

**Growing up in the Third Reich:
Representations of Childhood under
Nazism in Post-1990 German Culture**

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis examines post-1990 representations of growing up in the Third Reich within German culture. It has two primary aims: to demonstrate how childhood is recalled, represented, and imagined by those with, and without first-hand experience of Nazism; and to situate these narratives as a central part of the post-Unification discourse about identity in the Berlin Republic.

The material is organised into five chapters: it begins with an analysis of recent museum displays and exhibitions, followed by German cinema (*Hitlerjunge Salomon*, *NaPolA: Elite für den Führer*); autobiographical works, by former members of the Hitler Youth (Günter de Bruyn, Martin Walser, Günter Grass) and by Jewish children (Ruth Klüger, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, Günter Kunert); and finally, imagined accounts of growing up in the Third Reich (W.G. Sebald, Benjamin Wilkomirski, Gudrun Pausewang). Through close readings of primary sources, and analysis of their reception, including the public debates which they sparked, this study shows how these narratives interact with historical and contemporary notions of childhood. They are informed by the concern, embedded within post-Unification discourse, that the wealth of documentary and technical accounts of Nazism obscures the individual's understanding of those events and what it was like to experience them.

I argue that because of the close conceptual association between childhood and origins, these narratives contribute to a discourse about how the Third Reich is to be remembered, performing a 'search for a usable childhood'. This is situated within the context of Harald Welzer's notion of 'gefühlte Geschichte'; that is a mode of historical discourse focused on experience, rather than 'factual knowledge', and which appeals to emotions. In assessing narratives of growing up – which take a developmental view of childhood – this study seeks to open up previously rigid categorisations of childhood as found in literary studies which focus on the function of the child's perspective as a literary device. Thus within a crowded research area the present study offers a differentiated treatment of these works.

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LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis examines post-1990 representations of growing up in the Third Reich with reference to museum exhibitions, cinema, and autobiographical and fictional literature. Although present in cultural discourse since 1945, Unification and important moments of national remembering, such as the major anniversaries of the end of the Second World War in 1995 and 2005, have given an added impetus to the interest in the National Socialist period and its legacy. This interest is exhibited both by those who experienced it first-hand, and those who, coming after, attempt to make their own sense of what was and remains a defining period of Germany history.

The present study sets out from the idea, embedded within post-Unification discourse, that in its knowledge of the Third Reich the German public is what Marcel Reich-Ranicki has termed ‘überinformiert und trotzdem unwissend’.¹ He suggests that the wealth of documentary and technical accounts of Nazism obscures the individual’s understanding of those events and what it was like to experience them. With the growing awareness that the last generation of eye-witnesses to experience Nazism will soon be gone, and with them the immediacy of first-hand memory, narratives of their experience have gained currency. At the same time, the post-*Wende* period has been dominated by

¹ Marcel Reich-Ranicki (ed.), *Meine Schulzeit im Dritten Reich: Erinnerungen deutscher Schriftsteller* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1982), p. 9.

accounts from the perspective of those born after the end of the Third Reich. Such stories are frequently structured around inter-generational communication, as individuals, taught in history classes about the events of their grandparents' lifetime, now seek to discern their own place within the historical narrative.

The critic Harald Welzer uses the term 'gefühlte Geschichte'² to describe the kind of responses to this concern which focus on experience, rather than 'factual knowledge', or what Helmut Schmitz terms a 'shift both in historiographical and popular discourse from a history of "hard facts" to "story", human interest and emotionalisation'.³ 'Gefühlte Geschichte' consists of the stories that are told within families and communities, but which are not deemed to be 'official', public accounts of history. Furthermore, narratives which are situated within the framework of 'gefühlte Geschichte' both give account of, and appeal to, emotions: 'sie sprechen die Gefühle an'.⁴ This approach is, of course, not without its potential problems and these will be signalled and explored throughout the thesis.

Post-1990 representations of growing up in the Third Reich appear to offer just such a 'gefühlte Geschichte': there is a suggestion that childhood, rooted both in a literal and poetic sense in the private sphere, will offer a more personal view of history. This view will not be fettered by public rhetoric and adult concerns, but will rather access and represent the most direct experience of Nazism and the Second World War. In addition, such accounts appear to respond directly to the desire to secure some kind of narrative of

² Harald Welzer, 'Schön unscharf: Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane', *Mittelweg* 36 (2004), 53-64, here p. 53.

³ Helmut Schmitz, Introduction, in *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 1-31, here p. 5.

⁴ Harald Welzer, Interview, 'Im Gedächtniswohzimmer: Warum sind Bücher über die eigene Familiengeschichte so erfolgreich? Ein Zeit-Gespräch mit dem Sozialpsychologen Harald Welzer über das private Erinnern', *Die Zeit*, 25 March 2004, pp. 43-6, here p. 43.

‘authentic experience’: ‘authentic’ both in terms of being ‘first hand’, and in possessing an ‘experiential’ quality in contrast to purely factual material on the topic.

In treating this selection of material, I am primarily interested in two questions: firstly, *how* is the experience of growing up in the Third Reich depicted? I look at the discourses of childhood with which these narratives interact, and examine the aesthetic means with which childhood and adolescence are recalled, represented and imagined by those with, and without biographical experience of Nazism. I contextualise this analysis within post-war writing and film-making on the subject.

Secondly, I consider the wider function of these narratives within the post-1990 context. Any public engagement with the past necessarily raises questions about identity in the present, on both an individual and national level. Contemporary Germany is still on a quest for its post-war identity, which is inextricably linked to family history: ‘the entanglement of virtually every German family story in the Third Reich history means that this quest necessarily involves a confrontation both with the past of a private family and with that of a wider nation.’⁵ Accounts of growing up in the Third Reich bridge that gap, and, in many cases, seek also to bridge the gap between the intragenerational experience of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, and between eye-witnesses and subsequent generations.

Through close readings of primary sources, and analysis of their reception, including the public debates which they sparked, I show that narratives of childhood and adolescence under Nazism are an important site of memory work. They are central to

⁵ Marie Louise Wasmeier, ‘The Past in the Making: Invented Images and Fabricated Family History in Marcel Beyers *Spione*’, in *New German Literature: Life-Writing and Dialogue with the Arts*, ed. by Julian Preece, Frank Finlay and Ruth J. Owen (Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang 2007), pp. 343-58, here p. 343.

contemporary discussions of German memory and identity, particularly in their exploration of origins and authenticity with which childhood is so often associated.

In so doing, I want to suggest that these works form part of a discourse associated with what I term the ‘search for a usable childhood’. Based on Robert G. Moeller’s notion of ‘the search for a usable past’ in *War Stories: the Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (2001), the ‘search for a usable childhood’ suggests that the Berlin Republic’s search for identity is being undertaken through an engagement with the nation’s own ‘childhood’: its origins in the Third Reich. This is not intended as a normative framework: a version of the past which is ‘usable’, in the sense of acceptable. Rather, it is a descriptive term, which incorporates a range of narratives that seek to engage with personal, family, and national stories of the past, rooted in the experience of growing up.

The thesis is organised into five chapters, which follow a substantial Introduction outlining the theoretical, literary and historical background within which to contextualise the subsequent analysis. While several different schemes for organising the material suggested themselves, by beginning with an analysis of recent museum displays and exhibitions, followed by German cinema, autobiographical works – by former members of the Hitler Youth, and by Jewish children – and finally, imagined accounts of growing up in the Third Reich, I am able to set the study within a material, visual and literary context. This allows me – beyond the specific question of growing up – to foreground particular questions of genre and the expectations associated with it, in order to provide a wide-ranging examination of the topic after Unification.

The Introduction focuses on three areas: firstly, I describe the known ‘Erfahrungsräume’ of growing up in the Third Reich, looking at the spaces in which it was experienced. In all cases, the works I analyse in this thesis attempt to narrate a process, taking place over a number of years, in which the protagonist, or protagonists, develop from being children to being adults. I therefore outline some of the historical approaches to childhood which inform the works in the thesis, as well as considering four points of consensus on the modern, Western view of childhood which have emerged from this: the child as different, as associated with Nature, as innocent, and, consequently, as vulnerable and dependent.⁶ Definitions of childhood may be shaped by objective boundaries, such as the legal age of majority in a given jurisdiction, and the transition may be marked by a change in physical, psychological, social, moral or legal state. However, the margins of childhood are also open to subjective determination, and were further unsettled by the conditions of war and racial persecution. I therefore also consider the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, commonly called ‘adolescence’. This more recent, more contested term is frequently neglected in literary studies of childhood, yet it is crucial to consider within narratives of the process of growing up.

Finally, in focusing on narratives produced after Unification, it is necessary to consider what came before. Indeed, the works discussed in this thesis question traditional notions of, and myths about, the experience of childhood in the Third Reich as they have been perpetuated in conventional literary and cinematic storytelling since 1945. I therefore briefly trace the development of such post-war representations.

⁶ Jenny Hockey and Allison James, *Growing Up and Growing Old: Ageing and Dependency in the Life Course* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 60.

The subject of literary and filmic attempts to confront the National Socialist period is, as Chloe Paver notes, a ‘moving target’, with new topics for study appearing continuously.⁷ The subject of growing up in the Third Reich has received significant critical interest, with studies focusing particularly on children’s literature and autobiographies of childhood. Previous scholarly treatment of this subject has primarily explored the function of the child’s perspective as a literary or filmic device. This can be used to distance the reader from the narrated events by providing a fresh viewpoint, and can encourage the reader, or viewer, to ‘fill in the moral gaps’ left by a perspective which views National Socialism as everyday normality.⁸ As a consequence of their concern with the aestheticisation of children, scholars have frequently neglected to engage with the full complexity of notions and definitions of childhood and adolescence. In assessing narratives of growing up – which take a developmental view of childhood – I seek to open up previously rigid categorisations. Thus within a crowded research area the present study offers a differentiated treatment of these works.

In preserving and exhibiting the paraphernalia of Nazism the museum has become an important site of memory in which visitors can encounter and engage with this historical period. Chapter One (Growing up in the Third Reich: The Physical Legacy) provides a close reading of a selection of temporary exhibitions and permanent displays at both national and regional level in Germany which depict the experience of growing up in the Third Reich. My analysis is informed by a theoretical underpinning

⁷ Chloe Paver, *Refractions of the Third Reich in German and Austrian Fiction and Film* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), p. 1.

⁸ Debbie Pinfold, *The Child’s View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye Among the Blind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 27.

which sees museums not as ‘unreconstructed realities’ but rather as ‘texts’.⁹ I thus examine the narratives which are constructed within individual exhibitions, looking at the strategies used to display childhood and the implications of these. I show that exhibitions portray the corruption of children by the State by figuring this against the background of an idealised childhood, a time of innocence and ignorance, protected from political and social concerns. Thus, they unwittingly demonstrate how children’s agency is regularly marginalised or denied in favour of more conventional notions of children as simply the ‘victims’ of history. At the same time, they facilitate an ‘encounter’ with the past, both through the exhibiting of historical objects, and by incorporating eye-witness testimony into their displays. They seek to offer a tangible link to the past and to bring history ‘to life’ for a contemporary audience.

In Chapter Two (‘Führung und Verführung’: Growing up under Nazism in Contemporary German Cinema) I continue my analysis of visual media by examining Agnieszka Holland’s *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991) and Dennis Gansel’s *NaPolA: Elite für den Führer* (2004). These films foreground the process of Nazi indoctrination and its effects on their respective adolescent protagonists, both born in 1925. I examine these films in light of the idea that, as the ‘organic memory’ of the Third Reich increasingly disappears, German cinema will become ‘das mächtigste Mittel der Geschichtsdarstellung’.¹⁰ In my analysis of their reception I show that the authenticity which is associated with them is attributed not to their historical accuracy, but rather to

⁹ Joanna Laidler, ‘What Roles do Museums Play in Shaping our Understanding of the Holocaust?’, <http://www.phansw.org.au/publications/LaidlerEssay.pdf> [accessed 10 September 2011], 1-16, here p. 2.

¹⁰ Christian Schneider, ‘Sehen, Hören, Glauben: Zur Konstruktion von Authentizität’, in *Das Böse im Blick: Die Gegenwart des Nationalsozialismus im Film*, ed. by Margrit Fröhlich, Christian Schneider and Karsten Visarius (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2007), pp. 15-30, here p. 18.

the films' perceived ability to reveal a 'deeper truth' about the experience of the past. This, it would seem, is again linked specifically to the depiction of the young.

Chapter Three ('Die Wahrheit der Kunst': Autobiographical Writing about Childhood in the Hitler Youth) considers autobiographical accounts by former members of the Hitler Youth: Günter de Bruyn's *Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin* (1992), Martin Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998) and Günter Grass's *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006). Born in the 1920s, these authors share many similar formative experiences, and their accounts express similar concerns, with both the aesthetic and ethical problems of autobiographical writing about their particular childhood experience. The texts all offer 'privileged insights'¹¹ into the life of their respective authors: they speak with the authority not just of the eye-witness, but of prominent public intellectuals. In this way their accounts seek to function both as a description of private experience, and as a way of speaking on behalf of others.

While autobiographical texts and collections of oral testimony by those who, like de Bruyn, Walser and Grass, were deemed 'acceptable' by the regime abound, the number of texts which thematise the Jewish childhood experience are relatively small in number. Chapter Four ('Seen but not heard?': Challenging Images of the Jewish Child) examines three autobiographical accounts in which the Jewish child's experience of the Third Reich is made legible: Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992), Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt's *Die Absonderung* (1991), and Günter Kunert's *Erwachsenenspiele: Erinnerungen* (1997). Klüger, Goldschmidt, and Kunert seek to articulate their experience of growing up in order to place their experiences alongside

¹¹ Katharina Gerstenberger, *Truth to Tell: German Women's Autobiographies and Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000), p. 176.

better known, but more symbolic versions of Jewish childhood. They demonstrate, in different ways, the possibility of overcoming the trajectory – the enforced obedience to external forces – of children of the Holocaust. They call for a productive critical engagement with the experience of racial persecution in Nazi Germany.

With the transition from communicative to cultural memory, eye-witness accounts give way to more free-ranging approaches by those who have no biographical involvement with the Third Reich. Chapter Five (Imagined Childhoods: Fictional Accounts of Growing up in the Third Reich) examines three texts in which the Jewish child's experience of the Holocaust is imagined and fictionalised. In W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) I focus my analysis on the depiction of the child figure throughout the text: as it appears within the protagonist's memories, and in photographic images, which further complicate Austerlitz's relationship with the child he used to be.

In contrast, Benjamin Wilkomirski's controversial false Holocaust memoir *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (1995) presses the analogy between memory and the photograph into service in order to prove the veracity of his account. While much scholarly attention has been paid to the question of authenticity in Wilkomirski's text, the function of the child figure and its perspective have been largely neglected; yet these two aspects of the work are closely intertwined. In my analysis, I examine the narrative strategies used to create the child's voice, and explore how, despite its exposure as a fraud, the book continues to be credited with providing an account infused with 'emotional authenticity', rather than historical veracity. In her novel *Reise im August* (1992) Gudrun Pausewang offers an imagined account of a Jewish child's experience of racial persecution. The text questions both the aesthetic creation of the child's voice, as

well as the ethical legitimacy of writing the narrative of a Holocaust victim from the standpoint of one who, at the same time as her fictional protagonist, was a member of the *Bund deutscher Mädel*. Above all, these texts provoke a discussion about the way in which the experience of childhood in the Third Reich will be made legible after the last eye-witnesses have disappeared.

By exploring the origins of those who grew up under Nazism, these narratives comment on the origins of the nation. In the Conclusion I reflect on the multiple narrative strategies by which growing up in the Third Reich has been represented, and particularly on the way in which childhood is often conceptually linked to origins. Neil Sinyard writes that ‘the artist looking back to his own childhood as a clue to his modern existence is all part of an endless attempt, on all our behalfs, to rewrite and analyse our own history’.¹² The ‘search for a usable childhood’ describes the contribution which the narratives in this study make to the wider debate about the ongoing legacy of Nazism, and its meaning and implications for the present.

Because of the wealth of material on this topic, the present study cannot hope to provide an exhaustive treatment of it. I therefore end by touching on possible further avenues of research, positing that the ‘search for a usable childhood’ may be a useful conceptual tool for analysing works about childhood and adolescence in other contexts, and their contribution to discussions of the past, and identity in the present.

¹² Neil Sinyard, *Children in the Movies* (London: Batsford, 1992), p. 8.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Figures	xiii
Acknowledgements	xv
Introduction	1
Growing up in the Third Reich: ‘Erfahrungsräume’	10
Defining Terms: Childhood, Adolescence and Growing Up	15
Understanding Childhood: Historical Approaches	19
Understanding Childhood Today: Four Points of Consensus	24
‘Die Grenzen der Kindheit’: When Does Childhood End?	28
Childhood and the Discourse of Authenticity	31
Growing up in the Third Reich: Post-1945 Representations.....	34
Post-1990 Representations of Growing up in the Third Reich	41
Literature Review	45
1. Growing up in the Third Reich: The Physical Legacy	52
History and Memory in the Museum	55
‘Sachzeugen’ and ‘Zeitzeugen’: Exhibiting Childhood in Contemporary Germany	58
Conclusion	91
2. ‘Führung und Verführung’: Growing up under Nazism in Contemporary German Cinema	95
Growing up in Film	97
‘Das glaubt dir kein Mensch’: Agnieszka Holland’s <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> (1991)	101
Dennis Gansel’s <i>NaPolA: Elite für den Führer</i> (2004)	109
‘Inszenierte Authentizität’?: Depicting the Past in Cinema	122
Conclusion	133
3. ‘Die Wahrheit der Kunst’?: Autobiographical Writing about Childhood in the Hitler Youth	136
The Place of Childhood within Autobiographical Writing	137
‘Kindheitsmuster’: Autobiographical Writing since 1945	140
Günter de Bruyn’s <i>Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin</i> (1992)	142

Martin Walser's <i>Ein springender Brunnen</i> (1998)	153
Günter Grass's <i>Beim Häuten der Zwiebel</i> (2006)	164
Conclusion	174
4. Seen, but not heard?: Challenging Images of the Jewish Child	181
Post-war Portrayals of the Jewish Child's Experience	186
Ruth Klüger's <i>weiter leben</i> (1992)	192
'Ich bin ein Lebensschmuggler': Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt's <i>Die Absonderung</i> (1991)	203
Günter Kunert's <i>Erwachsenenspiele</i> (1997)	212
Conclusion	222
5. Imagined Childhoods: Fictional Accounts of Growing up in the Third Reich	226
W. G. Sebald's <i>Austerlitz</i> (2001)	228
Benjamin Wilkomirski's <i>Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948</i> (1995)	240
Gudrun Pausewang's <i>Reise im August</i> (1992)	251
Problems of Authenticity	258
Conclusion	266
The Search for a Usable Childhood	276
Further Avenues of Research	280
Bibliography	285
Primary Texts	285
Additional Primary Texts	285
Interviews with Authors of Primary Texts	288
Speeches	289
Filmography	289
Secondary Sources	290

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
Fig. 1 <i>Hitler Moves East: A Graphic Chronicle 1941-43</i> , David Levinthal and Garry Trudeau (1977).	52
Fig. 2 ‘Puppenhaus – Deutschland, nach 1933’, in the <i>Deutsches Historisches Museum</i> , Berlin.	65
Fig. 3 ‘Puppenhaus – Deutschland, nach 1933’, in the <i>Deutsches Historisches Museum</i> , Berlin.	65
Fig. 4 ‘Spielzeuge’ in the <i>Deutsches Historisches Museum</i> , Berlin.	66
Fig. 5 ‘Brettspiel’: ‘Wir fahren gegen Engeland’, in the <i>Deutsches Historisches Museum</i> , Berlin.	68
Fig. 6 ‘Brettspiel’: ‘Adler Luftkampfspiel’, in the <i>Deutsches Historisches Museum</i> , Berlin.	68
Fig. 7 ‘Jugend’, in the <i>NS-Dokumentationszentrum</i> , Cologne.	72
Fig. 8 ‘Jugend’, in the <i>NS-Dokumentationszentrum</i> , Cologne.	72
Fig. 9 Lapel badges representing the many non-National Socialist affiliated youth groups in the display ‘Jugend’, in the <i>NS-Dokumentationszentrum</i> , Cologne.	73
Fig. 10 National Socialist lapel badge in the display ‘Jugend’, in the <i>NS-Dokumentationszentrum</i> , Cologne.	73
Fig. 11 ‘Eye-witness interviews’, in the <i>NS-Dokumentationszentrum</i> , Cologne.	76
Fig. 12 ‘Eye-witness interviews’, in the <i>NS-Dokumentationszentrum</i> , Cologne.	76
Fig. 13 ‘Schallplatten-Bar’ in the exhibition ‘Und sie werden nicht mehr frei’, in the <i>Historisches Centrum</i> , Hagen.	78
Fig. 14 Toy soldiers in the exhibition ‘Hitler und die Deutschen: Volksgemeinschaft und Verbrechen’, in the <i>Deutsches Historisches Museum</i> , Berlin.	79
Fig. 15 A ‘Jewish girl’, in the exhibition ‘Und sie werden nicht mehr frei’, in the <i>Historisches Centrum</i> , Hagen.	83
Fig. 16 A ‘Swing Kids member’, in the exhibition ‘Und sie werden nicht mehr frei’, in the <i>Historisches Centrum</i> , Hagen.	83
Fig. 17 ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’, in the permanent exhibition, <i>Schulmuseum</i> , Hamburg.	88
Fig. 18 ‘School desks’, in the exhibition ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’, <i>Schulmuseum</i> , Hamburg.	89
Fig. 19 ‘National Socialist Textbooks’, in the exhibition ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und	

	Neuanfang nach 1945', <i>Schulmuseum</i> , Hamburg.	90
Fig. 20	'National Socialist Textbooks', in the exhibition 'Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945', <i>Schulmuseum</i> , Hamburg.	90
Fig. 21	Solly bayonets a caricature doll, in <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> , dir. by Agnieszka Holland (Central Cinema Company Film, 1991).	105
Fig. 22	Solly bayonets a caricature doll, in <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> , dir. by Agnieszka Holland (Central Cinema Company Film, 1991).	105
Fig. 23	Solly and Isaak, walking into the distance, in <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> (1991).	109
Fig. 24	Solly climbing to his teacher's window, in <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> (1991).	114
Fig. 25	A similar frame composition in <i>NaPolA – Elite für den Führer</i> , dir. by Dennis Gansel (Olga Film GmbH, 2004).	114
Fig. 26	The 'Sportlehrer' in <i>NaPolA</i> (2004).	116
Fig. 27	The fairy-tale castle which houses the school, in <i>NaPolA</i> .	118
Fig. 28	A frame from the final sequence, in <i>NaPolA</i> .	121
Fig. 29	Footage taken from a <i>Pathé</i> newsreel, in <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> (1991).	123
Fig. 30	The frame which immediately follows the images taken from the <i>Pathé</i> newsreel, in <i>Hitlerjunge Salomon</i> (1991).	123
Fig. 31	The pupils assembled in the school hall, in <i>NaPolA</i> .	126
Fig. 32	Friedrich sings 'Uns're Fahne flattert uns voran', in <i>NaPolA</i> .	126
Fig. 33	Dust-jacket of the Dutch edition showing the photograph of the young Walser which was used on Suhrkamp's 'Verlagsprospekt'.	157
Fig. 34	Frank Meisler's sculpture 'Züge in das Leben – Züge in den Tod', Berlin.	182
Fig. 35	The dust-jacket of the first and the most recent edition of Ruth Klüger's <i>weiter leben</i> .	185
Fig. 36	Dust-jacket of the first German edition of Sebald's <i>Austerlitz</i> (2001).	232
Fig. 37	Dust-jacket of Pausewang's <i>Reise im August</i> (1992).	263

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INTRODUCTION

Between January 1981 and August 1982 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a series of reminiscences by prominent authors of their childhood and adolescence in the Third Reich. Looking back over three decades to their formative years under Nazism, they recount a range of experiences: some of the Hitler Youth, and others of racial persecution. In his foreword to the subsequent anthology of these texts – entitled *Meine Schulzeit im Dritten Reich: Erinnerungen deutscher Schriftsteller* (1982) – Marcel Reich-Ranicki questioned the way in which the past was being remembered in Germany at the time. He writes:

wie war es eigentlich damals, als überall Hakenkreuzfahnen wehten und die SA marschierte ‘in ruhig festem Schritt’? Über die historischen Fakten sind wir informiert. An wissenschaftlichen Werken mangelt es nicht. Unentwegt werden wir mit Dokumenten aus der Zeit des ‘Dritten Reiches’ versorgt, mit Fakten und Daten jeglicher Art beliefert. Was sich auf der Ebene, auf der Geschichte entschieden wird, abgespielt hat, ist ungefähr bekannt. Und doch: Wer ist schon sicher, er sei hinreichend unterrichtet? Viele von uns befürchten, überinformiert und trotzdem unwissend zu sein. Trotzdem oder eben deshalb? Vor allem aber: Wie war es auf der anderen, auf der niederen Ebene, auf der die Weltgeschichte erlitten wird?¹³

Here, Reich-Ranicki emphasises society’s compendious knowledge about the events of the Third Reich era, but, in asking ‘wie war es eigentlich damals?’, he questions the extent to which this can be said to equate to knowledge of ‘what it was really like’. He suggests that the wealth of documentary and technical accounts of Nazism obscures the individual’s understanding of those events and what it was like to experience them. People are ‘informiert’, but not ‘unterrichtet’, and, as a result, are ‘unwissend’. Two aspects emerge from Reich-Ranicki’s comments here: firstly, he suggests that there is a

¹³ Marcel Reich-Ranicki (ed.), *Meine Schulzeit im Dritten Reich: Erinnerungen deutscher Schriftsteller* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1982), p. 9. The writers in the anthology were born between 1919 and 1929.

desire for experiential accounts which include not only *what happened*, but *how it felt* to experience it at the time; secondly, he puts forward the idea that people's knowledge of the Third Reich is divided between what is known to have happened on the 'Geschichtsebene', and the events as experienced 'auf der niederen Ebene', suggesting a disjuncture between public and private experiences and narratives of history.

It is now three decades since Reich-Ranicki's comments and nearly seventy years after the end of the Second World War. In the intervening period, the Third Reich has remained entrenched in German public and private memory. The context of that memory has changed significantly, most recently in light of the watershed of German Unification, which saw an end to the forty-year division between East and West. New approaches to the subject of the Third Reich have emerged within German culture, as a result both of the changing context and of important moments of national remembering, such as the major anniversaries of the end of the Second World War in 1995 and 2005. These events have given an added impetus to the interest in the Third Reich and its legacy, both on the part of those who lived through this time, and those who, coming after, attempt to make sense of what was and remains a defining period of Germany history.

The post-Unification era has been shaped by a series of public engagements with the subject of Nazism: what Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove term 'memory contests'.¹⁴ These are defined as 'highly dynamic public engagements with the past that are triggered by an event that is perceived as a massive disturbance of a community's self-understanding'.¹⁵ Such debates deal with competing interpretations of the past, which are

¹⁴ They suggest this term as a more dynamic alternative to the process of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'.

¹⁵ Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, 'Introduction', in *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. by Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2006), pp. 1-21, here p. 2.

crucial to the self understanding of individuals and nations. As such, they are closely linked with identity. The frequency and intensity of such debates demonstrate the centrality of National Socialism – and the ways in which it is depicted – to contemporary Germany.

One such memory contest was the debate on the part played by ‘ordinary’ Germans in the Third Reich. This is exemplified by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996), published in German in the same year, which provoked widespread debate in the German media and led many to reassess their parents’ or grandparents’ complicity in Nazi atrocities. Similarly, the *Wehrmachtausstellung*, first displayed between 1995-1999 and in a revised format between 2001-2004, focused on war crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front from 1941-1944. Although surrounded by controversy – it had to be suspended due to multiple labelling inaccuracies – the exhibition radically altered the widely-held, unblemished view of the *Wehrmacht*, demonstrating that it had worked in close collaboration with the SS and SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) in providing infrastructure for, and in some cases participating in, the killing of prisoners of war, Jews, and other civilians.¹⁶

A further example of changing approaches to the past can be found in the shift of focus which occurred during the 1990s away from crimes and atrocities committed by Germans, to the widespread suffering and sense of victimhood resulting from their experience of the Second World War. Publications such as W.G. Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999), Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* (2002), and Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* (2002) marked a change in public discussions about German wartime suffering, aided by

¹⁶ For a full account of this, see Chloe Paver, “‘Ein Stück langweiliger als die Wehrmachtausstellung, aber dafür repräsentativer’: the Exhibition Fotofeldpost as Riposte to the Wehrmacht Exhibition”, in *German Memory Contests*, pp. 107-25.

a number of books and television series on the flight and expulsions of Germans from the Eastern territories, the Allied bombing of German cities, and the rape of German women by Soviet soldiers.¹⁷ While this attention to German victimhood initially ran the risk of being seen as a relativisation of Nazi crimes, the result of this ongoing discourse has been a climate in which, as Stuart Taberner observes, the presentation of German wartime suffering is ‘typically seen not as a descent into revisionism [...] but as the final stage in Germany’s coming to terms with its past and an indication of the country’s new normality’.¹⁸

At the same time, works such as Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* (1995) sought to demythologise the view of the perpetrators through a more complex portrayal of the moral issues involved. Indeed, the boundaries between the categories of victim (*Opfer*), perpetrator (*Täter*) and bystander (*Mitläufer*), as established in the immediate post-war period, have blurred; and post-Unification writing on the subject both reflects, and contributes to, this trend. It is intended, as Aleida Assmann argues, to be therapeutic and not political,¹⁹ and focuses on healing the perceived divide between being ‘überinformiert’ and yet ‘unwissend’.

Within this context, the anxiety which Reich-Ranicki expressed in *Meine Schulzeit* remains acute. With the growing awareness that the last generation of eye-witnesses to experience Nazism will soon be gone, and with them the immediacy of first-

¹⁷ See, for example, Guido Knopp, *Die große Flucht. Das Schicksal der Vertriebenen* (München: Econ, 2001) and the accompanying ZDF series which first aired in 2001, as well as *Dresden* (dir. by Roland Suso Richter, 2006). Narratives of German wartime suffering appeared during the 1950s; however, it is clear that the particular post-Unification context created a space for such narratives to enter the public sphere as never before.

¹⁸ Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, ‘Introduction’, in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (Rochester/NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2006), pp. 1-17, here p. 8.

¹⁹ Aleida Assmann, ‘On the (In)compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory’, *German Life and Letters*, 59 (2006), 187-200, here pp. 198-200.

hand memory, narratives of their experience have gained currency, leading Norbert Frei to dub this period the ‘Dekade der Zeitzeugen’.²⁰ At the same time, the post-*Wende* period has been supplemented by a body of literature dominated by accounts from the perspective of those born after the end of the Third Reich. Such stories are structured around inter-generational communication, as individuals, taught in history classes about the events of their grandparents’ lifetime, now seek to discern their own place within the historical narrative. These family stories and the resulting *Generationenromane* commonly focus on private, familial experience of Nazism, as a corrective to a perceived emphasis on a more collective approach.²¹ In contrast to the more accusatory stance taken in the *Väterliteratur* genre of the 1970s and 1980s, which Helmut Schmitz describes as the ‘tribunalisation of family relationships’,²² recent family novels are often characterised by an attempt at empathy and understanding. Where ‘tribunalisation’ is depicted, this is frequently intended to show its inadequacies.²³

The critic Harald Welzer has used the term ‘gefühlte Geschichte’ to describe the kind of responses to this concern which focus on experience, rather than ‘factual knowledge’, or what Schmitz terms a ‘shift both in historiographical and popular discourse from a history of “hard facts” to “story”, human interest and

²⁰ Norbert Frei, *1945 und Wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (München: Beck, 2005), p. 24. He uses this term to refer to the period 1995-2005 though it is equally applicable to the entire post-*Wende* period to date.

²¹ For a discussion of recent ‘family novels’ which take this approach, see Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2005).

²² Helmut Schmitz, *On Their Own Terms: The Legacy of National Socialism in Post-1990 German Fiction* (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2004), p. 60.

²³ See, for example, Schlink’s *Der Vorleser*, Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* and Tanja Dückers’s *Himmelskörper* (2004) in which the accusatory approach of the post-war generation is shown to have a negative effect on their relationship to the past and, consequently, to the present.

emotionalisation'.²⁴ Welzer attributes the popularity of recent publications such as Grass's *Im Krebsgang* and Friedrich's *Der Brand* in part to the fact that they are closer to the 'gefühlte Geschichte der Bundesbürger', telling stories of German suffering, rather than of Nazi crimes.²⁵ They provide embellished narratives of the past. Here, 'gefühlte Geschichte' comprises the stories of individuals told within families and communities, but which are not deemed to be 'official', public accounts of history. Furthermore, narratives which are situated within the framework of 'gefühlte Geschichte' both give an account of, and appeal to, emotions: 'sie sprechen die Gefühle an.'²⁶ Similarly, Frei considers 'gefühlte Geschichte' to function through its appeal to sentiment as it facilitates the 'Wiederbelebung [der] Vergangenheit im Modus des emotionalen Nacherlebens'.²⁷

Post-1990 representations of growing up in the Third Reich offer, or appear to offer, just such a 'gefühlte Geschichte'. Indeed, it is remarkable how many such accounts focus on childhood. For many, childhood, rooted both in a literal and poetic sense in the private sphere, offers a more personal view of history, not fettered by public rhetoric and adult concerns, but rather accessing and representing the most direct experience of Nazism and the Second World War. The experience of childhood offers the essence of what Schmitz terms the 'Alltag im Faschismus',²⁸ which can be viewed as an acute form of a wider concern with accounts of the past. In addition, such accounts seem to respond

²⁴ Helmut Schmitz, 'Introduction', in *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 1-31, here p. 5.

²⁵ Harald Welzer, 'Schön unscharf: Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane', *Mittelweg* 36 (2004), 53-64, here p. 53.

²⁶ Harald Welzer, Interview, 'Im Gedächtniswohnzimmer: Warum sind Bücher über die eigene Familiengeschichte so erfolgreich? Ein Zeit-Gespräch mit dem Sozialpsychologen Harald Welzer über das private Erinnern', *Die Zeit*, 25 March 2004, pp. 43-6, here p. 43.

²⁷ Norbert Frei, 'Gefühlte Geschichte', *Die Zeit*, 21 October 2004, p. 3. This is, of course, a potentially problematic response and one which will be discussed throughout the thesis.

²⁸ Helmut Schmitz, 'Soundscapes of the Third Reich: Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde*', in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past: Representations of National Socialism in Contemporary Germanic Literature*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 119-41, here p. 121.

directly to the desire to secure some kind of narrative of ‘authentic experience’: ‘authentic’ both in terms of being ‘first hand’, and in possessing an ‘experiential’ quality in contrast to purely factual material on the topic.

Although present in cultural discourse since 1945, the conditions of Unification have triggered a renewed interest in this topic, and the past two decades have seen a steady outpouring of memoirs, novels, anthologies of oral testimony, films, and museum exhibitions about those who grew up in the Third Reich, both within Germany and abroad. The primary concern of these narratives – within different contexts and genres – is to articulate the *experience* of formative years spent in the Third Reich. In this way, they both respond and contribute to Reich-Ranicki’s concern that people are ‘überinformiert und trotzdem unwissend’.

This thesis examines responses to the question ‘what was it like to grow up in the Third Reich’ with reference to narratives within museums, cinema, and autobiographical and fictional literature since 1990. The central question – ‘wie war es eigentlich damals?’ – has been posed and answered in a variety of ways and, as I demonstrate in the course of this study, has frequently been a source of controversy and public outrage.²⁹ In treating this selection of material, I am primarily interested in two questions: firstly, *how* is the experience of growing up in the Third Reich depicted? I look at the discourses of childhood with which these narratives interact, and examine the aesthetic means with which childhood and adolescence are recalled, represented and imagined.

Secondly, I consider the wider function of these texts within the post-1990 context. Any public engagement with the past necessarily raises questions about identity

²⁹ For example, the controversy surrounding Martin Walser and his *Friedenspreisrede* in 1998, and Günter Grass’s revelation in 2006 that he had been in the SS. These will be discussed in Chapter Three.

in the present, on both a national and individual level. Post-Unification public discourse has been dominated by discussions about the complex and often contentious issue of German identity in the Berlin Republic. The unforeseen collapse of the GDR and the rapid unification of the two German states with their contrasting political and ideological systems, posed problems of identity, including the question of how to integrate the history of the Third Reich into this new self-image.

In bringing together this selection of material I hope to demonstrate that narratives of growing up in the Third Reich are central to contemporary discussions of German memory and identity, in that they explore origins, something which childhood is seen to embody. In so doing, these works form part of a discourse associated with what I term the ‘search for a usable childhood’. In his study *War Stories: the Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (2001) Robert G. Moeller coins the phrase ‘the search for a usable past’ to describe the search for, and construction of, a narrative of German victimhood in West Germany after the war.³⁰ This ‘usable past’ encompasses accounts of history which are useful to the present, both in attempting to come to terms with the individual’s, or nation’s history, and in the formation of the nation’s identity at home and abroad.

Based on Moeller’s notion, the ‘search for a usable childhood’ suggests that the Berlin Republic’s search for identity is being undertaken through an engagement with the nation’s own ‘childhood’: its origins in the Third Reich. This is not intended as a normative framework: a version of the past which is ‘usable’, in the sense of acceptable. Rather, it is a descriptive term, which incorporates a range of narratives that seek to

³⁰ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley and London: U of California P, 2001), p. 20.

engage with personal, family, and national stories of the past, rooted in the experience of growing up.

In order to provide a framework for the discussion of representations of childhood under Nazism in post-1990 German culture, the remainder of this Introduction will consider the physical, textual, and temporal contexts of the material treated in the five main chapters. Firstly, I describe the known ‘Erfahrungsräume’ of growing up in the Third Reich, looking at the spaces in which childhood was experienced. This brief outline draws on historical studies of growing up under Nazism. Secondly, as narratives, the works under discussion in this thesis portray their protagonists’ development as a series of connected events which advance temporally. This means that they engage not only with childhood, but also frequently with its end and the transition to adulthood. In order to contextualise this discussion, I provide an outline of popular Western discourses relating to childhood. This incorporates both a historical perspective and an account of childhood as it is represented in contemporary culture, and in particular the child’s role in the German literary and cinematic tradition. Because the end of childhood is complicated by the concept of adolescence, I include this in my discussion. These discourses underpin the narratives examined in the study.

Finally, because the watershed constituted by Unification has provided a changed context in which to read cultural engagements with the legacy of Nazism, it is necessary to consider what came before. Indeed, the works discussed in this thesis question traditional notions of, and myths about, the experience of childhood in the Third Reich as they have been perpetuated in conventional literary and cinematic storytelling since 1945.

Growing up in the Third Reich: 'Erfahrungsräume'

There is great diversity of experience amongst those who grew up in the Third Reich. As a movement, National Socialism tapped into the energy and positive potential of the young. Thus, for those children who were deemed 'acceptable' by the regime, the experience of childhood was dominated to a large extent by Nazism. This domination is most obviously shown by the large proportion of young people who were members of the Hitler Youth,³¹ which emerged from the multiple youth organisations within the Weimar Republic.³² The 'Gesetz über die Hitlerjugend', established in December 1936, enshrined the organisation's role in law. As well as making Hitler Youth membership compulsory for all German youth aged ten to eighteen, it further amplified the ideological place of youth within the Third Reich: 'von der Jugend hängt die Zukunft des deutschen Volkes ab. Die gesamte deutsche Jugend muß deshalb auf ihre zukünftigen Pflichten vorbereitet

³¹ The individual youth organisations which made up the Hitler Youth were divided by gender, with the 'Jungvolk' and 'Hitlerjugend' for boys, and the 'Jungmädel' and 'Bund deutscher Mädel' for girls. Girls' socialisation during the Third Reich was in many respects similar to that of their male contemporaries. As Michael H. Kater suggests, 'girls were integrated into the larger Nazi youth movement in a manner similar to the way boys were treated, with little planning from above to account for gender difference', Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (London: Harvard UP, 2004), p. 73. Indeed, the sense of equality between girls and boys it engendered was part of the reason for the popularity of the BDM, see Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), p. 120. At the same time, however, there was a marked difference in the activities of the two gender divisions, and in what was expected of their members. BDM activities were largely gender-specific, in line with National Socialist ideology and the perceived needs of the regime: emphasis was placed on the importance of each girl's duty to become a mother, and a bearer of German culture, see Pine, p. 121. For further scholarly treatment of the BDM, see Dagmar Reese, 'The BDM generation: a female generation in transition from dictatorship to democracy', in *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770-1968*, ed. by Mark Roseman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. 227-247; Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, pp. 117-137; Lisa Pine, 'Creating Conformity: The Training of Girls in the Bund Deutscher Mädel', *European History Quarterly*, 33 (2003), 367-85; and Kater, *Hitler Youth*, pp. 70-113. Like the female division, the emphasis within the male division of the Hitler Youth was placed on becoming 'bearers of the new Reich', see Kater, *Hitler Youth*, p. 15. This was to be done through winning (by force) and shaping the new Germany, in which that culture was to be expressed. Where the girls were, to a large extent, prepared in the skills of motherhood and home-making, the boys were trained in military skills. On this subject, see also: Kater, pp. 28-48; and Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, pp. 95-117.

³² Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, translated from the German by Richard Deveson (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 89-93.

werden.’³³ The Hitler Youth augmented the National Socialist education programme as a whole, which was intended to prepare the young for their future as members of the ‘Thousand Year Reich’. Its principal purpose was to condition German youth to undertake ‘the ultimate Nazi goal of winning new living space in foreign lands’.³⁴

The school was another primary locus of indoctrination. With the process of *Gleichschaltung* in 1933, the education syllabus was altered to include and to emphasise subjects relating to racial, national, and political ideas; by 1938, official texts had been introduced to focus on these subjects more systematically. The intention was, as Robert B. Kane writes, ‘to inculcate the regime’s nationalist spirit and racial principles into the school-age population, bolstering the work of the HJ [*Hitler Jugend*]’.³⁵ Education was intended to strengthen obedience to the Party line. Dorothy Macardle comments in her study of German schoolchildren in the Third Reich that: ‘the critical faculty develops rapidly, if it is encouraged, from the age of fourteen or fifteen on, but in these young Germans it atrophied [...] They were not taught to reason.’³⁶ The system sought to achieve the ‘Entmündigung’ of youth.³⁷

The educational system was further altered to include the establishment of a series of élite schools: the *Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten* (NaPolAs), the *Adolf-Hitler-Schulen* and the *Ordensburgen*.³⁸ At these élite educational institutions, pupils were instructed in National Socialist ideology and prepared for their future role as

³³ ‘Gesetz über die Hitlerjugend’, 1st December 1936, http://www.documentarchiv.de/ns/1936/hj_ges.html [accessed 9 September 2011].

³⁴ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, p. 15.

³⁵ Robert B. Kane, *Disobedience and Conspiracy in the German Army 1918-1945* (London: McFarland & Co., 2002), p. 107.

³⁶ Dorothy Macardle, *Children of Europe: A Study of the Children of Liberated Countries: Their War-Time Experiences, their Reactions, and their Needs, with a Note on Germany* (London: Gollancz, 1949), p. 25.

³⁷ Matthias von Hellfeld and Arno Klönne (eds.), *Die betrogene Generation: Jugend im Faschismus* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1985), p. 345.

³⁸ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, pp. 71-2.

members of the privileged class – even more so than their contemporaries in ordinary schools. In her recent study of education in Nazi Germany, Lisa Pine writes:

these institutions represented a microcosm of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* by fostering the leadership principle, promoting competitiveness and emphasising life as a struggle and survival of the ‘fittest’. They encouraged physical prowess. They excoriated the ‘enemies of the Reich’, in particular the Jews, Communists and Socialists. They emphasised racial purity, glorified war and fostered militarism.³⁹

As well as moving to exert control over the young within the educational system and as part of their extra-curricular activities, the National Socialist regime sought to exercise influence from birth, and even beforehand: the SS-run ‘Lebensborn’ programme encouraged young women and adolescent girls to ‘schenk dem Führer ein Kind’.⁴⁰ Children who fitted the regime’s racial requirements became a commodity, to be born under the Party’s control, educated under its supervision, ordered by its programme in their free time, and thus equipped, according to their background, to be its servants, members and leaders.

Those who were not deemed ‘acceptable’ were dealt with very differently. The National Socialist treatment of children defined by the regime as Jewish excluded them from educational establishments, in the same way that Jewish adults were being excluded from all areas of public life. The ‘Gesetz gegen die Überfüllung deutscher Schulen und Hochschulen’ in April 1933 set a cap on the total number of Jewish pupils at 1.5 per cent of the total enrolment figures.⁴¹ When the threat of Nazism to Jewish citizens became increasingly urgent, many children were sent out of Germany, either to friends and

³⁹ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, p. 72.

⁴⁰ Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 246.

⁴¹ Marion Kaplan, ‘The School Lives of Jewish Children and Youth in the Third Reich’, *Jewish History*, 11 (1997), 41-52, here p. 41.

relatives, or with the *Kindertransporte*. The *Kindertransport* initiative or ‘Refugee Children Movement’ was a formalised programme, run by the Central British Fund for German Jewry, which facilitated the emigration of ten thousand children and teenagers from central and Eastern Europe to the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1939.⁴² Within the Third Reich, children were also concealed: some remained ‘visible’, masked with a false identity and fictional origins; others – the majority – were kept hidden from sight.⁴³ In addition, from 1938 onwards, five thousand children became the victims of the Nazi euthanasia programme. Code-named ‘Aktion T4’, it was intended to eliminate individuals with ‘cognitive or developmental impairment, severe physical disability, or incurable mental illness’.⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the war, the profound effects of these diverse conditions, and of Nazism and the Second World War as a whole, on the experience of growing up, were revealed. The scale and impact of Nazi indoctrination was reflected in the practical, but also ideological, difficulties faced by the occupying powers. The high death toll resulting from the war meant that many families were incomplete or fragmented: by the end of the war 250,000 German children had lost both parents and ‘1,250,000 had become fatherless’.⁴⁵ International humanitarian efforts were launched across Europe in order to reunite families, and to re-house children. Furthermore, the proportion of children who had been socialised under Nazism required attention. As part of the programme of denazification (*Entnazifizierung*), which was designed to eradicate National Socialist

⁴² Simone Gigliotti, *The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), p. 15. See also Vera K. Fast, *Children’s Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴³ Howard Greenfeld, *The Hidden Children* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993), p. 3.

⁴⁴ Patricia Heberer, ‘The Nazi “Euthanasia” Program’, in *The Routledge History of the Holocaust* ed. by Jonathan C. Friedman, (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 137-48, here p. 138.

⁴⁵ Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p. 342.

thought and ideology from political, economic, cultural, and intellectual life, individuals' relationship to the Nazi party was scrutinised. This process was also considered for those aged under eighteen. As Jaimey Fisher has observed: 'the denazification of the young was a contentious issue after the war because of their unclear status as adult agents; their age complicated the already murky issues of guilt in the context in general.'⁴⁶ In the years after the war the complex issue of German guilt, as well as the moral or political agency of minors, began to be addressed. On the one hand, the Hitler Youth had participated in the Second World War, and their efforts, both on the Home Front and as soldiers, undeniably prolonged this conflict. However, their age obscured the question of complicity. In early 1947 a 'youth amnesty' was enacted in eastern Germany which 'exempted the vast majority of young East Germans from the on-going denazification process'.⁴⁷ It pronounced German youth 'too young to be held accountable for Nazism'.⁴⁸ A similar youth amnesty was introduced in the US zone in August 1946 and in the British and French zones in May 1947.⁴⁹ This is striking because, in declaring these juveniles innocent, there was a suggestion that they might be guilty, or at least culpable. However, these former Hitler Youth members were simultaneously faced with the recognition that they had to 'reflect on their cognitive map in view of the bankruptcy

⁴⁶ Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2007), p. 240.

⁴⁷ The amnesty applied to all those born after 1919. The anti-fascist youth committee in Chemnitz had previously issued a statement in July 1945 declaring all Germans, including youth 'mitschuldig' for Nazi crimes, in Alan McDougall, 'A Duty to Forget? The "Hitler Youth Generation" and the Transition from Nazism to Communism in Postwar East Germany, c.1945-49', *German History*, 26 (2008), 24-46, here p. 31.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, p. 253.

of the ideals they had been taught and the criminality of the regime in which they had been socialized'.⁵⁰

Jewish children initially represented one of the smallest groups of displaced young people after 1945, since children too young to work 'had been systematically exterminated'.⁵¹ Those few who survived had to try to come to terms with their experiences. For Jewish children who had been in hiding, there were limited possibilities: they could remain with the family, attempt to be united with surviving relatives, be rehoused with another family, or be sent to a Jewish orphanage.⁵² Margarete Myers Feinstein describes their situation and the challenge which it posed:

traumatized by feelings of abandonment and tremendous loss, hungry to make up for lost years of experiences and education, desperate for the comfort of family, and yet often fiercely independent, child survivors represented a tremendous challenge to the adults who would care for them and seek to ease their transition to life in normalcy.⁵³

The consequences of National Socialist policies during the Third Reich, as well as the events of the Second World War were far-reaching and profound, leaving an indelible mark on all those who grew up during this period, albeit in very different ways.

Defining Terms: Childhood, Adolescence and Growing up

In assembling the material in this study I have focused primarily on narratives which foreground the experience of growing up in the Third Reich. In all cases, the works I analyse attempt to narrate a process, taking place over a number of years, in which the

⁵⁰ A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 57.

⁵¹ Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge/MA and London: Harvard UP 2011), p. 11.

⁵² Heide Fehrenbach, 'War Orphans and Post-Fascist Families: Kinship and Belonging after 1945', in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. by Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (New York and Oxford: Berghahn 2010), pp. 175-96, here p. 179.

⁵³ Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany: 1945-1957* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 159.

protagonist, or protagonists, develop from being children to being adults. The term ‘growing up’ suggests the sense of trajectory and movement with which they engage. The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of this term is ‘to advance to or towards maturity’.⁵⁴ Similarly, the German equivalent – ‘heranwachsen’ – is defined by *Duden* as ‘allmählich ein bestimmtes Stadium der Reife erreichen’,⁵⁵ where ‘Reife’ is synonymous with adulthood. Thus growing up denotes both the sense of journey, and also pre-adulthood, which may be described as ‘childhood’. Indeed, *Duden* also defines ‘Kindheit’ as ‘[die] Zeit, in der jemand aufwächst [oder] heranwächst’.⁵⁶ Childhood is often used as a catch-all term to denote pre-adulthood, constituting everything before that state of maturity is reached. For the purposes of the present study, this includes everything from birth onwards.⁵⁷ It is commonly understood as a stage on the way to adulthood, the ‘not-yet-ness of adulthood’.⁵⁸

Childhood is both a natural state of being – a biological stage of development – and a social category or construct that emerges from the attitudes, beliefs, and values of particular societies at particular points in time, and is thus subject to changing definitions and expectations. It incorporates a large number of individuals whose abilities and level of dependence span a great range. Historical approaches to the study of childhood have formed a consensus that childhood embodies a plurality, ‘not only cross-culturally but also within cultures. [...] [C]hildhood is fragmented and stratified, by class, age, gender, and ethnicity, by urban or rural locations and by particularized identities cast for children

⁵⁴ ‘Growing up’, in Anon., ‘OED Online’, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 20 August 2011].

⁵⁵ ‘Heranwachsen’, in Anon., ‘Duden Online’, www.duden.de [accessed 20 August 2011].

⁵⁶ ‘Kindheit’, in *Duden Online*, www.duden.de [accessed 20 August 2011].

⁵⁷ The question as to when childhood can be said to begin is beyond the scope of the present study.

⁵⁸ David Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 44.

through disability or ill health'.⁵⁹ Education and schooling also have an important influence on the concept of childhood.⁶⁰ The demarcation between different stages of growing up is not always clear, even though it would seem commonsensical that a difference is to be found between a five-year-old, a twelve-year-old, and an eighteen-year-old. Most people use the term 'childhood' to refer to the period before adulthood, however adulthood is defined.

Furthermore, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are contested. Objective boundaries may be placed upon definitions of childhood, and the transition may be marked by a change in physical, psychological, social, moral or legal state. This might include, for example, biological maturation, such as the development of secondary sexual characteristics during puberty, the legal age of majority in a given jurisdiction,⁶¹ or the Catholic Church's teaching on the 'age of reason'.⁶² However, the margins of childhood are also open to subjective determination. This is important to consider in light of the narratives in this study, many of which are autobiographical, or based on autobiographical sources.

In addition, the conditions of war and racial persecution further unsettled these boundaries. Tara Zahra suggests that 'the war itself seemed to confuse the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Years of malnourishment had robbed children of inches and pounds, and they often appeared younger than their age'.⁶³ At the same time, in the absence of their parents, many children took on 'adult' responsibilities, such as

⁵⁹ Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 122.

⁶⁰ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Longman 2005), p. 6.

⁶¹ The criteria involved in the 'age of majority' may include criminal responsibility, marriage, consent, and alcohol or tobacco consumption.

⁶² *The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 14.

⁶³ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, p. 9.

caring for younger siblings. Children and adolescents also took on military responsibilities. During the final years of the war, boys as young as fifteen were being drafted into the *Wehrmacht* and the *Waffen-SS*,⁶⁴ and approximately 200,000 German children aged between nine and seventeen were recruited as soldiers, most of whom were deployed as anti-aircraft auxiliaries at air force or marine bases.⁶⁵ These children may well have looked even younger.

Thus because, in reality, young people growing up do not always fit such categories, and since the narratives I analyse in this study are attempting to show ‘what it was really like’, it is inappropriate to set rigid boundaries. I will therefore keep these open in my analysis of the following material. In so doing, I also want to consider adolescence, as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. I want to recognise that childhood is not always an appropriate framework in which to discuss older children, and that ideas about adolescence may be more appropriate.⁶⁶ This is not always necessary, and in some cases my analysis shows that although a protagonist may be identified physically, or through age, as an adolescent, this aspect is not engaged with in the exhibition, film, or text. Nevertheless, as I outline below, adolescence is situated within a specific conceptual framework which provides a useful background to the analysis of some works.

In the following section I provide a brief historical sketch of ideas about childhood in order to demonstrate their origins and development, and to show how they

⁶⁴ Karl Heinz Jahnke and Michael Buddrus, *Deutsche Jugend, 1933-1945: Eine Dokumentation* (Hamburg: VSA, 1989), p. 35.

⁶⁵ Hans Dietrich Nicolaisen, *Die Flakhelfer: Luftwaffenhelfer und Marinehelfer im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1981), p. 11.

⁶⁶ This more recent, more contested term is frequently neglected in literary studies of childhood in which adolescent figures, whose adolescence is thematised within the text, are regarded by critics as children. This is outlined in the Literature Review, see below pp. 45-52.

‘subtly structure the ways in which children are thought about in Western cultures’.⁶⁷ I then consider the place of childhood in contemporary thought, structuring my discussion around four points of consensus identified by Jenny Hockey and Allison James in their thorough historical study of the emergence of ideas about childhood, *Growing Up and Growing Old: Ageing and Dependency in the Life Course* (1993).⁶⁸

Understanding Childhood: Historical Approaches

There has been considerable scholarly debate surrounding the emergence of childhood within Western civilisation. In his seminal, though now much contested, work *Centuries of Childhood* (1962)⁶⁹ Philippe Ariès suggests that the medieval world had no conception of children as ‘other’ and that consequently the child was considered a miniature adult. While this aspect of Ariès’s research is now regarded as flawed,⁷⁰ scholars do, however, support the idea that the very notion of ‘a child’ is both historically and culturally conditioned, and that it was only in the mid-seventeenth century that the idea of children *as children*, rather than as incomplete adults, emerged. This is what Phyllis Gaffney terms the ‘deficiency paradigm’, which had prevailed in Western Europe since the Greeks.⁷¹ The Aristotelian model, for example, saw the child as important for its

⁶⁷ Jenny Hockey and Allison James, *Growing Up and Growing Old: Ageing and Dependency in the Life Course* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 60.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, translated from the French by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

⁷⁰ See, for example, Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood and the Middle Ages* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1990) and James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages 1100-1350* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995), both of whom refute Ariès’s thesis.

⁷¹ Phyllis Gaffney, *Constructions of Childhood and Youth in Old French Narrative* (Farnham/Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), p. 10.

potential, rather than for itself; an immature specimen of the mature human.⁷² Similarly, Plato was principally interested in the child as the ‘not-yet-competent’, rather than simply as a person of limited age.⁷³

In the later Christian West, examples from the New Testament demonstrate how the idea of the child as subordinate persisted into this period. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus exhorts his disciples to humble themselves by ‘becom[ing] like children’ in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁴ In this passage the Greek word ‘paidion’ is used to signify ‘children’, a term used with reference to those under the age of twelve who, during this period, had no social status or political significance.⁷⁵ Becoming ‘like a child’ is thus linked to humility here: to become as a child is to become someone without social status. Elsewhere, in St Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians the author writes: ‘when I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.’⁷⁶ Here, the concept of the ‘child’ connotes a quality of simplicity pertaining specifically to children.

These New Testament ideas, however, did not succeed in dislodging the enduring Old Testament notions of childhood, which saw the child, like any human, as being tainted by Original Sin. This view was supported by theologians such as St Augustine,⁷⁷ although he also viewed childhood as the embodiment of the kind of

⁷² See Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1990), pp. 6-9.

⁷³ Andrew Stables, *Childhood and the Philosophy of Education: An Anti-Aristotelian Perspective* (London and New York: Continuum International, 2008), p. 26.

⁷⁴ Matthew 18.3-4.

⁷⁵ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 264.

⁷⁶ I Corinthians 13:11.

⁷⁷ Martha Ellen Stortz, “‘Where Or When Was Your Servant Innocent?’: Augustine on Childhood’, in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. by Marcia JoAnn Bunge (Grand Rapids/Mich. and Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 78-103, here p. 82.

humility that characterised Christian discipleship.⁷⁸ The idea of childhood as a period of deficiency, in which the child was subordinate to the adult, endured throughout the medieval period. James A. Schultz argues that, in Middle High German narratives, the hero's childhood becomes increasingly important, and its depiction receives more attention.⁷⁹ In the early modern period, the Christian idea of the child as inherently wicked, born in sin, was particularly maintained in Calvinist thought.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Émile* (1762) is widely considered to have radically changed perceptions of childhood, suggesting that the child arrived in the world in a state of innocence which was then gradually corrupted.⁸⁰ He argued that humankind was essentially good, and that this goodness was to be found in the child in a primal condition. According to Rousseau, by educating children according to 'natural' principles these qualities could be properly nurtured. As Debbie Pinfold writes, '*Émile* was translated into German in the year of its publication and had a profound influence on contemporary German writers who were deeply affected by the idea of the child's original innocence.'⁸¹

It was the dual concepts of the child's innocence and association with the natural world which most profoundly influenced attitudes towards, and concepts of, childhood during this period, and which were later adopted by the Romantics, who undertook a glorification of childhood. Angela Winkler sees this reflected in a significant body of literature during this period: 'das Bild des Kindes vermittelt Qualitäten, die zum Kanon

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 13-4.

⁷⁹ Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood*, p. 266.

⁸⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, translated from the French by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979). For a detailed discussion, see Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 37-51.

⁸¹ Debbie Pinfold, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye Among the Blind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 11.

des romantischen Programms gehören: Spontaneität, Kreativität, ausufernde Phantasie, Naivität, ewiges Werden, Unkenntnis der Konventionen und Regeln, Fähigkeit der selbstvergessenen Hingabe an Gefühle, an die Natur, an Sinnliches und Übersinnliches.’⁸² The significant turning-point during this period is the evolution of a concept of childhood which views the child as an ‘ontology in its own right’.⁸³ For example, in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) Goethe ‘setzt sich für eine Kindheit ein, die in ihrem Eigenwert akzeptiert und nicht nur als Aufbauphase für das spätere Erwachsenenleben angesehen wird’.⁸⁴

In *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795) Friedrich Schiller describes the child as: ‘eine Vergegenwärtigung des Ideals, nicht zwar des erfüllten, aber des aufgegebenen, und es ist also keineswegs die Vorstellung seiner Bedürftigkeit und Schranken, es ist ganz im Gegenteil die Vorstellung seiner reinen und freien Kraft, seiner Integrität, seiner Unendlichkeit.’⁸⁵ Schiller suggests that there is a timelessness about childhood, paving the way for it to be viewed in a nostalgic light. Indeed, the Romantics ‘first drew attention to the idea of the child as an area of self-knowledge lying within each individual’.⁸⁶ Looked at like this, childhood represents a state of being cut off from the adult world, which is yearned for after its loss, through socialisation, or through corruption by the adult world. Similarly, the child’s innate closeness to nature could be

⁸² Angela Winkler, *Das romantische Kind: Ein poetischer Typus von Goethe bis Thomas Mann* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg UP, 2000), p. 31.

⁸³ Jenks, *Childhood*, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Winkler, *Das romantische Kind*, p. 18.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, in Friedrich Schiller, *Erzählungen, Theoretische Schriften*, ed. by Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert, 9th edn (= *Sämtliche Werke: Erzählungen, Theoretische Schriften*, ed. by Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert, 1958-1993, 5 vols, vol. 5) (München: Hanser, 1993), pp. 694-781, here p. 697. See also Pinfold, *The Child’s View*, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁶ Diana Gittins, *The Child in Question* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 81.

corrupted by civilisation and culture.⁸⁷ This notion persisted throughout the nineteenth century.⁸⁸

In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud positioned sexuality – which he considered to be a biological given – as a natural part of the developmental process.⁸⁹ This popularised the notion of the innately sexual child, producing a ‘model of the child as a sexual being’.⁹⁰ What Freud terms the ‘Wißtrieb’ or ‘Wißbegierde’ is, in psychoanalytic theory, one of the drives linked to sexuality which is in turn part of a quest for origins.⁹¹ Michel Foucault would later support Freud’s thesis, arguing that this had always been the case: that children’s sexuality had been repressed, and that, ironically, this repression merely increased with the reception of Freud’s writings on the subject.⁹² Indeed, Freud’s discussion of childhood sexuality caused a furore and he was accused of ‘re-invoking “original sin” in a libidinal form’.⁹³ Like the earlier Old Testament and Calvinist conception, this ‘rests on the assumption of an initial evil or corruption within the child’.⁹⁴ And while this was not the stance which Freud took, it was undoubtedly how it was most commonly received, as the id – ‘the special province of the child’ – was ‘the libidinal repository of insatiable desire’.⁹⁵ Freud’s views sit uneasily with the Romantic view of childhood: as Hockey and James rightly point out, ‘the

⁸⁷ Pinfold points out that while not all representations of the child during this period were the ‘ethereal ideal’, this image has nevertheless endured, in Pinfold, *The Child’s View*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ For a detailed overview of this period see Pinfold, *The Child’s View*, pp. 17-21.

⁸⁹ See Sigmund Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991).

⁹⁰ Carolin Duttlinger, ‘The Ethics of Curiosity: Ruth Klüger, *weiter leben*’, *Oxford German Studies*, 38 (2009), 218-32, here, p. 221.

⁹¹ Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, p. 96.

⁹² See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1990).

⁹³ Jenks, *Childhood*, p. 124.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

mythology of Western childhood innocence cannot embrace children's sexuality, either contemporarily or in the past.'⁹⁶

Throughout the history of childhood two 'codes' of thinking and talking about this subject emerge:⁹⁷ what Robert Pattison considers the 'Old and New Testament' views.⁹⁸ However, it is the positive, Romantic view of childhood which has prevailed and which continues to dominate cultural notions in this area. Rainer Hagen argues that German writers and readers have been particularly fascinated by, and susceptible to, the idealised, Romantic view of the child and childhood.⁹⁹ Pinfold also supports this idea: 'German writers, even those dealing with the Third Reich, are deeply saturated with the Romantic myth of childhood that has dominated German thinking on the subject for over two centuries.'¹⁰⁰

Understanding Childhood Today: Four Points of Consensus

In *Growing Up and Growing Old* Hockey and James identify four points of consensus on contemporary ideas about childhood: that the child is 'other'; that it has a special nature; that it is innocent; and that, because of its innocence, it is vulnerable and dependent upon adults.¹⁰¹ The first of these points suggests that the child is set apart as 'other'. Jenks begins his study of childhood with the acknowledgement that the child is 'familiar to us and yet strange; he or she inhabits our world and yet seems to answer to another; he or she is essentially of ourselves and yet appears to display a systematically different order

⁹⁶ Hockey and James, *Growing Up*, p. 69.

⁹⁷ Jenks, *Childhood*, p. 62.

⁹⁸ Robert Pattison, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1978), p. 20. See Pinfold, *The Child's View*, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁹ Rainer Hagen, *Kinder, wie sie im Buche stehen* (München: List, 1967), p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 158.

¹⁰¹ Hockey and James, *Growing Up*, p. 60.

of being'.¹⁰² Here 'other' can be understood as difference, in the sense that the child inhabits different spaces from adults.¹⁰³

As the historical outline above has shown, the consensus that childhood is different is a longstanding one, and can be traced back to Antiquity. The child's innate 'difference' signifies that children are deemed to be both of the adult world, yet simultaneously separated from it because of their age, which, in the modern Western treatment of children, situates them in different social spaces, such as the nursery and the school. David Archard contends that 'the particular nature of children is separate; it clearly and distinctly sets them apart from adults. Children neither work nor play alongside adults; they do not participate in the adult world of law and politics'.¹⁰⁴ It is not the fact of difference, but rather the nature of that difference which has changed over the centuries. Whilst in some cases the child's difference has connotations of inferiority and danger, in others the difference can be imbued with positive connotations. For example, in Rousseau's opinion, 'nature wants children to be children before they are men [...]. Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it.'¹⁰⁵ In this view, the child's difference is to be protected and nurtured.

As part of this 'difference', the child is viewed as being linked to nature, both in the sense of possessing a specific nature, and in being close to Nature. This special nature has, from the Romantics through to the twentieth century, suggested that the child and childhood are associated with a kind of inner self, and with the individual's personal

¹⁰² Jenks, *Childhood*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰³ Although Hockey and James use the term 'other', they do not do so specifically in the sense of Emmanuel Lévinas's concept of alterity.

¹⁰⁴ Archard, *Children*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ Rousseau, *Émile*, p. 90.

history.¹⁰⁶ The idea of the interiority of the Self was further cemented as a result of Freud's work in the field of psychoanalysis, which popularised the notion of childhood as the site of the origins of the individual self. Freud stressed the decisive role of the early years of infancy and childhood in laying down the 'basic character structure of a person',¹⁰⁷ and, as a result of his work, early childhood experience came to be regarded more widely as bearing some origins of the personality and character of the adult which the child would become. Thus childhood can be used effectively to suggest a desire or search for origins, for both individual and collective identity. This is manifested in the established literary and cinematic trope of childhood as a physical space or location. For example, childhood is frequently likened to a garden – be it a pre-Lapsarian Garden of Eden, or what John Holt calls the 'walled garden' of childhood.¹⁰⁸

Thirdly, the child is innocent. This image can be traced to Romanticism, as outlined above. According to Rousseau, innocence was the child's essential quality, where innocence is constructed around a kind of naïvety and initial incorruptibility. Education and knowledge, as well as sexuality, are corrupting influences which 'spoil' the child's natural innocence. Here, as with the child's closeness to nature, the pre-Lapsarian Eden becomes closely linked with childhood, where the child represents Adam before the Fall. This suggests not only innocence in the sense of being free from sin or corruption, but also the idea of innocence as ignorance.¹⁰⁹ In modern Western cultures children's ignorance is used as a means with which to preserve the state of childhood,

¹⁰⁶ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (London: Virago, 1995), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ Don Dinkmeyer, *Child Development: The Emerging Self* (Englewood Cliffs/NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ John Holt, *Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children* (Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1974), p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Adam and Eve were permitted to remain in the Garden of Eden provided they did not eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

and if children acquire what is viewed as premature knowledge of sex and death, then a taboo is seen to be broken. The sociologist Jenny Kitzinger asserts that ‘a child is ignorant if she doesn’t know what adults want her to know, but innocent if she doesn’t know what adults don’t want her to know’.¹¹⁰ Mary Jane Kehily and Heather Montgomery identify this privileging of innocence as involving adults in a potentially harmful denial of childhood sexuality.¹¹¹

The fourth and final theme which contributes to contemporary ideas about childhood is that because of its innocence, the child is vulnerable and dependent upon adults. John Holt asserts that:

most people who believe in the institution of childhood as we know it see it as a kind of walled garden in which children, being small and weak, are protected from the harshness of the world outside until they become strong and clever enough to cope with it.¹¹²

Because the child is vulnerable to corruption it requires protection. As a result of this, children are commonly deemed not to have any political or social responsibility, and with this positioning of children as outside responsibility, comes the idea that children are without personal, moral or social agency. By this I mean the ability of children to understand their own world and act upon it, or their capacity to originate and direct actions for given purposes. Agency is ‘influenced by the belief in one’s effectiveness in

¹¹⁰ Jenny Kitzinger, ‘Who Are You Kidding? Children, Power, and the Struggle Against Sexual Abuse’, in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. by Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Falmer, 1997), pp. 165-90, here p. 169.

¹¹¹ Mary Jane Kehily and Heather Montgomery, ‘Innocence and Experience: a Historical Approach to Childhood and Sexuality’, in *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, ed. by Mary Jane Kehily (New York: Open UP, 2004), pp. 57-75, here p. 68.

¹¹² Holt, *Escape from Childhood*, pp. 26-7.

performing specific tasks, which is termed *self-efficacy*, as well as by one's actual skill'.¹¹³

Kitzinger suggests that it is the notion of innocence which positions the child as passive and without agency. Similarly, James Kincaid attributes this to the dominating notion of childhood innocence which 'empties the child of its own political agency, so that it may more perfectly fulfil the symbolic demands we make upon it'.¹¹⁴ This is evident, for example, in writing about children during the Second World War. In the earliest post-1945 study of children and war, Macardle's *Children of Europe* (1949), the author comments that German children were 'Hitler's first victims. Fired to a white heat of devotion, they were then hammered and twisted, like iron on the anvil, into weapons for his ends'.¹¹⁵ Macardle's reading suggests the malleability of children, emphasising what is taken to be their essential passiveness. The historian Nicholas Stargardt counters this idea in his recent study of childhood during World War II, writing that the prevailing rhetoric used to discuss such children results in an image of them as 'the objects rather than the subjects of history'.¹¹⁶

'Die Grenzen der Kindheit': When Does Childhood End?

The narratives discussed in this thesis recount the experience of growing up, and, as such, generate a developmental view of childhood. It is therefore necessary to look at the contested boundaries of childhood and ask where, or when, childhood ends. What are, to

¹¹³ Barry J. Zimmerman and Timothy J. Cleary, 'Adolescents' Development of Personal Agency: The Role of Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Self-Regulatory Skill', in *Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents*, ed. by Frank Pajares and Timothy C. Urdan (Greenwich/CT: IAP, 2006), pp. 45-71, here p. 45.

¹¹⁴ James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 347.

¹¹⁵ Macardle, *Children of Europe*, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, p. 10.

use Hilke Lorenz's term, 'die Grenzen der Kindheit'?¹¹⁷ If 'growing up' is the journey to 'maturity', then we must consider the stations on that journey. Stanley Hall is generally credited with having 'discovered' adolescence in 1904,¹¹⁸ and since then, it has increasingly been recognised as an important life stage. The term 'adolescence', both in English and in German, derives from the Latin 'adolescere', 'to grow up'.¹¹⁹ Like childhood, adolescence eludes clear definitions, and has a range of connotations. It can be defined by age, by social criteria, by physiological development, by state of mind, or by a combination of the above. Of the term 'adolescence' Carsten Gansel writes:

als Adoleszenz gilt allgemein jene Phase, die den 'Abschied von der Kindheit' und den Eintritt in das Erwachsenenalter bezeichnet. [...] Damit ist auch gesagt, dass die Besonderheit dieser lebensgeschichtlichen Phase im Mit- und Gegeneinander von körperlichen, psychischen und sozialen Prozessen besteht. [...] Es geht sozusagen um die 'Neuprogrammierung' der physiologischen, psychologischen und psychosozialen Systeme.¹²⁰

Adolescence, then, is conceived of as a time of development and change: a movement or progression from one state, childhood, to another, adulthood. However, unlike 'growing up', adolescence represents a liminal period. This transitional phase between childhood and full inclusion into adulthood is often accompanied by public manifestations of that liminal period, by rites of passage. The French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep first formally put forward the concept of rites of passage in his work *Les rites de passage* (1908), to denote such social, religious, and political rituals. Rites of passage have three phases: separation, transition, and re-incorporation. The transitional period is the liminal

¹¹⁷ Hilke Lorenz, *Kriegskinder: Schicksal einer Generation* (München: List, 2003), p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Granville Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, and Religion* (London: Hesperides Press, 2008).

¹¹⁹ 'Adolescence', in *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 20 August 2011].

¹²⁰ Carsten Gansel, 'Bilder von Kindheit und Adoleszenz in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur nach 1989', in *Deutsch-russische Germanistik: Ergebnisse, Perspektiven und Desideraten der Zusammenarbeit*, ed. by Dirk Kemper and Iris Bäcker (Moscow: Stimmen der Slavischen Kultur, 2008), pp. 283-97, here p. 288.

stage, as the subject moves from one status to another, but belongs to neither.¹²¹ Adolescence marks the arrival at the ‘limen’ – literally, the threshold. Rites of passage announce to society that that threshold is being, or has been, crossed.

In the late 1960s, the cultural anthropologist Victor Turner focused further attention on van Gennep’s notion of the liminal stage, and argued that in order for an individual to pass from childhood to adulthood he/she had to pass through a state of liminality, what he terms the ‘betwixt and between’ (transition) period.¹²² Turner suggests that:

during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger,’ or ‘liminar’) becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state.¹²³

The individual embarks upon a journey, moving from the security of identity as a child to adulthood. Erik Erikson described adolescence as a period during which the individual moves from one stable identity (childhood) to another (adulthood), and that an ‘identity crisis’ of some form, even a muted one, is a universal aspect of development from childhood to adulthood.¹²⁴ To speak of childhood, then, is necessarily to include a consideration of the transition out of childhood into adulthood, which is deemed to occur through this transitional process of adolescence.

¹²¹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, translated from the French by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 21.

¹²² Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 95.

¹²³ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1974), p. 232.

¹²⁴ See Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

Childhood and the Discourse of Authenticity

In addition to these definitions of growing up, I want to briefly consider some conceptual associations with childhood which inform the works in this study. Authenticity has many shades of meaning, from stark adherence to facts, to a less rigid concept of a quality of truthfulness, what we might term ‘inner’ or ‘symbolic truth’.¹²⁵ It is the latter which is most commonly associated with the child, which has long been a cultural symbol of authenticity. This has two principal modes of expression. Firstly, authenticity means presenting an account which is rooted in private experience. In his study of post-1990 approaches to the Third Reich, Schmitz writes:

there is much to suggest that, while the period of National Socialism is a deeply ‘political’ era, [...] post-unification literary treatment does what it can to depoliticize it, in other words to ‘return’ the perspective to those who experienced the Third Reich and take it ‘out of the hands’ of the post-war evaluation and adjudication [...]. There is a search for the ‘authentic’ voice, unmediated by the political correctness of post-war responses to National Socialism.¹²⁶

Here, Schmitz uses ‘authentic’ to describe de-politicised accounts of the Third Reich: those which give account without what he views as the moral strictures of post-war perspectives. If, for Schmitz, the ‘authentic’ is the private, then the fact that John Wall identifies childhood as increasingly privatised is significant. Wall explores how the development of childhood has shifted over the past three centuries. He suggests that:

a seismic shift has gradually taken place [...], led by developed countries, in how to understand the idea of ‘childhood’ itself [...]. Childhood has become increasingly privatized, individualized, and invisible to the public and social sphere (which has been conceptually separated from the private sphere).¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (London: Yale UP, 1984), p. 2.

¹²⁶ Schmitz, ‘Introduction’, in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past*, pp. 1-11, here p. 15.

¹²⁷ John Wall, ‘Fallen Angels: A Contemporary Christian Ethical Ontology of Childhood’, *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 8 (2004), 160-84, here p. 162.

Taken together, Wall's and Schmitz's work suggests that the child's experience, rooted in the private sphere, provides the essence of the 'authentic voice'.

'Authentic' in this context also comes to mean an inner truth which writing about childhood – be it autobiographical or fictional – is frequently considered to evoke. A brief look at theoretical writing on the subject suggests this. In his study of autobiographical writing about childhood – '*Kindheitsmuster*': *Kindheit als Thema autobiographischer Dichtung* (1982) – Werner Brettschneider argues that autobiographical depictions of childhood are authentic:

weil die Wahrheit nicht durch Soziologie oder Psychologie, sondern durch Dichtung zur Aussage gelangt, weil allen behandelten Büchern gemeinsam die Frage nach dem Ich und seinem Werden ist, und das ist die Frage nach der deutschen Geschichte, wie sie uns in diesem Jahrhundert der beiden Weltkriege überwältigt hat und wie sie sich heute den Lebenden als Aufgabe stellt.¹²⁸

In Brettschneider's view, childhood itself becomes a guarantor of authenticity when it is the subject of an autobiographical account. Similarly, in her study of childhood autobiographies, Marianne Gullestad argues that 'childhood reminiscences, in particular, can be true without being historically accurate'.¹²⁹ This raises significant questions when applied to writing about the Holocaust and the Third Reich, as I will explore in subsequent chapters.

We also find this trend in writing about cinema. For example, in a review of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997) the author Imre Kertész describes the film as 'authentic': 'der Geist, die Seele dieses Films sind authentisch, dieser Film berührt uns

¹²⁸ Werner Brettschneider, '*Kindheitsmuster*': *Kindheit als Thema autobiographischer Dichtung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1982), p. 5.

¹²⁹ Marianne Gullestad, 'Modernity, Self, and Childhood in the Analysis of Life Stories', in *Imagined Childhoods: Self and Society in Autobiographical Accounts*, ed. by Marianne Gullestad (Oslo and Oxford: Scandinavian UP, 1996), pp. 1-41, here p. 24.

mit der Kraft des ältesten Zaubers, des Märchens.’¹³⁰ For Kertész, the film’s historical authenticity lies not in its material details, but rather in its special quality of authenticity, by which he means the appeal it makes to the audience’s emotions, enabling them to engage with the events and characters. This effect is heightened through the evocation of the fairy-tale and its associations with childhood. These pronouncements suggest that the ‘truth’ unequivocally comes out through the poetic depiction of childhood, either of one’s own, or of childhood in general. This is an idea which appears repeatedly in critical literature on cultural representations of childhood and which is a central focus of the present study.

Because of this intimate association with ‘inner’ or ‘poetic’ truth, the child is recognised as a powerful tool with which to engage an audience, reader or visitor. They are invested with symbolic capital. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, children are an important vehicle with which to negotiate complex and difficult issues, because the child is ‘rich in potential meanings and extends an open invitation to writers with very different agendas’.¹³¹ In an article on the use of the juvenile protagonist in Weimar literature and film John Daniel Stahl observes that ‘the child could embody contradictory visions; he or she could represent both the hopes of innocent individuals and the collective drives and fears of a desperate society’.¹³² In addition, ‘by virtue of their childhood innocence, their promise of hope, their unalloyed vulnerability, children are somehow a force for good in the world.’¹³³ Furthermore, images of, and narratives about

¹³⁰ Imre Kertész, ‘Wem gehört Auschwitz?’, *Die Zeit*, 19 November 1998, pp. 55-6.

¹³¹ Pinfold, *The Child’s View*, p. 9.

¹³² John Daniel Stahl, ‘Moral Despair and the Child as Symbol of Hope in Pre-World War II Berlin’, *Children’s Literature*, 14 (1986), 83-104, here p. 83.

¹³³ Richard Mills, ‘Perspectives of Childhood’, in *Childhood Studies: A Reader in Perspectives of Childhood*, ed. by Jean Mills and Richard Mills (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 7-39, here p. 17.

children invite an emotional response: ‘they are a signal for a release of emotions.’¹³⁴ The image of the suffering child may well elicit an emotional response from a reader or audience, with the effect that ethical and emotional judgements are substituted with an uncritical response. Feelings, authenticity, and the child are thus inextricably linked: the essence of ‘gefühlte Geschichte’. This approach, of course, is not without potential problems and these will be signalled and explored throughout the thesis.

Growing up in the Third Reich: Post-1945 Representations

Representations of growing up under Nazism are by no means a post-1990 phenomenon, and can be traced from the immediate end of the war to Unification in both East and West German political and cultural discourse. It is impossible to give an exhaustive account of these here; instead, I will outline some of the major examples and trends which have influenced post-1990 discourse, and which provide an important background to the subsequent analysis.

In 1945, the practical questions of post-war rebuilding and regeneration, as well as the complex ideological effects of Nazism, not only on the young, but on all those who had lived under it, were pressing. This was reflected in both literature and film. The problem of how to deal with the “indoctrinated” young¹³⁵ received widespread attention in the immediate post-war period. As Fisher outlines in his study *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (2007), there was a tendency in early post-war political and cultural discourse to rely on discussions about ‘youth and generation to navigate and negotiate the most difficult

¹³⁴ Patricia Holland, *What is a Child? Popular Images of Childhood Photography* (London: Virago, 2004), p. 15.

¹³⁵ Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, p. 12.

questions of Germany's recent history'.¹³⁶ Post-war cinema in both East and West Germany – primarily the *Trümmerfilme*¹³⁷ – portrayed children who had experienced Nazism and depicted them either in a Third Reich or post-war setting. In East Germany, films such as *Irgendwo in Berlin* (1949) and *Rotation* (1949), produced by DEFA (*Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft*), the state-owned monopoly for film production in East Germany, focused on the child as a symbol with which to draw attention to the concerns of post-war reconstruction. They could represent either bright hope for the future, or the 'most fanatical of a fatally fanatical movement'.¹³⁸

In the Federal Republic of the 1950s, *Heimatfilme* dominated, with enormous commercial success. Typical themes in such films were the importance of a spiritual tie to the land, and the decadence of the urban. These films 'long for a time of innocence, of the childhood of the nation before its fall from grace'.¹³⁹ Whilst these were not solely escapist films, their rural settings expressed a longing for a lost world. Sabine Hake writes that 'the apolitical notion of homeland provided an alternative to both the compromised history of German nationalism and to the contested status of the two Germanys during the Cold War'.¹⁴⁰ Thus they provided a means not only to engage with the past, but also with the present.

One of the most influential filmic portrayals of children in the Third Reich was Bernhard Wicki's celebrated anti-war film *Die Brücke* (1959), which tells the story of a group of Hitler Youth members who fight, and die, attempting to defend a bridge from

¹³⁶ Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, p. 2.

¹³⁷ German feature films made between 1945-1951, pertaining to the recent past or present.

¹³⁸ Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, p. 127.

¹³⁹ Heidi M. Schlipphacke, *Nostalgia after Nazism: History, Home, and Affect in German and Austrian Literature and Film* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2010), p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 109.

the American advance. The film followed others which depicted school-aged children in the Third Reich, such as *Kinder, Mütter und ein General* (1955). Unlike these earlier films, however, *Die Brücke* portrayed the young soldiers as innocents, corrupted by National Socialist indoctrination perpetrated by adults.

In the year of *Die Brücke*'s release Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* was published. Here, everyday life in the Third Reich is narrated from the perspective of Oskar Matzerath who, apparently born with an adult's capacity for thought and perception, retains the outward appearance of a three-year-old throughout the Third Reich.¹⁴¹ Grass's focus on his own generation continued in *Katz und Maus* (1961) and *Hundejahre* (1963). Siegfried Lenz's *Deutschstunde* (1968) was an imaginative and picaresque description of life in the Third Reich from the perspective of the juvenile protagonist, Siggi Jepsen. According to Reich-Ranicki, Lenz's novel was originally received poorly by group members at meetings of the *Gruppe 47* in the mid-1960s: 'es schüttelten manche bedenklich den Kopf. Wen interessiert das noch? – fragten sie skeptisch.'¹⁴² However, Lenz's book initially sold in excess of 1.7 million copies, and has been translated into twenty-four languages.

In a 1990 assessment of post-war West Germany literature, Frank Schirrmacher claims that works such as Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* and Lenz's *Deutschstunde* were so well received because they depicted Nazism as 'eine böse, aber märchenhaft verzerrte Kindheitserinnerung, in mythischen Vorzeiten angesiedelt und aus aller Geschichte

¹⁴¹ Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (München: dtv, 2003).

¹⁴² Reich-Ranicki, *Meine Schulzeit*, p. 10.

herausgefallen'.¹⁴³ In Lenz's case, Reich-Ranicki's remarks suggest that his fellow-writers failed to grasp this. Furthermore, subsequent analysis of this body of literature would seem to indicate that the 'märchenhaft' quality attributed by Schirmmacher to these works is intended not as a way of removing these memories from history, but rather of confronting and assimilating that history and their place within it.

In East Germany, the context of engaging with the past was very different. The GDR had been constructed in part upon the anti-fascist founding myth which figured East Germany as built upon the foundations of anti-fascist resistance in the Third Reich. It served, as Wolfgang Emmerich comments:

a double function: both as a national doctrine, which was upheld for forty years, and as a comforting lifelong illusion – considering that the majority of the citizens of the SBZ (*Sovietische Besatzungszone*) and later the GDR had no more been anti-fascists than the citizens of West Germany.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, one of the earliest attempts at confronting childhood in the Third Reich in literary form was originally published in East Germany: Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976). It came as a sharp contrast to the GDR foundation myth, and influenced both East and West German approaches to the National Socialist past.¹⁴⁵ Wolf was motivated to write by what she saw as an unacknowledged continuity between Nazism and the GDR. She explains:

wir haben also den Faschismus in die Bundesrepublik delegiert [...]. *Kindheitsmuster* unternahm den Versuch, den Alltag von damals und den von heute zu beschreiben, um zu zeigen: das sind doch die gleichen Personen, die

¹⁴³ Frank Schirmmacher, 'Abschied von der Literatur der Bundesrepublik: Neue Pässe, neue Identitäten, neue Lebensläufe: Über die Kündigung einiger Mythen des westdeutschen Bewußtseins', *FAZ*, 2 October 1990, Buchmesse Beilage, p. 1. Cited in Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁴ Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Cultural Memory East v. West: Is what belongs together really growing together?', *From Stasiland to Ostalgie: The GDR Twenty Years After*, ed. by Karen Leeder (= *Oxford German Studies*, 38 (2006)), 242-54, here p. 247.

¹⁴⁵ Caroline Schaumann, *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women's Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), p. 63.

damals lebten und die heute auch noch leben. [...] Vor und nach der Stunde Null existieren die gleichen Leute.¹⁴⁶

The author undertakes a quest to find ‘das Kind, das ich gewesen [bin]’¹⁴⁷ and ‘seeks to recall her childhood [...] in the hope of finding some connection between the patterns of behaviour developed then and her own troubled identity’.¹⁴⁸ Wolf’s work is highly self-critical, and she was particularly vocal in response to Helmut Kohl’s pronouncement of his generation’s innocence, expressed in a speech in January 1984 as the ‘Gnade der späten Geburt’.¹⁴⁹ Wolf writes: ‘nie habe ich etwas wie ‘Gnade’ über den späten Zeitpunkt meiner Geburt, etwas wie Entlassensein aus der Verantwortung empfinden können.’¹⁵⁰ In addition, she was overwhelmed by the positive response to her text: ‘wie ich aus Briefen und Gesprächen weiß, haben viele Leute bei diesem Buch die nackte Alltagsbeschreibung als das wichtigste genommen, als eine Bestätigung ihrer eigenen Erlebnisse.’¹⁵¹ The resonance found in her ‘Alltagsbeschreibung’ has two sources: on the one hand, it speaks to those who experienced the Third Reich in the same way; on the other hand, it provides a view of everyday life, rooted in the private, rather than the political sphere.

The 1970s and 1980s also saw the publication of a series of autobiographical accounts in East and West Germany, which were to an extent influenced by Wolf’s account. Michael H. Kater writes of these that:

¹⁴⁶ Christa Wolf, ‘Eine Diskussion über *Kindheitsmuster*’, *German Quarterly*, 57 (1984), 91-5, here p. 92.

¹⁴⁷ Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* (München: Luchterhand, 2002), p. 11.

¹⁴⁸ Robert K. Shirer, *Difficulties of Saying ‘I’: the narrator as protagonist in Christa Wolf’s Kindheitsmuster and Uwe Johnson’s Jahrestage* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Helmut Kohl, ‘Rede vor der Knesset’, 24 January 1984, <http://www.dradio.de/dlr/sendungen/kalender/227514/> [accessed 20 January 2012].

¹⁵⁰ Christa Wolf, *Christa Wolf, ein Arbeitsbuch: Studien, Dokumente, Bibliographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1990), p. 449.

¹⁵¹ Wolf, ‘Eine Diskussion über *Kindheitsmuster*’, p. 94.

by the late 1970s, when these former Hitler boys and Hitler girls were becoming grandparents and their past appeared less threatening, they started to recollect [...]. It was the trauma of their knowledge, about the rule of force and the intolerance engendered by a totalitarian dictatorship, that had kept them from remembering earlier.¹⁵²

Accounts produced during these years include Thomas Bernhard's *Ein Kind, Die Ursache, Der Keller, Der Atem* (1975); Renate Finckh's *Sie versprachen uns die Zukunft* (1979); Peter Härtling's *Nachgetragene Liebe* (1980); Eva Zeller's *Solange ich denken kann* (1981); Erich Loest's *Durch die Erde ein Riß* (1981); Max von der Grün's *Wie war das eigentlich: Kindheit und Jugend im Dritten Reich* (1981); Margarete Hannsmann's *Der helle Tag bricht an: Ein Kind wird Nazi* (1982); Carola Stern's *In den Netzen der Erinnerung* (1986); and Gudrun Pausewang's *Fern von der Rosinkawiese* (1989). These texts, in which the authors are often highly self-critical, are characterised by a sense of conflict between history and memory, and they express their difficulty in reconciling their childhood memories with their retrospective knowledge of the extent of National Socialist crimes, and their sense of shame. Childhood memory has been colonised by subsequent adult knowledge.

Texts such as these were most commonly written by members of what has been termed the 'Hitler Youth generation': a phrase commonly used to denote those born in the 1920s who were socialised during the Nazi period. In addition to this title, Alexander von Plato has termed them the 'disappointed generation', emphasising their disappointment at the ease with which the individual may be manipulated.¹⁵³ In an overview of interpretations of the term 'generation', including Karl Mannheim's seminal work *Das Problem der Generationen* (1928), Susan Suleiman demonstrates that the

¹⁵² Kater, *Hitler Youth*, p. 265.

¹⁵³ Alexander von Plato, 'The Hitler Youth Generation and its Role in the Two Post-War German States', in *Generations in Conflict*, ed. by Mark Roseman, pp. 210-27, here p. 217.

prevailing definition of a 'generation' is that it is a group, held together by its members' broadly common age range, but more importantly, by their collective experience and possession of what is generally termed a 'generational consciousness'.¹⁵⁴ However, as a generation, members of what Kater terms the 'Nazi Regime Youth Cohort'¹⁵⁵ were not characterised as much by their collective experience, as by their condition at the end of the Second World War. As Mark Roseman argues, it is 'the particular psychological position of the Hitler Youth generation *after defeat* that gives it such a distinct profile'.¹⁵⁶ Many young people found themselves in a state of confusion, disillusionment, and instability. Indeed, 'most young people experienced 1945 not just as the collapse of National Socialism but also as the destruction of the German nation, an experience that produced a deep sense of shock, betrayal and uprooting.'¹⁵⁷ There thus exists a tension between youth's innocence of National Socialist crimes on the one hand, and simultaneous complicity in its systems and structures on the other. It is encapsulated in the words of the philologist Viktor Klemperer:

dieser Generation ist das Denken und Fühlen vom Abc an vergiftet worden, sie hat nie etwas anderes gelernt, gesehen, in sich eingeatmet als Nazismus; sie ist von sich aus vollkommen unschuldig, und ist doch ganz eingetaucht in die Erbsünde des Nazismus und ganz durchtränkt von ihr.¹⁵⁸

The attempt to negotiate the problematic concept that youth was both 'unschuldig' and 'eingetaucht in die Erbsünde des Nazismus' is the central concern of many of the texts cited above.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, June Edmunds and Bryan S. Turner (eds.), *Generational Consciousness, Narrative, and Politics* (Lanham/Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

¹⁵⁵ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁶ Mark Roseman, 'Introduction', in *Generations in Conflict*, pp. 1-47, here p. 33.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Buddrus, 'A Generation Twice Betrayed: Youth Policy in the Transition from the Third Reich to the Soviet Zone of Occupation (1945-1946)', in *Generations in Conflict*, pp. 247-68, here p. 249.

¹⁵⁸ Viktor Klemperer, *Kultur: Erwägungen nach dem Zusammenbruch des Nazismus* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1946), p. 54.

Post-1990 Representations of Growing up in the Third Reich

In *Kindheitsmuster* Wolf writes that ‘der Tourismus in halbversunkene Kinderwelten blüht’.¹⁵⁹ In the Berlin Republic this ‘tourism’ has continued, perhaps in part aided by the fact that, as Kate Douglas contends, autobiographical accounts of childhood ‘pledge to offer experiences and stories of childhood for adult consumption, allowing adults to fantasize about their collective pasts and futures. Childhood lives are presented as available, desirable, and consumable’.¹⁶⁰ Since Unification, the growing awareness that the new rising generation has no first-hand experience of the National Socialist period has proved ‘a strong motivation for the writing of literary memoirs and “ordinary memoirs”’,¹⁶¹ as well as the production of other forms of cultural representation. In addition, Schmitz rightly interprets the continued interest in Nazi Germany, and in its children particularly, as an expression of the public’s acknowledgement that the disappearance of the Hitler Youth generation is now foreseeable. These factors provoke the need to pose anew the question of how the ‘Nazi past’ is to be remembered.¹⁶²

This process has continued since 2000. In March 2001 ZDF broadcast *Hitlers Kinder*, part of a series of programmes begun in the mid-1990s, under the direction of Guido Knopp, head of its contemporary history department. In April 2005 the election of former Hitler Youth Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI provoked further discussions in the German and foreign press. Similarly, the controversy surrounding

¹⁵⁹ Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁰ Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2010), p. 44.

¹⁶¹ Schmitz, *On Their Own Terms*, p. 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Günter Grass's *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* and Joachim Fest's *Ich nicht* in 2006 drew renewed attention to the Hitler Youth Generation.¹⁶³

As part of the wider subject of 'Hitler's children', interest in specific areas of children's experiences in this period has developed. For example, the lives of Jewish children during the Third Reich have received considerably greater attention since Unification. The number of Jewish children who survived the Holocaust is small: only 11 per cent of European Jewish children lived to see the end of the war, and roughly 1.5 million children and adolescents were murdered.¹⁶⁴ In an article on racial persecution perpetrated by the Nazis in France, Steven Jaron describes Jewish children as a 'liminal generation'. They are bound together by

a condition at once historical, existential and psychical which I understand, drawing on Freud, as *entre-deux*: the state of being between childhood or adolescence and adulthood; between Judaism and Christianity [...]; between memory and history.¹⁶⁵

Similarly, Susan Suleiman has termed this same age cohort the '1.5 generation'. By this she means 'child survivors of the Holocaust, too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have *been there* during the Nazi persecution of Jews'.¹⁶⁶ According to Suleiman, the specific experience of such children was two-fold: firstly, 'the trauma occurred (or at least, began) before the formation of stable identity that we associate with adulthood, and in some cases before

¹⁶³ For an analysis of these controversies and their impact, see Fuchs, *Phantoms*, pp. 161-200.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Krell, 'Child Survivors of the Holocaust: The Elderly Children and Their Adult Lives', in *And Life is Changed Forever: Holocaust Childhoods Remembered*, ed. by Martin Ira Glassner and Robert Krell (Michigan: Wayne State UP, 2006), pp. 1-17, here p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Steven Jaron, 'Autobiography and the Holocaust: An Examination of the Liminal Generation in France', *French Studies*, 56 (2002), 207-19, here p. 209.

¹⁶⁶ Susan R. Suleiman, 'The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust', *American Imago*, 59 (2002), 277-95, here p. 277.

any conscious sense of self’;¹⁶⁷ secondly, children often experienced ‘premature aging’, as they were forced to take on adult roles. In addition, her use of the phrase ‘adult understanding’ is striking in that it implies that children did indeed have an understanding of what was happening to them, but that it was in some way different or deficient. It is reminiscent of the ‘deficiency paradigm’ outlined above. Thus even these definitions of generation suggest certain attitudes towards those Jewish children who grew up in the Third Reich: they correspond to the idea of the child lacking in agency.

Looking at specifically National Socialist ‘Erfahrungsräume’, there has been an interest in German children’s experience of the élite educational establishments, for example: Christian Schneider’s *Das Erbe der Napola: Versuch einer Generationengeschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (1996), Hans Günther Zempelin’s *Des Teufels Kadett: Napola-Schüler von 1936 bis 1943. Gespräch mit einem Freund* (2001), and Johannes Leeb’s ‘Wir waren Hitlers Eliteschüler’: *Ehemalige Zöglinge der NS-Ausleseschulen brechen ihr Schweigen* (2001). In addition, recent literary works have treated the *Lebensborn* programme, for example: Birgit Bauer’s *Im Federhaus der Zeit* (2003) and Dorothee Schmitz-Köster’s *Kind L364: Eine Lebensborn-Familiengeschichte* (2007).

Children’s experience of the Second World War has also become prominent, and the term ‘Kriegskinder’ to denote this group is increasingly commonplace.¹⁶⁸ In his recent study *Die Erfindung der Erinnerung: Deutsche Kriegskindheiten im Gedächtnis der Gegenwart* (2010) Michael Heinlein proposes a reformulation of Frei’s statement

¹⁶⁷ Suleiman, ‘The 1.5 Generation’, p. 277.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Kriegskinder’ normally include children born in the 1930s and early 1940s who were not called into active service as *Flakhelfer* or recruits.

that after 1990 ‘soviel Hitler war nie’, observing ‘soviel *Kriegskindheit* war nie’.¹⁶⁹ Images of refugees fleeing Kosovo in the late 1990s (the first conflict in which the German Armed Forces had taken part since the end of the Second World War) raised this issue in people’s minds, and projects such as the Munich ‘Kriegskinder’ research scheme, entitled ‘Europäische Kriegskindheit im 2. Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen’, and the first *Internationaler Kriegskinderkongress* in 2005 in Frankfurt am Main encouraged eye-witnesses to meet and to articulate their experiences publicly.¹⁷⁰ In addition, a number of anthologies of oral testimony by those who experienced the Second World War as children and adolescents have also recently been published, including Hilke Lorenz’s *Kriegskinder: Schicksal einer Generation* (2003), Sabine Bode’s *Die vergessene Generation: Die Kriegskinder brechen ihr Schweigen* (2005) and Yury and Sonya Winterberg’s *Kriegskinder: Erinnerungen einer Generation* (2009).¹⁷¹ With their emphasis on ‘breaking the silence’, these texts contribute to a wider discourse of taboo-breaking in post-Unification Germany with regard to public discussion of Germans as victims of the Second World War.

This discourse of ‘breaking the silence’ is further bound up with Reich-Ranicki’s notion of being ‘überinformiert und trotzdem unwissend’: it suggests the need to reassess what is apparently *known* about historical events, as a result of the turn taken in the post-war conversation about the legacy of Nazism in the Berlin Republic. The generational

¹⁶⁹ Michael Heinlein, *Die Erfindung der Erinnerung: Deutsche Kriegskindheiten im Gedächtnis der Gegenwart* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ The ‘Kriegskindheit’ project began in 2003 explores the long-term effects of childhood trauma in war. See Anon., ‘The Childhood in War Project at the Munich University’, <http://www.warchildhood.net/html/english.html> [accessed 29 August 2011]. The *Kriegskinderkongress* in Frankfurt am Main 2004 proved extremely popular with over six-hundred attendees, see Lu Seegers, ‘Die Generation der Kriegskinder und ihre Botschaft für Europa sechzig Jahre nach Kriegsende’, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=766> [accessed 10 September 2011].

¹⁷¹ Each text compiles the experiences of a number of ‘Kriegskinder’.

shift which has seen those who grew up in the Third Reich become grandparents has instigated a change in interlocutors, so that children are no longer accusing their parents, but grandparents are answering their grandchildren's questions. The passage of time, and the caesura of Unification, have driven and shaped this turn. As a consequence, the testimony of 'what it was like' to live through this time gains currency, as do efforts to depict such testimony accessibly: in literature, film, and museum exhibitions, particularly in view of the fact that these eye-witnesses will soon no longer be able to communicate their own stories anew. Because of this, 'gefühlte Geschichte' becomes the vehicle for these inter- and intragenerational interactions. It both shapes, and is shaped by, a discourse which is driven by the question of what it was like to grow up in the Third Reich.

Literature Review

The subject of literary and filmic attempts to confront the Third Reich is, as Chloe Paver notes, a 'moving target', with new subjects for study appearing continuously.¹⁷² There has been significant critical interest in the subject of growing up in the Third Reich, including childhood and adolescence under Nazism in children's literature, in autobiography of childhood and in literary studies.

A number of historical studies have discussed the way in which children were educated and brought up in the Third Reich, and the effects of this.¹⁷³ The scope of these

¹⁷² Chloe Paver, *Refractions of the Third Reich in German and Austrian Fiction and Film* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁷³ Early studies include: Erika Mann's *Zehn Millionen Kinder: Die Erziehung der Jugend im Dritten Reich* (1938) and Hans-Jochen Gamm's *Führung und Verführung: Pädagogik des Nationalsozialismus* (1964). Recent studies include: Kater's *Hitler Youth* (2004); Stargardt's *Witnesses of War* (2005); Pine's *Education in Nazi Germany* (2010); Debórah Dwork's *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (1991); and Jane Marks's *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust* (1994).

works includes Jewish children in hiding, on the *Kindertransporte*, in the concentration camps; and non-Jewish children, including the experience and effects of National Socialist education and the Hitler Youth, and in particular young people's experience of the Second World War. The breadth and wealth of recent studies reflects the continued interest in the topic, and these works attempt to shed new light on a much researched area.

Autobiographical writing about childhood in the Third Reich has long been a topic of scholarly interest, although studies have typically focused on the autobiographical nature of the texts, from a genre perspective, rather than on their depiction of growing up.¹⁷⁴ Studies on post-1990 autobiography have been restricted to chapters, rather than whole works.¹⁷⁵ Gillian Lathey's *The Impossible Legacy: Identity and Purpose in Autobiographical Children's Literature Set in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (1999) provides a comparative study of autobiographical texts about wartime childhood experience by German, Jewish, and British authors for a child or adolescent readership. Similarly, Hamida Bosmajian's *Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature about Nazism and the Holocaust* (2002) focuses almost exclusively on texts written for children by authors who experienced the Third Reich as children and adolescents. Bosmajian explores children's texts which have either a Holocaust survivor or a former member of the Hitler Youth as a protagonist. These

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Barbara Saunders's *Contemporary German Autobiography: Literary Approaches to the Problem of Identity* (1985); Barbara Kosta's *Recasting Autobiography: Women's Counterfictions in Contemporary German Literature and Film* (1994); Gretchen Wieseahn's, *A Dubious Heritage: Questioning Identity in German Autobiographical Novels of the Postwar Generation* (1997); and Michael Jopling's, *Re-placing the Self: Fictional and Autobiographical Interplay in Modern German Narrative* (Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Weiss, Christa Wolf) (2001).

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, Werner Brettschneider's aforementioned 'Kindheitsmuster' (1982) and, more recently, Schmitz's *On Their Own Terms* (2004); Fuchs's, *Phantoms of War* (2008); and Schaumann's *Memory Matters* (2008).

critical works focus on aesthetic questions, such as how the language of the child can be recreated, and on the didactic question of how the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust should be depicted for a juvenile readership.

A number of recent critical works have focused exclusively on literary depictions of childhood and youth in German literature, including representations of the Third Reich. These focus particularly on the child's perspective as a narrative device. The Jewish child's perspective on the Third Reich has been examined in Tanja Hetzer's *Kinderblick auf die Shoah: Formen der Erinnerung bei Ilse Aichinger, Hubert Fichte und Danilo Kiš* (1999), as well as in a number of articles on individual texts.¹⁷⁶ These commonly explore the function of the child's perspective in depicting the events of the Holocaust, with the child as an 'unbeteiligter Beobachter'.¹⁷⁷ Hetzer argues that the child's perspective, often unqualified by the voice and retrospective knowledge of the adult writer, is used to create a more authentic sense of fear, as the child is unable to make sense of the events it observes. This in turn engages the reader, who is unsettled by the discrepancy between his/her own historical knowledge, and the child narrator's lack of understanding.¹⁷⁸ Hetzer views this as a contrast to the role of the child's perspective in literary accounts of non-Jewish children in the Third Reich which, in contrast, she considers reflect the desire to assume a position of innocence in history.

This topic is the specific focus of Debbie Pinfold's *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye Among the Blind* (2001). Pinfold undertakes a wide-ranging study of post-war texts about Nazism which use a child as narrator, or

¹⁷⁶ See, for example, Mark M. Anderson's article 'The Child Victim as Witness to the Holocaust: An American Story?', *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, 14 (2007), 1-22.

¹⁷⁷ Tanja Hetzer, *Kinderblick auf die Shoah: Formen der Erinnerung bei Ilse Aichinger, Hubert Fichte und Danilo Kiš* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), p. 10.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

focaliser, or both. She argues that the child is one of a number of traditional outsider figures who can be utilised as part of a defamiliarisation technique, which enables the reader to engage in new ways with the object of narration. It enables the audience or reader to see with ‘fresh eyes’ as the child is able to observe the perverted moral and political system of Nazism in a detached and therefore shocking way. This model of interpretation is built upon the foundational notion, as outlined above, that the child is different. Authors are also able to convey the horror of the period by depicting the corruption of the child by the state. This literary device provides many varied ways to approach the subject of German fascism and its ongoing legacy.

Pinfold’s work has been followed by others which undertake a similar kind of approach. Monika Spielmann’s *Aus den Augen des Kindes: Die Kinderperspektive in deutschsprachigen Romanen seit 1945* (2002) examines much of the same theoretical ground as Pinfold, whilst analysing a range of post-1945 texts, not specifically focused on the Third Reich.¹⁷⁹ Spielmann considers the child’s perspective as fulfilling four central functions: as a point of identification for the reader; as a means of exploring the psychological origins of the adult; as a means of autobiographical engagement with childhood; and as a means of critiquing society.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, Mechthild Barth’s *Mit den Augen des Kindes: Narrative Inszenierungen des kindlichen Blicks im 20. Jahrhundert* (2009) examines the function of the child’s perspective, although Barth engages with a much broader range of literature, including Boris Pasternak’s *Ljuvers Kindheit* (1922), Imre Kertész’s *Roman eines Schicksallosen* (1975), and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s*

¹⁷⁹ Spielmann provides a short history of concepts of childhood, from the Middle Ages to the present. She cites Ariès, but does not acknowledge the wide critical refutations of his work.

¹⁸⁰ For a summary of these arguments, see Spielmann, *Aus den Augen des Kindes* (Innsbruck: Universität Innsbruck, 2002), pp. 202-29.

Children (1981). Neither Barth nor Spielmann considers the research undertaken in Pinfold's study.¹⁸¹

Despite the similarity of title with Barth and Spielmann's respective works, Viktoria Hertling's edited volume *Mit den Augen eines Kindes: Children in the Holocaust, Children in Exile, Children under Fascism* (1998) deals not with the child's perspective but with the central question of the traumatic effects of racial persecution on Jewish children in the Third Reich, and treats, to a lesser extent, the effects of Nazi education. Based on conference proceedings, this wide-ranging study considers how the subject of childhood trauma has been treated in autobiographical and fictional texts, both for adults and children, since 1945, and the varied strategies used to articulate this trauma retrospectively. With a pre-Unification and broad European focus it provides a useful background to the present study. Similarly, the volume edited by Barbara Bauer and Waltraud Strickhausen in 1999, "*Für ein Kind war das anders*" – *traumatische Erfahrungen jüdischer Kinder und Jugendlicher im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, considers the subject of trauma in accounts by, and about, children in the Holocaust.

A frequent issue with scholarly works which engage with this topic is the problem of defining childhood. None of these works include a discussion of adolescence or the implications of the child's development. Pinfold concedes that her definition of childhood is fairly broad. This is the result of the chronological range of her texts, since, as she observes, 'the early twentieth century was not an era that embraced the idea of adolescence as a separate stage of existence'. It is also because the authors she discusses

¹⁸¹ Spielmann cites the doctoral thesis on which Pinfold's study was based, although she was unable to consult it. Barth does not cite Pinfold's study.

refer specifically to their teenage protagonists as ‘Kind’.¹⁸² ‘Thus’, she argues, ‘even as adolescents these figures contribute to their creators’ understanding of what it is to be a child and to have a childlike point of view.’¹⁸³ She ultimately argues that, although this broad categorisation may seem to ‘cover a multitude of sins’, the authors in the study are less concerned with children than with what it means to have a childlike perspective.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, the works under consideration in *this* study are not primarily concerned with an aestheticisation of the child and its perspective, but with creating a representation of a historical child and experience of growing up within a specific historical context. As such, whilst building on earlier studies of representations of childhood in the Third Reich, I provide an original analysis of this aspect of post-1990 German culture.

Finally, this study is by no means exhaustive: the post-1990 era has seen numerous accounts about growing up in the Third Reich,¹⁸⁵ which have provided useful background for this study and could also have been included more prominently or as objects of special study here. In the same way, several different schemes for organising the material suggested themselves along the way, since inevitably questions of memory, narrative, authenticity, agency, and the relationship between victimhood and guilt are prominent in all the texts discussed. However, by beginning with an analysis of recent museum displays and exhibitions, followed by German cinema, autobiographical works – by former members of the Hitler Youth, and by Jewish children – and finally, imagined accounts of growing up in the Third Reich, I am able to set the study within a material,

¹⁸² Pinfold, *The Child’s View*, p. 31.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Ludwig Harig’s *Weh dem, der aus der Reihe tanzt* (1990); Ulla Berkéwicz’s *Engel sind schwarz und weiß* (1992); Dieter Forte’s *Der Junge mit den blutigen Schuhen* (1995); Susanne Hirzel’s *Vom Ja zum Nein: Eine schwäbische Jugend 1933-1945* (2000); Joachim Fest’s *Ich nicht: Erinnerung an eine Kindheit und Jugend* (2006); and Ralph Giordano’s *Erinnerung eines Davongekommenen* (2007).

visual and literary context. This allows me – beyond the specific question of growing up – to foreground particular questions of genre and the expectations associated with it, in order to provide a wide-ranging examination of the topic after Unification.

CHAPTER ONE

Growing up in the Third Reich: The Physical Legacy

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 1: *Hitler Moves East: A Graphic Chronicle 1941-43*, David Levinthal and Garry Trudeau (1977).¹⁸⁶

This photograph, which appears to show a *Wehrmacht* soldier in the early 1940s, was first exhibited in 1977 and was the product of a project by American students David Levinthal and Garry Trudeau. In the publication that emerged, *Hitler Moves East: A Graphic Chronicle 1941-43* (1977), photographs, illustrations, and text excerpts are carefully arranged in a sequence which endeavours to recreate a documentary-style account of the advance of Hitler's Sixth Army into the USSR over the course of 1941-42, and their eventual rout by, and surrender to, Soviet forces in the winter of 1943. With their sepia tones and grainy resolution, the photographs evince the prevailing style of the era's reportage photography, invoking the celebrated battlefield images of the Hungarian

¹⁸⁶ David Levinthal, 'Hitler Moves East 1975-77', http://www.davidlevinthal.com/works_hme.html [accessed 2 October 2011]. Originally published in: David Levinthal and Garry Trudeau, *Hitler Moves East: A Graphic Chronicle 1941-43*, David Levinthal and Garry Trudeau (New York: powerHouse Books, 2008), p. 58.

combat photographer Robert Capa. However, far from being authentic photographs taken in the field, the prints show a series of what are in fact toy soldiers and dolls from the 1930s and 1940s which were arranged and displayed on model backdrops. Levinthal and Trudeau use the material culture of children and reframe it in order to produce what appears to be an authentic representation of past events. Significantly, when the publication first appeared, the artists were astonished at how quickly people believed the images were actual war photographs. Book shops routinely placed the volume in the history and not photography sections.¹⁸⁷

The composition of the images in *Hitler Moves East*, as well as in Levinthal's later collection *Mein Kampf* (1994), which narrates Hitler's rise to power and the Nazi campaign of persecution against the Jews, raises important questions about the possibility of authentic and mediated forms of representing the past. The desire to establish close links to historical events and eras goes hand in hand with the awareness that 'authenticity' in this context is elusive. The mediated character of any representation of the past comes into focus, just as the content of the representation itself does.

What makes the photographs particularly powerful, when their true mode of composition is revealed, is their use of toys. Levinthal obtained children's toys from shops and collectors in central Europe and was fascinated by their particular quality:

ever since I began working with toys, I have been intrigued with the idea that these seemingly benign objects could take on such incredible power and personality simply by the way they were photographed. I began to realize that by carefully selecting the depth of field and making it narrow, I could create a sense of movement and reality that was in fact not there.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Anon., 'John McWhinnie at GHB', http://www.johnmcwhinnie.com/index.php/gallery/details/david_levinthal_hitler_moves_east_vintage_photographs/ [accessed 9 September 2011].

¹⁸⁸ Blake Hallanan, 'Toy Story', http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/1998/sep/oct/articles/toy_story.html [accessed 9 September 2011].

The toys used by Levinthal in these photographs constitute part of the material reality of children who grew up in the Third Reich. Toys have a particular popular association with childhood as a time of recreation and play. The toys in themselves also reveal something about the historical period from which they derive.

In this chapter, I provide a close reading of a selection of temporary exhibitions and permanent displays at both national and regional level in Germany which seek to depict the experience of growing up in the Third Reich.¹⁸⁹ I address how museums construct meaning through the selection, arrangement and display of material culture within the exhibition space, as well as the inclusion of information and narratives in the form of labels and eye-witness testimony. I explore the variety of objects used to display the wide range of children's experience of Nazism, addressing in particular ideas about childhood and youth which they use as visual codes, as well as their narrative potential. Finally, I address the ways in which museums' representation of history can affect our understanding of past events.

Chloe Paver points out that the diversity of museum displays and exhibitions on a single subject, such as the Third Reich, precludes the drawing of sound generalisations about trends in exhibitions.¹⁹⁰ Museums can only construct exhibitions using the items at their disposal and are variously constrained by budget, location, overall emphasis and traditions. In addition, they are made up of directors, trustees, curators, academics, and consultants who all contribute to varying degrees to the research and design processes. In light of these methodological considerations, I will avoid direct comparisons between

¹⁸⁹ The exhibitions under discussion have appeared since 1990. They include permanent and temporary displays.

¹⁹⁰ Chloe E. M. Paver, 'Exhibiting the National Socialist Past: An Overview of Recent German Exhibitions', *Journal of European Studies*, 39 (2009), 225-49, here p. 226.

exhibitions, but rather explore the ways in which childhood under Nazism is put ‘on display’ and the established ideas about childhood and youth in contemporary Germany which this suggests.

History and Memory in the Museum

In post-*Wende* Germany we have seen a preoccupation with preserving the past as never before, with museums, exhibitions, and memorials of and about the Third Reich dominating the cultural landscape.¹⁹¹ In preserving and exhibiting the paraphernalia of Nazism the museum has become an important site of memory in which visitors can encounter this historical period. The history museum (and indeed the museum more generally) is commonly understood as an ‘inherently social institution’ which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits, and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit, ‘collecting society’s past to display to society’s present and preserve for society’s future’.¹⁹²

The role of the history museum has developed dramatically in recent years to the point where it has come to be regarded increasingly as a ‘memory institution’.¹⁹³ It has moved away from what Gail Anderson calls the ‘ivory tower of exclusivity’¹⁹⁴ to more inclusive forms of representation. In her introduction to *Museums and Memory* (2000) Susan Crane gives credence to John Locke’s assertion that memory is the ‘Storehouse of

¹⁹¹ For a wide-ranging study of this subject, see Chloe Paver and Bill Niven (eds.), *Memorialization in Germany since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁹² Sharon Roberts, ‘Minor Concerns: Representations of Children and Childhood in British Museums’, *Museum and Society*, 4 (2006), 152-65, here p. 152.

¹⁹³ Susan A. Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum’, *History and Theory*, 36 (1997), 44-63, here p. 45.

¹⁹⁴ Gail Anderson, ‘Introduction’, in *Reinventing the Museum – Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. by Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek/CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), pp. 1-9, here p. 1.

our Ideas'.¹⁹⁵ She writes: 'Locke renders intangible ideas into goods, cargo to be stored and protected until used. The externalizing of the memory function in museums literalizes Locke's metaphor: the museum stores memories.'¹⁹⁶ The museum as a storehouse of memory corresponds to the more inclusive planning of recent exhibitions and the increased recognition of the importance of individual eye-witnesses' oral testimonies, alongside more traditional forms of communicating history such as objects and conventionally scripted labels and historical texts. Over the past thirty years there has been a shift towards what Rosmarie Beier-de Haan terms 'micro-history, in which the emphasis is less on facts and more on the description of contexts and emotions, and in which the scientific analysis of sources is accompanied by inspiration, empathy, and understanding'.¹⁹⁷ This, Beier-de Haan suggests, leads to a 'shift from displaying grand histories of nation-states to focusing on everyday themes, experiences, and memories'.

Sigrid Godau observes of the development in museums in recent years: 'mehr und mehr ziehen [...] solche Ausstellungen die Aufmerksamkeit breiter Publikumsschichten auf sich, die umfassende Einblicke in historischen Epochen beziehungsweise deren alltägliche Hinterlassenschaften gewähren.'¹⁹⁸ The same is the case for the focus on individual life experiences and personal memories. Autobiographical documents and personal testimonies – in written form or on video – have become a 'staple of modern

¹⁹⁵ Susan A. Crane, 'Introduction', in *Museums and Memory*, ed. by Susan A. Crane (Stanford/CA: Stanford UP, 2000), pp. 1-17, here p. 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, 'Re-staging Histories and Identities', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. by Sharon MacDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 186-98, here p. 187.

¹⁹⁸ Sigrid Godau, 'Inszenierung oder Rekonstruktion? Zur Darstellung von Geschichte im Museum', in *Geschichte – Bild – Museum: Zur Darstellung von Geschichte im Museum*, ed. by Michael Fehr and Stefan Grohé (Köln: Wienand, 1989), pp. 199-212, here p. 199.

exhibitions’.¹⁹⁹ These can also be of use to museum curators who must rely much more on oral history, rather than simply the objects they display in order to evoke movement within exhibitions and emotional reaction. They provide a means of allowing for ‘multiple interpretations rather than a single authoritative account of the past’.²⁰⁰ This is in line with Joanna Laidler’s argument that museums are not ‘unreconstructed realities’ but rather ‘texts’, which can and should be examined’.²⁰¹ In this sense, the museum offers multiple narratives of the past which are as open to public scrutiny and contradiction as literary texts.

Indeed, the nature of museums is such that ‘picking and choosing, comparing and contrasting, judging and concluding are acts which constitute curatorial practice’.²⁰² As Susan Pearce writes: ‘all the material in our museum collections has been selected from the large range of possible choices by individuals who acted in the light of their own ideologies, conscious and unconscious, and is, accordingly, flawed as an historical record.’²⁰³ Similarly, Udo Größwald sees this increasingly pluralistic approach as the primary function of the modern museum: ‘so sollte sich das Museum als Teil sozialer Gedächtnisse verstehen, denn als prädestinierter Ort der Erinnerung bietet es Raum für die Präsentation verschiedener Fragmente, die Geschichte permanent (re)konstruieren.’²⁰⁴ By incorporating multiple memories of the past within exhibitions of history, museums increasingly attempt to respond to the widespread questioning of

¹⁹⁹ Beier-de Haan, ‘Re-staging Histories and Identities’, p. 187.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Joanna Laidler, ‘What Roles do Museums Play in Shaping our Understanding of the Holocaust?’, <http://www.phansw.org.au/publications/LaidlerEssay.pdf> [accessed 10 September 2011], 1-16, here p. 2.

²⁰² Gaynor Kavanagh, ‘Making Histories, Making Memories’, in *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. by Gaynor Kavanagh (London: Leicester UP, 1998), pp. 1-15, here p. 3.

²⁰³ Susan Pearce, ‘Introduction’, in *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. by Susan Pearce (London: Leicester UP, 1989), pp. 1-11, here p. 9.

²⁰⁴ Udo Größwald, ‘Das Museum als soziales Gedächtnis’, in *Erinnerungsstücke: Das Museum als soziales Gedächtnis*, ed. by Udo Größwald (Berlin: Hentrich, 1991), pp. 6-13, here p. 8.

authenticity in contemporary public discourse: the ‘re-constructed’ nature of representations of the past is afforded a more privileged position.

‘Sachzeugen’ and ‘Zeitzeugen’: Exhibiting Childhood in Contemporary Germany

The popularity of exhibiting childhood in the museum can be attributed both to the didactic potential of displaying childhoods past, and to the contemporary interest in childhood as a means of discovering more about the origins of individuals, societies and nations. John Geraint Jenkins writes that museums

most represent man’s desire to know his roots, which can supply solidarity in a world that is in a constant state of flux. In this preoccupation with the past [...] anything reminiscent of an almost forgotten youth has become eminently collectable.²⁰⁵

Childhood, like past epochs, represents a time which has been lost but which can be rediscovered and engaged with in the museum context. In the ‘quest for the lost child’ in contemporary culture, the museum provides, both conceptually and in practice, a place in which childhood can be seen to be preserved.²⁰⁶

In addition, the educational potential of the museum has been well-documented²⁰⁷ and the opportunities for meaningful memory work and engagement with the past in exhibitions of childhood are recognised as considerable within the field of museum studies. Sharon Roberts suggests that ‘children can provide a familiar and approachable

²⁰⁵ John Geraint Jenkins, ‘The Collection of Material Objects and their Interpretation’, in *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, 119-25, here p. 119.

²⁰⁶ Gittins, *The Child in Question*, p. 144.

²⁰⁷ See Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, ‘Education, Communication and Interpretation: Towards a Critical Pedagogy in Museums’, in *The Educational Role of the Museum*, ed. by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (Leicester: Routledge, 1994), pp. 3-28; and Margaret Lindauer, ‘The Critical Museum Visitor’, in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. by Janet Marstine (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 203-23.

framework for the museum visitor to appropriate new experience and understanding'.²⁰⁸ Similarly, Brian Shepherd considers that 'through the particular [artefacts with specific provenance and story of their own], visitors may all experience the "other" thus at once connecting with familiar symbols, but through them experiencing something new'.²⁰⁹ Where visitors approaching the Third Reich in Germany today feel 'überinformiert und trotzdem unwissend',²¹⁰ the opportunity to engage with the history and legacy of the Third Reich in a new way has distinct possibilities.

How, then, do museums make meaning? Although more modern means of constructing exhibitions are being developed, and advances in technology are offering new opportunities for interactive displays, the majority of exhibitions still rely on the traditional method of displaying items of material culture. This consists of artefacts from former times arranged so that a narrative of the past can be communicated. Such objects, as Jules Prown suggests, can reveal the 'beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time'.²¹¹ Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that material culture is considered to provide a tangible link to the past.²¹² Such objects provide 'an opportunity by which "we encounter the past at first hand; we have direct sensory experience of surviving historical events"'.²¹³ In her

²⁰⁸ Roberts, 'Minor Concerns', p. 161.

²⁰⁹ Brian W. Shepherd, 'Making Children's Histories', in *Making Histories in Museums*, pp. 258-71, here p. 269.

²¹⁰ Reich-Ranicki (ed.), *Meine Schulzeit*, p. 9.

²¹¹ Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17 (1982), 1-19, here, p. 1.

²¹² This is exemplified by the *DDR Museum* in Berlin, which states on its website: '[d]ie Dauerausstellung nimmt das Motto "Geschichte zum Anfassen" wörtlich: Sie betreten eine Plattenbausiedlung im Maßstab 1:20 und müssen dabei alle Ihre Sinne mitnehmen. Informationen und Exponate verbergen sich hinter Schubladen, Schränken und Türen. Die Exponate können angefasst und benutzt werden, die Küche riecht noch original nach DDR, der Trabi lädt zur virtuellen Rundfahrt ein. Das aus normalen Museen bekannte Dogma des Schauens mit den Augen wird zu einem Sinn unter vielen, den Sie benutzen müssen'. See Anon., 'DDR Museum', <http://www.ddr-museum.de/de/museum/> [accessed 9 September 2011].

²¹³ Jules David Prown, 'Style as Evidence', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 15 (1980), 197-210, here p. 208.

introduction to *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006), Janet Marstine argues that, in the imagination of the general public at least, the material culture of the past provides a much sought-after link to history, be it specific or general. There is a tendency to view museum objects as ‘unmediated anchors to the past’.²¹⁴ Objects displayed in the museum possess an aura of authenticity, both in their status as original objects from the historical period in question, and in their apparent power to provide an emotional or sensory link to the past. In their introduction to *Das historische Museum* (1991) Gottfried Korff and Martin Roth write:

das museale Objekt ist ein authentisches Objekt. Damit ist es Dokument und Zeuge. Doch weil Authentizität mehr meint als Echtheit und Originalität, kommt beim musealen Objekt neben dem Zeugnischarakter noch eine andere Dimension ins Spiel. Und zwar ist dies die sinnliche Anmutungsqualität, die Ausgangspunkt für die faszinierende Wirkung der Objektwelten des Museums ist.²¹⁵

Here, it is not only the provenance of the object which creates its aura of authenticity, but also its ‘sinnliche Anmutungsqualität’: its status as a tangible link to the past. This doorway into the past is, for Korff and Roth, at the heart of the visitor’s fascination with the museum. This sense of tangibility is, of course, heightened in interactive or ‘hands-on’ museums where objects can actually be handled rather than simply observed behind perspex. This places the museum visitor, albeit it in an artificial way, in the position of the original user of the object.

The German word ‘Sachzeuge’, referring to items of material culture of past epochs evokes exactly this ‘sinnliche Anmutungsqualität’. In addition, the proximity of the term ‘Sachzeuge’ to ‘Zeitzeuge’ further emphasises the idea of the object as a living link to the past. For example, in Hilke Lorenz’s collection of oral testimony

²¹⁴ Janet Marstine, ‘Introduction’, in *New Museum Theory and Practice*, pp. 1-37, here p. 2.

²¹⁵ Gottfried Korff and Martin Roth, ‘Introduction’, in *Das historische Museum*, ed. by Gottfried Korff (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1991), pp. 9-41, here p. 17.

Kriegskinder: Das Schicksal einer Generation the author introduces children's experience of the bombing war through the 'experience' of a child's doll, 'Rosa', whose young owner always carried her to the air-raid shelter during bombing-raids. Lorenz writes: 'Rosa [...] hat alles überlebt. Sie war immer dabei.'²¹⁶ When the doll's young owner was sent from Berlin to the provinces as part of the *Kinderlandverschickung* evacuation programme, she refused to take the doll with her in case it was damaged. When she returned she found her family, and the doll, intact. The doll, Rosa, is personified further as Lorenz writes that she is 'ein stummer Zeuge dafür [...], dass das Auseinandergerissene manchmal auch wieder zusammengefügt werden kann'.²¹⁷ Here, the object, and by association the child, takes on a dual role, embodying both the silent witness of the event, and hope for the future.

In order to be depicted in exhibitions, the experience of growing up during the Third Reich must be broken down and codified. It is necessary to determine which objects and material sources might be used to represent childhood in the museum context. This poses a number of representational challenges. Given the diversity of childhood experience, and competing ideas about how it is best defined, how is it possible to establish the material culture appropriate as a means of display? Furthermore, how might it be possible to display the experience of children at different stages of development? Such questions are also shaped by the preconceptions and expectations of the museum visitor which will necessarily affect the narrative being presented in any display, childhood included. Brian Shepherd argues that while the museum makes decisions as to the objects on display, visitors 'of all ages bring with them their own

²¹⁶ Lorenz, *Kriegskinder*, p. 50.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

cultural baggage in the shape of expectations, childhood memories, ideas about what children are like, what children ought to be and what is appropriate to include'.²¹⁸

The item of material culture most widely associated with children is the toy. Indeed, Shepherd claims that 'it would seem that, in the minds of most, a museum of childhood could be synonymous with a toy museum'.²¹⁹ Sharon Brookshaw has found that of the thirteen categories of material culture most commonly associated with childhood, including clothing and books, the most popular is 'toys and games'.²²⁰ A recent project in Romania has sought to establish the country's first museum of childhood, which declares its intention to 'gather all [childhood's] aspects, from toys, games, clothing, children's folklore, beliefs, customs, body techniques, food, [and] education'.²²¹ Again, it is noteworthy that the first items on the list are toys and games.

The prominence of such items in exhibitions of childhood is in part due to their significant didactic potential. Museums can take for granted the fact that, although not everyone will have had similar childhood experiences, every visitor will have been a child. To use an image from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem 'Die Erwachsene', every adult is also a 'Kindgewesene'.²²² Concepts of the child and childhood are deceptively universal, and childhood is frequently used as a vehicle for representation, because of what is deemed to be its universal application and its 'appeal to common experience'.²²³ There

²¹⁸ Shepherd, 'Making Children's Histories', p. 261.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 261.

²²⁰ Sharon Brookshaw, 'The Material Culture of Children and Childhood: Understanding Childhood Objects in the Museum Context', *Journal of Material Culture*, 14 (2009), 365-83, here p. 369.

²²¹ Anon., 'Virtual Museum of Childhood in Romania', <http://www.institutumeni.cz/res/data/009/001122.pdf> [accessed 9 September 2011].

²²² Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Die Erwachsene', in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Gedichte, Erster Teil*, ed. by Ernst Zinn and Ruth Sieber-Rilke (= *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Ernst Zinn, 1955-66, 7 vols, vol. 1) (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955), pp. 514-5, here p. 515.

²²³ Neil Sinyard, *Children in the Movies* (London: Batsford 1992), p. 7. This idea will be explored throughout the thesis.

are undeniably aspects of experience which are common in childhood, such as language acquisition and play, as well as qualities we associate as being particularly childlike: petulance, for example.²²⁴ In her study of a century of Russian childhood experiences, Catriona Kelly cites the use of lullabies to send children to sleep as a cultural universal, as well as as interest in naming objects, for example.²²⁵

In addition, historical research into children's play shows that even in the most dire circumstances children resort to games and play.²²⁶ The universal quality of toys and games thus has the potential to communicate meaning to a wide audience. Simultaneously, however, as objects of material culture, toys represent principally a specific Romantic ideal of childhood as a time of carefree innocence. Drawing on the work of the historian Johan Huizinga and his influential study *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938), Richard N. Coe writes of children's toys that:

the 'closed world of toys' is not merely *different* from the real world, but it intensifies the fascination of that otherness by being at the same time exactly *parallel* to that real world: a miniature reduction of it, and hence – being itself, and yet existing in a different dimension both of size and of experience, controllable instead of being out of control – it is a *symbol* of the real world, and a symbol which 'represents' it 'perhaps at the highest pitch of intensity'. In other words, the effect of the *contrast* between two alternative dimensions is intensified many times over [...] when the *appearances* of the two worlds are identical.²²⁷

In this concept of the toy, play is perceived as a preparation for a recognisable adulthood, one which reproduces the parents' experience of the world. Yet at the same time it embodies the 'otherness' which childhood is, so often, seen to represent. Furthermore, it provides a symbol of nostalgia for that time, now lost. David Fleming, the former

²²⁴ Qualities such as this are tolerated in children but are generally deemed inappropriate if found in adult behaviour.

²²⁵ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (London: Yale UP, 2007), p. 6.

²²⁶ Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, p. 37.

²²⁷ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. 263.

director of the award-winning Tyne and Wear museums, describes this critically as ‘the childhood of the Edwardian nursery, the innocence of the gingham dress and the sailor suit, the Meccano set, the teddy bear, the doll’s pram’.²²⁸ Fleming’s suggestion here is that an emphasis on toys will produce an incomplete picture of the experience of childhood. It also causes us to ask how such nostalgia might be at play in the memory of the Third Reich.

An item which can be swiftly identified as belonging to a particular era or political movement, for example, is more swiftly recognised as such if this is obvious, not only from its labelling, but also in some way on the object itself. In order to signify ‘Third Reich’ to the visitor, toys and games from the National Socialist era are likely to be required to be coded as such. A pertinent example of this is one of the objects on display in the permanent exhibition of the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin. As the principal national history museum in Germany, the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* seeks to depict the entire history of Germany from the first century BC to the fall of the Berlin Wall and Unification.²²⁹ As such it must use certain ‘shorthands’ to convey as much information as possible to the visitor. While the section of the exhibition devoted to the Third Reich does not contain any displays specifically devoted to childhood under Nazism, it does exhibit a number of objects associated with childhood, displayed in the context of Nazi social policy and the Second World War. The first of these objects is a doll’s house produced after 1933. Three rooms from the doll’s house are exhibited: a bedroom, living room, and a kitchen. While the first two rooms are decorated in the style

²²⁸ David Fleming, ‘Social History in Wonderland: A Review of the SHCG Annual Study Weekend of 1988’, *Social History in Museums*, 16 (1988), 31-3, here p. 31. Cited in Roberts, ‘Minor Concerns’, p. 157.

²²⁹ The *Deutsches Historisches Museum* is a private limited company financed by the Federal Republic of Germany.

of a nineteenth-century interior, the kitchen is decorated with wallpaper bearing National Socialist images and symbols (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figures 2 and 3: 'Puppenhaus – Deutschland, nach 1933', in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, Berlin.²³⁰

²³⁰ These and all subsequent photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

From the Romantic perspective, a doll's house, as a child's toy, provides an image of childhood innocence. However, in this case, the wallpaper decorated with National Socialist images, as well as the swastika and image of Hitler on the wall, are effective symbols of the indoctrination and corruption of youth by the Nazi state. In Germany, where fascist symbols are banned by law, this has a particular resonance. We can see this tension between apparently innocuous objects of children's play and National Socialist symbols elsewhere, for example in board games and toy figures (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: 'Spielzeuge', in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, Berlin.

The use of toys in the exhibition of childhood more generally raises further questions about concepts of childhood and youth. In her study of the material culture of childhood Brookshaw proposes a distinction between the material culture of *childhood* and that of *children*. The material culture of *childhood* should, Brookshaw argues, refer 'only to those items made for children by adults', which as such 'reflect adult attitudes

towards children and not the child's world in itself'. In contrast, the material culture of *children* should encompass 'those items that children make themselves or adapt into their own culture from the adult world that have a different use to that intended by the adult manufacturer'.²³¹ Brookshaw's categorisation creates a distinction between children as autonomous creators of their own material culture, and as the recipients of adults' designs for them. In so doing, Brookshaw raises an important point about children's agency, and their perceived lack of it. In *Children and Material Culture* (2000), Joanna Derevenski asserts that:

the modern, Western view of childhood as a prolonged period of dependence on an adult has led archaeologists to construct interpretations that reduce children to passive, inert automatons. Yet children are actors and constructors of their own lives who act not simply intuitively, but initiate action by choice.²³²

This echoes Stargardt's criticism that, in historical and literary accounts of the Second World War the emphasis on suffering can 'make children appear strangely passive [...] the objects rather than the subjects of history. But most children were still able to engage with their environment and lived the war in a network of social relationships'.²³³ In the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* the child's experience of the Second World War is exhibited by the means of two board games of the period: 'Wir fahren gegen Engeland' and 'Adler Luftkampfspiel' (see Figures 5 and 6). These items demonstrate 'not the child's world, but the adult's perception of what the child needs or wants'.²³⁴

²³¹ Brookshaw, 'The Material Culture of Children', p. 381.

²³² Joanna Sofaer Derevenski, 'Material Culture Shock: Confronting Expectations in the Material Culture of Children', in *Children and Material Culture*, ed. by Joanna Sofaer Derevenski (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-17, here p. 11.

²³³ Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, p. 10.

²³⁴ Brookshaw, 'The Material Culture of Children', p. 379.



Figure 5: 'Brettspiel': 'Wir fahren gegen England', in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, Berlin.



Figure 6: 'Brettspiel': 'Adler Luftkampfspiel', in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, Berlin.

Indeed, here we see how, as Kelly demonstrates, ‘adults control the spaces that children may occupy [...] and children learn from adults how they ought to perceive the world’.²³⁵ The text panel which accompanies the war-themed board games informs the visitor that: ‘zahlreiche Gesellschaftsspiele für Jung und Alt bezogen sich auf das Militärwesen [...]. Die meisten Erwachsenen wollten aber nicht auch noch in ihrer Freizeit mit dem Krieg konfrontiert werden.’²³⁶ This raises an interesting point with regard to contemporary ideas about children. The account given in this text panel has a protectionist edge, suggesting that while *adults* did not wish to be confronted with the realities of war in the form of board games, *children* would have been oblivious to them – a suggestion which much of the work of psychological theory and trauma studies would now contradict. Indeed, the memories of those children who experienced the Allied bombing of German cities and the expulsions from the Eastern territories towards the end of World War II have recently come to the fore and it is clear that, while children certainly used play to make sense of these experiences, they were by no means unconscious of them.²³⁷

Another significant challenge with regard to displaying childhood in the museum is the diversity of childhood. Childhood is a social construct and as such varies according to place, time, and a number of other conditions: ‘there is no one universal child or childhood for any period or place.’²³⁸ As a consequence, the material culture used by children may differ widely according to historical period and place. Jane Baxter points out that we would not dream of making a museum of ‘adulthood’²³⁹ and yet there is an

²³⁵ Kelly, *Children’s World*, p. 13.

²³⁶ *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, Berlin.

²³⁷ Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, pp. 174-5.

²³⁸ Brookshaw, ‘The Material Culture of Children’, p. 367.

²³⁹ Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture* (Walnut Creek/CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), p. 24.

assumption that all elements of the childhood experience can be gathered under one roof. On the contrary, the sheer diversity of childhood experience means that, as Brian Shepherd puts it, ‘any representation of childhood in a museum can, at best, be little more than a window into a portion of that world of experience.’²⁴⁰ He observes that:

the sheer impossibility of harnessing a body of material culture to be truly representative of the varieties of childhood experience makes a nonsense of any pretence that a museum addressing children’s experience can be truly comprehensive, definitive or unbiased.²⁴¹

In the context of museums exhibiting the Third Reich, the range of children’s experience includes that of children and young people deemed acceptable by the regime, and those which it considered unacceptable: Jewish children, the disabled, and those who dissented or resisted the state’s control. While objects of National Socialist material culture can be more easily coded, the experience of those deemed ‘unacceptable’ by the National Socialists proves more elusive for museums to display as there are no obviously coded objects which might be used. The sheer variety of temporary exhibitions since 1990 reflects this dilemma.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Shepherd, ‘Making Children’s Histories’, p. 268.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 257.

²⁴² The following list (grouped according to topic) is not exhaustive: National Socialist education and indoctrination: ‘Indoktrination der Jugend im NS-Regime: Geschichte im “Dritten Reich” am Beispiel der Zeitschrift “Wille und Macht”’ (1998) *Gedenkstätte deutscher Widerstand*; “Das war eine wunderschöne Zeit” – Kindheit und Jugend im Nationalsozialismus’, *Geschichtswerkstatt Herrenwyk*, Lübeck (2002); ‘Verführt, Verleitet, Verheißt: Das kurze Leben des Nürnberger Hitlerjungen Paul B.’, *Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*, Nürnberg (August 2005-March 2006); ‘Spiel mit dem Reich: Nationalsozialistische Ideologie in Spielzeug und Kinderbüchern’, *Staats- und Seminarbibliothek Eichstätt* (2011). *Kriegskinder*: ‘Die Kriegskinder-Generation 1944/45 in Freiberg’, *Stadt- und Bergbaumuseum Freiberg* (May-June 2010); ‘Kriegskinder: Halle und der Zweite Weltkrieg’, *Stadtarchiv, Halle (Saale)* (May-June 2005). *Kinderlandverschickung*: ‘Kinderlandverschickung’, *Heimatismuseum Reinickendorf*, Berlin (2008); ‘Heimat ade! Kinderlandverschickung im Dritten Reich’, *Historisches Centrum*, Hagen (April-August 1999). Jewish children’s experience: “Wir hatten noch gar nicht angefangen zu leben”. Eine Ausstellung zu den Jugend-Konzentrationslagern Moringen und Uckermark 1940-1945’, *KZ-Gedenkstätte Moringen* (1992); ‘Juden im Widerstand. Drei Gruppen zwischen Überlebenskampf und politischer Aktion Berlin 1939-45’, Rosenthaler Str., Berlin-Mitte, (1993); ‘Da ich ein Kind war... Vom Kind-Sein in vergangenen Zeiten’, *Bezirksmuseum, Dachau* (2009). See: Chloe Paver, ‘Exhibiting the National Socialist Past’, http://people.exeter.ac.uk/cpaver/exhibitions_ausstellungen.html [accessed 9 September 2011].

These focus on such subjects as children's experience of the Second World War; the *Kinderlandverschickung* programme; persecution and life in ghettos and concentration camps; the *Kindertransport* project and other attempts at saving Jewish children; membership of the Hitler Youth and *Bund deutscher Mädel* (BDM); and exhibitions which focus on the experience of one particular child who acts as representative of other children. In addition, the 'Zug der Erinnerung' is a recent travelling exhibition aimed at preserving the memory of children deported during the Third Reich, which displays letters, photos, and other documentation of and about these children (May 2008-December 2010).²⁴³

The *NS-Dokumentationszentrum* in Cologne houses a three-storey exhibition on the history of the Third Reich.²⁴⁴ The display on the subject of 'Jugend' is located on the second floor, and is differentiated from the experience of resistance groups, which is treated elsewhere in the exhibition.²⁴⁵ While the museum as a whole has a number of objects from the Third Reich, the section 'Jugend' is almost entirely free of objects, other than a replica of a 1940s school desk which forms the centrepiece of the display (see Figures 7 and 8). It features information boards, mounted photographs, and an interactive screen. This screen offers written information on topics such as 'Jugend im Nationalsozialismus', 'Mitgliedschaft in der Hitler Jugend und im Bund deutscher Mädel', 'Schule und Nationalsozialismus' und 'Werbung für HJ und BDM', each of which offers short and uncontroversial historical accounts of these subjects.

²⁴³ See Paver 'Exhibiting the National Socialist Past' for an account of the 'Zug der Erinnerung', p. 238.

²⁴⁴ This is an international annual award which was launched in 2003 by the European Heritage Association in Zagreb.

²⁴⁵ The location of the museum in Cologne means that resistance youth, such as the Edelweiß Pirates, is given particular attention in the exhibition.

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Figures 7 and 8: 'Jugend', in the *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Cologne.

The only other material items to be included in the display are a number of lapel badges (see Figures 9 and 10). An important aspect of material culture studies is not merely the analysis of objects, but also the means and context of their mode of display.

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Figure 9: Lapel badges representing the many non-National Socialist affiliated youth groups in the display 'Jugend', in the *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Cologne.

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Figure 10: National Socialist lapel badge in the display 'Jugend', in the *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Cologne.

Museum objects do not simply transmit meaning, they cannot 'speak for themselves', but rather are ordered by their method of display and interpretation.²⁴⁶ 'Meanings of objects are constructed according to the perspectives from which they are viewed and in relation

²⁴⁶ Helen Coxall, 'How Language Means: an Alternative View of Museums Text', in *Museum Languages: Objects and Texts*, ed. by Gaynor Kavanagh (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1991), pp. 83-100, here p. 92.

to the discourses within which they are placed.’²⁴⁷ As Roger G. Kennedy writes: ‘objects speak most powerfully in intentional juxtaposition. Great designers of museum exhibitions are narrators making respectful use of sequences’. Here ‘narrators’ are the curators and designers of exhibitions.²⁴⁸

On the right upon entering, on the wall, displayed in a large perspex case are a number of pins depicting the symbols of a range of non-National Socialist affiliated youth groups from the Third Reich. In contrast, on the opposite wall there are a significant number of mounted photographs of Hitler Youth activities, in the centre of which there is a single pin, which bears a swastika. The stark visual contrast between the multiple symbols against the single emblem of Nazism is suggestive of the dominance and control of Nazism on the one hand, yet also of the possibility for dissent and individuality on the other. In addition, the absence of other objects, most particularly toys and games, is suggestive of an abnormal childhood, where the anticipated accoutrement of childhood is absent. Whatever the potential practical reasons for this omission, such as the scarcity of authentic objects, it tells a particular story of the past.

The display also includes eye-witness testimony, which, as I have outlined, has become an increasingly central part of exhibitions, not only in terms of research, but also in displays themselves. Two interactive screens offer the visitor a series of interviews given by two eye-witnesses from the locality – one male and one female – who speak on a number of topics (see Figures 11 and 12). These include ‘Familie’, ‘Schule’, ‘HJ-Führer im Krieg’, ‘Jungmädelzeit’, ‘Volksdeutsche in Tschechien’ and ‘Nach 1945’.

²⁴⁷ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 76.

²⁴⁸ Roger G. Kennedy, ‘Some Thoughts about National Museums at the End of the Century’, in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. by Bettina Messias Carbonell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 302-7, here p. 304.

Each section is then further subdivided into topics such as ‘Tabuisierung der NS Zeit’ and ‘Jungvolkideologie’, for example. These videos are accompanied by a wall-mounted display of copies of the two eye-witnesses’ Hitler Youth identification papers and family photographs dating from the period. Eye-witness testimony has a high value and a particular legitimising quality in the museum and the absence of period objects in this exhibition places a greater emphasis on their testimony, for in this display they provide the most tangible link to the past. In addition, the testimony of the eye-witnesses adds another dimension of relevance to the museum visitor, for these are two elderly people still living in the local area. A sense of continuity between the past and the present is evoked and emphasis is placed on the connection between the young generation displayed in the museum and the oldest generation in Germany today.

The most recent temporary exhibition of childhood and youth in the Third Reich was held at the *Historisches Centrum* in Hagen from June to November 2009, and was extended to March 2010 due to its popularity. Entitled ‘Und sie werden nicht mehr frei – Jugend im Nationalsozialismus’, the exhibition focused primarily on children and young people who were members of Nazi youth organisations, yet simultaneously sought to include the variety of different children’s experiences within the Third Reich, including resistance factions such as the ‘Swing Kids’, and Jewish child victims of the Holocaust. This was part of an attempt to provide a more inclusive depiction of this generation.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ The exhibition was primarily intended for young people, although visits by families and eye-witnesses were encouraged. See Anon., ‘Historisches Centrum Hagen’, <http://www.historisches-centrum.de/index.php?id=549> [accessed 9 September 2011]. It was funded by several private and public institutions, see Ibid., <http://www.historisches-centrum.de/index.php?id=563> [accessed 9 September 2011].

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Figures 11 and 12: ‘Eye-witness interviews’, in the *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Cologne.

The three-room exhibition space consisted of a series of individual displays which were structured both thematically and broadly chronologically, beginning with the ‘Jungvolk’ and ‘Jungmädel’ and proceeding through the ranks of the Hitler Youth and public education, to the Second World War and the immediate post-war period. In this way a linear narrative was constructed, which gave a sense of the journey of childhood through the Hitler Youth and National Socialist formation. Each topic was presented by a

text panel offering a brief summary of the subject under discussion, accompanied by photographic reproductions, quotations taken from National Socialist speeches, writings, and educational policy documents, as well as period and reproduced objects displayed centrally in glass cases.

The history of resistance youth was exhibited through an interactive ‘game’, the ‘Schallplatten-Bar’ (see Figure 13). One wall-surface was covered in records bearing the names of music and musicians banned during the Third Reich with interactive buttons, labelled ‘Drücken’. On pressing the buttons, apparently to hear the record in question, a flashing sign appeared above it, declaring ‘Verboten!’. This was the case for all the records on the display. This was an effective way of demonstrating the control of the National Socialist state in which the visitor’s expectation of hearing the records at the touch of a button was confounded. However, the means of displaying this information seemed unequal to the hard line taken by the Nazis against those who dissented. The simplicity of the ‘game’ had an almost comic effect, but was potentially without greater meaning or implication.

Alongside conventional information panels, the material culture used to exhibit Jewish children’s experience consisted of a reproduction of an adult’s concentration camp shirt. In addition, the exhibition displayed a series of drawings made by a young man growing up in Hagen during the 1930s and 1940s who was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto. The drawings were originals and provided an example of the material culture of childhood constructed by a child, rather than produced by adults for

children. This is what Brookshaw would term the ‘material culture of children’ rather than of childhood.²⁵⁰

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Figure 13: ‘Schallplatten-Bar’ in the exhibition ‘Und sie werden nicht mehr frei’, in the *Historisches Centrum*, Hagen.

Similarly, in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*’s recent and controversial exhibition ‘Hitler und die Deutschen: Volksgemeinschaft und Verbrechen’ (October 2010 – February 2011), there is an attempt to accommodate both the experience of German children who belonged to National Socialist youth organisations, as well as the experience of Jewish children. The National Socialist childhood experience is depicted in a cabinet in which puppets and toy soldiers produced by the ‘Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel’ are exhibited. These items include toy soldiers bearing Nazi insignia, and hand-puppets representing Nazi stereotypes of Jews and foreigners (see Figure 14).

²⁵⁰ Brookshaw, ‘The Material Culture of Children’, p. 381.

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Figure 14: Toy soldiers in the exhibition 'Hitler und die Deutschen: Volksgemeinschaft und Verbrechen', in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, Berlin.²⁵¹

In contrast, Jewish children's experience is represented by a series of children's pictures produced in the 1940s in the Theresienstadt ghetto.²⁵² Thus both in the exhibition in Hagen, and in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* the Jewish children's experience was conveyed primarily through the means of their own material culture. The implication of this is two-fold: on the one hand it reinforces an idea of German Gentile youth as the passive receivers of National Socialist indoctrination through the display of objects saturated by Nazi symbols and produced by adults for their use; at the same time, the Jewish children's material culture consists of objects produced by them, and in this way suggests an agency often lacking in depictions of children of the Holocaust.²⁵³ In addition, while the German Gentile children are associated with games, the Jewish child's experience is, unsurprisingly, entirely divorced from such positive concepts of childhood.

²⁵¹ Anon., 'Berlin Museum seeks to correlate Hitler and German society', <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/71837/20101014/hitler-german-historical-museum-berlin-nazi.htm> [accessed 9 September 2011].

²⁵² The drawings were produced by 'Quartier 609', an education project within the Theresienstadt ghetto.

²⁵³ This will be discussed further in Chapter Four, see below pp. 186-7.

An alternative approach to the problem of representing Jewish children's material culture is that of the *Jüdisches Museum* in Berlin. In Daniel Libeskind's architectural design, a series of unoccupied 'voids' demonstrate the limits of representation of the crimes of Nazism and of the suffering of German Jews. The museum's controversial design uses silence and light to attempt to evoke the loss of those who died in the Holocaust and the memory of their suffering. 'Negative spaces'²⁵⁴ are 'arranged along an absolutely straight line through the entire [...] structure' and empty glass cabinets, devoid of objects, 'effectively structure the Holocaust as actual and metaphorical absence': of objects and of people.²⁵⁵ In this way the experience of Jewish child victims of the Holocaust are represented symbolically through the absence of their material culture. In addition, one of the curators responsible for the section of the museum which treats the period 1933-45 explains that while there are items of material culture on display, Jewish children's experience of the Third Reich is deliberately treated only marginally in this part of the museum. This is to facilitate a more critical engagement with this part of Jewish German history, and to avoid an overly emotional response.²⁵⁶

A further consideration with regard to 'displaying childhood' is the issue of whether material culture intended only for adults can be considered as the material culture of childhood if it is used by children. This is discussed by Joanna Derevenski in her introduction to *Children and Material Culture* (2000). Derevenski examines a photograph of an Afrikaner child which appeared alongside an article in a British

²⁵⁴ Bernhard Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin*, translated from the German by John William Gabriel (London: Prestel, 1999), p. 51.

²⁵⁵ Peter Chametzky, 'Not what we expected: the Jewish Museum Berlin in practice', *museum and society*, 6 (2008), 216-45, here p. 220.

²⁵⁶ Alexandra Lloyd, Interview with Maren Krüger, *Jüdisches Museum*, Berlin, 28 September 2010, unpublished notes in the possession of Alexandra Lloyd. Included by kind permission of Maren Krüger.

newspaper not long after the end of apartheid in South Africa. The photograph depicts a young girl dressed in an oversized camouflage shirt and holding a hand-gun which she is being trained to use by an army officer. Derevenski questions whether the gun can be considered to constitute part of the material culture of children because it is part of the child's material reality.²⁵⁷ Derevenski comments:

the juxtaposition of a child with a lethal weapon creates incongruity [...]. We conceive of children as apolitical, yet here the girl appears involved in adult intrigue. For all these reasons, conceptual associations between the child and the material culture do not match.²⁵⁸

The reality of the child's experience and the modern Western view of childhood do not, in this case, correspond. There is a disjunction between the reader's expectation of the meaning of childhood and the material reality in which the child exists. According, for example, to the historians Karl Heinz Jahnke and Michael Buddrus, 'rund zwei Drittel aller männlichen HJ-Angehörigen zwischen 14 und 18 Jahren wurden regelmäßig im Schießdienst erfaßt.'²⁵⁹ Thus, weapons and objects associated with warfare played a significant part in the lives of many children and young people during the Second World War in particular. Any overwhelming focus on toys and games in the museum context thus risks providing an unrealistic view of the past and marginalising an important narrative. Realities such as this prove problematic as they challenge contemporary notions of childhood as an innocent, sheltered time, a time in which the individual is, or ought to be, protected within the 'walled garden' of childhood.²⁶⁰ Here, there is a marked discrepancy between ideas about childhood and the reality of the childhood experience:

²⁵⁷ Derevenski, 'Material Culture Shock', p. 5.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵⁹ Jahnke and Buddrus, *Deutsche Jugend*, p. 27.

²⁶⁰ Brookshaw, 'The Material Culture of Children', p. 366.

between the authentic experience of those growing up during this era, and the latter construction of the narrative of the period.

This point is also raised by the design of the aforementioned temporary exhibition in Hagen, ‘Und sie werden nicht mehr frei – Jugend im Nationalsozialismus’. Within the exhibition a series of six talking heads were displayed in the form of videos, each encased within a plastic child-sized case roughly shaped as a human-being. On each video screen there was a profile shot of the head of a young person reading a short text pertaining to the particular topic which they were representing. The topics included a ‘typical’ Hitler youth boy, two *Bund deutscher Mädel* members, a Jewish girl, a member of the ‘Swing Kids’ and a *Flakhelfer* (see Figures 15 and 16). The videos were played on a loop and although headphones were provided to listen to the accounts more closely, the sound was sufficiently loud that they could constantly be heard on a loop throughout the visit. The effect of the children’s voices mingling quietly in the background was suggestive of the many children affected by Nazism, and had a sinister quality to it. This was heightened through the effect of the sparse lighting, predominantly grey display boards and generally dingy atmosphere of the exhibition space. The featureless plastic cases afforded the ‘testimonies’ an air of universality and suggested that the statements could have been given by anyone and encouraged the visitor to consider what their own response to National Socialism might have been.

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Figure 15: A 'Jewish girl', in the exhibition 'Und sie werden nicht mehr frei', in the *Historisches Centrum*, Hagen.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 16: A 'Swing Kids member', in the exhibition 'Und sie werden nicht mehr frei', in the *Historisches Centrum*, Hagen.

Furthermore, the fact that the children of the past were being represented by children of the present gave the texts a sense of immediacy and suggested that fascism

might still be a threat to democracy. Indeed, one of the exhibition's aims as stated in the accompanying promotional literature was as follows:

in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit befähigt [die Ausstellung], zeitgenössische Formen des Rechtsextremismus besser einordnen und beurteilen zu können. Die Ausstellung zeigt eindrucksvoll, wo eine Gesellschaft endet, die nicht Werte wie Vielfalt, Toleranz und Demokratie ihr eigen nennt.²⁶¹

Although the testimonies were spoken by contemporary young people, the videos gave the impression of being authentic eye-witness testimonies, such as those in the *NS-Dokumentationszentrum* in Cologne. However, the testimonies spoken by the children were in fact texts scripted in improvisations during school drama lessons on the theme of Nazi childhood.²⁶² This raises an important issue: the videos suggest themselves as authentic eye-witness testimonies, although there is no accompanying information to endorse or contradict such an assumption on the part of the visitor. The narratives are, in fact, constructed and thereby represent a mediated form of the past as it has been filtered through the subsequent knowledge and interpretation of a generation twice removed from those which the videos seem to represent. This was not, however, made explicit in the exhibition and so the mediated quality of the 'testimonies' was not called into question.

An interesting aspect of the testimonies, which may or may not be a result of their conception by the school pupils, was that at no point do any of the children suggest even remotely the appeal of Nazism. It has been widely acknowledged, both in historical studies and in autobiographical texts, that the Hitler Youth exerted an unquestionable influence over youth, but could also made itself extremely attractive to young people eager to escape the confines of the family home and eager for responsibilities and

²⁶¹ Anon., 'Historisches Centrum Hagen', <http://www.historisches-centrum.de/index.php?id=549> [accessed 9 September 2011].

²⁶² Alexandra Lloyd, Interview with Dr Ralf Blank, *Historisches Centrum*, Hagen, 23 July 2009, unpublished notes in the possession of Alexandra Lloyd. Included by kind permission of Dr Ralf Blank.

authority over their peers. That is not to say that there were not those – and many of them – who endured the Hitler Youth; but there were undoubtedly those who enjoyed it. As Kater writes, ‘it was one of the great propaganda achievements of the Nazi rulers that they were able to offer a political and ideological world view that granted status, certainty, and power to young people.’²⁶³

By re-writing this narrative the exhibition positions itself firmly within a particular view of the past. By failing to show just how attractive Nazism could fashion itself to be, the exhibition offers a version of the past which marginalises an important element of the indoctrination process, and in so doing has a potentially negative effect upon its educational potential. Welzer’s comment on young people’s understanding of Nazism in the Berlin Republic suggests that this lack of enthusiasm is a popular misconception. Welzer writes:

despite all successful educational efforts in the last couple of decades, the view of history of today’s youth resembles the caricature known from the 1950s [...]: In 1933 the space ship arrives with the Nazis. They get out, seduce the German people, fly away again in 1945, and leave behind a host of dead and a German people embarrassingly moved and somehow vaguely ashamed.²⁶⁴

In failing to depict the appeal of Nazism to certainly a proportion of young people, the exhibition risked providing a view of German youth as devoid of agency – the passive recipients of indoctrination – and denies this aspect of the threat to democracy in the present which, as outlined above, was one of the exhibition’s stated aims. In addition, the absence of eye-witness testimony appeared to contradict the overall emphasis of the exhibition, which suggested itself as the ongoing legacy of Nazism in the present. The

²⁶³ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, p. 4.

²⁶⁴ Harald Welzer, ‘The Collateral Damage of Enlightenment: How Grandchildren Understand the History of National Socialist Crimes and Their Grandfathers’ Past’, in *Victims and Perpetrators, 1933-1945: (Re)presenting the Past in Post-unification Culture* ed. by Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 285-96, here p. 290.

title of the exhibition ‘sie werden nicht mehr frei’, taken from a line in one of Hitler’s speeches on the task of German youth, is displayed in full in the first section of the exhibition: ‘und sie werden nie wieder frei sein ihr ganzes Leben!’.²⁶⁵ Given this focus, it is perhaps surprising that the exhibition did not make more of the long-term effects of a National Socialist childhood, and that it did not include the testimony of those who were indeed affected for the rest of their lives.

This raises an important consideration about the relationship between the museum as a place in which narratives of the past are constructed and communicated, and the private memory culture of individual visitors, particularly eye-witnesses. In the Hagen exhibition, the absence of testimonials from those who grew up in the Third Reich had the potential to lead to a conflict between visitors’ memories and the narrative of history it was displayed. Susan Crane writes that:

museums are not supposed to lie to us; this act seems a breach of faith. Assuming that our own memories are fallible, we rely on museums as well as on historians to get the past ‘right’ for us [...] we know that that ‘straight’ version of the past is available to remedy our ‘queered’ or distorted memories.²⁶⁶

Yet at the same time, museums risk controversy when they offer narratives of history which contradict accounts of the same events in the memories of those who lived through the period. The absence of a visitor’s book in the Hagen exhibition makes it difficult to draw further conclusions about whether such a conflict might, in some cases, have occurred. However, my own observations on multiple visits, as well as on an organised

²⁶⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Rede in Reichenberg*, 4 December 1938, <http://www.eichendorffschule.de/Wissensreise/Hitlerjugend/Seiten/RedeReichenberg1938-01.html> [accessed 2 October 2011].

²⁶⁶ Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum’, p. 51.

tour of the exhibition, suggested that there were certainly elderly visitors for whom the positive aspects of the Hitler Youth were absent in the displays.²⁶⁷

Finally, I want to address the depiction of the past in the *Hamburger Schulmuseum*, which provides an example of how childhood under Nazism is displayed within the broader context of National Socialist education. The museum exhibits an assortment of artistically reconstructed German school rooms from different historical periods including the Third Reich, entitled ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’ (see Figure 17).

In the promotional literature accompanying this particular school room, the museum claims to offer the visitor ‘ein Ort der Begegnung, wo Menschen diesen prägenden Teil ihrer Lebenserfahrung [die Schulzeit] im Spiegel der Geschichte wiederentdecken, kritisch hinterfragen, neu bewerten und mit anderen in Beziehung setzen können’.²⁶⁸ The permanent exhibition thus seeks to put the visitor in the position of the historical child, both through links which can be drawn with their own school experiences, and through the engagement with the exhibition space. This is in line with Peter Vergo’s argument that ‘the drive to make the past come alive is unusually vigorous in museums of childhood, which have been presented as [...] offering each visitor a chance to relive their own particular childhood’.²⁶⁹

In the *Hamburger Schulmuseum*, period objects are displayed in glass cases, on the walls, and even underfoot: the visitor is literally surrounded by objects from the past.

²⁶⁷ This is of course extremely impressionistic. In addition, sentiments such as ‘it wasn’t that bad’ or, ‘I quite enjoyed it’ may of course be the result of a sense of nostalgia for childhood, which sits uneasily with retrospective knowledge of the crimes of Nazism. This will be discussed further with reference to Martin Walser in Chapter Three.

²⁶⁸ Anon., ‘Hamburger Schulmuseum’, <http://www.hamburgerschulmuseum.de/framedef.htm> [accessed 8 December 2010].

²⁶⁹ Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), p. 26.

In order to view the objects exhibited within the floor space, the visitor is required to stoop and in this way is placed effectively in the position of the child, temporarily looking back up into the schoolroom from a new, child-like perspective.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 17: ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’, in the permanent exhibition, *Schulmuseum*, Hamburg.

A similar effect is achieved through the use of school desks, which contain a variety of objects such as books and toy soldiers, and at which the visitor can sit (see Figure 18). The overall effect was heightened by the presence of a white papier-mâché ‘child’ at one of the desks (see Figure 17) and sounds of children emanating from the real neighbouring primary school.

The overall effect of the museum corresponds in part to Alison Landsberg’s notion of ‘prosthetic memory’. Landsberg contends that technologies such as film, as well as exhibitions, can induce the individual to live through the past in material and

empathetic ways. They make it increasingly possible to ‘*experience* an event or a past without having actually lived through it’.²⁷⁰

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 18: ‘School desks’, in the exhibition ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’, *Schulmuseum*, Hamburg.

This kind of experience allows audiences, or in this case visitors, to access the past through mimetic experience, with the effect that history is made imaginable for those who did not live through the events in question. This was most effectively achieved through the display’s inclusion of a series of original school textbooks of the period available for the visitor to hold and read (see Figures 19 and 20).

Here, the tangible link to the past which the books provide contributes further to the overall endeavour of the exhibition to bring the past ‘to life’ for a contemporary audience. In this exhibition, the notion of ‘*gefühlte Geschichte*’ takes on a concrete function: the multi-sensory experience offered by the museum enables the visitor to

²⁷⁰ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), p. 48. This is, however, done within the museum’s wider framework of seeking to elicit a critical response to historical events.

‘experience’ the past, through tangible means, and it facilitates the kind of ‘emotionales Nacherleben’ of which Frei writes. The potential problem with this, as outlined with regard to the display of Jewish childhood, is that it may preclude a critical engagement with the past.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 19: ‘National Socialist Textbooks’, in the exhibition ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’, *Schulmuseum*, Hamburg.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 20: ‘National Socialist Textbooks’, in the exhibition ‘Schule unterm Hakenkreuz und Neuanfang nach 1945’, *Schulmuseum*, Hamburg.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined how, in different ways, contemporary exhibitions seek to depict childhood in the Third Reich, and in so doing how they negotiate theoretical questions about the nature and perception of childhood, and the representation of that childhood for a contemporary audience. These exhibitions construct the historical account of growing up under Nazism using a variety of means. Objects of childhood past such as books, toys, games, clothes and drawings reflect, reinforce and challenge established notions of childhood in the Third Reich, both as a time of innocence and ignorance, and as a period protected from political and social concerns. They demonstrate how children's agency is regularly marginalised or denied in favour of more conventional notions of children as simply the 'victims' of historical events. In addition, in these exhibitions, there is a general absence of material culture which was used by children, but which does not easily signify childhood, such as weapons, despite the fact that these were a reality of many children's experience during World War II.

The exhibitions discussed in this chapter do not claim to offer a fully comprehensive picture of the past. However, this examination of contemporary displays demonstrates how museums' representation of history can affect our understanding of past events. In today's world, museums 'are unanimously recognised as *lieux de mémoire*, capable of generating public [...] (mostly national) collectives'.²⁷¹ The term *lieux de mémoire*, coined by historian Pierre Nora, refers to places 'where [cultural]

²⁷¹ Christine Cadot, 'Can Museums Help Build a European Memory? The Example of the *Musée de l'Europe* in Brussels in the Light of "New World" Museums' Experience', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 23 (2010), 127-36, here p. 127.

memory crystallizes and secretes itself'²⁷² and which aim to 'stop time, to block the work of forgetting'.²⁷³ For Nora, 'memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name [...]. History, on the other hand, is reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.'²⁷⁴ In part two of George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) the protagonist, Winston Smith, reads aloud a document explaining the methods of the Party:

past events, it is argued, have no objective existence, but survive only in written records and in human memories. The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon. And since the Party is in full control of all records and in equally full control of the minds of its members, it follows that the past is whatever the Party chooses to make it.²⁷⁵

In Orwell's dystopian world, the past exists only where history and memory meet, but the Party's control over the minds of its members means that in fact official history and memory will always converge. This is an extreme example of concerns expressed by the author Martin Walser, both in his famous *Friedenspreisrede* in 1995 and in his autobiography of childhood in the Third Reich, *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998). Walser comments: 'in der Vergangenheit, die wir alle zusammen haben, kann man herumgehen wie in einem Museum. Die eigene Vergangenheit ist nicht begehbar. Wir haben von ihr nur das, was sie von selbst preisgibt.'²⁷⁶ For Walser, a conflict exists between the memories of individuals within society, the subject of 'private memory culture' (to use a term coined by Welzer²⁷⁷), and the 'official memory culture', which constitutes the narrative of history as it exists within the public sphere, museums included. In Walser's

²⁷² Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24, here p. 7.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁷⁵ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Signet, 1950), p. 176.

²⁷⁶ Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 9.

²⁷⁷ Welzer, 'The Collateral Damage of Enlightenment', p. 290.

view, the collective narrative of the past is reified and on display for all to see. In contrast, individual memory is alive and cannot simply be called up from the archive and exhibited. That members of the public can encounter the past ‘wie in einem Museum’ establishes a juxtaposition between what Walser views as authentic, private ‘Erinnerung’ and inauthentic, public ‘Gedächtnis’.

Similarly, in his autobiographical account of growing up in the Third Reich the historian Joachim Fest uses the metaphor of the museum to question authoritative representations of the past. He writes:

denn was das Gedächtnis bewahrt, ist strenggenommen nie, was sich einmal ereignet hat. Die Vergangenheit ist stets ein imaginäres Museum. Man zeichnet im Nachhinein nicht etwa auf, was man erlebt hat, sondern was die Zeit, die wachsende perspektivische Verschiebung sowie der eigene Formwille im Chaos halbverschütteter Erlebnisse daraus gemacht haben. Im ganzen hält man weniger fest, wie es eigentlich gewesen, sondern wie man wurde, wer man ist.²⁷⁸

Here, Fest emphasises the importance of the present in shaping narratives of the past. He echoes James Young’s statement that ‘museums can only present the past through the prism of the present’.²⁷⁹ Rather than demanding the recognition of memory alongside history, however, Fest questions the very existence of historical representation divorced from a retrospective view.

Ultimately, however, Fest stresses the importance of viewing the past as a picture of how the present came to be. As well as negotiating concepts of childhood, exhibitions of youth in the Third Reich, consciously or unconsciously, narrate a journey. They offer theories not only with regard to what it was like to grow up under Nazism, but simultaneously how this experience is understood and transmitted in the present. In this

²⁷⁸ Joachim Fest, *Ich nicht: Erinnerungen an eine Kindheit und Jugend* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2008), p. 366.

²⁷⁹ James Young, *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), p. 71.

way, we might regard the constructed concept of childhood as it is exhibited in the museum as a kind of ‘historically specific and retrospectively constructed *lieu de mémoire*’: childhood embodies a period which is ‘both closed upon itself, and forever open to a constantly shifting production of meaning’.²⁸⁰ In the contemporary exhibitions discussed above we see these two sites of memory converge. Just as Levinthal and Trudeau removed the material culture of childhood from its original context and used it to literally form new images of the past, the material culture of children and childhood on display does not always display ‘real’ children’s experience. In this way the contemporary exhibition of childhood in the Third Reich may not tell us as much about the past as about the present.

²⁸⁰ Susanne Baackmann, ‘Female Counter-Memories of Nazi Germany: The Child as a *Lieu de Mémoire* in Marianne Rosenbaum’s Film *Peppermint Frieden*’, *Seminar*, 40 (2004), 19-34, here p. 32. Baackmann uses the idea specifically to refer to the child’s gaze within cinematic storytelling.

CHAPTER TWO

‘Führung und Verführung’²⁸¹: Growing up under Nazism in Contemporary German Cinema

The previous chapter examined the ways in which contemporary museums of childhood under Nazism make use of visual codes in order to reinforce and subvert established ideas about childhood and adolescence. Although the exhibitions portray the corruption of children by the State, they can only do so by figuring this against the background of an idealised childhood, a time of innocence and ignorance, protected from political and social concerns. They unwittingly demonstrate how children’s agency is regularly marginalised or denied in favour of more conventional notions of children as simply the ‘victims’ of history. The exhibitions and displays suggest the authenticity of their representation of the past through the focus on the child’s experience. This is augmented through the use of eye-witness testimony and the ‘sinnliche Anmutungsqualität’²⁸² of the items of material culture on display. Yet at the same time, theoretical considerations of museum practice, and contemporary examples, also bring to light the ‘constructedness’ both of the conceptualisation of ‘childhood’ in the museum context, and of historical representation more generally.

In the same way, cinematic depictions of the past echo the tension between the quality of authenticity evoked by the museum, and the inevitable ‘constructedness’ of its form. In her study *The Historical Film* Marcia Landy suggests that: ‘from earliest embodiments in the cinema, the penchant for documenting the past has been evident’,

²⁸¹ This is taken from the title of the first extensive study of National Socialist pedagogy: Gamm’s *Führung und Verführung: Pädagogik des Nationalsozialismus* (1964).

²⁸² Korff and Roth, ‘Introduction’, in *Das historische Museum*, p. 17.

and this has always entailed a ‘demand for “veracity” and “facticity” [...] especially around staged events on film purported to be “authentic”.’²⁸³ As the ‘organic memory’ of the Third Reich increasingly disappears German cinema becomes the ‘primary site of transmitting memory between generations who have never lived through the actual events’.²⁸⁴ Christian Schneider considers that in this new climate, cinema will take centre stage in the transmission of the past in the present: ‘im Übergang vom kommunikativen zum kulturellen Gedächtnis, das heißt mit dem Aussterben der Zeitzeugen wird der Film – gleichgültig ob als Dokumentation, Doku-Drama oder Spielfilm mit historischen Zitaten – das mächtigste Mittel der Geschichtsdarstellung werden.’²⁸⁵

In this chapter I focus on two recent films which depict a young male protagonist’s coming of age journey, primarily through his experience of a National Socialist educational institution: Agnieszka Holland’s *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991) and Dennis Gansel’s *NaPolA: Elite für den Führer* (2004). Through their contrasting treatment of the experience of growing up in the Third Reich, these films raise questions about the ways in which childhood and adolescence are constructed and represented in cinema, both in order to elicit sympathy for the plight of those involved in Nazism – Jews and Germans – and to demonstrate the appeal of Nazism to the young. I explore the aesthetics of authenticity employed by these films, and their approach to historical

²⁸³ Marcia Landy, ‘Introduction’, in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. by Marcia Landy (London: Athlone, 2001), pp. 1-25, here p. 7.

²⁸⁴ Lutz Koepnick, ‘Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s’, *New German Critique*, 87 (2002), 47-82, here p. 57.

²⁸⁵ Christian Schneider, ‘Sehen, Hören, Glauben: Zur Konstruktion von Authentizität’, in *Das Böse im Blick: Die Gegenwart des Nationalsozialismus im Film* ed. by Margrit Fröhlich, Christian Schneider and Karsten Visarius (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2007), pp. 15-30, here p. 18.

representation, particularly in light of Schneider's prediction that cinema will become 'das mächtigste Mittel der Geschichtsdarstellung'.²⁸⁶

Growing up in Film

Portrayals of childhood and adolescence have played a major role in cinema since its beginnings in the nineteenth century.²⁸⁷ This is due both to the universal appeal of childhood as a subject, and to the opportunity for multiple interpretations which it offers, and which arises from the ambiguity of the terms 'childhood' and 'adolescence'.²⁸⁸

Marcia Landy writes:

figures of childhood [...] serve as a window to another, less familiar, way of exploring and viewing the social landscape. Evolving since the cinema's beginnings, the cinematic child and adolescent have functioned variously as signifiers of innocence in a corrupt world, melodramatic images of martyrdom tied to the disintegration or regeneration of society, figures of nostalgia for a lost past, signs of generational warfare in society, and as means of providing a different and distanced perspective on familiar social situations.²⁸⁹

The juvenile protagonist can provide a fresh perspective on events with which the audience is already familiar. In addition, he/she can be invested with a variety of symbolic meanings: as the social or political good in the world which is threatened by evil or corrupting forces, and as a metaphor for a nostalgic past, or hopeful future. In addition, the prevalence of the Romantic concept of the child as innocent has made juvenile protagonists an effective narrative tool for filmmakers tackling difficult subjects such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. In *Children in the Movies* Neil Sinyard writes that 'children are the war film's handiest symbol of innocent victims, and

²⁸⁶ Schneider, 'Sehen, Hören, Glauben', p. 18.

²⁸⁷ Vicky Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema* (London: Reaktion, 2008), p. 7.

²⁸⁸ As outlined in the Introduction, see above pp. 19-28, and pp. 33-4.

²⁸⁹ Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 234.

their fate is designed to register on adult sensibilities'.²⁹⁰ However, as Sinyard also observes, the main problem with this approach is that it risks prompting a purely sentimental response from the viewer, rather than one which engages more critically with the topic.²⁹¹ This echoes concerns raised in the previous chapter about the uncritical response which representations of childhood in the museum may encourage.

In *Childhood Studies* (2002) Stuart Hanson identifies three common ways in which childhood, and the process of coming of age, is constructed in cinema: firstly, he suggests that children are depicted as essentially innocent, with innocence being constructed as a kind of naïvety and incorruptibility. The child's perspective on events is thus deemed to be free of judgement and of a full comprehension of events. Secondly, growing up is represented as a painful transitional process, as the individual moves from childhood to adulthood. Thirdly, the relationships between children and adults reflect the power relations between these two groups.²⁹² Generational conflicts abound, and can highlight the social problem of deep generational divides brought about by historical change; they can also function as a metaphor for political attitudes, glorifying youth and condemning the aged.

The National Socialists had a highly developed understanding of the role of children and youth in the popular imagination, and cultivated a 'generational profile': a youthful image which they utilised in their policies and propaganda.²⁹³ The means by which Nazism styled itself as a forward-thinking youth movement became part of the

²⁹⁰ Sinyard, *Children in the Movies*, p. 35.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁹² Stuart Hanson, 'Children in Film', in *Childhood Studies*, pp. 145-61, here p. 155.

²⁹³ Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, p. 2.

‘mythology of the regime’.²⁹⁴ The most famous example of this is the notorious propaganda film *Hitlerjunge Quex: Ein Film vom Opfergeist der deutschen Jugend* (Hans Steinhoff, 1933), based on a novel by Karl Aloys Schenzinger, *Der Hitlerjunge Quex* (1932) which itself had become a canonical text by the mid-1930s.²⁹⁵ Steinhoff’s film was one of the most popular of the National Socialist era²⁹⁶ and has long been recognised as ‘an integral part of Nazi ideology’.²⁹⁷ The romanticised martyrdom of the film’s young protagonist, Heini Völker, for the National Socialist cause was designed to promote the values of comradeship, courage and idealism, and was intended to serve as a model for imitation and emulation.²⁹⁸

This is also reflected in hundreds of images of Hitler with children and adolescents, which were designed to reinforce this conceptual link.²⁹⁹ One such image is the final film footage of Hitler, taken during his last public appearance ten days before his suicide. Hitler is depicted alongside Hitler Youth members, whom he is decorating with the Iron Cross. This footage represents a final attempt at visually and symbolically linking the *Führer* and Nazism with the positive potential of a bright future.

After World War II, youth continued to play a central role in public discourse, and the most frequently recurring image in early ‘rubble films’, both in the Eastern and

²⁹⁴ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge/MA: Harvard UP, 1979), p. 72, cited in Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2004), p. 171.

²⁹⁵ The narrative is based on the true story of Herbert Norkus, a Hitler Youth member who was killed by Communists in a street battle in June 1932.

²⁹⁶ Karl-Heinz Schoeps, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich* (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2003), p. 81.

²⁹⁷ Jay W. Baird, ‘From Berlin to Neubabelsberg: Nazi Film Propaganda and *Hitlerjunge Quex*’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18 (1983), 495-515, here p. 495.

²⁹⁸ Schoeps, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*, p. 81.

²⁹⁹ See for example *LIFE* magazine, 6 December 1937, in which an article on ‘Jugend um Hitler’ describes Hitler’s propagandist use of photographs depicting him with children, pp. 7-9.

Western Zones, was the young.³⁰⁰ Because of the ambiguous position of those who grew up in the Third Reich, cinematic portrayals of youth had two contrasting tendencies: the young could be invested either with a Romantic notion of childhood innocence and portrayed as the epitome of the ‘ordinary German’ led astray by the Nazi élite; alternatively, the guilt for Nazism could be imputed to them, thereby exculpating the adult population of a large measure of guilt. Fisher identifies how post-war German films use the young to solve a number of representational challenges, writing that, in post-war cinema, the young ‘appeared again and again [...] to negotiate and navigate opaque situations’.³⁰¹ Motion pictures such as Roberto Rossellini’s Neo-Realist rubble film *Germania anno zero* (1948) and Bernhard Wicki’s anti-war film *Die Brücke* (1959) demonstrate how the lens of youth provided a means with which to explore recent history, either by depicting the menacing child as threat, or the innocent, vulnerable child in need of nurture and rehabilitation. In this configuration, the child came to represent the horror of the recent past, and the hope for a democratic future.

The Third Reich has, unsurprisingly, been a recurring subject of post-Unification German cinema, either in depictions of the era itself, or in filmic explorations of the impact of the legacy of Nazism on contemporary Germans.³⁰² Such films have not commonly featured child protagonists as the term is usually understood; instead young people more readily recognisable as *adolescents* dominate filmic portrayals of the period. Both *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991) and *NaPolA* (2005) use the backdrop of an élite

³⁰⁰ Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, p. 177.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁰² Examples include: *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (Caroline Link, 2001); *Der Untergang* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004); *Der neunte Tag* (Volker Schlöndorff, 2004); *Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage* (Marc Rothemund, 2005); *Die Welle* (Dennis Gansel, 2008); *Die Brücke* (Wolfgang Panzer, 2008); and *Jud Süß – Film ohne Gewissen* (Oskar Roehler, 2010).

National Socialist school as their setting and explore the techniques used by the National Socialists to indoctrinate the young. The films' respective protagonists are born in 1925 and come of age through their experience of Nazism. For Solly Perel, the protagonist of *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, this is a journey both of self-discovery, but also of self-denial, as he experiences the Third Reich as a Jew in hiding. For Friedrich Weimar in *NaPolA*, attendance at an élite school offers the promise of privilege, yet he learns to reject Nazism through his encounter with its victims.

'Das glaubt dir kein Mensch': Agnieszka Holland's *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991)

Agnieszka Holland's controversial film *Hitlerjunge Salomon* was first released in Germany in October 1991³⁰³ and explores the Third Reich from a Jewish perspective. The narrative is based on the true story of Solomon 'Solly' Perel (Marco Hofschneider), born in Peine, Lower Saxony, in 1925 and is structured around his journey from childhood to adulthood. The incredible and picaresque account begins with his circumcision in the opening scenes, and concludes with his emigration to Palestine as a young man in the early post-war period.

The film's title is an ironic reference to *Hitlerjunge Quex*³⁰⁴ in which the protagonist Heini Völker defies his fiercely anti-fascist father and joins the Hitler Youth, where he earns the honourable nickname 'Quex', an abbreviation of *Quecksilber* (quicksilver), which alludes to his quick wit and sprightliness. In *Hitlerjunge Salomon* it is Solly's quick-wittedness which enables him to evade Nazi persecution and death. The

³⁰³ The film is a French-German-Polish co-production: the artistic direction is Polish and much of the film was shot in Poland. The film's primary language is German and it was funded by the Berlin *Filmförderungsanstalt*.

³⁰⁴ In the English-language translation of *Hitlerjunge Salomon* – *Europa Europa* – this allusion is lost.

eve of Solly's Bar Mitzvah coincides with *Kristallnacht*, during which the family's shop is attacked and his sister is killed. As a result of this the family flees to Łódź. When the Germans attack Poland, he and his brother Isaak (René Hofschneider) escape with the intention of heading east, but become separated. Solly is placed in a Soviet orphanage in Grodno, in Soviet-occupied Poland, where he enrolls as a member of the youth wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the *Komsomol*. After a *Wehrmacht* attack on the school he is separated from his teachers and schoolmates and taken prisoner by the Nazis. When asked whether he is a Jew, he denies it, claiming instead to be a *Volksdeutscher* and, now as Josef 'Jupp' Peters,³⁰⁵ becomes an interpreter for a *Wehrmacht* unit. Here he forms a friendship with the homosexual actor Robert Kellerman (André Wilms), who discovers Solly's secret Jewish identity, but swears to keep silent. After Robert is killed, Solly attempts to defect to the Soviets and, in so doing, unwittingly leads the German troops to their position. As a result, he is dubbed a German war hero by the assembled unit. He is adopted by a German officer and sent to an élite National Socialist school in Germany where he spends the rest of the war until he is dispatched, along with the other pupils, to defend Berlin against the final Soviet advance. After his capture, Solly attempts to re-assert his Jewish identity, but without success. It is only when he is identified by his brother Isaak, who has just been liberated from a concentration camp, that he is saved from being shot, and the penultimate sequence depicts the two brothers walking arm-in-arm into the distance, having resolved to emigrate to Palestine.

The film's reference to *Hitlerjunge Quex* encapsulates the crisis of identity in

³⁰⁵ The name recalls the protagonist of the Nazi propaganda film *Carl Peters*, directed by Herbert Selpin (Ufa, 1941).

which Solly finds himself: as simultaneously Jew and Hitler Youth member. His absent foreskin, the film's central motif, is the only visible mark which can betray his true identity.³⁰⁶ Yet simultaneously he is pronounced 'ein echter Arier' by Herr Goethke, the school's race expert. Furthermore, he shares his birthday, 20 April, with Hitler, and his complexion and dark hair lead him to be likened physically to the *Führer*. Thus Solly's identity as a victim of Nazism is complicated not only by his engagement in the Nazi structures of the *Wehrmacht*, and its educational institutions, but also by his apparent essential connection to the *Führer*. Indeed, Solly fails to fit simply into a victim/perpetrator binary. While he does indeed remain a victim of Nazi terror throughout the film, and his actions are almost always informed by his need to survive, he is also depicted as possessing a certain amount of agency – unusual in the portrayal of Holocaust victims, who are commonly seen to lose agency when they become inhabitants of ghettos or prisoners of concentration camps, or when they are forced into hiding.³⁰⁷ In the previous chapter we saw how the depiction of children can frequently show them as devoid of agency, and that this can be exacerbated in the case of Jewish children. Yet Solly is not portrayed simply as a symbol of victimhood which, for Omer Bartov, Jewish child victims of the Holocaust embody.³⁰⁸ Far from appearing as the object, rather than the subject of history, to use Stargardt's term,³⁰⁹ Solly takes on an ambiguous role as visually both victim and perpetrator.

³⁰⁶ Circumcision for medical reasons was extremely rare in continental Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. The fact that Solly was circumcised, therefore, would have pointed immediately to his Jewish identity.

³⁰⁷ Beate Müller, 'Agency, Ethics and Responsibility in Holocaust Fiction: Child Figures as Catalysts in Bruno Apitz's *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1958) and Edgar Hilsenrath's *Nacht* (1964)', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 36 (2011), 85-114, here p. 87.

³⁰⁸ Omer Bartov, *The 'Jew' in Cinema: from The Golem to Don't touch my Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005), p. 114.

³⁰⁹ Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, p. 10.

The question of agency is integral to the concept of adolescence, and the journey from childhood to adulthood. In their study of adolescence, Barry Zimmerman and Timothy Urdan write:

one major challenge that adolescents encounter during their teenage years involves acquiring a sense of personal agency in what often seems to be a recalcitrant world. Personal agency refers to one's capability to originate and direct actions for given purposes.³¹⁰

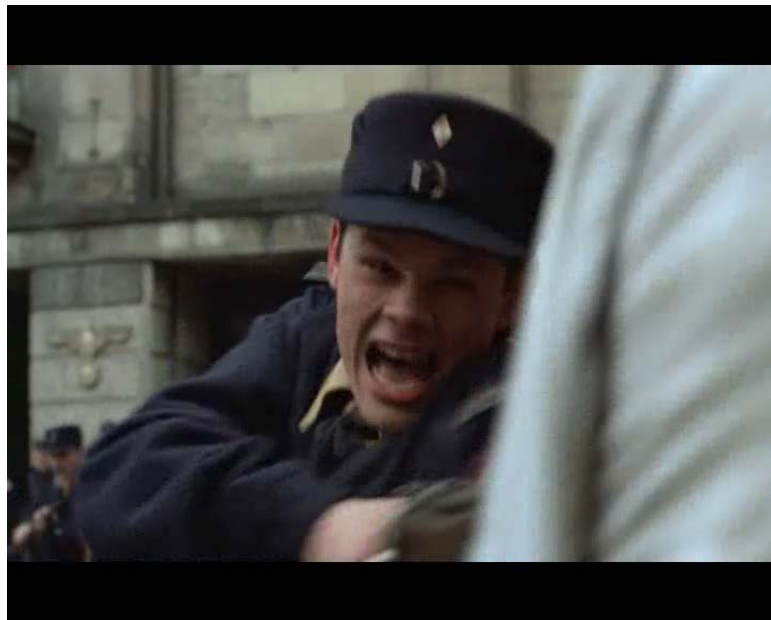
Solly is faced with a number of challenges and makes decisions which affect his future. His decision to deny his Jewish identity to the *Wehrmacht* is unquestionably brought about by outside forces, yet Solly is shown to make this choice consciously. This unsettles the clear-cut presentation of the character: he no longer symbolises the passive victimhood associated with the child, but rather, by acting with agency (however limited), he takes on a more complex role. A prime example of this complexity is a sequence in which the pupils are required to bayonet a doll representing a caricature Jew. Solly must participate in the exercise, and his role as 'perpetrator' is reinforced through the camera angle: a shot from behind the dummy places the off-screen viewer in the position of being attacked by him.³¹¹ Holland retains the complexity of the character by following the shot with a close-up of Solly's troubled reaction; however, the image of the protagonist engaging in this act of violence is profound (see Figures 21 and 22).

Similarly, when confronted with pictures of the concentration camps at the end of the war, Solly repeats what his *Wehrmacht* captain had told him: that the Jews had been sent to live in Madagascar. While it is true that Solly might well have had no notion of the true fate of the Jews, it is nonetheless striking that in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* a Jewish

³¹⁰ Zimmerman and Cleary, 'Adolescents' Development of Personal Agency', p. 45.

³¹¹ Janet Lungstrum, 'Foreskin Fetishism: Jewish Male Difference in *Europa, Europa*', *Screen*, 39 (1998), 53-66, here p. 64.

victim of Nazi persecution should utter a phrase so condemned in post-war discourse: that he 'didn't know'.



Figures 21 and 22: Solly bayonets a caricature doll, in *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, dir. by Agnieszka Holland (Central Cinema Company Film, 1991).

Solly's identity as a passive victim of Nazi persecution is also undermined throughout the film by the depiction of his burgeoning sexuality. At each stage on Solly's

journey he engages in some form of romantic encounter. Having hidden naked in a barrel during *Kristallnacht*, Solly asks a young neighbour, Kati (Kama Kowalewska), to fetch him some clothes, and is clearly ashamed of his nakedness. In Łódź, he forms the beginning of a relationship with the proprietor of the local cinema, and with his *Komsomol* teacher in Grodno. Solly unexpectedly succeeds in a sexual encounter with the female NSDAP envoy sent to escort him to his new National Socialist school. This scene is both comic and grotesque: on learning that Solly shares the same birthday as Hitler, the woman forces herself upon Solly.³¹² The scene's initial function seems to be to demonstrate the corrupting power of Nazism on the young Jewish boy; yet the scene cuts immediately to a shot of Solly triumphantly shouting in an exhilarated manner from the train window, suggestive of the fact that he has had his first successful sexual experience and that, rather than experiencing shame or degradation, he is in fact proud of it. Here we witness a disjuncture between the private and the ideological: between the boy's sexual awakening, and the political context. At the élite school he begins a romantic relationship with one of the BDM girls who works there, Leni (Julie Delpy). Her fanatical anti-Semitism prevents him revealing the physical mark of his Jewish identity, and so he is forced to abstain from sexual intercourse. Frustrated by Solly's lack of interest, Leni becomes pregnant by his friend, Gerd (Ashley Wanninger), in order to give up her child as part of the SS run *Lebensborn* project.

³¹² This scene is composed of several close-up shots of National Socialist properties, including a swastika-decorated cigarette case and a cigarette lighter in the shape of a bullet, visually reinforcing the woman's commitment to Nazism.

Hitlerjunge Salomon received lukewarm reviews upon its release in Germany and was poorly distributed in German cinemas.³¹³ Furthermore, an independent jury representing a cross-section of the film industry rejected its candidacy as the country's official entry for the Academy Awards, ostensibly as it was not deemed German enough.³¹⁴ Agnieszka Holland regarded the refusal of the *Export-Union des deutschen Films* to nominate the film for the Oscar as 'deutscher Arroganz gegenüber jüdischen Themen'.³¹⁵ Critics claimed that one of the reasons for the poor reception of the film was because Germans did not want others 'interfering' with their process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.³¹⁶ This, however, raises the question as to why *Schindler's List* (1995) – a film about the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich – an American production, was received so positively in Germany. The answer may on the one hand be simply the timing: in the early 1990s Germany was preoccupied with quite different concerns, and it was only with the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1995 that the legacy of Nazism in the Berlin Republic became central to public discourse once again. On the other hand, it seems plausible that Holland's unlikely and challenging depiction of the Jewish protagonist may also have been a contributing factor. Central to this is Solly's age, and the film's depiction of youth. Solly's 'non victim-like opportunism', as Lungstrum terms it,³¹⁷ challenges received images of the Jewish child victim of the Holocaust.³¹⁸

³¹³ Lungstrum, 'Foreskin Fetishism', p. 54. Holland had already made two films which had been popular in Germany: *Eine Liebe in Deutschland* (1983) and *Bittere Ernte* (1985).

³¹⁴ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton/NJ and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001), p. 54.

³¹⁵ Andreas Kilb, 'Kein Skandal: der Kino-Streit um "Hitlerjunge Salomon"', *Die Zeit*, 31 January 1992, <http://www.zeit.de/1992/06/ohne-oscar> [accessed 12 January 2012].

³¹⁶ See, for example, Anon., 'Stur und streng', *Der Spiegel*, 30 December 1991, p. 149.

³¹⁷ Lungstrum, 'Foreskin Fetishism', p. 55.

³¹⁸ This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four. See below, pp. 181-222.

Hitlerjunge Salomon sets up its narrative clearly as the coming of age journey of its protagonist. The opening sequence of the film proper³¹⁹ depicts Solly's circumcision: a rite of passage which places him within a clear religious and social context. The rite of passage which ought to follow it – his Bar Mitzvah – is disrupted by *Kristallnacht* and, significantly, it is from this moment that Solly's identity becomes uncertain. 'Identity [...] is at the core of "coming of age"'.³²⁰ That the rite of passage Solly subsequently engages in is a sexual one is significant, as it disrupts his own, and the audience's, notion of him as a child. This is, as I outline above, integral to our understanding of the film. After being reunited with his brother, Solly changes clothes once again into the striped uniform of the concentration camp prisoner, and he and Isaak are shown walking away from the lens, surrounded by trees and bathed in sunlight (see Figure 23). Pinfold considers that Jewish child Holocaust victims often function as a means of suggesting the 'moral triumph of an innocent child over Nazism'.³²¹ Such figures embody notions of victimhood and a redemptive hope for the future. As I have shown, Solly does not embody the image of the 'innocent child'; however, it is difficult to reconcile the film's final sequence with Holland's otherwise critical approach. The path snaking through the middle of the frame, suggests both the future, but also, with the path they have already trodden in the foreground of the frame, the troubled journey the protagonist has already made: a journey through Nazi Europe, and a journey from childhood to adulthood.

³¹⁹ The first sequence in the film, which precedes the introductory credits, depicts Solly (Hofschneider) underwater, wearing his Hitler Youth uniform, fighting to reach the surface.

³²⁰ Claudine Raynaud, 'Coming of Age in the African American Novel', in *Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, ed. by Mary Emma Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 106-22, here p. 106.

³²¹ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 104.



Figure 23: Solly and Isaak, walking into the distance, in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991).

Dennis Gansel's *NaPolA: Elite für den Führer* (Dennis Gansel, 2004)

The premiere of Dennis Gansel's *NaPolA: Elite für den Führer* was held in August 2004, less than a month before the release of Oliver Hirschbiegel's controversial film *Der Untergang*, which overshadowed the former's reception. Nevertheless, *NaPolA* won a host of awards, including the *Deutscher Filmpreis* for best un-adapted screenplay (2004),³²² the *Bayrischer Filmpreis* for best director (2004) and the award for best film at the Viareggio European Film Festival.³²³ Gansel's stated intention in making the film was to demonstrate 'wie Verführung funktioniert',³²⁴ and the narrative is a straightforward coming of age tale which charts the moral development of its protagonist

³²² Co-written by Dennis Gansel and Maggie Peren.

³²³ The financial backing came from the German Federal Film Board (FFA) and *FilmFernsehFonds*, Bayern. It was produced by Olga Film, Munich, in co-production with Constantin Film Production, Munich, and Seven Pictures Film.

³²⁴ *NaPolA* [DVD Commentary].

from a state of ignorance, to a fuller understanding of the flawed ideological values inherent in the National Socialist system.

Because of his exceptional boxing talent, seventeen-year-old Friedrich Weimar (Max Riemelt) is lifted out of his humdrum existence in the suburb of Berlin-Wedding and offered the chance to enrol in the local *NaPoLA* in Allenstein. At the school he becomes friends with the son of the local Gauleiter, Albrecht Stein (Tom Schilling), an artistic and sensitive youth who is sceptical of National Socialism's values and the dazzling opportunities it appears to offer. Friedrich, on the other hand, is enthralled by the school's exceptional facilities, the comradeship of the other pupils, and the promise of his future role as a member of the National Socialist élite. However, he also witnesses the cruelty and lack of pity shown towards those who fail to meet the school's expectations. His classmate Siegfried Gladen (Martin Goeres), who is routinely persecuted for his bedwetting, is a case in point. The film's turning-point comes when pupils from Friedrich's class are required by Gauleiter Stein (Justus von Dohnányi) to participate in a nocturnal military operation in the woods surrounding the school: because of their knowledge of these woods, they are to assist in the capture of some escaped prisoners-of-war. However, they unwittingly shoot and kill a number of Russian children, whom they had believed to be the escapees. In response to the episode, Albrecht writes an anti-fascist essay in which he criticises both the school and the Nazi regime. Facing punishment by his father (the Gauleiter), enforced enrolment in the *Waffen SS* and immediate transfer to active combat on the Eastern Front, he commits suicide during a sporting exercise on the school lake. Through Albrecht's moral stand, Friedrich gains the strength and understanding to make his own stand by deliberately losing an important

school boxing match. He is expelled from the school, and the film's final sequence shows him walking into the distance, and into an uncertain future.

While *Hitlerjunge Salomon* primarily plays on the title alone of *Hitlerjunge Quex*, *NaPolA* is informed both by the plot and the style of the Nazi propaganda film. Like Heini Völker in *Hitlerjunge Quex*, Friedrich functions as a kind of everyman figure, representing the 'typical' German youth in the 1930s and 1940s.³²⁵ In addition, he represents the Nazis' ideal young German male: blonde, blue-eyed, strong, and loyal to the *Führer*, to the extent that he is prepared to threaten his own family with denunciation. Like *Quex*, both in Schenzinger's novel, and in Steinhoff's adaptation, we see 'Heini's conversion to the authoritarian Hitler Youth organisation as a liberation from the obviously brutal confines of the authoritarian family'.³²⁶ In *NaPolA* Friedrich is depicted as a victim of his strict father (Alexander Held) who, like Heini's father, is a Communist and violently opposed to Nazism. Friedrich's father forbids him to enrol in the *NaPolA*, stating: 'mit diesen Leuten [the National Socialists] haben wir nichts zu schaffen'.³²⁷ Friedrich defies his father, departing secretly from the family home, and leaving behind a letter in which he swears he will report his father's anti-fascist comments should he attempt to remove Friedrich from the school.³²⁸ Yet although Herr Weimar represents anti-fascism, and is, in this sense, himself a victim – we learn subsequently that he has been investigated by the *Gestapo* – he nonetheless *appears* oppressive and authoritarian

³²⁵ The name Friedrich Weimar also suggests a universality which is also to be found in the name Heini Völker.

³²⁶ Stahl, 'Moral Despair', p. 92.

³²⁷ *NaPolA* [on DVD].

³²⁸ Daniel Kulle rightly identifies a parallel scene to this one in *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933) as the protagonist, Heini Völker tries to convince his Communist father to allow him to enrol in the Hitler Youth: Daniel Kulle "'Tut so was ein deutscher Junge?": Verantwortung und Mitleid in *Napola – Elite für den Führer*', in *Das Böse im Blick*, pp. 219-31, here p. 221.

because the audience experiences the narrative from Friedrich's perspective. This view is only reinforced by his violent response to Friedrich's departure.

Friedrich, like Heini, is enthralled by the Hitler Youth and the opportunities it appears to offer. In Schenzinger's novel, the author describes how Heini comes across a company of the Hitler Youth. He watches the members singing:

‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles’, fiel es mit tausend Stimmen wie eine heiße Welle über ihn her. [...] Er wollte mitsingen, aber seine Stimme versagte. Dies war deutscher Boden, deutscher Wald, dies waren deutsche Jungens, und er sah, daß er abseits stand, allein, ohne Hilfe, daß er nicht wusste, wohin mit diesem jähen großen Gefühl.³²⁹

As well as the protagonist's profound emotional response, his status as outsider is particularly emphasised here; and a similar construction is at play in *NaPolA*. Friedrich is the film's primary focaliser: the audience sees the world of the *NaPolA* through his eyes, often quite literally through the frequent use of point-of-view shots. In many ways, Friedrich embodies the innocent, unknowing outsider figure often used in cinema as a means of revealing the true horror of events to the audience. Friedrich, as outsider, learns about Nazism, and his limited insight encourages the viewer to fill in the gaps, and to respond to events with the benefit of hindsight.

This is part of Gansel's aim to depict the Hitler Youth in a way that the audience could sympathise with and understand. Asked in an interview with *Die Zeit*'s cinema section about reactions to the film abroad, Gansel quotes a student from Prague who describes himself as having been ‘fassungslos angesichts der Opferbereitschaft der deutschen Jugend. Jetzt weiß ich warum’. Gansel comments: ‘darum ging es mir. Die Generation von damals nicht von oben herab zu verurteilen, sondern ihre Erfahrungen

³²⁹ Karl Aloys Schenzinger, *Der Hitlerjunge Quex* (Berlin: Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1932), p. 47.

verständlich zu machen.’³³⁰ Gansel’s emphases are on making the Hitler Youth boys more ‘verständlich’, more ‘human’, and on depicting how easily they were corrupted to serve ideological ends. His determination to avoid judging youth ‘von oben herab’ reflects the broader empathetic attitude in post-Unification Germany towards those who experienced Nazism. Gansel’s approach stems in part from his own family history, as his grandfather was a pupil at a National Socialist élite school. Gansel comments:

mein Großvater war selber auf einer Reichskriegsschule, was zwar keine NaPolA ist, aber vom Drillablauf her ähnlich funktioniert. Er hat diese Zeit immer als sehr schön in Erinnerung gehabt, er hat immer gesagt ‘für uns war das eine tolle Zeit, eine Zeit, in der ich sehr viel Selbstvertrauen bekommen habe, in der ich selbst irgendwie Karriere machen konnte. Man hat mir Anerkennung gegeben’.³³¹

Here Gansel relates how his grandfather stresses the positive aspects of the school which he remembers, particularly the sense of independence, the recognition and the promise of a future career as a member of the élite. In *NaPolA*, Gansel emphasises the attractive elements of the school and Friedrich’s enjoyment of it. A montage shows Friedrich studying, taking part in sporting activities and flying a biplane. In all these pursuits he is shown to be enjoying the experiences, and, significantly, the sense of comradeship which they entail.

Unlike *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, which seeks to blur the boundaries between young people’s status as victims and as perpetrators, *Napola* establishes a paradigm of the innocence of youth throughout the film. In the first instance, the film’s emphasis is on Friedrich’s moral journey, and as such it sidelines his adolescent development and depicts him as sexually innocent throughout. In an identical sequence of frames to

³³⁰ Dennis Gansel, Interview, kino-zeit.de, <http://www.kino-zeit.de/filme/artikel/Napola-ein-interview-mit-dennis-gansel.html> [accessed 3 September 2011].

³³¹ Dennis Gansel, Interview, <http://www.3sat.de/3sat.php?> [accessed 3 September 2011].

Hitlerjunge Salomon, Friedrich and Albrecht attempt to watch a girl undressing (see Figures 24 and 25).³³²



Figure 24: Solly climbing to his teacher's window, in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991).

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 25: A similar frame composition in *NaPolA – Elite für den Führer*, dir. by Dennis Gansel (Olga Film GmbH, 2004).

While the scene does suggest the boys' burgeoning sexuality, the air of innocence, and its isolation within the rest of the film and from the rest of the plot, led Daniel Kulle to comment: 'man hat fast den Eindruck, als diene [die Szene] eher dazu, den möglichen Verdacht einer homosexuellen Beziehung zwischen den beiden Freunden

³³² In *Hitlerjunge Salomon* the girl is the young *Komsomol* teacher; in *NaPolA*, it is a BDM member.

auszuräumen.’³³³ The de-sexualisation of the boys contributes to a process of infantilisation which runs throughout the film.

NaPolA employs a number of generational conflicts which seek to place the young in a position as the innocent victims of adults. In the same way that Friedrich’s father is portrayed in a negative light, despite his opposition to Nazism, Albrecht and his father, Gauleiter Stein are contrasted throughout the film. Gauleiter Stein is a hard-line Nazi whose cruelty is demonstrated in a number of scenes.³³⁴ Albrecht’s physicality and almost effeminate body contrasts starkly with the Gauleiter’s thickset and muscular build. Stein’s comment on hearing of Albrecht’s death in the icy waters of the school lake is that his son was ‘einfach zu schwach’,³³⁵ referring both to Albrecht’s physical and to his mental condition. On the contrary, Albrecht demonstrates to the viewer his strength in resisting his father’s duress, demonstrating independent moral decision-making, which he defends to his death. In this way Albrecht takes on the characteristics of a Romantic figure, linked closely with the poet, through his love of literature. He functions as the foil to Friedrich’s total embodiment of the Nazi ideal of youth.

The generational conflicts which dominate the film are also conveyed through the depiction of the adult teaching staff at the *NaPolA* who are predominantly negative figures, depicted largely one-dimensionally. This is exemplified well by the nameless ‘Sportlehrer’ (Michael Schenk), a character reminiscent of the oppressive and inhuman teacher figures in Frank Wedekind’s *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891) (see Figure 26).

³³³ Kulle, “‘Tut so was ein deutscher Junge?’”, p. 222.

³³⁴ For example, at his birthday party when he forces Albrecht and Friedrich to box, despite being fully aware of his son’s lack of talent and slight frame.

³³⁵ *NaPolA* [on DVD].

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 26: The ‘Sportlehrer’ in *NaPolA* (2004).

The ‘Sportlehrer’ persecutes Siegfried Gladen, a habitual bed-wetter. When a hand grenade exercise goes wrong, the ‘Sportlehrer’ flees, leaving the terrified boys in the trench; Siegfried throws himself upon the grenade, thereby saving the other pupils. The spectacle made of his death by the school exemplifies National Socialism’s glorification of youth: Siegfried, who had been persecuted for his weakness, is hailed as a hero, which even his name appears to confirm. The idea that his action might have been motivated by his own wish to die, rather than, or indeed as well as, his wish to save the lives of his friends, is not entertained.

In this constellation, the audience comes implicitly to identify itself with the young Nazis through its empathy with Friedrich. As Daniel Kulle comments: ‘die empathisch zugänglichen und sympathischen Figuren sind allesamt unschuldig und stehen einem übergeordneten, nationalsozialistischen System gegenüber, zu welchem sie

Stellung beziehen müssen. Die Jugendlichkeit der Protagonisten befreit sie gleichzeitig von einer Mitschuld.³³⁶ The pupils' lack of agency in *NaPolA* provides a largely uncomplicated picture of German youth in the Third Reich. This is made explicit in Gansel's commentary on the scene in which the youths kill the Russian children. The pupils who are sent out to kill escaped POWs have no idea that these are in fact children and adolescent civilians. The *NaPolA* pupils shoot as a result of their own fear and the indoctrination they have been subject to. With reference to Friedrich's involvement in the sequence, Gansel comments: '[Friedrich] ist Zeuge. Jetzt zu diesem Zeitpunkt kann er nicht mehr sagen, ich hab' von nichts gewusst.'³³⁷ Despite Gansel's apparent criticism of Friedrich here, his use of the word 'Zeuge' reinforces Friedrich's powerlessness.³³⁸

In addition to these generational conflicts, which establish the apparently child-like innocence and passivity of the pupils in contrast to the corrupting power of the adults, *NaPolA* employs established cinematic images of childhood, most notably the motif of the fairy-tale, or 'Märchen'. The fairy-tale – a product of Romanticism – was co-opted by National Socialism, to the extent that after Second World War the Allied occupation forces banned the reproduction of traditional fairy-tales.³³⁹ The fairy-tale thus represents the innocence associated with childhood as well as the potential for exploitation and corruption.³⁴⁰

The building in which the school is housed is a romantic, Gothic castle (see Figure 27), surrounded by woodland. At the beginning of the film this functions as a

³³⁶ Kulle, "“Tut so was ein deutscher Junge?”", p. 229.

³³⁷ *NaPolA* [DVD commentary].

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Jack David Zipes, 'Introduction', in *Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days*, ed. and translated from the German by Jack David Zipes (Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1989), p. 25.

³⁴⁰ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 86.

contrast to the claustrophobic, urban setting of Wedding, from which Friedrich is eager to escape. Thus initially the forest represents freedom and opportunity. Yet it also comes to signify the liminality of adolescence through its evocation of the fairy-tale. The forest has a long history in literary allusion. In Middle High German literature heroes commonly embark on quests which lead them into the forest where they earn their status in society. For example, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the protagonist journeys through the forest in order to fulfil his destiny. He takes many paths through the forest – often false ones – before he reaches the required moral and societal maturity.³⁴¹

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 27: The fairy-tale castle which houses the school, in *NaPolA*.

In the early nineteenth century the Brothers Grimm became fascinated by the forest in German folklore. As Jack David Zipes writes:

³⁴¹ Parzival is an archetype of the literary outsider figure commonly associated with the mad and with children. This will be discussed in Chapter Three with reference to Günter Grass's *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006).

the heroes of the Grimms' tales customarily march or drift into the forest and they are rarely the same people when they leave it. The forest provides them with all they need, if they know how to interpret the signs.³⁴²

The forest is a site in which moral betterment is possible, and as such often plays a particular role in the fairy-tale, which is about those who stray from the path and, in so doing, become more self-aware and stronger. Bruno Bettelheim writes: 'only by going out into the world can the fairy-tale hero (child) find himself there [...]. The fairy tale is future-oriented and guides the child [...] to relinquish his infantile dependency wishes and achieve a more satisfying independent existence.'³⁴³ For Friedrich, the path through the forest leads him to kill the Russian children, but also to witness Albrecht's compassionate response to the 'enemy', as he defies his father and attempts to dress the Russian boy's wounds. For Friedrich, the forest provides the site of the liminal stage of adolescence: as he witnesses Albrecht's empathy, he is shown finally to have left his childhood behind, and yet he is still 'betwixt and between': the forest has provided him with all he needs, but he has not yet learnt how to interpret the signs. Albrecht's own awareness of the evil of Nazism is crystallised in this sequence, and is confirmed the following day, when he writes a critique of Nazism in an essay. The essay is composed with the language of the fairy-tale. He writes:

so kindlich es auch sein mag, so erfüllt uns Menschen die Winterzeit und der Anblick frischgefallenem Schnee, immer mit einem Gefühl von unerklärlicher Glückseligkeit. [...] Ich jedenfalls war in meinen Vorstellungen von Held, der Drachen besiegt und Jungfrauen rettet, jemand der die Welt von dem Bösen befreit. Und als wir gestern loszogen, um die Gefangenen zu finden, da kam ich mir wieder vor wie der kleine Junge, der die Welt von dem Bösen retten will.

³⁴² Jack David Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 89.

³⁴³ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Peregrine Books, 1978), p. 8.

Und als wir zurückkamen, da war mir klar geworden, dass ich selbst Teil des Bösen bin, vor dem ich die Welt immer bewahren wollte.³⁴⁴

Albrecht's experience is constructed as a fairy-tale, but he has come to realise that it is one in which he is the figure of evil, rather than the hero-protagonist as he had been trained to believe. Albrecht's insight is expressed in the language of the child, who views the world as a struggle between the hero and 'dem Bösen'. Albrecht speaks as a child, which simultaneously belies the maturity of his understanding, and reinforces the audience's view of him as an innocent victim, and a symbol of hope and redemption in the face of the corrupting power of Nazism.

In *NaPolA* Gansel aims to depict National Socialism's effect on German youth, both by demonstrating how attractive it appeared to them, and also to show young people in a more sympathetic light. Ultimately, Friedrich is portrayed as a victim of Nazism: a young man who is dazzled by the attractive opportunities for advancement and power, a juvenile victim of adult manipulation and corruption. The infantilisation of his character reinforces this view. However, Friedrich *does* develop, and the final frame depicts him walking away from the school, which has transformed from a fairy-tale castle into a site of terror and oppression. The natural setting of the final frame is also significant: the affinity of childhood and the natural world is a well-established trope, both in literature and film, and also in the fairy-tale as discussed above (see Figure 28).³⁴⁵ By aligning Friedrich with nature here, *NaPolA* reinforces the child-like status of its protagonist, thereby emphasising notions of innocence and passivity. In addition, the seasons have reflected Friedrich's journey, and the spring of his youth has become a wintry landscape. It echoes Margaret Meek's comment that maturation 'leads the individual from a lost

³⁴⁴ *NaPolA* [on DVD].

³⁴⁵ Sinyard, *Children in the Movies*, p. 7.

magical state of innocence and perception into the prosaic state of regretful adulthood'.³⁴⁶ The innocence of the first half of the film has been gradually worn away, and Friedrich has been shown to have come of age morally, albeit through a painful process.

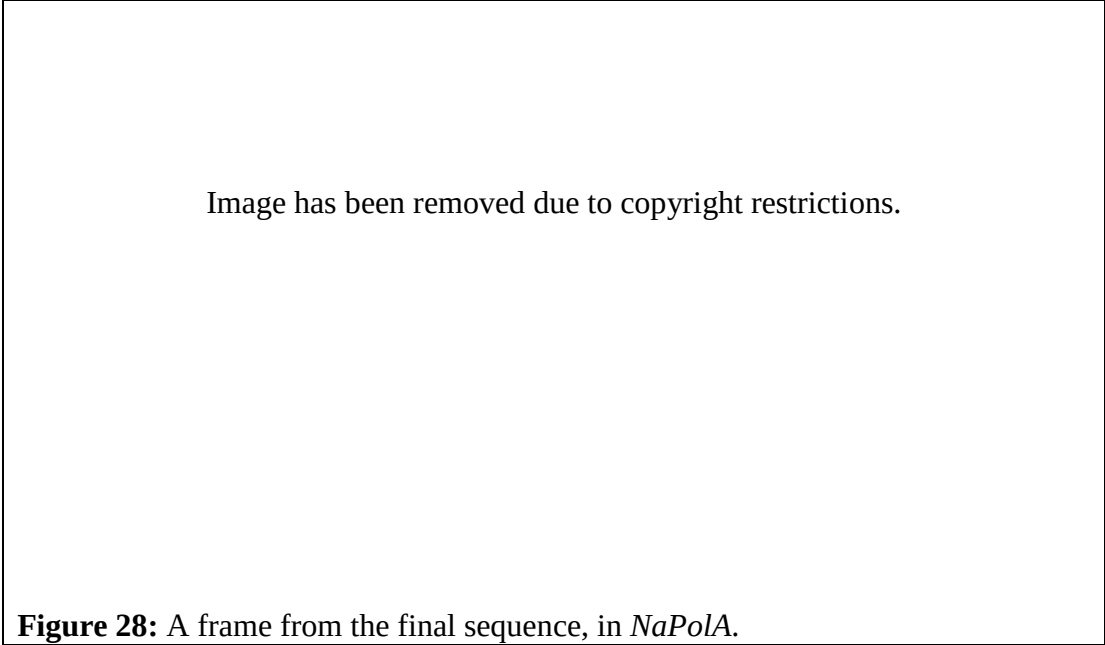


Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 28: A frame from the final sequence, in *NaPolA*.

The similarity between this frame composition and that at the end of *Hitlerjunge Salomon* is striking, and can be found elsewhere in post-Unification cinema, for example in *Der Untergang* and in Wolfgang Panzer's 2008 re-make of Bernhard Wicki's *Die Brücke*.³⁴⁷ The winding path symbolises the journey that the protagonists have made within the film, as well as the journey still to be undertaken. For an audience looking back at the events of the past, this future-orientated journey is already history.

³⁴⁶ Margaret Meek and Victor Watson, *Coming of Age in Children's Literature* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 8.

³⁴⁷ In *Der Untergang*, the final shot of the main part of the film shows the figures of Traudl Junge and the Hitler Youth member, Peter Kranz, cycling through the forest together into the future. In *Die Brücke*, the protagonist and his girlfriend are reunited and they embrace, standing on a small wooden bridge against a backdrop of trees.

‘Inszenierte Authentizität’?: Depicting the Past in Cinema

Both *Hitlerjunge Salomon* and *NaPolA* engage implicitly with Reich-Ranicki’s concern that in contemporary society people have become ‘überinformiert, aber trotzdem unwissend’ in their knowledge of the Third Reich.³⁴⁸ By focusing on the development of a young protagonist, the films assert personal experience, and its emotional effects. An important element in both films’ marketing strategies was the cachet of ‘authenticity’, and they both utilise a number of conscious strategies which, as Gil Bartholeyns writes, are commonly used by filmmakers to ‘call forth history, by way of particular procedures of aesthetics’.³⁴⁹ In both *Hitlerjunge Salomon* and *NaPolA* we see multiple strategies at work. Both films take great pains to depict the paraphernalia of Nazism, including items of material culture such as maps, newspaper headlines, memoirs, and archival documents, as well as costumes, properties, and symbols, which, as Steve Neale argues, function in this context as ““authentic” (and authenticating) discourses’.³⁵⁰

Hitlerjunge Salomon uses footage from the *Pathé* newsreels and, through the use of camera angles, integrates them directly into the main film. For example, the newsreel footage shows aerial bombing from the perspective of the planes. This cuts directly to a shot of the interior of the Perels’ living room, and the rattling of the lights as bombs hit the surrounding buildings (see Figures 29 and 30). In addition, in keeping with the comic style of *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, Holland makes visual references to National Socialist

³⁴⁸ Reich-Ranicki, *Meine Schulzeit*, p. 9.

³⁴⁹ Gil Bartholeyns, ‘Representation of the Past in Films: Between Historicity and Authenticity’, *Diogenes*, 48:1 (2000), 31-47, here p. 34.

³⁵⁰ Steve Neale, ‘Questions of Genre’, in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Austin/Texas: U of Texas P, 2003), pp. 160-85, here p. 162.

aesthetics, and Margaret Olin identifies the ‘intertextual, parodistic allusions to the likes of Leni Riefensthal’s Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*’.³⁵¹



Figure 29: Footage taken from a *Pathé* newsreel, in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991).



Figure 30: The frame which immediately follows the images taken from the *Pathé* newsreel, in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (1991).

³⁵¹ Margaret Olin, ‘Lanzmann’s *Shoah* and the Topography of the Holocaust Film’, *Representations*, no. 57 (1997), 1-23, here p. 8.

These include scenes showing young men and women engaging in sporting activities, night scenes in which flaming torches light up the screen and the over-enthusiastic teacher who, in a pre-dinner pronouncement in the place of a traditional grace, exhorts the pupils to a ‘gesittetes Essen mit Messer und Gabel’ before wishing them ‘Guten Appetit!’,³⁵² in a tone of exaggerated quasi-religious fervour.

NaPolA also makes use of the aesthetics of National Socialist propaganda films, in particular, those of Leni Riefenstahl: *Triumph des Willens* (1934), *Sieg des Glaubens* (1933) and *Tag der Freiheit* (1935). Susan Sontag writes of Riefenstahl’s films that

whether about Party congresses, the Wehrmacht, or athletes [they] celebrate the rebirth of the body and community, mediated through the worship of an irresistible leader [...] The Nazi films are epics of achieved community, in which everyday reality is transcended through ecstatic self-control and submission.³⁵³

The sense of community and the aesthetics of the body are central to *NaPolA*, not least in demonstrating the hold of Nazism over the young. Several scenes depict Friedrich boxing and evoke earlier National Socialist images which place emphasis on robust, healthy young bodies. The cinematic references to *Hitlerjunge Quex* are also a significant aspect of the film. Hilmar Hoffman describes a scene in Steinhoff’s *Hitlerjunge Quex* thus:

Heini Völker gazes at the disciplined brown-shirted youths. A long shot shows them lined up rank and file, solemnly hoisting their flag. The film uses picture and sound to link Heini’s longing for security, a surrogate father, and comradeship to the attitude toward life exemplified by this idealized community of young people.³⁵⁴

A strikingly similar sequence appears in *NaPolA*. In one of the first scenes set in the élite school, the camera pans across a hall full of ranks of pupils in their uniforms, singing the Hitler Youth song ‘Uns’re Fahne flattert uns voran’ which begins and ends *Hitlerjunge*

³⁵² *Hitlerjunge Salomon* [on DVD].

³⁵³ Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 86.

³⁵⁴ Hilmar Hoffman, *The Triumph of Propaganda*, translated from the German by John Broadwin and Volker R. Berghahn (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), pp. 50-1.

Quex, and the first line of which is uttered by the dying Heini Völker with his final breath. *NaPolA*, like *Quex*, ‘uses picture and sound to link the protagonist’s longing for security, a surrogate father, and comradeship to the attitude toward life exemplified by this idealized community of young people’ (see Figures 31 and 32).³⁵⁵ A montage of Friedrich’s activities in the school towards the middle of the film emphasises the pupils’ comradeship, and the soundtrack reinforces this positive image.

While *NaPolA* draws on the aesthetics of National Socialist propaganda it also critiques them, principally by showing their superficiality and hypocrisy. The memorial service held for Siegfried Gladen is a case in point, as the boys, and the viewers, are aware of the u-turn made by the school’s staff in their treatment of the boy. In addition, Albrecht – the figure of resistance – is never depicted taking part in the collective ceremonies. Moreover, *NaPolA* reflects post-*Wende* films about Nazism. Isabella Reicher writing in the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard* notes that the ‘Farbtönung der Bilder, ihre künstlich hergestellte Patina, entspricht den Konventionen der Historienmalerei des zeitgenössischen populären Kinos’.³⁵⁶ Visually, the film reproduces historic film from the Third Reich, and historical film from the post-*Wende* period. In so doing, it corresponds not only to a historical image, but to a contemporary recreation of that image: its aesthetics are thus doubly recognisable to a post-*Wende* audience.

³⁵⁵ Hoffman, *The Triumph of Propaganda*, p. 51.

³⁵⁶ Isabella Reicher, ‘Schule für den Heldentod’, *Der Standard*, 22 April 2005, <http://derstandard.at/2023249/Schule-fuer-den-Heldentod> [accessed 12 January 2012].

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 31: The pupils assembled in the school hall, in *NaPolA*.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figures 32: Friedrich sings ‘Uns’re Fahne flattert uns voran’, in *NaPolA*.

Both films’ respective marketing strategies emphasised their authenticity in their adaptation of true events. *Hitlerjunge Salomon* is marketed as a ‘true story’ with an emphasis on its basis in fact. It is based on the experiences of its protagonist, Solomon Perel, who has given his own account of his early years: *Ich war Hitlerjunge Salomon*

(1993) written in Hebrew and first published in French in 1990.³⁵⁷ In the film adaptation, the central action is frequently commented upon, and framed, by a voice-over narration, spoken by Marco Hofschneider as Solly; furthermore, a song which is sung by an unidentified woman's voice at the opening of the film is sung at the end of the film by the real Solomon Perel. This framing helps to create the quality of authenticity. Indeed, Perel appears to act as a guarantor of authenticity when he appears in the final sequence. In Hans Günther Pflaum's scathing review of *Hitlerjunge Salomon* he comments that 'die Geschichte von Salomon Perel ist authentisch. Die Verfilmung treibt ihr diese Qualität aus'.³⁵⁸ In particular he observes how 'ein Epilog zeigt den authentischen, nach Palästina ausgewanderten Salomon Perel. Agnieszka Holland stellt ihn aus, um den Wahrheitsgehalt ihres Films zu belegen. Wer der Inszenierung mißtraut, zweifelt am Bericht eines Opfers'.³⁵⁹ Pflaum's view is echoed by the critic Janet Lungstrum who considers that the film's claim to authenticity as an autobiographical tale is confirmed when the real-life Salomon Perel appears at the film's end as 'an implied guarantor of all we have seen'.³⁶⁰ Similarly, Schneider argues that historical films about Nazism use their claims to authenticity and their access to footage of authentic eye witnesses in order to legitimise their own depiction of the past. The filmmakers emphasise the 'authenticity' of their production through historical figures like Traudl Junge in *Der Untergang* and

³⁵⁷ Solomon Perel's *Ich war Hitlerjunge Salomon* (München: Heyne, 1993) was published several months after the film's release in Germany. It is noteworthy that Perel's autobiography was published *after* the release of the film, and indeed is entitled *Ich war Hitlerjunge Salomon*, referring back to the title of the film. Here the 'factual' source text seems to seek to confirm its truth value through its association with the creative project: the film adaptation of Perel's life story.

³⁵⁸ Hans Günther Pflaum, 'Keine Zeit für Trauer: Agnieszka Hollands zum Politikum gewordener Film "Hitlerjunge Salomon"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 February 1992, <http://www.filmportal.de/df/9a/Artikel,,,,print,,,ECC7C5EBF5DD33F0E03053D50B3728F4,,,,,html> [accessed 20 January 2012].

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Lungstrum, 'Foreskin Fetishism', p. 56.

similarly in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* with the appearance of Salomon Perel in the final sequence. Schneider writes: 'die Bekundung der Zeitzeugin macht das Geschehen, das der *Untergang* zeigt, zu einer historischen Urszene.'³⁶¹ The result of this is that the viewer leaves the cinema regarding himself not as an audience member who has seen a film, but rather as a witness to an event. Schneider's comment not only suggests that the presence of the eye-witness performs a kind of authenticating function, but his use of Freud's notion of the 'Urszene' also positions the viewer in the place of the child.

The question of authenticity is also raised on the diegetic level of the film. The film begins with the narrator's voice-over. He states: 'niemand wollte mir je glauben, dass ich mich an den Tag meiner Beschneidung erinnere.'³⁶² While referring directly to his circumcision, the comment also has a broader relevance as it raises the theme of credibility and believability at the outset. In a scene shortly after Solly and Isaak's reunion, Isaak commands his brother never to tell his story, because 'das glaubt dir keiner. Das glaubt dir kein Mensch'.³⁶³ Here authenticity is linked to plausibility. It also jars with the post-war imperative for Holocaust survivors to relate their experiences, in order to warn and inform subsequent generations. That Solly will not be believed echoes his experience with the Soviet camp liberators whom he encounters shortly before the reunion with Isaak. Solly is confronted with photographs of concentration camp victims. The Soviet soldier, pointing at the photographs, tells Solly: 'wenn du Jude wärst, würdest du so aussehen. Sieh her! Tote, Schädel, Kinder... Siehst du sie?'.³⁶⁴ Solly, dressed in the uniform of the Hitler Youth and relatively healthy, does not 'look like' a Jew, just as

³⁶¹ Schneider, 'Sehen, Hören, Glauben', p. 21.

³⁶² *Hitlerjunge Salomon* [on DVD].

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

the story of his experience does not conform to the popular image of the Holocaust victim. It suggests, perhaps, that authenticity is only that when it conforms to a pre-existing image or code. The implication is that images which are deemed 'authentic' may merely consist of reconstructions of previously 'authentic' images. Just as in the museum, the toys are considered to best represent childhood, because they correspond to a fixed image of 'childhood', so in the case of the depiction of Perel, it may be that his story and image challenge the common conception of the Holocaust child. This echoes Bartholeyns comment that since cinema uses visual signals in order to evoke an epoch:

more often than not, history will be received as historical if these signals find an echo in the collective imagination – that is to say, if they correspond to models of representation that precede the film.³⁶⁵

It may well be that *Hitlerjunge Salomon* failed to 'find an echo in the collective imagination'.

Although it was not based on the testimony of a particular eye-witness, *NaPolA* did make claims to historical authenticity in its marketing. In an interview with *Die Zeit's* cinema magazine, Gansel stresses that nine months of the production time were spent simply researching the film.³⁶⁶ The former élite school pupil Hans Müncheberg agreed to act as 'historischer Berater' for the film, having spent five years as a 'Jungmann' at the *NaPolA* in Potsdam, and having written an autobiographical account of his experiences.³⁶⁷ However, Müncheberg subsequently distanced himself from the project after he was troubled by the great liberties being taken with the subject matter and

³⁶⁵ Bartholeyns, 'Representation of the Past in Films', p. 40.

³⁶⁶ Dennis Gansel, Interview, kino-zeit.de, <http://www.kino-zeit.de/filme/artikel/Napola-ein-interview-mit-dennis-gansel.html> [accessed 3 September 2011].

³⁶⁷ Hans Müncheberg, *Gelobt sei, was hart macht: Aus dem Leben eines Zöglings der Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalt Potsdam* (Salenstein: Morgenbuch, 1991).

setting, despite the filmmakers' apparent preoccupation with historical accuracy.³⁶⁸ A significant point raised by Müncheberg is Friedrich's total avoidance of National Socialism and his relative ignorance of it, until he enrolls in the *NaPolA*. Other critics too have noted that, while not impossible, this is nevertheless somewhat implausible.³⁶⁹ The Nazis' control of the web of youth organisations, as well as their total control of educational policy and staffing, made children and adolescents 'the targets of political propaganda to an unprecedented degree'.³⁷⁰ Erika Mann's critical account of Nazi youth policies in *Zehn Millionen Kinder: die Erziehung der Jugend im Dritten Reich* (1938), notes that German youth could be subject to indoctrination at every turn: in the family, in school and in the Hitler youth. She observes how 'die Kinder sagen "Heil Hitler" 50 bis 150 mal am Tag [...] das Tag des Deutschen Kindes steht im Zeichen von "Heil Hitler"'.³⁷¹ That Friedrich is portrayed as apparently completely ignorant of Nazism appears to be an extremely constructed situation. It reveals, perhaps, something of contemporary ideas about childhood: that it is often what adults would wish it to be, rather than what it in fact is like.

In *Opa war kein Nazi* (2005) Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall claim that

filmische Medien besitzen, obwohl sie nur momentane und mikroskopische Ausschnitte von Geschehenszusammenhängen oder gestellten Ereignissen sind, eine Art Überzeitlichkeit: Sie manifestieren scheinbar authentische, in Wirklichkeit aber höchst artifizielle Perspektiven auf Geschehensverläufe, und

³⁶⁸ Hans Müncheberg, 'Die Geschichte der Geschichte', *Freitag*, 14 January 2005, <http://www.freitag.de/2005/02/05021301.php> [accessed 12 January 2012].

³⁶⁹ Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Towards a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2008), p. 114.

³⁷⁰ Gillian Lathey, *The Impossible Legacy: Identity and Purpose in Autobiographical Children's Literature set in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 61.

³⁷¹ Erika Mann, *Zehn Millionen Kinder: Die Erziehung der Jugend im Dritten Reich* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1938), pp. 23-4.

damit werden sie zu Deutungsvorgaben, zu Interpretamenten dafür, wie etwas gewesen ist.³⁷²

The phrase ‘scheinbar authentisch’ resonates here. To what extent can the *appearance* of authenticity be a legitimate goal of filmmakers tackling historical subjects, particularly one as ethically charged as the Holocaust? How significant is the ‘truth value’ of a historical film? Just as there is a widespread expectation on the part of the museum visitor that museums will ‘get the past right for us’,³⁷³ so films which are ‘about history’ are expected to ‘tell the truth’ about the past. James Schofield Saeger argues that ‘because of the power of film, movies with historical themes affect public perceptions of the past more deeply than do scholarly reconstructions’.³⁷⁴ In creating a visual recreation of a ‘historical reality’,³⁷⁵ films appear to offer a picture of the past which is ‘authentic’ and the question of authenticity in cinema has often been reduced to ‘the normative question of the historical accuracy of movies set in the past’.³⁷⁶ Similarly, Bartholeyns writes:

the historicity of a film can legitimately be measured by external criteria: costumes, set and language. However, it should not be confused with the rarer impression of authenticity, which is not dependent on what does or does not conform to the original. ‘Authenticity’ has no relationship with historical accuracy. It is neither its cause nor its consequence, and should instead be understood as the character of that which expresses a profound truth about man.³⁷⁷

³⁷² Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall (eds.), *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2005), p. 105.

³⁷³ Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum’, p. 51.

³⁷⁴ James Schofield Saeger, ‘The Mission and Historical Missions: Film and the Writing of History’, *The Americas*, 31 (1995), 393-415, here p. 393.

³⁷⁵ Bartholeyns, ‘Representation of the Past in Films’, p. 43.

³⁷⁶ Bruno de Wever, ‘Prologue: Historical Film as Palimpsest’, in *Perspectives on European Film and History* ed. by Leen Engelen and Roel Vande Winkel (Gent: Academia Press, 2007), pp. 5-12, here p. 5.

³⁷⁷ Bartholeyns, ‘Representation of the Past in Films’, p. 34.

In Batholeyns view, the authenticity of the historical film lies not in its referentiality, but rather in its ability to reveal a deeper truth about the experience of the past. Oskar Roehler's recent film *Jud Süß: Film ohne Gewissen* (2010) is a case in point. The film, which depicts the production of Veit Harlan's notorious anti-Semitic propaganda film *Jud Süß* (1940) from the perspective of its star, Ferdinand Marian, was poorly received in Germany, not least because of the numerous liberties taken with the account of Marian's personal life. The screenwriter, Klaus Richter, responded to these criticisms directly, and, when asked whether he thought it was legitimate to fictionalise the life of a real person to such a great extent, commented that

es gibt auch eine innere, eine psychologische Wahrheit, die manchmal mit der Historie nicht übereinstimmt. Der Fall Marian steht auch für die vielen anderen Schauspieler im Dritten Reich, die wegen ihren jüdischen Partnern Probleme bekamen. [...] Außerdem glaubten wir den Vorteil zu haben, dass das tatsächliche Leben Marians gar nicht bekannt ist.³⁷⁸

Richter's desire to access the 'inner truth' suggests not only that cinema can legitimately alter the past in order to access a deeper, or more universal truth, but that the cinema as an artistic medium will make this possible. Yet this has significant implications about the legitimacy of such an approach to historical representation, particularly when the historical subject is the fate of European Jews in the Holocaust. Most German film reviewers found fault with Holland's departure from Perel's autobiography³⁷⁹ and in an interview, Holland explained that although she had wished to remain as faithful as possible to Perel's own account, she did rewrite episodes for the screenplay. Holland recalls Perel's response to the film thus:

³⁷⁸ Hanns-Georg Rodek, "'Jud Süß' sollte Spiel-, kein Dokumentarfilm sein', *Die Welt*, 21 September 2010, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article9775361/Jud-Suess-sollte-Spiel-kein-Dokumentarfilm-sein.html> [accessed 12 January 2012].

³⁷⁹ Lungstrum, 'Foreskin Fetishism', p. 55.

I'm happy to tell you that he [Perel] loved the film, totally loved it. And when a scene would come on that I had invented, he would say 'Oh yeah! It was like that.' What I had added became a part of his memories.³⁸⁰

That Holland utters this statement so uncritically is surprising given the post-war debate about the representation of the Holocaust in art. Perel here appears to confirm the authenticity of the film, even though the events he views are not what he experienced. It seems that, for Perel, what he considered that the film revealed about his experience, and the experience of living through this historical period, transcended the factual discrepancies between the film's narrative, his own autobiography, and his memory.

Conclusion

Both *Hitlerjunge Salomon* and *NaPolA* seek to depict the experience of coming of age under Nazism, and in so doing, to portray onscreen the appearance of this historical era. As such they embody Lutz Koepnick's concept of the 'heritage film'. Koepnick writes that such films 'present the texture of the past as a source of visual attractions and aural pleasures. Though these films often challenge mainstream codes of gender and sexuality, their gaze is museal: they transform the past into an object of consumption'.³⁸¹ To develop Koepnick's use of the adjective 'museal', in the previous chapter we saw the ways in which museums themselves present the culture of childhood, and, in so doing, do not always display 'real' children's experience. They offer images of childhood, and of the past, for public consumption; thus they must correspond to what the public wants to consume. *Hitlerjunge Salomon* subverted the received image of the suffering, passive 'Holocaust child', and consequently challenged this picture of the past. *NaPolA* spoke to

³⁸⁰ John C. Tibbetts, 'An Interview with Agnieszka Holland: The Politics of Ambiguity', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 25 (2008), 132-43, here p. 138.

³⁸¹ Koepnick, 'Reframing the Past', p. 50.

the contemporary discourse of Germans as victims of the Second World War in its depiction of Friedrich as the innocent, devoid of agency. The films' claims to authenticity, however flawed, do not by themselves serve to introduce them into the canon of acceptable accounts of the past as entertained by public opinion. *Hitlerjunge Salomon*'s subversive character meant that initially it was unpopular, but it has now been received into the canon due to Perel's efforts in Holocaust education in Germany.

Finally, what these two films impress upon the viewer, in a more concerted way than the museums which we have discussed, is a convincing depiction of the 'visual attractions and aural pleasures' which Nazism frequently held for the young. In *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, even Solly – who is a Jewish boy in hiding, who has witnessed his sister's murder by the Nazis, and who has seen his family interned in the Łódź ghetto – is seduced by National Socialism. Perel has expressed publically how even he was not immune to what he describes as the 'poison' of National Socialist education,³⁸² to the extent that he recalls: 'ich war sogar etwas traurig, dass Deutschland den Krieg verloren hat.'³⁸³ *NaPolA* demonstrates the way in which an 'ordinary' German boy could have been indoctrinated, both through the film's coming of age narrative, but also through the reproduction of National Socialist aesthetics. By demonstrating the extent of the appeal of Nazism to the young, both films succeed in communicating how the process of Nazi indoctrination was possible. It is this which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is often absent in contemporary education about the Third Reich. In this way, they come closer to the authenticity they strive to cultivate: not an authentic picture of the child necessarily,

³⁸² Geneviève Wood, 'Er war "Hitlerjunge Salomon" und führte ein Doppelleben', *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 27 January 2011, <http://www.abendblatt.de/hamburg/article1769348/Er-war-Hitlerjunge-Salomon-und-fuehrte-ein-Doppelleben.html> [accessed 12 January 2012].

³⁸³ Philipp Gessler, 'Tödliches Misstrauen', *Die Tageszeitung*, 6 October 2009, <http://www.taz.de/!41787/> [accessed 20 January 2012].

but an authentic picture – in so much as it ever can be such – of the effect of education and indoctrination on the young, who had been ‘vom Abc an vergiftet worden’.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ Klemperer, *Kultur: Erwägungen nach dem Zusammenbruch*, p. 54.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Die Wahrheit der Kunst’?: Autobiographical Writing about Childhood in the Hitler Youth

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how the representation of growing up in the Third Reich is depicted within post-1990 German film. The films explore the effects of education and indoctrination on the young, and chart the protagonists’ journey through the Third Reich, from childhood to adulthood. They are, in part, attempts to understand, and to recreate onscreen, the fascination of Fascism for the young. The analysis of the films’ reception suggests that the authenticity which is associated with them is frequently attributed not to their historical accuracy, but rather to their perceived ability to reveal a ‘deeper truth’ about the experience of the past.

In this chapter I examine three autobiographical accounts by prominent German authors, in which they recall and re-present their experiences growing up under Nazism: Günter de Bruyn’s *Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin* (1992),³⁸⁵ Martin Walser’s *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998)³⁸⁶ and Günter Grass’s *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006). De Bruyn, Walser and Grass were born in the 1920s and belong to what is commonly termed the ‘Hitler Youth Generation’.³⁸⁷ Their early years were spent under the dual influence of National Socialism and the Catholic Church, and they share many similar formative experiences: as pupils in the Nazi education system, through membership of the Hitler

³⁸⁵ Günter De Bruyn, *Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992).

³⁸⁶ Martin Walser *Ein springender Brunnen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), henceforth cited in the main text as ‘*Brunnen*’.

³⁸⁷ De Bruyn was born in 1926. Grass and Walser were born in 1927.

Youth, as *Flakhelfer*,³⁸⁸ through participation in the *Arbeitsdienst* (work service) and the military, and as prisoners of war. Yet while their broader experiences coincided, the way in which these shaped their later lives, and the ways in which they have sought to engage with these experiences, are vastly different.

By writing autobiographically about growing up under Nazism, all three authors contribute to public debates about how to remember this period in the Berlin Republic. Their different approaches reflect their very individual approaches to literature and philosophy, as well as demonstrating the complex and often contested sites of memory politics in contemporary Germany. I begin by briefly outlining the place of childhood within autobiographical writing, and specifically with reference to literary accounts of growing up in the Third Reich. I then examine de Bruyn, Walser and Grass's respective texts, asking how, and to what purpose, they represent their experiences.

The Place of Childhood within Autobiographical Writing

While the study of autobiography has long been concerned with its status as a distinct genre, a clear definition has never been established. As William Spengemann has observed, 'the more the genre gets written about, the less agreement there seems to be on what it properly includes.'³⁸⁹ And yet there is a tacit understanding between reader and author that the text will contain a quality of authenticity. As the theorist Paul John Eakin writes: 'telling the truth [...] is surely the most familiar of the rules we associate with

³⁸⁸ This has led to this generation frequently being dubbed the *Flakhelfergeneration* in post-war discourse.

³⁸⁹ William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), p. xi.

autobiographical discourse.’³⁹⁰ There is a desire for truth on the part both of the writer and the reader. The fascination with reading autobiography lies in the reader’s interest in being privy to the personal life of people they consider public figures, or in the desire to attain a private perspective of wide-scale events. Similarly, the motivation for writing autobiographically stems from a fascination with the self and a desire for self-knowledge: for a kind of “Selbstbesinnung”, a search for one’s inner standing’.³⁹¹ Writing in the early 1980s, Roy Pascal considered that ‘to give the truth about oneself has always been the aim of true autobiography’.³⁹² An important distinction emerges between the truth of a life as it was lived, and the deeper truth of the individual and his/her identity.

Of the works widely considered as embodying the ‘great tradition’³⁹³ of autobiographical writing,³⁹⁴ Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782) constitutes the first great autobiography which treated the author’s worldly, rather than spiritual life. Rousseau’s definition of ‘truth’ in autobiographical writing was a kind of truthfulness, ‘the non-verifiable *intention* of honesty on the part of the author’, as Linda Anderson puts it. She writes: ‘truth, therefore, can never be established once and for all, but can only be presented in terms of the constant reiteration of avowals and disclaimers by Rousseau himself.’³⁹⁵ It is the elusive ‘truth of feelings’ which is his primary concern.³⁹⁶ Coe sees this as an important element of autobiographical writing about childhood. He argues that authors are ‘concerned first and foremost with telling a truth about themselves which

³⁹⁰ Paul John Eakin, ‘Breaking Rules: The Consequences of Self-Narration’, *Biography*, 24 (2001), 113-27, here p. 115.

³⁹¹ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960), p. 182.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁹³ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

³⁹⁴ See, for example, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (c. 398-400 AD), John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) and William Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1888).

³⁹⁵ Anderson, *Autobiography*, p. 44.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

shall be as complete, as authentic, and as absolute as possible'.³⁹⁷ This is what Goethe calls for in his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.³⁹⁸ While he endeavours to give an accurate account of the events of the past – the *Wahrheit* – Goethe is equally, if not more, concerned with the literary reshaping of these events – the *Dichtung*. He writes: 'es war mein ernsteres Bestreben, das eigentliche Grundwahre [...] möglichst darzustellen und auszudrücken.'³⁹⁹ Here 'das Grundwahre' represents the truth of lived experience as it is expressed through imaginative, poetic language.

Depictions of childhood have featured frequently and increasingly in autobiographical writings in the twentieth century. The writer's particular fascination with his/her own childhood stems partly from the idea of childhood as the source of identity: since Freud, childhood has been widely viewed as the key to unlocking the door of identity and, following on from his work, childhood became an increasingly significant element in autobiographical writing. Consequently, this kind of writing about childhood is also commonly viewed as an exploratory endeavour, in which the writer seeks to discover as much for himself as he seeks to reveal to the reader. Sandra Frieden considers the aim of childhood autobiography to be a critical engagement with the present by looking back at the past and scrutinising it.⁴⁰⁰ Similarly, Coe argues that while all autobiography is assertion – '*This* is what I was; *that* is what I did' – in the autobiography of childhood, the mode of assertion tends to be secondary to the mode of

³⁹⁷ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. 80.

³⁹⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1808-1831).

³⁹⁹ Goethe, Letter to King Ludwig I of Bavaria, Weimar, 11 January 1830, in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Autobiographische Schriften II*, ed. by Erich Trunz (= *Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. by Erich Trunz, 1955-67 and 1981, 14 vols, vol. 10) (München: Beck, 1981), pp. 568-9, here p. 568.

⁴⁰⁰ Sandra Frieden, *Self into Form: German-Language Autobiographical Writings of the 1970's* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1983), p. 118.

interrogation: ‘How did I come to be like that? Why was I impelled to do this?’.⁴⁰¹ The writer interrogates the past, and this process becomes a historical endeavour. The author Eva Zeller likens it to an archaeological dig: ‘[es] wird zu einem archäologischen Unternehmen; man gräbt und wühlt in der Vergangenheit, man trainiert sein Gedächtnis und staunt, was es freigibt, und ahnt kaum, was es verdrängt.’⁴⁰²

‘Kindheitsmuster’: Autobiographical Writing since 1945

Since the *Wende* a number of autobiographical accounts of growing up in the Third Reich have been published, including both individual memoirs and collections of oral testimony which offer multiple narratives of the experience of the past.⁴⁰³ The fascination with autobiographical accounts of childhood and adolescence is the result partly of the general interest in autobiographical writing, and also of the particular draw which the idea of childhood, and childhood experience, can have.⁴⁰⁴ In the post-war context in particular, the singular position of those who had grown up under Nazism became the subject of a number of autobiographical works. As I outlined in the Introduction, Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster* – the first influential autobiography of its kind to appear – has provided a model for this mode of autobiographical discourse in which the author reflects critically on his/her own part in National Socialism. Wolf argued that coming of age in the Third Reich was a formative experience which continued to shape her generation’s adult life, but that the GDR was not permitting those who had

⁴⁰¹ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. 41.

⁴⁰² Eva Zeller, *Die Autobiographie: Selbsterkenntnis – Selbstentblößung* (Stuttgart: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1995), p. 7.

⁴⁰³ See, for example, Sonya and Jury Winterberg, *Kriegskinder: Erinnerungen einer Generation* (2009); and Hilke Lorenz, *Kriegskinder: Schicksal einer Generation* (2003).

⁴⁰⁴ As outlined in the Introduction, see above pp. 36-7.

undergone it to admit and confront that truth. It should, she contended, be acknowledged: 'solange Menschen leben, die diese Kindheit hatten, die diese Jahre als Kinder oder junge Menschen erlebt haben, ist das alles in ihnen.'⁴⁰⁵

Several texts which followed Wolf's model treated the theme of Nazi childhood in a variety of formal modes; yet a common thread runs through them all, namely the question of how to reconcile the private childhood memories of the author with the retrospective knowledge that the system under which they grew up had in fact perpetrated crimes against humanity. Indeed, it hampers the possibility of a nostalgic view of personal childhood. Gullestad writes that 'in modern autobiographical narratives there is generally a feeling of loss. [...] One's own childhood is gone, as well as the historical conditions associated with it'.⁴⁰⁶ This is compounded by the Third Reich context. While members of the generation who grew up under the banner of Nazism may mourn the passing of their childhood, it is more problematic for them to mourn the historical conditions in which they lived. Retrospective knowledge of Nazi crimes makes it difficult to view childhood during this era with the kind of 'legitimate' sense of nostalgia permitted in writing about other, 'normal' childhoods. This may well be specific to the Third Reich context. For example, in a recent article on autobiographical accounts of growing up in the GDR, Anna Saunders echoes Thomas Brussig's assessment that: 'jeder Mensch erinnert sich gerne an die Kindheit oder Jugend.'⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Christa Wolf, 'Erfahrungsmuster. Diskussion zu *Kindheitsmuster*', in Christa Wolf, *Die Dimension des Autors: Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959-1985*, 2 vols (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1987), II, pp. 350-88, here p. 351.

⁴⁰⁶ Gullestad, 'Modernity, Self, and Childhood', in *Imagined Childhoods*, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Anna Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past: East German Culture and *Ostalgie*', in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (Rochester/NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2006), pp. 89-105, here p. 101.

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which de Bruyn, Walser, and Grass remember and reconstruct childhood, and the extent to which they seek to defend or challenge the authenticity of their childhood experiences. Their works address the interaction between individual and collective historical experience, demonstrating how their own private experiences of childhood were, and continue to be, affected by Nazism. In his autobiography *Zwischenbilanz* (1992) de Bruyn provides a representation of the past in which he offers the ‘Wahrheit der Kunst’.⁴⁰⁸ In his autobiographical novel *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998), Walser fervently defends the right to preserve his own childhood memories without reference to the Holocaust and ‘[o]bjects to the public forms of commemoration of National Socialism as alienated and politically correct insisting on his different perspective and his private conscience as more “authentic” forms of remembrance’.⁴⁰⁹ Finally, in his controversial memoir *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* Grass problematises each ‘path’ into the past, first describing its luring promise of factuality and authenticity only to demonstrate the absences and constructedness contained within each of these.⁴¹⁰

Günter de Bruyn’s *Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin* (1992)

Günter de Bruyn’s *Zwischenbilanz*⁴¹¹ was one of a number of autobiographies published in the early 1990s in which authors previously resident in the GDR recounted their

⁴⁰⁸ Günter de Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich: Über Wahrheit und Dichtung in der Autobiographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), p. 66.

⁴⁰⁹ Schmitz, ‘Introduction’, in *A Nation of Victims?*, p. 4.

⁴¹⁰ Günter Grass, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), henceforth cited in the main text as ‘*Zwiebel*’.

⁴¹¹ Günter de Bruyn, *Zwischenbilanz* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992).

experiences both of Nazism and East German Socialism.⁴¹² De Bruyn had been a moderately well-known author in the GDR, but the publication and success of his autobiography in 1992 prompted a ‘decisive jump in [his] popularity and critical standing’.⁴¹³ *Zwischenbilanz* spans de Bruyn’s first twenty-three years, from his birth in Berlin in 1926 to the formal division of Germany in 1949.⁴¹⁴ He recalls his childhood and youth in Berlin-Britz und Neukölln, time spent in a *Kinderlandverschickungslager* in Kattowitz (now Katowice), service as a *Flakhelfer* and in the *Arbeitsdienst* and, at the end of the war, military action as a soldier in the *Wehrmacht*. De Bruyn’s account of his personal experiences and private memories are interwoven with the collective, historical experience of Nazism, and the retrospective awareness of its crimes.

As a narrative of childhood in the Third Reich, *Zwischenbilanz* is untypical of autobiographical accounts of the period. Unlike many of the autobiographical texts to appear on the subject of growing up under Nazism, de Bruyn’s narrative ‘shows no reason why he should feel shame about anything he did in the years up to 1945’.⁴¹⁵ Throughout his childhood he was protected from the worst elements of Nazi indoctrination by his parents, and was instead influenced primarily by his family and by the Catholic Church. He recalls that it was only later, and to a small extent, that he was influenced by the Nazi education system through attendance at school, and never by his time in the Hitler Youth (*Zwischenbilanz*, 87). It was the protective efforts of his parents

⁴¹² See also Hermann Kant’s *Abspann: Erinnerung an meine Gegenwart* (1991) and Heiner Müller’s *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (1992).

⁴¹³ Dennis Tate, ‘Introduction’, in *Günter de Bruyn in Perspective*, ed. by Dennis Tate (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 1-9, here p. 2.

⁴¹⁴ He subsequently wrote a second instalment, *Vierzig Jahre: Ein Lebensbericht* (1998) about his experiences in the GDR.

⁴¹⁵ Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives: East German Autobiographical Narratives Before and After the End of the GDR* (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2007), p. 180.

which achieved this: for example his mother regularly provided him with excuses in order to keep him back from the *Jungvolk* and later the Hitler Youth. The world of his childhood is characterised by ‘Toleranz und Freizügigkeit’.⁴¹⁶ He writes: ‘[d]ie Seelenruhe meiner frühen Kindheit beruhte zum Teil auf Unwissenheit. Durch Verschweigen glaubten meine Eltern bei Hitlers Machtantritt die heile Welt des Sechsjährigen erhalten zu können’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 53). His parents’ attempt to preserve the ‘heile Welt’ of childhood also reveals a facet of adult attitudes to children, since the child’s ignorance of what information may be passed on to whom is potentially dangerous. Thus de Bruyn’s parents withhold all information from him, ensuring nothing can inadvertently be passed on and interpreted by others as anti-fascist comment. The preservation of his innocence is not wholly altruistic, since it also serves to protect their subversion.

This ‘heile Welt’ is twice shattered, and on both occasions it is when adult realities impinge on the child’s consciousness. The first occasion is when de Bruyn finds a series of letters, poems, and a novel written by his father which he sent to de Bruyn’s mother during a period of imprisonment during the First World War. The novel is overtly sexual and de Bruyn recalls his shock upon reading it at the age of seventeen. He comments: ‘[d]ie heile Kindheitswelt brach mir entzwei’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 14). Here, as in the previous quotation, de Bruyn describes his childhood as ‘heil’, which, in combination with ‘entzwei’ is intensified: the childhood which is ‘heil’ – whole, undamaged – has broken.

⁴¹⁶ Günter de Bruyn, ‘Fremd im eigenen Land’, in *Über Deutschland: Schriftsteller geben Auskunft*, ed. by Thomas Reitzschel (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993), pp. 154-74, here p. 160.

The second occasion on which de Bruyn's 'heile Welt' is shattered marks the definitive end to his childhood. He describes the destruction of his family home in Berlin in a bombing raid. As he recounts how he and his brother played in the ruins, he observes: '[u]nter dem schneebedeckten Schutthügel ließ sich das Haus, in dem ich geboren und aufgewachsen war, nicht mehr erkennen. Meine Kindheit war nun wohl wirklich zu Ende. Ich war 17 Jahre und zwei Monate alt' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 165). The chapter in which this takes place is entitled 'Das Puppenhaus'. Here the doll's house – the innocuous child's toy – becomes the symbol of the destroyed house, the site of de Bruyn's childhood. Just as the house has been destroyed beyond repair, so has his childhood.

Writing, then, from the 'sicheren Hafen des Alters'⁴¹⁷ de Bruyn can evaluate his own youthful part in National Socialism, interweaving his private experience with historical knowledge. De Bruyn reflects on his perception of events as a child. For example, he describes his response to the outbreak of war as disappointment, rather than fear, and he amusingly comments that 'nicht einmal die Schule fiel aus' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 101). However, rather than trying to give the illusion of the child's perspective, de Bruyn encases this comment within the perspective of the remembering adult. In his theoretical work on autobiography, *Das erzählte Ich: Über Wahrheit und Dichtung in der Autobiographie* (1995) de Bruyn argues that in autobiographical writing about childhood: '[d]er Standort des Kindes, der nur Kurzsicht erlaubt, wird benannt und beschrieben, aber nicht eingenommen. Der Erzähler von heute weiß mehr als das Kind damals, und wenn es nötig ist, sagt er es auch.'⁴¹⁸ For de Bruyn it appears always to be considered 'nötig':

⁴¹⁷ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 19.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

the child's viewpoint is never unqualified or unmediated. For example he writes: '[z]u den deutschen Katastrophenjahren 1933 und 1939 werden Verbindungslinien zwischen dem, was ich als Kind wußte, und dem, was wirklich geschah, gezogen.'⁴¹⁹ He explores the extent to which history has impinged upon the child's life, citing the simultaneous appointment of Goebbels as Gauleiter of the NSDAP in his hometown of Berlin and his own birth: '[e]inen Zusammenhang bekommt das in der Rückschau erst' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 23). De Bruyn's account of his childhood and adolescence is one in which history and memory are interwoven. He comments: 'alles, was mit mir und um mich geschah [wurde] nur in bezug auf mich selbst registriert. Die eigne Verwobenheit ins Historische, die in der Rückschau interessiert, wurde nur am Rande bemerkt' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 134). Similarly, he later comments '[d]ie Weltgeschichte aber trat an diesem Abend [...] an' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 53).

A significant moment in de Bruyn's childhood is a trip to the cinema to see *Emil und die Detektive* (*Zwischenbilanz*, 46-52), which coincidentally took place on the day that Hitler came to power. De Bruyn describes his young, naïve belief in the triumph of good over evil.⁴²⁰ Despite the film's happy ending, the young de Bruyn is in tears at the fact that 'ein Traum [ging] zu Ende' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 53). In an interview with Uwe Wittstock de Bruyn comments on this scene:

ich habe die Erinnerung an diesen Kinobesuch auch deshalb ziemlich zu Anfang meiner *Zwischenbilanz* geschildert, weil das Buch natürlich den Reifeprozess des jungen Menschen beschreiben soll, der ich einmal gewesen bin. Dieser naive Glaube an den Sieg des Guten wird dann später durch Lebensstatsachen korrigiert. Nebenbei: Die Szene im Kino endet damit, daß ich die Angst schildere, die ich als Kind hatte, aus dem schönen Traum zu erwachen, den mir der Film vermittelte.

⁴¹⁹ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 53.

⁴²⁰ In a manner similar to that of Albrecht in *NaPolA*. See above, pp. 119-20.

Offenbar hat auch das Kind, das ich war, zumindest geahnt, daß die Welt nicht so schön und gerecht ist wie dieser Film.⁴²¹

This comment reveals much of de Bruyn's approach towards childhood, and his own childhood in particular. The child's naïve belief in the triumph of good over evil echoes the character Albrecht's view in *NaPoLA*, and his realisation that this belief is false marks the definitive end of Albrecht's childhood. Similarly, the child's tears at the end of the film, and de Bruyn's suggestion that he had begun to suspect the naïvety of this view, afford the child more than a simplistic innocence. It is also significant that the idea of authenticity is raised in this passage, when de Bruyn comments that cinema is 'das bewegte Bild, das vorgab, Wirklichkeit zu zeigen' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 52).

Indeed, authenticity is central to de Bruyn's autobiographical project. He explicitly situates his own autobiography within the tradition of autobiographical writing and theory.⁴²² He explores the tension between 'truth' and 'fiction' in autobiographical writing, particularly through the allusion in the text's title to the Goethean dialectic of 'Dichtung' and 'Wahrheit'. De Bruyn conforms to Goethe's notion that an author's collected works serve as 'eine große Konfession'⁴²³ and had accordingly attempted to write about his wartime experiences in his fictional works.⁴²⁴ However, he felt he failed to do justice to his intentions, and chose a more overtly autobiographical form in *Zwischenbilanz*. In *Das erzählte Ich* he describes his motivation to write about his experiences: that his relief at having survived the war gave him a sense of duty to write a

⁴²¹ Uwe Wittstock, 'Interview with Günter de Bruyn', <http://www.uwe-wittstock.de/0000009b61131c119/index.htm> [accessed 9 September 2011].

⁴²² De Bruyn cites autobiographical works by a number of authors in *Das erzählte Ich*, including Saint Augustine, Adalbert Stifter, Ulrich Bräker, Theodor Fontane, Stefan Heym, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Erich Loest, General von der Marwitz, Otto von Bismarck, Karl Phillip Moritz, Vladimir Nabokov, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Christa Wolf, and Benjamin Franklin, see pp. 22-4.

⁴²³ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 62.

⁴²⁴ See, for example, *Der Hohlweg* (1963).

‘wahrheitsgetreuer Bericht darüber, [...] wie es gewesen war’.⁴²⁵ Yet at the same time, de Bruyn questions the possibility of presenting an accurate picture of ‘how it really was’. He writes: ‘ich lernte [...], daß man Wirklichkeit durch Erzählen nur schattenhaft wiederbelebt’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 29). For de Bruyn, accurate historical representation is problematic, and he implicitly rejects Brettschneider’s comment that the Goethian combination of ‘Dichtung’ and ‘Wahrheit’ is essentially the ‘Wahrheit des Kindes’.⁴²⁶ Conversely, de Bruyn considers literature (for which read fiction) to be truly successful only when it is underpinned by authentic experience. As de Bruyn comments in an interview with Chris Lewis: ‘ich habe [...] gemerkt, daß die Literatur immer nur dann wahrhaftig wird, wenn irgendwas Selbsterlebtes dahintersteht.’⁴²⁷

In the opening paragraph of *Zwischenbilanz* de Bruyn plays on the Rousseauian concept of autobiographical truth, promising the reader that he will tell the truth, but not the whole truth: ‘der berufsmäßige Lügner übt, die Wahrheit zu sagen. Er verspricht, was er sagt, ehrlich zu sagen; alles zu sagen, verspricht er nicht’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 7). It alludes to Rousseau’s assertion that as an autobiographer, he had to confess everything: ‘I must leave nothing unsaid.’⁴²⁸ Yet in a playful subversion of Rousseau’s formulation, de Bruyn asserts the veracity of his account by stressing that the limited material he chooses to share will, at least, be accurate. In addition, by referring to the writer of fiction as a ‘liar’, he establishes the autobiographer as the harbinger of truth. Indeed, this takes on a quasi-academic quality, as he describes himself as ‘Historiker meiner selbst’

⁴²⁵ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 15.

⁴²⁶ Brettschneider, ‘*Kindheitsmuster*’, p. 11.

⁴²⁷ Chris Lewis, ‘Der verkaufte Schatten?: Interview mit Günter de Bruyn am 27. September 1996’, in *Günter de Bruyn in Perspective*, 207-29, here p. 212.

⁴²⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, translated from the French by J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 548.

(*Zwischenbilanz*, 134), conducting historical research into his own past. For de Bruyn, the tension between authenticity and constructedness is a necessary one, which lends the autobiography its particular interest:

das Besondere der Autobiographie besteht ja nicht darin, daß hier derjenige ein Leben beschreibt, der am meisten über es weiß, sondern darin, daß hier jemand sich so beschreibt, wie er sich selbst sieht und beurteilt. Interessanter als die mitgeteilten Fakten über eine Person ist die Art, wie sie von dieser Person mitgeteilt werden. Objektivität, die auch nicht möglich wäre, wird gar nicht verlangt.⁴²⁹

De Bruyn contends that, though history and biography necessarily cannot convey the total reality of a situation, part of the truth resides in the mediation of that reality as expressed by the writer. For de Bruyn, autobiography becomes ‘die Wahrheit der Kunst’.⁴³⁰ As he comments in *Das erzählte Ich*:

mit der Wahrheit der Autobiographie verhält es sich ähnlich wie mit der der Geschichte. Deren Inhalt ist nicht unbedingt das, was geschah, sondern das, was wir durch die Geschichtsschreibung von ihr wissen [...]. Nicht die Wirklichkeit der Vergangenheit können wir von ihnen erfahren, sondern die Vorstellung von Vergangenheit, die sie sich gemacht haben.⁴³¹

De Bruyn offers the reader an account of the past through the lens of the present, acknowledging the constructedness of his account which is the result of memory and of the writing process. This echoes Fest’s comments in Chapter One that representations of history cannot hope to remain unmediated by the present. Rather than defending the truth of his account, de Bruyn promises the reader that he will strive for truth, whilst at the same time recognising that this will be a complex, and ultimately impossible task.

De Bruyn provides an example of this in his use of the documents he possesses from the period. He uses the many letters, photographs, diary entries, and earlier

⁴²⁹ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 62.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

autobiographical drafts⁴³² as part of his exploration of the idea of memory and authenticity. On the one hand, these written documents perform a positive function: ‘andere [Erinnerungen], die verschüttet waren, wurden durch das Lesen wieder freigelegt’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 110). On the other hand, they form a barrier to the past, as memory and documentary source do not concur. He explains:

würde der Leser von heute den Schreiber von damals nicht so genau in Erinnerung haben, könnte er in ihm ein fröhliches, unbeschwertes Kind vermuten, das sich problemlos in die Zwangsgemeinschaft fügt, die Lager- und Klassen-Hierarchien fraglos akzeptiert. (*Zwischenbilanz*, 110-111)

The diary, despite its documentary status, cannot give an accurate account of history. Like memory, it fails to record the entirety of the past, retaining merely a fragment of it. For example in response to a diary entry on the subject of an argument, he comments: ‘auf die Frage, was ich damals über den Streit dachte, gibt das Tagebuch keine Antwort’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 133). The diary records what he said and wrote, but not necessarily what he thought. The evidence of a diary entry on the subject of a rebellious youth in the *Kinderlandverschickungslager*, Karl-Heinz E., shows that de Bruyn condemned the boy’s anti-fascist actions. However, de Bruyn’s recollection of the event reads: ‘in Wirklichkeit wurde der Rebell damals von de Bruyn bewundert. Schriftlich aber schlug er sich auf die Seite der Mehrheit’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 111).

While de Bruyn claims that he cannot recognise himself in his diary entries, and that they do not represent his true feelings at the time: he views himself as ‘der Tagebuchschreiber, in dem ich mich selbst kaum wiedererkenne’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 109). Despite the documentary evidence that he wrote these comments, he considers himself to be a different person. As the split between child and adult author closes, the language

⁴³² Tate, *Shifting Perspectives*, p. 180.

reflects this. In the majority of the text, he frequently switches between the first-person and the third-person singular narrative voice to emphasise his separation from his child-self. In the closing chapters of *Zwischenbilanz* de Bruyn articulates this: the past and present identities are shown to merge through the exclusive use of the first person to narrate this section. He views this in retrospect as a way of coping with his part in Nazism. In his essay 'Fremd im eigenen Land', he explains that when he was forced into uniform: 'es hatte bei mir eine Trennung des Ich vom erzwungenen äußeren Leben zur Folge, eine Art Schizophrenie, die mich schützte, aber auch krank machte.'⁴³³ Thus the division he sees between his adult self and the child he used to be may have deeper roots and be part of a division he made to protect himself from his involvement in the structures of the Nazi regime.

Nevertheless, de Bruyn presents a largely positive depiction of his childhood and, while his adolescence is at times troubled, he is not plagued by the shame of having been a committed believer in National Socialism, as many of his contemporaries who have dealt with the subject in literary form were. On the contrary, he asserts his innocence of the crimes of Nazism, and his subsequent lack of guilt. He argues that for him, and many of his generation, a discussion of guilt is inappropriate. De Bruyn writes: '[wir] fühlten [...] uns mehr oder weniger mit Schuld beladen und glaubten den Emigranten und Widerstandskämpfern gegenüber zu Ehrfurcht verpflichtet zu sein: in diesem Punkt war man moralisch erpreßbar' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 374). De Bruyn's use of 'wir' here is significant as it suggests that he feels to some extent bound by the enforced sense of collective guilt which, as an individual, he does not share. He claims that while all those

⁴³³ De Bruyn, 'Fremd im eigenen Land', in *Über Deutschland*, p. 161.

who were children in the Third Reich were affected by Nazi propaganda and ideology, ‘fanatische Nazis waren wir wider Erwarten nicht geworden’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 143).

More than one critic has viewed this lack of self-questioning as a shortcoming of de Bruyn’s text. In her article comparing *Zwischenbilanz* with Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster*, Renate Rechtien argues that the latter achieves a more authentic depiction of her generation’s struggle for identity than de Bruyn’s narrative, which claims the pursuit of truth as its primary endeavour.⁴³⁴ De Bruyn’s lack of critical reflection on his involvement in Nazism – however limited that was in reality – is viewed as a weakness of his text. Similarly, Tate argues that, although de Bruyn’s account of his lack of susceptibility to fascist doctrine is plausible and perfectly justified, his claim to have known nothing about the fate of the Jews becomes problematic ‘in the context of the whole post-Holocaust analysis of the complicity of “ordinary” Germans’.⁴³⁵ It is the omission by de Bruyn of his own response to finding out about the Holocaust which detracts from the impact of his text.

However, de Bruyn’s method of mingling personal and collective historical experience throughout *Zwischenbilanz* also has a more positive effect. By taking this approach, the re-presentation of the child’s experience growing up does not seek to relativise the crimes of Nazism, nor is it intended to depict Germans as victims of Nazism. It is, as Owen Evans argues, primarily intended to demonstrate the interaction between the private and public spheres, and to show how the private sphere can mask external events. Evans argues that:

⁴³⁴ Renate Rechtien, ‘Gelebtes, erinnertes, erzähltes und erschriebenes Selbst: Günter de Bruyns *Zwischenbilanz* und Christa Wolfs *Kindheitsmuster*’, in *Günter de Bruyn in Perspective*, pp. 151-70, here p. 160.

⁴³⁵ Tate, *Shifting Perspectives*, p. 181.

despite describing how the family's privateness is sullied by history, de Bruyn seeks neither to exonerate himself nor to make an issue of how members of his family were victimised. He underlines, instead, the extent to which the private sphere can distract attention from events outside.⁴³⁶

De Bruyn attempts to create 'aus dem Einzelfall so etwas von einer Geschichtsschreibung von unten'.⁴³⁷ In the 'heile Welt' of his childhood, de Bruyn is shielded from Nazi ideology, but he acknowledges that this shielding, which could continue into the present, is no longer defensible. The final result is an account of a childhood which is represented in the present alongside the retrospective acknowledgement and understanding of events beyond the view of his younger self.

Martin Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998)

Martin Walser's autobiographical novel *Ein springender Brunnen* has, more than any other German text in the post-*Wende* period, stimulated debate about the memory of the National Socialist period.⁴³⁸ It tells the coming of age tale of Johann, born in 1927 in the Swabian village of Wasserburg on Lake Constance. Three reflective, theoretical chapters, all entitled 'Vergangenheit als Gegenwart', divide the narrative into three sections, each of which depicts Johann at a different age: in 1932, at pre-school age; in 1937, at the age of his First Communion; and in 1944/45 in the *Wehrmacht*. It ends as Johann, now aged eighteen, returns to Wasserburg.

Like de Bruyn, Walser emphasises the minimal impact which National Socialism had on his formative years, partly due to the family's geographical location, and partly

⁴³⁶ Owen Evans, *Ein Training im Ich-Sagen: Personal Authenticity in the Prose Work of Günter de Bruyn* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 297.

⁴³⁷ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 20.

⁴³⁸ Elena Agazzi, *Erinnerte und rekonstruierte Geschichte: Drei Generationen deutscher Schriftsteller und die Fragen der Vergangenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), p. 23.

because of his interest in literature which he used as a means of protecting himself from the influences of National Socialist ideology and doctrine. Also like de Bruyn, Walser's text does not conform to the model of earlier autobiographical accounts of childhood in the Third Reich. As Lathey argues with reference to autobiographical accounts of childhood under Nazism: 'childhood's joys are rarely celebrated in German texts; there is a retrospective perception of childhood as lost in many narratives [...] All attempts to reconstruct the childhood self are ultimately judged against the magnitude of the holocaust [sic].'⁴³⁹ This is what Walser seeks to avoid. Indeed, in contrast to de Bruyn's approach, Walser asserts his right to depict his childhood experiences without contextualising them within his retrospective knowledge of the crimes of Nazism. Walser wants to depict the National Socialist period as it was perceived by his young protagonist at the time, rather than through the lens of a retrospective commentary. It was this approach, with its apparent omission of any mention of Auschwitz, which caused a furore on the occasion of Walser's speech given after having been awarded the *Friedenspreis* for *Ein springender Brunnen*. Walser attempts to alleviate the difficulty, frequently articulated by members of his generation, of reconciling their personal memories of Nazism with retrospective knowledge of Nazi crimes. In the *Friedenspreisrede* he comments:

es ist mir, zum Beispiel, nicht möglich, meine Erinnerung mit Hilfe eines inzwischen erworbenen Wissens zu belehren. [...] Das erworbene Wissen über die mordende Diktatur ist eins, meine Erinnerung ist ein anderes. Allerdings nur so lange, als ich diese Erinnerung für mich behalte. Sobald ich jemanden daran teilhaben lassen möchte, merke ich, daß ich die Unschuld der Erinnerung nicht vermitteln kann. [...] Ich müßte also so reden, wie man heute über diese Zeit redet. Also bliebe nichts übrig als ein heute Redender. Einer mehr, der über

⁴³⁹ Lathey, *The Impossible Legacy*, p. 242.

damals redet, als sei er damals schon der Heutige gewesen. [...] Die meisten Darstellungen der Vergangenheit sind deshalb Auskünfte über die Gegenwart.⁴⁴⁰

Thus in *Ein springender Brunnen* Walser seeks to capture an authentic, unmediated account of his childhood under Nazism as it was, without having to conform to contemporary political debates about the way in which the past ought to be remembered.⁴⁴¹

Walser asserts that in order to write about the crimes of Nazism, he would have to deny his, and his parents' involvement in fascism, and depict himself as an antifascist child, forming a protective boundary of fiction around his own life story.⁴⁴² He writes:

ich habe nicht den Mut oder nicht die Fähigkeit, Arbeitsszenen aus Kohlenwaggons der Jahre 1940 bis 43 zu erzählen, weil sich hereindrängt, daß mit solchen Waggons auch Menschen in KZs transportiert worden sind. Ich müßte mich, um davon erzählen zu können, in ein antifaschistisches Kind verwandeln. Ich müßte also reden, wie man heute über diese Zeit redet.⁴⁴³

In so doing, he would be conforming to contemporary popular opinion, but would not be expressing the truth. The only possibility for him was, it seems, to write a narrative of growing up without superimposing subsequent historical awareness on that narrative.

Walser's interest in the theme of childhood is evident in his earlier writings. Works including *Ehen in Philippsburg* (1957), *Halbzeit* (1960), *Ein fliehendes Pferd* (1978), *Das Schwanenhaus* (1980), and *Jagd* (1988) demonstrate the way in which Walser examines 'the long-term effects of personal past, particularly childhood'.⁴⁴⁴ His

⁴⁴⁰ Martin Walser, *Über Deutschland reden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 76–7.

⁴⁴¹ In his novel *ohne einander* (1993) Walser draws attention to what he views as a restrictive political correctness: a journalist, Ellen, is required to write a positive review of *Hitlerjunge Salomon* to counter the effects of a previous article which might be interpreted as anti-Semitic. See Martin Walser, *ohne einander* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993).

⁴⁴² Walser, *Über Deutschland reden*, p. 77.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Gertrud Bauer Pickar, 'In Defense of the Past: The Life and Passion of Alfred Dorn in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*', in *New Critical Perspectives on Martin Walser*, ed. by Frank Pilipp (Columbia/SC: Camden House, 1994), pp. 134–56, here p. 135.

novel *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* (1991) particularly explores the presence of the past through an individual's childhood, and its legacy in the present. The protagonist, Alfred Dorn, has a passion for collecting the 'tangible remnants of his childhood', lost in war, seeking to save it from oblivion by retaining and documenting its physical traces.⁴⁴⁵ His life is dedicated to the relentless pursuit of his childhood and youth. However, while Dorn collects, he never interrogates, investigates or explores the past. As he is described on the novel's dust-jacket: 'er wird zu einem Fanatiker des Datums. Er will alles so bewahren, festhalten, wie es wirklich gewesen ist. [...] Und nicht weniger als gar alles. Und alles ganz genau. Bloß keine Fiktion'.⁴⁴⁶ Dorn refuses to acknowledge that simply amassing the past will not help him to come to terms with it, or even engage with it in a meaningful way. In addition, his fear of fictionalising is the antithesis of Walser's project, in which fictionalising is necessary in order to approach the past.

Indeed, there has been some discussion as to the genre of *Ein springender Brunnen*.⁴⁴⁷ Susanne Veas-Gulani calls *Ein springender Brunnen* a 'fictionalized memoir',⁴⁴⁸ and Friederike Eigler has termed it a 'hybrid genre that under-cuts clear distinctions between real and fictional realms'.⁴⁴⁹ In the 1980s, Walser had stated that he would 'demand' a novel of himself which would treat his own experiences in the Second World War, and *Ein springender Brunnen* was the result.⁴⁵⁰ The text is highly

⁴⁴⁵ Pickar, 'In Defense of the Past', p. 137.

⁴⁴⁶ Dust-jacket, Martin Walser, *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

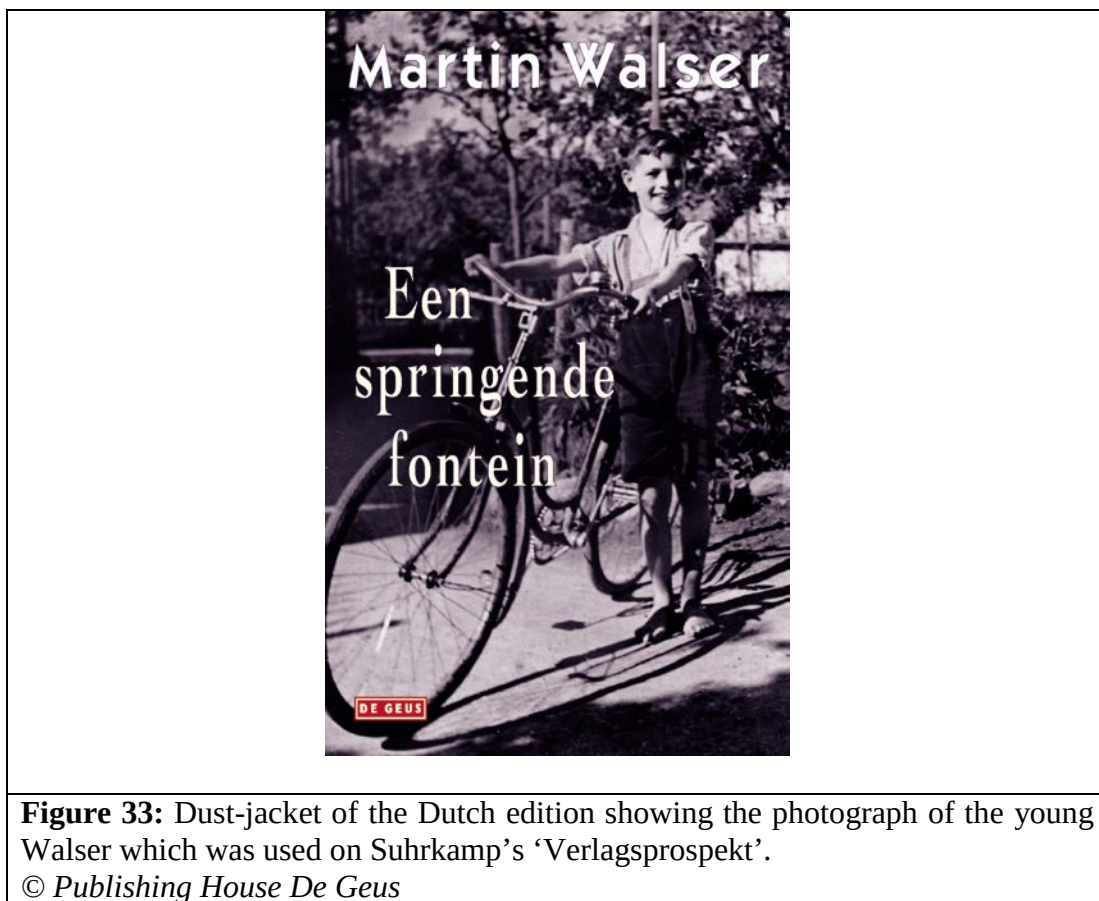
⁴⁴⁷ The novel is labelled a 'Roman', but was also frequently discussed as an 'autobiography' in the press. See, for example, Jörg Magenau, 'Abschied von der Einmischung', *taz*, 26 June 1998, p. 11; Reinhard Baumgart, 'Epen in Wasserburg. Martin Walser verteidigt seine Kindheit', *Die Zeit*, 6 August 1998, p. 35.

⁴⁴⁸ Susanne Veas-Gulani, 'Troubled Memories: Posttraumatic Stress, German writers and the Bombings of World War Two', *War, Literature and the Arts*, 17 (2005), 175-94, here p. 177.

⁴⁴⁹ Friederike Eigler, 'Engendering Cultural Memory in Selected Post-Wende Literary Texts of the 1990s', *German Quarterly*, 74 (2001), 392-406, here p. 392.

⁴⁵⁰ Volker Hage, 'Königssohn von Wasserburg', *Der Spiegel*, 27 July 1998, pp. 148-50.

autobiographical: Walser's own second name is Johann;⁴⁵¹ we know from paratextual information that the circumstances of the protagonist are very similar to those of the author; and the use of 'I' in the three 'metafictional'⁴⁵² introductory chapters reinforces this idea. In addition, the front cover of Suhrkamp's 'Verlagsprospekt' showed a photograph of the young Walser (see Figure 33) which corresponds exactly to the photograph of Johann described in the opening chapter of the novel, taken by a 'Wanderphotograph' (*Brunnen*, 20).⁴⁵³



⁴⁵¹ Willi Winkler, 'Die Sprache verwaltet das Nichts', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 September 1998, p. 15.

⁴⁵² Kathrin Schödel, 'Normalising Cultural Memory? The "Walser-Bubis Debate" and Martin Walser's Novel *Ein springender Brunnen*', in *Recasting German Identity: Culture, Politics and Literature in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Frank Finlay (Rochester/NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), pp. 67-87, here p. 68.

⁴⁵³ Kathrin Schödel, 'Erinnerung und Fiktion: Zur Darstellung der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in Martin Walsers Roman *Ein springender Brunnen*', in *Reale Fiktionen, fiktive Realitäten: Medien, Diskurse, Texte*, ed. by Johannes Angermüller, Katharina Bunzmann, and Christina Rauch (Hamburg: Lit, 2000), pp. 105-16, here p. 107.

In *Ein springender Brunnen*, then, according to Walser's programme, the reader encounters the past primarily through the child's perspective and through his understanding of events. Johann functions as the paradigmatic innocent child who, in Nazi Germany, remains innocent due to his ignorance of the events going on around him. This point of view is largely uninterrupted throughout the novel, with the exception of the three, philosophical chapters on the theory of memory. As a result, there is a consistent emphasis on the domestic sphere, and on historical and political events only when they impinge upon the child's world as he perceived them at the time. The reader's first encounter with Johann is as observer: 'Johann beobachtete alles von der Küchentür aus' (*Brunnen*, 10): this is a view not from below, but from a threshold, placing Johann as outsider. His observations frequently focus on objects which fascinate him, such as his father's bag (*Brunnen*, 52), and constitute what Coe terms the 'triviality of the childhood experience'.⁴⁵⁴ In addition, his child-like response to external events is also a source of humour. For example, Johann considers how much fun it would be to spell the word 'Anwesensversteigerung' (*Brunnen*, 66). Of the inflation problem in the early 1930s he comments: 'immer wenn Johann von dieser Inflation etwas hörte, dachte er, das Land hat Fieber gehabt damals, 41 oder 42 Grad Fieber müssen das gewesen sein' (*Brunnen*, 93).

Similarly, Johann's naïve perspective creates a gap of knowledge which can be filled by the reader. Johann comments that his best friend, Adolf 'sagte öfter Sätze [...], die so klangen wie alle Sätze, die Adolf bei Erwachsenen, vor allem bei seinem Vater, gehört hatte und die er dann dahersagte, auch wenn sie überhaupt nicht paßten' (*Brunnen*, 80). The result of this perspective is primarily to distance the reader from the events being described. The child's naïve and innocent tone provides a fresh commentary

⁴⁵⁴ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. xii.

on the historical events and conditions which will be well known to the reader. Pinfold suggests that ‘those who have read countless books, watched films, and learnt about the period in history classes run the risk of [...] habitualization; they “know” about the Third Reich’.⁴⁵⁵ The child’s naïve and uncomprehending view of events is afforded to the reader as a means of defamiliarisation, which is designed to offer a new approach to engaging with the past.

The narrative also contains frequent references to fairy-tales, which form a conceptual framework for the young Johann to make sense of the world. He considers that the hairdresser resembles ‘ein Zauberkünstler’ (*Brunnen*, 16), and similarly describes the way in which the ‘fremde Wanderphotograph’ ‘zauberte aus dem Stabartigen ein Stativ’ (*Brunnen*, 21). Johann also adopts this language from the adults around him. His father has told him a local woman, Hermine, who cleans the villas of rich merchants, is a queen, and Johann comments in the language of the fairy-tale: ‘als der Vater verraten hatte, daß Helmers Hermine eine Königin sei, hatte Johann sofort gespürt, daß dieses Königinnentum in der hohen schlanken Warze links neben ihrer Nase zum Ausdruck kam’ (*Brunnen*, 23). He similarly adopts the statement made by the family’s maid, Mina, that in his photograph Johann looks like a ‘Königssohn’, whose ‘Rad ist sein Roß!’ (*Brunnen*, 72). He describes his grandfather as ‘ein Riese’ (*Brunnen*, 36) and when Johann receives a knitted grey jumper as a Christmas present he declares that he is ‘der Silberne Ritter’ (*Brunnen*, 106).⁴⁵⁶

The innocence evoked by the frequent use of the language of fairy-tales establishes an image of Johann as angelic and innocent. It is also intertwined with

⁴⁵⁵ Pinfold, *The Child’s View*, p. 26.

⁴⁵⁶ The ‘Brunnen’ of the novel’s title is also a common motif in traditional German fairy-tales. See Stefan Neuhaus’s *Märchen* (Tübingen: Francke, 2005).

Walser's evocation of the notion of *Heimat*. This concept was famously defined by Ernst Bloch as 'etwas, das allen in die Kindheit scheint und worin noch niemand war: *Heimat*'.⁴⁵⁷ In his recent study of this discourse in Germany Peter Blickle writes:

the idea of *Heimat* is based on an imaginary space of innocence projected onto real geographical sites. Whether this innocence is religious (paradise), sexual (childhood), sociological (premodern, preindustrial), psychological (preconscious), philosophical (prerational, predialectical), or historical (pre-Holocaust) in character, in every case we find imageries of innocence laid over geographies of *Heimat*.⁴⁵⁸

The rural setting of *Ein springender Brunnen*, as well as its implicit defence of historical innocence, strongly evoke the idea of innocence associated with, and embodied by, the idea of *Heimat*. The term is often associated with the innocence of childhood⁴⁵⁹ and is commonly designated a place of nostalgic childhood memory.⁴⁶⁰ The yearning for a lost time and place of childhood innocence in *Ein springender Brunnen* appears to reflect Walser's desire to relieve his (and his generation's) memories of childhood of the stain of retrospective knowledge of the crimes of Nazism. Fuchs reads this as a negative aspect of Walser's text, arguing that he 'deliberately taps into the *Heimat* discourse to evoke Proustian childhood memories that refuse to obey the conventions of contritional writing'.⁴⁶¹ As Fuchs demonstrates, Walser's evocation of this discourse is questionable because it proposes a version of the past which has been stripped of its more unsavoury elements.

⁴⁵⁷ Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959), p. 1628.

⁴⁵⁸ Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester/NY and Woodbridge/UK: Camden House, 2002), p. 130. It is striking that childhood is categorised here as sexual innocence. This will be discussed further in Chapter Four, see below pp. 222-6.

⁴⁵⁹ Blickle, *Heimat*, p. 17.

⁴⁶⁰ Elizabeth Boa, 'Lost Heimat in Generational Novels by Reinhard Jirgl, Christoph Hein, and Angelika Overath', in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 86-102, here p. 89.

⁴⁶¹ Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 165.

In *Ein springender Brunnen* this takes on a Christian dimension as Johann's childhood comes to represent a kind of pre-Lapsarian Eden. The ideal and metaphor of childhood as a garden, but one with established perimeters, was a common motif in the Victorian era. This corresponds to Holt's image of childhood as a 'walled garden': a place of natural beauty where the innocent are protected, but which simultaneously keeps children confined within it. In addition, a Freudian concept of childhood is at work. Freud writes: 'diese der Scham entbehrende Kindheit erscheint unserer Rückschau später als ein Paradies, und das Paradies selbst ist nichts Anderes als die Massenphantasie von der Kindheit des Einzelnen.'⁴⁶² Here, childhood, like human existence before the Fall, is conceptualised as a time free from shame, which in turn is the result of a lack of knowledge of good and evil. And yet as Freud argues, this state which is free from shame is also a fantasy.

Amongst the criticisms directed at *Ein springender Brunnen* in ZDF's programme *Literarisches Quartett*, was the challenge that the novel failed to show the 'Schrecken des Faschismus'.⁴⁶³ Walser was accused of constructing an unrealistically idyllic picture of the past, and wanted 'nur Schönes zu sagen'.⁴⁶⁴ In his speech in Autumn 1988 in the Munich Kammerspielen, 'Über Deutschland reden', Walser asked:

ist man fähig oder gar verpflichtet, Kindheitsbilder nachträglich zu bewerten, oder darf man sich diesem allerersten Andrang einfach für immer überlassen? Ich habe das Gefühl, ich könne mit meiner Erinnerung nicht nach Belieben umgehen.

⁴⁶² Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005), p. 252.

⁴⁶³ A good account of this is given in: Jochen Hieber, 'Unversöhnte Lebensläufe. Zur Rhetorik der Verletzung in der Walser-Bubis-Debatte', in *Hinauf und zurück in die herzhelle Zukunft*, ed. by Michael Braun and Birgit H. Lermen (Bonn: Bouvier, 2000), pp. 543-59, here p. 544. The programme was broadcast on 14 August 1998.

⁴⁶⁴ Martin Walser, 'Die Banalität des Guten. Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede aus Anlass der Verleihung des Friedenspreises des Deutschen Buchhandels', *FAZ*, 12 October 1998, p. 15.

Es ist mir, zum Beispiel, nicht möglich, meine Erinnerung mit Hilfe eines inzwischen erworbenen Wissens zu belehren.⁴⁶⁵

This comment encapsulates Walser's attitude and programme in *Ein springender Brunnen* and is in direct opposition to de Bruyn's approach. The 'Kindheitsbilder' here represent Walser's memories. Just as the images of childhood 'well up from the "springender Brunnen" of language and do not have to be re-created',⁴⁶⁶ so they also cannot, or in Walser's view should not, be informed retrospectively. Helmuth Kiesel contends that by depicting average, ordinary people during this period, Walser succeeds in showing them 'ohne Beschönigung, aber auch ohne Verteufelung' and ultimately makes them 'verständlich'.⁴⁶⁷ It echoes Dennis Gansel's desire to make teenagers of Walser's generation, as well as their actions during the Third Reich, understandable.

Walser did indeed 'make a claim' for the historical innocence of his and his generation's childhood.⁴⁶⁸ Fuchs is critical of this approach and suggests that Walser 'represses the inevitable mediation of all our memories through the portrayal of a childhood idyll which is sealed off from the author's later historical knowledge'.⁴⁶⁹ She argues that Walser '[pitches] the idea of an authentic recall of the past against political correctness'.⁴⁷⁰ Walser himself states:

ich wollte mir die Unschuld meiner Kindheit bewahren und sie nicht durch nachträgliches Dreinreden verbessern oder schärfen oder politisch korrekter machen. Darüber habe ich sehr lange nachgedacht und meine Gedanken dazu in drei halb essayistischen Passagen in dem Buch untergebracht, die überschrieben sind mit 'Vergangenheit als Gegenwart'. Da heißt es dann eben, daß es die

⁴⁶⁵ Walser, *Über Deutschland reden*, p. 76.

⁴⁶⁶ Schmitz, *On Their Own Terms*, p. 200.

⁴⁶⁷ Helmuth Kiesel, 'Zwei Modelle literarischer Erinnerung an die NS-Zeit: *Die Blechtrommel* und *Ein springender Brunnen*', *German Monitor*, 60 (2004), 343-61, here p. 360.

⁴⁶⁸ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford/CA: Stanford UP, 2003), p. 139.

⁴⁶⁹ Fuchs, *Phantoms*, p. 165.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Vergangenheit als solche nicht gibt, daß ich weiß, ich schreibe von heute aus, daß ich die Gegenwart nicht wegdenken und nicht verhindern kann, daß sie beim Schreiben stets dabei ist. Trotzdem habe ich versucht, eine Schreibart zu entwickeln, in der die Vergangenheit mir entgegenkommt wie von selbst und keine Einmischung von heute duldet.⁴⁷¹

The 'Unschuld [der] Kindheit' – specifically *Walser's* childhood – is conceived as a lack of knowledge of wider events which frees the protagonist from any guilt, shame or sense of having been complicit in Nazism. Here Walser simultaneously acknowledges the complexity, and ultimate impossibility, of his desire to show the past as it was lived, without retrospective commentary, and at the same time defends his right to do so.

The three meta-fictional chapters to which Walser here alludes frame each of the text's three sections. They provide reflections on the process of remembering and a commentary on the difficulty of his endeavour. By exploring the constructedness of memory and historical truth, they succeed, however briefly, in undercutting the overall impression of the narrative, which gives the illusion of being an unmediated description of the past. Entitled 'Vergangenheit als Gegenwart', their function, as Schmitz argues, is to establish a distinction between public and private memory.⁴⁷² He proposes that the past is subject to the demands of the present and, as such, cannot be represented: 'die Vergangenheit als solche gibt es nicht. Es gibt sie nur als etwas, das in der Gegenwart enthalten ist, ausschlaggebend oder unterdrückt, dann als unterdrückte ausschlaggebend' (*Brunnen*, 281). While writers like Wolf and de Bruyn express concern with the way the past continues to shape their present, Walser is preoccupied by the effect of the present on the past. This is also reflected in his placement of the 'Vorwort als Nachwort', thereby shifting the expected structuring of the text (*Brunnen*, 409-13).

⁴⁷¹ Willi Winkler, 'Die Sprache verwaltet das Nichts', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 September 1998, p. 15.

⁴⁷² See, for example, Walser's discussion of memory and the museum outlined in Chapter One, p. 92.

Christoph Parry argues that the text's concern is not so much the question 'wie war es wirklich', as the more precise question 'wie hat man es damals erlebt'.⁴⁷³ Similarly, according to Taberner the narrator aims 'to relate the past in such a way that it becomes "auf ihrer Weise gegenwärtig" [*Brunnen*, 9], that is, *gegenwärtig* in the sense of "authentically accessible" to us, *wie es eigentlich gewesen* [ist]'.⁴⁷⁴ Both comments suggest that the authenticity for which Walser is striving is not necessarily rooted in the past events, but rather in the feeling of the time. This is the quintessence of Walser's 'gefühlte Geschichte'. As Friederike Eigler observes: 'by narrating the past with few interferences from the present, Walser creates a sense of authenticity that suggests the "naturalness" of memory'.⁴⁷⁵ This ultimately proves an 'impossible authenticity';⁴⁷⁶ yet it is this authenticity which Walser defends, and which for him takes on a political significance.

Günter Grass's *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006)

In *Ein springender Brunnen*, Walser comments: 'manche haben gelernt, ihre Vergangenheit abzulehnen. Sie entwickeln eine Vergangenheit, die jetzt als günstiger gilt' (*Brunnen*, 282). We can read the verb 'entwickeln' here in two ways: firstly, simply as 'developing' in the sense of creating or causing to grow; and secondly as 'developing' in the more literal sense of 'unwrapping'. In this more literal reading, it is not simply that such individuals have rejected their past in favour of a more convenient or

⁴⁷³ Christoph Parry, 'Die Rechtfertigung der Erinnerung vor der Last der Geschichte', in *Grenzen der Fiktionalität und der Erinnerung*, ed. by Christoph Parry and Edgar Platen (München: iudicium 2007), pp. 98-111, here p. 102.

⁴⁷⁴ Stuart Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* (Rochester/NY and Woodbridge: Camden House 2005), p. 123.

⁴⁷⁵ Eigler, 'Engendering Cultural Memory', p. 394.

⁴⁷⁶ Maja Zehfuss, *Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 146.

retrospectively auspicious version, but rather that they have sought to remove the accretions with which prevailing historical narrative has overlaid their lived experience. Whilst the stripping of this historical varnish can, on one reading, appear both morally and historiographically commendable, on another, the question of what ought to be removed is almost entirely subjective; and, to extend the metaphor, we might ask whether the layers which have been removed are in fact obscuring some other facet of the autobiography which, for whatever reason, the author does not wish to share.

Just such a charge was levelled at Günter Grass when, in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in August 2006 he revealed that he had served in the *Waffen SS* 10th Tank Division ‘Frundsberg’ in 1944 – a fact which he had not hitherto disclosed publically. Grass had never denied his youthful involvement in Nazism, stating repeatedly in interviews and in his autobiographical literary works, that he had been a Nazi.⁴⁷⁷ Yet this new admission of having been in the SS provoked widespread criticism both for its belatedness, and for Grass’s apparent hypocrisy in having acted for decades as a national ‘Moralprediger’.⁴⁷⁸ Grass’s confession was made in advance of the publication of his autobiography *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* which provides a detailed account of his childhood and adolescence in Nazi Germany and the immediate post-war period, culminating in the publication of his first novel, *Die Blechtrommel* (1959) which propelled him into public life as a popular – although often rather unpopular – figure.

While the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article broke the story of a new and previously unknown piece of information about the life of the author, in reality the book

⁴⁷⁷ For an overview of this, see Julian Preece, *The Life and Work of Günter Grass: Literature, History, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1-9.

⁴⁷⁸ Martin Kölbel, ‘Nachwort’, in *Ein Buch, ein Bekenntnis: Die Debatte um Günter Grass’ Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, ed. by Martin Kölbel (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007), pp. 335-57, here p. 336.

offers the reader little autobiographical information to which he/she had not already been privy. Grass's childhood, indeed his entire life, has consistently been public property since he first came to prominence. Indeed, he draws attention to this in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* when he writes that everything which follows in his current narrative is 'aufgezählt und datiert, steht gedruckt und in Zeilen geordnet' (*Zwiebel*, 471). Similarly, pointing forward to his life after the publication of *Die Blechtrommel* he comments: 'so lebte ich fortan von Seite zu Seite und zwischen Buch und Buch' (*Zwiebel*, 479), suggesting both his career, but also the notion that he is encased or enclosed within the very pages themselves. The case would seem to validate Reich-Ranicki's comment that autobiographical writing about childhood offers nothing original. In Grass's case, the reader has encountered it all before. Grass draws attention to this very point in the opening pages, asking:

warum überhaupt soll Kindheit und deren so unverrückbar datiertes Ende erinnert werden, wenn alles, was mir ab den ersten und seit den zweiten Zähnen widerfuhr [...] einer Person anhängt, die [...] nicht wachsen wollte, Glas in jeder Gebrauchsform zersang, zwei hölzerne Stöcke zur Hand hatte und sich dank ihrer Blechtrommel einen Namen machte [...]? (*Zwiebel*, 8)

Grass refers here to Oskar Matzerath, the protagonist of his first and most famous novel, *Die Blechtrommel*, whose early biography was a rewriting of Grass's own childhood and youth. Grass's response to the question 'why recall childhood?' reads:

weil dies und auch das nachgetragen werden muß. Weil vorlaut auffallend etwas fehlen könnte. Weil wer wann in den Brunnen gefallen ist: meine erst danach überdeckelten Löcher, mein nicht zu bremsendes Wachstum, mein Sprachverkehr mit verlorenen Gegenständen. Und auch dieser Grund sei genannt: weil ich das letzte Wort haben will. (*Zwiebel*, 8)

Grass's motivation seems to be in part a desire to reclaim his own youthful biography from the fictional use to which it was put, and to assert a full account of, and for, himself.

In addition, the reference to 'Brunnen' here also recalls Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen*, and Taberner has suggested that Grass makes reference to Walser's text as part of his motivation for writing his own autobiography.⁴⁷⁹

The link with Oskar Matzerath at the outset of *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* is significant, both in terms of Grass's approach to the idea of authenticity, and his idea and treatment of childhood. In *Die Blechtrommel* the diminutive protagonist, Oskar, views the world of Nazism from below, experiencing it in the guise of a three-year-old child, albeit one who is possessed of an adult's capacity for thought and perception.⁴⁸⁰ Oskar refuses to grow up physically, thereby insistently remaining an outsider. Pinfold terms Oskar the quintessential 'Kind-Dämon' or 'Anti-Kind'.⁴⁸¹ Oskar is a 'pseudo child', who possesses 'many adult attributes', but also the outward appearance of a child.⁴⁸² It is this outward appearance which enables Oskar to maintain an ironic distance from the events he describes. It also enables the adult narrator, Oskar, now thirty-years-old and in an asylum, to elicit sympathy from the reader. Salman Rushdie calls Oskar the 'Peter Pan among the million lost boys and murderous pirates of Nazi Germany: little, stunted Oskar, the other boy in classic literature who never grew up'.⁴⁸³ However, Grass, unlike Oskar, feels a profound sense of shame at having been involved in Nazism. The text begins with the recollection of the end of Grass's childhood: 'auf engem Raum wurde meine Kindheit beendet, als dort, wo ich aufwuchs, an verschiedenen Stellen zeitgleich

⁴⁷⁹ Stuart Taberner, 'Private Failings and Public Virtues: Günter Grass's *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* and the Exemplary Use of Authorial Biography', *Modern Language Review*, 103 (2008), 144-54, here p. 152. A further reference is made to *Ein springender Brunnen* when Grass compares his own biography with 'Schriftsteller meiner Generation, die seßhaft am Bodensee [...] aufgewachsen [...] sind' (*Zwiebel*, 64).

⁴⁸⁰ Grass, *Blechtrommel*, p. 52.

⁴⁸¹ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 89.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁸³ Salman Rushdie, 'A Fine Pickle', *The Guardian*, 28 February 2009, <http://redroom.com/member/salman-rushdie/writing/a-fine-pickle-slumdog-millionaire-and-film-adaptation> [accessed 20 January 2012].

der Krieg ausbrach [...]. [M]it ehernen Worten wurde [...] das Ende meiner Kinderjahre ausgerufen' (Zwiebel, 7). However, Grass continues to write about his childhood and youth for a significant proportion of the text. Grass draws attention to the theme of childhood, both through his depictions of his young self and through several linguistic pointers. He refers to himself throughout the narrative as 'der Junge meines Namens' (Zwiebel, 27); 'jener Junge, dem ich auf der Spur zu bleiben habe' (Zwiebel, 26); 'jener Junge, der anscheinend ich war' (Zwiebel, 10); and 'der Schüler meines Namens' (Zwiebel, 337), emphasising both his youth and the adult narrator's disassociation with this child he once was. He describes his younger self as resisting accusations of guilt, saying: 'er [...] will nicht beurteilt, verurteilt werden. Er flüchtet auf Mutters Schoß. Er ruft: "Ich war doch ein Kind nur, nur ein Kind"' (Zwiebel, 37). He describes his belief in Hitler: 'an ihn zu glauben, strengte nicht an, fiel kinderleicht' (Zwiebel, 106). Even memory becomes imbued with the characteristics of childhood: 'die Erinnerung liebt das Versteckspiel der Kinder' (Zwiebel, 8). In this way the theme of childhood dominates the narrative.

The contrition which is largely absent in *Zwischenbilanz* and *Ein springender Brunnen* is prominent in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* which periodically reads like the autobiographical sub-genre, the confession. Grass views his childhood years as having been dominated by a silence: specifically, a failure to ask questions about events and the world around him. He cites several examples: the sudden disappearance of his uncle Franz, who was executed by the National Socialists for fighting on the Polish side; his Latin teacher at school, Monsignor Stachnik, who was imprisoned in Stutthof concentration camp; and a fellow recruit in the *Arbeitsdienst* – a young man dubbed

Wirtunsowasnicht because of his refusal to take up arms. Of the latter, Grass writes: 'ich hatte mich kindlich dummgestellt, sein Verschwinden stumm hingenommen und so abermals das Wort 'warum' vermieden' (*Zwiebel*, 25). This is surprising, as 'kindlich dumm' is a misnomer: children are forever asking 'why'. Grass undermines the reader's expectation here and in so doing evokes the 'Alibi der Jugend'.⁴⁸⁴ This term, coined by the author Eva Zeller in her autobiography of childhood under Nazism, is an attempt to denote the ambiguous position of her generation as implicated in, but free from, guilt for National Socialist crimes. Zeller suggests that their youth provides the alibi: they are widely considered to have been too young to understand the consequences of that in which they were participating and by implication too young to be held accountable.

Grass sees his silence, his failure to ask questions, as the source of his shame. On recalling a scene in which he watched a Danzig synagogue burn, he writes: 'ich [war] untätig, doch als neugieriger Zuschauer dabei [...]. Offenbar haben keine Zweifel meine Kinderjahre getrübt' (*Zwiebel*, 26). Of the disappearance of his uncle Franz he asks: 'und auch ich habe, wenngleich mit Beginn des Krieges meine Kindheit beendet war, keine sich wiederholenden Fragen gestellt. Oder wagte ich nicht zu fragen, weil kein Kind mehr? Stellen, wie im Märchen, nur Kinder die richtigen Fragen?' (*Zwiebel*, 16). Grass's dilemma recalls that of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, in which the protagonist's entry into courtly society hinges upon his success or failure to ask a question.⁴⁸⁵ *Parzival* fails to ask his host, the King Anfortas, about his mysterious wound or about the magical objects which are paraded before him, recalling the advice of his tutor, Gurnemanz, not to be too curious. Had he asked Anfortas the reason for his suffering, the spell would

⁴⁸⁴ Eva Zeller, *Solange ich denken kann. Roman einer Jugend* (Stuttgart: Ullstein, 1987), p. 186.

⁴⁸⁵ Grass makes reference to *Parzival* in *Die Blechtrommel* through the motif of three drops of blood in the snow (*Blechtrommel*, 623).

have been broken and the King would have been restored to health. The concern to avoid curiosity stands in the way of compassion. In Wolfram's tale, Parzival's inability to ask the crucial question – 'Oeheim, waz wirret dir?' – is the reason redemption is withheld, and the subsequent narrative is concerned with his search for righteousness. Grass sees his own lack of questioning as a grave sin of omission. Grass emphasises this further, describing his younger self as 'unverschämt jung' (Zwiebel, 51). As in *Ein springender Brunnen*, the idea of childhood becomes synonymous with a pre-Lapsarian state, in which no shame is experienced. Just as Parzival learns to experience shame after his failure to question suffering, so too by analogy does Grass come to feel consumed with shame for his failure to question the fate of so many.

The way in which Grass treats the issue of *guilt* is reminiscent of the narrative pattern at work in *Die Blechtrommel*. Grass uses the narrative formula of exculpation through exaggerated self-accusation deployed in *Die Blechtrommel* in his autobiography. For example, in *Die Blechtrommel* Oskar recounts the death of his putative father, Jan Bronski, giving an account of the scene in which Jan is taken prisoner by the SS. He then qualifies it, however, with the words: 'soeben las ich den zuletzt geschriebenen Absatz noch einmal durch. Wenn ich auch nicht zufrieden bin, sollte es um so mehr Oskars Feder sein, denn ihr ist es gelungen [...] zu lügen. Ich möchte jedoch bei der Wahrheit bleiben.'⁴⁸⁶ Oskar attempts to assert his own reliability as a narrator by claiming that his pen has lied. The narrator's claim to the reader that he will stick to the truth is a device used frequently in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, in which the onion – the metaphor for the author's process of accessing the past – contradicts Grass's account of events. A similar construction in *Die Blechtrommel* involves Oskar's reaction to his receipt of a new tin

⁴⁸⁶ Grass, *Blechtrommel*, p. 318.

drum. Oskar comments: 'und während Jan das müde Blech, ich das frische faßten, blieben Jans, Mamas, Matzeraths Augen auf Oskar gerichtet. [...] [J]a dachten die denn, ich klebte am Althergebrachten, nährte Prinzipien in meiner Brust?'.⁴⁸⁷ Pinfold comments on this passage that:

we might consider Oskar's preference for a new toy over an old and broken one to be quite natural, yet the narrating Oskar apparently encourages us to see the incident as proof of a kind of unnatural amorality. However, it is also possible that this very deliberate blackening is intended to create an impression of him being too hard on his childhood self and so encourage reader sympathy with him or at the very least the sense that 'he can't be as bad as all that'.⁴⁸⁸

Oskar the narrator heaps guilt upon himself. The reader's response to his guilt and complicity in the crimes and misdemeanours he claims to have perpetrated is complicated by his status as a child. In the same way in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, Grass refuses any means with which his guilt might be mitigated. The anthropomorphised onion defends the young Grass: 'du warst nur ein dummer Junge, hast nichts Schlimmes getan' (*Zwiebel*, 44). This assurance is later rejected by Grass who claims: 'meine Tat läßt sich nicht zur jugendlichen Dummheit verwinzigen' (*Zwiebel*, 75). Yet Grass also emphasises to the reader the 'dummer Stolz meiner jungen Jahre' (*Zwiebel*, 127). As Taberner notes: 'the plea for mitigation, once rejected, is now adopted by Grass, and the reader may well feel that the author has committed only a minor sin of omission in remaining silent for so long about his foolish youthful pride.'⁴⁸⁹

Grass frequently draws attention to the veracity – or lack of it – of his account. He repeatedly insists that, while interred in an American prisoner of war camp in Bad

⁴⁸⁷ Grass, *Blechtrommel*, p. 84.

⁴⁸⁸ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 152.

⁴⁸⁹ Stuart Taberner, 'Günter Grass's *Peeling the Onion*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), pp. 139-51, p. 142.

Aibling, he met and befriended Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. He describes his re-telling of the story and his sister's response:

meine Schwester glaubt meinen Erzählungen grundsätzlich nicht [...] Ihr Mißtrauen nahm zu: 'Stimmt das? Hört sich übertrieben an, ganz wie eine von deinen Geschichten!' Ich sagte: 'Also, wenn dich mein Lagerleben unter Bayerns Himmel nicht interessiert...' Sie drauf: 'Na, erzähl schon'. (Zwiebel, 419)

Grass has his sister voice the probable thoughts of the reader, for although we are aware that this account is another tall story, we simultaneously want to know more. Grass's overt fictionalising serves merely to draw the reader in closer. By employing this narrative construction, Grass deliberately draws attention to the problem of authenticity in his account. This is a common feature of Grass's writing, and one which he frequently uses to engage the reader.

He achieves this most effectively through his exploration of memory. For Grass the title metaphor of the onion represents the elusive quality of 'Erinnerung'. He writes: 'wenn ihr mit Fragen zugesetzt wird, gleicht die Erinnerung einer Zwiebel, die gehäutet sein möchte, damit freigelegt werden kann' (Zwiebel, 9). The layers themselves constitute the author's memories and experiences. At the same time, they form a protective casing, which make up the onion: or rather, Grass's youth consists of layers of memory which must be peeled back, and which desire to be removed. Just as Virgil shows Dante the layers of the underworld, so the authorial persona guides us through the vagaries of his past. Like Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, which Elizabeth Boa terms 'a quest narrative within the mode of labyrinthine writing',⁴⁹⁰ *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* is presented as a search for the author's past, and for the truth of that past.

⁴⁹⁰ Elizabeth Boa, 'Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*', in *Landmarks of the German Novel* (2), ed. by Peter Hutchinson and Michael Minden (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 77-93, here p. 86.

In Greek mythology, King Minos's labyrinth was built to hold the Minotaur: a bull-headed creature which fed on children offered as tribute. For Wolf, the creature at the centre of the labyrinth is her own child self, whose uncritical enthusiasm for Nazism frightens the adult looking back. In Grass's case, the German word for labyrinth – 'Irrgarten' – is particularly apt. While it may suggest the notion of childhood as Edenic garden, it also puts emphasis on the idea of 'sich irren', to err. Thus for Grass the labyrinthine journey towards his past as performed within the text is continually hampered by the shame he expresses for his youthful mistakes. Ultimately, however, the onion metaphor with its idea of unwrapping simultaneously symbolises the futility of searching for the truth of the past: there *is* no seed or kernel at the centre of an onion.

Authenticity is a central idea in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*: this issue is raised when Grass recounts his wartime experiences at the Front. He writes:

aber das, was hier im einzelnen geschrieben steht, habe ich ähnlich bereits woanders, bei Remarque oder Céline gelesen, wie schon Grimmelshausen bei der Schilderung der Schlacht von Wittstock, als die Schweden die Kaiserlichen in Stücke hauten, überlieferte Schreckensbilder zitierte... (*Zwiebel*, 142)

Grass's comment that the wartime pictures he calls up from his memory are simply repetitions of pre-existing images in literary works echoes the discussion in the previous chapter about the appropriation of authenticity by images which correspond to existing depictions of the past. Grass also introduces the notion that photographs are constructed, rather than being direct representations of reality, in order to problematise memory. He writes: 'oft gibt die Lüge, oder deren kleine Schwester, die Schummelei, den haltbarsten Teil der Erinnerung ab; niedergeschrieben klingt sie glaubhaft und prahlt mit Einzelheiten, die als fotogenau zu gelten haben' (*Zwiebel*, 9). Grass emphasises the fact that although memories may seem to be 'fotogenau', that is no guarantee of truth. Like

de Bruyn, he ultimately concludes that the moving images merely purport to show reality. He draws attention to the constructedness of his account, hampered by memory, and by his own reluctance to reveal the truth about his past.

Conclusion

Reich-Ranicki questions the legitimacy of autobiographical accounts of childhood, commenting: 'leider lieben es viele Autobiographen, sich ausführlich über etwas zu verbreiten, worüber sie nur selten etwas Originelles zu sagen haben – über ihre Kindheit.'⁴⁹¹ We might attribute this 'lack of originality' to the perceived universality of childhood experience: the idea that all childhood experiences are basically the same. It might also stem from the idea that the reading public has heard about the particular author's childhood in other contexts, and thus an autobiographical re-telling will be a mere repetition of those accounts. Much has been written about the Hitler Youth generation, both by historians, and by members of that generation looking back, including the authors under discussion here. In this case, more than anywhere in this thesis, the concern that the reader is 'überinformiert' can be raised. What, then, do these post-1990 texts offer? They all express the desire to produce an account of 'how it really was', and to give an authentic depiction of the past, whilst acknowledging the various limits of such an approach.

It is not surprising, then, that the close association between childhood and authenticity can be found in these texts. In her study *Imagined Childhoods* Gullestad seeks to

⁴⁹¹ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Über Ruhestörer: Juden in der deutschen Literatur* (München: Piper, 1973), p. 168.

challenge the assumption, deeply embedded in Western modernity, that there is a fundamental contradiction between truth and authenticity, on the one hand, and literary constructedness, on the other. It is often through literary or imaginary means that a narrator can construct an approximately authentic account of experiences from the point of view of the child in the narrated past.⁴⁹²

Her comment suggests that autobiographical writing about childhood can reveal an inner truth about an individual, even if this does not correspond to past events. They ‘can be true without being historically accurate’.⁴⁹³ It is the nature of childhood as subject matter which, in her view, makes this possible. Similarly, Brettschneider, like Gullestad, suggests that the very subject of the memory – childhood – is a guarantor of truth.⁴⁹⁴ According to this reading, even if they are not rooted in events which took place, autobiographical accounts of childhood can nevertheless reveal a truth about the individual writer and the period in which he/she grew up. Yet this sits uneasily with contemporary thought on historical representation and, as Suleiman argues, with ‘the constructedness of all narratives, including historical narratives’.⁴⁹⁵ Coe takes a slightly more nuanced view and asserts that the author recalling and recreating their childhood in literary form ‘refashions accuracy in the direction of truth’. He argues that the truth is out of reach forever:

at best, it can be reevoked through art in a new form, conjured up by way of symbols, images and impressions, and endowed retrospectively with a pattern and a significance which it can rarely, if ever, have possessed at the time, when the later-circumscribed facticity of the past was dissolved into the shapeless and elusive fluidity of the present.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹² Gullestad, ‘Modernity, Self, and Childhood’, in *Imagined Childhoods*, p. 24.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁹⁴ Brettschneider, ‘*Kindheitsmuster*’, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁵ Susan Suleiman, ‘Problems of Memory and Factuality in Recent Holocaust Memoirs: Wilkomirski/Wiesel’, *Poetics Today*, 21 (2000), 543-59, here p. 549.

⁴⁹⁶ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. 3.

In Coe's view, autobiographical writing about childhood cannot reveal the truth of the past, but will necessarily be informed by present concerns. As such, the past as it is represented will exist in a newly crafted form.

According to this reading, the truth of the past is rooted in the truth of the individual and of identity. The primary impetus of autobiographical writing – particularly accounts of childhood – is to give a truth about oneself and about personal experience. As Coe argues, the writer who produces autobiographical work about his childhood is 'concerned not so much with *the* truth, as with *his* truth'.⁴⁹⁷ In *Das erzählte Ich* de Bruyn explores this idea. He writes:

daß [...] der Begriff Dichtung nicht Erfindung bedeutet, sondern daß er als Verdichten des Geschehenen, als Konzentrieren des Vielfältigen und Zufälligen oder auch als gedankliches Durchdringen oder Deuten zu verstehen ist. Dichtung im autobiographischen Schreiben ist die Fähigkeit, das Vergangene gegenwärtig zu machen, Wesentliches in Sein und Werden zu zeigen, Teilwahrheiten zusammenzufassen zu dem Versuch der ganzen Wahrheit über das schreibende und beschriebene Ich.⁴⁹⁸

De Bruyn's notion of the 'Wahrheit der Kunst' as outlined here does not suggest that the subject of childhood in itself can guarantee authenticity; rather the authenticity which can be achieved is always an attempt, hampered by the limits of memory and literary representation. Describing in *Zwischenbilanz* how he told stories to his friend Hannes, he comments: 'Hannes, mein Publikum, wollte ja keine exakte Geschichtsschreibung, sondern Geschichten' (*Zwischenbilanz*, 29). The reader's desire for the 'truth' of the author Günter de Bruyn's early life may well be considered in these terms. Just as in the previous chapter the measure of a film's authenticity corresponded to the extent to which it reinforced existing images of 'authentic' experience, so the reader may well, like

⁴⁹⁷ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. 80.

⁴⁹⁸ De Bruyn, *Das erzählte Ich*, p. 31.

Hannes, be satisfied with stories, rather than necessarily the ‘exakte Geschichtsschreibung’.

Grass’s text uses precisely this idea in order to draw the reader in throughout the account. It is part of both his literary style, and his persona. In an interview with Elizabeth Gaffney he playfully contends that ‘the truth is mostly very boring, and you can help it along with the lies. There is no harm in that’.⁴⁹⁹ In a similar way to de Bruyn, Grass also views his autobiography as performing an almost exemplary function:

ich habe bewusst das Wort ‘Autobiographie’ vermieden. Mir kam es eher darauf an, den schwierigen Werdegang eines jungen Menschen in einer Zeit zu beschreiben, die in der Anfangsphase bestimmt war von der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus [...] der schwierige Prozess des sich Darauslösens nach dem Krieg und zugleich [...] der verstiegene Wunsch eines Zwölf- Dreizehnjährigen und die feste Vorstellung: ‘ich werde Künstler’.⁵⁰⁰

His account offers the reader not so much de Bruyn’s ‘Wahrheit der Kunst’, but rather the ‘Wahrheit der Künstler’. By drawing attention to the problematic nature of writing about one’s own childhood, and in particular childhood spent under dictatorship, Grass conforms to de Bruyn’s notion that the child’s view and experience must always be tempered with that of the remembering adult who is, and has been since 1945, aware of the crimes perpetrated in the name of Nazism. For those who have lived through pernicious historical periods, such as the Third Reich, the imperative to comment on the events of this time is great and both de Bruyn and Grass acknowledge this, despite executing it in different ways.

⁴⁹⁹ Elizabeth Gaffney, ‘Interview with Günter Grass’, *Paris Review*, no. 124 (1991), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2191/the-art-of-fiction-no-124-gunter-grass> [accessed 2 October 2011].

⁵⁰⁰ Günter Grass, Interview, in Richard E. Schade, ‘Layers of Meaning, War, Art: Grass’s “Beim Häuten der Zwiebel”’, *German Quarterly*, 80 (2007), 279-301, here pp. 282-3.

In contrast, Walser subscribes to Brettschneider's idea that the truth of the past can best be expressed through 'Dichtung'. Walser *does* draw attention to the problematic nature of his endeavour. For Walser 'erzählen, wie es war, ist ein Traumhausbau' (*Brunnen*, 10); however, his concern stems not from a concern about the representability of the past, but rather with his own ability to access his memories 'authentically', by which he means without the constraints and interests of the present. As Stephen Brockmann argues:

what people may think of as the objectively true past, the narrator claims, is in fact a construction which they have created for their own purposes in the present. Every past, inasmuch as it is told in the present, is at least partly a fiction. 'Geschichte' as history is always also 'Geschichte as story'.⁵⁰¹

Indeed, Lathey attributes the popularity of recent autobiographical works about childhood in the Third Reich to this, writing that 'the thriving autobiography industry of recent decades has been accompanied by the promotion of life histories as a successful product. A 'true story' always attracts readers – but it must still be a "story"'.⁵⁰² Lathey's comments suggest not only the commodification of life stories, but also the constructedness of such accounts. The process of selection involved in the museum – picking and choosing the elements to include in the narrative of the past – is central to the act of writing autobiographically. As Hélène Cixous writes, 'all biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another.'⁵⁰³ This also recalls Reich-Ranicki's comment, and demands why, if autobiographical accounts of childhood necessarily have nothing original to say, does one write them at all? For de Bruyn and

⁵⁰¹ Stephen Brockmann, 'Martin Walser and the Presence of the German Past', *German Quarterly*, 75 (2002), 127-43, here p. 128.

⁵⁰² Lathey, *The Impossible Legacy*, p. 40.

⁵⁰³ Hélène Cixous, 'Albums and Legends', in *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life-writing*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber and Hélène Cixous, translated from the French by Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 177-207, here p. 178.

Grass, the limitations of this approach are considered the unreliability of memory, the mediated quality of writing and the confines of historical representation. Walser also explores the constructedness of autobiographical accounts of childhood, but for him this takes on a moral dimension, as he argues that the interests of the present are what 'construct' the past.

De Bruyn, Walser and Grass are prominent public intellectuals and because of this their autobiographical texts offer 'privileged insights'⁵⁰⁴ into the lives of their respective authors. In this way their accounts seek to function both as a description of private experience, and as a way of speaking on behalf of others. As writers, they are well-placed to give expression to their experiences; yet at the same time, their membership at the heart of what Eva Menasse and Michael Kumpfmüller term Germany's 'intellektuelle Gerontokratie'⁵⁰⁵ means that we arguably read their accounts differently from those, written by first-time authors, which do not possess the practised narratological compellingness of the successful writers.

Finally, in her study of memoirs written by those who grew up during the American Revolution and Revolutionary War (1775-1783), Elizabeth McKee Williams concludes that because of issues of memory and writing, such accounts do not so much tell us about childhood during the period, but rather offer 'a marvellous resource for exploring how men and women of this generation understood their childhood experiences of war and how they thought the Revolutionary War affected the course of

⁵⁰⁴ Katharina Gerstenberger, *Truth to Tell: German Women's Autobiographies and Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000), p. 176.

⁵⁰⁵ Eva Menasse and Michael Kumpfmüller, 'Wider die intellektuelle Gerontokratie: Ein Plädoyer für weniger Grass und mehr Nahost in der Debatte', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 August 2006, p. 11.

their lives'.⁵⁰⁶ In the same way, the texts under discussion in this chapter offer three very different accounts of a childhood and adolescence in the Third Reich, from which we can learn as much about approaches to the past as about the past itself.

⁵⁰⁶ Elizabeth McKee Williams, 'Childhood, Memory and the American Revolution', in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. by James Alan Marten (New York and London: New York UP, 2002), pp. 15-26, here pp. 15-6.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seen, but not heard?:

Challenging Images of the Jewish Child

The previous chapter examined autobiographical works by writers who experienced the Third Reich as members of the Hitler Youth. As individuals, and as members of this generation, they face the challenge of reconciling their memories of childhood with their retrospective knowledge of the extent of National Socialist crimes. They articulate this tension in different ways: Günter de Bruyn structures his account as a dual narrative, interweaving accounts of both his childhood and of its historical context; Martin Walser makes a claim for the historical innocence of his and his generation's childhood by writing almost exclusively from the child's perspective; and Günter Grass draws attention to the problematic nature of memory, and his feelings of guilt and shame for not having resisted, or questioned, Nazism. All three authors express the difficulty of recalling and re-presenting their childhood experience during this pernicious historical period, and of incorporating that experience into their adult lives, particularly after Unification.

While autobiographical texts and collections of oral testimony by those who, like de Bruyn, Walser, and Grass, were deemed 'acceptable' by the regime abound, texts which thematise the Jewish childhood experience are relatively small in number. This is due in part to the fact that so few Jewish children survived the Holocaust. Susan Tebbutt contends that although from the 1980s onwards an increasing number of memorials were erected in Germany to commemorate those who were persecuted by the Nazis, 'few

Holocaust memorials chart the suffering of children, and even fewer remind today's young people of the totality of the horrors inflicted on innocent people.'⁵⁰⁷ In 2008 a memorial was erected in Berlin, near the entrance to the Friedrichstraße *U-Bahn* station. The sculpture, by the artist Frank Meisler, is entitled 'Züge in das Leben – Züge in den Tod', and commemorates both those children who escaped on the *Kindertransporte* which left from *Friedrichstraße* station for England, and those who were transported to concentration camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe (see Figure 34). Meisler's sculpture depicts two alternative trajectories, demonstrated by the train tracks which surround the sculpture: either the end of childhood in suffering and death, or the possibility of escape and survival.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 34: Frank Meisler's sculpture 'Züge in das Leben – Züge in den Tod', Berlin.

⁵⁰⁷ Susan Tebbutt, 'Journey to an Unknown Destination: Gudrun Pausewang's Transgressive Teenage Novel *Reise im August*', in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past*, pp. 165-81, here p. 181.

The natural trajectory of childhood is adulthood; the end of childhood may occur ‘unnaturally’, that is to say in a way which counters the prevailing consensus about when it is appropriate that childhood should end. The common modern, Western understanding of the premature ending of childhood is that it occurs through knowledge or experience: either of death, or of sex. The acquisition of such knowledge by children at a point which is deemed by society to be too early is considered a taboo subject and has an unsettling effect. Meisler’s sculpture points to two states, both of which confound our conventional notions of childhood. On the one hand, they are on a path to their deaths; on the other, the children on the *Kindertransporte* were forced to grow up too quickly: they are robbed of their childhood as they are forced into new surroundings, and experience the loss of language, family, homeland, culture, and religion.⁵⁰⁸

In this chapter I discuss three autobiographical texts in which the Jewish experience of childhood in the Third Reich is foregrounded. The authors who form the focus of this chapter all grew up in the same years as de Bruyn, Walser, and Grass; however, their experience of Nazism was entirely different because they were categorised by the state as Jewish. For these children, many of the universal aspects of childhood and common formative experiences were disrupted by National Socialism, and by the consequences of its racial policies. In her journalistic autobiography *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992) Ruth Klüger recounts her childhood in three concentration camps, and her attempts at coming to terms with her past.⁵⁰⁹ In *Die Absonderung* (1991), Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt narrates his escape as a ten-year-old boy from Germany

⁵⁰⁸ Krell, ‘Child Survivors of the Holocaust’, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁹ Ruth Klüger, *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (München: dtv, 2008).

and his continued persecution in Nazi-occupied France.⁵¹⁰ Finally, in *Erwachsenenspiele: Erinnerungen* (1997), Günter Kunert recalls his childhood in National Socialist Berlin and his life in the GDR until he left in 1979.⁵¹¹

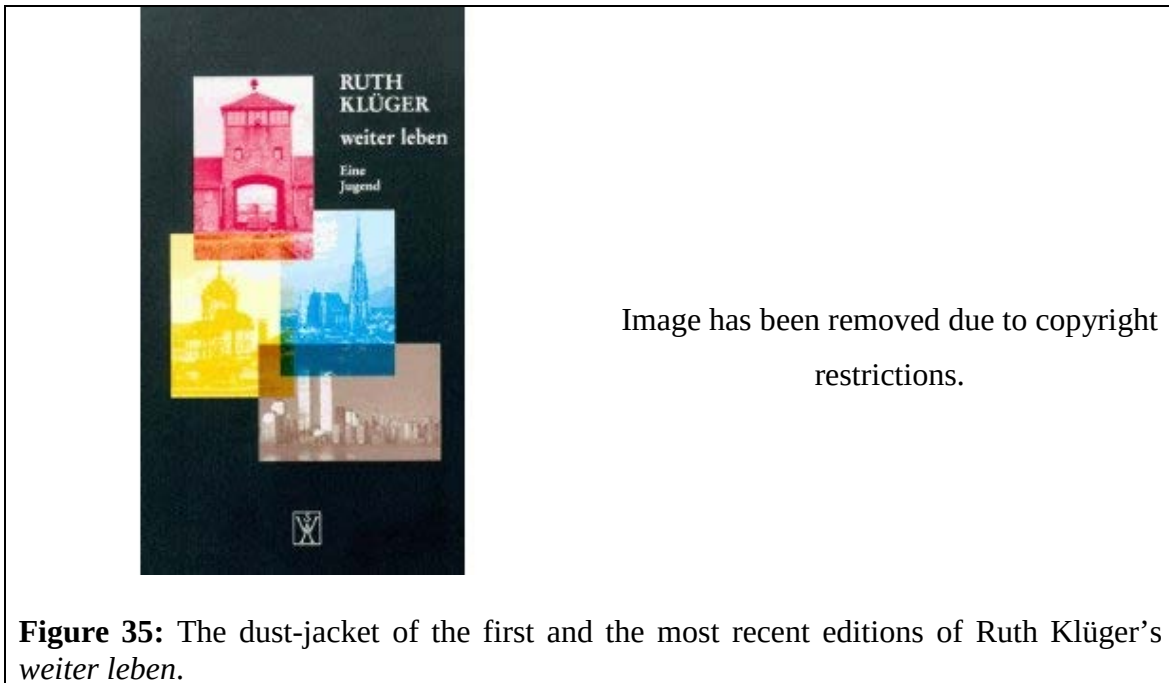
The notion of journey, which is encapsulated in Meisler's sculpture, also pervades these texts. The dust-jacket of the first German edition of *weiter leben* showed four pictures of the 'stations' on Klüger's journey from childhood to adulthood and freedom in the United States.⁵¹² The painting on the most recent edition, which depicts a woman sitting surrounded by suitcases (see Figure 35) reflects the author's sense of uprootedness and the dominating presence of her own journey. Goldschmidt's text focuses on the effects of an actual journey, from Germany via Florence to France, and also thematises adolescence as an arduous journey from childhood to adulthood. The title of Kunert's work – *Erwachsenenspiele* – already points to the anticipated destination of the journey from childhood to adulthood. The summary of the text on the dust-jacket informs the reader that Kunert 'rekapituliert die Stationen seines Lebens'.⁵¹³ Like Klüger, Kunert structures his account around places, and in so doing brings out the notion of the journey. In addition, he dedicates *Erwachsenenspiele* to his wife, Marianne, without whose help his 'Expedition in die Vergangenheit schon bei Beginn gescheitert wäre' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 5). Here, his childhood is conceived of as a distant land, full of potential discoveries.

⁵¹⁰ Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, *Die Absonderung* (Zürich: Ammann, 1991), henceforth cited in the main text as 'Absonderung'.

⁵¹¹ Günter Kunert, *Erwachsenenspiele: Erinnerung* (München: Hanser 1997), henceforth cited in the main text as 'Erwachsenenspiele'. Goldschmidt was born in 1928; Kunert was born in 1929; Klüger was born in 1931.

⁵¹² Klüger originally intended to call the text 'Stationen', but decided against it as she felt it placed too much emphasis on the importance of places and, as she writes: 'ich [bin] doch eine, die nirgendwo lange war und wohnt' (*weiter leben*, 79).

⁵¹³ Kunert, *Erwachsenenspiele*, dust-jacket.



The basic definition of a trajectory is that it constitutes ‘the path of any body moving under the action of given forces’.⁵¹⁴ This raises a significant point about children of the Holocaust, for it suggests that the object which is in motion is not moving under its own volition, but is rather propelled by some other force: the subject has little effect on its course. By offering an account of their experience of Nazism, these authors challenge the largely symbolic representation of the Jewish child’s experience of the Third Reich in post-war discourse, both through their depiction of childhood, and their explicit or implicit engagement with earlier representations of Jewish child Holocaust victims. Klüger explores notions of childish ignorance; Goldschmidt asserts the child’s burgeoning sexuality; and Kunert narrates a picaresque account of his experience of persecution. In my analysis of these texts I address the ways in which these writers

⁵¹⁴ ‘Trajectory’, in Anon., ‘OED Online’, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 20 August 2011].

negotiate the legacy of this formative experience, and examine the narrative strategies they use to portray it.

Post-war Portrayals of the Jewish Child's Experience

In Chapter One we saw how, in the museum context, the depiction of children can tend towards a purely symbolic representation, depicting children as devoid of agency, and that this is exacerbated in the case of Jewish child Holocaust victims. In the example of *Hitlerjunge Salomon* in Chapter Two, we witnessed the consequences when this view is challenged. Similarly, in literary portrayals of the Jewish child's experience of Nazism, we frequently encounter such children as the embodiment of victimhood and of redemptive hope for the future. In a paper on child figures in Holocaust writing, Beate Müller observes that children frequently function in several ways: they provide an outsider's perspective through defamiliarisation; they represent innocence, utilising the Romantic idealisation of childhood; they are 'regarded as particularly vulnerable and helpless so that their plight appeals to parental instincts in an adult readership'; and they symbolise hope.⁵¹⁵ In addition to these categories, Müller suggests that

narrated children [...] can act as catalysts for adult behaviour. When living in hiding, in ghettos or in camps, children would normally be expected to have even less agency than the adults who find themselves in the same situation. Where adult characters are faced with or confront child figures, adults have to make up their minds how to respond to the child, have to choose between right and wrong courses of action – this crucially reinstates agency (and, by implication, responsibility) in a group of people who have precious little agency left.⁵¹⁶

We can see this kind of instrumentalisation of children as purely symbolic and devoid of agency exemplified by the two children who have proved the most powerful and

⁵¹⁵ Müller, 'Agency, Ethics and Responsibility in Holocaust Fiction', p. 86.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

enduring representatives of the Jewish childhood experience in post-war Germany: Anne Frank in the West, and the ‘Buchenwald child’ in the former GDR. Both children were born and grew up in the Third Reich, yet it is through their memorialisation in literature that they have become best known.

The first and most prominent child figure depicted in East German fiction was undoubtedly the young boy in Bruno Apitz’s novel *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1958). The novel became one of the most widely read texts in the GDR⁵¹⁷ and was made into a film by DEFA, directed by Frank Beyer and released in 1963. Apitz’s novel is based on the true story of three-year-old Stefan Jerzy Zweig, who was brought to Buchenwald with his father in 1944. His name was included on a list of two hundred children and adolescents to be transported to Auschwitz, but when the child was found to be absent (hidden in the camp’s typhus ward), another youth, a sixteen-year-old Sinto boy named Willy Blum, was deported in Zweig’s place. This fact is mentioned neither in the novel, nor in the film adaptation.⁵¹⁸ Apitz’s novel is loosely related to the true story: it tells the dual narrative of the ‘self-liberation’ of Buchenwald on 11 April 1945 by its Communist prisoners, and the attempts to save the life of a young Polish-Jewish boy, renamed Stefan Cyliak.⁵¹⁹ In the novel, Stefan is smuggled into the camp in a suitcase and, once he has been discovered by some of the prisoners, is protected by them until they manage a successful

⁵¹⁷ Hanno Loewy, ‘Das gerettete Kind: Die “Universalisierung” der Anne Frank’, in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. by Stephan Braese, Holger Gehle, Doron Kiesel and Hanno Loewy (Frankfurt: Campus, 1998), pp. 19-43, here p. 35.

⁵¹⁸ Susanne zur Nieden, “... stärker als der Tod” – Bruno Apitz’ Roman *Nackt unter Wölfen* und die Holocaust-Rezeption in der DDR’, in *Bilder des Holocaust: Literatur - Film - Bildende Kunst*, ed. by Manuel Köppen and Klaus R. Scherpe (Köln: Böhlau, 1997), pp. 97-109, here p. 106.

⁵¹⁹ Bill Niven, *The Buchenwald Child: Truth, Fiction, and Propaganda* (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2007), p. 103.

uprising against the SS guards and liberate themselves. In the final scene, the prisoners hold the child aloft as they storm out of the camp gate.⁵²⁰

In his recent study *The Buchenwald Child: Truth, Fiction and Propaganda* (2007), Bill Niven analyses the propagandist use that was made in the GDR of the narrative of Stefan's survival. In Apitz's novel, the figure of the child is helpless, passive, and devoid of all personality and agency. He has a purely symbolic function within the text. In addition, Apitz robs the child of the power of speech, so that he consequently 'remains a blank surface onto which the greater glory of adult male communist achievements can be projected'.⁵²¹ Significantly, it is because of his youth that the boy is deemed to require protection, not because he is Jewish. Indeed, his identity as a Jew is almost entirely written out of Apitz's fictional account. As Niven points out, Jewish suffering is not thematised: 'on the surface [...] it appears to be a book about the rescue of a Jewish child [...], but he is rarely referred to as Jewish, [...] they describe him simply as a child.'⁵²² The novel became 'a kind of literary monument to antifascism'⁵²³ with the child as its symbolic centrepiece.

In West Germany, it was undoubtedly Anne Frank who provided the most potent symbol of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust.⁵²⁴ Her diary was first published in Germany in 1949 with a limited print-run, and even when it was taken up by the publishing house Fischer in 1955 it was not initially a best-seller. It only came to prominence with the German translation of the American stage play *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank*, written

⁵²⁰ Bruno Apitz, *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1958).

⁵²¹ Niven, *The Buchenwald Child*, p. 115.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, pp. 112-3.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵²⁴ Sylke Kirschnick's recent study on the reception of Anne Frank in the GDR – *Anne Frank und die DDR: Politische Deutungen und persönliche Lesarten des berühmten Tagebuchs* (Berlin: Links, 2009) – demonstrates that she did indeed have more influence there than has previously been acknowledged. However, it is still in the West that her resonance has proven greatest.

by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, which was first performed in Germany on 1 October 1956.⁵²⁵ This seems to suggest that it was not Anne Frank's own voice which initially captured the imaginations and hearts of the German public, but rather the use of that voice by other writers. In this sense Anne Frank's own voice was denied her, and she, like 'Stefan', became a symbol, rather than an individual. As Pinfold observes,

Anne fits the German Romantic conception of childhood to perfection, and thus forms a natural focus for mythmaking [...]. The obsessive interest in her story since the end of World War II and the various versions of it [...] suggest [...] that this girl's story has been taken over by people who are using it to meet the needs of their own.⁵²⁶

Furthermore, Anne Frank's status as child has to be reinforced. It is only in this way that her total innocence – both in terms of guiltlessness and in terms of lack of knowledge – is maintained. Several passages regarding her developing sexuality were omitted until the publication of the most recent critical edition.⁵²⁷ This acts as a means of infantilising her and heightening our sense of her innocence. In an article on the American reception of Anne Frank, L. J. Nicoletti explores the photographic representation of Frank in a recent Holocaust exhibition. According to Nicoletti, the curators of the exhibition observed that

commonly, images of Anne (all of them taken before she went into hiding) are used to visualize her at a later age and in the time period when she started to write. The image of her as a child or young teenager, coming from these photos [...] altered the reading of her diary as we assume a much younger Anne as the author of her writings.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ Loewy, 'Das gerettete Kind', p. 25.

⁵²⁶ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 94.

⁵²⁷ David Barnouw and Gerrold van der Stroom (eds.), *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition* (London: Viking, 1989). There have been a number of recent cases in the United States of the book being banned from schools because of its apparently overt sexual content. For a discussion of this, see Francine Prose's *Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife* (London: Atlantic, 2010) pp. 253-71.

⁵²⁸ Klaus Müller, E-mail to author, 6 January 2004, cited in L. J. Nicoletti, 'No Child Left Behind: Anne Frank Exhibits, American Abduction Narratives, and Nazi Bogeymen' in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. by David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2008), pp. 86-114, here p. 107.

The message from the case of both Anne Frank and the Buchenwald child is the same: they have been made to function as symbols in order to fit a wider purpose. In Apitz's novel, Stefan literally has no voice; Anne Frank's diary was far more popular in its stage adaptation in West Germany than as a diary account, and the symbolic use of her extends far further than the critical engagement with her text. Anne Frank's enduring phrase, 'trotz allem glaube ich noch an das Gute im Menschen',⁵²⁹ fits both reception narratives perfectly: the story of the prisoners' daring rescue of the child in *Nackt unter Wölfen* seeks to demonstrate nothing other than that the 'good in people' leads them to risk their lives to do what is right.

In the case of both Anne Frank and the Buchenwald child, the young protagonist's experience is mapped onto the national narrative of confronting the past. Hanno Loewy writes of these two figures:

die Rettung des [Buchenwald] Kindes wird zum Mythos der Erlösung aus der tiefsten Barberei, der drohenden eigenen Verrohrung durch den Terror des Gegners. Im Westen hingegen mußte Anne Frank, der unschuldige Opfer, tot sein, um jedes Jahr aufs neue zum Leben erweckt werden zu können.⁵³⁰

In addition, the focus on these two examples fails to represent the diversity of Jewish children's experience of the Third Reich which might have included going into hiding, being discovered or betrayed; escaping the continent on a *Kindertransport*; being ghettoised; being deported to a concentration camp, either dying there, or surviving and facing the trauma of this experience and the loss of homeland, language and family. In addition, as I explained in Chapters One and Two, there is an awareness that the image of the suffering child may well elicit an overly emotional response from the audience or

⁵²⁹ Anne Frank, *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank*, translated from the Dutch by Anneliese Schütz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1957), p. 51.

⁵³⁰ Loewy, 'Das gerettete Kind', p. 35.

reader, with the effect that their ethical and intellectual judgements prompt, in particular, an uncritical response.

At the same time, a single child figure appears to offer a means with which to encounter the totality of the Holocaust, but this can, unsurprisingly prove a reductive approach. The reception of Anne Frank is a case in point. Primo Levi suggested that Anne Frank is so frequently identified as a single representative of the millions of people who suffered and died as she did because

one single Anne Frank moves us more than the countless others who suffered just as she did but whose faces have remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is better that way; if we were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live.⁵³¹

While Levi seems grudgingly to accept the use of Anne Frank's role in Holocaust remembrance, he raises an important point about the representation of the victims. Similarly, Theodor W. Adorno commented on a story he heard from a friend attending a performance of the stage play *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank*: 'man hat mir die Geschichte einer Frau erzählt, die einer Aufführung des dramatisierten Tagebuchs der Anne Frank beiwohnte und danach erschüttert sagte: ja, aber *das* Mädchen hätte man doch wenigstens leben lassen sollen.'⁵³² The figure of Anne Frank in the literary construction becomes a sentimental figure and one with whom an audience or reader can empathise without having to engage with the totality of the Holocaust – perhaps even, in Adorno's example, without having to deprecate it.

⁵³¹ Primo Levi, cited in *Anne Frank House: A Museum with a Story*, ed. by Janrense Boonstra and Marie-José Rijnders (Amsterdam: Anne Frank Stichting, 1986), p. 62.

⁵³² Theodor W. Adorno, 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit', in Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann with Gretel Adorno et al. (= *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann with Gretel Adorno et al., 1970-1986, 20 vols, vol. 10.2) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 555-73, here p. 570.

The child's view and experience therefore provide the reader with a view from below which enables a more critically engaged response to the legacy of the Holocaust. At the same time it can function as a means of creating a purely sentimental depiction of events which allows the reader merely to identify with one child's suffering without attempting to engage with the wider picture. This discussion highlights two aspects of the symbolic potential of children which determine discussions about the texts I will discuss in this chapter. These texts reflect both the diversity of experience as well as commonalities. Primarily, they demonstrate how the legacy of Jewish children's experience of the Holocaust has been negotiated, with the view to contributing to contemporary discourse about memory and remembrance.

Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992)

Ruth Klüger's autobiographical text *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992) has become one of the best known German-language accounts of childhood in the Holocaust since Unification. Klüger gives a detailed report of her childhood and youth under Nazism: in Vienna, the Theresienstadt ghetto, and the concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Christianstadt (Groß-Rosen). The text represents both a private attempt at coming to terms with the author's own origins, and a very public commentary on literary and political topics, including the commemoration of the Holocaust in post-war and post-Unification Germany. Most significant for this study is Klüger's treatment of the child figure, including her engagement with established notions of childhood, and of Jewish child victims of the Holocaust. Throughout the text Klüger re-imagines the common understanding of the child survivor's experience of the Holocaust, seeking to counter the

view that children of the Holocaust were too young to understand what was happening to them. She asserts the fundamental difference between the child's experience of the Holocaust and that of adults, but in so doing she also underlines the need not to reduce the child's experience to that of a mute, passive group.

The narrative begins in Vienna in 1939, and the opening is narrated from the child's perspective. The eight-year-old Klüger is secretly observing the adults in her family. She writes:

der Tod, nicht Sex war das Geheimnis, worüber die Erwachsenen tuschelten, worüber man gern mehr gehört hätte. Ich gab vor, nicht schlafen zu können, bettelte, daß man mich auf dem Sofa im Wohnzimmer [...] einschlafen ließe, schlief dann natürlich nicht ein, hatte den Kopf unter der Decke und hoffte, etwas von den Schreckensnachrichten aufzufangen. (*weiter leben*, 9)

This opening passage immediately establishes the child's 'view from below'⁵³³ and yet Klüger does not use it primarily in order to defamiliarise the reader from the events being recounted, as for example Grass does in *Die Blechtrommel*, but rather to establish her approach towards the child's experience of Nazism. The child listens avidly to the adults as they discuss the increasing violence towards Jewish friends and relatives, including imprisonment and torture. As Carolin Duttlinger outlines in her study of curiosity in *weiter leben*, Klüger 'defies an image of childhood first established in Romanticism' and begins her text by 'debunking' the Romantic view of the child.⁵³⁴ The style and setting of this opening passage evokes 'Freud's famous *Urszene* – the real or imagined event of the child witnessing the parental intercourse'.⁵³⁵ By establishing a clear link in this opening scene with the Freudian notion of childhood, in which the child is a sexual being, Klüger

⁵³³ Bernard McElroy, 'Lunatic, Child, Artist, Hero: Grass's Oskar as a Way of Seeing', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 22 (1986), 308-22, here p. 312.

⁵³⁴ Duttlinger, 'Ethics of Curiosity', p. 221.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

emphasises to her readers her rejection of the Romantic view of the child, which she sees as the epitome of the public's view of child Holocaust victims, and sets out immediately, as Duttlinger argues, to 'debunk' the 'limitation and naivety of the child's perspective'.⁵³⁶

And yet, the taboo to which Klüger bears witness in this scene is not the common taboo of sex (associated with Freudian theories of the loss of innocence in the *Urszene*), but rather the taboo of death. Thus rather than exploring Freudian notions of sexual development, Klüger calls to mind a Heideggerian notion of death. For Heidegger, as much as man is always his 'Noch-nicht', so he is also always his 'Ende'.⁵³⁷ Heidegger quotes from the fifteenth century text *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen*: 'sobald ein Mensch zum Leben kommt, sogleich ist er alt genug zu sterben.'⁵³⁸ This negates a notion of childhood and adulthood as separate, for both states share a common potentiality for death – which in the Holocaust context is particularly apt as the Nazis killed indiscriminately – and so by drawing on this Heideggerian notion,⁵³⁹ Klüger asserts that the child stands on an equal footing with the adults in this regard. She comments on the 'Geheimnis der Erwachsenen, die den Kindertod den Kindern verschweigen und ihnen weismachen wollen, daß es nur den Erwachsenenentod gebe, daß nur sie, die Überlegenen, dem Tod gewachsen sind' (*weiter leben*, 10). This comment has a particularly petulant tone, and the child's voice can be clearly heard. The adults' desire to protect the child from the knowledge, both of sex and death, which they consider will end childhood

⁵³⁶ Duttlinger, 'Ethics of Curiosity', p. 221.

⁵³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), p. 245.

⁵³⁸ Johannes von Tepl, *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen: Im Auftrage der Königl. preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. by Alois Bernt and Konrad Burdach (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1917), p. 46. Cited in Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 245.

⁵³⁹ Without commenting upon Heidegger's politics.

(breaking a taboo, moreover, if this knowledge is attained too soon), is shown by the author to be futile. Thus Klüger challenges not only the Romantic view of the child, but also the deficiency paradigm which views children as inferior to adults.

Klüger does, however, defend the idea that the child's experience is different to that of adults. Coe considers the experience of the child to constitute an 'alternative world' and that the child's view is entirely removed from that of the adult: the child 'sees differently, reasons differently, reacts differently'.⁵⁴⁰ Similarly, Klüger stresses the unique nature of the child's experience of Nazi persecution. She asserts that 'für ein Kind war das anders, denn mir war in den wenigen Jahren, die ich als bewußter Mensch existierte, die Lebensberechtigung Stück für Stück aberkannt worden, so daß Birkenau für mich einer gewissen Logik nicht entbehrte' (*weiter leben*, 113). For the young Klüger, Auschwitz exists as a 'verkehrte Welt' (*weiter leben*, 114), and yet also takes on a certain normality: unlike the adults, she has little with which to compare it.

The child's way of seeing things differently even provides a source of humour in the text, for example, Klüger recalls having found her father's name as it stood on the sign outside his surgery – Doktor Viktor Klüger – a source of amusement: 'ich fand die Verdoppelung der Silbe 'tor' lustig, als ich sie zum ersten Mal richtig lesen konnte. Die Erwachsenen fanden das nicht komisch, was mich erstaunte, wie so oft, diese Diskrepanz der Wahrnehmungen' (*weiter leben*, 25-6). Klüger also describes her first outing with her mother after attaching the (now compulsory) Stars of David to their clothes. A woman compliments Klüger's mother on how the star matches her blouse, which Klüger finds 'mutig und witzig' (*weiter leben*, 50); however, this is not echoed by her mother. Such moments of humour are not, however, intended to elicit a sentimental response from the

⁵⁴⁰ Coe, *When the Grass*, p. 1.

reader, but rather help to establish a stark generational opposition throughout the text, which contributes to Klüger's overall project: to address what she regards as the problems of German remembrance culture.

Klüger considers that when the adults are not trying to keep knowledge from the child, they wilfully fail to acknowledge its cognisance, writing of the 'Bedürfnis der Erwachsenen [...], das Erlebnisvermögen der Kinder in Frage zu stellen' (*weiter leben*, 74). She cites the example of a recent television programme she has watched in which footage of a group of hostages was shown. One of them – a child – was subsequently described in a newspaper as having been bored, because it was apparently unable to understand what was happening around it. Klüger counters this, saying: 'das Kind war jedoch alt genug, um zu wissen, was mit ihm geschah, und war weder blind noch taub. Verdrängungsbedarf der Erwachsenen. Ich kenn das gut' (*weiter leben*, 73). In an essay on the child's voice in Holocaust literature Naomi Sokoloff undertakes a comparison of the retrospective writing of childhood by adults, and poetry written by children at the time, such as is included in *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*,⁵⁴¹ a collection of children's poetry written in the Theresienstadt ghetto in the early 1940s. Sokoloff observes:

while the children in adult texts are often uncomprehending, the children's own poetry frequently features attempts at explanation – by way of philosophical observations or generalizations that take on the quality of aphorism, and that demonstrate an unmistakable desire to comprehend.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴¹ Hana Volavková (ed.), *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

⁵⁴² Naomi Sokoloff, 'Childhood Lost: Children's Voices in Holocaust Literature', in *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Goodenough et al (Michigan: Wayne State UP, 1994), pp. 259-75, here p. 264.

Sokoloff attributes far greater cognitive powers to the children than do some of the adult writers she discusses.⁵⁴³ Similarly, Klüger describes how as an adult she encounters incredulity at her having survived the Holocaust as a child, though more particularly, at her having been conscious of her surroundings and experiences at the time. She recounts how she is asked, or rather told by people, both Germans and Americans: ‘aber Sie waren doch viel zu jung, um sich an diese schreckliche Zeit erinnern zu können’ (*weiter leben*, 73). Klüger responds:

ich denke dann, die wollen mir mein Leben nehmen, denn das Leben ist doch nur die verbrachte Zeit, das einzige, was wir haben, das machen sie mir streitig, wenn sie mir das Recht des Erinnerns in Frage stellen. (*weiter leben*, 73)

While Klüger seeks to deprecate what she sees as the adult’s underestimation of the child by undermining it, she also uses this model to reflect more generally on German remembrance of the Holocaust and its victims. Klüger rejects what she considers the role of innocent victim which has been assigned to Jewish Holocaust victims. She describes a recent meeting with two young German students who have recently completed their ‘Zivildienst’ whitewashing the fences in Auschwitz (*weiter leben*, 69). Klüger writes: ‘meine Zaunanstreicher glaubten alles [...] von ihren eigenen Großvätern [...] und nichts Schlimmes von den Opfern’ (*weiter leben*, 78). She considers that the national narrative has come to encourage such young people to be attuned to the stark differentiation between victims and perpetrators, the result of which is that they hold up the victims on pedestals – they ‘[hochstilisieren] die Opfer’ (*weiter leben*, 85) – and, in so doing, fail to engage meaningfully with their experience. Furthermore, Klüger considers there to be a lack of differentiation amongst victim groups which denies individual suffering and

⁵⁴³ Sokoloff looks particularly at Louis Begley’s *Wartime Lies* (1991) and Uri Orlev’s *The Island on Bird Street* (1985).

experience. She is critical of the fence-painters' failure to distinguish between Polish and Jewish concentration camp inmates, as they ignore the 'Antisemitismus der polnischen Bevölkerung' (*weiter leben*, 71). In Klüger's view, such public remembrance of the victims as does take place is reductionist, and blocks a more constructive engagement with the past: 'so werden alle Opfer, alle Lager in der Zusammenfassung nivelliert' (*weiter leben*, 83).

Moreover, in her text, Klüger seeks to break down the stark binary between victim and perpetrator, emphasising her point by recounting how, even as a child, she rejected the label of 'innocent victim'. She cites two examples of this. Firstly, she recalls a tram journey in Vienna, during which a stranger (a non-Jew) handed her an orange as the tram passed through a tunnel. Her reaction, she recalls, was not one of gratitude, but rather of outrage: 'ich gefiel mir nicht in dieser Rolle. Ich wollte mich als oppositionell statt als Opfer sehen' (*weiter leben*, 51). Similarly, Klüger recalls how, after the end of the war, she submitted two poems she had composed about her experience of Auschwitz to the local Bavarian newspaper. One of her poems was published, although only half of it was printed and included in the context of a story about children in the Holocaust intended for a 'kinderliebendes Publikum' (*weiter leben*, 200). In addition, the text was accompanied by 'eine Zeichnung, ein verlumpstes, verschrecktes Kind darstellend' (*weiter leben*, 200) which, much to the young author's annoyance, is not unlike her. The graphic allusion to the child victim in the article is exactly contrary to Klüger's desired depiction. Klüger recalls her strong reaction against this labelling: 'ich wollte ja als eine junge Lyrikerin gelten, die im Lager gewesen war, nicht als das Umgekehrte, das KZ-Kind, das Verse geschrieben hatte' (*weiter leben*, 200). As Caroline Schaumann notes:

‘characteristic of a German nadir of confronting the past at the time, the editors deprived Klüger of her voice, reduced her to a passive, helpless victim pleading for compassion, and stifled her identity as a survivor with sentimental preconceptions.’⁵⁴⁴ This episode proves representative for a broader argument that Klüger constructs throughout her text with regard to German memory culture and the commemoration of the Holocaust. By the reduction of her experience to a sentimental tale of misfortune, Klüger considers her story and, consequently, her experience, to have been both disregarded and de-individualised. This, she argues, leads to an avoidance of critical engagement with the victims on a broader scale. It resonates with criticism of Anne Frank’s reception, that she provides a single, innocent identification-figure, which prevents any real engagement with the totality and variety of the horror of Nazi persecution.⁵⁴⁵

Having asserted her dissatisfaction with the traditional view of the innocent, passive, and unknowing child in the context of the Holocaust, Klüger expands on this throughout her text with a critical evaluation of works which have used this approach. She cites in particular the example of the ‘Buchenwald child’. The success of the film, which was internationally well-received, was due, in Apitz’s opinion, to the fact that the rescue of the Jewish child represented a ‘sentimentaler Brennpunkt’.⁵⁴⁶ It is precisely this, however, which Klüger condemns. She considers that the story of the innocent child being rescued has a reductive effect on the suffering of those in the concentration camps to a point where critical engagement and memory work is no longer possible. She claims that those who propagated this tale ‘infantilisierten, verkleinerten und verkitschten damit den großen Völkermord [...] im 20. Jahrhundert’ (*weiter leben*, 75). Although Apitz’s

⁵⁴⁴ Schaumann, *Memory Matters*, p. 100.

⁵⁴⁵ Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006), p. 27.

⁵⁴⁶ Josef-Hermann Sauter, ‘Interview mit Bruno Apitz’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 19 (1973), 26-37, here p. 34.

novel has been translated into over thirty languages and was hailed, certainly in the GDR, as a seminal Holocaust text, it might also be charged with a sentimentalising tendency. In an article to mark the centenary of Apitz's birth Volker Müller comments: 'es steht nicht im Roman, dass für Stefan, der im letzten Moment von der Todestransportliste genommen wurde, der Sinto-Junge Willy Blum ins Gas musste.'⁵⁴⁷ Klüger, for whom such sentimentalising is anathema, concludes: 'und der Roman über dieses Kind ist trotz der Achtung, die er genießt, ein Kitschroman' (*weiter leben*, 75).

In a further rejection of the role of innocent victim, Klüger recounts a visit to the cinema, to see Walt Disney's *Snow White* (1938). In so doing she violated race laws which forbade Jews from attending. During the film, Klüger realises that she was sitting near the baker's daughter, whose family were hard-line Nazis. At the end of the film, the girl stops Klüger and declares that, if she sees her in the cinema again, she will report her to the authorities. Klüger uses the story of *Snow White*, which the children had just viewed, as a frame for recounting her experience of persecution. Jennifer Taylor concludes of this episode that 'it is not hard to imagine why the child protagonist [Klüger] likens her mother to the fairy tale Witch and herself to Snow White, the innocent victim',⁵⁴⁸ for it was her mother who insisted that she attend the performance. However, it is not the mother but rather the BDM girl whom Klüger casts in the role of the wicked Stepmother in this scene. The baker's daughter stands 'im eigenen Hause, den Spiegel ihrer rassistischen Reinheit vor Augen' (*weiter leben*, 48). Yet Klüger also

⁵⁴⁷ Volker Müller, 'Das willkommene Heldenlied', *Berliner Zeitung*, 28 April 2000, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/er-schrieb-das-buch--nackt-unter-woelfen---heute-vor-100-jahren-wurde-bruno-apitz-geboren-das-willkommene-heldenlied,10810590,9794632.html> [accessed 12 January 2012].

⁵⁴⁸ Jennifer Taylor, 'Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben: eine Jugend*: A Jewish Woman's Letter to Her Mother', in *Out from the Shadows: Essays on Contemporary Austrian Women Writers and Filmmakers*, ed. by Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger (Riverside/CA: Ariadne Press, 1997), pp. 77-88, here p. 81.

deliberately complicates even this constellation of roles, for the baker's daughter, seen here in the role of the 'wicked stepmother' is herself a child and consequently, as Schaumann puts it, the victim of the 'poisonous pedagogy'⁵⁴⁹ with which she was being socialised at the time.

Klüger's inclusion of the *Snow White* story is not used as an opportunity to evoke sentimentality. Indeed, Klüger is scathing of the desire for a fairy-tale happy ending: 'nur darf der wahrheitsliebende Leser das Happy-End meiner Kindheitsirrfahrten [...] nicht auf ein Hoffnungskonto [...] setzen' (*weiter leben*, 108). In an essay on the function of fairy-tales in Holocaust fiction, Lawrence Langer writes: "Once upon a time," the traditional refuge for children always ended "and they lived happily ever after," assuring an uninterrupted adventure from past to future.'⁵⁵⁰ For Klüger, her survival is not reason enough to take away a positive message from her text. This would only result in the kind of response which, she argues, is unhelpful in coming to terms with the legacy of Nazism. Indeed, for Klüger this is part of a wider issue. She considers the problem with autobiographical accounts by Holocaust survivors to lie in the fact that 'der Autor am Leben geblieben ist' (*weiter leben*, 140). The 'weiter leben' of the title represents a complex and difficult endeavour to live on with the memory of the trajectory her life has taken.

By offering a text in which the child's experience is so entirely removed from the sentimental, Klüger insists that her readers engage with her narrative and reflect more critically on the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust in post-Unification

⁵⁴⁹ This term was coined by Alice Miller in *Am Anfang war Erziehung* (1980), in Schaumann, *Memory Matters*, p. 30.

⁵⁵⁰ Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1975), p. 158.

Germany. Amongst German contemporaries Klüger feels that her own memories are still marginalised. She describes a scene in which she and some German friends in Göttingen are discussing situations in which they have felt trapped. Klüger automatically thinks of her journey to Auschwitz, yet she feels unable to recall this story as it is not ‘salonfähig’ (*weiter leben*, 110). She addresses the German reader directly: ‘über eure Kriegserlebnisse dürft und könnt ihr sprechen, liebe Freunde, ich über meine nicht. Meine Kindheit fällt in das schwarze Loch dieser Diskrepanz’ (*weiter leben*, 111). Here Klüger demands to know why tales of the bombing war, expulsions, and death are deemed topics for possible discussion, and yet, the portion of her own experience, the journey on the transport to Auschwitz is not. This scene demonstrates what Klüger sees as the fundamental issue with memorial culture in post-Unification Germany: that the version of the past considered ‘appropriate’ marginalises the full spectrum of memories of this period of German history. Her aim throughout the text is to provoke her readers to engage critically and constructively with this issue, rather than passively acknowledging Jewish suffering en masse. She exhorts her readers:

ihr müßt euch nicht mit mir identifizieren, es ist mir sogar lieber, wenn ihr es nicht tut; [...] Aber laßt euch doch mindestens reizen, verschanzt euch nicht, sagt nicht von vornherein, das gehe euch nichts an oder es gehe euch nur innerhalb eines festgelegten, von euch im voraus mit Zirkel und Lineal säuberlich abgegrenzten Rahmens an, ihr hättet ja schon die Photographien mit den Leichenhaufen ausgestanden und euer Pensum an Mitschuld und Mitleid absolviert. Werdet streitsüchtig, sucht die Auseinandersetzung. (*weiter leben*, 142)

This is precisely what the text, dedicated specifically to ‘den Göttinger Freunden – ein deutsches Buch’ (*weiter leben*, 284) is meant to achieve. Her autobiography was not intended, as she stated in an interview in 1995, ‘als Selbsttherapie, sondern als

Kommunikation’.⁵⁵¹ As Schaumann suggests, Klüger’s text becomes ‘an invitation to a dialogue’ which is ‘particularly courageous and daring’.⁵⁵² Klüger rejects clear-cut paradigms of victims and perpetrators which she considers both unhelpful and even dangerous. The figures in her text are, as Stephan Braese comments, not forced into a straightforward victim-perpetrator binary: ‘ihre Opfer sind keine Engel, ihre Täter keine Bestien.’⁵⁵³ Her call is for a more pluralistic approach: a version of the past in the public sphere which accommodates the range of experiences and memories of Nazism which, Klüger argues, would result in a more critical and productive commemoration of the past.

‘Ich bin ein Lebensschmuggler’: Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt’s *Die Absonderung* (1991)

Like Ruth Klüger, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt left the country of his birth during childhood and has lived abroad for the greater part of his adult life. Born just outside Hamburg in 1928 into a Jewish family which had converted to Protestantism in the nineteenth century, Goldschmidt spent his early childhood unaware of his Jewish heritage. When in 1938 his parents judged the threat of Nazism to be sufficiently pressing, he was sent with his brother to live with an acquaintance in Florence.⁵⁵⁴ This departure from his parents – whom he never saw again – marked the ‘Grundzäsur’ of his

⁵⁵¹ Marita Pletter, ‘Der Pazifik hat die richtige Farbe’, *Die Zeit*, 3 March 1995, p. 67.

⁵⁵² Caroline Schaumann, ‘From *weiter leben* (1992) to *Still Alive* (2001): Ruth Klüger’s Cultural Translation of her “German Book” for an American Audience’, *German Quarterly*, 77 (2004), 324-39, here p. 325.

⁵⁵³ Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, ‘Ruth Klüger *weiter leben* – ein Grundstein zu einem neuen Auschwitz-Kanon’, in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, pp. 157-73, here p. 159.

⁵⁵⁴ Goldschmidt never saw his parents again. His mother died of natural causes in 1942 and his father was deported to Theresienstadt where he died in 1943.

formative years.⁵⁵⁵ After the introduction of the Race Laws in Italy in 1939, the two boys were forced to seek refuge with an aristocratic relative in France, where they were housed in a Catholic boarding school in the Savoy Alps. The German occupation of the region in 1942 constituted a further threat to the boys' safety and Goldschmidt was hidden by farmers from 1943 until the end of the war. After the war, he moved to Paris where he became a secondary school teacher of German, and a writer, essayist, and translator.

A further similarity between Goldschmidt and Klüger is that, despite having lived in France for the greater part of his adult life, Goldschmidt chose to write his autobiographical account of childhood in German. He had already written two autobiographical works in French: *Le Miroir quotidien* (1981) about his life after the Liberation, and *Un Jardin en Allemagne* (1986) in which he evokes his early childhood in Germany with his parents.⁵⁵⁶ In the afterword to the German edition of *Un Jardin en Allemagne – Ein Garten in Deutschland*⁵⁵⁷ – Goldschmidt writes:

eine Erzählung wie 'Ein Garten in Deutschland' hätte in der Muttersprache (das Deutsche) wegen der erlebten Vergangenheit und der Erfahrung der Trennung nicht so entstehen können, wie sie eben im Französischen entstanden ist [...]. Die Heimat, die einen verstieß, macht es [dem Autor] auch unmöglich, in der Muttersprache von der Heimat zu erzählen.⁵⁵⁸

Goldschmidt's inability to write in his German mother-tongue (despite teaching it to others) is here characterised by his sense of dislocation from his homeland and the trauma of separation from his parents whom he never saw again after his flight from

⁵⁵⁵ Günter Rüther, 'Ein Schriftsteller, der keiner sein will: Einführung in Leben und Werk von Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt', http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_7553-544-1-30.pdf?051118133259, 1-11, here p. 6 [accessed 5 October 2011].

⁵⁵⁶ Following the publication of *Die Absonderung* Goldschmidt also produced *La traversée des fleuves* (1999) which he translated and which appeared in German in 2001 with the title *Über die Flüsse*.

⁵⁵⁷ Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, *Ein Garten in Deutschland*, translated from the French by Eugen Helmlé (Zürich: Ammann, 1988).

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

Germany. He differentiates elsewhere between his ‘Muttersprache’ – German – and his ‘Lebenssprache’ – French.⁵⁵⁹ Goldschmidt managed, however, to overcome this linguistic crisis to write the third of his autobiographical texts, *Die Absonderung* in German, which was published in spring 1991 and was the first book Goldschmidt had written in German. Indeed, he recounts that he began writing without a deliberate intention to use German, but rather found: ‘ohne dass ich wusste, schrieb ich auf Deutsch.’⁵⁶⁰

Die Absonderung was awarded the Geschwister-Scholl-Preis in 1991 and was received overwhelmingly positively in the German press,⁵⁶¹ and endorsed by Goldschmidt’s good friend Peter Handke. The narrative begins in 1938 as Goldschmidt and his elder brother are travelling to Florence. The text has a third person narrator, referred to only as ‘er’ throughout the text. It is striking that of the authors discussed in this chapter, Goldschmidt is the only one who does not use a first-person narrator, and the protagonist remains unnamed throughout the account. This is reminiscent of many autobiographical accounts, such as *Kindheitsmuster*, in which the authors articulate a sense of dislocation from the child-self and consequently feel unable to write in the first-person.⁵⁶² This also complicates the genre designation of the text. Goldschmidt’s entire oeuvre treats the long-term effects of his exile as a child in some way, but, as Stefan Willer points out in his essay on language in Goldschmidt’s texts, it is only in *Über die*

⁵⁵⁹ Anon., ‘Joseph-Breitbach-Preis an Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt’, *FAZ*, 28 July 2005, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/kultur/auszeichnung-joseph-breitbach-preis-an-georges-arthur-goldschmidt-1255911.html> [accessed 20 January 2012].

⁵⁶⁰ Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt in conversation with Lothar Müller, *Literarisches Colloquium Berlin*, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, 24 November 2010. Unpublished notes in the possession of Alexandra Lloyd. Included by kind permission of the *Literarisches Colloquium Berlin*.

⁵⁶¹ For an account of this, see Martin Rector, ‘Frühe Absonderung, später Abschied: Adoleszenz und Faschismus in den autobiographischen Erzählungen von Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt und Peter Weiss’, *Peter Weiss Jahrbuch*, 4 (1995), 122-39.

⁵⁶² Goldschmidt changed his name from Jürgen to Georges-Arthur after the war.

Flüsse that ‘a memorizing and authenticating “I” is introduced’.⁵⁶³ Thus in *Die Absonderung* there is a marked distance within the text between author and subject, as well as the distance between the remembering adult and the child he used to be.

Unlike the retrospective narrative perspective in *weiter leben*, in *Die Absonderung* the child’s perspective dominates and is almost entirely uninterrupted by interjections which might show the reader that the events are being recalled from over fifty years later.⁵⁶⁴ The narrative spans the period from 1938 to 1944. Almost the entire war is spent in the boarding school in Savoy, making a link between childhood and war explicit. The immediate threat comes, however, not from the Nazis, but from the boy’s fellow pupils and his teachers, at whose hands he suffers physical and sexual abuse. The Nazi occupation of the region makes the boy’s life too dangerous and the narrative ends as he departs the school, aided by the headmistress, in the hope of hiding more effectively from the Nazis in the mountains.

Also reminiscent of Klüger’s text is the opening and its aura of secrecy and taboo. Goldschmidt recalls the way in which his parents kept his Jewish ancestry from him, and that this led him to associate Judaism with shame and guilt: ‘zu Hause, es war 1938 gewesen, hatte er nicht bleiben dürfen: er war schuldig, von ihm hatte man etwas gewußt, was er selber noch nicht wußte’ (*Absonderung*, 14). For the child there is ‘etwas Unheimliches’ (*Absonderung*, 15) about being Jewish which he does not understand. He recalls:

die Eltern schwiegen, wenn er eintrat, saßen steif da, als wollten sie zeigen, daß sie gar nicht von ihm redeten. [...] Sie flüsterten sich ununterbrochen zu [...]. Das Wort ‘Jude’ kam immer wieder vor, ein Wort aus der Bibel, er hatte nicht

⁵⁶³ Stefan Willer, ‘Bring Translated: Exile, Childhood, and Multilingualism in G.-A. Goldschmidt and W.G. Sebald’, in *German Memory Contests*, pp. 87-107, here p. 90.

⁵⁶⁴ In this sense, Goldschmidt’s text is reminiscent of Walser’s *Ein springender Brunnen*.

verstanden, warum sie so unruhig waren, wo sie doch von der Bibel sprachen. Aber dann war ihm plötzlich eingefallen, daß in der Sonntagsschule, wenn das Wort Jude fiel, der Pastor ihn immer angeschaut hatte, und das Wort hatte ihm angst gemacht. (*Absonderung*, 14-15)

His parents' reluctance to talk about the subject, coupled with the stern looks of the pastor, lead him to believe that being Jewish is something shameful. He immediately associates this with the shame he feels at having masturbated for the first time, and consequently his Jewish identity becomes inextricably linked with his emerging sexuality.⁵⁶⁵ From this point onwards the narrative is dominated by the child's obsession with his body which holds a terrible fascination for him, being both the source of exploration and pleasure, but simultaneously the source of his separation from his home and his parents. His mother – a devoted follower of the teaching of the Lutheran theologian Johann Hinrich Wichern – upheld a view of sexuality which was 'geprägt von strenger autoritärer Triebunterdrückung und Körperfeindlichkeit'.⁵⁶⁶ He recalls being 'mit physischer Scham erzogen worden',⁵⁶⁷ associating the body and sexuality with evil. This is shown to have had a profound influence on the young Goldschmidt.

Thus, the onset of puberty, which ought to mark the beginning of the physical development into adulthood, is negatively connoted, and the natural trajectory of childhood is stifled by overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame. In this way, Goldschmidt develops a complex metaphor for the body, in which it becomes the site of his childhood trauma, both literally and as a symbol of violence and loss. Eva Lezzi considers the body to be the 'Austauschorgan zwischen Außenwelt und inneren Vorstellungen, zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Landschaftswahrnehmung und

⁵⁶⁵ Rector, 'Frühe Absonderung, später Abschied', p. 129.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁶⁷ Goldschmidt, *LCB*, 24 November 2010.

Erinnerung'.⁵⁶⁸ For example, the boy's sense of physical, social, and linguistic dislocation on arriving at the school is reflected in his frequent sensation that he has no control over his body. After a severe punishment for having got lost and returned late from a walk he is caned. He recalls: 'da hielt er sich die Finger vors Gesicht, zusammengedrückt [...], eine Geste, die er an sich selber noch nicht gekannt hatte' (*Absonderung*, 83). Similarly, when he visits his guardian he feels he cannot control his body out of fear: 'erst auf dem Weg zurück ins Kinderheim kam er zu sich selbst und konnte wieder ganz Körper werden' (*Absonderung*, 54).

At the same time, masturbation and sexual fantasies constitute the child's means of dealing with loss, pain, and exile. He endures violent abuse throughout his childhood and adolescence at the school, including physical beatings and sodomy. It is ironic that, after the war breaks out, this persecution is due to his nationality, and he recalls being ashamed to be German, and associated with the enemy (*Absonderung*, 56). As a victim, he develops means with which to deal with his experience: 'er tat, wenn er geohrfeigt wurde, als wäre er das Opfer. Schon lange war der Schmerz vorbei, als er noch den Verzweifelten spielte' (*Absonderung*, 102). While the child fears such beatings, he also expresses a sense of pride at having been the recipient of such attacks:

wenn man wüßte, wie weh das tut, würde man ihn nicht prügeln. Seltsam, aber zugleich dieser Stolz in ihm, daß er es war, den man da züchtigte, daß er es war, der sich wand und der heulte, daß ihn alle anderen dabei sehen konnten. (*Absonderung*, 69)

⁵⁶⁸ Eva Lezzi, *Zerstörte Kindheit: Literarische Autobiographien zur Shoah* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001), p. 321. For a discussion of trauma in *Die Absonderung*, see Julia Baker, 'Fragments and Beyond: Childhood Trauma in Benjamin Wilkomirski's and Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt's Holocaust Testimonies and Life-Writing', in *Trajectories of Memory: Intergenerational Representations of the Holocaust in History and the Arts*, ed. by Christina Guenther and Beth Griech-Polelle (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 279-313.

For Goldschmidt, the body is the site on to which the trauma of flight, exile, and persecution is mapped and the naked body is a recurring image in the text. The boy's journey into puberty is also the journey through persecution. The explicit nature of the boy's sexuality makes this text unusual among those which narrate the child's experience of the Holocaust. In *Die Absonderung* the child's innocence is removed and indeed his sexuality is a central aspect of the text. In addition, the perverse pride he takes in the beatings he receives complicates the reader's view of him as an innocent victim, although it is possible to recognise this as a way of coping which enables him to endure the persecution. Not only the narrative but also childhood itself is pervaded by images of the sexual. As Barbara Breysach suggests: 'das Bild dieser Kindheit ist [...] von Anfang an stark sexualisiert und niemals "unschuldig".'⁵⁶⁹

And yet the boy is also still a child. When he encounters three *Wehrmacht* officers (having just left the school in order to evade discovery and deportation) they remind him of his toys at home in Germany: 'zwei behelmte Soldaten – genau wie damals noch seine Bleisoldaten' (*Absonderung*, 171). The child observes them and the reader, through the child's perspective, sees the soldiers as the toys, in an interesting reversal of the images in Levinthal and Trudeau's *Hitler Moves East*. Goldschmidt describes:

ein Kommandowagen der Wehrmacht mit auf die Kühlerhaube herabgeklappter Windschutzscheibe, breit mit genau den gelb-grünen Tarnflecken, die es auch auf seinen Spielfahrzeugen gegeben hatte, als er den Feldmarschall Mackensen auf der Lafette eines Geschützes durch das Zimmer fahren ließ. (*Absonderung*, 172)

Similarly, Goldschmidt depicts the boy with a wry irony at times. For example, when it becomes clear that the Germans are rounding up Jewish children the Headmistress helps

⁵⁶⁹ Barbara Breysach, 'Verfolgte Kindheit: Überlegungen zu Ilse Aichingers frühem Roman und Georges-Arthur Goldschmidts autobiographischer Prosa', in *Bilder des Holocaust*, 47-63, here p. 55.

to conceal the boy. As she hands him his coat, sending him off to hide, he appears to be more in control than the she, the adult, is:

im Vorzimmer wurde ihm der dicke Wintermantel weit offen von der Anstaltsleiterin entgegengehalten [...]. Wie um zu zeigen, daß er es gewohnt war, bedient zu werden, drehte er sich um und streckte die Arme hinter sich aus, wie er es seinen Vatter hatte tun sehen. (*Absonderung*, 169)

Goldschmidt's text often includes voids in which the reader understands more than the child can know or express. For example, as his passport is checked, the boy considers it odd that certain passports bear the letter 'J' since they belong to elderly people and he knows that the 'J' stands for 'Jugendlicher'. However, it then suddenly occurs to him – immediately after it will have occurred to the reader – 'es konnte auch "Jude" heißen' (*Absonderung*, 22-23). In addition, the reader's outrage at the abuse suffered at the hands not only of the other school boys, but also the teachers and the headmistress is exacerbated by the boy's own acceptance of the situation as normal.

In another episode, the protagonist is warmed and given new clothes: 'er stand da, nackt, weiß, kindhaft und schuldlos, ein zu hoch geschossener, noch unreifer kleiner Junge' (*Absonderung*, 176). In this moment the dual shame of masturbation and Jewishness disappears and his burgeoning sexuality is allowed to be what it is: the beginning of growing up. As he comments at the end of this passage: 'er fühlte sein Gesicht vor Röte glühen, vielleicht wußte man, daß er an sich das große Wunder entdeckt hatte' (*Absonderung*, 176). In contrast to earlier accounts, his self-exploration is described in positive terms: the taboo, having been broken, is now bypassed. The positive connotations of 'glühen' and 'Wunder' reinforce this shift.

In *Die Absonderung* childhood becomes inextricably linked with place rather than with knowledge, or the lack of it, and an important underlying concern of the text is the search for *Heimat*. Goldschmidt describes this in the opening pages:

damals 1944, in Hoch-Savoyen, als man wieder tief und unruhig atmen konnte. Immer richtete sich dann, in der Deutlichkeit des Abends, der Blick in die Richtung der Heimat. Denn es wurde eine ganze Kindheit damit verbracht, sich die Heimat zu vergegenwärtigen. (*Absonderung*, 14)

His entire childhood becomes an effort at conjuring up his lost homeland. Goldschmidt's flight from Germany as a child leads to a rupture from the site of his childhood, both in a real and a metaphorical sense. Barbara Breysach describes Goldschmidt's situation as an exile from his mother tongue and, consequently, from childhood: 'ausgeschlossen aus dem Deutschen, der Ausdrucksweise der Empfindung, wurde Kindheit zu einem Anderswo, zu etwas Unerschließbaren.'⁵⁷⁰ The fact that he is always longing for his *Heimat* is also reflected in his journeying on. He is safe nowhere and the end of the narrative sees him about to move on again to another farm where he may or may not be safe for long, as the Germans are still out looking for Jews. Again, his trajectory is the result of other influences.

German is the language responsible for the trauma of Goldschmidt's early childhood: the separation from his parents and from his homeland. As an adult, he retains the association between loss and childhood, as German remains the 'Sprache der Kindheit'.⁵⁷¹ In his introduction to the first edition of the text Peter Handke writes that:

Goldschmidt hat so etwas wie ein Traumbuch geschrieben: in dem Sinn, daß er für Situationen und Ereignisse, für die es bis dahin keine Sprache gab, wie

⁵⁷⁰ Breysach, 'Verfolgte Kindheit', p. 58.

⁵⁷¹ Joachim Fritz-Vannahme, 'Der Anwalt, der Komplize: Doppelporträt der Übersetzer Goldschmidt und Lortholary', *Die Zeit*, 13 October 1989, p. 6.

somnambul, planlos, vorsatzlos, dafür um so klarer und unmittelbarer eine solche – nicht findet, sondern einfach hinsetzt.⁵⁷²

Thus in Handke's view Goldschmidt has not only overcome his own *Sprachkrise* by writing in his native tongue, but has also overcome the more common problem of finding a language with which to express the trauma of his youth. This has, in a sense, been the impetus behind all his literary works. Indeed, Goldschmidt has claimed that he is not an author, and that he could not write a convincingly fictionalised account: 'er könne nur über sein Leben erzählen und nicht mehr.'⁵⁷³ This is precisely what he achieves in *Die Absonderung* and which offers a fresh approach to the subject of growing up, and the effects of racial persecution in the Third Reich.

Günter Kunert's *Erwachsenenspiele* (1997)

Günter Kunert's *Erwachsenenspiele* was one of a number of autobiographical texts published in the 1990s in which the author sought to deal with a double legacy: of having grown up under Nazism, and having lived as an adult in the GDR. Kunert's text stands out, in that his experience of the Third Reich was one of persecution at the hands of the Nazis. As the son of a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father, he was classed as a 'Mischling ersten Grades' by the state.⁵⁷⁴ This categorisation put Kunert, and those like

⁵⁷² Peter Handke, 'Vorwort', in *Die Absonderung*, pp. 7-9, here p. 9.

⁵⁷³ Rüther, 'Ein Schriftsteller, der keiner sein will', p. 2.

⁵⁷⁴ The 'Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre' passed in September 1935 marked a watershed in the 'legal' persecution of the Jews. It excluded Jews from citizenship rights and prohibited marriage and sexual contact between Jews and Aryans. It also addressed the question as to how to define a 'Jew'. Party officials favoured a wide-ranging definition, which would incorporate anyone with any Jewish blood. Many state and justice officials, on the other hand, considered it necessary to distinguish between 'Volljuden' and 'Mischlinge'; see Eric Johnson, *The Nazi Terror: the Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 105. As Raul Hilberg writes: '[t]he party "combated" the part-Jew as a carrier of the "Jewish influence"; the civil service wanted to protect in the "part-Jew" that part which is German' in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (London: W.H. Allen, 1961), p. 47. In the end, the definition of 'Mischling' was written into the law.

him, in a precarious position: he was protected from deportation by virtue of his ‘Aryan’ heritage, yet he was unable to complete his secondary education⁵⁷⁵ and lived in constant fear that his protected status would be revoked (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 52).

In *Erwachsenenspiele*, Kunert narrates his life from his birth in 1929 to his emigration from the GDR in 1979. His account of childhood constitutes the first of nine books which make up his autobiography, and ends with the arrival of the Soviets in Berlin and the end of the Second World War. In spite of the grave nature of the events in *Erwachsenenspiele* and its ultimately pessimistic outlook, Kunert’s account is characterised by a playfulness which is alluded to in the title. In contrast to the opening of Klüger and Goldschmidt’s texts, which are rooted in an aura of secrecy and taboo, Kunert’s autobiography begins with the child at play:

oben auf dem Schrank hockt ein Indianer, das Gewehr im Anschlag. Gespannter Blick über Kimme und Korn in Erwartung der Feinde. [...] Das Visier ist auf hundert Meter Entfernung eingestellt. Der Indianer lauert reglos. Der Indianer bin ich. (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 9)

This initial scene is striking in that, while it establishes the child as the focus of the narrative, the young Kunert is shown in a position of height, looking down on the scene. This contrasts with the more conventional child’s perspective: where the child looks up at the adult world and provides a view from below. In addition, the presence of the ‘Gewehr im Anschlag’ provides an unexpected image, and while the reader is swiftly made aware that this is a child’s game, it is unsettling nonetheless. The fact that it is only at the end of the first paragraph that Kunert reveals ‘der Indianer bin ich’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 9) reinforces this, and reminds the reader of many of Kunert’s contemporaries who would indeed be armed with guns only a few years later. It also

⁵⁷⁵ The book is latterly concerned with Kunert’s experience of, and emigration from, the GDR. Over a third of the book is filled with quotations from his Stasi files.

signals Kunert's very particular position in the Third Reich as the son of 'mixed' parentage. On the one hand, he can be viewed retrospectively as having been a victim of National Socialism, and indeed most of his family on his mother's side was deported; on the other hand, he is protected by his 'German blood'. In the course of the text, the 'Indianer' also becomes a symbol of the process of growing up. Kunert explains that 'es ist keineswegs leicht und einfach, Indianer zu werden' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 12): a series of rites of passage must be gone through before the child can consider himself, and be considered, a true Indian. Here Kunert couples the self-assured tone of the child's voice with the notion of coming of age, which will be a focus of the text.

While the first part of *Erwachsenenspiele* is concerned with the child's experience of the Third Reich, the child's perspective as a narrative device is used sparingly. Kunert employs it primarily to comic effect and to demonstrate the uniqueness of the child's view of Nazism. In order to demonstrate his experience of the Allied bombing of Berlin, for example, Kunert uses the language of the fairy-tale, in a manner similar to Martin Walser in *Ein springender Brunnen*. He writes: 'sodann kündigt sich von weit her den verängstigten Liliputanern das Heranschreiten eines blinden, übermächtigen Gulliver an. [...] Hysterie erfaßt die Kellerinsassen. Gulliver stapft davon, das Licht flammt auf, die Gesichter haben die Farbe der Wände angenommen' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 45). In his description of bombing as the trudging of Gulliver, and in drawing an affinity between the terrified German civilians, and the fictional Lilliputians, Kunert encourages the reader to view this experience in a new light. In this sense the child's view has a defamiliarising effect.

More frequently, however, the child's voice is framed by the ironic tone of the adult narrator, thus removing the naïvety of the child's perspective and creating a different effect. In a scene which echoes Goldschmidt's account of mistaking the 'J' on a passport for 'Jugendlicher' (rather than 'Jude'), Kunert recalls examining his mother's identity papers. He comments: 'zwar muss sie [die Mutter] keinen Stern tragen, doch ihre Kennkarte und ihre Lebensmittelkarten weisen unübersehbar das 'J' auf, von dem keiner annehmen würde, dass es die Abkürzung für Japaner wäre' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 52). Rather than supplying a void for the reader to fill with his/her knowledge of the period, Kunert colludes with the reader, and in so doing exposes the absurdity of Nazi race laws, at the hands of which Kunert suffered throughout his youth.

Like both Klüger and Goldschmidt, Kunert recounts how, during his childhood, his parents withheld knowledge and information from him. He writes: 'innerhalb der Familien ergeben sich Spannungen, deren Gründe mir vorenthalten werden [...]. Nähere ich mich einer Streiterei, verstummen die Streitenden' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 26). His parents seek to protect him by shielding him from problems which he is deemed too young to understand. In response, the young Kunert becomes increasingly curious, eager to discover more. He recalls: 'auf die Sprache, auf das Sprechen, auf die Sprechenden sind meine Ohren fledermausartig ausgerichtet. Da wird vom "Affidavit" geredet, was für mich komisch und zoologisch klingt' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 29). This comment echoes Klüger's recollection of her childish delight in words and sounds, as well as her curiosity. In his depiction of this scene Kunert draws attention to the autonomy of the child, its capacity for knowledge and the curiosity which would seem to characterise it.

Kunert views his life as having been repeatedly marked by historical events, even during his childhood. He considers that his generation has been marked by the Third Reich and by the *Wende*. He criticises the demand for his life story to be divided according to historical events: ‘heute sind wir gezwungen, zwei Perioden zu unterscheiden [...]: vor Hitler und nach Hitler.’⁵⁷⁶ Similarly, he considers the *Wende* to be a ‘Daseinzäsur für die Betroffenen’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 221). While the latter is a self-imposed caesura, for those who, like Kunert, experienced both Nazism and the GDR, these thresholds come to mark their life retrospectively. Like de Bruyn in *Zwischenbilanz*, Kunert situates the account of his childhood in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s firmly within the political and social developments of the day. He alludes to events in passing, and demonstrates their interrelatedness, both within the arch-narrative of history, and within his own experience. For example, of the events of *Kristallnacht* he writes: ‘ich nehme nur eine tobende Meute wahr, höre Geschrei, Glas splittert [...]. Man zieht mich vom Fenster zurück. Da ist der Teufel los, der deutsche Teufel. Der Kalender nennt das Datum: 9. November 1938’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 36). Here his own recollections are placed alongside the retrospective knowledge that the event was a highly significant one. Similarly, he comments: ‘inzwischen tagt die “Wannseekonferenz zur Endlösung der Judenfrage”, mit deren Beschlüssen die fröhliche Skatrunde insgesamt zu Verlieren wird’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 42). In the opening pages, he describes listening to the radio. He recounts

[wie] die Stimme Kurt Gerrons quäkend entgegenschallt: ‘Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne...’ Mein Lieblingslied. Noch weiß man nicht, daß es überhaupt einen Ort namens Theresienstadt gibt. Dort dreht Kurt Gerrens einen Film, betitelt: ‘Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt’, und wird nach Ende der Dreharbeiten zu

⁵⁷⁶ Günter Kunert, *Die letzten Indianer Europas: Kommentare zum Traum, der Leben heißt* (München: Hanser, 1991), p. 241.

einem anderen Platz transportiert, der Auschwitz heißt. Von dem weiß man auch noch nichts. (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 10)

This passage points the reader backwards towards the narrated time-frame, to the events situated in the past, and also forwards, to the Holocaust. As a reader looking back on the events, there is a strong sense of foreboding, as well as an evocation of a time before Auschwitz, which, in this depiction at least, has a quality of innocence about it. The phrase ‘noch weiß man nicht’ suggests the innocent ignorance of the child’s perspective, and through this, evokes the notion of a time of historical innocence, before the Holocaust had been perpetrated.

Throughout the text, Kunert aligns himself with the protagonist of Grimmelshausen’s *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (1668), who embodies the ‘quintessential German example for describing the horrors of war through the picaresque lens’.⁵⁷⁷ Simplicissimus is the model of the ‘picaro’: the roguish hero who lives by his wits in a corrupt society.⁵⁷⁸ He experiences the Thirty Years’ War, first as a child, and then frequently, although unwittingly, finds himself at the centre of events, joining the armies of both of the warring sides. The source of Kunert’s sense of affinity with Simplicissimus can be identified in a comment made in Chapter Four of Grimmelshausen’s text. Addressing the reader, the narrator – Simplicissimus – declares: ‘so erfordert jedoch die Folge meiner Histori, daß ich der lieben Posterität hinterlasse, was vor Grausamkeiten in diesem unserm Teutschen Krieg hin und wieder verübet worden, zumalen mit meinem eigenen Exempel zu bezeugen.’⁵⁷⁹ By writing about his

⁵⁷⁷ Susanne Vees-Gulani, *Trauma and Guilt: Literature of Wartime Bombing in Germany* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), p. 155.

⁵⁷⁸ Grass also identifies with Grimmelshausen’s Simplicissimus in his account of military action.

⁵⁷⁹ Hans Jakob Christoph von Grimmelshausen, *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), p. 25.

own experience of the Third Reich, Kunert uses his life story as an example, and in so doing provides an account of the horrors of oppression and war for posterity. Kunert asserts: ‘ich bin ein Nachfahre des Simplicius Simplicissimus. Einer, der dank seiner überwältigenden Naivität fast unangefochten durch die Schrecken und Scheußlichkeiten praktizierter Historie schlendert’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 57). It is particularly striking that Kunert should draw this link with Simplicissimus, and particularly with his quality of naïvety.⁵⁸⁰ As has been said, Kunert uses the child’s perspective primarily as a means with which to emphasise the uniqueness of the child’s experience, and for comic effect. He does *not* argue that the child has a lack of understanding. The naïvety he points to in this comment represents far more the confines of knowledge which are established by his parents, and the historical accident which seems to place him again and again at the centre of world events.

In all the works addressed so far in this study, we have seen the unsettling effects of the juxtaposition of the private and public realms. Kunert views his own youth as a ‘staatlich verpfuschte Kindheit’.⁵⁸¹ In the same way as Grass, de Bruyn, and Walser express in the previous chapter, Kunert highlights the way in which the political has impinged upon the private: external events have destroyed his childhood. As Carsten Gansel observes: ‘die erinnerte frühe Kindheit Kunerts erscheint dem Dichter als eine noch heile Welt – eine ‘Noch-nicht-Lebensphase’, in der die späteren Ortsnamen des Schreckens ‘noch’ keine Assoziationen bilden lassen.’⁵⁸² Gansel’s use of the phrase ‘heile Welt’ is reminiscent of de Bruyn’s usage in *Zwischenbilanz*, and just as de Bruyn

⁵⁸⁰ Kunert again makes this link when writing about the GDR. He refers to East Berlin as ‘das sozialistische Narrenparadies’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 356).

⁵⁸¹ Günter Kunert, *Notizen in Kreide: Gedichte* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1970), p. 12.

⁵⁸² Carsten Gansel, *Rhetorik der Erinnerung: Literatur und Gedächtnis in den ‘geschlossenen Gesellschaften’ des Real-Sozialismus* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), p. 120.

laments the end of his childhood, which has been shattered by war and conflict,⁵⁸³ so Kunert refers to his own youth as a ‘verstörte Kindheit’.⁵⁸⁴ In an article on *Erwachsenenspiele* Susanne Vees-Gulani writes that ‘in fact, Kunert hardly has any childhood, but very early on he is forced to become an adult because of the constant threat of the Nazi era’.⁵⁸⁵ The premature aging of children is a taboo subject, and so the abrupt end of Kunert’s childhood through political events has an unsettling effect. Suleiman writes of the trauma incurred by such children, who were forced to grow up too quickly, particularly before ‘the formation of stable identity that we associate with adulthood’.⁵⁸⁶ This echoes Klüger’s comment on Primo Levi’s testimony *If This is a Man* (1947) in which he explores the effects of Auschwitz on the individual’s concept of identity. Klüger points out: ‘der aber kam mit dem Selbstgefühl eines erwachsenen, fertigen Europäers dahin, [...] beheimatet und gefestigt. Für ein Kind war das anders (*weiter leben*, 113).

However, Kunert counters this unnatural ending of childhood with several vivid accounts of his sexual development in puberty, emphasising a more natural transition from childhood to adulthood. Indeed, this is even alluded to in the ‘adult games’ of the title, which Kunert plays as part of his first sexual encounters. He describes his sexual awakening in the following way: ‘Nahrung für meine haltlose Fantasie stöbere ich überall auf. Was Pubertät sei, ist mir bekannt. Denn ich studiere mit zunehmender Ungeduld ‘Frühlings Erwachen’ von Wedekind und vermisste enttäuscht die erhofften Stellen’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 17). When he receives his pocket-money, he uses it to buy

⁵⁸³ De Bruyn writes: ‘die heile Kindheitswelt brach mir entzwei’ (*Zwischenbilanz*, 14).

⁵⁸⁴ Günter Kunert, *Warum schreiben?: Notizen zur Literatur* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1978), p. 191.

⁵⁸⁵ Vees-Gulani, *Trauma and Guilt*, p. 155.

⁵⁸⁶ Suleiman, ‘The 1.5 Generation’, p. 277.

ein Pariser Nudistenblatt mit zahllosen hübschen, nackten Mädchen auf Schiern im Schnee [...]. Von den nebenstehenden Texten erwarte ich eine zusätzliche Steigerungsmöglichkeit, aber ich verstehe kein einziges Wort. Mit Hilfe eines französischen Wörterbuches klaube ich mir einiges fragmentarisch zusammen, ohne davon berührt zu sein. Ich halte mich fernerhin an die Fotos. Das scheint mir solider. (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 17-18)

While the young Kunert experiences shame when his mother eventually finds, and confiscates the ‘Nudistenblatt’, the episode contrasts starkly with Goldschmidt’s account of puberty. In another episode, Kunert returns to the family’s former home – which has been bombed – in order to view the destruction. He describes the return to the house as a return to the site of childhood: ‘ans Geländer gedrückt, schleiche ich die Treppen hinauf, löse den Drahtverschluß und betrete meine kürzlich abrupt abgebrochene Kindheit’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 64). On his arrival, he encounters a girl he knew when he was younger and who, as he notices, has reached puberty. He describes her as a ‘Mädchenfrau’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 65). He threatens to drop an unexploded bomb unless she agrees to undress. This initially disturbing scene of sexual power games is quickly shown, however, to be a game of equals. Kunert comments: ‘doch meine Gefangene spielt mit, entkleidet sich mit verdächtiger Geschwindigkeit und begibt sich umstandslos aufs Bett, damit ich meine geringen anatomischen Kenntnisse vervollständigen kann’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 65).

This part of Kunert’s adolescence is a prominent aspect of the text, and draws attention to the notion of journey in that it narrates the protagonist’s development from pre-pubescence to adulthood. It also draws attention to the development of identity, which was complicated for Kunert by his ambiguous position in the Third Reich as the son of a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father. He was protected by virtue of his ‘Aryan’ father from deportation, but was also ostracised for his Jewish identity. Kunert is unable

to fit into one category or the other, and growing up becomes a complex search for identity. As I have outlined elsewhere in this study, identity is at the core of coming of age, and so the ambivalent position in which the young Kunert finds himself upsets this process.⁵⁸⁷ In this context, role-playing becomes important and indeed the dust-jacket on the hard-back edition of the text depicts Kunert as a child, standing next to a toy theatre. This aspect of Kunert's youth, as well as the playful style of his account, is reminiscent of Holland's *Hitlerjunge Salomon*: like Solly, Kunert defies the National Socialist stereotype of the Jewish male as effeminate and weak.⁵⁸⁸ For example, Kunert is inspected by the military to assess his fitness to be drafted into the *Wehrmacht*. The officer in charge of the process, impressed by Kunert's physical prowess, declares: 'solche Jungen [...] brauche man' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 69). However, on discovering that Kunert is a 'Mischling', the officer must declare him unfit to serve. In the same way as Holland's film, this parodies the Nazis' race laws and the Third Reich.

Finally, like Klüger, Kunert provides a searing critique of both politics and memory politics, in twentieth century Germany. The title – *Erwachsenenspiele* – also alludes to Kunert's contempt for those who cause suffering, war and oppression. Within his autobiography, this refers both to his experiences in the Third Reich, and those in the GDR, where he opposed the strict censorship and oppressive methods of state control. Kunert mocks the endeavours of adults throughout the century who have engaged in games of power, control, war, and persecution. Of his peers being drafted into the army he comments: 'offenkundig sind sie von der Schulbank ausgerissen, um wie die Erwachsenen Krieg zu spielen' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 86). Similarly, he describes a

⁵⁸⁷ See above, pp. 28-30.

⁵⁸⁸ Doris L. Bergen, *The Holocaust: A Concise History* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p. 38.

weapon as ‘ein Spielzeug, wie es auch Erwachsene verwenden’ (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 14). Like Klüger, Kunert is extremely critical of what he views as a general complacency in German memory culture, both immediately after the war and following Unification. He recalls how, after Hitler’s death had been announced, people began to burn their now incriminating papers:

ab ins Fegefeuer mit dem belastenden Material, auf daß man selber gereinigt und geläutert aus dem Keller in eine neue Zeit hervorgehe. Ich ahne nicht, daß es kaum einen Tag dauert, bis jeder der verzweifelt Agierenden einen jüdischen Bekannten gehabt haben würde [...]. Morgen früh werde ich mich unter lauter Opfer des Faschismus befinden. (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 85)

The use of the term ‘Fegefeuer’ suggests the purging of sin and adds a religious dimension to Kunert’s criticism. It draws out his condemnation of a memory culture in which the past can simply be erased, and with it, guilt and responsibility.

Conclusion

The authors discussed in this chapter frame their conception of childhood within different physical, psychological, moral, and social spaces: for Klüger, childhood is a struggle against oppressive forces which, in her adult life, comes to embody in particular a resistance to patriarchy. For Goldschmidt, childhood is the site of physical abuse, pain, and loss. His narrative recounts a journey towards self-understanding and independence. For Kunert, childhood is a state of innocence in which the creative faculties are uninhibited. In an interview with *Die Welt* he cites his love of biographies, including one of Albert Einstein. He comments: ‘auch Einstein hat ein starkes Maß an Kindlichkeit besessen, sonst hätte er nie so unbelastet seine Entdeckungen machen können. Wenn die

Psyche eingeklammert und verfestigt ist, kommt nichts mehr.’⁵⁸⁹ For Kunert, the state of being a child is one of creative freedom and when the individual grows up this quality can be lost or retained.

The kind of symbolic instrumentalisation at work in the case of Anne Frank and the Buchenwald child, outlined at the beginning of this chapter, is resisted by Klüger, Goldschmidt and Kunert. Indeed, their accounts challenge, more or less explicitly, the narrative of child Holocaust victims as it has been co-opted by the paradigmatic examples of the Buchenwald child and Anne Frank. Klüger, Goldschmidt, and Kunert assert the range of the child’s part in the Holocaust between the two poles of experience which these figures have come to represent. Unlike Anne Frank and the Buchenwald child, whose presence in German culture has become symbolic, all the authors discussed in this chapter assert the child’s voice and experience, offering the reader a picture of childhood which takes into account a range of experience. Each of the authors attempts to highlight and to overcome forces which propel them from outside to follow certain trajectories, and which deny them their voice and their agency.

They call instead for a productive critical engagement with the experience of racial persecution in Nazi Germany: one which acknowledges the pluralistic nature of memory and of experience, and which provokes a productive engagement with the past in the present. It is striking that these authors reject the title and role of ‘victim’. Klüger repeatedly expresses her frustration at being treated as a ‘victim’ in the sense that her own story is reduced to simplistic models of this experience. Similarly, Goldschmidt resists the role of victim, commenting, for example, ‘ich bin kein Opfer, kein

⁵⁸⁹ Christoph Klimke, ‘Es gibt keinen vernünftigen Grund, ein Gedicht zu schreiben!’, *Die Welt*, 28 February 2009, http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article3290188/Es-gibt-keinen-vernueftigen-Grund-ein-Gedicht-zu-schreiben.html [accessed 12 January 2012].

Überlebender. Ich bin ein Lebensschmuggler.’⁵⁹⁰ Not only does Goldschmidt deny his status as a victim of the Holocaust, the concept of the ‘Lebensschmuggler’ suggests a picaresque image of the child as having cunningly outwitted his foes. As the son of a Jewish mother and German father, Kunert’s identity as a child victim of the Holocaust is already complicated. By depicting his burgeoning sexuality during adolescence, Kunert also resists any status he might have as simply an innocent, passive victim.

In that they narrate the process of growing up, rather than offering a symbolic depiction of the Jewish child victim of the Holocaust, these authors portray a journey. And they demonstrate, in different ways, the possibility of overcoming the trajectory – the enforced obedience to external forces – of children of the Holocaust. As a child deported to Auschwitz, Klüger followed a specific trajectory; however, as her autobiography demonstrates, she has since incorporated that experience into a meaningful engagement with Holocaust remembrance. In Klüger’s view there is still a trajectory which is imposed on the Holocaust child and which, even if it cannot be overturned, might be recuperated. Goldschmidt’s exile becomes defined by his loss of his native language, and his subsequent estrangement from it as a means of expressing his own life in literature. When he is estranged from his homeland and his mother-tongue, he enters a self-imposed isolation which he develops as a coping mechanism in reaction to the trauma of sexual and physical abuse. In writing the account of his childhood and by using his native German to do so, Goldschmidt passes through the boundary of self-imposed linguistic exile and manages to reclaim the journey he has in fact made.

As a ‘Mischling’, Kunert finds himself in the centre of two separate trajectories, belonging truly to neither. Furthermore, in the GDR he once again encounters this

⁵⁹⁰ Goldschmidt, *LCB*, 24 November 2010.

trajectory. He writes: 'ich bin ja durch eine Bezeichnung stigmatisiert, welche mir vierzig Jahre später, obschon aus anderen Gründen, noch einmal als Markenzeichen verliehen werden wird: Dissident' (*Erwachsenenspiele*, 21). While he does not compare the two regimes, he sees his role as outsider, and as a dissident as having been a continuation from the Third Reich to the GDR. By leaving the GDR, and by writing about his experiences he managed to overcome the trajectory. Unlike the authors in the previous chapter, they cannot hope to act as representatives of their generation as they are the exception: they survived. Their texts thus fill a void of narrated experience: not only of the experience of the children caught up in the Holocaust, but also of the legacy of that experience on their adult lives.

In the following chapter I address texts by authors who have produced imagined accounts of the Jewish child's experience of Nazism. These texts raise more pointed questions about authenticity, particularly the legitimacy of writing fictional accounts about, and from the perspective of children who were persecuted during the Holocaust. Above all, they provoke a discussion about the way in which the experience of childhood in the Third Reich will be made legible after the last eye-witnesses have disappeared.

CHAPTER FIVE

Imagined Childhoods:

Fictional Accounts of Growing up in the Third Reich

In the previous chapter we saw how Ruth Klüger, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, and Günter Kunert's respective texts challenge the Romantic symbolism of the Jewish child victim of the Holocaust as embodied in the cases of the Buchenwald child and Anne Frank. They achieve this by showing the child protagonist's journey to adulthood, and by depicting the development of their sexuality as adolescents. While these three authors never deny the victim status of the Jewish child during the Holocaust, they nevertheless unsettle the idea of victimhood through their depiction of their younger selves. They assert the breadth of experience and suffering and the manifold effects on those who survived as children.

With the transition from communicative to cultural memory, eye-witness accounts give way to more free-ranging approaches by those who have no biographical involvement with the Third Reich. In this chapter I analyse three fictional works about childhood in the Third Reich whose authors' own trajectories do not correspond to those of the children in their literary works. The authors embody three levels of distance from the imagined children in their texts. W.G. Sebald was born in Bavaria in 1944, and his father fought in the *Wehrmacht*. In his novel *Austerlitz* (2001) Sebald tells the story of a child – Jacques Austerlitz – who was sent by his Jewish mother from Prague to England on one of the last *Kindertransporte* to depart the continent in 1939.⁵⁹¹ *Austerlitz* is a complex narrative in which Sebald interweaves a number of themes and ideas, in order to

⁵⁹¹ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2001).

approach the fundamental issues of historical consciousness, the relationship between the past and the present, and the representability of history. The depiction of the protagonist, his search for his childhood self, and indeed the psychological and visual traces of the child which remain, are central to Sebald's overall project.

Binjamin Wilkomirski's 'false' or 'deluded' memoir⁵⁹² *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (1995) raises the question of authenticity to an ethical level.⁵⁹³ In this text, the close association of the child and authenticity is exploited in order to demonstrate and validate the authenticity of the narrative. However, the complex reception of his text has raised questions about the extent to which his account might in fact be considered 'emotionally authentic' despite its exposure as a fraud, and the general acknowledgement that it should be discredited as a document of witness. Finally, in her novel *Reise im August* (1992) Gudrun Pausewang offers an imagined account of the Jewish childhood experience.⁵⁹⁴ Her text is narrated from the perspective of the eleven-year-old Alice Dubsky, who is travelling on a transport to Auschwitz. At the same age as her fictional protagonist, Pausewang was a member of the *Bund deutscher Mädel* and her text thus questions both the aesthetic creation of the child's voice, as well as the ethical legitimacy of writing the narrative of a Holocaust victim from the standpoint of one who, at the same time, was on the side of the perpetrators.

Because of the very different nature of these texts I do not wish to provide a comparison; rather I seek to examine the ways in which they evoke or challenge authenticity through an imagined depiction of childhood under Nazism. I address the

⁵⁹² Suleiman, 'Problems of Memory', p. 552.

⁵⁹³ Binjamin Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), henceforth cited in the main text as '*Bruchstücke*'.

⁵⁹⁴ Gudrun Pausewang, *Reise im August* (Ravensburg: Ravensburger, 1997), henceforth cited in the main text as '*Reise*'.

different ways in which these three writers portray the child's experience of, and perspective on, the Third Reich, asking in what ways they seek to reinforce or undermine the challenge of authenticity in Holocaust writing. Finally, I consider the discussion these texts provoke about the way in which the experience of childhood in the Third Reich will be made legible after the last eye-witnesses have disappeared.

W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001)

W.G. Sebald's final novel *Austerlitz* documents the protagonist Jacques Austerlitz's reconstruction of identity from the remnants of his lost childhood. Born in 1934 in Prague to Jewish parents, Austerlitz travels to England on a *Kindertransport* in 1939. Like the young Goldschmidt in *Die Absonderung*, the character Austerlitz is displaced by the events of the Holocaust: sent into exile by his parents as a means of protecting him from deportation to the concentration camps. The exile from home and family, however, results in a different kind of trauma, as the young protagonist's true identity is swiftly hidden by his foster-parents and he is furnished with a new name (Dafydd Elias), language, family, and way of life.⁵⁹⁵ The narrative, told from the perspective of a nameless narrator who encounters Austerlitz several times over a period of some years, charts Austerlitz's difficult adulthood, mental breakdown, and subsequent uncovering of his true identity. When the narrator meets Austerlitz again by chance in the mid-1990s, Austerlitz tells him the story of his long-repressed childhood which he himself has

⁵⁹⁵ While there are several accounts of the *Kindertransporte* published in English (both autobiographical and fictional), there are no such accounts in German to my knowledge. This is, in itself, unsurprising, but also indicates an absence of this narrative in German public discourse. Frank Meisler's sculpture, 'Züge in das Leben - Züge in den Tod', discussed in the previous chapter, can be viewed as an attempt to make this experience visible. See above, p. 182.

discovered shortly before, and which he now feels compelled to communicate to someone.

The narrative focuses primarily on Austerlitz's search for his origins and identity, which is motivated by his admission that 'seit meiner Kindheit und Jugend [...] habe ich nicht gewußt, wer ich in Wahrheit bin' (*Austerlitz*, 68). The initial trauma of separation from family and home has a lasting effect upon Austerlitz. As he comments later in the text: 'irgendwann in der Vergangenheit, dachte ich, habe ich einen Fehler gemacht und bin jetzt in einem falschen Leben' (*Austerlitz*, 306). In addition to this, the manner in which this trauma is negotiated, both by Austerlitz and by others, contributes further to his inability to establish a stable identity. The erasure of his origins as a five-year-old child is shown to have had a profound effect on his adult life, causing 'emotional impotence'⁵⁹⁶ and a refusal to engage with recent historical events: he will not read newspapers and fixates on pre-twentieth century history. As an adult, Austerlitz recalls and describes the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Welsh manse in which he grew up, where the closed doors and windows represent the stifling environment, as well as the secrecy and concealment, which pervade Austerlitz's childhood. The lack of paragraphing in the text also emphasises this notion. The manse is the first of many locations which Austerlitz experiences as a 'fremde' or 'falsche Welt'. It contrasts starkly with the 'heile Welt' which both de Bruyn and Kunert recall.⁵⁹⁷ Austerlitz is unable to feel any sense of belonging and comments: 'noch heute träumt es mir manchmal, daß eine der verschlossenen Türen sich auftut und ich über die Schwelle trete in eine freundlichere, weniger fremde Welt' (*Austerlitz*, 69).

⁵⁹⁶ Mark Richard McCulloh, *Understanding Sebald* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003), p. 136.

⁵⁹⁷ As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, see above pp. 144-5 and 218.

At the age of fifteen, Austerlitz learns his real name from his boarding-school headmaster, though he receives no further information about his origins. It is the exoticism of the name which, the adult recalls, most unsettled the adolescent. He comments: 'wäre mein neuer Name Morgan oder Jones, dann hätte ich das beziehen können auf die Wirklichkeit' (*Austerlitz*, 102).⁵⁹⁸ I have discussed in previous chapters the significance of adolescence for identity formation; significantly, Austerlitz learns of his alternate identity precisely during the period when his emerging sense of self is most vulnerable to disruption. Arguably, it is after this point that Austerlitz is truly unable to develop further. The notion of journey is central to *Austerlitz*, including the literal journeys he makes – both as a child to England, and as an adult across Europe – and also his figurative journey into the past. It is at this moment, as he discovers his alternate identity, that, to follow the metaphor, the journey abruptly stops. It only resumes after he experiences a mental breakdown, and resolves to discover his origins in more detail.

Austerlitz becomes a static figure, not physically or intellectually, but in terms of his inner life. This is exemplified throughout the text in his social interactions, most particularly in his relationship with women. Helen Finch writes that Austerlitz 'functions

⁵⁹⁸ It is ironic that Austerlitz's adoptive name, Dafydd Elias, has greater Old Testament connotations than his real name, Jacques Austerlitz. For a detailed discussion of the name Austerlitz in the text, see Anne Fuchs, *Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte: Zur Poetik der Erinnerung in W. G. Sebalds Prosa* (Köln: Böhlau, 2004), pp. 56-7. Fuchs addresses the way in which Sebald uses the protagonist's reflections on his birth-name to explore the formation of his emerging identity. While one's proper name is, under normal circumstances, a positive guarantor of individuality inasmuch as it shows one's origins, this very particularity was 'das sichere Todesurteil' for the protagonist's family and all Jewish victims of the Holocaust, Fuchs, *Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte*, p. 56. However, neither of these forms of self-identification is initially available to Austerlitz whose inability to imagine himself as the bearer of this strange name is also a reflection of his inability to root his identity in a specific tradition or genealogy. As Fuchs writes, 'die Namensproblematik veranschaulicht beispielhaft, dass in Austerlitzens Leben die Verbindung zu seiner Familie und jüdischen Vorgeschichte gekappt wurde', Fuchs, *Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte*, p. 57. It is only when a schoolmaster indicates that Austerlitz is also the name of a battle that the protagonist is able to invest the name with some concrete reality, and to begin to view it as a source of identity, rather than of unease and shame. See Fuchs, *Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte*, pp. 56-7.

like an uncanny doll, possessing no autonomous sexual identity'.⁵⁹⁹ This stasis is also alluded to by the narrator. In the text's opening pages the narrator recounts a visit to the Antwerp zoo where a racoon reminds him of Austerlitz. He comments on his observations of:

ein Waschbär, [der] immer wieder denselben Apfelschnitz wusch, als hoffe er, durch dieses, weit über jede vernünftige Gründlichkeit hinausgehende Waschen entkommen zu können aus der falschen Welt, in die er gewissermaßen ohne sein eigenes Zutun geraten war. (*Austerlitz*, 10-11)

The 'falsche Welt' recalls Austerlitz's own statements regarding his feeling of alienation from reality. It also draws attention to his lack of development and stasis in that the racoon repeatedly washes the same piece of fruit.

The best example of this idea of Austerlitz's stasis is the image, which has now become extremely well known, of the 'young Austerlitz' aged five, on the dust-jacket and cover (see Figure 36). The image is an integral part of the narrative, and plays an important role in the reader's reception of the text. Within the narrative, the discovery of this photograph proves to be the culmination of Austerlitz's search for his origins. Having travelled to Prague, Austerlitz encounters Věra, a friend of his deceased mother's, who cared for him as a child. During his stay, Věra finds the photograph by chance and shows it to Austerlitz, providing its context for him: it was taken in February 1939 at a masked ball which Austerlitz was permitted to attend with his mother, six months before he left Prague. At this point a smaller version of the photograph is reproduced within the text itself.

⁵⁹⁹ Helen Finch, "'Die irdische Erfüllung': Peter Handke's Poetic Landscapes and W. G. Sebald's Metaphysics of History in W. G. Sebald's work", in *W. G. Sebald and the Writing of History*, ed. by Anne Fuchs and J. J. Long (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2007), pp. 179-97, here p. 196.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 36: Dust-jacket of the first German edition of Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001).⁶⁰⁰

Considerable critical attention has been paid to Sebald's use of photographs in his works.⁶⁰¹ In an essay on the interaction of narrative and photography, and their contribution to the conceptions of history and memory in Sebald's 1992 text *Die Ausgewanderten*, J. J. Long suggests that such photographs function in combination, both with the text, and in juxtaposition with other photographs. They are situated within 'a

⁶⁰⁰ To my knowledge this image is used on the cover of all German and English editions. Silke Horstkotte points out that the cover-image was chosen by the publisher from those included in the main body of the text, rather than being specified by Sebald himself. See Silke Horstkotte, *Nachbilder: Fotografie und Gedächtnis in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Köln: Böhlau, 2009), p. 239.

⁶⁰¹ The secondary literature on Sebald is extensive. For treatment of Sebald's works in general, see Anne Fuchs and J. J. Long (eds.), *W. G. Sebald and the Writing of History* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2007); Scott Denham, and Mark McCulloh (eds.), *W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006); J. J. Long and Anne Whitehead (eds.), *W. G. Sebald: A Critical Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004); and Mark Richard McCulloh, *Understanding Sebald* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003). On *Austerlitz*, see most recently Mary Cosgrove, 'W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', in *The Novel in German since 1990*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), pp. 195-211; see also Stuart Taberner, 'German Nostalgia? Remembering German-Jewish Life in W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*', *Germanic Review*, 79 (2004), 181-202; and John Zilcosky, 'Lost and Found: Disorientation, Nostalgia and Holocaust Melodrama in Sebald's *Austerlitz*', *Modern Language Notes*, 121 (2006), 679-98.

nexus of interrelations that mirrors metaphorically the overall thematics of the verbal narrative'.⁶⁰² He writes:

within the narrative economy of Sebald's text, photographs acquire their meaning through acts of captioning and commentary that are circumscribed by the familial and affiliative gaze. Reading the family album emerges as one way in which something permanent can be salvaged from the passing of time and the ravages of history.⁶⁰³

This is, he argues, part of 'an attempt, at the level of form, to counteract the dispersal, dissipation, and rupture inherent in the historical process'.⁶⁰⁴ However, within *Austerlitz*, although the photograph of the child has endured, and appears to offer a direct link to the past – an image of the protagonist as a child – it does not offer any more than a basic record of the fact of the past. Indeed, rather than aiding Austerlitz in his quest for his childhood, the photograph becomes what Roland Barthes terms a 'counter-memory' which, rather than stimulating remembering, 'actually blocks memory'.⁶⁰⁵ Austerlitz refers to the child in the picture as 'der Knabe' (*Austerlitz*, 263), the 'Kinderkavalier', and 'der Page' (*Austerlitz*, 264).⁶⁰⁶ In the photograph, the effect of the child's 'otherness' is heightened by the strange costume with its old-fashioned style and his presence in this field, the reason for which he cannot now recall. That the photograph is so highly stylised further complicates Austerlitz's relationship with the child it depicts. The boy remains

⁶⁰² J. J. Long, 'History, Narrative, and Photography in W. G. Sebald's "Die Ausgewanderten"', *Modern Language Review*, 98 (2003), 117-37, here p. 137.

⁶⁰³ Long, 'History, Narrative, and Photography', pp. 131-2. For further treatment of Sebald's use of photographs, especially in *Austerlitz*, see Horstkotte, *Nachbilder: Fotografie und Gedächtnis*, pp. 43-107 and pp. 215-253; Maya Barzilai, 'On Exposure: Photography and Uncanny Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*', in W. G. Sebald: *History – Memory – Trauma*, ed. by Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, pp. 205-19; and Carolin Duttlinger, 'Traumatic Photographs: Remembrance and the Technical Media in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', in W. G. Sebald: *A Critical Companion*, ed. by J. J. Long and Anne Whitehead, pp. 155-71.

⁶⁰⁴ Long, 'History, Narrative, and Photography', p. 137.

⁶⁰⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated from the French by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 91.

⁶⁰⁶ Austerlitz's use of synecdoche here in referring to his young self echoes that of other authors in this study, most notably Grass.

remote and mysterious, both to the reader and to Austerlitz himself. In addition, it possesses a haunting quality, as the child, with his shock of blonde hair, creates an ethereal image, which is heightened by the old-fashioned, theatrical costume.

Austerlitz can see himself as a child, but cannot identify with that figure. Susan Sontag argues that the iconic properties of the durable photograph will inevitably replace the myriad details of the experience represented in the image; in the end it is the photograph itself that is remembered.⁶⁰⁷ Memory signals an affective link to the past, a sense of an embodied ‘living connection’. The ‘indexical link that joins the photograph to its subject’ is termed by Roland Barthes as the “‘umbilical cord’ made of light”.⁶⁰⁸ The connection symbolised by the umbilical cord is a strong one: the umbilical connection cannot be recalled by the child, but leaves a tangible trace on the body. For Austerlitz, not only is he unable to engage with the child in the photograph, but he is further distanced from his origins because he cannot even engage with the memory of the child he used to be. Austerlitz confesses that

an mich selber in dieser Rolle aber erinnerte ich mich nicht, so sehr ich mich an jenem Abend und später auch mühte. Wohl erkannte ich den ungewöhnlichen, schräg über die Stirne verlaufenden Haaransatz, doch sonst war alles in mir ausgelöscht von einem überwältigenden Gefühl der Vergangenheit. (Austerlitz, 267)

The ‘Rolle’ refers here both to the part of page-boy which Austerlitz played at the masked ball, but also to the ‘part’ of the child which he used to play. In reality, he did not play this role – he *was* the boy in the photograph – but he can find no affinity with him.

In her study of photography and memory in contemporary German texts – *Nachbilder: Fotografie und Gedächtnis in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (2009) –

⁶⁰⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 54.

⁶⁰⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 81. Cited in Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, *Poetics Today*, 29 (2008), 103-28, here p. 111.

Silke Horstkotte suggests that, while Austerlitz's 'früheres, kindliches Ich' finally materialises in this photograph,⁶⁰⁹ the image ultimately raises more questions than it answers: 'Während die Fotografie ihrem Betrachter keinen Zugang zur Vergangenheit eröffnet, sondern eher Rätsel aufgibt [...], fordert der kleine Page selbst als Wiedergänger sein Recht vom Betrachter'.⁶¹⁰ In Horstkotte's reading, the child in the photograph is figured as a 'Wiedergänger', but while the adult Austerlitz gazing at the photograph cannot access the past through the act of seeing, the child nonetheless makes a claim on him. In addition, Horstkotte draws attention to the 'Zukunftsversprechen der Fotografie' which is undermined by the fact that this future can no longer be realised: the adult Austerlitz is looking back at his own, albeit unfamiliar, past.⁶¹¹

Ultimately, the photograph also fails to provide an image of the past for Austerlitz, who possesses almost no memories of childhood from this period. This causes Austerlitz to have a response to the photograph which is reminiscent of Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory. Hirsch contends that

postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.⁶¹²

This generational distance seems in fact to exist for Austerlitz, who is in his sixties when he sees the photograph. Although it is of him, he reacts as though it is of somebody else – somebody who is familiar (he recognises the figure's distinctive hair as similar to his

⁶⁰⁹ Horstkotte, *Nachbilder: Fotografie und Gedächtnis*, p. 240. Horstkotte reads Sebald's inclusion of photographic material in the text, and his thematising of photography within the narrative, as part of a discourse centred on intergenerational transfer of memory. See Horstkotte, pp. 215-6.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p. 239.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 240.

⁶¹² Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (London: Harvard UP, 1997), p. 22.

own) – but who is, ultimately, a different person from a different time. The concept of post-memory becomes active as though a member of the second generation were attempting to engage with a representation of someone from their family's past. As a member of the second generation, Sebald (b. 1944) has explored this concept both in his literary works, and in his own life. In an interview with Christian Scholz, Sebald reveals his own response to leafing through family photograph albums. He comments:

as a rule, you look through these albums as a child, completely naively, without any sense for history or of history or any knowledge of the Third Reich. You didn't know what role your parents played during this period of history, what position they adopted. [...] And then you left them lying in a drawer. When you get them in your hands again, say as a forty-year-old, after a gap of twenty or twenty-five years, the whole thing is something of a negative revelation. Because in the interim you've learned what history is.⁶¹³

Austerlitz has indeed 'learned what history is', but appears to lack the kind of basic, uncomplicated familial response to which Sebald here alludes.⁶¹⁴

In her study of photographs of children used on book covers and dust-jackets, Douglas emphasises the importance of the book cover as 'the first meeting place between reader and book'⁶¹⁵ and suggests that this image will shape the reader's expectations and interpretations of the text. She suggests that while fictional books tend to use artistic images for the cover, autobiographies of childhood frequently depict a photographic image of the author/protagonist as a child. The association of the photograph, autobiography, and childhood respectively and authenticity prove a 'powerful mix'.⁶¹⁶

The picture on the front of Sebald's *Austerlitz* may, therefore, point to a particular genre

⁶¹³ Christian Scholz, 'Aber das Geschriebene ist ja kein wahres Dokument: Ein Gespräch mit dem Schriftsteller W.G. Sebald über Literatur und Photographie', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 26 February 2000, p. 77.

⁶¹⁴ For further discussion of the role of post-memory in Sebald's works, see Long, 'History, Narrative, and Photography', pp. 122-37.

⁶¹⁵ Douglas, *Contesting Childhood*, p. 44.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

designation as autobiography for the uninformed reader. Indeed, the photograph of the child in *Austerlitz* appears in some way on the cover of all editions of the book and functions within the text like a genuine photograph or film still of the central figure of a conventional autobiography. However, Austerlitz is of course a fictional character and the real subject of the photograph does not share his story.⁶¹⁷ Thus this seeming touchstone of realism and authenticity is in fact illusory, and represents a comment on the idea of authenticity which the conventional deployment of such images is intended to invoke.

In addition, Douglas suggests that images of children used on book-covers often fall into certain prevalent categories: the ‘playful child’, smiling straight into the camera or looking ‘serenely’ away; the close-up of ‘angelic child faces’ used to emotive effect; and a small image engulfed by the page which is used to ‘emphasize the vulnerability of the figure’.⁶¹⁸ The photograph on the cover of *Austerlitz* eludes these categorisations: the image is otherworldly, and the child’s enigmatic gaze has an unsettling effect. Yet the picture also has the power to evoke the kind of nostalgia which childhood is so frequently seen to embody. Here, the image of the boy – who, significantly, is dressed in white, the colour of purity – represents the time before the disruption of Austerlitz’s childhood, and the Holocaust. This effect is heightened by the fairy-tale costume of the *Rosenkönigin*’s page. However, this seemingly benign image also proves strangely

⁶¹⁷ The photograph depicts an architectural historian and friend of Sebald as a child, in Maya Jaggi, ‘Recovered Memories’, *The Guardian*, 22 September 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/sep/22/artsandhumanities.highereducation> [accessed 12 January 2012].

⁶¹⁸ Douglas, *Contesting Childhood*, p. 60. For example, the photograph of Günter Kunert on the dust-jacket of *Erwachsenenspiele* unquestionably comes under the category of the ‘playful child’.

prophetic, hinting at the loss which Austerlitz will later experience, because, in the traditional story of the *Rosenkönigin*, the queen dies, leaving her only son abandoned.⁶¹⁹

Furthermore, although the photograph is apparently taken outside, perhaps in a garden or field, the child's pose lends it something of the photographer's studio. This further complicates the kind of nostalgia to which it alludes. Of the nostalgic use of images of children in advertising Nancy Martha West writes: 'unlike the actual child, photographs are represented as pure objects not taken up in the changing sphere of lived reality. Like the *idea* of childhood, as opposed to its reality, photographs remain complete, whole, timeless.'⁶²⁰ The child becomes associated with an atemporal world, outside time. This photograph could not be further removed in effect from the other photograph of 'Austerlitz' in the text, which depicts him at school with his rugby team (*Austerlitz*, 114) and which provides a conventional image from the within the context of an English school.

Despite the prominence of the image of Austerlitz as a child, the figure of the young Austerlitz remains elusive throughout the text. Austerlitz has, we learn, always been a silent figure. On a visit to the spa at Marienbad with a friend, he experiences a sense of the uncanny. His companion, Marie, asks 'warum sehe ich, wie deine Lippen sich öffnen, wie du etwas sagen, vielleicht sogar ausrufen willst, und dann höre ich nichts?' (*Austerlitz*, 311). Austerlitz's self-imposed silence, rooted in his childhood trauma, is echoed by the silence of the child he used to be. It is only when he travels to Prague and the Czech language of his childhood is awoken, that he is shown to be able to truly communicate. This is reminiscent of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's notion of the

⁶¹⁹ Ludwig Bechstein, *Deutsches Märchenbuch* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1847), p. 35.

⁶²⁰ Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (London: UP of Virginia, 2000), p. 84.

relationship between an individual's mother tongue and their childhood, and her suggestion that 'in der Fremdsprache haben Wörter keine Kindheit'.⁶²¹ In his mother tongue Austerlitz can begin to find the words to express what he needs to and to attempt to recover his lost origins. This recalls the overcoming of distance from the German-language which Klüger and Goldschmidt express in their autobiographical works. However, it is less contested as Austerlitz reclaims Czech, rather than the German associated so often with the language of the perpetrators.

Through his inclusion of the photographs in the narrative, Sebald both evokes and challenges the authenticity of depictions and accounts of the past. However, the use of an anonymous image of a real child as the basis of these considerations must raise questions about authenticity and our response to the text: to borrow another's image or account for literary purposes is potentially problematic when this is uncredited within the book. This is not the only such area of difficulty in this text: in an interview about *Austerlitz* Sebald commented on the problem of whether someone who has not suffered under the Nazis can legitimately speak for, or at least about, a Jewish victim of National Socialist persecution.⁶²² Sebald comments:

meine Überlegung dazu war, dass das, was von deutschen Autoren nichtjüdischer Herkunft über dieses Thema der Verfolgung und der versuchten Ausrottung des jüdischen Volks geschrieben worden ist, im Allgemeinen unzulänglich ist und über weite Strecken aus Peinlichkeiten besteht, auch aus Usurpationen.⁶²³

Yet it was just such a usurpation of which *Austerlitz* was accused by Susi Bechhöfer, whose ghost-written account of her experience as a *Kindertransport* child had provided a

⁶²¹ Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Mutterzunge: Erzählungen* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998), p. 44.

⁶²² Katja Garloff, 'The Task of the Narrator: Moments of Symbolic Investiture in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', in *W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, pp. 157-71, here p. 168.

⁶²³ Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich fürchte das Melodramatische', *Der Spiegel*, 12 March 2001, pp. 228-34.

model for Sebald's character Jacques Austerlitz.⁶²⁴ Bechhöfer explained in an article in the *Sunday Times* that she had contacted Sebald, that they had been in correspondence, and that he had confirmed that *Austerlitz* was indeed based in part on her story. She comments: 'I felt once more that my identity had been usurped.'⁶²⁵ Bechhöfer expressed her outrage at having had her story appropriated in this way without being formally acknowledged. Sebald explained in an interview that 'the details of Susie Bechhofer's (sic) life [...] are far more horrific than anything in *Austerlitz*. But I didn't want to make use of it because I haven't the right. I try to keep at a distance and never invade'.⁶²⁶ In an article on *Austerlitz* Elizabeth Baer rightly argues that Sebald's appropriation of Bechhöfer's story must be seen within the context of his wider literary project.⁶²⁷ Nevertheless, it encourages the reader to consider this approach, and the limits – and ethics – of representation.

Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (1995)

The notion of a counterfactual autobiography was appealing to many of those who grew up in the Third Reich.⁶²⁸ In the case of Benjamin Wilkomirski this is precisely what the author constructed.⁶²⁹ Wilkomirski was not a particularly well-known public figure when

⁶²⁴ Jeremy Josephs with Susi Bechhöfer, *Rosa's Child: The True Story of One Woman's Quest for a Lost Mother and a Vanished Past* (1996).

⁶²⁵ Bechhöfer argued that it was a matter of intellectual property and indeed pursued Sebald's publisher unsuccessfully after his death. There is no evidence to suggest that Sebald appropriated anything other than the basic outline of her story.

⁶²⁶ Jaggi, 'Recovered Memories'.

⁶²⁷ Elizabeth Baer, 'W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*: Adaptation as Restitution', in *Adaptations in Film, the Arts, and Popular Culture: Reworking the German Past*, ed. by Susan G. Figge and Jenifer K. Ward (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 181-203.

⁶²⁸ As discussed in Chapter Three, see above pp. 164-5.

⁶²⁹ Benjamin Wilkomirski is the name under which *Bruchstücke* was published. The subsequent investigations by Stefan Mächler revealed that the author's birth-name was Bruno Grosjean, and that he was later adopted by a family named Doesseker. For ease of reference I will refer to the author of the text as Wilkomirski, as is common practice in critical literature on the subject.

his autobiographical account of childhood was first published by Suhrkamp's *Jüdischer Verlag* in 1995. The text, entitled *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948*, purports to narrate the story of its author's childhood experiences, which include escaping from the persecution of the Jews in Riga, surviving imprisonment in concentration camps in Poland, and being smuggled from a Polish orphanage to Switzerland immediately after the war. The narrative is shaped by the contrast between the child's experience in the camps, and its experience in a children's home in Switzerland after the war.

On publication, the text was widely hailed as a literary masterpiece, and although it was not a bestseller, it received numerous prestigious awards, including the American National Jewish Book Award for autobiography and memoirs, the *Jewish Quarterly* prize for nonfiction in the UK, and the *Prix Memoire de la Shoah* from the Foundation for French Judaism (*Fondation Judaisme Francais*). In particular, Wilkomirski was praised for his use of the child's perspective – an uncommon technique in a retrospective account of the Holocaust, perhaps because of its ubiquity in works of fiction on this subject. Reviews placed Wilkomirski alongside Elie Wiesel, Anne Frank, and Primo Levi.⁶³⁰ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, author of the controversial *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996) called *Bruchstücke* 'ein "kleines Meisterwerk", das "die zerstörerische Wirkung des Holocaust auf das Leben eines Kindes vermittelt [...] Dieses fesselnde Buch ist auch für jene lehrreich, die mit der Literatur über den Holocaust vertraut sind. Es wird jeden tief bewegen"'.⁶³¹

Only some years later did it transpire that, prior to publication Hanno Helbling, former head of the *feuilleton* of the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* had raised concerns about the

⁶³⁰ Stefan Mächler, *Der Fall Wilkomirski: über die Wahrheit einer Biographie* (Zürich: Pendo, 2000), pp. 127-9.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

veracity of Wilkomirski's story. Helbling had heard rumours from acquaintances of Wilkomirski that the account was not authentic. He therefore advocated its publication provided it was billed as a work of fiction. His concern was not that the work was without literary merit, but rather hinged on whether or not the publisher intended to present the text as an "Auschwitz-Roman", dem der Verfasser die literarische Form der Ich-Erzählung gegeben hat [...]; oder als "echtes" Erinnerungsbuch, das aber wohl früher oder später als fiktiv erkannt werden dürfte'.⁶³² Suhrkamp halted printing while Eva Koralnik, Wilkomirski's literary agent, questioned him as to the truth of his account. Satisfied that Wilkomirski was indeed who he claimed to be, the book was published as an autobiographical account.

Then in August 1998 an article appeared in the Swiss magazine *Weltwoche* in which the author and journalist Daniel Ganzfried questioned the truth of Wilkomirski's account.⁶³³ Ganzfried suggested in the strongest terms that Wilkomirski was not in fact a Holocaust survivor at all, but rather Swiss-born Bruno Dösekker, who, after his mother was unable to care for him, was fostered by various families before finally being adopted by a Swiss doctor and his wife in 1945. Ganzfried's article created a public uproar and finally Wilkomirski's own agent engaged the historian and writer Stefan Mächler to investigate the case. Mächler's findings were published in the volume: *Der Fall Wilkomirski: über die Wahrheit einer Biographie* (2000). In this study, Mächler persuasively demonstrates the likelihood of Ganzfried's conclusions: that Wilkomirski was 'nie als Insasse in einem Konzentrationslager'.⁶³⁴ Mächler suggests rather that

⁶³² Hanno Helbling, Letter to Siegfried Unseld, 9 February 1995, cited in Mächler, *Der Fall Wilkomirski*, p. 109.

⁶³³ Daniel Ganzfried, 'Die geliehene Holocaust-Biographie', *Die Weltwoche*, 27 August 1998, p. 45.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

Wilkomirski, whose early childhood had been extremely problematic, engaged in a course of memory recovery techniques as a result of which he was able to situate his memories of childhood in a Holocaust context.

While much scholarly attention has been paid to the question of authenticity in Wilkomirski's text, the function of the child figure and its perspective have been largely neglected in the scholarly treatment of *Bruchstücke*. Yet these two aspects of the work are intertwined. Wilkomirski begins his text by seeking to establish the 'truth-value' of his account. He writes: 'ich bin kein Dichter, kein Schriftsteller. Ich kann nur versuchen, mit Worten das Erlebte, das Gesehene so exakt wie möglich abzuzeichnen – so genau, wie es eben mein Kindergedächtnis aufbewahrt hat: noch ohne Kenntnis von Perspektive und Fluchtpunkt' (*Bruchstücke*, 8). Wilkomirski suggests that the historical discrepancies and contradictions do not undermine the authenticity of his account, but rather serve to underline it.⁶³⁵ However, this argument proves problematic. Whilst authors of autobiography commonly draw attention to the problems of memory,⁶³⁶ here Wilkomirski fails even to entertain the concept of the unreliability of memory. In his study of Julian Schutting's autobiographical writing about childhood, Gerhard Zeillinger makes a striking observation: 'Kindheitserinnerungen [müssen] immer bruchstückhaft sein [...]. Grundsätzlich gilt darüber hinaus, daß das Erinnern eine Phantasietätigkeit im nachhinein ist, die eine Echtheit von Kindheitserinnerungen automatisch in Zweifel zieht.'⁶³⁷ Zeillinger's comment first appears to indirectly endorse Wilkomirski's project in his suggestion that writing about childhood must necessarily be 'bruchstückhaft';

⁶³⁵ Mächler, *Der Fall Wilkomirski*, p. 298.

⁶³⁶ As I have shown in the previous chapters. See, for example, the discussion on Grass above, pp. 171-4.

⁶³⁷ Gerhard Zeillinger, *Kindheit und Schreiben: zur Biographie und Poetik des Schriftstellers Julian Schutting* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1995), p. 47.

however, he also raises the point that memory involves a ‘Phantasietätigkeit’ which calls the remembrance of past events into question. It is this which Wilkomirski seeks to refute in the opening to his text when he asserts: ‘meine frühen Kindheitserinnerungen gründen in erster Linie auf den exakten Bildern meines fotografischen Gedächtnisses und den dazu bewahrten Gefühlen’ (*Bruchstücke*, 7). Wilkomirski uses the analogy of memory with the photograph to prove the veracity of his account. He urges his reader to trust him and his recollections, because the story he is telling is true and can be proved by such evidence as his ‘photographic memory’. Mächler draws attention to this in his own study of Wilkomirski’s text. Mächler writes:

der Pakt, den Wilkomirski einem Leser implizit abverlangt, heißt: Du mußt meinen Text als fotografisch genaue Wiedergabe meiner erinnerten Erfahrungen lesen; ich bin kein Geschichten erfindender Dichter. In den Genuß der Wahrheit kommst du nur, wenn du verstehst, zwischen den Zeilen zu lesen und das Nichtgesagte zu erraten, denn die Sprache ist nicht mein eigentliches Ausdrucksmittel, und für das Wesentliche fehlen mir die Worte. [...] ich komme aus einer Welt, die sich zweiteilt in Opfer und Täter, und ich gehöre selbst zu den unschuldigsten aller Opfer, die sich statt an Mutter und Vater nur an ihre Ursprünge in KZ-Baracken erinnern. Willst du meine Erzählung verstehen, mußt du auf die ordnende Logik des Erwachsenen verzichten und meine Kinderperspektive einnehmen. Wählst du die Seite der Ordnung, wählst du die Seite der Täter, die mich und meinesgleichen zu ermoden planten.⁶³⁸

As Mächler observes, Wilkomirski establishes a binary opposition between the perpetrators and the victims which, in the context of his narrative, requires the reader to take the side of the innocent child, rather than the ‘guilty’ adult. This perpetrator-victim binary was, as I have shown, precisely what Ruth Klüger had argued against in *weiter leben*. Indeed, Klüger comments on *Bruchstücke* in an article originally published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 1998 that ‘es war ermüdend, dieses Einerlei der Sprache, die

⁶³⁸ Mächler, *Der Fall Wilkomirski*, p. 295.

Klischees, die Perspektiven eines Kindes'.⁶³⁹ It is texts such as Wilkomirski's which, according to Klüger's interpretation, reduce the child victim to a cliché, devoid of agency and unable to have engaged cognitively and actively in the world around them. The charge of being 'kitsch' which she levels at *Bruchstücke* stems primarily from the use of the child's perspective unqualified by that of the adult.

Klüger's criticism is not unfounded. The child protagonist in *Bruchstücke* does not develop throughout the text, so that as Suleiman observes, 'the narrative moves forward and back, producing new experiences and new memories but no new understanding',⁶⁴⁰ until the final chapter when the boy watches a documentary in his history class about the liberation of Mauthausen and realises the war is over. This ensures that the child's perspective does not change throughout the text. His seemingly innocent responses to what will prove to be difficult and traumatic events elicit a sense of pity. When he is told he is going to Majdanek he responds positively: 'der Name klang so schön!' (*Bruchstücke*, 36) and he exclaims: 'ich konnte es kaum erwarten' (*Bruchstücke*, 37). Similarly, he recalls his first encounter with a female SS officer: 'aber Stiefel hatte sie – noch nie hatte ich so schöne gesehen! [...] Die graue Uniform war [...] glatt und sauber, ohne Risse, ohne Löcher, ohne einen Flecken. Sie mußte etwas Besonderes sein!' (*Bruchstücke*, 35). Elsewhere, the child reacts positively to a new situation, only to discover its true violent and horrific nature. The second response is often inappropriate,

⁶³⁹ Ruth Klüger, 'Kitsch ist immer plausibel: was man aus den erfundenen Erinnerungen des Benjamin Wilkomirski lernen kann', in ...*alias Wilkomirski: Die Holocaust-Travestie*, ed. by Daniel Ganzfried (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), pp. 225-9, here p. 226.

⁶⁴⁰ Susan R. Suleiman, 'Do Facts Matter in Holocaust Memoirs? Wilkomirski/Wiesel', in *Obliged by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics*, ed. by Steven T. Katz and Alan Rosen (Syracuse/NY: Syracuse UP, 2006), pp. 21-43, here p. 28.

at least in the reader's estimation. It can be read either as childhood curiosity uncensored by the morality of adult understanding, or simply as badly written prose.

A further example of this can be found in the description of one night at Majdanek, during which two babies are brought into the children's freezing-cold barracks. During the night, the protagonist notices that the babies' fingertips are black: this, he is told, is frost-bite. In the morning the babies are found frozen, and their fingertips are now white. They have chewed off their numbed fingers, leaving tiny bones. The child's response on being told what has happened is not the instinctive shock and disgust experienced by the reader, but rather: 'ich konnte mir zum ersten Mal vorstellen, wie meine Knochen aussehen. Ich hatte das erhabene Gefühl, eine große Entdeckung gemacht zu haben' (*Bruchstücke*, 67). This kind of curiosity about the human and natural world is a natural attribute of childhood. However, in the context of the Holocaust, where the events themselves are so thoroughly shocking, such responses as this take on a taboo quality. The protagonist's naïve perspective continues throughout the book: furthermore, because, when he is in the post-war children's home he is unaware that the war is over, the 'verkehrte Welt' of the camps lives on, albeit it in a different place and time. These seemingly disjointed reactions could be seen as a presentation of a particular kind of coping mechanism.

Bruchstücke is, on the face of it, strikingly similar to Goldschmidt's *Die Absonderung*, both in its style and in some of its primary concerns. The two respective protagonists are separated from their parents at an early age, both endure hardship and terror in a school environment and both are the victims of violence, persecution and fear. In addition, the style of both works is not dissimilar: both are structured in a series of

short chapters which are only loosely linked and which depict moments in the protagonists' childhood. Just as in *Die Absonderung* the body acts as the site of trauma, so in *Bruchstücke* the physical effects of the camps are the most prominent. However, while Goldschmidt offers a complex literary account into which he incorporates the qualifying view of the remembering adult, and which is written in a neutral and measured style, Wilkomirski's naïve perspective of the child offers the reader little more than a *Greuelmärchen*.

It has often been commented upon that a frequent technique in literature and art which seeks to engage with the subject of the Holocaust is to use the notion of absence to draw attention to the indescribability of those events. For example, the new extension on the Jewish Museum in Berlin, designed by the architect Daniel Libeskind, constitutes a twisted zig-zag construction which spans 161,000 square feet and is intended to resemble an unraveled Star of David. Its controversial design uses silence and light to attempt to evoke the loss of those who died in the Holocaust and the memory of their suffering. A function of the voids in Libeskind's design is to undermine 'any voyeuristic desire to see traces of the extermination, displaying instead vast spaces of emptiness'.⁶⁴¹ Wilkomirski, on the other hand, fills such voids with scenes of explicit and graphic violence which shock, but which are presented in so uncritical a fashion that they border on the voyeuristic.

This kind of approach no doubt intensified the outrage provoked by the revelation that Wilkomirski was not who he claimed to be. In addition, Daniel Ganzfried's criticism

⁶⁴¹ Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny: Paul Celan, Specularity and the Visual Arts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), p. 250.

was not only that Wilkomirski was a fraud, but also that he affected the way in which people respond to the Holocaust. He argues:

hier ist Mitleid ein erhebendes Gefühl. Es hilft über manchen menschlichen Abgrund, bringt uns den andern zwar nicht näher, aber uns wenigstens näher zu ihm hin. [...] Er nimmt uns die Aufgabe des Nachdenkens und die erschütternde Erfahrung des Versagens unseres Menschenverstandes vor dem Faktum Auschwitz ab. Wir benützen das Erleben des andern, um nicht denkend wettmachen zu müssen, was sich der Vorstellungskraft entzieht. Gedankenlos mitleidend, finden wir im Opfer den Helden, mit dem wir uns auf der Seite der Moral verbrüdern können: Binjamin Wilkomirski.⁶⁴²

That the protagonist is so consciously and deliberately presented as an innocent and baffled child only serves to make this 'Mitleidsucht' more affecting. It recalls the kind of empathy which the child's experience is seen to evoke, particularly within the museum context and in autobiographical accounts of this experience. It also further underlines Adorno's comment on what he perceived as the overly-empathetic and uncritical reception of Anne Frank's story.⁶⁴³ It signals one of the potential problems with the notion of 'gefühlte Geschichte', that emotional responses will come to outweigh critical engagement.

Wilkomirski deliberately sets out to fill any such voids as a response to what he considers the void of the child's experience as a topic in post-war memory culture. Wilkomirski describes the silence imposed on him by his foster parents who apparently insisted that he not mention his experience in the camps; the silence of the Jewish experience in post-war Switzerland and Germany; and the silence of the child during his ordeal as he discovers that the safest course is to remain silent. Yet in order to break the silence he takes a starkly different approach to Sebald, putting words into the child's

⁶⁴² Ganzfried, 'Die geliehene Holocaust-Biographie'.

⁶⁴³ See above, p. 191.

mouth and attempting to ‘reconstruct’ the child’s voice. In the afterword to *Bruchstücke* Wilkomirski cites silence as the primary motivating factor for his text. He claims:

ich bin aufgewachsen und groß geworden in einer Zeit und in einer Gesellschaft, die nicht zuhören wollte oder konnte. ‘Kinder haben kein Gedächtnis, Kinder vergessen schnell, du mußt alles vergessen, alles war nur ein böser Traum’ – so die stets wiederholten Worte, mit denen man mir meine Erinnerungen löschen, mich seit meiner Schulzeit zum Schweigen bringen wollte. So habe ich dann jahrzentelang geschwiegen. (*Bruchstücke*, 142)

His hope was also that his text would encourage others to find the strength to voice their memories: ‘ihre traumatischen Kindheitserinnerungen endlich in Worte zu fassen und auszusprechen, um dann zu erfahren, daß es heute noch Menschen gibt, die sie ernst nehmen’ (*Bruchstücke*, 143). This comment is strikingly similar to Klüger’s attitude towards German memory politics, and her demand for a considered and critical engagement with the Jewish victims of Nazism. Also like Klüger in Germany, Wilkomirski argues for a wider recognition of the experiences of children during the Holocaust in Switzerland. It is ironic, then, that his account might be deemed to have in fact damaged their cause.

On one level the question of the boundary between truth and fiction is clear-cut in Wilkomirski’s case: his claim to have been in Majdanek and Birkenau is not true. He was never there. In this sense the case of Wilkomirski is a paradigm of the phenomenon of ‘autobiographical disenchantment’,⁶⁴⁴ exacerbated of course by the ethical dimension which caused widespread outrage and profound concern: that he claimed to be a Holocaust survivor. However, critics have questioned whether there might also be a truth in Wilkomirski’s text which is beyond the truth of referentiality.⁶⁴⁵ Misia Leibel, a

⁶⁴⁴ Michael Jopling, *Re-placing the Self: Fictional and Autobiographical Interplay in Modern German Narrative* (Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Weiss, Christa Wolf) (Stuttgart: Heinz, 2001), p. 272.

⁶⁴⁵ See, for example, Suleiman, ‘Problems of Memory’.

former employee of one of the children's homes in which Wilkomirski claims to have been during the war, told Mächler in an interview that although she could not remember Wilkomirski as one of the children in the home, she considered the book itself to be 'grausam wahr'.⁶⁴⁶ Berel Lang observes that 'more than one defender of Wilkomirski's "memoir" has claimed that since his account is authentic *emotionally* that basis also certifies something akin or even identical to historical authenticity'.⁶⁴⁷

This raises an important question: while Wilkomirski's text does not necessarily convey the truth of his own autobiography – in the sense that he was not ever in a concentration camp – does it perhaps reveal a more universal truth about what Linda Anderson has called 'the pathology of history whose traumatic effects spread uncontrollably and implicate us in ways we do not as yet understand'?⁶⁴⁸ I want to return briefly to Brettschneider's claim that the 'truth' unequivocally comes out through the poetic depiction of one's own childhood. If taken too literally, Brettschneider's comments are potentially problematic.⁶⁴⁹ However, they seem peculiarly apt in Wilkomirski's case. Similarly, in her introduction to *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (1993) Dwork defends the title of her text against those who rightly point out that the many children in hiding never wore a star of David, and that those under six, ten or twelve years of age (depending on the location), were also not required to wear it. She writes: '[the star] is an icon. It is a symbolic image which embodies more than mere description; it transcends historical accuracy for the sake of historical truth.'⁶⁵⁰ The

⁶⁴⁶ Mächler, *Der Fall Wilkomirski*, p. 194.

⁶⁴⁷ Berel Lang, *Post-Holocaust: Interpretation, Misinterpretation, and the Claims of History* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005), p. 83.

⁶⁴⁸ Anderson, *Autobiography*, p. 133.

⁶⁴⁹ Brettschneider, 'Kindheitsmuster', p. 5.

⁶⁵⁰ Debórah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (London: Yale UP, 1991), p. xvii.

claims of Wilkomirski/Grosjean have been discredited, and yet discussion of the ethical and stylistic aspects of his text has not. Scholars have called for a reappraisal of the work as fiction and, despite its tendency towards the sentimental as a result of its uncomplicated use of the child's perspective, it has nevertheless provoked discussion and debate about the representability of the Holocaust in the post-*Wende* era.

Gudrun Pausewang's *Reise im August* (1992)

Gudrun Pausewang's novel *Reise im August* (1992) is intended primarily for a teenage market, as part of a genre identified by Susan Tebbutt as 'socially critical "Jugendliteratur"'.⁶⁵¹ It is narrated from the perspective of the eleven-year-old Jewish protagonist Alice Dubsky who, with her grandfather, is travelling on a transport to Auschwitz. The narrative begins as Alice, her grandfather and forty-seven other prisoners are loaded onto a wagon. During the course of the journey Alice, from whom the truth of Jewish persecution has been kept secret, discovers the reality of the situation. The narrative ends as Alice, now alone, stands in a gas chamber awaiting the 'Wasser des Lebens' (*Reise*, 175) of the shower which, as the reader knows, will in fact result in her death.

In *Reise im August* Pausewang broke two taboos. The first was that she is a German author who was, at the same age as her protagonist, Alice, a member of the *Bund deutscher Mädel*. Pausewang was born in 1928 in the Sudetenland, and was a member of the BDM until she and her family had to flee from the Soviet advance at the end of the

⁶⁵¹ See Susan Tebbutt, *Gudrun Pausewang in Context: Socially Critical 'Jugendliteratur'* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994).

war.⁶⁵² Pausewang's novel engages directly with the question as to whether someone who has not suffered under the Nazis can legitimately speak for, or at least about, a Jewish victim of National Socialist persecution. She 'dares' to write her account with the intention of informing contemporary youth about the reality of the Holocaust. The second taboo which she counters is the depiction of the horror of the Holocaust for a specifically teenage audience. Tebbutt suggests that 'the explicit descriptions of totally natural events such as the birth of a child, breast-feeding and menstrual blood, are unconventional in the context of children's novels'.⁶⁵³ In fact English-language novels for children and teenagers of eleven and upwards have been dealing with these themes for over forty years.⁶⁵⁴ However, striking here is that not only these, but also the themes and events of adult Holocaust literature are dealt with realistically and uncompromisingly, which *is* rare in literature for this age-group. Unlike Wilkomirski's text, these elements are 'not just prurient voyeurism or exploitation of the horror-genre, but part of Pausewang's use of dystopian images to transmit an utopian vision'.⁶⁵⁵

The 'Reise' of the title is both physical and metaphorical: it marks the journey to Auschwitz and simultaneously Alice's journey from childhood to adulthood. In *Reise im August* childhood is synonymous with a lack of knowledge. Like the young Klüger and Goldschmidt, discussed in the previous chapter, the fictional Alice has been protected from a dark secret by her family. Yet while Klüger's curiosity leads her to uncover the secret, and Goldschmidt comes quickly to a realisation of the truth, Alice only gradually

⁶⁵² Pausewang recounts her experiences growing up in her autobiographical trilogy *Rosinkawiese* published between 1980 and 1990. For a discussion of these texts, see Kati Tonkin, 'From "Sudetendeutsche" to "Adlergebirger": Gudrun Pausewang's *Rosinkawiese* Trilogy', in *Coming Home to Germany? The Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*, ed. by David Rock and Stefan Wolff (New York: Berghahn, 2002), pp. 119-213.

⁶⁵³ Tebbutt, 'Journey to an Unknown Destination', p. 176.

⁶⁵⁴ See, for example, Judy Blume, *Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret* (London: Pan Piper, 1970).

⁶⁵⁵ Tebbutt, *Gudrun Pausewang in Context*, p. 165.

learns the reality of her situation. The systematic process of Jewish persecution has been kept from Alice by her parents and grandparents who, two years previously, went into hiding in the cellar of their old apartment building. This period in the 'Kellerwohnung' is evoked in flashbacks and memories throughout the novel which, as Alice comes gradually to realise, was not what it seemed. For example, when Alice asks why they cannot go out into the streets anymore, her grandmother explains: 'es ist jetzt so schmutzig in den Straßen [...]. In diesem Schmutz kann man sich den Tod holen' (*Reise*, 53).

Alice's innocence – which in this case is considered the equivalent of not knowing – is symbolised by the cellar in which the family hides before deportation. The cellar protects her from the many truths about which her family feels she need not know. Alice recalls staring longingly up into the outside world: 'an diesen Fenstern hatte Alice stundenlang gesessen und geträumt. Sie hatte sich danach geseht, jenseits der Mauer zu sein, im Garten herumzutoben und auf der Schaukel zu sitzen' (*Reise*, 43). As soon as they leave the cellar, the grandparents continue to try to protect her from all kinds of truths. For example, Alice entreats another girl her age, Rebekka, to tell her 'alles, was ich wissen muss' (*Reise*, 41), but the grandfather calls her away. The other children also initially try to shield Alice from the truth when they realise she knows nothing of the racial persecution taking place throughout the Third Reich. The narrative echoes Klüger's criticism of adults' false estimation of what children can comprehend. The grandfather warns Alice not to pour so much coffee: 'du bist doch noch ein Kind!' (*Reise*, 85).

Thus while the cellar provides protection, it has also stunted her personal development. Many accounts of children in the Holocaust tell of encountering the standard taboo, of having to grow up too quickly, in order to take the place of absent parents, looking after themselves and younger siblings.⁶⁵⁶ Alice, however, has had the opposite experience: her youthful innocence has been preserved and her childhood unnaturally prolonged in an attempt to shield her from the horrors of reality. In this constellation, then, the wagon represents both another prison, but also a means of release from a state which, while not a taboo, is nonetheless an uncomfortable one for the reader to imagine. For it is here that Alice is able to catch up on all she has missed. When her grandfather dies, Alice comments: ‘Großvater war tot. Es gab niemand mehr, der über sie bestimmen konnte. [...] Jetzt war Schluss mit dem Keller. Jetzt begann das richtige Leben’ (*Reise*, 120).

Having had no contact with her peer group, and having been protected from any kind of sexual knowledge from her parents and grandparents, Alice has no awareness of her burgeoning sexuality. The physical and emotional development which comes with puberty is one of the ways in which Alice is shown to move from childhood to adulthood. The final step on this journey is marked by the onset of menstruation as they stand in the gas chamber: the physical mark of her movement into adulthood is the last event before her death. Alice’s final thoughts include a moment’s reflection on the attractiveness of one of the boys: the only man she had ever previously seen naked was her grandfather. This final scene is, on one hand, extremely crass; yet on the other Pausewang succeeds in demonstrating the futility of Alice’s death, just as her adult life is

⁶⁵⁶ Sokoloff, ‘Childhood Lost: Children’s Voices in Holocaust Literature’, p. 259.

shown to begin, and provides a more complex image of the child on the threshold of becoming sexually aware.

Indeed, Alice is no innocent victim figure whom the author depicts uncritically so as to elicit a purely sentimental response from the reader. Pausewang deftly presents Alice only as an innocent in terms of her lack of knowledge, but not in her moral purity. The grandfather's death is presented as having been the result of Alice's sudden and ferocious verbal attack after she learns the truth of Jewish persecution. It is interesting that Alice is shown to have been directly responsible for this death and it responds indirectly to Klüger's call for a more critical view of the victims. Alice's response to the grandfather's collapse is similarly shocking: 'auf einem fremden Rucksack sah Alice eine große, zusammengeklappte Brotschnitte liegen. Instinktiv griff sie nach ihr und stopfte die mit Griebenschmalz bestrichene Schnitte in sich hinein' (*Reise*, 87). The action is uncharacteristic, and the response shocks the reader and prevents a purely sentimental response. Unlike Austerlitz and Wilkomirski, Alice does not experience long-term adulthood. Her trajectory from the beginning of the text results not in the usual taboo (for this kind of writing) of premature adulthood, but rather in premature death at the hands of the Nazis.

Central to the reader's understanding of the text is the incorporation of allusions to fairy-tales, which have both a comforting, but also sinister quality. For example, in response to Alice's admission that she has no idea about what is happening to the Jews, one of the boys exclaims: 'deine Leute haben dich aber ganz schön ahnungslos gehalten. Haben die dich in einen Rapunzelturm gesteckt?' (*Reise*, 83). Here the cellar is transformed, in the language of the children, into Rapunzel's tower, which keeps the

princess hidden from the outside world. Isolde (a name rich with fictional allusions) is the child who says they should tell her the truth, because Alice is ‘zu alt für diese Kindermärchen’ (*Reise*, 83).

Most prominent of these intertextual allusions, however, is the link between Alice and the protagonist of Lewis Carroll’s classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Like Carroll’s Alice, Alice Dubsky recites advice and commands given by her parents and grandmother during the initial stage of the journey. In addition, Alice’s development causes her to question her own identity, as does Alice in Wonderland. At one point she muses:

I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?’ Ah, *that’s* the great puzzle!⁶⁵⁷

The passive construction employed here (‘been changed in the night’) is reminiscent of the questions of trajectory at which we have looked: by what forces are the children’s lives being guided, and what will be their destination? And yet, a juxtaposition of ‘Wonderland’ and Auschwitz initially seems incongruous and is loaded with bitter irony,⁶⁵⁸ for Carroll’s text has been regarded in popular culture as a tale of the fantastical. And yet the ‘Wonderland’ of the title also suggests a world turned up-side-down; indeed, more than one critic has noted the sinister nature of Carroll’s fictional world. It is reminiscent of Klüger’s definition of Auschwitz as a ‘verkehrte Welt’, where all logic is gone. Like the world of Carroll’s text, time appears suspended and scenes appear to

⁶⁵⁷ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 17. The text is available to German readers in over twelve translated editions.

⁶⁵⁸ Rüdiger Steinlein, ‘*Sternkinder und Tote Engel* – Bilder des Holocaust in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur zwischen pädagogisch-moralischer Wiedergutmachung und dokumentarisch-katastrophischer Wirkungsästhetik’, in *Bilder des Holocaust*, pp. 63-97, here p. 89.

merge into one another in a dream-like sequence. 'Wonderland' has reversed the true and proper meanings of things. Virginia Woolf wrote of *Alice in Wonderland* that:

to become a child is to be very literal; to find everything so strange that nothing is surprising; to be heartless, to be ruthless, yet to be so passionate that a snub or a shadow drapes the world in gloom. It is so to be in *Alice in Wonderland*.⁶⁵⁹

It may be this quality of literalness, of finding all so new that nothing shocks, which we find disturbing about *Reise im August*.

Alice's child's perspective is initially a conventional narrative means of encouraging the reader to fill in the gaps left by her lack of knowledge. The reader is given clues, and is left to piece together the truth from the ironies. For example, Alice recalls that after her parents had departed from the cellar never to return, she received two letters from them. She observes: 'merkwürdig war nur, daß Mami und Papi dort, wo sie jetzt waren, eine Schreibmaschine hatten, bei der das große P ganz ähnlich klemmte wie bei Großvaters alter Schreibmaschine' (*Reise*, 56). When Alice draws his attention to this the grandfather is silent and then is reported to have said 'was für eine scharfe Beobachtungsgabe sie doch habe!' (*Reise*, 56). Alice recalls many such instances of the adult protecting the child from knowledge which is perceived to be harmful. Significantly, however, even those who are adults do not know what awaits them at Auschwitz, and so while in the beginning there are two voids, by the end there is only one. The great void in the text is the reality of the fate which awaits the group at Auschwitz. Thus while Alice has become an adult through her acquisition of knowledge throughout the journey, she remains, like her companions, a victim of ignorance of the true capacity for evil which awaits them in Auschwitz.

⁶⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf, 'Lewis Carroll', in *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen Through the Critics' Looking-Glasses, 1865-1971*, ed. by Robert Philips (London: Gollancz, 1972), pp. 47-50, here p. 48.

By writing this account Pausewang seeks to make legible the Jewish child's experience in order to warn and inform young readers about the dangers of extremism and the human capacity to inflict suffering. However, as already mentioned, *Reise im August* raises ethical questions about the legitimacy of a former BDM member writing a first-person account of a Jewish child's experience of the Holocaust. Indeed, the text has the potential to be extremely inflammatory: it is a fictional text about a child victim of the Holocaust which depicts not only this experience from the protagonist's perspective, but also shows the moment of her death in the gas chambers. However, seen within the context of her life-long literary project, Pausewang's text should be viewed as an attempt to assert an experience which she considers to have been neglected in memory culture and which, she believes, will prove educational to subsequent generations of Germans. Pausewang's professional life may be seen as having been driven by a sense of the need to atone for her own youthful actions by writing socially engaged children's literature, as well as through her humanitarian endeavours.

Problems of Authenticity

In all three texts discussed in this chapter, childhood is fashioned as a period of confinement. This is an ambiguous concept: on the one hand, it provides security and protection from the dangers of the world. On the other, it can act as a means of stifling the child, denying it the knowledge and tools it requires to engage with these complexities. In *Austerlitz*, the protagonist recalls the claustrophobic atmosphere of the manse, and Sebald depicts the self-imposed psychological confinement which separates the adult Austerlitz from the memories of his early childhood in Prague. For the child in

Bruchstücke, childhood is spent in the physical confinement of the ghettos and camps. He is unable to understand that the war is over, and so also experiences what he believes to be a continued state of conflict: the atmosphere of confinement thus remains for Wilkomirski. For Alice Dubsky, the cellar is a prison which keeps her in a perpetual state of childhood, protected from persecution, but also shielded from development into adolescence and beyond. It is ironic that the wagon to Auschwitz simultaneously facilitates the beginnings of her adult life, but also its end.

Like the texts in the previous chapter these describe a range of experience: deportation, survival in the camps, exile. In addition, they explore the notion of journey; however, while Austerlitz, the protagonist of Wilkomirski's text and Alice all undertake a journey in the physical sense, they do not experience a psychological journey into adolescence. While Klüger, Goldschmidt and Kunert used this idea of journey to challenge the static, symbolic representation of the Jewish child victim of the Holocaust, the authors in this chapter seem rather to reinforce it.

Yet above all, these texts raise questions of the legitimacy of writing about the Holocaust from the perspective of those who did not themselves experience it. At one extreme we find Elie Wiesel's statement that: 'literature of the Holocaust does not exist, cannot exist. It is a contradiction in terms [...]. A novel about Treblinka is either not a novel, or not about Treblinka.'⁶⁶⁰ At the other, we find Timothy Dow Adams's question, posed in his study of American autobiographical texts, about whether 'it [is] more important to be true or to ring true'.⁶⁶¹ In the particular case of Holocaust writing, and

⁶⁶⁰ Elie Wiesel, 'Art and Culture after the Holocaust', in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. by Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. 403-15, here p. 405.

⁶⁶¹ Timothy Dow Adams, *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 9.

especially as shown by the reactions to *Bruchstücke*, these questions are invested with an urgent ethical dimension. In this context, Rousseau's notion of the 'truth of feelings', as cultivated in his *Confessions*, is inadequate as it fails to respond to the weight of the Holocaust's documentary burden.

Sebald engages with the issue of legitimacy within *Austerlitz*, most particularly by examining questions of authenticity through his combination of fictional narrative and documentary sources, both in the composition of the text and in the use of photographs. *Austerlitz* was one of a number of texts, published from the late 1990s onwards, which 'explore the tension between photographic evidence, the imaginative reconstruction of the past and the pursuit of historical truth'.⁶⁶² Despite its status as a fictional work, Nicholas Lezard writing in the *Guardian* describes *Austerlitz* as possessing 'an unimpeachable tang of veracity'.⁶⁶³ Yet Sebald challenges the authenticity value attributed to photographs, and his approach takes on an integrity precisely through this questioning which he sets up within the narrative. At every turn he reminds the reader of the unreliability of technical media, such as photographs and films. As Patricia Holland writes in *Picturing Childhood: the Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (2004):

all too often, the adult gaze seeks to put children in their place and to conform their image to expected patterns. [...] They must allow their innocence to shine through. But [...] the innocence of the child and that of the photographic image have proved equally deceptive.⁶⁶⁴

By being manipulated, Sebald's photographs take on a 'tang of veracity'; in being used for fictional ends, the deployment of the innocent child victim of the Holocaust is used to achieve the same result.

⁶⁶² Taberner, *German Literature*, p. 111.

⁶⁶³ Nicholas Lezard, 'Austerlitz by W.G. Sebald', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2002, p. 31.

⁶⁶⁴ Patricia Holland, *Picturing Childhood: the Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 9.

In contrast, Wilkomirski presses the analogy between memory and the photograph into service in order to prove the veracity of his account. He urges the reader to trust him and his recollections, because the truth of the story he is telling can be proved by such evidence as his ‘photographic memory’. The photograph becomes a guarantor of authenticity. As Hirsch observes: ‘photography’s promise to offer an access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, makes it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable.’⁶⁶⁵ In addition, the construction of the child’s voice in *Bruchstücke* has invited criticism, yet it was also this which was considered the text’s most compelling aspect. Just as the photographs in Sebald’s text suggest authenticity (which they later undermine), so the child’s voice in *Bruchstücke* becomes a guarantor of truth. It bears out Douglas’s claim in *Contesting Childhood* that ‘when the naïve child voice enters the text, this commonly functions as a gesture of authenticity’.⁶⁶⁶

The questioning approach associated with the naïve child is in Pausewang’s text extended to the adult characters. When Alice angrily demands of her grandfather his reasons for not telling her the truth about the persecution of the Jews, one of the other passengers comments on the problematic notion of truth in general: “‘wenn man nur immer wüsste, was Lüge und was Wahrheit ist”, sagte Herr Blum. “Wer weiß, ob gerade das die Wahrheit ist, was wir jetzt für Wahrheit halten”” (*Reise*, 86). Here Pausewang transfers the idea of the dream-like world of wonderland to the world of the Holocaust, in which reality has become so absurd that it seems to be incomprehensible to those

⁶⁶⁵ Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, pp. 107-8.

⁶⁶⁶ Douglas, *Contesting Childhood*, p. 89.

experiencing it. Herr Blum's uncertainty about the nature of reality also draws attention to the fictional nature of Pausewang's text. As Zohar Shavit writes:

unlike the prevalent German discourse, which seeks to lend a sense of authenticity to narratives by resorting to a perspective that provides an account of the events "as they were," Pausewang undermines the truth value of the story provided by the structure of the perspective.⁶⁶⁷

But if the adults' questioning serves to undermine the story's truth value in this way, by allowing them to be presented as, to a degree, infantilised, then Alice's almost completely unquestioning approach does so even more, since this lack of curiosity is not what we expect from the child.

The image on the dust-jacket of the most recent paperback edition of *Reise im August* also serves to undermine the narrative in this way (see Figure 37). The cover illustration shows Alice and her grandfather carrying their suitcases. The figures are painted entirely in a dark, murky green and depicted on a red background. The title is printed in yellow and both figures are wearing a bright yellow Star of David. What is significant, however, is that within the text Alice in fact asks her grandfather why they are *not* wearing stars like the others. He explains that because they have not been out in the street they have not had to wear them (*Reise*, 30). For the attentive reader, the cover illustration contradicts the narrative, and performs a symbolic function, rather like Dwork's use of the Star of David in the title of her historical account. The function of the Star on the cover is to announce that this is a Holocaust novel, whether or not the characters in fact wear the stars. The semiotics of the Holocaust novel include such devices; the question is whether 'authentic' accounts of childhood in the Third Reich can be said to be employing the conventions of the child narrator in the same way as they

⁶⁶⁷ Zohar Shavit, *A Past without a Shadow: Constructing the Past in German Books for Children* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 239.

employ the photograph or other received image of the victims. The child as subject becomes the guarantor of authenticity, and there is a conventional mode of expression given to the child which, when used, signifies a desire to project ‘authenticity’.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 37: Dust-jacket of Pausewang’s *Reise im August* (1992).

The manner of their reception suggests that these texts are indeed considered to offer ‘authenticity’, and that this is achieved precisely through their depiction of childhood. Thus the focus on children in these texts is significant. Hirsch focuses attention on the power of the Jewish child Holocaust victim as an image, particular within photographs, and posits that these have a singular effect. She writes that ‘every child whose image we see is, at least metaphorically, one who perished’ and that ‘images of children readily lend themselves to such universalization’.⁶⁶⁸ Because of the ideas associated with childhood by Western culture, which Hirsch identifies here as innocence and vulnerability, the photographic image of the child ‘elicits an affiliative and

⁶⁶⁸ Marianne Hirsch, ‘Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy’, in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover/NH: Dartmouth College, 1999), pp. 3-24, here p. 12.

identificatory as well as a protective spectatorial look marked by these investments'.⁶⁶⁹ Images of children are used so frequently in Holocaust representation, Hirsch argues, because of their openness to identification, and because they 'bring home the utter senselessness of Holocaust destruction'.⁶⁷⁰ Hirsch considers Wilkomirski's text to be problematic precisely because it asks the reader to identify with the child figure. This image of the child victim:

facilitates an identification in which the viewer can too easily become a surrogate victim. Most important, the easy identification with children, their virtually universal availability for projection, risks the blurring of important areas of difference and alterity: context, specificity, responsibility, history.⁶⁷¹

Indeed, the danger of this, which I have identified as a concern throughout this study, is that it can preclude a critical engagement with the past. This alternative, as Hirsch suggests, might be found in the concept of 'working through', which, in Dominick Lacapra's analysis, involves a response which 'implies the possibility of judgement [...], self-questioning, and [is] related in mediated ways to action'.⁶⁷² It encourages learning from the past.

This has significant implications for the way in which the Jewish experience of childhood in the Third Reich will be made legible after the last eye-witnesses have disappeared. These texts offer a representation of the child's experience and, through their close association with authenticity – through the conditions of the texts' composition and the deployment of the child figure – there is a suggestion that they will contain an account of lived experience. The kind of response which this might elicit has,

⁶⁶⁹ Hirsch, 'Projected Memory', p. 13.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁷² Dominick Lacapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1998), p. 196.

as I have outlined, its own problems. So it is that these texts contribute to contemporary discussions about identity and origins by provoking a debate about the extent to which the appearance of authenticity can be a legitimate goal of those tackling historical subjects, particularly one as ethically charged as the Holocaust. They encourage us to ask whether the texts might, even as imagined accounts, tell us something 'emotionally authentic' about the past, which makes it more 'accessible' to those coming after. At the same time, our scrutiny of these texts contributes further to that debate.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how the experience of growing up in the Third Reich is represented within post-1990 German culture. While the contexts, purposes, and modes of expression of these narratives are by no means uniform, underlying each of them is a concern to articulate the *experience* of formative years spent in the Third Reich. They thereby engage with Reich-Ranicki's concern that people are 'überinformiert und trotzdem unwissend' by demonstrating something of what it was like 'auf der niederen Ebene' of history.⁶⁷³ In so doing, they not only offer theories with regard to what it was like to grow up under Nazism, but simultaneously examine and discuss how this experience is understood and transmitted in the present. As such, they make an important contribution to contemporary cultural discussions of the ongoing legacy of National Socialism, specifically through their treatment of childhood and adolescence.

In the museum, childhood under Nazism is put 'on display' in order to provide a representation of historical events and experiences through which visitors can 'encounter' the past. This is enhanced by the focus on childhood which provides 'a familiar and approachable framework [through which to] appropriate new experience and understanding'.⁶⁷⁴ The perceived universal appeal of childhood and the aura of authenticity⁶⁷⁵ of childhood objects, such as toys and games, further intensify this. The exhibitions discussed in Chapter One demonstrate some of the particular images and narratives of childhood in the Third Reich which exist within contemporary culture, revealing that childhood is frequently portrayed as a time of innocence, and as a period

⁶⁷³ Reich-Ranicki, *Meine Schulzeit*, p. 9.

⁶⁷⁴ Roberts, 'Minor Concerns', p. 161.

⁶⁷⁵ Korff and Roth, 'Introduction', in *Das historische Museum*, p. 17.

protected from political and social concerns. Many exhibitions unwittingly demonstrate how children's agency is regularly marginalised or denied in favour of more conventional notions of children as simply the 'victims' of history. The predominance of toys and games, as well as the sidelining of Nazism's appeal, contribute to this idea. The downplaying of this aspect of Nazism's approach to commanding and controlling the young is striking, given that it contradicts many remembered accounts, and visitor comments which demonstrate the seductive power of Nazism. Where an exhibition's aim is to show, for example, 'wo eine Gesellschaft endet, die nicht Werte wie Vielfalt, Toleranz und Demokratie ihr eigen nennt',⁶⁷⁶ this approach seems questionable.

In contrast, Chapter Two explores precisely this idea by examining how *Hitlerjunge Salomon* and *NaPolA* demonstrate the appeal of Nazism. Friedrich, as an emblematic German youth, is seduced by National Socialism's promise of advancement and community. Similarly, even Solly – a Jewish boy in hiding, who has witnessed his sister's murder by the Nazis, and who has seen his family interned in the Łódź ghetto – is briefly seduced by National Socialism. As is the case with many immediate post-war films, in *Hitlerjunge Salomon* and *NaPolA* the young are deployed in order to 'navigate and negotiate the most difficult questions about Germany's [...] history'.⁶⁷⁷ In addition, the focus on adolescents in this chapter is significant. Whereas Solly is depicted as developing sexually, Friedrich is infantilised; his development towards adulthood is purely a moral one, as he comes to understand that the ideology of Nazism is morally flawed.

⁶⁷⁶ Anon., 'Historisches Centrum Hagen', <http://www.historisches-centrum.de/index.php?id=549> [accessed 3 September 2011].

⁶⁷⁷ Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, p. 2.

The reception of these films carries us into a wider debate which considers the idea that, as Schneider suggests, with the transition from communicative to cultural memory, film will become ‘das mächtigste Mittel der Geschichtsdarstellung’.⁶⁷⁸ In my analysis of the films’ reception I show that the authenticity which is associated with them is attributed not to their historical accuracy, but rather to the perceived ability of film to reveal a ‘deeper truth’ about the experience of the past. This, it would seem, is again linked specifically to the depiction of the young.

The autobiographical accounts of growing up in the Third Reich by de Bruyn, Walser, and Grass in Chapter Three demonstrate the breadth of experience on the part of those categorised as the ‘Hitler Youth Generation’, and of autobiographical approaches to childhood experience more generally. For de Bruyn, childhood is a ‘heile Welt’ which is breached as the public and political spheres encroach on the private. This concern is shared by Walser, who sees the private world of his childhood under threat, not just from the political sphere, but from the demands made by post-war discourse that he contextualise his memories of childhood within the knowledge of the Holocaust. Grass’s retrospective view of his childhood is shrouded in shame for what he sees as a sin of omission in not questioning the system in which he was formed. The text seems to reveal something of his desire to atone for what he views as a failure to question the world of his youth. *Zwischenbilanz*, *Ein springender Brunnen*, and *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* all offer ‘privileged insights’⁶⁷⁹ into the life of their respective authors: they speak with the authority not just of the eye-witness, but of prominent public intellectuals. De Bruyn seeks to show the ‘Reifeprozess des jungen Menschen’ within the context of a whole

⁶⁷⁸ Schneider, ‘Sehen, Hören, Glauben’, p. 18.

⁶⁷⁹ Gerstenberger, *Truth to Tell*, p. 176.

generation who encountered this experience, and had to come to terms with it after the war.⁶⁸⁰ They offer their accounts both as a description of private experience, and as a way of speaking on behalf of others.

In contrast to the variety of approaches taken by the works discussed in Chapter Three, the autobiographical accounts in Chapter Four are united in their attempt to question the traditional symbolic portrayal of the Jewish child victim of the Holocaust. Klüger, Goldschmidt, and Kunert seek to make legible their experience of growing up in order to place this alongside better known, but more symbolic versions of Jewish childhood. They demonstrate, in different ways, the possibility of overcoming the trajectory – the enforced obedience to external forces – of children of the Holocaust. For Klüger, childhood is a struggle against oppressive forces which, in her adult life, comes to embody in particular a resistance to patriarchy. For Goldschmidt, childhood is the site of physical abuse, pain, and loss. It represents a journey towards self-understanding and independence. For Kunert, childhood is a state of innocence in which the creative faculties are uninhibited. These authors call for a productive critical engagement with the experience of racial persecution in Nazi Germany, and particularly with that of the child Holocaust victim.

With the transition from communicative to cultural memory, eye-witness accounts give way to more free-ranging approaches to the subject. The fictional portrayals of Jewish children's experience in Chapter Five provoke a discussion about the way in which the experience of childhood in the Third Reich will be made legible after the last eye-witnesses have disappeared. The texts are written from three distinct

⁶⁸⁰ Uwe Wittstock, 'Interview with Günter de Bruyn', <http://www.uwe-wittstock.de/0000009b61131c119/index.htm> [accessed 3 September 2011].

perspectives, each of which carries its own unique questions of legitimacy: Sebald, as a non-Jewish member of the post-war generation, writes the story of a Jewish child; yet the aesthetic means with which he depicts this experience would seem to justify his approach. In contrast, Wilkomirski has been exposed as a fraud: though his account of childhood was purported to be a representation of his own experiences, he was never in a concentration camp. Yet his text has encouraged discussion about the nature of ‘authenticity’, suggesting that although his account is not historically referential, it may nevertheless reflect a ‘poetic truth’ about children’s suffering. As a former member of the BDM, Pausewang occupies a more subtly complex position. The child’s voice which she constructs in *Reise im August* is often implausible, and her depiction of the gas chambers is questionable; yet the text brings into focus the question as to how this experience will be depicted when those of her generation, Jewish and non-Jewish, are no longer able to relate it. Indeed, the reception of these texts suggests that, while the narratives they contain are acknowledged to be imagined, they nevertheless are considered to offer something ‘authentic’ about the past. As in previous chapters, this authenticity is tied directly to their depiction of the child’s experience.

In choosing to represent the experience of growing up in the Third Reich, either as a historical narrative, an autobiographical appraisal, a fiction, or a fictionalised interpretation of a witness’s account, these works necessarily entertain the notion that the child’s experience can provide a means with which to encourage critical engagement with the subject of the Third Reich. Because everyone has been a child – even if the specific nature and context of that childhood was different – common aspects emerge which speak to the visitor, viewer, or reader. In addition, the special place of childhood

within public discourse and thought, which sees childhood as ‘familiar to us and yet strange’,⁶⁸¹ offers a renewed perspective on events which are both known, and yet also unknown, about which we may be ‘überinformiert’, but nevertheless ‘unwissend’.

However, such an approach is not without potential problems. Concern is frequently expressed that, while representations of children have a universal appeal and thus a positive potential, they may simultaneously engender an overly-emotional response which precludes the kind of critical engagement with the past which remembrance and commemoration demand. In the case of depictions of Jewish child victims of Holocaust, this concern has been repeatedly raised. It is precisely this which is avoided in the Jewish Museum’s selection of material culture deriving from the National Socialist period, which deliberately treats children’s experience only marginally, and which Klüger argues so vehemently against in *weiter leben*. Much of the success of *Bruchstücke* can be attributed to its ‘emotional authenticity’. It satisfies ‘a desire for the authentic emotion and experience’.⁶⁸² In this case, the reader might well feel, in a reversal of Reich-Ranicki’s notion, ‘überwissend’ and, at the same time, ‘uninformiert’.

Modern conceptualisations of childhood as outlined in the Introduction appear repeatedly throughout the works in this study. Notions of the child as different, as associated with Nature, as innocent, and as vulnerable and dependent, are reinforced in some texts, but also strongly challenged in others. All the authors acknowledge the child’s innate difference, but Klüger in particular strongly contends that this difference is not to be read as deficiency. The innocence of children is emphasised by Pausewang and

⁶⁸¹ Jenks, *Childhood*, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁸² Andrea Reiter, ‘Memory and Authenticity: The Case of Benjamin Wilkomirski’, in *The Memory of Catastrophe*, ed. by Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004), pp. 132-47, here p. 139.

Wilkomirski in their accounts, while Grass and Kunert play with a more ambivalent figuring of the child as the picaro.

As I have demonstrated, the depiction of children as the ‘victims of history’ emerges from the idea of children as passive and devoid of agency. When this image of childhood is employed in the exhibition, film, or literary text it can have a dual effect: it can both preclude a critical engagement with the topic at hand,⁶⁸³ and, at the same time, the child’s passivity can deny important aspects of the way in which Nazism sought to indoctrinate and control.⁶⁸⁴ In a similar way, the employment of the image of the Jewish child Holocaust victim as a symbol of hope, or of the inhumanity of the Final Solution, is seen to encourage an emotionally-charged response with this experience.⁶⁸⁵

Furthermore, throughout this study, additional aspects of the ‘child-like’ have emerged which are treated in different ways. For example, curiosity plays an important role in several accounts, emerging as a particularly child-like quality. In Klüger’s *weiter leben* the child’s curiosity is part of a wish to know the truth about life, which, for the young Klüger, lies not in the origins of life, but in its end: she finds that what she really desires to know about is death. As Klüger becomes an adult, this desire becomes part of a need to confront the truth about the past. Similarly, Kunert recalls his curiosity and his desire to discover the secrets that his parents were keeping from him. Their silence only increased that curiosity. His account also explores an idea of curiosity which is more readily associated with adolescence. His early sexual encounters, alluded to in the *Erwachsenenspiele* of the title, are part of this curiosity to explore his burgeoning

⁶⁸³ Klüger articulates this fear in *weiter leben*, as do curators engaging with Jewish childhood experience in the Third Reich.

⁶⁸⁴ This is demonstrated by the repeated insistence of eye-witnesses that they frequently enjoyed aspects of the Hitler Youth.

⁶⁸⁵ As I explored particularly in Chapter Four. See above, pp. 186-92.

sexuality. Here, as in *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, this is depicted as an overwhelmingly positive experience which, as the reception of the works demonstrates, did not conform to previous images of the passive Jewish child victim of the Holocaust.

In contrast, part of Grass's shame as an adult lies in his failure to respond to his childish curiosity. Faced with the unexplained disappearance of friends and family members, whom he realises retrospectively had been imprisoned or deported, the child Grass fails to question these events. Grass sees his own silence not as a lack of curiosity, but, like Parzival, as a failure to articulate his questions. In Pausewang's *Reise im August*, the child Alice is entirely devoid of curiosity, which undermines the plausibility of the character, whilst also demonstrating how this curiosity has been discouraged by her family. Indeed, it can read as an effect of her confinement in the cellar, which has not only prolonged childhood unnaturally, it has also apparently repressed certain innate qualities.

Fairy-tales appear frequently throughout the narratives in this study, both as a means with which to evoke innocence, and as a framework in which a young protagonist can make sense of the world. In *Ein springender Brunnen* Walser evokes the notion of innocence and simplicity through references to fairy-tale characters and settings. In contrast, Klüger rejects the idea of a 'fairy-tale ending' to her story, arguing that this is too simplistic and uncritical a way of viewing the experience of the Holocaust survivor. For Friedrich in *NaPolA* the fairy-tale is linked to the forest, into which he must travel in order to come of age. Albrecht constructs his anti-fascist essay in the style of a fairy-tale, in which he expresses his own realisation that, rather than taking the role of the hero, he

has in fact become a ‘Teil des Bösen’.⁶⁸⁶ In *Austerlitz* the photograph of the child in the costume of the *Rosenkönigin*’s page evokes a fairy-tale world, but it is one which is cut off from reality, and from the adult looking back at his child-self. *Reise im August* deals most overtly with the idea of the fairy-tale, which may in part be because it is intended primarily for teenagers and young adults. Allusions to fairy-tales and their characters abound and are firmly associated in the text with childhood. Thus they serve to emphasise the unnatural state of Alice’s childhood, which has been prolonged by attempting to preserve her innocence, and her ignorance. Fairy-tales, then, appear in all of these works, whether they are referenced in the course of the narrative, whether their themes and tropes are employed to place new stories in continuity with older ones, or whether they are critically engaged with.

In representing childhood within a specific historical context these works touch on the idea of authenticity. This is either because of the particular expectations of the genre (museum, film, autobiography), or results from claims made by the authors or filmmakers. It also emerges from the collective endeavour to show something of what it was *really* like to grow up in the Third Reich. The ‘authentic’ appears to be confirmed only when representations conform to a pre-existing image or code. In the museum, toys are frequently considered to best represent childhood, because they correspond to a fixed image of ‘childhood’ which is most strongly endorsed by contemporary society: namely, the specific Romantic ideal of childhood as a time of carefree innocence. This, however, does not always correspond to the experience of those who lived through the period. Just as there is a widespread expectation on the part of the museum visitor that museums will

⁶⁸⁶ *NaPoIA* [on DVD].

‘get the past right for us’,⁶⁸⁷ so films which are ‘about history’ are expected to tell the truth about the past. The implication here is that images which are deemed ‘authentic’ may merely consist of reconstructions of previously ‘authentic’ images: either images from the period in question, or later representations which are collectively received as ‘authentic’. Furthermore, images of the past may be deemed ‘authentic’ if they reveal a truth about the past which, though it may not necessarily be historically accurate, is nevertheless deemed to offer a picture of ‘what it was really like’.

What emerges from the discussion of authenticity in these works is the notion that childhood is frequently used as a guarantor of authenticity, where authenticity signifies a kind of ‘innere Wahrheit’.⁶⁸⁸ This is commonly deemed to reveal a truth about the past which is rooted in experience and which appeals to the emotions. Ironically, we see this exemplified best in Wilkomirski’s *Bruchstücke* which, even after it was revealed to be a fake memoir, was nevertheless declared to be ‘grausam wahr’: not because it recounted true events, but because of what it was seen to reveal about the experience of a child facing loss and persecution, which the Holocaust survivor could recognise from their own experience.

These works also engage with the idea of legitimacy and the right to remember: who is permitted to write about what, and in what way? The post-1990 debate about the commemoration of German wartime suffering has unsettled traditional post-war notions of victims and perpetrators in public discourse. Similarly, post-Unification events, including the rededication of the *Neue Wache* in Berlin to all victims of the war, the building of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*, debates such as that between

⁶⁸⁷ Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum’, p. 51.

⁶⁸⁸ Rodek, “‘Jud Süß’ sollte Spiel-, kein Dokumentarfilm sein’, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article9775361/Jud-Suess-sollte-Spiel-kein-Dokumentarfilm-sein.html> [accessed 12 January 2012].

Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis following Walser's *Friedenspreisrede* in 1998, and Grass's SS revelations, have demonstrated that 'attempts to diffuse or suspend traditional categories of victim and perpetrator elicit an intensity of emotion that originates, in part, from personal or family histories of victimization on opposing sides of the debate'.⁶⁸⁹ In its depiction of a Jewish boy seduced by Nazism, *Hitlerjunge Salomon* does not seek to fit its protagonist simply into a victim/perpetrator binary. Similarly, Klüger discusses the right to remember, positioning her own memories of deportation alongside the war memories of her contemporaries in public discourse. The question as to the legitimacy of fictional portrayals of Jewish children by those who did not have this experience is the focus of the final chapter, where the contested topic of usurpations and fabrications is treated. The documentary burden of the Holocaust gives an imperative to write, but gives an ethical dimension to fictional portrayals.

The Search for a Usable Childhood

As I have demonstrated throughout this study, childhood is often conceptually linked to origins and, as Sinyard writes, 'the artist looking back to his own childhood as a clue to his modern existence is all part of an endless attempt, on all our behalfs, to rewrite and analyse our own history.'⁶⁹⁰ Contemporary Germany is still on a quest for its post-Wall identity, which is inextricably linked to family history: 'the entanglement of virtually every German family story in the Third Reich history means that this quest necessarily involves a confrontation both with the past of a private family and with that of a wider

⁶⁸⁹ Cohen-Pfister and Weinroeder-Skinner, 'Introduction', in *Victims and Perpetrators*, p. 8.

⁶⁹⁰ Sinyard, *Children in the Movies*, p. 8.

nation.’⁶⁹¹ I want to suggest that, by exploring the origins of those who grew up under Nazism, these narratives also comment on the origins of the nation. In this way, they can be viewed as part of what I term a ‘search for a usable childhood’ in the Berlin Republic. It simultaneously implies the usefulness of certain constructions of that experience to the national narrative of post-unification Germany, which have been both reinforced and challenged, and which contribute to a kind of founding identity.

The search for a usable past first took place during the 1950s in order to find a way for Germans to negotiate recent history. Moeller suggests that this process has continued following Unification:

the search for a usable past is not at an end. It must include the continued study of National Socialism, European Jewry before the Holocaust, the ‘final solution,’ the Second World War, the collective experience of German loss and suffering that embraced millions of unique stories, the emergence of the Cold War, and attempts to write a complex history of the war’s end, one in which all these strands appear.⁶⁹²

Similarly, Cohen-Pfister and Weinroeder-Skinner see this search for a usable past in the Berlin Republic: ‘with the caesura of 1989-1990 – marking the end to Germany’s division at the end of WWII – the search for a usable past has emerged in the Berlin Republic as part of the process of “normalization”.’⁶⁹³ This process seeks to make sense not only of the Third Reich, but also the resulting division of Germany during the post-war era.

It is possible to trace at least two competing meanings of the term normalisation within the debates on the social, political, and cultural changes that Germany has

⁶⁹¹ Marie Louise Wasmeier, ‘The Past in the Making: Invented Images and Fabricated Family History in Marcel Beyers *Spione*’, in *New German Literature: Life-Writing and Dialogue with the Arts*, ed. by Julian Preece, Frank Finlay and Ruth J. Owen (Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang 2007), pp. 343-58, here p. 343.

⁶⁹² Moeller, *War Stories*, p. 20.

⁶⁹³ Cohen-Pfister and Weinroeder-Skinner, ‘Introduction’, in *Victims and Perpetrators*, p. 7.

undergone since Unification. Until the mid-1990s, the term was most often associated with conservatives desiring to draw a line under Germany's Nazi past and reinstate German national identity.⁶⁹⁴ Critics, especially on the left, perceived normalisation as part of an attempt to relativise the Nazi past by questioning the singularity of the National Socialist regime and, by association, the Holocaust. Since the mid-1990s, however, normalisation has become less controversial, and part of the political landscape in Germany, as well as of its social and cultural discourse. Thus at one end of the spectrum, normalisation is part of an endeavour to construct a national identity which emphasises German victimhood and produces 'an imagined community defined by the experience of loss and displacement during the Second World War'.⁶⁹⁵ At the other, it emerges as a concerted search for an integration of multiple memories, the 'totale Erinnerung' which accepts Germans' role both as victims and perpetrators, and which might facilitate a dialogue between different victim groups.⁶⁹⁶ As Niven demonstrates:

there is now a broader awareness of the true extent of National Socialist criminality and of the range of victims and that this inclusiveness can be understood as an 'ongoing process of broadening understanding' of the project of 'coming to terms with the past' in Germany.⁶⁹⁷

Niven, amongst others, argues that a context has developed in which multiple narratives of the past can and do exist contemporaneously, without the one denigrating the significance of the other. This is where Welzer's notion of 'gefühlte Geschichte' is so important for understanding this shift in approach.

⁶⁹⁴ For a discussion of this, see Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, 'Introduction', in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 1-17.

⁶⁹⁵ Moeller, *War Stories*, p. 6.

⁶⁹⁶ Gerrit Bartels, 'Die totale Erinnerung', *Tageszeitung*, 29 March 2003, <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2003/03/29/a0120> [accessed 12 January 2012].

⁶⁹⁷ Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 4.

It is within this context that the search for a usable childhood must be read. The term describes the contribution which the narratives in this study make to the wider debate about the ongoing legacy of Nazism, and its meaning and implications for the present. It is not intended as a normative framework: it does not suggest or denote a version of childhood, or rather of Germany's past, which is deemed acceptable, or 'salonfähig', to use Klüger's term;⁶⁹⁸ rather, it is intended to suggest a construction of the past which incorporates the wide spectrum of experience that can be engaged with critically. In the same way as the concept of memory contests, which 'reflect a pluralistic memory culture which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past',⁶⁹⁹ these accounts of childhood under Nazism are part of a broad discourse of identity and origins.

The search for a 'usable childhood' takes a number of forms: it involves an engagement with personal, family, and national narratives of the past in order to articulate this experience, or to challenge existing narratives. The museum exhibitions facilitate an 'encounter' with the past, both through the display of historical objects, and by incorporating eye-witness testimony into their displays. For Gansel and Holland, the production of films about growing up in the Third Reich provides a means with which to understand family history, and to explore, from a period of historical distance, how the events of the past could take place.

For de Bruyn, Grass, and Walser, the search for a usable childhood functions both as a means to negotiate something of what Fuchs terms their 'delegitimized past',⁷⁰⁰ and is also the result of their commitment to shaping German public discourse. It is also, in

⁶⁹⁸ Klüger, *weiter leben*, p. 110.

⁶⁹⁹ Fuchs and Cosgrove, 'Introduction', in *German Memory Contests*, p. 2.

⁷⁰⁰ Fuchs, *Phantoms*, p. 164.

Walser's case, part of a drive to defend private memory from what he considers the 'political correctness' of public discourse. For Klüger a 'usable childhood' is one which instigates critical engagement with the past. Her work is not intended 'als Selbsttherapie, sondern als Kommunikation'.⁷⁰¹ Like de Bruyn, Kunert faces a personal history which has been delegitimised not once, but twice, through his involvement with the GDR. His account, like those of both Goldschmidt and Klüger, seeks to come to terms publically with the effects of persecution, and the complex relationship with the German language and nation which is the result of that experience.

Finally, the literary accounts of growing up in the Third Reich by Sebald, Pausewang, and Wilkomirski demonstrate how imagined accounts contribute to the search for a usable childhood. The fact that, in their reception, these works have been praised for their authenticity – that is to say, the 'inner truth' which they portray – suggests that a usable childhood in the future might be one which relies on communicating the feeling of the experience, even if this experience itself is not historically accurate. This contributes to a wider discussion of the legitimacy of writing fiction about the Holocaust, and one which is likely to intensify after the disappearance of the last eye-witnesses and survivors.

Further Avenues of Research

In this thesis I have considered autobiographical accounts, accounts based on eye-witness testimony, and accounts in which the protagonists are fictional constructs. One of the questions raised by these latter texts is the way in which representations will continue after the last eye-witnesses have disappeared. As an indication of the strategic options

⁷⁰¹ Pletter, 'Der Pazifik hat die richtige Farbe'.

available to later authors I want, briefly, to consider three prominent post-1990 literary accounts of National Socialism in which the child's experience is fore-grounded and the author portrays the period from the perspective of a juvenile protagonist. Ulla Berkéwicz's (b. 1948) *Engel sind schwarz und weiß* (1992) is an attempt to depict Nazism through the mind of a Hitler Youth member, Reinhold Fischer, between 1928 and 1945.⁷⁰² Like Friedrich in *NaPolA*, Reinhold arrives at a critical stance towards Nazism through encounters with its victims. The text, narrated from the perspective of the protagonist, offers a de-politicised perspective on the Third Reich and, perhaps as a consequence, received an overwhelmingly negative response in Germany.⁷⁰³ Schmitz suggests that the novel 'enables the reader to experience the mental foundations of our present by making him or her the involved subject of this emotional world'.⁷⁰⁴ In a similar way, Marcel Beyer's (b. 1965) *Flughunde* (1995) is composed of two narrative strands, the first of which is presented from the perspective of the sound technician, Hermann Karnau, and the second through the eyes of Helga Goebbels, the propaganda minister's eldest daughter.⁷⁰⁵ Helga's narration performs the conventional defamiliarisation technique associated with the child's perspective. Through the children's inability to contextualise events and experiences, the reader is forced to fill in the gaps, and everyday life takes on a sinister quality.

The child figure also appears in Tanja Dückers's *Himmelskörper* (2003) in which the narrator, Freia Sandmann, seeks to establish her own identity within her family's history. A focal point of the narrative is the story of how her mother (Renate) and

⁷⁰² The parallels between *Engel sind schwarz und weiß* and Gansel's *NaPolA* are striking and would be worth further exploration.

⁷⁰³ Schmitz, *On Their Own Terms*, p. 92.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁰⁵ Helga Goebbels is also depicted in Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang*.

grandmother (Jo) fled Gotenhafen in 1945 on the ship *Theodor*, narrowly escaping boarding the *Wilhelm Gustloff* and thus avoiding being victims of the worst shipwreck tragedy in naval history.⁷⁰⁶ Their places on the *Theodor* were secured when Renate, aged five, denounced another family for failing to give the *Hitlergruß*. This causes her a crippling sense of shame in later life. Renate consumes historical material, whilst at the same time refusing to discuss her memories. When, as a result, she attempts to correct Jo's memories and interpretations of the past, she is told: 'was weißt du schon, du warst doch damals ein Kind!'.⁷⁰⁷ The novel has been discussed on account of its portrayal of intergenerational discourse, yet it also sheds light on attitudes towards those who experienced Nazism as children, and their own engagement with that past.

The means of 'accessing' or 'encountering' the past come increasingly to rely on forms which seek to compensate for a dearth of direct experience. Concepts such as Landsberg's prosthetic memory, and Hirsch's post-memory have become increasingly prevalent within post-Unification literature, cinema, and museum displays, as a means of accessing the past from a later perspective. The construction of memories through imagining people's lives using any evidence or traces that remain – such as photographs – and seeking to imagine and re-experience, in an artificial way, historical events is according to Hirsch perhaps the only way 'that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions, and symptoms of the previous generation'.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁶ Schmitz, *On Their Own Terms*, p. 266.

⁷⁰⁷ Dückers, *Himmelskörper* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2004), p. 128.

⁷⁰⁸ Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (2001), 5-37, here p. 12.

As *Engel sind schwarz und weiß*, *Flughunde*, and *Himmelskörper* show, the interest in the subject of growing up in the Third Reich has continued to fascinate, and to provide subject-matter for exhibitions, films, and literature.⁷⁰⁹ In addition, the range of experience of growing up under Nazism as it has been portrayed within the works in this study is not exhaustive. Heinlein comments, ‘soviel Kriegskindheit war nie’, and a study of representations of children’s experience specifically of war would be a fruitful study which has, as yet, not been undertaken.

It would also be productive to see if the model of the search for a usable childhood could be applied to discussions of what has become known as the ‘Aufarbeitung der DDR Vergangenheit’.⁷¹⁰ The forty-year-long division of Germany in East and West and the conditions of Unification⁷¹¹ have led to a concern about German identity which is directly impacted upon by this upheaval. Since 1990 there has been a wealth of autobiographical writing about growing up in the GDR, as well as films which focus on children and adolescents’ experience of this era.⁷¹² This may well prove to be a further site in which a similar search for a usable childhood is being attempted. Pinfold writes that representations of the child in German literature – and as I argue, also in cinema and the museum – imply ‘the possibility of holding on to what is good about the past as well as looking forward to the future, both aspects of the child’s symbolic

⁷⁰⁹ The 2011-12 winter season at the *Zeughaus Kino* attached to the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin consisted of films produced during the Third Reich. Entitled ‘Unter Vorbehalt’, the season began with four films which narrate the experience of young people and members of the Hitler Youth. See Anon., ‘Deutsches Historisches Museum’, http://www.dhm.de/kino/unter_vorbehalt.html [accessed 3 September 2011].

⁷¹⁰ For a discussion of this, see Jan-Werner Müller, ‘Just another *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? The Process of Coming to Terms with the East German Past Revisited’, *Oxford German Studies*, 38 (2009), 334-44.

⁷¹¹ See Debbie Pinfold, “‘Erinnerung ideologisch entschlacken’ or Lost in Translation: Reflections on Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder* and its American Translation’, *German Life and Letters*, 60 (2007), 133-48.

⁷¹² Examples include: Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder* (2002), Claudia Rusch’s *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003), and Leander Haußmann’s *Sonnenallee* (1999).

potential'.⁷¹³ Thus, through their focus on the past, the memories and accounts of childhood within this study simultaneously comment on the present and look to the future. They seek to encourage a new view of this historical moment, and a new way of seeing what we think we already know.

⁷¹³ Pinfold, *The Child's View*, p. 250.

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