ist unvermittelt erloschen. Nun ist Literatur nichts anderes mehr als Literatur – kein Zeugnis für oder gegen etwas, kein Mittel für irgendwelche undurchsichtigen Zwecke."¹⁹ Whether Kunert's call for a-political literature will be followed or not in unified Germany is beyond the scope of my dissertation.²⁰ What is important in my discussion here is that along with the new round of polemic generated by Schirmacher and Greiner etc., the *Literaturstreit* ignited a discussion not only about Wolf and GDR literature but also about the whole post-War German literature. Just like the title of a book dealing specifically with the *Literaturstreit* suggested, "Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf",²¹ Wolf and her work *Was Bleibt* offered excuses for the judgment of intellectuals both in the West and East politically and morally. However, as a victim of this controversy, Wolf has lost her significance as a public intellectual in a unified Germany.

The second *Literaturstreit* began with the unveiling of Sascha Anderson's status as an informant for the Stasi in 1991 and with the exposure of the collaboration of Wolf and

¹⁸ This was an old debate that had occurred in the 30s in Germany (Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno, Lukacs etc.) and again in the 50s and 60s (Adorno, Sartre). It is the controversy about "commitment" (See Sartre etc.)

¹⁹ G. Kunert, Der Sturz von Sockel.

²⁰ See Stephen Brockmann, Literature and German reunification (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 1999). There Brockmann argues for the continuing existence of strong ties between the literary and the political even in post-1989 Germany. According to him, the significant role played by Schirmacher and Bohrer etc. during the *Literaturstreit* is itself proof for the prestigious status of literary critics, which is based on literature as a privileged discourse in Germany.

²¹ Thomas Anz, ed. „Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf“: der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland (München: edition spangenberg, 1991).

other prominent GDR writers, such as Heiner Müller, with the Stasi in 1993.²² The involvement in politics of the Prenzlauer Berg poets, such as Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski – representatives of so-called postmodern de-politicized intellectuals in opposition to the traditional committed ones, like Wolf and Müller – seems to destroy the illusion of “pure” intellectuals represented by Benda. Wolf’s already retarded reputation as a prominent critical GDR intellectual during the first Literaturstreit was totally ruined.

What conclusion can we draw from the brief introduction of the Literaturstreit above? First of all, after the Wende, the reception of Wolf’s literary text was totally politicized. In this seeming literary debate about Wolf’s fictional work, focus was put only on the identification of political messages revealed in the text. In doing so, content rather than literary form in *Was Bleibt* was taken into account. Even when few critics mentioned language or form, it served mainly for their political or ideological argumentations. The total disregard of the literary quality is as problematical a perspective as the one of a pure literature or disengaged aesthetics represented for example by Kunert. The lack of objective analysis of the literary quality in Wolf’s work also applied to those supportive voices represented for example by Karin Struck and Günter Grass, as pointed out by Monika Papenfuß.²³

With respect to a total politicizing of a literary text there are similarities between the reception of *Was Bleibt* in the 1990s and the reception of *Nachdenken* in the first phase at

²² More about the second Literaturstreit see Thomas Anz, ed. Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf: der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland (München: edition spangenberg, 1991). Karl Deiritz, ed. Der Deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit, oder, "Freunde, es spricht sich schlecht mit gebundener Zunge" : Analysen und Materialien (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1991). Bernd Wittek, Der Literaturstreit im sich vereinigenden Deutschland : eine Analyse des Streits um Christa Wolf und die deutsch-deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften (Marburg: Tectum, 1997).

²³ Papenfuß 46.

the end of 1960s. In both cases, the literary text is treated only as a political issue and is totally subordinated to the personality of the author, in particular, her political standpoint toward socialism. In this context, Katharina von Ankum uses sarcastically the term “Gesinnungskritik” – in critical response to Greiner’s term “Gesinnungsästhetik” – and so characterizes the western critics’ attitude towards GDR literature.²⁴ In her view, the contemporary German critics read or evaluate literary works only according to the political standpoint of the writer. *Nachdenken* was read in the GDR and the FRG above all as Wolf’s denouncement of socialism, while *Was Bleibt* suggested after the Wende Wolf’s conformity to state-socialism. In the first case, she is celebrated by the western conservative critics as a dissident writer and critiqued by the critics of the GDR; in the second case, seen as a poet of the state, she and her whole literary work are totally discredited by a very similar group of conservatives (mainly journalists). Despite the totally opposite consequences, the same mechanism is at work in the reception of Wolf’s literary works in these two very different historical moments. That is, literary works serve as a means to identify the writer’s political standpoint or the writer’s political correctness. The predominant role played by the author’s political correctness in the reading of Wolf’s literary work is also addressed by Margit Resch. After pointing out that “... no matter what Wolf published, it is going to be politically incorrect somewhere”,²⁵ Resch indicates: “The war of political correctness, especially in Wolf’s

²⁴ von Ankum, Die Rezeption von Christa Wolf in Ost und West. Von „Moskauer Novelle“ bis „Selbstversuch“ (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1992).

²⁵ Margit Resch, Understanding C. W. Returning home to a foreign land (Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1997) 5.

case, is an unwinnable war".²⁶ Wolf's changing from a dissident to a poet of the state proves the validity of Resch's argument.

These critics, in short, do not read Wolf's work, they do not pay attention to one of her main stakes (also political stakes) in her texts: the question of writing itself. In their making arguments on ideological ground, they very often identify the author with the narrator. In doing so, one of the most important aspects in Wolf's understanding of writing is disregarded. That is, the relationship/dialogue among the author, the narrator, and the protagonist for the purpose of self-examination, and self-understanding. It is true that unlike for *Nachdenken*, when Wolf wrote herself an interpretation of her novel in order to foreground her dialogic relationship with the process of writing and her commitment to socialism, in the case of *Was Bleibt*, in 1990, Wolf did not address her work in a gesture of self-justification. Instead, she kept silent. Maybe this war against her came too abruptly and surprised her. In addition, the condemnation of her and her work during the Wende was very often based on false information or rumors. For example, in journalists' harsh critique of Wolf's lack of integrity exemplified in *Was Bleibt*, fast nobody showed concern about the reason why the protagonist or Wolf (according to some) was ever put under the Stasi's surveillance. Most critics failed to notice that the Stasi surveilled Wolf because of her support of those nine writers expelled from the Writers Union in 1979.²⁷ In fact, some critics even denied that Wolf had signed

²⁶ Resch 7.

²⁷ Those nine writers were Kurt Bartsch, Adolf Endler, Stefan Heym, Karl-Heinz Jakobs, Klaus Poche, Klaus Schlesinger, Rolf Schneider, Dieter Schubert, Joachim Seyppel. Their "crime" lied in their sending a letter to the western press expressing their concerns about the repressive cultural policies after Birmann's expulsion. The reason for their doing this was that they were denied the opportunity to publish their criticism in the GDR. 50 people voted against expulsions including Wolf. She wrote a letter to the writers union showing her concern about the consequences caused by expulsions.

to protest against Biermann's expatriation in 1976. Facing this kind of polemic, Wolf's self-justification seemed useless, as she stated in her letter to Efim Etkind later (1992):

Sie wissen ja wohl, dass gerade diese Erzählung ganz zerrissen wurde; das hat dazu geführt, dass ich sie eine lange Zeit nicht mehr ansehen konnte, geschweige denn daraus lesen(...). Unter anderem warf man mir ja vor, ich, die ich eigentlich "Staatsdichterin" gewesen sei, würde mich in diesem Text widerrechtlich als Verfolgte aufspielen. Ich mußte mich fragen, ob die Leute, die das sagten, nicht lesen können oder nicht lesen wollen; vielleicht beides. Jedenfalls brachte mich die Einsicht, dass niemand Argumenten zuhören würde, zum Schweigen.²⁸

The polemic around *Was Bleibt* was a terrible shock for Wolf. She expressed her incomprehension of the lack of facts and lack of interests in a true argumentation. This caused her silence. She continued to say that "Ich fühle mich durch die Reduzierung auf die Ja-Nein-Frage: Staatsfeind: ja oder nein! Als Person beleidigt."²⁹ This binary logic, best demonstrated in the literary responses to *Nachdenken* at the end of the 1960s, continues to work after the cold war. In this context, silence – neither denying nor affirming – might be the best means of resistance.

Besides the total politicizing of a literary text, in both the reception of *Nachdenken* and *Was Bleibt* the same ideology of modernism dominates. As I pointed out at the end of the last chapter, *Nachdenken* was celebrated by western critics as Wolf's emancipation from socialist realism and her trajectory towards modernism, which was characterized by its privileging aesthetics over politics or ethics. Twenty years later Wolf's *Was Bleibt* was seen as the best example of "Gesinnungsästhetik", whereby aesthetics and ethics were intertwined, and therefore was totally discredited for its falling short of the western aesthetic standards. In both cases, the evaluation of Wolf's work is based on certain

²⁸ Christa Wolf, "Christa Wolf an Efim Etkind," *Christa Wolf Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1992) 196.

²⁹ Wolf, *Christa Wolf an Efim Etkind* 200.

understanding of literature which sees the separation of aesthetics from ethics or politics as the important feature of modernism. When a literary text fits in with this standard, it is a good literature; when not, it is bad, banal and simply moralistic.

This ideology of modernism (privileging aesthetics) continues to influence some critics' attitude towards Wolf after the Wende, which can be seen in few (not many, due to Wolf's being discredited in Germany) critical responses to *Nachdenken* after the German unification, as I shall discuss in the following part.

II. Wolf only a writer of fiction?

25 years after its publication, Heidi Gidion reread *Nachdenken* in the issue 46 of *Text und Kritik*, which was dedicated to Wolf (1994). In her article, Gidion made a clear differentiation of Wolf's fictions and her official speeches and asserted that Wolf's contribution as a writer lied with her fiction. She argued that the higher artistic (literary) quality Wolf's work possessed, the less trace of her being influenced by ideology could be identified:

Je mehr sie uns als Schriftstellerin entgegentritt, das heißt in kunstvoll gestalteter Fiktion, desto weiter entfernt erscheint sie von dem systemkonformen Freund-Feind-Weltbild, desto differenzierter gestaltet sie Wahrheit, gerade auch ideologisch unerwünschte. Ihre Romane und Erzählungen selbst sind es, die mir die Kriterien an die Hand geben, ihren Umgang mit der Wahrheit in ihren offiziellen Verlautbarungen zu kritisieren.³⁰

Here the author seems to put Wolf's fiction and her official speech in opposition, instead of seeing them in a complementary relationship. It seems unclear which category Wolf's own comments, such as *Selbstinterview* or theoretical essays Gidion would put into:

³⁰ Heidi Gidion, "Christa Wolfs 'Nachdenken über Christa T.' Wiedergelesen nach fünfundzwanzig Jahren," *Text und Kritik* 46 (1994): 54.

fiction or official speech? Moreover, in her affirmation of literary quality of Wolf's fiction – a quite positive gesture in opposition to the total discredit of Wolf's work by journalists – and in her rejection of Wolf's political declarations in her official speeches, Wolf's significance lies only in her writing of fiction.

Unlike her contemporary Irmtraud Morgner, who is recognized as a feminist writer in the GDR and who does not play a role in GDR cultural politics,³¹ Wolf's significance, I argue, goes far beyond that of a writer who is writing on women's issues, or that of a writer who is writing only fiction. In other words, being a feminist writer like Morgner (This will be dealt with in the next chapter) does not suffice in Wolf's case. Her active involvement in the construction of socialism – public interventions (speeches and appeals etc.) besides her literary work – and also in the imagination of a *lebbare* future for mankind make her a moral and political spokesperson in both Germanys. Even after the demise of the GDR, Wolf still insists on a writer's or an intellectual's critical sense and responsibility of effecting changes. Understood in this way, the attempts of critics, such as Heidi Gidion, to save Wolf from being totally discredited by reclaiming the literary quality of Wolf's work and reaffirming her status as a good fictional writer is praiseworthy. However, the identity of Wolf only as a fictional writer is reductive and cannot account for the complexity of Wolf's work as intellectual. Moreover, those critics' attempts also demonstrate the continuing domination of ideology of modernism in western critics' attitude towards the GDR literature, as I pointed out at the end of the previous chapter. That is, in term of “westernized” standard of modernism, literature is separated from politics or ethics, and the priority is given to literature or aesthetics over

³¹ Geoffrey Westgate, Strategies under surveillance: reading Irmtraud Morgner as a GDR writer (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2002).

politics or ethics. Guided by this, either GDR literature is dismissed or devalued for its political and didactic nature, or in the critics' selective reading, any political content is filtered out, as Gidion did.

On the one hand, Gidion's position is the continuity of ideology of modernism; on the other hand, her refusal of Wolf's political engagement is a response to Wolf's so-called failure as engaged intellectual discussed during the *Wende* within a larger context of the failure of both the GDR intellectuals and left-wing intellectuals in the FRG. For several critics, the *Wende* was a turning point in their approach to the GDR. In this regard, Kuhn speaks of "a double lens", as she states:

*The unique position that GDR studies occupy in post-GDR society calls for a special mode of reading: it requires the reader to view critical studies through a double lens, one that situates them within the context of pre-November 1989 scholarship and also reads them through the prism of post-1989 German history.*³²

Here Kuhn argues that GDR studies should be situated within a historical and social context, which, after the demise of the GDR, should also include the *Wende* and post-1989 Germany. For Gidion, this double lens – reading Wolf through *the prism* of the demise of the GDR – means the rejection or forgetting / obliteration of Wolf's intervention in politics. For other critics, Wolf's intervention is either generalized or put under a newly critical scrutiny, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

³² Anna Kuhn, „Was bleibt. (Re)Assessing C.W. scholarship after the *Wende*: A review essay," *The Germanic Review* 67 (1992): 174.

III. Wolf – a postmodernist?

Dieter Saalman attempted to understand Wolf's losing her moral and political standing after the Wende in light of the effects of postmodernity on culture. He saw Wolf's marginalization as an intellectual after the Wende as a perfect example for a de-centered and ex-centric position of subjectivity in postmodernity, as he argued: "In view of the national pluralism that governs the post-Wall/postmodern era, she has become the emblem of a marginalized intellectual, seemingly deprived of a viable presence in unimpaired identity, moral legitimacy, and ideational representation."³³

Celebrating Wolf in the post-Wall era as a postmodernist, Saalman attempted to locate the beginning of Wolf's postmodernism, which he found in *Nachdenken*. There he identified first signs of a de-centered and marginalized subject in postmodernity. C.T. had already served as the "incarnation of the de-centered 'I' in an assiduously maintained ex-centric position that is symptomatic of the marginalization affecting the subject in postmodernity".³⁴ Although Saalman did point out in a footnote that some critics such as Fries (or Love) were reluctant to apply this label of postmodernism to Wolf's work, he interpreted *Nachdenken* within the framework of postmodernism and disregarded the GDR context. The following quote of Saalman shows clearly how he tried to use ideas from post-structuralism and postmodernism to make sense of *Nachdenken*:

Nachdenken...signals the shift from a putatively solid perspective on representation to a fundamental questioning of this concept under the impact of poststructuralist reasoning. The postmodern skeptic explores, rather than takes for granted, the relations between literary and societal practices. ... *Nachdenken*, with its distinctive emphasis on undecidability of meaning and displacement of the

³³ Dieter Saalman, "We Erect Our Structure in the Imagination Before We Erect It in Reality." (Karl Marx, Das Kapital) Postmodern Reflections on Christa Wolf, " The Germanic Review 67 (1992): 160.

³⁴ Saalman 160.

*subject, is symptomatic of the postmodern ethos.*³⁵

To put it in a simple way, for Saalman, *Nachdenken* demonstrated the same free play with infinite possibilities one finds in postmodernism, whereby notions such as truth, subjectivity and representation are deeply questioned. Even Wolf's skepticism towards rationality, which was read by many critics as re-appropriation of the tradition of German Romanticism, was seen by him as analogous to the postmodern faith in the redemptive power of irrationalism.³⁶ It is true that *Nachdenken* is characterized by ambiguity or undecidability to some extent. However, as Love points out in her discussion of *Nachdenken*, "the text's resistance to being used as an ideological instrument, ... should not be mistaken for political ambiguity, ..." ³⁷ far from a postmodernist rejection of truth and representation, Wolf strives for another type of truth which is understood within the project of socialism. This explains why Wolf wrote *Selbstinterview* as a supplement to the fiction, in which, as we discussed in chapter 2, she expressed her commitment to socialism explicitly. This aspect was ignored in the ideological war generated by *Nachdenken* at the end of the 1960s. In the nineties, it did not play any role either. Different from the 1960s, the non-existence of socialism in unified Germany in the nineties might explain Saalman's decision to ignore Wolf's commitment to socialism as expressed in her essay.

The conclusion Saalman drew in the end is that Wolf was a "postmodern artist in the East", as he stated:

³⁵ Saalman 161.

³⁶ Saalman 164.

³⁷ Myra N. Love, *Christa Wolf. Literature and the conscience of history* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) 182.

*As postmodern artist in the East, Wolf agrees to being co-opted by the socialist dominant, just as postmodern aesthetics in the west recognizes its commodification in capitalist culture. In both instances, the idea is to effect a critique of this very same procedure by exploiting its potential.*³⁸

Here Saalman compared Wolf with western postmodern artists and saw the similarities existing between her, as a postmodernist writer in the East, and her counterparts in the West, that is, their taking up the position of insider and outsider at the same time.

Accordingly, like artists in the West who work within the framework of consumerist ideologies and economies while at the same time they criticize this system from within, Wolf too did not reject state socialism when she wrote in the GDR. Instead, on this view, she stayed within this system and explored the possibility of reforming it through her critique.

In some sense Saalman's notion of resistance from within – Wolf's insider and outsider position at the same time – does account for the complexity of the GDR intellectuals (mainly of Wolf's generation). Bathrick made a similar argument, as discussed in chapter 1. However, in Saalman's generalization of this type of resistance as “a postmodernist way”, Wolf's commitment to socialism – an important part of her critical involvement with society as an intellectual (writer) – vanishes into thin air.

Although Saalman did mention the role played by Wolf's utopia in her own marginalization, he understood Wolf's utopian perspective or any utopian politics quite negatively. He defined Wolf's utopian text as “referential as well as indefinite”.³⁹ That is, it represented “the flawed present and the future perfect”⁴⁰ at the same time. This,

³⁸ Saalman 161.

³⁹ Saalman 161.

⁴⁰ Saalman 161.

according to the critic, could “neutralize and problematize”⁴¹ the status quo. Here Saalman pointed out the possible danger of any utopian thought – a better future at the expense of the present. However, in his understanding of Wolf’s utopia, he seems to overemphasize the negative nature of any utopian thought. Utopia becomes for him a total non-presence which results in “self-inflicted ‘Entmündigung’”.⁴² Any revolutionary potential of utopia (the possibility of changing the status quo) is denied here. Moreover, the role played by an alternative socialism and Wolf’s rejection of capitalism becomes relativized to a certain extent through his universal account of “future perfect”. In addition, Saalman’s attempt to understand Wolf’s marginalization after the Wende only within the framework of postmodernism, i.e. her marginalization was generalized as a typical example of de-centering of subjectivity in the post-modern era, is too simplistic and reductive to account for the specificity of Wolf’s case. Questions, such as why Wolf instead of other prominent GDR intellectuals, like Heiner Müller and Christoph Hein, was chosen as a scapegoat in the ideological war against socialism and why other intellectuals like Günter Grass can still play a relatively important role in the public sphere after Unification etc. remain unanswered. In order to answer these questions, one must take into consideration a) that Wolf was one of the most prominent GDR intellectuals, b) her political engagement as a writer and c) insistence on “the third way” and d) the feminist accent in her critical involvement with society. The latter, as some critics argued, plays an important role in Wolf’s marginalization during the unification process. The gendered dimension involved in the attacks against Wolf will be dealt with later in this chapter.

⁴¹ Saalman 161.

⁴² Saalman 161.

Like Saalman, Judith Ryan foregrounded Wolf's identity as a postmodern author. She explained the journalists' reading of Wolf as collaborator as lack of attention to Wolf's postmodernism, e.g. a "Tendenz zur Mehrdiskursivität".⁴³ She seems to suggest that if journalists had known Wolf's tendency in her work earlier they would not have been surprised by her involvement with the Stasi. In other words, Wolf's involvement with the Stasi seems to be one aspect of this "Mehrdiskursivität", aspect to be added to her feminism. Although Ryan's focus is on *Kassandra Vorraussetzungen* (four lectures except the narrative) instead of on *Nachdenken*, her position represents those critics who read Wolf only within the framework of postmodernism.

Ryan argued for a new type of poetic put forward by Wolf in the four lectures, which, in opposition to the traditional abstract and objective aesthetic ("Regelwerk") defined by male norms, contained typical features of postmodernism. She defined postmodernist art as "eine gewisse Zweigleisigkeit"⁴⁴ (a certain quality of being double tracked). For Ryan, this "Doppelzüngigkeit"⁴⁵ (duplicity) could be found for example in the co-existence of resistance and collaboration in the figure of Cassandra; in the mixed literary form that borrows from both the closeness of the traditional poetic and the openness of postmodernism;⁴⁶ and in Wolf's notion of poetics, understood here as „zwischen einer romantischen Vorstellung der Dichtung als wahrheitsstiftend und einer

⁴³ Judith Ryan, „Poetik als Experiment: Christa Wolf, Voraussetzung einer Erzählung: *Kassandra*“, *Poetik der Autoren: Beiträge zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1994) 80.

⁴⁴ Ryan 80.

⁴⁵ Ryan 92.

⁴⁶ Ryan 90.

modernen Auffassung der Dichtung als eines ‚Trugbilds‘⁴⁷ etc. Moreover, the mixture of personal and subjective forms such as letter, diary, “das Gewebe-und Labyrinthartige der Frankfurter Vorlesungen”⁴⁸ in place of a linear narration, Wolf’s understanding of history, not “als dialektisch sich fortbewegende Entwicklung, sondern als schichtenartiges Gebilde”,⁴⁹ and most importantly, the mixture of theory and praxis⁵⁰ in Wolf’s new poetic all pointed to the postmodernist *Zweigleisigkeit*.

Although Ryan bestowed great significance on Wolf’s poetics as she saw this developed in the four lectures, her overemphasis on ambiguity and undecidability, like Saalman, does not account for Wolf’s explicit endeavor to effect changes through writing, as I argued in chapter 2. Truly, there are moments of ambiguities and contradictions in Wolf’s work. However, Wolf does not simply leave those unsettled elements there, nor is she satisfied with no-solutions. Rather she locates in these contradictions the origin of her creativity and productivity, which both however aim ultimately at answers or solutions, as she states in her interview with Frauke Meyer-Gosau:

*Living in contradictions is my fundamental form of life – it’s not something I find or have ever found negative. Certainly it can be uncomfortable, also very irritating; it can make you doubt yourself; only it’s not shattering or fatal when it’s a question of contradictions that move each other toward solutions.*⁵¹

Hence, Wolf’s approach is less grounded in *Mehrdiskursivität* than in dialectics.

⁴⁷ Ryan 92.

⁴⁸ Ryan 85.

⁴⁹ Ryan 87.

⁵⁰ Ryan 86.

⁵¹ Christa Wolf and Jeanette Clausen, “Culture is what you experience: an interview with Christa Wolf,” *New German Critique* 27(1982): 93.

Until now we have seen that both Ryan and Saalman attempted to save Wolf from total discredit and to reclaim her relevance for a post-1989 era. Rather than seeing Wolf as a fictional writer, as Gidion did, they identified Wolf's significance after the Wende in her postmodernism. In both cases, Wolf's political engagement as a socialist writer was either thrown out as superficial/strategic ideology or neutralized. In addition, some critics including the critics mentioned above, were also disturbed by yet another element/factor, e.g. her extremely critical position towards German unification and her continuing commitment to an alternative socialism; at the same time they did not want to dismiss Wolf's whole work as bad, moralistic writing, like journalists did. Unlike Gidion, Saalman and Ryan, these other critics insisted on reading Wolf within the framework of socialism. However, their reading was characterized by a change of perspective. I will discuss this change of perspective in the following part.

IV. Wolf - A conformist? Balance between dissidence and conformity

It seems that for some literary critics in the West, such as Sabine Wilke, Papenfuß, and Anke Pinkert, too much attention had been given to Wolf's critical stance toward the GDR regime before the Wende. Using the dissident bonus alone, they had great difficulty in explaining Wolf's insistence on a socialist alternative during the unification process. Therefore, Wolf's dissidence was more carefully examined. Her achievement as a critical writer in the facilitation of a more open and democratic literary public sphere in the GDR was recognized. However, at the same time, the conservative side of Wolf was also taken into consideration. Those critics seemed to search for a balance between Wolf's conformity and critique to the GDR regime.

William H. Rey, a Wolf scholar in the USA, for example dealt with Wolf's dilemma in detail in her relationship to the GDR regime. Focusing mainly on Wolf's political behaviour (such as her support of those nine writers expelled from the Writers Union in 1979) rather than her literary works, Rey argued how Wolf was caught in an intermediate situation between „Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung“⁵² (self-assertion and conformance) and between „Loyalität und Opposition“⁵³ (loyalty and opposition). He pointed out that this in between position of Wolf was very often ignored in her reception among western critics, who stressed mainly „Die Kühnheit ihrer Abweichungen von dem formalen wie dem thematischen Dogma der Partei“.⁵⁴ Rey's view is also shared by Monika Papenfuß. In her investigation of Wolf's reception in the feuilleton, such as *Die Zeit*, *der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and also some local newspapers from the 1960s until after the Wende, Papenfuß emphasized Christa Wolf's loyalty towards the GDR regime and pointed out that such kind of loyalty had been ignored or misunderstood by critics both in the West and the East. In her view, critics' blindness to C.T.'s commitment to socialism had overemphasized Wolf's critique of the GDR regime before the Wende. Papenfuß wrote:

*C.T.'s Dauerkonflikt mit ihrer gesellschaftlichen Umwelt ist jedoch so gestaltet, dass ihre grundsätzlich positive Haltung zur DDR deutlich wird, ein Aspekt, der von der Kritik in Ost und West überwiegend falsch gesehen wurde. Es stellt sich die Frage, ob die Kritik, die C.W. zweifelsohne übte, im Westen überbewertet wurde.*⁵⁵

⁵² William H. Rey, „Wo habt ihr bloß alle gelebt“ C.W.s Dilemma in ihrem Verhältnis zur DDR,“ The Germanic Review 66 (1991): 90.

⁵³ Rey 91.

⁵⁴ Rey 90.

⁵⁵ Papenfuß 69.

Affirming Wolf's contribution to the 1989 revolution in the GDR, like Papenfuß did, Rey too indicated that Wolf's relative critique co-existed with a certain degree of conformity as precondition.⁵⁶ This conformity could be seen in Wolf's fear of „Ausgrenzung“ (exclusion), which found expression for example in the announcement of her loyalty to the GDR and to socialism even when she publicly criticized the party for its unreasonable condemnation of Werner Bräunig⁵⁷ at the 11th Plenum of the central committee of the SED in 1965.

With regard to Wolf's loyalty toward the GDR, Rey avoided comparing Wolf with the intellectuals of the Third Reich for her complacency to power. Instead, he understood Wolf's case in the context of her own personal involvement with the social and political growth of the GDR, and above all, in the context of her constant adherence to the Marxist utopia.⁵⁸ For Rey, it was these two aspects rather than the generalization about German intellectuals' „Unglücksverhältnis“⁵⁹ with power that explained Wolf's soft critique of the GDR regime („Die Zaghaftigkeit ihrer Haltung“). According to Rey, the late publication of *Was Bleibt* suggested such kind of problematic relationship of Wolf with the state, although he did recognize Wolf's courage for her writing on the organ of terror in the GDR (Stasi). Rey continued to say that although the demise of the GDR made Wolf's utopian view baseless, her utopia still played a significant role in the critique of capitalism and in the struggle for a true human society. For this reason, in the critic's

⁵⁶ Rey 90.

⁵⁷ A writer who because of his novel “Rummelplatz” was severely criticized by Erich Honecker at the 11th Plenum of the central committee of the SED in 1965.

⁵⁸ Rey 92. “Die Loyalität Christa Wolfs gegenüber der DDR beruhte auf dem Glauben, dass der ‘real existierende Sozialismus’ trotz aller Mängel entwicklungsfähig sei und eine Vorstufe zu dem von Marx verheißenen echten Sozialismus als dem Reich der Freiheit darstelle.”

⁵⁹ Quoted in Rey 93.

view, the end of the GDR was for Wolf a beginning of a new creative era. I agree with Rey on this account, although it is to be regretted that Wolf did not produce much because she is older now and she did feel defeated after the Wende.

In a similar manner with Rey, Sabine Wilke foregrounded Wolf's desire for "Übereinstimmung mit der Gruppe"⁶⁰ (conformity to a group or quest for group approval). She indicated that before the Wende, critics ignored "die resignativen und durchaus stagnierenden und konservativen Elemente von Wolfs Prosa".⁶¹ However, Wilke rejected the journalists' condemnation of Wolf during the *Literaturstreit*, and argued for the necessity of finding a new context to make Wolf's text relevant again for us. She defined this new context as informed by the dialectics between utopia and downfall (Untergang), critique and conformity.⁶² Wilke pointed out that the erosion of utopia was textually realized in *Cassandra*, *Sommerstück*, and Wolf's speech on the Alexanderplatz in 1989. In her dealing with the resignative and conservative side of Wolf's prose, Wilke emphasized how Wolf as intellectual failed to understand her people and to judge the process of social development correctly. The critic finally ascribed Wolf's incomprehension to her urge to identify with the GDR state. Moreover, as Wilke argued, it was the contradiction between critique and conformity, in particular, Wolf's „Gier nach

⁶⁰ Sabine Wilke, *Ist Alles so geblieben, wie es früher war? Essays zu Literatur und Frauenpolitik im vereinten Deutschland* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000) 52. In this book she deals mainly with the marginalization of women during and after the unification process. Or see her article in 1991 "Die Dialektik von Utopie und Untergang, Kritik und Übereinstimmung," *Colloquia Germanica* 24 (1991): 121-140.

⁶¹ Wilke, *Ist Alles so geblieben, wie es früher war?* 52.

⁶² Wilke, *Die Dialektik von Utopie und Untergang, Kritik und Übereinstimmung* 127.

Unterwerfung“⁶³(lust for submission) that had inhibited her from finding a new *angstfreie* language in her *Was Bleibt*.

The distance between intellectual and the mass discussed by Wilke was later addressed by Anke Pinkert. In her study of the fictional depiction of intellectuals in Wolf's work, Pinkert focused more on the conservative side of Wolf than on the dialectic between critique and conformity. At first she examined *Juninachmittag* and argued that Wolf's understanding of the intellectual in the 1960s was defined by a sense of moral superiority. In her reading of *Kindheitsmuster*, she showed how two conflicting desires – Wolf's desire for critical reflection and her desire for self-preservation as an intellectual – ended in the preservation of the political status quo and the solidification of the GDR's founding narrative of antifascism. Finally, Pinkert pointed out the bonding of the state and its writer, which culminated in the writers' responses to Biermann's expatriation in the 70s and in Wolf's literary reflection in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979). There Pinkert saw that the loss of writers' involvement in society was accompanied by the attempt to find a new way to reassert their public role.

Arguing that Wolf's dissidence ended paradoxically in stabilization and support of the GDR regime, way beyond her own intention, Pinkert read also negatively Wolf's "modernist impulses", such as her new emphasis on subjectivity, and her intellectual concern about universal problems of modernity including the women's questions – quality cherished by western critics in the 1980s. According to this critic, Wolf's moving beyond the specificity of the GDR state could easily become accommodated within the political structure of the GDR regime. In this context, the writer's dissidence was

⁶³ Wilke, Die Dialektik von Utopie und Untergang, Kritik und Übereinstimmung 139.

understood as a fantasy provided by the state. It ended mostly in the preservation of the status quo. On this view, the writer and the state fed on each other. Wolf needed the state which paradoxically functioned as “a safe harbor”,⁶⁴ so that she could articulate and made herself heard in the public sphere; the state needed Wolf and other dissidents as a *Schein* for its openness.

Unlike most journalists during the Literaturstreit, Pinkert’s mainly negative reading of the GDR intellectuals’ dissidence represented by Wolf and Franz Fühmann is based on her detailed analysis of literary texts. Her and other literary critics’ (such as Wilke) *Perspektivenwechsel*, caused by the demise of the GDR, or the double lens mentioned by Kuhn, emphasizes the complexity and contradictions in Wolf’s work, rather than simply labeling Wolf either as a dissident or as a poet of the state. Their readings offer us without doubt new insights in Wolf’s much-discussed work and at the same time demonstrate the interpretative potentials of Wolf’s work.

Conclusion

From the above discussions we can see that Wolf’s dissidence is not agreed upon either before or after the collapse of the GDR. For conservative journalists writing in/from the West, Wolf becomes a collaborator or a poet of the state and this takes the place of dissidence, an identity that had been granted to Wolf by the same group of conservatives in the first place at the end of the sixties. Both Wolf’s political engagement and literature are condemned in black. For those critics who have empathy with Wolf’s downfall and attempt to reclaim Wolf’s significance after the Wende, either her political

⁶⁴ Anke Pinkert, „Literary intellectuals and the East German State: legitimation and dissent in the works of Christa Wolf and Franz Fühmann,“ diss., U of Chicago, 2000, 182.

intervention is totally put aside or ignored (Wolf is thus taken into consideration only as a fictional writer) or it is generalized from within the context of postmodernism. A more nuanced approach to Wolf after the Wende can be seen in the critics who try to find a balance or inextricable contradictions between Wolf's dissidence and conformism. Due to the changing political climate, Wolf's dissidence is interpreted in a different way from those critics mentioned in the last chapter. Rather than seeing it only as a means to subvert the regime or to criticize real existing socialism, critics now put Wolf's conservative side into the foreground and argue for the co-existence of elements of dissidence with elements of collaboration. Some of them, such as Pinkert, even understand Wolf's dissidence as a fantasy that effects the legitimization of existing regime. These different understandings of Wolf's dissidence indicate the constructed nature of Wolf's identity as a dissident. In some sense, this chapter dealing with Wolf's reception after the Wende is a supplement to the last chapter. Both chapters examine how Wolf's identity as a dissident is discursively constructed.

What is more, through the investigation of Wolf's reception after the Wende, we can see that there is continuity in the reception of Wolf before and after the Wende: I mean that the same mode of critique reappears beyond the content of the criticism. For example, the total politicizing of Wolf's literary work can be seen in the ideological war at the end of the 1960s around *Nachdenken* and during the Wende around *Was Bleibt*. Her literary work serves only as a means to decipher her political standpoint towards the state, which is either interpreted as opposition, therefore her reputation as a dissident, or as collaboration, therefore the label of Staatsdichterin. In opposition to this extremely reductive reading defined by binary logic, some western critics interpret Wolf's work and

her political intervention through the lens of modernism or postmodernism. In doing so, she is rooted out of the GDR context. This generalization continues from the 1980s to 1990s in a unified Germany. Both of these opposing positions do not do justice to Wolf's endeavor as a politically engaged intellectual/writer.

One of the reasons for these continuing misunderstandings is the critics' willed avoidance of their engagement with Wolf's commitment to socialism. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in Wolf's project of effecting changes through exposing the blind spot in her writing, her ultimate goal is to rearrange social relations or structures within the framework of socialism so that a more humane and democratic socialism other than real existing socialism and capitalism can be established. Even after the collapse of the GDR, Wolf did not give up this idea of socialism. Wolf has thus never identified with capitalist society and cultural modes of production. In the new context, the utopia of socialism, not the nostalgia for the GDR, becomes a position from which Wolf criticizes capitalism. However, in her reception, her commitment to socialism is either denied, disregarded, or it is distorted and identified with her commitment to the GDR state, hence to real existing socialism. The willed ignorance of Wolf's commitment to socialism demonstrates itself also in Wolf's reception among western feminists, a subject I will deal with in the next chapter. One more question needs to be addressed here, namely whether there is a gendered aspect in Wolf's downfall during the Wende.

In Wolf's interview with Frauke Meyer-Gosau in 1982, when asked about women's publishing under their own name, Wolf states:

Though even today, according to what I keep hearing, women have to grapple more intensely with this problem than men because they so often reveal themselves as

*people in their writing, making themselves “recognizable” in that sense. You can also see in their reactions to criticism that they are apparently more vulnerable. It is probably historically conditioned.*⁶⁵

Here Wolf talks about women’s vulnerability to critiques. She explains that women’s feeling of inadequacy etc. is not biologically determined but historically conditioned.

This susceptibility to attack applies also to Wolf’s case. In my view, in contrast to Heiner Müller or Christoph Hein, the fact that Wolf was singled out as a scapegoat to discredit everything associated with the GDR and perhaps even the whole of post-War German literature during the Wende cannot be separated from the fact that she is a woman intellectual with a feminist accent.⁶⁶

For some feminists German unification represented the much regrettable “triumph of the Fatherland”, since women have been marginalized through the whole unification process.⁶⁷ Regarding Wolf and the severe attack on her during the Literaturstreit, some feminists underscored the gendered dimension of such attacks. They interpreted Wolf not only as a victim of an ideological war aimed at pointing out the failure of socialism but also as a victim of a unified, and patriarchal Germany. Christiane Zehl Romero, for example, argued for a patriarchal subtext to the anti-Wolf polemic, as she stated:

In the new Germany, with its conservative agenda and economic priorities, however, there was no place for a woman writer of her stature, particularly if she insisted on reminding those enthralled with unification that, while they may have found a fatherland, ‘Ein Mutterland ist, wie bisher, nicht in Sicht.’ Discrediting

⁶⁵ Christa Wolf and Jeanette Clausen, “Culture is what you experience: an interview with Christa Wolf,” New German Critique 27 (1982): 95.

⁶⁶ Christine Schoefer argues that Wolf’s being singled out has little to do with her gender, rather with her prominent status in the GDR. See “The attack on C.W.,” The Nation 22 Oct.1990: 448.

⁶⁷ Brigitte Young’s argument that German unification is the “triumph of the Fatherland”. (Triumph of the Fatherland: German Unification and the Marginalization of women (The University of Michigan, 1999). See Sabine Wilke, Ist alles so geblieben, wie es früher war? Essays zu Literatur und Frauenpolitik in vereinten Deutschland (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000).

*Wolf achieved both her removal from the first rank, where women writers in the West 'normally' do not figure, and a rejection – or at least down-playing- of the gender-based values and vision she had articulated.*⁶⁸

In Romero's discussion of the gendered aspect that was overlooked or downplayed in the anti-Wolf polemic, she attributed the discrediting of Wolf not only to her being a woman intellectual of great stature but also to her strong feminist insights that are still not acceptable in the new fatherland. In doing so, Wolf's identity as a feminist writer has been foregrounded.

In a later article, in which Romero read Wolf's works published after the Wende (in particular *Medea Stimmen*), the critic wrote:

*We cannot equate Medea with C.W., but neither can we deny that the book reflects its author's experiences of becoming an object for negative projections and her own sense that there was a patriarchal, even misogynist dimension to the polemics about her. It is further evidence of Wolf's continuing struggle against being silenced by her critics, by her own sense of failure, and by the "end of history".*⁶⁹

Romero added that Wolf's unwillingness to be silenced through criticism also found expression in her *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*. There and in *Medea* Wolf continued her quest for self-exploration in the face of a crisis. Moreover, in Wolf's re-imagining of the most maligned woman in Western civilization, Romero saw an affirmative tendency to say "I" as a woman who is aiming at playing a positive role in society.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Christiane Zehl Romero, "Sexual Politics and C.W.'s Was bleibt," Studies in GDR culture and society 11/12 The end of the GDR and the problems of integration. Selected papers from the 16th and 17th New Hampshire symposia on the GDR, ed. Margy Gerber and Roger Woods (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1992) 168.

⁶⁹ Romero, Sexual Politics and C.W.'s Was bleibt 104.

⁷⁰ Romero, Sexual Politics and C.W.'s Was bleibt 132.

I agree with Romero on the sexual dimension in the polemic against Wolf, an aspect very often ignored by critics. Wolf's gendered identity together with her explicit feminist position plays an important role in her marginalization during the unification process. However, on the other hand, the same factors, which are crucial in Wolf's disgrace during the Wende in Germany, make it possible for her, as a female public intellectual, to also acquire a specific audience. Unlike her male counterparts in the GDR, Wolf has gained a reputation as a feminist writer among the international feminists as early as the seventies. Her popularity among feminist literary critics coming mainly from the United States seems to be untouched in the polemic against her. In some sense, we can say that Wolf's continuous attraction among feminist literary critics has saved her from being entirely discredited after the Wende. In the next chapter I will concentrate on the feminist literary critical responses to Wolf's *Nachdenken* before and after the Wende as an attempt to show what role feminism plays in Wolf's reception.

Chapter 5 Christa Wolf as a feminist?

-- Feminist literary critical responses to *Nachdenken über Christa T.*

In the previous two chapters, which focused mainly on the literary critical responses to *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in Germany from the 1960s to the immediate post 1989 controversies, I showed how Wolf's dissidence was constructed by different social and historical contexts. While Bathrick approaches the literary culture of the GDR and the GDR intellectuals in similar fashion in his book *The powers of speech*, his analysis of the socialist public intellectual in the GDR disregards the feminist aspects of Wolf's reception. Wolf is very often read along the lines of other GDR intellectuals, such as Heiner Müller and Volker Braun, and her gender does not seem to play an important role. In this chapter I will focus on the role and function of feminism in the reception of Wolf. Together with Wolf's own feminist accent in her critical involvement with society, as I discussed in chapter 2, I will demonstrate the significance of a gendered perspective in the case of Wolf and argue that it is mainly Wolf's feminism and her reception among feminists that set her apart from the other established GDR intellectuals.

I. Introduction: Wolf, a feminist writer?

Irene Heidelberger-Leonard cites Jens Jesse, who describes Wolf as a „Rezeptionsphänomen“ and then attributes her rapid decline during the Wende to this reception-case, and asks whether Wolf's popularity among the feminist literary critics may also be due to such phenomenon:

Fragt sich, ob Wolfs Adoption von Seiten der feministischen Literaturwissenschaft –

analog zu ihrer politischen Vereinnahmung – sich nicht ebenfalls als ‚Rezeptionsphänomen‘ beschreiben ließe, ob sich nicht auch hier die Frauenlobby in eine Schriftstellerin ‚hineingeträumt‘ hat, die es realiter nie gab.¹

In Heidelberger-Leonard's view, Wolf is only a "refraction", a refracted image of cultural discourses. There is nothing more than that for her. In other words, Wolf's fascination is only the projection of some feminists' wishful thinking; according to her, all female protagonists in Wolf's work follow the same „Uhrwerk“ (clockwork / mechanism)– the triumph of Vernunft (reason) over feeling. That is, they are in fact captive of rationality; they subject feelings to "reason" according to the dominant belief in its universality. Therefore the dominant male values are confirmed instead of being questioned. The conclusion Heidelberger-Leonard draws is that Wolf's work is of no importance for feminists and does not seem to deserve so much attention and praises from feminists.

For Heidelberger-Leonard, Christa T. is a negative figure for feminists: she does not listen to her "irrational" passion for Kostja; instead, she chooses to marry an ordinary man and bury herself into the routine life of a mother and housewife. In a quite sarcastic tone Heidelberger-Leonard asks whether this reductive life, this retreat to the private is Wolf's expectation of women's self-realization:

Mit diesem Schritt trägt sie die 'Vision', die 'phantastische Existenz', die sie mit ihren dramatischen 'Trompetenstößen' eröffnet hatte, zu Grabe. Und wenn sie sich in der Ehe auf die ‚Vorteile ihres Frauseins‘ besinnt, dann nur, um in einer sie ganz erfüllenden Häuslichkeit aufzugehen, im Kindversorgen, Backen, Kochen, Gärtnern und in der Buchführung für ihren Mann. Ist das die innovative Wahrheit über das ‚Zu-sich-selbst-Kommen‘ der Frau?... Mit ihrem konsequenten Rückzug aufs Private, auf Familie und Natur, optiert sie für ein reduziertes Leben.²

¹ Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, „Literatur über Frauen=Frauenliteratur: Zu C.Ws literarischer Praxis und ästhetischer Theorie,“ Text + Kritik 46 (1994): 129.

² Heidelberger-Leonard 130.

She concludes in the end that Wolf's writing even after 1968 is defined by deficiency due to her internalization of male norms, as she claims that Wolf's main contribution to feminism lies only in her effort (*sich schreibend bemüht*) to emancipate women's writing from men's aesthetic norms and to search for an authentic woman's language and writing style. However, the result of Wolf's effort is rather disappointing. For Heidelberger-Leonard, Wolf's writing is stuck only in an earlier phase of feminism/women's writing defined by feminist protest. The only positive insight Wolf can offer to feminists is identified in her theoretical contributions.³ There, Wolf shows her specific interest in women writers, such as Günderrode and Bachmann, and approaches women's identity in a more nuanced way.⁴ In spite of this, in Heidelberger-Leonard's view, Wolf's appeal to feminists is misplaced, an overestimation.

Yet, is this the case? In some sense Heidelberger-Leonard stands for a somewhat negative attitude embodied by Western feminist literary critics (such as Sigrid Weigel) towards GDR women writers. Here a Western standard or view on feminism is assumed to be "universal" and thus invoked to examine the limits of women's writing's accomplishments in the GDR. (In Heidelberger-Leonard's discussion about Wolf's reception of Bachmann, she seems to use Bachmann as a standard to test Wolf's writing.) Heidelberger-Leonard's rejection of any positive insights offered by Wolf's literary praxis is based only on her extremely reductive reading of Wolf's work: she uses the so-called triumph of reason to interpret every female figure in Wolf's work, totally irrespective of the different contexts each figure lives in, not mention the developments Wolf's work goes through, especially after 1968. Moreover, considering the role and

³ Heidelberger-Leonard 138.

⁴ Heidelberger-Leonard 131.

function of feminism in Wolf's critical involvement with society (chapter 2), Wolf's attraction to feminists cannot be explained with feminists' own wishful thinking alone, as Heidelberger-Leonard claims. In other words, the conclusion that Wolf's identity as a feminist writer is only a "Rezeptionsphänomen" is too reductive and simplified to account for Wolf's undertaking. However, the notion of "Rezeptionsphänomen" seems to suggest that Wolf's appeal to feminists as a feminist writer is in some sense an "effect" constructed in the discourse of western feminism. In my dealing with the feminist critical responses to Wolf's work *Nachdenken* in the following sections, I demonstrate that Heidelberger-Leonard is not entirely wrong when she accuses feminists for projecting "some" idea on Wolf, since in most cases Wolf's work is read only in relation to discussions or debates central to current feminist theories. And as embodiment of certain Western feminist theories developed by others, Wolf's feminism in her own right seems to recede to the background. In addition, one important aspect in Wolf's political engagement as an intellectual, that is, her commitment to socialism, exemplified not only in her understanding of writing in general but also in women's writing in specific, is largely ignored by feminist critics in the FRG and the US.

In this chapter I will focus mainly on critical responses engendered by *Nachdenken* in different time periods with different feminist agendas in play and argue that, alongside Wolf's own engagement in women's questions, the feminist reception of Wolf, in no way "monolithic", plays a significant role in her "becoming" a feminist writer. For some literary critics, such as Alexander Stephan⁵ and Hans Kaufmann⁶, *Nachdenken* does not

⁵ Alexander Stephan stated that "The fact that this person is a woman...appears, apart from a few minor details, to be of little significance" ("The emancipation of Man: C.W as a woman writer" GDR Monitor 2 (1979/80): 25.)

belong to women's literature per se and has nothing to do with feminism. However, in my view, although feminism might not have been Wolf's main concern when she wrote this book, her point of view with regard to the woman's question already found expression in *Nachdenken*. Therefore like the feminist critics I will deal with in the following sections, I affirm the feminist content of *Nachdenken*. In what follows, I will consider the feminist critical responses to *Nachdenken* each one in a separate section: first, responses from "difference feminism", second, from poststructuralist/postmodernist feminism, and third, responses from French feminism (mainly post-Lacanian feminists).⁷ I intend to show how Wolf's fictional work serves mainly as reflection or verification of feminist theoretical concepts put forward by Western feminists. Then I will examine the influence of the Wende on the feminist reception of Wolf and see if the collapse of the GDR has produced a new context for the reception of Wolf among feminist literary critics. Finally, I will conclude my discussion with a few "other" voices, which either focus on what a "socialist" feminist view would add (specificities of "socialist" feminism) or emphasize various aspects of Wolf's identity important to feminism.

⁶ See Hans Kaufmann, a GDR critic: "Glück ohne Ruh," Erwartungen und Angebot: Studien zum gegenwärtigen Angebot von Literatur und Gesellschaft in der DDR, ed. H. Kaufmann und E. Kaufmann (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1976) 186-187.

⁷ The division is made chronologically in some sense, but it is not absolute. As we know, a lot of French feminists, such as Irigaray and Kristeva, have been influenced by poststructuralism in their critique of the existing dominant master discourses, and critique of foundations of knowledge and in their theorizing gendered subjectivity.

II. “Difference feminism” from late 1970s to 1980s

Wolf began to appeal to feminists, mainly those in the United States, at the end of the 1970s, when “difference feminism” dominated the (feminist) theoretical debates in the States.⁸ As a critical response to “equality feminists” represented for example by liberal feminists and socialist feminists, second-wave feminism, which developed in the late 1960s, challenged the limits of sameness and reinstated the value of women’s difference. In the struggle for women’s equality with men, women were included in traditional male pursuits; however, it was charged, the tactic of inclusion did not call into question the deep-rooted structures of patriarchy, particularly the sexual division of labor and dominant norms of femininity and masculinity. Therefore the equality principle in the “emancipation” struggles was put under critical scrutiny by feminists during the second-wave women’s movement at the end of the 1960s for its reinforcement of men’s norms. Unlike liberal feminism, difference feminists did not see women’s difference as a cause for inferiority. Instead, they rewrote the notion of the feminine and granted femininity new and positive qualities. With the famous principle “the personal is political”, the importance of women’s experience, of the female body and sexuality, and of values associated with femininity was reinstated for women’s resistance to the patriarchal order.

In this context, Wolf’s belief in the differences between women and men and the priority she gave to certain feminine qualities as the potential basis for emancipation, not only of women but also of the whole human species, generated without doubt great

⁸ Interestingly, it is the same feminist theorizing that makes Hannah Arendt an awkward topic for feminists. See Mary G. Dietz. “Feminist reception of Hannah Arendt,” *Feminist interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: The Penn State University, 1995).

interest among “difference” feminists. It is Myra N. Love and Sara Lennox who first introduced Wolf to American (feminist) readers.

In *Der Versuch, man selbst zu sein: C.W und der Feminismus* (1979) Lennox pointed out that despite the fact that Wolf did not specifically talk about the discrimination of women and gendered clichés of the GDR,⁹ there was a connection between Wolf and difference feminism. She attributed this connection to Wolf’s gendered identity or her experience as a woman, which made her significant for feminists, since Wolf not only argued for women’s difference from men but also celebrated female qualities for the purpose of bringing into play all kinds of human potentials.

Lennox identified Wolf’s significance for feminists in her articulation of a dialectical form of perception, which integrated feeling and thinking, emotion and reason into the subject’s perception of the outside world and into the process of self-actualization. This dialectic was attributed by Lennox to Wolf’s own experience as woman.¹⁰ Based on Silvia Bovenschen’s work *Is there a feminine aesthetic?*¹¹ Lennox

⁹ Sara Lennox, „’Der Versuch, man selbst zu sein’ Christa Wolf und der Feminismus,“ Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin: Neue kritische Ansätze zur deutschen Literatur, ed. Wolfgang Paulsen, Sigrid Bauschinger and Helmut G. Hermann (Bern: Francke, 1979) 217.

¹⁰ Lennox, ’Der Versuch, man selbst zu sein’ Christa Wolf und der Feminismus 221.
„Für Feministinnen besteht der Wert von C.W’s Arbeiten in der Erkenntnis und Artikulation dieser alternativen Bewußtseinsformen, die sie ausdrücklich auf ihre eigene Erfahrung als Frau bezieht. Ihren Versuch, einen erweiterten, aus der Frauenerfahrung abgeleiteten Begriff der Dialektik zu gewinnen, kann man als wichtigen Beitrag zur dringend benötigten Theorie eines sozialistischen Feminismus begreifen. Was jedoch Feministinnen an Wolfs Werk problematisch erscheinen könnte, ist ihr Postulieren einer grundlegend vom männlichen Bewußtsein verschiedenen Form des weiblichen Bewußtseins“.

¹¹ Sylvia Bovenschen explores the question if there is a feminine aesthetic in her essay “Is there a feminine aesthetic?” New German Critique (10) 1977: 111-137.

According to Bovenschen women should or must find a language which is appropriate for them. But that doesn’t mean that all the masculine cultural achievements should be denied and a totally new and counter-tradition should be constructed by women, since dualism as men’s norm should be refused by women artists. And abandoning one in favor of the other is a kind of dualism. In this sense women’s situation seems to be in a dilemma: the means of expression most readily available to women are very often not

argued that the narrative form in Wolf's work was also determined by Wolf's specific experience as a woman.¹² In doing so, she foregrounded this writer's gendered identity in her discussion of Wolf's affinity with "difference" feminism.

At the same time Lennox pointed out the drawback of Wolf's work for feminists, that is, her essentialist understanding of women's difference, which in her view was manifest in *Selbstversuch*, a story about a female scientist who participated in an experiment whereby she became a man. The resulting different perception of the outside world and different experiences based on sex made the scientist reject the sex change and break up the experiment. *Selbstversuch* demonstrated Wolf's celebration of female qualities; however, according to Lennox, female qualities in Wolf were in some sense biologically determined. There was an antagonistic difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world. In other words, Wolf opposed male qualities to female

originally women's own. Since it is impossible or doesn't make too much sense to make women's own language and to refuse the whole symbolic order, women must use the existing code to express their own experience (like Foucault's or Butler's idea that there is no outside. All resistance should come from inside). Since women experience things differently, different imaginations and different means of expression within the existing order are therefore celebrated by Bovenschen. With regard to female difference, Bovenschen points out that the feminine quality of a work ought not be determined solely by its subject-matter. Aesthetic quality / form is important too. Her insights here are very important since from the 1960s on a lot of women begin to write their own experience according to the principal that "the personal is the political". Every book about women's life can be women's literature. Aesthetic quality is ignored in this trend of politicizing literature.

As for the title question "if there is a feminine aesthetic", Bovenschen's answer is yes, if feminine aesthetic means aesthetic awareness and modes of sensory perception; But if feminine aesthetic refers to constructed theory of art or unusually variant of artistic production, the answer is no. In other words, feminine aesthetic should not be theorized. Being theorized means to be restricted by another norm. What differentiates women's writing from the mainstream men's writing is its refusal of any restrictions and exclusions through norms and laws etc. Therefore women's writing is more about aesthetic awareness and modes of sensory perception, in other words, about the release of women's imagination. Besides the refusal of any norms, Bovenschen refuses to see women's writing only as variant of the so-called normal artistic production. Instead, its existence is autonomous.

¹² Lennox, *'Der Versuch, man selbst zu sein'* Christa Wolf und der Feminismus 219.

ones.¹³ Moreover, certain stereotypes were reinforced, such as the association of men with rationality and of women with emotion.¹⁴ Christa T., for example, represented one such stereotype of a woman, as pointed out by Lennox. In the end Lennox drew the conclusion that Wolf should be read positively but at the same time critically by feminists.

Lennox's critique of Wolf's essentialism should be understood in the broader context of "difference feminism". In "difference feminism" those female qualities celebrated by feminists very often draw on the traditionally long-established ideas of female sexual difference, which has a twofold effect. This focus revalues the feminine, which difference feminism attempts to rewrite entirely, but at the risk of leaving old binaries intact. For this reason, difference feminists, especially "radical" feminists, who see women's body and sexuality both as the locus of women's oppression and the site of resistance, are often criticized as essentialists by later feminists more grounded in postmodernism and poststructuralism. The potential shortcomings of "difference feminism" seem to be found in Wolf's work. However, Lennox' argument that Wolf squarely opposed male qualities and female ones does not square with Wolf's own integrative model. Instead, Wolf argues for the active inclusion of feminine qualities cultivated throughout history, not for the straightforward rejection of male values, including reason. Moreover, she proposes a new paradigm in which human reason is qualitatively different from how it has earlier been conceived, as well as being less universal, as I discussed in chapter 2. In addition, Lennox attributed Wolf's affinity to

¹³ Lennox, *'Der Versuch, man selbst zu sein' Christa Wolf und der Feminismus* 221. "Was jedoch Feministinnen an Wolfs Werk problematisch erscheinen könnte, ist ihr Postulieren einer grundlegend vom männlichen Bewußtsein verschiedenen Form des weiblichen Bewußtseins."

¹⁴ Lennox, *'Der Versuch, man selbst zu sein' Christa Wolf und der Feminismus* 221.

feminism only to her specific experience as a woman. She failed to take into account the GDR context, which explains why Wolf turned to certain historically specific female qualities at a particular historical moment, and she disregarded Wolf's celebration of femininity as a goal of a new form of socialist organization. In this regard, Lennox is not an exception.

Already at the beginning of her analysis, Love remarked that the point of departure for her discussion was the appeal of Wolf's writings to American feminists, whose main concern remained a critique of patriarchy rather than the realization of socialism.¹⁵ Therefore, instead of socialism in the GDR, Love located the power of Wolf's writing within another historical context known to and shared by feminists in capitalist countries, that is, patriarchy. Love was very careful to point out that anti-patriarchy might not have been Wolf's intention when she wrote *Nachdenken*; however, since many of her works later focused on patriarchal conditions, it was legitimate to read *Nachdenken*, retrospectively, within the framework of patriarchy. Moreover, Love indicated that a feminist interpretation could not only enrich our understanding of Wolf's work but also could "contribute to a process of further clarification of concepts of patriarchy and feminism, and shed light upon the frequently posited but still undefined notion of a female (and non-patriarchal) sensibility in literature".¹⁶

Love's understanding of patriarchy was based on "a system of dichotomous and mutually exclusive opposites",¹⁷ such as male/female, subject/object, speech/writing and

¹⁵ Myra Love, "Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection," New German Critique 16 (1979): 31.

¹⁶ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 32.

¹⁷ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 32.

presence/absence – a critique that echoes the poststructuralist critique of “phallogocentrism” (Derrida). Love read *Nachdenken* as a process of breaking down the system of dichotomous oppositions. Unlike Lennox, she focused on the different ways in which Woolf subverted these dichotomous oppositions, which defined patriarchy, in *Nachdenken*.

Love’s reading of the anti-patriarchal and feminist quality of Woolf’s work particularly foregrounded the intersubjective relationship between the narrator and Christa T., in which selfhood was affirmed without the domination of the other.¹⁸ This was seen as an important way to reject the patriarchal interconnection of subjectivity and domination. First pointed out by Love, the concept of intersubjectivity in Woolf is later developed by other feminist literary critics, such as Anne Herrmann, Kathleen L Komar and Alison Lewis.¹⁹

¹⁸ One example Love mentioned was the narrator’s critique of the reification of memory in the preface of the novel. The narrator described a dominating subjectivity who could do whatever she wanted with the dead-Christa T. Though dominating, this subjectivity was passive and uninvolved. Rather than giving a full account of her friend and the relationship between them, what the narrator attempted to do through memorizing and reflection was to integrate Christa T. into her consciousness and to change herself into “one who was receptive to C.T.’s ways of thinking and being”, as Love argued. In this sense, their relationship was free from reification.

¹⁹ Anne Herrmann (*The dialogic and difference: an/other woman in Virginia Woolf and C.W.* 1989 and *I/She: the female dialogic in the Quest for C.T.* 1989) argued for a non-dominating subjectivity in *Nachdenken* too. Moreover, she went a step further and stated that the relationship between two characters was dialogic and the other woman therefore became “a dialogized subject” instead of the object of representation. In this context, Herrmann referred to Bakhtin’s term “the dialogic”. In her insightful and interesting discussion (She imitated Woolf’s style and one chapter was written in a form of a letter) the GDR context was left out.

Similar to Herrmann, Kathleen L Komar (*The communal self: re-membering female identity in the works of C.W. and Monique Wittig* 1992) focused on the intersubjective relationship illustrated in *Nachdenken*. However, she approached this topic from a different perspective, namely, her main focus was on the intersubjective character of memory. She compared C.W. with Monique Wittig in terms of the significance of memory in the reconstruction of identity and in the deconstruction of gender roles. She stressed the communal character of memory in Woolf’s work in the sense that memory, usually a private domain of the self, became inter-subjective. That is the writer’s memory was mingled with the memory of her subject. Two versions of the communal self: inter-subjective model (I, you ...) and intra-subjective (different selves of a single figure) were examined in detail by Komar.

The theme of intersubjectivity was also the main focus of Alison Lewis. In her “Foiling the Censor”: reading and transference as feminist strategies in the works of C. W. Irmtraud Morgner and Christa Moog

To explain C.T.'s inability to reconcile the goal of socialism with this character's conditions of life, Love emphasized the role played by C.T.'s female identity:

*Seen from the standpoint of specifically female experience, C.T. is unwilling to sacrifice the positive and humane elements of the typically female existential context for the alienation of participation in a yet unliberated public sphere.*²⁰

Here Love talked about the difference between a female sphere of production ("the typically female existential context") and the male (public) sphere of production. As a result of different modes of production, men and women cherish different sets of values. The female qualities exemplified in C.T., such as openness, love, empathy, were identified by Love as the potential to subvert or as alternatives to the patriarchal consciousness defined by separations and domination. In this context, Love was aware of the danger caused by using the term femininity or female qualities, since the female qualities she celebrated in C.T. could be easily identified with stereotypically feminine. In order to solve this problem, she differentiated two kinds of "femininity": one is "stereotypically feminine"²¹ which must be understood as the cultural roles and categories produced by the male imagination; the other is constructed by "certain key modalities of experience and behavior"²² that she identified in C.T. as potentially

(1993), she dealt with East German women writers and saw Wolf's (*Der geteilte Himmel* and *Nachdenken über Christa T.*) and Morgner's writing with their special interest on women's subjectivity as subversive of socialist realism, which instead was concerned only with a gender-neutral socialist personality. Intersubjectivity exemplified in female friendship and bonding, in which another woman's agency and mediation played an important role for the search for the female self, was identified by Lewis as a feminist strategy in Wolf's *Nachdenken*, Morgner's *Leben and Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* and Moog's *Aus tausend grünen Spiegeln*.

²⁰ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 37.

²¹ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 50.

²² Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 50.

subversive of patriarchal ideology. And those modalities, as she continued to point out, could include some of those elements usually classified as stereotypically feminine.

Unlike Lennox, Love insisted on the positive aspects a feminist reader could find in C.T.

Love argued that using the opposition realism and modernism / postmodernism did not do justice to Wolf's work since both realism and modernism shared an essentially patriarchal quality of authorship as authority. One feature defining the patriarchal quality of authorship, as Love pointed out, was the separation of the narrator from the narration. In traditional realism, the author's function was to master a pre-existing reality and to present it as a structured and coherent product to the reader. Although different from realism, modernism understood reality as constituted through the process of writing, the author still stood outside his creation and functioned as an a-historical and absolute subject. Love continued to say that what differentiated Wolf from both realism and modernism was "her evident concern with demonstrating the self's constitution of itself and with exploring that process in relation to society and history".²³ In other words, Wolf insisted on the author's presence or involvement in writing and on the constructed nature of the author's identity through the process of writing, which manifested itself in her notion of "subjective authenticity". In spite of the fact that the modernist narrative technique was employed in Wolf's work, it was "rather a tool used in striving for 'subjective authenticity'",²⁴ a quite different position from modernist (male) writers, whose authorship was still defined by authority – an authoritarian position outside the narration. However, the rejection of authorship as authority did not mean the rejection of

²³ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 45.

²⁴ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 45.

subjectivity, as Love indicated, for Wolf there was a possibility of a non-dominating subjectivity. In this context, Love pointed out the danger of the deconstructive approach for feminists since she saw the failure of those avant-garde male philosophers, most recently coming from the deconstructionist school, represented for example by Derrida, to take into account the possibility of the existence of a non-dominating subjectivity in their discussion of the dualist frame of reference in patriarchal discourse.²⁵ It seems that for Love, the renunciation of identity by deconstructionists could have a negative effect on feminist politics. More than ten years later in *C. W. literature and conscience of history* (1991) Love reiterated the tension between deconstructed and assertive subjectivity in Wolf.²⁶

In order to make Wolf accessible to American feminist readers in spite of their different social contexts, Love drew a comparison between Wolf and American feminists. For example, she identified the similarities between Wolf's writing and the writings of American radical feminists, such as Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly. All of them rejected authority, manipulation and domination in their writing. Wolf's differentiation of prose from film, the latter understood by her as a practice of manipulating and dominating the audience, for example was a gesture of her refusal of authority. In *The reader and the writer* Wolf states:

Prose should try to be unfilmable. It should give up the dangerous work of circulating miniatures and putting finished pieces together. It should be incorruptible in its insistence on the one and only experience, and not violate the experiences of others; but it should give them the courage of their own

²⁵ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 49.

²⁶ Love, Christa Wolf Literature and the Conscience of History (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). She points out that there is a creative tension between two frameworks: deconstructive and assertive in Wolf's treatment of the subject.

*experiences.*²⁷

Here Wolf opposes film to prose since they express a different subjectivity. The image of film, as Love indicated, “reveals the authority of what passes for subjectivity in patriarchy as a species of subjective inauthenticity and alienation”,²⁸ while prose with its insistence on experience (of both the writer and the reader) has the possibility of overcoming such a “patriarchal mode of existence”²⁹ as film. In this context, Love read Wolf along with Rich and Daly. In addition, Love mentioned Julia Stanley and Susan Wolfe, who grounded their concept of female aesthetic or women-style mainly on the writings of American radical and/or lesbian feminists. She found out that both Stanley’s and Wolfe’s description of the characteristics of women’s prose, for example the refusal of dichotomy, “reads almost like a catalogue for the quest for C.T, despite the difference in social context”.³⁰

Ever since Lennox’s and Love’s pioneering readings, feminist literary critics mainly in the States have approached Wolf’s work from different perspectives. For example, from a linguistic-feminist perspective, Jeanette Clausen detected Wolf’s significance for feminists in the writer’s analysis of language.³¹ Focusing mainly on self-reference in *Nachdenken*, such as the use of the third person and of the German impersonal pronoun “man”, Clausen argued that Wolf had contributed to our understanding of grammatical

²⁷ Christa Wolf, “The reader and the writer”, The reader and the writer, trans. Joan Becker (New York: Signet, 1977) 193.

²⁸ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 37.

²⁹ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 37.

³⁰ Love, Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection 48.

³¹ Jeanette Clausen, “The difficulty of saying ‘I’ as theme and narrative technique in the works of C.W.,” Amsterdamer Beitrage zur Neueren Germanistik 10 (1980) 319-333.

categories as “embodiments of patriarchal consciousness”. What is more, her writing had provided “a model for an alternative, i.e. non-patriarchal model of literary discourse”,³² mainly because linguistic categories were expanded to integrate subjective experiences by Wolf. In Clausen’s analysis of Wolf’s work at the level of language, there was no specific discussion of the GDR context either.

To summarize, Wolf’s appeal to Western feminists beginning at the end of the 1970s and continuing in the 1980s has a lot to do with the advent and dominance of “difference feminism” in the feminist theoretical debates in the United States at that time period. The recognition of women’s difference and a new and positive interpretation of femininity by “difference feminists” find an echo in Wolf’s *Nachdenken*. For these critics, Christa T. becomes the embodiment of a new type of women’s experience, women’s writing and women’s language etc., which stands in opposition to the patriarchal system. The ideological differences between Wolf as a socialist and Western feminists become insignificant in the face of gendered identity and their shared experience as women. Moreover, the accessibility of Wolf to Western feminist readers proves in some sense the validity of an international “sisterhood”, upon which feminist politics could be made. In this context, Wolf’s commitment to socialism together with her strong belief in the advantages brought forth by socialism to women, including women writers, was totally left out.

Love with her insightful analysis of Wolf might go beyond the framework of “difference feminism”. Her reading touches upon many important topics, which the later feminist literary critics either reiterate or expand in their reading of Wolf, such as intersubjectivity. And the tension between the deconstruction of the author’s authority

³² Clausen 320.

and the assertion of a non-dominating subjectivity first pointed out by Love is picked up later by other feminist literary critics such as Anna Kuhn, Fries and Helen Fehervary.³³ Seen in a broad context of feminist debates around postmodernism and poststructuralism, this tension has a lot to do with feminists' anxiety about the twofold effect brought forth by poststructuralist approaches, namely its critique of essentialism and its recognition of difference on the one hand, and the deconstruction of notions, such as identity, agency, and as a consequence, the rejection of "sisterhood" for feminist political cohesion on the other hand. In some sense, Love in 1979 seems to have anticipated some feminists' one-sided celebration of deconstructed features in Wolf's work. Her stress on the existence of a non-dominating subjectivity in Wolf contains also her critique of those post-structuralist approaches to *Nachdenken* from the 1980s until now, whereby subjectivity in Wolf's work is deprived of any agency.

III. Post-structuralist approaches to Nachdenken since the 1980s

Since the second-wave women's movement, women's differences from men have been celebrated and seen as common ground for feminist politics. But by the mid-1980s, "difference feminism" was criticized for its privileging the standpoint of the white Anglo

³³ Helen Fehervary, "C.W.'s prose: A landscape of masks," *New German Critique* 27 (1982). In a similar manner with Love, Fehervary saw the tension of Wolf's notion of self between the authoritative and deconstructed one: "Wolf's literary creation of self (and history), however, rests neither in the teleological development of the bourgeois individual, nor in the decentering or deconstruction of this very same individual" (59). But different from Love, who stressed the non-dominating nature of Wolf's notion of subjectivity, Fehervary put the multiplicity of self in the foreground: "In each of her works, the authorial identity and the narrative voice seem entirely redefined, different and 'other': There are many selves and many histories at work here. Rather than demonstrating the unified and progressive developmental career of the writer, C.W.'s work exhibits both a retrogressive and expansive unfolding of many different authorial lives" (58-59).

See also Anna Kuhn's *Christa Wolf's utopian vision: from Marxism to feminism* (1988) and Fries' *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays* (1989)

heterosexual middle-class women who had so far dominated the women's movement. In the US, critical voices came mainly from women of color and lesbians. It was argued that in the celebration of women's difference from men, a certain kind of femininity, which was represented by middle-class, heterosexual, white-European women, was idealized and universalized. In this universal account of a specific form of gendered identity, the differences among women were neglected and other forms of hierarchies beyond gender, such as hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, were hidden from view. As a result, feminist solidarity based only on gender very often ended up with white, middle class and heterosexual women speaking for all women irrespective of race, class and culture, while working class women, women of color or lesbians etc. were very often underrepresented and silenced. The power mechanism of exclusion and hierarchy defining patriarchy seemed to be reproduced in the feminist politics pivoted upon "sisterhood". It therefore became urgent to recognize differences among women and the multiple forms of hierarchy and subordination faced by women. From the mid 1980s on, "difference feminism" with focus on difference between men and women gave way to "differences among women".

The notion of "sisterhood" based on the shared experience of women in a patriarchal society, which dominated the feminist debates in the 1970s, was soon undermined by the very different experiences of women from different classes, racial groups and non-heterosexual women. In addition to the changing perspective of feminist politics (from difference between men and women to differences among women), now influenced by poststructuralism and postmodernism from the beginning of 1980s, the concept of "difference" itself went through varied understandings. Drawing primarily on the work

of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, poststructuralist theory challenged the traditional theories about language, subjectivity, meaning and power and argued that, instead of being natural and given, meaning and subjectivity were produced within a wide range of discourses located in institutions and practices, such as medicine, psychology, school and church etc. As constituted within these competing and conflicting discourses, meaning was not fixed once and for all, instead, it was always plural and contingent. Understood in this way, difference, be it sexual or gendered difference, class or race, was seen as culturally constructed or discursively produced. In the process of construction, certain interpretations of difference represented by a dominant group could be articulated while other definitions and interpretations were submerged. In other words, the concept of difference embodied a power struggle, in which interests of different groups at a particular historical moment were at stake. For this reason, it never got settled down and was open to changes. In a similar manner, subjectivity was seen as “effect” being produced within discourse, therefore the traditional notion of a coherent and intentional subjectivity was put into question ever more strongly than in the days of Freud. Among poststructuralist feminists, who refused natural or given meaning of difference or being a woman, some have taken the deconstructive idea further to see identity as a question of performance deprived of any agency.³⁴

³⁴ At least that is the charge made against Butler’s performative theory, though she would deny it and has also tried to respond to these criticisms. Influenced by Foucault Judith Butler as representative poststructuralist feminist theorist goes as far as to negate the existence of any identity. She criticizes identity politics as feminist politics because of its exclusive nature and imperialist strategies. Any claim for true identity and agency, any search for resistance outside of signification becomes impossible for Butler. Even the body, which is thought as cause and as “the taken-for-granted ground or surface upon which gender significations are inscribed” (165) is deconstructed by Butler in her Gender Trouble. According to Butler body/sex is understood as the effect of the “apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender” (11). The gendered body/identity therefore doesn’t have any authentic inner self but is the effect of our performative, various acts. In other words, gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts. Through participating in these practices of repetition, identity is constructed. Again Butler is criticized by a lot of

Wolf's work with its quest for a female identity as a never-ending process,³⁵ its questioning of an autonomous, coherent female subjectivity (i.e. her notion of fragmentary self³⁶), its critique of universality and rational dualism in terms of "instrumental reason"³⁷ (including her refusal of women to identify with power), together with her doubts about language and her celebration of multiple and inclusive positions with no fixed boundaries³⁸ etc., invites again positive responses, this time, coming from poststructuralist feminists. Although the features mentioned above were best exemplified in later works by Wolf, such as *Kindheitsmuster* and *Kein Ort*.

feminists for her denying any agency outside of discursive practices. But on the other hand, her understanding of gendered identity opens up possibilities of gender transformation. In other words, if identity is only repetition of acts, there are possibilities of subversive repetitions emerging from the constructions. As on a theatrical stage, every actor has a play in hand. He/she cannot decide the main story in the play. But he/she might have opportunities too to use his/her own imagination and to add something new to that play. That's the main idea of Butler: to identify the possibilities of intervention during the performance and to locate strategies of subversive repetition.

³⁵ For example, in *Nachdenken*, the narrator's searching for her own identity through thinking about her friends: Christa T. is open-ended, as she says in the end: "The goal of this account of Christa T. was to find her and to lose her again. To know both and to accept both" (98-99). The quest for identity is all about the process of coming to be, something not finished.

³⁶ The notion of fragmentary self is best exemplified in *Kinderheitsmuster*. The narrator has great difficulty of saying "I" when she confronts herself as a *Musterchild* in the Nazi regime. One way to show the crisis of identities or the splitting subject is the complicated and multiple narrative voices the narrator uses in her three-level-narration: the writing process of the narrator (I), the visit to her hometown several years ago (you) and the growing up of Nelly (using the third person narration) during the war. It seems that in the end the narrator still has difficulty of saying "I" and has to accept her non-coherent and fragmentary self.

³⁷ See chapter 2 section IV.

³⁸ in *Kein Ort, Nirgends*, for example, due to the varying narrative perspectives and the polyvalent personal pronouns, the reader or Wolf can identify him/herself with more than one figure and take several different positions at the same time. The possibilities of changing positions mean at the same time the fluid boundary between self and the other.

With regard to Wolf's doubt to language, see Manfred Jäger "Die Grenzen des Sagbaren," *Christa Wolf: Materialienbuch*, ed. Klaus Sauer (Luchterhand, 1979) 130-145. Astrid Herhoffer, "Vor den Worten kommt die Angst: Christa Wolfs Suche nach einer neuen Sprache," *German monitor: finding a voice, problems of language in East German society and culture*, ed. Graham Jackman and Ian F. Roe (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 229-246.

Nirgends, it does not hinder feminists from reading her earlier work *Nachdenken* within the framework of poststructuralism.

In Mary A. Cicora's reading (*Language, identity, and the woman in Nachdenken über Christa T.: A post-structuralist approach* 1982), *Nachdenken* became a story about a woman's downfall in a patriarchal society. Based on Claudine Herrmann's theory about women's identities, Cicora found an explanation for C.T.'s (mental) illness and her imagination. According to Herrmann, a person's having an identity or status of being was determined by society, i.e. society had the power to determine who one really is. Our society was male-oriented therefore it excluded any possibility for a woman to have an identity. Instead of "Sein" (being), woman only signified "Schein" (illusion). Hence, women's searching for an identity - an illusory one - always ended in mental illness. Guided through this theory, not only was C.T.'s illness read by Cicora as insanity but also she attributed it directly to C.T.'s searching for her (illusory) identity. Moreover, Christa T.'s reading and writing were seen as a retreat from the male-oriented society. As Cicora suggested, "writing belongs to the feminine world of the imagination",³⁹ writing was put in a total opposition to the "cruel reality".

C.T.'s death was interpreted by Cicora according to Derrida's strategy, known as "putting under erasure", which he used to underscore the need to escape dualist, logocentric thinking and its inescapability at once. According to Cicora, instead of attempting to have an illusory identity – a gesture to conform to society –, C.T. wanted and chose death. However, even her death indicated the influence of male norms on C.T., as Cicora claimed. It seemed that C.T.'s death was caused by her saying "I" in her

³⁹ Mary A. Cicora, "Language, identity, and the woman in *Nachdenken über Christa T.: A post-structuralist approach*," *Germanic Review* 57(1982) 18.

dissertation as an attempt to express herself in language. Since, according to Derrida, language could not express being/the real essence, C.T.'s saying "I" expressed indirectly her non-existing identity, as Cicora wrote:

Therefore, in saying "ich," Christa T. expresses, indirectly, that her identity does not exist. Therefore, she cannot exist. Her only reality is the illusory world of reading and writing. Her expression of herself in a useless medium (language) signifies resignation, an acceptance of her dilemma and its inevitable consequences. Because language cannot express being, "ich," and, therefore, the identity that it represents, are "under erasure." In a very different way, Christa T. is following the motions of Derrida.⁴⁰

So in Cicora's interpretation C.T. was a tragic figure, who did not want to comply with male norms to have an illusory identity, and who had no possibility at all in the real world to find any essence. Therefore what she could do in the end was either to become insanity or to escape to her imaginary world, such as her reading and writing. Even in language, she was confronted with the fate of being erased. Cicora's pessimistic tone continues when she argues that C.T.'s tragic ending was in fact caused by society than by her inner self:

External factors play only marginal roles. Her sickness comes from within herself. It grows organically from the conflict between the two sides of her, the "träumerisch" and the "tätig," having an identity (as a woman) and giving it up to be part of the world of men (that is, having an "identity"). C.T. opts for the former, and loses both.⁴¹

It seems that Cicora's understanding of Christa T. does not fit in with Wolf's intention in writing on Christa T. Cicora contrasts writing/literature (as an imaginary world) with life/reality and this contradicts Wolf's understanding of the function of literature (the intertwining of literature and reality and the function of literature to effect social changes directly or indirectly). Influenced by Derrida's deconstruction, she

⁴⁰ Cicora 20.

⁴¹ Cicora 21.

pinpointed the deceptive role of language and used it as the only factor to explain C.T.'s failure (her death), a conclusion that cannot be accepted if one follows Wolf and her commitment to the political / social task of the intellectual in socialism. Cicora's extremely reductive and erroneous reading might be ascribed to her use of poststructuralism as the only frame of interpretation. Emphasis is put on the identification of the main concepts put forward by Herrmann and Derrida in Wolf's work so that their theoretical concepts can get clarified in some sense. There is no word about the GDR context or even about how deconstruction may have entered – if at all – this socialist cultural world; or, still, if any writer or theoretician in the GDR may have his or her version of poststructuralism from a socialist perspective. In other words, GDR society is defined only by its being male-oriented and therefore once again socialism bears no specific trait or holds no political insight to these feminist readings. In this kind of generalization, even liquidation of some important moments in Wolf's text, the assertive nature of subjectivity in Wolf is totally left out and replaced only by a deconstructed notion of subjectivity. I believe that this assertive nature, first pointed out by Love, cannot be separated from Wolf's understanding of literature within the framework of socialism (her project of making changes through the exposure of the blind spot).

IV. Wolf and French Feminism

While “difference feminism” developed mainly in the United States, in France, since the 1970s, feminists have attempted to find a new way of theorizing sexual difference and gendered subjectivity. Like “difference feminism”, French feminism gives priority to

sexual difference and identifies in female quality a potential source for resistance. Unlike “difference feminism”, however, influenced by post-structuralism, French feminism understands female difference as discursively constructed rather than inborn and unchangeable. In this context, German feminist Sigrid Weigel talks about “dis-placement of viewpoint”, that is: “...femaleness is no longer considered a natural condition opposed to male logic and rationality (be it valued as equal or inferior), but as an energy capable of challenging the logocentrism of phallic order”.⁴² Besides post-structuralism, French feminism turns to psychoanalysis – mainly Lacan’s rewriting of Freud – in their theorizing sexual differences and language. French feminists’ rejection of the hierarchical division between male and female, their celebration of feminine difference, and their seeing women’s writing as possibility for change again find a perfect match in Wolf’s writing. Wolf’s affinity with French Feminism has since then become a subject of discussion among feminist literary critics in many countries. Before going into any detail and analyzing the feminist responses to *Nachdenken* within the framework of French feminism, let me offer a quick warm-up of introductions to some basic terms in Lacanian theory and post-Lacanian feminist theories, in particular as represented by Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous.

For most feminists who have engaged with psychoanalysis, the point of departure is Lacan’s rereading of Freud in the light of Saussurean structuralism. Lacan differentiates different stages in the constitution of subjectivity, and all these stages are defined by loss or lack. The first loss is at the moment of birth and the infant is separated from the mother. Then after birth, but prior to the acquisition of language, when the baby (around

⁴² Sigrid Weigel and Luke Springman, “Woman begins relating to herself: Contemporary German women’s literature,” *New German Critique* 31 (1984) 57.

6 and 18 months) begins to look him/herself in the mirror, he/she experiences the second loss. Lacan calls this phase “the mirror stage”. The image in the mirror is an ideal image or mis-recognition since the baby assumes it as a whole and as knowable. Self-alienation comes from the attempt to get to know or define oneself through an external ideal image, as Lacan points out:

*Thus, this Gestalt... symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; It is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automation in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion.*⁴³

One important conclusion we can draw here is that from that moment the subject is defined through an external image, which can be his/her own image in the mirror, his/her mother, father or other person. But the image is a fictional one, like a phantom. The subject can never be that phantom no matter how hard he/she tries.

Subjectivity is produced and mis-constructed at the moment when the baby begins to look at her/himself in the mirror. The imaginary, which appears before the symbolic order but coexists with it, is exemplified by the mirror stage. The gendered subjectivity however is produced when infants begin to acquire language and enter into the symbolic order. Here both the Oedipus complex and language play an important role in the constitution of subjectivity. According to Lacan, after entering the symbolic order the subject begins to participate in signification. Lacan’s theory of signification is based on his critical reading of Saussure’s notion of language as a closed system. According to Lacan meaning emerges from the play of differences within this system. For example, the meaning of the word “da” comes from its difference from “fort” and it has nothing to

⁴³ Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,” *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden: Blackwell, 1998) 179.

do with the outside reality. In other words, the signified (reference in the outside reality) doesn't exist at all. In this sense, he reads the fort-da game introduced by Freud in a radically different way from Freud himself. Each signified functions in turn as a signifier. In this sense language isolates the subject from the real. The subject's entering into signification is the moment when the unconscious comes into being, since being trapped in the network of signification the subject will never get to know the real which is now forever lost. Lacan uses "desire" to describe such kind of alienation. Desire comes into being not only because of the mis-recognition in the mirror-stage, when the ideal image is beyond the subject's reach, but also because of the disguised role played by language, as Silverman points out in her reading of Lacan in *The Subject of Semiotics*:

*in short, it (desire) begins with the subject's emergence into meaning. Desire has its origins not only in the alienation of the subject from its being, but in the subject's perception of its distinctness from the objects with which it earlier identified. It is thus the product of the division by means of which the subject is constituted, divisions which inspire in the subject a profound sense of lack.*⁴⁴

Since there is no way that the subject can get out of the trap of signification he/she would remain alienated from the real forever. Therefore desire can never get satisfied.

It seems that in Lacanian theory both men and women experience the lack when entering into the symbolic order. However, what makes women different from men is that a woman's lack is doubled because of the primacy of the Phallus as the signifier of difference that makes meaning possible. In other words, governed by the primary signifier, the Phallus, the symbolic order is necessarily patriarchal. Despite the ambiguous status of the Phallus in Lacan – it is symbolic not real –, he did not exclude the possibility of the Phallus being incorporated also by the penis. As such, men gain absolute power in the definition of meaning, while women, due to their status as always

⁴⁴ Kaja Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 176.

already castrated, are not allowed the position of power and therefore their place in the symbolic order is doubly determined by lack.

A consequence of the symbolic order thus defined as the Law of the father is that female subjectivity or the feminine is patriarchally determined; the “real” feminine is repressed and unreachable. It is the Other of language and power. In their appropriation of Lacanian theory, post-Lacanian feminists, such as Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, have turned to this real feminine, very often the maternal body, as the potential source for resistance and change. Since the feminist literary critic I will discuss in this section draws on French feminist theories represented by these post-Lacanian feminists, I will give a brief introduction of them here.

Kristeva, as I have discussed in chapter 2, for example, differentiates the semiotic from the symbolic and announces the potential of the semiotic for a revolutionary change. Another important concept developed by Kristeva is the subject in process („sujet en process“). Influenced by Lacan’s theory that language pre-exists and produces subjectivity and meaning, Kristeva refuses the idea that subjectivity is a fixed and humanistic essence. Instead, it is constituted in language and is subject to the symbolic order. But the symbolic is always faced with conflicts and disruptions coming from the semiotic (poetic language) – the language of the body, the mother and repressed –. Therefore the subject is always open to change.

Another post-Lacanian feminist theorist is Irigaray. Her work is characterized by her critique of Western philosophy which is both logocentric for its privileging the word and phallogocentric for the primacy of the Phallus as the signifier of difference. She

points out that “sexual indifference”⁴⁵ has dominated not only Freud’s psychoanalysis but also the whole philosophical discourse. Within this kind of discourse, “the economy of the Same”⁴⁶ holds sway. Female identity is represented only according to exclusively masculine values. In doing so, female difference is erased and defined as lack or deficiency with respect to masculinity. Seen as man’s other, his negative or mirror-image, women have to act or speak just like men in order to articulate and to be heard within the symbolic. There is no place for an authentic female subjectivity within the philosophical discourse. In other words, a/the “true” feminine remains outside representation, outside the symbolic order.

Describing women’s sexual organs as plural and autoerotic, Irigaray celebrates the strategy of a specific female openness and multiplicity as an alternative to the principle of the same in patriarchal society.⁴⁷ Besides the economy of the same, Irigaray’s other focus of critique is the priority of the gaze (men’s gaze), the visual, through which women are totally objectified. Instead of vision, she privileges touch, and along with this, nearness and generosity in opposition to ownership and property.⁴⁸

Like Irigaray, Hélène Cixous invokes the plurality of female sexuality and women’s generosity. In contrast to Irigaray, women’s multiplicity doesn’t come from their sexual organs but from their multiple libidinal energy. In *The laugh of the Medusa* (1976) Cixous deals with women’s writing in particular. She first emphasizes the necessity of

⁴⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This sex which Is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) 69.

⁴⁶ Irigaray 74.

⁴⁷ Irigaray 28.

⁴⁸ Irigaray 25-31.

women's writing and second she locates in writing a sources for social changes: "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures."⁴⁹ Although Cixous doesn't want to give any feminine practice of writing a final definition, because to define female writing is to "theorize, enclose and code"⁵⁰ it, she nevertheless stresses the bisexual quality of women's writing. In other words, writing is multiple, variable and ever-changing. In writing, differences are pursued and celebrated. To explain the freedom enjoyed by women's writing, Cixous locates women's writing within the Lacanian Imaginary, or the mother's womb, where no separation, no gendered differences exist. In this sense, one sees parallels with Kristeva's approach to the mother-child (in a womb) relation as the only psychotic relation admitted within our society.

Without doubt, those ideas of love, touch, generosity, multiplicity, and flexible boundaries etc. together with the significance of women's writing represented by post-Lacanian French feminists can be easily identified in Wolf's writing. The affinity and differences between Wolf and the French feminists attract thereafter those feminist literary critics' attention, who are influenced by French feminism. Suzanne Legg, as one of them, offered a detailed analysis of Wolf's work within the framework of French feminism.

Legg attempted to read Wolf within the framework of *weibliche Ästhetikdebatten*, which were grounded on two different approaches: one from psychoanalytic and text-

⁴⁹ Hélène Cixous, "The laugh of the Medusa," *New French Feminism. An anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken books, 1981) 249.

⁵⁰ Cixous 253.

oriented perspective represented by French psychoanalytic theorists such as Kristeva and Cixous, and the other from more ideological critical perspective represented by German or Anglo-American feminist critics, such as Bovenschen. Although Legg recognized that Wolf wrote *Nachdenken* within a certain historical and social context, she did not take the GDR society into account in her reading of *Nachdenken*. As justification she claimed that the fascination with Wolf's work lay in the reader's process of reflection, which, according to her, had nothing to do with the social context of the GDR.

In Legg's reading of *Nachdenken*, focus was put on the identification of similarities between Wolf and the other Western feminist theorists, mostly, French feminists. Parallels were drawn for example between the motif about the confrontation of the self through writing in *Nachdenken* and Kristeva's "sujet en process", between the expansion of the self at no cost of the other and Cixous' idea of perception, between C.T.'s famous yelling, her voice and the semiotic in Kristeva, who argued for the deep combination of voice, femaleness and unconsciousness. Besides the above mentioned features, other elements, which, according to Legg, defined women's writing, such as the motifs of dream and female body, the non-dominating relation between the author and her figure, the questioning of truth and authenticity, non-linear text structure and the idea of whole (Lacan) etc. could be found in *Nachdenken*. In regard to women's specific experience, Legg understood C.T.'s lack of adaptability to social surroundings as an individual problem, whereby the focus was put mainly on her adaptation to the rule of the symbolic order. C.T.'s failure of being taken seriously as a writer was attributed to the "Ausschlußverfahren im Prozeß der Versprachlichung"⁵¹ (the experience of being

⁵¹ Suzanne Legg, Zwischen Echos leben. Christa Wolfs Prosa im Licht weiblicher Ästhetikdebatten (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1998) 90.

excluded through the process of articulation). In this context, Lacan's emphasis on the restrictive role of language and the feminist re-appropriation and re-interpretation of Lacan's theory by Kristeva and Cixous apparently offered a perfect frame for Legg's interpretation.

Different from some feminist literary critics, such as Heidelberger Leonard and Sonja Hilzinger, Legg refused the idea of reading C.T.'s marriage as a retreat to the traditional women's role. Moreover, such kind of misinterpretation was seen by Legg as deficiency of the ideological-critical approach for its focus only on content: "... Aufsatz führt exemplarisch vor, wie eine ideologiekritische Vorgehensweise literarische Figuren auf ihren feministischen Gehalt abklopft und dabei wesentliche Aspekte übersieht".⁵² In this context, Legg seemed to prefer the psychoanalytical and text-oriented approach. Rather than total rejection, she emphasized the ambivalent and contradictory character of C.T.'s marriage and love.

Legg's conclusion in the end was that certain characteristics of „weibliche Schreibweise“ could be identified in Wolf. However, compared to the ability of theories to express nuances, the literary praxis dropped far behind the expectation, as she argued: „an dem Punkt der größten theoretischen Differenziertheit die ästhetische Praxis weit hinter den Erwartungen zurückbleibt“. ⁵³ Turning to Lacan's symbolic order to explain the so-called deficiency of literary praxis, Legg claimed: „... weibliche Erlebniswelten und sinnliche Wahrnehmung viel eher in anderen Kunstrichtungen realisieren als in der

⁵² Legg 92.

⁵³ Legg 183.

Literatur, die ja zwangsläufig mit sprachlichen Symbolisierung arbeitet“.⁵⁴ In her view, women's experience can be better expressed in other artistic forms (such as painting) than in literature, which do not need to deal with language.

Without doubt Legg's reading of Wolf through the lens of Lacan, Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray has enriched our understanding of Wolf as a woman writer to a great extent. However, her comparison of literary praxis with theories and the conclusion about the deficiency of the former in the expression of nuances are not so persuasive. Theory and praxis are two different domains with their own merits, limitations and different impact, thus, I believe, they are not so easily comparable. Moreover, in Legg's reading, Wolf's work is used only as a case to test the criteria put forward in theories with regard to women's writing: how far can such kind of criteria be identified in Wolf's work? How useful those theories with their different approaches could be for the investigation of literary texts etc.? In other words, Legg's approach is more aimed toward a practical application of the Western feminist theories. Wolf's work is used as a case study to elaborate or examine certain Western feminist theories. In doing so, Wolf's difference or her own feminism has been hidden from view. Emphasis has been always put on the identification of the similarities existing between Wolf's work and certain Western feminist theories as proof of the wide-ranging power of the latter. In most cases, this undertaking ends in success; when there is not too much correspondence, Wolf's difference is usually interpreted as deviation, deficiency or even failure. Not much reflection has been given to the reason or implication of such kind of difference.

It is noteworthy that Legg's book was published in 1998, long after the demise of the GDR. For a lot of critics, the collapse of the GDR becomes a turning point in their

⁵⁴ Legg 184.

study of this state and its literature. Even when some of them continue to cherish Wolf as a writer or as an intellectual despite the journalists' total discredit of her during the *Literaturstreit*, their focus seems to change after the Wende, as I discussed in chapter 4. For example, the conservative side of Wolf rather than of her critical sense is foregrounded after the Wende. However, the historical turning point does not seem to play a role in Legg's approach to Wolf; in fact, the *Literaturstreit* is left out. Is Legg only an exception? Or does she represent a trend in Wolf's reception among feminist literary critics after the Wende? If so, continuity before and after the Wende exists in the feminist reception of Wolf. Wolf's work continues to be read only in terms of certain Western feminist theories and her commitment to socialism is left out. Also the "difference" that socialism itself might have constituted for the development of alternative feminist views goes unnoticed, not to speak of relations between socialism and other non-European feminisms, grounded in different histories of oppression (colonialism, for example) or even socialist histories. Considerations of Wolf's combination of socialism and feminism within the framework of Soviet or Maoist feminist traditions – or even women's writings – do not appear to be prominent. In the following I will examine the influence of the Wende or the collapse of the GDR on the feminist reception of Wolf.

V. The Wende: a new context of reception of Wolf among feminist literary critics?

Wolf's popularity among feminists is mostly grounded on her critique of patriarchy or her specific experience as a woman /a woman writer. Her dissidence or critical position towards the socialist state is downplayed in this reception. This explains to a

large extent why Wolf's reputation as a feminist writer seems to be untouched by the anti-Wolf polemic during the Wende. After the *Literaturstreit*, Anna Kuhn, a voice coming from the United States, first expressed her continuing support to Wolf. In her open letter to Wolf, she states: "Tatsache ist aber, dass Wolf als Schriftstellerin von größter Ehrlichkeit und Integrität und auch von außergewöhnlicher Begabung in diesem Land ihren Einfluß weiterhin ausübt."⁵⁵ A big discrepancy arises between Wolf in the American feminists' view and Wolf in the West German journalists' view. Recall that the latter condemned Wolf for her lack of integrity and her "supposed" hypocrisy.

One aspect we should not ignore is that after the Wende Wolf continued to write on women. This without doubt provides feminists with solid ground for their investigations. It is difficult to say that the Wende suggests a turning point in Wolf's writing career, since in both her major works published after the Wende – one about her reworking of the mythic figure Medea (*Medea. Stimmen*), the other about a crisis (both physical and mental) a woman intellectual goes through before the demise of the GDR (*Leibhaftig*) – the main focuses of Wolf's critique continue. Priority is given to those repressed and excluded values mostly embodied by women in the process of Western civilization, which is very often associated with patriarchy; a critique of the dominance of rationality, science and technique can be easily identified in Wolf's other works before the Wende, such as *Kassandra*, *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and *Störfall* etc. Even after the failure of socialism, Wolf still holds on to some notion of utopia, as expressed in her collection of essays in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (1994). In spite of this continuity, the breaking of the promise of socialism does leave traces in Wolf's recent works. Her version of utopia, for

⁵⁵ Quoted in Marilyn Sibley Fries: "C. W.s Ort in Amerika," Schriftstellerinnen der DDR aus amerikanischer Sicht, ed. Ute Brandes (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1992) 170.

example, seems to become “modest, individualized, and ‘domesticated’”, as Romero argues, who insists on reading Wolf’s recent works including her essays as her direct responses to the demise of the GDR and to the polemic against her during the Wende.⁵⁶

However, for many other feminist literary critics, the Wende does not seem to play any role in their approaches to Wolf. Besides Legg’s reading within the framework of French feminism after the Wende, Wolf continues to be read in terms of other newly developed feminist theories. Sabine Wilke, for example, interprets Wolf’s work including *Nachdenken* in terms of feminist theories (tension between feminist essentialism and post-structuralism) as well as theories of new historicism.⁵⁷ Reading Wolf in parallel with well-known Western feminist theorists or writers after the Wende can also be found in many other critics, such as Kathleen L Komar,⁵⁸ Gerhard Neumann⁵⁹, Helga Kraft⁶⁰ and Donna K. Reed⁶¹ etc.

⁵⁶ See Christiane Zehl Romero, “ ,Was war? Was bleibt? Was wird?’ C.W. then and now,“ Michigan Germanic studies 21 (1995) 123.

⁵⁷ Sabine Wilke, Ausgraben und Erinnern: Zur Funktion von Geschichte, Subjekt und geschlechtlicher Identität in den Texten C.W.s. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993). At the beginning of the book, Wilke has pointed out her purpose of reading Wolf, that is, to investigate the relevance of Wolf’s literary work for general critical theories. In her reading of *Nachdenken*, Wilke at first focuses on how Wolf as narrator in Christa T. dealt with the material Christa T. had left so that similarities between Wolf and new historicism can be identified. Then she reads *Nachdenken* in another chapter within the framework of the feminist essentialism and post-structuralism. Wilke argues for a dialectic nature of Wolf’s subjectivity, that is, the female subjectivity in Wolf is defined by a position of in between a dialogical model and an essentialist model. A similar view can also be found in Love and Helen Fehervary etc., as I pointed out earlier in the discussion of Love’s reading of Wolf, though different from them, Wilke understands this tension between dialogic and essentialist in Wolf diachronically. In her examination of Wolf’s several works from *Nachdenken* to *Kassandra*, Wilke sees Wolf’s development from a dialogical mode in the early works to essentialism in the later ones. *Nachdenken* is seen as a perfect example for the dialogical mode, whereby the friendship between the narrator and C.T. is foregrounded by Wilke. (This is a subject dealt with in detail by other feminist critics (see footnote 19). *Kassandra*, however, is read negatively by Wilke due to Wolf’s essentialist understanding of women as peace lover and men as war fanatic. By means of drawing parallels between Wolf and new Historicism and feminist theories, Wilke seems to tell us that Wolf’s relevance to those western critical theories lies in the fact that the important features or concepts put forward in those theories can be identified in Wolf’s work. In other words, Wolf’s work is seen as embodiment of the wide-ranging power of western critical theories including feminist theories.

⁵⁸ Kathleen L Komar, “The communal self: re-memembering female identity in the works of C.W. and Monique Wittig,” Comparative Literature 44 (1992) 42-58.

Recently, a new interpretative context is ecofeminism⁶² or the feminist critique of science and technique. Wolf's understanding of women's affinity with nature – both of them are dominated and objectified by men – facilitates such kind of reading. Deborah Janson, for example, draws parallels between Wolf's works (*No Place on earth*, *Cassandra*, *Selbstversuch* and *Accident*) and that of well-known ecofeminists from the West, including Susan Griffin, Starhawk and Riane Eisler.⁶³ In Friederike Eigler's *rereading C.W.'s "Selbstversuch": cyborgs and feminist critiques of scientific discourse* (2000), the writer addresses the gendered conventions of scientific discourse as well as the discourse on sex and gender by drawing on three interrelated strands of research: feminist approaches to the philosophy and history of science represented by Sandra Harding, studies on cyborgs and cyborgology in Haraway's *Manifesto*,⁶⁴ and theoretical approaches in literary and cultural studies that challenge the sex/gender system. Her

⁵⁹ Gerhard Neumann, C.W.: „Selbstversuch“ Ingeborg Bachmann: „Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha“: Beiträge weiblichen Schreibens zur Kurzgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts,“ Sprache-im-Technischen-Zeitalter 28 (1990) 58-77.

⁶⁰ Kelga Kraft, „Seiltanz der Mütter und Töchter in der Männerwelt Schweigen und Sprechversuche: Ingeborg Drewitz, Eis auf der Elbe, Claudia Erdheim, bist du wahnsinnig geworden, C.W., Sommerstück,“ Mutter-Tochter-Frauen: Weiblichkeitsbilder in der Literatur, ed. Helga Kraft and Elke Liebs (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993) 267-95.

⁶¹ Donna K. Reed, “Merging voices. Dalloway and No place on earth,” Comparative Literature, 47 (1995) 118-35.

⁶² Chris Weedon, Feminism, theory and the politics of difference (Malden: Blackwell, 1999) 46. Her definition “celebrates women's affinity to nature and pre-Christian goddess cultures“.

⁶³ Deborah Janson, “In search of Common ground: An Ecofeminist Inquiry into C.W.'s work,” Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy, ed. Gaard Greta and Murphy Patrick D. (Urbana, IL: U of Illin, 1998) 172-185.

⁶⁴ Donna Haraway is famous for her postmodern feminist politics. In A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-feminism in the late Twentieth Century (New York: Routledge, 1991) Haraway deconstructs any notion of natural / original identity. Instead of women, the cyborg becomes her basis on which feminist politics are grounded. Therefore “a cybernetic organism [is], a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.” (149) It helps Haraway to deconstruct any binary oppositions.

analysis of the cyborgian dimension of *Selbstversuch* pivots around the question: to what extent does the story question dualistic notions of sex and gender? Women's complicity (their involvement and participation as scientists) in and their resistance to the "dominant scientific discourse" are pinpointed. In her interpretation of Wolf's earlier work using the most recent feminist theories, the GDR context disappears totally.

It seems that after the Wende, Wolf continues to be read within the framework of western feminist theories. Focus continues to be put on identification of the similarities between her and other western feminist theorists or writers. In some sense, we can say that the demise of the GDR / socialism does facilitate such kind of reading, since after the Wende, American academics, whose work has been grounded in GDR studies (GDR studies as their specialty), have to reconsider their work and readdress the relevance of their specialty to contemporary studies of the new Germany. Drawing parallels between Wolf's works and Western critical theories including feminist ones serves without doubt as a means to retain the continuing relevance of Wolf after the demise of the GDR.

From the above discussions, we can say that there is a continuity of reading Wolf in terms of western feminist theories after the Wende. This does not deny the existence of any feminist readings of Wolf within the GDR context before and after the Wende. For example, Wolf's work is read along with other GDR women writers, such as Irmtraud Morgner, Christa Moog, Helga Königsdorf and Monika Maron etc.⁶⁵ However, what I

⁶⁵ See Alison Lewis, Foiling the Censor": reading and transference as feminist strategies in the works of C. W. Irmtraud Morgner and Christa Moog (1993). There Lewis argues the significance of women's writing in the GDR: being subversive to socialist realism (gender-neutral socialist personality).

Helen Bridge, Women's writing and Historiography in the GDR (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

There she compares literature discourse with historiography and investigates the reason why literature has more possibilities to be subversive than historiography. In doing so, she emphasizes the significance of GDR women's writing as an example of a "counter-discourse capable of transforming the cultural and intellectual spheres under state socialism" (33).

want to point out here is that it seems that among many western feminists, Wolf's contribution to women's writing and to the literary public in the GDR was recognized and highly praised. But, her insights or her influence on the construction or formation of feminist theories other than the ones proposed by Wolf's feminist readers seem to be limited.⁶⁶ In other words, when talking about the affinity between Wolf and feminism, any "difference" that socialism itself might have shed light on the development of alternative feminist views is denied or goes unnoticed.

Two questions arise here. One is why socialism (real existing) is never or seldom taken into consideration in feminists' discussion of Wolf's feminism. The other is what a "socialist" feminist view would add to the feminist discussion of Wolf? In the next section, I will deal with these questions respectively.

VI. Socialism and feminism

Why did socialism not draw feminists' attention in their readings of Christa Wolf? Is it because it was a rigid space where subversion seemed impossible? Or because it failed feminist utopias? I will look at the relationship between feminism and socialism in the GDR as well as at feminists in both the FRG and the GDR who engage with socialism from a feminist perspective.

Brigitte Rossbacher, Illusion of progress: Christa Wolf and the critique of science in GDR women's literature (New York: P. Lang, 2000). The writer discusses Wolf, Monika Maron and Helga Königsdorf and argues how these women writers express the dialectic of enlightenment in gendered terms.

⁶⁶ This is also addressed by critic Thomas Beebee. He refused reading Wolf only within the framework of Western feminist theories and seeing her fictional works as "embodying or reflecting feminist theoretical concepts developed by others". In his reading of Wolf's *Cassandra* (five lectures as a whole) Beebee attempted to reclaim Wolf's identity as a feminist theorist in her own right. (Thomas Beebee, "A literature of theory: C.W.'s *Cassandra* lectures as feminist anti-poetics," The German Quarterly 74 (2001): 259-79.

In the GDR, women's emancipation was constructed above all as an economic issue in the official policies for women. That is, women's emancipation was identified with women's participation in the relations of production and their resulting economic independence from men. According to Eva Kolinsky, on the eve of German unification, women's participation in the labor market in East Germany was the highest in Europe. In 1989, 59% of the GDR labor force was made up of women.⁶⁷ Therefore, officially women's emancipation was seen as already realized, and critical discussion of it was usually considered unnecessary, even harmful. In order to enable women to work outside the home, the state granted women opportunities (training and employment) and rights, which were only to be dreamed of in West Germany: nursery care, abortion, contraception, etc.

The high priority given to economic criteria in the official understanding of women's emancipation goes back to Marx and Engels, who saw female labor as a necessary consequence of capitalist economic development and, moreover, women's involvement in the productive process as a means to disrupt capitalist relations of production. According to Marx and Engels, after a revolution, women's emancipation would come under totally new relations of production (communism). Under these socialists' influence, socialist feminism at the turn of the century represented for example by Clara Zetkin and August Bebel, and others, insisted on the significance of class in their discussion of gender and claimed that women's full emancipation came along with the fight against capitalism.

From the beginning, the socialist brand of feminism represented by Zetkin drew a clear line between the proletarian women's movement and the bourgeois women's

⁶⁷ Eva Kolinsky, Women in contemporary Germany: life, work and politics (Providence: Berg, 1993) 259.

movement (The parallel development of both characterizes the first-wave feminism in Germany.) and identified in the proletariat the only source of revolution. She stated:

*Marx's works also make clear that the proletariat is the only revolutionary class, able to create, with a socialist society, the necessary social preconditions for the complete solution of the woman question, and this is something that it must do. Apart from the fact that the bourgeois struggle for women's rights neither will nor can fight for the social liberation of the working class woman, it is also incapable of resolving the difficult new conflicts which must arise from the social and legal equality of the sexes in the capitalist order. These conflicts will only disappear when the exploitation of people by people and the contradictions which they produce are overcome.*⁶⁸

Zetkin pinpointed the significance of Marxism for understanding women's position and argued for the necessity of a socialist revolution for women's emancipation. In her famous pamphlet *The Question of Women Workers and Women at the Present Time* (1889), she made it quite clear that the end of women's economic dependence on men was the first step towards women's emancipation. To a large extent, feminism in the GDR follows this tradition.

However, women's participation in the productive process does not change the structure of the production itself. The sexual division of labor still exists. Besides their work outside the domestic sphere, GDR women had to bear primary responsibility for the children and household work. Social norms of femininity and masculinity still remained unchanged. Since the 1970s, the notion of women's emancipation as proposed by classical Marxism has been critiqued by the second-wave women's movement in the FRG.

Unlike socialist feminism at the turn of the century – represented by Clara Zetkin, August Bebel, Fredrick Engels, etc., who, in their insistence on the significance of class

⁶⁸ Quoted in Chris Weedon, *Feminism, theory and the politics of difference* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999) 139.

in their discussion of gender, subordinated gender to class – women of the second wave in capitalist countries refused to defer the woman’s question until a socialist revolution. They criticized Marxism for being sex-blind. That is, Marxism emphasized wage labor and the relations of production, while the relations of reproduction were ignored: sexuality and parenting. Since the mode of production alone could not account for women’s subordination, the focus shifted to the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy (as a dual system). Heidi Hartmann in *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (1979), for example, argued that patriarchy and capitalism go hand in hand. She pointed out that the mutual accommodation of patriarchy to capitalism took the form of the family wage (nuclear family).⁶⁹ She suggested that feminist socialist practice must address both the struggle against patriarchy and the struggle against capitalism.

Socialist feminism in the 1970s recognized the different forms of women’s oppression and argued for the significance of both gender and class to achieve equality with men. Besides socialist feminism at the turn of the century, liberal feminism was also criticized for its disregard of class. From the 1980s on, largely because of the critique of their work by women of color and lesbians, socialist feminists began to take into account other differences among women besides class and gender. Nancy Holmstrom defines socialist feminism as follows:

⁶⁹ Male workers don’t want their wives to work outside in the factories to compete with them. Therefore they want enough wages from the capitalists to support their families. For capitalists, although women are low-paid labor force, more disciplined and docile male workers are more welcome. These obedient workers come from the worker’s nuclear family where women produce little workers and husbands can find comfort and play the dominant role, which has been taken over by the capitalists outside. Therefore the family wage benefits both workers and capitalist. (Heidi Hartmann, “The unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” in *The Second Wave*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) 97-122.)

*I am going to characterize as a socialist feminist anyone trying to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help to liberate women.*⁷⁰

To some extent, we can say that the limitations of Marxist understanding of the woman's question as well as its practice in the GDR explains why socialism (real existing one) is never or seldom referred to in feminist responses to Wolf. Socialism's privileging of economic development over gender interests, its narrowly defined women's interests (only limited to production), and perhaps its lack of an autonomous women's movement (women's organizations are subordinated to party policy), and above all, the patriarchal nature of the socialist state,⁷¹ drove feminists, even those socialist feminists who attempted to reclaim Marxism's importance (either through revising or supplementing it), away from the socialist state. In some sense, we can say that socialism – the real existing one – was not a paradise for women. To a certain extent, incommunicability between Western socialist feminism and feminism in the GDR accounts for the intrinsic relationship between the socialist state and patriarchy.

However, this does not mean that real existing socialist states were a rigid place where subversion was out of the question. Alongside Western socialist feminism as it had developed in the 1970s in the FRG, women in the GDR, mainly women writers, such

⁷⁰ Nancy Holmstrom, ed. The socialist feminist project: a contemporary reader in theory and politics (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002) 1.

⁷¹ Critics Helen Frink and Ingrid Sandole-Staroste point out the difference between East Germany's public patriarchy and West German's private patriarchy, namely that East German women are economically independent of men. But within patriarchal structures East German women have to depend on the "Father state", whereas West German women are more dependent on individual men, mostly their husbands. Helen Frink, Women after communism: the East German Experience (Lanham: University press of America, 2001). Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, Women in transition: between socialism and capitalism (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

as Wolf and Morgner, began to be concerned about the limitations of feminism in the GDR and also engaged socialism from a feminist perspective. Seeing women's economic independence nevertheless as a prerequisite for women's emancipation, these women writers began to address other issues that had been officially ignored, such as the sexual division of labor, social norms of femininity and masculinity, etc. Wolf, as I explained before, gave priority to the repression of female qualities in her notion of "the blind spot", and saw the integration of femininity as crucial in the reconstruction of social relations within socialism. Because of the lack of a critical public sphere in the GDR, women's writing or fiction became a place for critique and the expression of alternative voices.

The subversion practiced by these GDR women writers had its own characteristics, which differentiated them from their Western counterparts, as GDR critic Eva Kaufmann points out in her discussion of the specificities of women and women writers in socialism.⁷² Recognizing the possible influence from Western feminist ideas and literature, Kaufmann still emphasizes the significance of GDR women's own experience. For example, their economic independence, their equality with men in education and professional employment, though granted to them "from above" as Kaufmann indicates, made them hold to a different version of feminism than their counterparts in capitalist societies. Even after the demise of the GDR, there were always doubts about and refusal to identify with (Western) feminism among the GDR women writers.⁷³ In Kaufmann's

⁷² Eva Kaufmann, "Women writers in the GDR, 1945-1989," and "Developments in East German Women's writing since autumn 1989," Postwar women's writing in German, ed. Chris Weedon (Providence & Oxford: Berghahn books, 1997).

⁷³ Eva Kaufmann, "Developments in East German Women's writing since autumn 1989," Postwar women's writing in German, ed. Chris Weedon (Providence & Oxford: Berghahn books, 1997) 220.

view, utopian thinking, the emphasis on dialogue or communication with their male counterparts, the understanding of women's interests in a broader context of the general interests of humankind, and so on, are distinct features of women writers in the GDR. In addition, Kaufmann stresses the political nature of GDR women's writing:

To do something for women through writing meant, for writers like Irmtraud Morgner and Christa Wolf, participating in the necessary changes in literature and, above all, in the development of society. This type of writing, which focused on intervention, took for granted a certain belief in the ability of socialism to change.⁷⁴

According to Kaufmann, GDR women's writing aims at effecting changes not only in literature but also in society, and moreover, this change will take place within the framework of socialism.

According to Kaufmann, the political nature of GDR women's writing also exemplifies itself in women writers' making varying use of opportunities to express themselves openly in public on political issues, besides in writing, such as on talk shows, in newspaper or magazine interviews and the like. In Wolf's case, her speech *Reden im Herbst* (1990) can be viewed as a culmination of her public intervention. However, her political role during the Wende – which aroused German journalists' criticism – does not seem to play any role in feminist readings post-Wende. Either it went unnoticed or it was introduced only as background knowledge about the collapse of the GDR. The implication or significance of such a public role for a feminist does not seem to deserve any attention from feminist literary critics. Perhaps it is because Wolf's political role during the Wende lasted too short and ended in failure. Or those critics who usually come from the academy might believe that Wolf's public intervention as a public intellectual does not fit with her literary profession, and therefore would not deserve their

⁷⁴ Eva Kaufmann, Women writers in the GDR, 1945-1989 194.

attention as literary critics. This practice of separating Wolf's role as a writer from her role as a public intellectual is mistaken, as I discussed before. It does not account for Wolf's undertaking as well as her own understanding of writing, since writing for her is political in nature; it aims at making differences or changes. On the other hand, this splitting of the writer's roles also suggests a division between feminists within academia and feminists outside academia, the latter being known mostly as activists. For feminist academics, feminist theories rather than praxis predominate. This also explains their lack of interest in Wolf's public political activities.

Kaufmann also argues that when writing completely committed literature that aims to change inequalities in political, economical, cultural and personal fields, women writers in the GDR do not want gender to be used as the only criterion to judge their undertaking.⁷⁵ However, as my previous discussion indicates, in feminist interpretations of Wolf, her gendered identity is very often privileged over other modes of differences.

In order to solve the problems caused by some feminists' exclusive focus on gender, Rosemary Hennessy, a materialist feminist, puts forward a global social analytic model for materialist feminism.⁷⁶ Insisting on the construction of women across multiple modalities of difference, she argues that if we see feminism as a political movement for social change, we should take the hierarchical structuring of racial, class, sexual, and gendered subject positions into account. In other words, the global analytic should be done in a particular historical context. At the same time, in order to maintain her theory as a feminist theory, Hennessy argues that gender should be the point of entry. But as

⁷⁵ Eva Kaufmann, Women writers in the GDR, 1945-1989 170.

⁷⁶ Rosemary Hennessy, Materialist feminism and the politics of discourse (New York & London: Routledge, 1993).

soon as we have entered our research field, we should not lose sight of other elements at different levels too, such as economical, political, and cultural, besides gender, since all of these elements interact simultaneously within a larger field/system.⁷⁷ So according to Hennessy, the investigation of gendered identity cannot be isolated from other identities.

When we reflect again on many feminist critics' disregard of the GDR context in their reading of Wolf, Hennessy's global social analytic seems to suggest an alternative feminist reading of Wolf. Since Wolf's works participate in a number of discourses such as a critique of the real existing socialism, a critique of patriarchy, of Western civilization, fascism, and imperialism, etc., the exclusive focus on gender causes us to lose sight of the complex and multiple ways in which the subject is constructed in that specific historical context. Therefore, in our reading of Wolf we should take into account the existence of other identities besides that of woman, such as her being a socialist or a Marxist, a pacifist, an intellectual (writer), a German, and a mother, etc., with gender as the main focus. Only in this way can we differentiate Wolf's writing from other women's writing and do justice to her and her own voice.

In some sense, Anna Kuhn's interpretation of Wolf in her *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism* (1988) – the first book length introduction of Wolf to American readers – comes close to Hennessy's idea, in the sense that Kuhn reads Wolf's work as an expression of the integration of the various aspects of her identity.⁷⁸

In order to account for Wolf's complex and sophisticated writing, Kuhn argues that each aspect of her identity (*East-German-woman-writer*) should be taken into account.

⁷⁷ Hennessy 97.

⁷⁸ Anna Kuhn, *C.W.'s utopian vision: from Marxism to feminism* (Cambridge [u. a.]: Cambridge Univ. 1988).

Moreover, these various aspects of her identity do not exist in isolation. Instead they are interrelated with one another.⁷⁹ Guided by this thesis, Kuhn reads *Nachdenken* so that each aspect of Wolf's identity (*East-German-woman-writer*) is given enough attention. To account for Wolf's identity as an East German, in her reading of *Nachdenken*, Kuhn deals with Wolf's own understanding of the relationship between socialism and literature, and her critique of socialist realism. Christa T.'s self-actualization is understood in the context of Marx's ideal of a fully developed subjectivity. Focusing on the social and historical context of *Nachdenken*, Kuhn concludes that "[v]iewed in its historical and political context, C.T. can also be read as a call for internal reform".⁸⁰ Given Wolf's position regarding the unification during the Wende, Kuhn's conclusion has its own legitimacy. In the elaboration of Wolf's identity as a "German", Kuhn indicates the affinity and difference between *Nachdenken* and German Romanticism (That C.T. longed to be able to engage in reality/society more fully was one of the main differences, for example, between her and the Romantics). As for the important role played by Wolf's gendered identity as a "woman", Kuhn suggests that Wolf's increasing concern with feminism had begun already with *Nachdenken*, in spite of the assumption that Wolf was not consciously criticizing patriarchy when she wrote the book.⁸¹ In Kuhn's feminist reading, she stresses the alternative model of human interrelationship exemplified in *Nachdenken* which, she says stems from women's experience. In addition, she foregrounds Wolf's critique of Marxism from a feminist perspective. However, this does

⁷⁹ Kuhn, *C.W.'s utopian vision: from Marxism to feminism* 3-4.

⁸⁰ Kuhn, *C.W.'s utopian vision: from Marxism to feminism* 79.

⁸¹ Kuhn, *C.W.'s utopian vision: from Marxism to feminism* 94.

not mean that in Kuhn's understanding of Wolf's development from Marxism to feminism, Marxism is replaced or cancelled by feminism, as is voiced instead by critics Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy.⁸² Rather, Wolf's commitment to Marxism is recognized as an important part of her feminism.

Some of the specifics of GDR women's writing pointed out by GDR critic Kaufmann are echoed in Richard Schmidt's reading of Wolf.⁸³ He deals with how the question of female identity is treated in literature by East and West German women writers (Monika Maron's *die Überläuferin*, Wolf's *Sommerstück*, Helke Sander's *die Geschichte der drei Damen*, and K. Uta Treder's *Luna Aelion*). In his reading, Schmidt foregrounds the significance of both utopian ideals and the concrete historicity, which prevail in East German women's writings, and identifies them as the specific contribution of East German women literature to the discussion of female identity. With regard to the historicity, he states:

*The East German writers ... set the genesis of their protagonists' identity crisis in a historical political context. ... This concrete historical approach to the question of identity adds insight which is not provided by the post-structuralist and object-relations theories mentioned at the beginning of my paper.*⁸⁴

Wolf and other East German women writers always understand women's identity crisis historically. In other words, their writing is always a conscious response to social and literary realities. In this sense, their approach to female identity is far beyond the approaches represented by Western post-structuralist and object-relations theories.

⁸² Robert Sayre, Michael Lowy, "Romanticism as a feminist vision, the quest of Christa Wolf," New German Critique 64 (1995) 106.

⁸³ Richard Schmidt, "The concept of identity in recent East and West German women's writing," German literature at a time of change 1989-1990: German Unity and German Identity in Literary Perspective, ed. Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Roland Smith (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991).

⁸⁴ Schmidt 443.

Until now we have seen that in the dissociation of feminism from socialism in Western feminist literary critics' responses to Wolf, any "difference" a "socialist" feminist view could bear is very often obliterated. Only a few critics attempt to locate the specificities of Wolf's and other GDR women writers' own feminism as well as its appeal to Western capitalism, such as the political nature of GDR women's writing, the emphasis on a particular historical context, etc. However, compared to many Western feminist literary critics, who are more attracted by similarities between Wolf and Western feminist theories before and after the Wende, those critics (Kaufmann, Kuhn and Schmidt) seem to be exceptional.

Conclusion

Until now I have discussed feminist literary responses mainly to Wolf's *Nachdenken* in different time periods with different feminist agendas at play. What then should we conclude from this discussion?

From "difference feminism" dominating the feminist debates in the 1970s and 1980s in the US, to French feminism and post-structuralism/post-modernism, Wolf's work has invited quite positive reactions from Western feminist critics. Without a doubt, these feminists' approaches to Wolf have set Wolf, as a woman intellectual, apart from the established GDR male intellectuals and enriched our understanding of her to a great extent. However, one important feature defining Wolf's reception among most feminists is the priority given to her gendered difference or her experience as a woman, while the other modes of difference, such as her commitment to socialism – an important aspect in Wolf's political engagement as an intellectual – are completely left out. In doing so, the

complexity of Wolf's being a woman intellectual is reduced only to her position as a feminist writer. The dissociation of Wolf's feminism from socialism continues after the demise of the GDR. Wolf continues to be read in terms of Western feminist theories, whereby her work functions mainly as the embodiment of certain Western feminist theories while her own right as a feminist is disregarded.

In the sense that in the Western feminists' responses to Wolf, she is very often displaced in the discourse of Western feminism and becomes the mouthpiece of certain Western feminist theories, there seem to be certain connections between Wolf's case and postcolonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of Western feminism. In *Under Western Eyes* (1986), Mohanty argues that Western feminist discourse relating to women in the third world is colonialist because the universality claims of Western feminist discourse are confirmed and power is exercised in the "process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world".⁸⁵ Mohanty points out that feminist scholarship, more than being a simple production of knowledge about a certain subject, is and must be, political. This political nature is embodied in the discursive construction of "third world women" in Western feminism.

Based on the notion that "sexual difference" is understood as "a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance",⁸⁶ Mohanty used the concept of "third world difference" to indicate how third world women are constructed as a singular and monolithic subject in Western feminist writings. In the Western understanding of "third world difference", "women" is assumed to be a category of

⁸⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses," *Third World women and the politics of feminism*, ed. Mohanty et al. (Bloomington: University of Indiana press, 1991) 54.

⁸⁶ Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes* 53.

analysis, whereby they are already a constituted group before entering into a social relationship. And the result of such analysis is that any possibility of resistance by third world women is denied. In this kind of construction, the binary system: Western feminist self-representation versus “third world difference” persists. The latter, irrespective of its social and historical context, is seen as stable and a-historical. All in all, Western feminist discourse on women in the third world is defined by Mohanty as a means for the West to exercise and reinforce its power; hence, the ultimate political effect of such discourse is colonialism.

The point of departure for Mohanty’s critique is the hierarchical relationship between the first world and the third world, and the dominance of Western feminist discourse. In the Western feminists’ attitude toward feminism in the socialist state of GDR, a similar mode can be identified, that is, the use of the West as the primary referent in theory and praxis, whereby the different histories of women’s oppression, whether socialist histories or colonialism, on which feminism in the GDR and other non-European feminisms are grounded, are totally overlooked; heterogeneities of women’s lives in a socialist state or in non-Western countries are disregarded and along with this, any possibility of subversion among those “other” women is rejected. In the case of Wolf, although she is a white and middle-class woman, her connection with socialism (living in a socialist state and insisting on a socialist alternative) seems to make her own feminism “lacking” compared to westernized forms of feminism. In addition, her socialism is cut off from her feminism. Under Western feminist eyes, her prominence as a public intellectual is reduced to her being a woman writer, who can write about women’s issues just as other Western feminists do.

Chapter 6 Conclusion: Is Wolf as an intellectual model passé?

My discussion of Wolf has focused mainly on two aspects of being a public intellectual, namely how she became and at the same time was constructed as a prominent intellectual figure in the twentieth century in Germany. As far as her “becoming” an intellectual, I concentrated on Wolf’s own work, whereby she herself claimed her role as a female intellectual in the GDR. Besides Wolf’s self-proclaimed intellectual positions, I have dealt with her critical reception, mainly in the two German States before the Wende, in the unified Germany, and in the US, in order to demonstrate how her intellectual positions were interpreted and understood discursively in historically-specific social contexts. I have argued for the constructed nature of Wolf’s identity as a feminist intellectual, with focus on her being constructed as a dissident and a feminist: how her identity as a dissident emerged and acquired different meanings and values in different social and historical contexts; and how her being a public intellectual was reduced to just being a feminist writer in the discourse of Western feminism.

Reading Wolf’s own texts along with and against the critics’ responses to them, we get a sense of how people’s social identities are complex and multiple, how they are constructed discursively in different social and historical contexts. Moreover, Wolf’s own voice, which might be ignored or distorted by her audience, but which always exists, along with or in opposition to her critics’ voices, contains in itself a critique of and resistance to her own construction. Wolf’s own voice demonstrates that the cultural construction of subjectivity does not exclude agency. In this regard, I agree with Nancy Fraser, who argues in her discussion of Benhabib and Butler, “nothing in principle

precludes that subjects are *both* culturally constructed *and* capable of critique.”¹ Wolf’s case seems to illustrate Fraser’s view of subjectivity as “endowed with critical capacities *and* as culturally constructed.”²

In this conclusion, I focus on certain aspects of Wolf’s “critical capacities” to contend with the problems prevailing in her cultural construction. In other words, I look at how Wolf responds to particular problems as regards her critical reception. In doing so, besides answering the question as to whether or not Wolf as an intellectual model is passé, I intend my discussion to generate further debate on the intellectual’s responsibility in society.

A major problem I exposed in my discussion of these discourses that constructed Wolf either as a feminist writer/intellectual or as a dissident writer is the predominance of Western cultural and literary standards by which critics measure her work, including Western feminist critics. Thereby, any difference contributed by a socialist view on literature or feminism that would be relevant to Wolf’s work is disregarded or eliminated. This Western dominance among critics demonstrates itself in two ways.

First of all, the ideology of modernism predominates. Western aesthetic standards are employed in the judgment of Wolf’s literary works, irrespective of a different understanding of literature in a socialist state, as my study of the critical reception of her *Nachdenken* and *Was Bleibt* has shown. The separation of aesthetics from politics or ethics is seen by Western standards as characteristic of modernism. According to this

¹ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: critical reflections on the “postsocialist” condition* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) 214. Here Fraser critiques both Benhabib and Butler for their false antitheses of critical theory and poststructuralism. Instead, Fraser argues for an alternative conceptualization of the subject, history and metaphysics: “one that integrates Butler’s poststructuralist emphasis on construction with Benhabib’s critical-theoretical stress on critique” (217). In other words, Fraser argues for the need for both deconstruction and reconstruction for feminists.

² Fraser 219.

thinking, Wolf is either celebrated as a modernist writer or is condemned as a poet of the state in varying political situations. Her literary works are either completely politicized (as in the reception of *Nachdenken* at the end of the 1960s in both German states and that of *Was Bleibt* during the Wende in Germany), or her intervention in politics is rejected or obliterated. Hence, she is read by Western critics as only a fictional writer. Or, at best, her political intervention is generalized by interpreting her as a postmodernist, a critic of Western civilization, or as a critic of patriarchy.

Secondly, Westernized feminism dominates Wolf's reception among feminist literary critics. A Western view or standard of feminism is assumed to be "universal" and is invoked to examine the limits of GDR women's writing. Even Wolf gets much more praise than negative criticism from Western feminists, she seems to become a spokesperson for certain Western feminist theories. Wolf's feminism in her own right, or any particularities brought forth by her socialist feminism, are overlooked or obscured when applied to Wolf.

In this context, any difference that socialist feminism might bring to feminism is obliterated by a simple, monolithic kind of capitalist feminism. Paradoxically, it is this same Western feminism that claims for itself plurality and difference that erases the "other" feminism. Now the dilemma is that this other feminism exemplified by Wolf does not consider itself a kind of feminism, and she speaks of universal paradigms, which in turn may erase difference. This debate about 'the universal versus difference' among feminists seems to echo the current one about women's rights versus universal human rights. Susan Moller Okin points out the tension between some Western feminists' critique of overgeneralization and disregard for difference as well as the universalizing

rhetoric manifested in feminist human rights activism.³ She states that unlike Western academic feminism, which is guided by anti-essentialism and is therefore quite skeptical of any kind of generalization or notions of universality, Third World feminists, grassroots activists, and certain Western feminists are working together towards the recognition of women's rights as human rights, based on their awareness that women have much in common. The debate among feminists regarding anti-essentialism and universalism continues and is far from reaching any consensus. Okin points out that respect for cultural differences could be used as an excuse for violating women's human rights and thus for doing harm to women. She argues for the necessity of keeping women's rights violations on the global agenda and for the necessity of support for women's rights by Western feminists. For Okin, both universal paradigms and differences in regard to women should be taken into account. This turn towards universal paradigms while respecting differences is shared by other feminists, such as Mohanty. Unlike her view in *Under Western Eyes*, in a more recent article, Mohanty (2003) changes her focus from "Western" and "Third World" feminist practices to the commonalities between the two. Contrary to the postmodernist celebration of difference, Mohanty emphasizes the significance of understanding difference / the particular in their connection to the universal, and argues for the possibilities and necessities of cross-national feminist solidarity and organizing against capitalism in "anticapitalist transnational feminist practice."⁴

³ Susan Moller Okin, "Feminism, Women's Human Rights, and Cultural Difference," Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world, ed. Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000) 38.

⁴ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity (Durham & London: Duke university press, 2003) 5.

When we consider Wolf's case, there seems to be a similar tension between universalizing notions and differences in her socialist project, since socialism with equality and emancipation as its ultimate goals, tends to erase any differences. So how does Wolf reconcile universal paradigms with respect for differences? Or what might be Wolf's thinking that allows for socialism—while driving towards equality and emancipation—but at the same time allows for “differences”?

To some extent, we can say that Wolf's specific interest in the individual human being, in particular her belief in the significance of the subject's self-knowledge in making social changes (recall her notion of “the blind spot”), offers possibilities of reconciling equality with differences. That is to say, in her struggle for emancipation of the whole human being (“Wie können wir Frauen ‘befreit’ sein, solange nicht alle Menschen es sind?”⁵), her focus on the individual with his/her own differences and seeing individual consciousness and responsibility as crucial in effecting changes make it possible to integrate individual needs and desire into Wolfe's claims about universality.

Moreover, Wolf shows deep interest in those marginalized or underrepresented individuals, such as Christa T., Kleist, Günderröde, and Büchner, and sees the values they embody and their desire as crucial in social development. Very often they are repressed and excluded from the dominant ideology, be it the exclusive focus on the economic construction of a new socialist state or the predominance of instrumental reason. Those individuals are, as Wolf states, “Fremdlinge (werden die) im eigenen Land, Vorgänger, denen keiner folgt, Begeisterte ohne Widerhall, Rufer ohne Echo. Und die von ihnen, die

⁵ Wolf, “Berührung,” *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 1. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 209.

den zeitgemäßen Kompromiß nicht eingehen können: Opfer.“⁶ They are disempowered since they are excluded from political, cultural, and literary representation. They try to speak for themselves but cannot let themselves be heard. As an intellectual, Wolf assumes the responsibility of speaking for them. Here similarities can be discerned between Wolf and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Both have a deep commitment to political intervention. Like Wolf, Spivak is not only famous for her academic writing, but also for her political speech-making and even left-wing organizing ‘on the ground.’ As Landry and Maclean comment, politics “have been part of her intellectual formation, from her student days in Calcutta to the present.”⁷ So both Wolf and Spivak see intellectuals as having responsibility for making changes in society. Moreover, both are specifically interested in marginalized and underrepresented individuals and groups, and believe it is an important part of the intellectual’s responsibility to represent these persons.

Spivak uses “subaltern” – a term used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to indicate non-elite or subordinated social groups – to specify those living in postcolonial nation states who are excluded from political representation.⁸ In Spivak’s article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* first published in 1988 based on a lecture she gave in 1983, she argues

⁶ Wolf, *Der Schatten eines Traumes*, “C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985” Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 514.

⁷ Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, ed. Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York & London: Routledge, 1996) 107.

⁸ Spivak elaborates on the notion of subaltern in her interview with Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean in 1993. She states, “In the essay (“Can the subaltern speak?”) I made it clear that I was talking about the space as defined by Ranajit Guha, the space that is cut off from the lines of mobility in a colonized country. You have the foreign elite and the indigenous elite. Below that you will have the vectors of upward, downward, sideward, backward mobility. But then there is a space which is for all practical purposes outside those lines.” (Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York & London: Routledge, 1996) 288-289.)

that the subaltern cannot speak, by which she means that although the subaltern makes an effort to speak and tries to represent herself, in the end she is unable to be heard by the privileged of either the first or third worlds, or her self-representation does not come through. For Spivak, the “speech act” consists of speaking and hearing, which means that the subaltern cannot finish the complete speech act for lack of the second part: to be heard; therefore she cannot speak.⁹ This does not mean that the subaltern does not have any agency. In fact the subaltern’s resistance and agency are Spivak’s main focus, using the critical tool of deconstruction. Although a detailed introduction and analysis of Spivak’s deconstruction is beyond my scope here, what I want to stress is that, just like Wolf, Spivak believes it is the intellectual’s responsibility to represent the subaltern. But unlike Wolf, Spivak’s focus is more on colonized women in colonial and post-colonial societies, tribal groups, and the rural peasantry in South Asia. Besides their differences in geographical and social locations of the “subaltern”, Wolf and Spivak embrace “subaltern” theory differently.

Wolf believes that those “outsiders”, because of their marginalization, can offer us an alternative notion of progress and a different way of thinking and lifestyle. Hence, more than just letting these figures speak in order to reclaim their important position in literary and social history; or more than just letting them speak for her about contemporary problems, such as the conflicts between writer and society (state), about the conditions of women writers, and the importance of a subject’s self-assertion, Wolf searches for alternative values that can be derived from marginalized perspectives and

⁹ See “Subaltern Talk: interview with the editors (10/29/1993),” *The Spivak reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 287-308.

insights through her critical engagement with her own “subaltern.” For example, values represented by Christa T. and Günderrode, such as a subject’s self-assertion, love, intimacy, dialogue, and fantasy—which cannot be heard by those in power—are celebrated by Wolf as an alternative to instrumental reason, separation, and alienation.

In Wolf’s representation of marginalized figures, she insists on the presence of the author as the fourth dimension (her notion of “subjective authenticity”). In *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, Wolf lets two historical figures, Kleist and Günderrode, meet in Brentano’s house on the Rhein. It is a fictional meeting. Although Wolf directly quotes much of the original material (i.e., the actual words of these two figures), she emphasizes that the main voice is her own: “... es ist meine Stimme, die spricht, eine Anverwandlung findet statt, die ich für legitim halte.”¹⁰ It is Wolf’s voice that prevents the reader from losing sight of the main picture in the seemingly confusing voices which are mixed together. In *Medea. Stimmen* too, Wolf lets six different narrative voices tell the same story from different perspectives. However, in the end, instead of the undecidability of the contradictory voices, Medea’s own voice, merged with the narrator’s, still predominates.

In other words, in Wolf’s own way of speaking *for* the “subalterns”, the presence of the author as the speaking subject becomes explicit. However, in her notion of “subjective authenticity”, the author’s authority is deconstructed, as I pointed out in the second chapter of this thesis. According to Wolf, the position of the author as the speaking subject does not mean that he/she is an authority mastering the text. Instead, as the one who produces the text, the writer is also mutually constructed through what he/she is producing, through his/her text. In some sense, we can say that Wolf is not

¹⁰ Wolf, „Projektionsraum Romantik,“ *C.W. Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze. Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985* Vol. 2. (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) 890.

interested in who the “subalterns” really are but in the kinds of relationship she as an author or narrator and the reader, have with these marginalized figures. Through this relationship, this dialogue, the speaking subject is exposed to the unknown part of his/her self (therefore the difficulty of saying “I”) and ultimately comes to his/her self-knowledge. Within this logic, Wolf does not deny the possibility of the subject saying “I” in the end. This means—though deconstructed to some extent—that Wolf’s notion of subject still seems to be grounded in the Enlightenment’s notion of subjectivity.¹¹ The ideas of wholeness, essence, and authenticity still prevail. For example, in her *Kindheitsmuster*, there are moments of deconstructive gesture, such as the notion of a fragmentary self and searching for identity as a never-ending process. However, there is always an ideal of wholeness or authentic identity there. What makes the protagonist special is her long journey towards that ultimate goal, that is, to be able to say “I” in the end.

I propose that it is this understanding of subjectivity that sets Wolf apart from Spivak, whose notion of subjectivity is deconstructed to a great extent. She rejects any notions of essence, identity, and originality. Their different understanding of subjectivity determines to some extent their different approaches to the intellectuals’ responsibility of speaking for others or representing the “subaltern.”

Unlike Foucault and Deleuze, who claim that intellectuals do not need to represent the subaltern or oppressed groups, since they can represent themselves, Spivak seems to

¹¹ Critic Sara Friedrichsmeyer argues that Wolf “owes more to Enlightenment ‘tolerance’ than to postmodern difference” (81). Wolf’s notion of subjectivity, for example, is closer to the Enlightenment position on subjectivity in her works since “Patterns.” That is, there is always an idealist vision of a whole and unified subject. See Friedrichsmeyer, “On multiple selves and dialogics: Christa Wolf’s challenge to the ‘Enlightened’ Faust,” *Impure reason: Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*, ed. W. Daniel Wilson and Robert C. Holub (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1991) 65-86.

affirm the intellectuals' responsibility to represent the subaltern based on her conclusion that the subaltern's speaking for herself always ends in failure.¹² However, Spivak's deconstructive understanding of the subaltern makes her extremely conscious of her own positionality in representing these disempowered groups.

Unlike Derrida, who in his critique of the logocentrism of Western metaphysics through deconstruction, rejects the notion of the authorial "presence", Spivak does not deny the existence of the subject. Instead, she shifts her notion of the subject or agency from essence to effect. Understood in this way, she critiques the sovereign subject as author, the subject of power and authority in humanism. For Spivak, this notion of the subject in humanism stands in deep connection with the imperialist subject.¹³ However, she does not want to deny any existence of subject, truth, and history since she insists on "the ethical necessity of maintaining a critical as well as a committed political stance."¹⁴ On the one hand, there is a need for subject or agency, which is determined by Spivak's political commitment to making changes in order to face neocolonialism and colonialism; on the other hand, she rejects any essentialist notion of subject. In this context, she understands subjectivity as effect rather than as essence, and claims a subjective position only as a strategy and argues for a strategic use of essentialism in a political interest.¹⁵

Spivak explains the subject-effect as follows:

that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network (...) of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history,

¹² Spivak, Subaltern Talk: interview with the editors 306-307.

¹³ Spivak, Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography 210-211.

¹⁴ Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, introduction, More on Power / Knowledge, by Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1996) 141.

¹⁵ Spivak, Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography 214.

*sexuality, language, and so on. (...) Different knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are themselves dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operation subject.*¹⁶

This means that the notion of a sovereign and determining subject is not cause (for consciousness) but “the product of a network of differential, potentially contradictory strands”.¹⁷ In other words, the self is the subject effect, “always production rather than ground.”¹⁸

The deconstructive gesture of Spivak also manifests itself in her understanding of definition, for example, the definition of women. She states that the word “woman” is defined as resting on the word “man.”¹⁹ So woman is a difference or a relation to man rather than an identity or essence. Spivak argues that it is impossible to make rigorous definition of anything, but she also recognizes that definitions are nevertheless necessary. In order to solve this paradox, she suggests making definitions “in a provisional and polemical one,”²⁰ or as she states: “I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of a woman’s putative essence but in terms of words currently in use.”²¹

According to this logic, for Spivak, the subaltern is about a difference rather than an identity, as she cites Ranajit Guha’s definition of subalternity: “The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total

¹⁶ Spivak, Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography 213.

¹⁷ Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, introduction, Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography, by Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1996) 204.

¹⁸ Spivak, Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography 223.

¹⁹ Spivak, “Feminism and Critical Theory,” The Spivak reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 54.

²⁰ Spivak, Feminism and Critical Theory 54.

²¹ Spivak, Feminism and Critical Theory 54.

Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'.”²² In other words, for Spivak, the subaltern is “subject-effect.” Along with this, subaltern consciousness too is subject-effect.

Spivak’s deconstructive understanding of the subaltern, as difference rather than as identity, or as effect, rather than as essence, determines that any notion of subaltern is provisional and undergoes changes, just as she describes the changing character of the subaltern: “when the subaltern ‘speaks’ in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual.”²³ This statement is similar to Gramsci’s definition of an organic intellectual. Here Spivak emphasizes that being a subaltern is not a permanent situation. Understood thus, the intellectual’s representing or speaking for the subaltern is and should be temporary. The ultimate goal is to undo the subaltern space so that the subaltern can truly speak for herself.

*On the other hand, you know, working for the subaltern is precisely to bring them, not through cultural benevolence, but through extra-academic work, into the circuit of parliamentary democracy....we cannot forget that working for the subaltern means the subaltern’s insertion into citizenship, whatever that might mean, and thus the undoing of subaltern space.*²⁴

I contend that Spivak’s deconstructive notion of subjectivity – seeing identity as difference or effect – explains to some extent her being conscious and critical of the intellectual’s position of speaking for the other. She talks about her lack of confidence in

²² Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” The Spivak reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 213.

²³ Spivak, “Translator’s Preface and Afterword to Mahasweta Devi, Imaginary Maps,” The Spivak reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 271.

²⁴ Spivak, Subaltern Talk: interview with the editors 307.

her ability to speak about what marginalized people ought to be interested in.²⁵ She shows concern about the intellectual's privilege and emphasizes the importance of unlearning one's privilege, which applies not only to Western feminists but also to herself. In an interview, Spivak points out, "There is an impulse among literary critics and other kinds of intellectuals to save the masses, speak for the masses, describe the masses. On the other hand, how about attempting to learn to speak in such a way that the masses will not regard as bullshit."²⁶ Here she emphasizes the responses of those represented by intellectuals, i.e., to take intellectuals seriously and more importantly, to be able to respond.

Compared to Spivak, Wolf seems to lack such consciousness about her own positionality in representing the other disempowered groups. In other words, she seems to take the role of intellectuals' speaking for others for granted and does not adequately reflect on her privileged position as an intellectual. Surely this is to be understood historically. Wolf's background in the GDR, in particular, the lack of a public sphere where the majority could speak for themselves and let themselves be heard, and the function of literature as an ersatz public sphere, determine to a large extent her seeing the intellectual's role of representing and educating the masses as her responsibility. However, even after the demise of the GDR, when literature has lost its major function as an ersatz public sphere and along with this, it seems to be difficult for the former GDR writers to maintain their right of speaking for a silent majority, a feeling that intellectuals have a better perspective can still be discerned in Wolf. In her essays after the Wende,

²⁵ Spivak, "The problem of cultural self-representation," The post-colonial critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues., ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990) 57.

²⁶ Spivak, The problem of cultural self-representation 56.

she shows her deep disappointment in her own people whom she finds naïve.²⁷ She continues to believe that the GDR people had a different relationship to property and money,²⁸ irrespective of the fact that in the collapse of the GDR, economic factors rather than a political ideal played a determining role in the GDR people's choice of unification. This continuity of seeing the GDR people as subaltern, despite the changing political climates, and of speaking for them in the same way as before, I suggest, can be attributed to some extent to Wolf's understanding of subjectivity and agency as essence. Because the intellectual's speaking for the "subaltern" aims at reaching the ultimate truth, Wolf's deconstructive gesture seems to be damaged by her reconstruction of a myth or a utopia in the end. This seems to do harm to her own project or contradict her own theory, that is, equality that does not disempower (i.e., everybody irrespective of his/her difference has an equal say).

The reason for my pointing out Wolf's so-called shortcoming is not to blame her or to ask superficial questions, such as, if she had known how to represent people in a better way before, could she have avoided being abandoned by her people during the Wende, etc. Instead, what I want to achieve in here is to engender further discussion about the intellectual's responsibility to represent or speak for others (mostly women as disempowered groups). I believe that this kind of reflection is quite crucial in intellectuals' speaking to the public, since being an intellectual, no matter where he/she

²⁷ Wolf, "Abschied von Phantomen: Zur Sache: Deutschland 1994," C.W. auf dem Weg nach Tabou (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999) 336

"die DDR-Bürger dachten mit der Einheit und der parlamentarischen Demokratie den Wohlstand zu wählen, mit Freiheit und Gleichheit, naiverweise sogar Brüderlichkeit -..."

²⁸ Wolf, Abschied von Phantomen: Zur Sache: Deutschland 1994 333.

"Ich glaube, was uns am deutlichsten trennt, ist das Verhältnis zum Eigentum. Nolens volens hatte man nämlich in der DDR einen anderen, laxeren Umgang mit Eigentum, das man nur als Gebrauchswert kannte, und, horribile dictu, auch zum Geld, um das sich nun wieder die Verhältnisse und die Gedanken in der freien Marktwirtschaft drehen."

is, whether in the so-called first world or in the third world, has already determined his/her relatively privileged position, at least in terms of educational opportunity and location within the division of labor. So how to speak to the others in such a way that they might take him/her seriously and, most importantly, to be able to respond and have a dialogue on an equal basis, becomes important in understanding the public intellectual's responsibility.

Now let me summarize what I have discussed so far. Regarding Wolf's critical reception, I have argued that with the predominance of Western standards for literature and feminism, any "difference" a socialist view could bring in is not acknowledged. The Western mode of thinking is universalized and predominant. This seems to contradict the Western feminist anti-essentialist critique (to respect differences) that has dominated the feminist debates since the mid-1980s. With regard to the tension between difference and universal claims, Wolf has her own way of embracing differences. Her project of socialism aims at equality and emancipation while allowing for "differences." So what might be at work in Wolf that allows both universal paradigms and "differences" to be operative? I foreground her specific interest in the individual and especially those marginalized and disempowered individuals. In her own way of embracing the "subaltern" theory, Wolf emphasizes the significance of integrating "differences" brought by those "subaltern" to her socialism project. Though with some drawbacks, which might have something to do with her humanistic understanding of subjectivity, her specific attention to marginalized individuals or groups and her persistent undertaking of representing and speaking for them aligns her with contemporary feminist thinkers such as Spivak, and thus makes Wolf relevant to contemporary feminism.

Wolf's method of integrating "differences" and universal paradigms is also reinforced by her communicative model. Like Habermas, she emphasizes the significance of dialogue in the construction of a social relationship. Dialogue on an equal basis beyond differences put forward by both, though idealized in some sense, is still what we should strive for in our world defined by power and dominance. Moreover, unlike Habermas, Wolf foregrounds the subjective dimension and subjective knowledge in her communicative model. This approach connects her with Frankfurt feminist thinkers, such as Benhabib, Fraser, and Young, as I discussed in chapter 2. In a similar manner to these feminists, Wolf critiques the hierarchical division between reason and feeling, public and private, and attempts to disrupt such division through the integration of moral feelings and other subjective dimensions – "differences" excluded from universal paradigms since Enlightenment.

Besides Wolf's way of dealing with the tension between differences and universal claims, which makes her relevant to contemporary feminists, what I find most appealing in Wolf as an intellectual is her sense of crisis and high degree of responsibility as an intellectual. As I noted in chapter 2, Wolf understands literature as a means to uncover "the blind spot" of the subject and of culture. Thus for her, being a writer or intellectual means being critical and political at the same time: to identify the wounds, ultimately to cure them, and to effect change. Guided by this philosophy, Wolf's writing shows a high degree of sensitivity towards social and historical crises and a profound commitment to a livable future for the whole human being. Confronting all kinds of "blind spots" in our society: impoverishment, war, uneven development, the pollution of the environment, alienation of the human subject, and marginalization of disempowered individuals and

groups, including intellectuals in the market economy, etc., the intellectuals' responsibility and political commitment to change these social conditions become more and more urgent and crucial. In this sense, Wolf's model for being an intellectual is far from passé.

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