ELEVEN

CROSSING THE GENDER WALL:

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN GDR FICTIONS OF SEXUAL METAMORPHOSIS

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The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man,
neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do
so *are* abomination unto the Lord thy God.
—Deuteronomy 22.5

WHILE THE COLLECTION *Bolt from the Blue* (*Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*) as a whole has not received great critical attention in the West, it aroused considerable interest and controversy in East Germany.[1] Published in 1975 as the result of Edith Anderson's call to a number of GDR writers to create tales about sexual transformation, the anthology is a far cry from socialist realism. Indeed, if socialist realism can be somewhat simplistically characterized as "boy meets tractor" literature, as I have occasionally done in teaching it, the plot of these fantastic stories might whimsically be summarized as "boy meets self as girl" (and vice versa).[2] Whereas all the stories in the collection criticize stereotypical gender differences that support male privilege,[3] the authors employ a variety of narrative situations to make this statement. On the most basic level, to depict convincingly the metamorphosis of a "she" into a "he" or of a male "I" into a female "I" poses particular technical challenges to the storyteller. I would like to examine here three different narrative situations and, concomitantly, three distinct literary modes represented in the anthology. I will focus on the stories best known to an American and West German audience (because they were published in the Federal Republic): Günter de Bruyn's "Sex Swap" ("Geschlechtertausch"), written in the first person and the existential mode; Sarah Kirsch's ironic, third-person "Bolt from the Blue" ("Blitz aus heiterm Himmel"); and Christa Wolf's didactic "Self-Experiment: Appendix to a Report" ("Selbstversuch: Traktat zu einem Protokoll"), which verges on a second-person

narrative insofar as a first-person narrator speaks to a second-person addressee.

My choice of texts reflects the fact that person is, as Franz Stanzel describes it, the "most obvious opposition" present among the structurally significant pairs of elements constituting the narrative situation.[4] Yet this opposition acquires special significance in the stories in *Bolt from the Blue*, since the pronouns that signal a difference in person also signal a difference in gender, the central antithesis propelling the anthology. Even though "I" does not carry the evident gender tag that "he" and "she" do, as Jeanette Clausen observes, "the pronoun 'I' . . . becomes gendered simply through being uttered,"[5] and one could make a similar statement about the gendering of second-person pronouns by the addressing speaker. As we shall see, insofar as the tension between the masculine and the feminine, as well as the ease or difficulty of moving from one gender to the other, are manifested in the tension between the pronouns distinguishing person, close analysis of the pronoun relationships in these three paradigmatic narrative situations offers considerable insight into the stories' depictions of the relations between the sexes.

In de Bruyn's "Sex Swap," the protagonist Karl's sexual transformation occurs as the magical result of the wish he and his wife Anna express to achieve complete unity by attaining the opposite gender. However, their formulation of this wish as simply the desire to be "the woman" and "the man" rather than each other specifically leads to an incomplete metamorphosis that manifests itself in a split between the subjective consciousness and the outer person. De Bruyn's first-person narrative graphically underlines the split in Karl, now Karla, between a maintained male inner self and a new female exterior through the grammatical reflexive. Whereas by definition the subject and object of a reflexive construction are the same person, because the externally female Karla still possesses a masculine consciousness, the identity between the perceiving "I" and the perceived "me" (direct object) (along with the related "my," myself," "me" as indirect object, and so forth) is not complete. The ego disorientation occasioned by this split is already announced, for example, as Karla approaches the office on the first workday following her transformation: "Here, where *I* was more at home than anywhere else, I became foreign to ***myself***" ("Hier, wo ich wie nirgendwo sonst zu Hause war, wurde ***ich mir*** selber fremd").[6] Seeing her face in a window in the office, she has the following realization: "First of all, that *I* still saw women, and hence ***myself*** as well, with the eyes of a man; and secondly, that my awareness of my good looks reassured ***me***" ("Daß ***ich***, erstens, Frauen, also auch ***mich***, noch immer mit den Augen des Mannes sah, und daß ***mich***, zweitens, die Gewißheit, gut auszusehen, beruhigte," 201; emphasis added). The image of the mirror serves as a visual analogue for the linguistic use of the reflexive form, yet in both instances

the identity between reflector and reflection is only superficial. Similarly, Karla later recounts "that *I* stood for a long time in the evening in front of the mirror and regarded *my* present form with the eyes of my former self" ("daß *ich* am Abend lange vor dem Spiegel stand und *meine* gegenwärtige Gestalt mit den Augen meiner vergangenen sah," 209; emphasis added).

Because it is this split between a male consciousness and a female exterior that allows for de Bruyn's unmasking of sexist behavior in the workplace, the effectiveness of a first-person narrative in portraying this issue may be evaluated by focusing on the reactions of the "I" to the treatment of the "me." Doing so, we find that Karla's dissatisfaction with her new female status sets in even before she arrives at the office, as men crowd unnecessarily close to her on the streetcar. She reacts with anger at the sarcastic "For you, Madam!" ("Bitte sehr, gnädige Frau!" 204) of a male coworker as he offers her a chair; with embarrassment when a group of male visitors find her loquaciousness and joke-telling inappropriate for a woman; with irritation when her secretary begins to turn the plant watering, coffee-making, and dishwashing tasks she has formerly taken care of over to Karla; with humiliation when her director makes sexual overtures to her, advancing from flirtation to chasing her around his desk; and finally with rage when she is passed over as a discussant at a conference and applauded there not because of her professional expertise but as the "only rose among thorns" ("einzige[n] Rose unter Dornen," 218).

Karla's male "I" perceives, in other words, that as a female her "me" becomes paramount, that she is judged according to externals rather than essences; as she wearily observes, "They found other things more interesting than my professional expertise" ("Man fand anderes interessanter als mein Fachwissen," 211). Accordingly, she begins to undergo a process she calls "superficialization" ("Veräußerlichung," 211) that contradicts her male consciousness: she begins to occupy herself with clothes and cosmetics; to take pride, as we saw above, in her good looks; and to base her sense of self on her attractiveness to men: "I had reached the point where I viewed my effect on men as an indicator of my worth or worthlessness" ("Ich war schon so weit, daß ich die Frage nach meiner Wirkung auf Männer für eine nach meinem Wert oder Unwert hielt," 209). More fundamentally, she finds her self-confidence ebbing away in the face of her treatment at work. Yet in contrast, for instance, to "Hiller, sitting there smiling and not saying a word" ("der schweigend und lächelnd dasitzenden Hiller," 209), who is fully feminine inside and out and is appreciated as such, Karla continues to shield herself against the encroachments of the feminine on her inner self, a process again highlighted by the use of the grammatical reflexive: "Of course *I* defended *myself* against these revaluations and attempted to get to the bottom of the psychic mechanism at work here" ("Natürlich wehrte *ich mich* gegen diese Umwertungen and versuchte, den

hier wirksam werdenden psychischen Mechanismus zu ergründen," 209; emphasis added).

Hence it is perhaps appropriate that it is Karla's male "I" rather than her female "me" that ultimately dominates her and determines her fate. Going to the clinic to meet Anna (now Adam), who has been ill, in order to have their mutual sex change reversed, Karla continues despite all she has experienced as an external woman about the limits of sexual stereotypes to think one-sidedly as a man: she approaches the situation "confident of victory" ("siegessicher," 222); persists in viewing Adam as a "she" despite his clearly masculine appearance; and is oblivious to the nurse's hints about her relationship with Adam. When the nature of this relationship dawns on Karla, as she recounts, "[masculine] pride suppressed [feminine] tears" ("Stolz hielt Tränen zurück," 222). Most revealing of Karla's one-sidedly masculine perceptions—in this case, men's negative views of the feminine—is the nurse's explanation to her of Adam's reason for wanting to remain a man: "The one-sidedness with which you described to Adam your life as a woman disturbed him. Never again could he have been Anna in any carefree and unprejudiced way. . . . Did Adam as Anna ever complain about being a woman?" ("Die Einseitigkeit, mit der Sie Adam Ihr Frauenleben schilderten, hat ihn verstört. Nie mehr hätte er unbekümmert und vorurteilslos Anna sein können. . . . Hat sich denn Adam als Anna jemals darüber beklagt, eine Frau zu sein?" 222–23). Ironically, Karl's original desire for unity with his wife results in the inescapable isolation of Karla's sexual limbo, since she is able neither to return to her male body nor to acquire a female consciousness.

The plot of "Sex Swap" thus resembles that of de Bruyn's earlier novels *Buridan's Jackass* (*Buridans Esel*) and *The Awarding of the Prize* (*Preisverleihung*) as described by Leonore Krenzlin: "New experiences and decisions present the individual with new demands and thereby with the possibility of new modes of behavior. The question is actually to what degree the individual is capable of living up to his newly attained behavioral norm. Not until a character's failure becomes public is the author's satire pointed against him" ("Aus neuem Erleben, neuen Entscheidungssituationen erwachsen dem einzelnen neue Ansprüche und damit die Möglichkeit neuer Verhaltensweisen. Die Frage ist eigentlich, wie weit der einzelne fähig ist, zu seiner neuerworbenen Verhaltensnorm zu stehen. Erst wenn das Versagen einer Figur offenkundig wird, wendet sich die satirische Spitze gegen sie").[7] Yet several features of the text take it beyond the sphere of social satire into a realm that might best be characterized as existential. Stanzel ascribes an existential motivation to all embodied first-person narrators; he observes that "everything that is narrated in the first-person form is somehow existentially relevant for the first-person narrator" and links David Goldknopf's notion of a "confessional increment" with the first-person

narrative act (98). One can scarcely imagine a more graphic example than Karla of an embodied first-person narrator, who according to Stanzel "is tied inextricably to a physical body which he cannot discard when it becomes inconvenient" (93–94). The alienation Karla feels as a male consciousness imprisoned, apparently forever, inside a female body is the basis of her existential compulsion to tell her story.

Furthermore, on a substantial level, Karla's state recalls the existential rootlessness of so many of Kafka's protagonists, and indeed de Bruyn's text contains elements that are strikingly reminiscent of Kafka's narratives. "Sex Swap" opens with two such elements, both evoked again at the story's end: a reference to the mysterious sound that accompanied the sexual transformation—"a creaking, almost a cracking—similar to the sound a person's shoulder joints sometimes make when he stretches in the morning" ("ein knirschend beginnendes Knacken, das dem Laut ähnelt, den beim morgendlichen Recken manchmal Schultergelenke verursachen," 198)—as well as the narrator's admission of her inability to recreate the noise—"In vain I keep trying again and again, although I know that even that could not help me" ("Vergeblich versuche ich es wieder und wieder, obwohl ich weiß, daß auch das mir nicht helfen könnte," 223).

The most obvious echo of Kafka is of course the metamorphosis itself. Franz Fühmann, who when Edith Anderson called to ask him to contribute to her collection of sex-change tales, exclaimed in horror, "A woman! Why, that's worse than Kafka! That's much, much worse than waking up as a cockroach!" ("Genesis and Adventures," 3), was evidently not the only writer to note the parallel. Throughout his story de Bruyn uses the word "metamorphosis" ("Verwandlung") to refer to his characters' transformation. A more subtle similarity is that between the male-female "I-me" tension in "Sex Swap" and the split in Kafka's "Metamorphosis" between Gregor Samsa's human consciousness and the insect he perceives himself to be, a split manifested in the reflexive "he-himself" constructions that begin in the novella's famous first sentence: "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, *he* found *himself* changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin" ("Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand *er sich* in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt").[8] While the narrative form used here is third person, the term coined by Cohn to describe such rendering of "a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse"—narrated monologue[9]—suggests the closeness of this technique to the first person.

In view of the substantive and formal features of "Sex Swap" discussed here—the embodied narrator's existential isolation, emphasized through echoes of Kafka's works, and her first-person compulsion to recount the genesis of this isolation—we can designate the mode of de Bruyn's story as existential. Kirsch's "Bolt from the Blue" is written in a very different

mode. Where "Sex Swap" ends with a spotlight on separation, the central motif of Kirsch's contribution to the anthology appears to be togetherness. This theme is announced early in the story, in the phrase "Let's wait to see what happens and keep combining" ("Weitersehen und kombinieren").[10] Although these words are used to describe the female protagonist Katharina's idiosyncratic taste for discerning regular patterns among the colored clothespins and pieces of laundry that she hangs up randomly, with her eyes closed, to dry, the phrase applies to other contexts in the story as well. For instance, the narrator summarizes Katharina's relationship with her boyfriend Albert, a long-distance truck driver, as follows: "They laughed about their mutual obsession and discovered many of the possible combinations" ("Sie lachten über ihre beiderseitige Versessenheit und entdeckten viele der möglichen Kombinationen," 11). But the combination most significant for the interpretation of the story is that which results when Katharina, transformed after three days of sleep into Max, teams up with Albert. Maintaining the focus on the private, domestic sphere evident in the portrayal of Katharina's life, the narrator tells us how Max and Albert now function together: stacking coal that has been dumped in front of the house and taking a shower together afterward; gathering wood together; sharing the tasks of cooking dinner and cleaning up; rearranging the furniture; repairing Albert's truck together; and projecting a utopia without physical labor, border skirmishes, and war.

The thematic emphasis on combinations in "Bolt from the Blue" is paralleled on the syntactic and linguistic levels as well. Both direct speech and quoted monologue of Katharina/Max, for example, are frequently blended into the text as parenthetical insertions, without mediation on the part of the narrator: Katharina's supposition about the water remaining from her wet laundry as she pours it onto the attic floor—"(it won't leak through)" ("[wird schon nich durchkomm]," 7), the words (we assume) she uses with her neighbor to defend her laundry game—"(what do you mean by sloppiness, *this is scientific work, Frau Spiller*)" ("[von wegen Schlampe, *diß is wissenschaftliche Arbeit, Frau Schpiller*]," 8), Max's resolution as he winds the alarm clock before bed on the first evening following his metamorphosis—"(I'm not going to sleep for three days straight again)" ("[Drei Tage schlafich nich nochmal]," 17). This deemphasis on narratorial mediation heightens the disembodied quality of the story's authorial third-person narrator.

Linguistically, where de Bruyn's embodied first-person narrator is victimized by the unbridgeable gap between the perceiving male "I" and the perceived female "me," Kirsch's disembodied third-person narrator depicts Katharina's transition from "she" to "he" as smooth and seamless. Although Katharina lets out a manly scream on discovering her metamorphosis, and "although she was sorry about the loss of her curves" ("ob-

wohls ihr um das Holz vorm Haus etwas leid war," 13), she soon comes to terms with her new status; precisely in the third person, where the reader would expect the greatest difficulty in conveying such a change, Kirsch's narrator achieves it through a simple pronoun leap, effected within a single sentence and without commentary: "Whereas *she* had previously aimed the shower spray at her belly first and then proceeded to the other parts, the water now hit *him* between his shoulders" ("Während *sie* vorher die Brause immer zuerst auf den Bauch gerichtet hatte und dann zu anderen Partien übergegangen war, traf *ihn* nun das Wasser zwischen die Schultern," 14; emphasis added). Subsequently, Katharina is Max, apparently without any problem whatsoever: "His fear and anxiety disappeared, and the feeling of well-being with which he had awakened returned" ("Furcht und Beklommenheit verließen ihn, und das Wohlbehagen, mit dem er erwacht war, stellte sich wieder ein," 14).

On closer examination, however, these combinations are not so harmonious and light-hearted as they seem on the surface to be. Stanzel's typological distinction is again illuminating here: "For the third-person narrator . . . there is no existential compulsion to narrate. His motivation is literary-aesthetic rather than existential" (93). As I will show, the precise literary-aesthetic motivation of Kirsch's narrator appears to be irony, so much so that in contrast to the existential mode of "Sex Swap," the mode of "Bolt from the Blue" can be characterized as ironic.

The narrator's semi-unmediated rendering of the speech and thoughts of Katharina and Max, described above, indicates that Max in fact remains Katharina internally. His possession of her consciousness is evident in their common use of dialect, slang, and curse words. Early in the story, we find the following thought about the local birds attributed to Katharina: "(It doesn't pay to feed them in the summer. The hairdresser downstairs says they just shit on the ladies' heads)" ("[Zahlt sich nich aus, im Sommer füttern. Der Frisör unten sacht, die scheißn den Damen noch aufn Kopp]," 11); similarly, Katharina/Max initially reacts to the metamorphosis with the words "Damned outrage, a thing like that will have a whole string of consequences!" ("Verfluchte Untat, das ziehtn Rattenschwanz nach sich; son Ding!" 13), and after his first shave Max thinks, "(I'll be damned, now that everyday. I'm not going to grow sideburns)" ("[Verdammich, das nu jeden Tach. Ich laß mir keine Kottletten waxen]," 18).

In view of the fact that Max maintains Katharina's consciousness, it is ironic that he externally models himself on Albert. Max now watches the sports news and soccer matches on television—even screaming "a loud, long, drawn out 'Yeeees' at the TV screen" ("ein lautes langgezogenes 'Jaaaah!' auf den Bildschirm," 16)—just as he has seen Albert do many times, and considers accompanying Albert in his truck until he finds another job. Moreover, Albert is himself ironized from the beginning of the

story by the authorial narrator. We learn that "[Katharina] had regarded this amusing fellow as a convenient temporary solution to tide her over until she found someone serious" ("[Katharina] hatte diesen kurzweiligen Burschen als günstige Übergangslösung betrachtet, bis sie eines Tages einen ernsthaften Menschen gefunden haben würde"; 11). He is first characterized as one of the "disturbances" that interrupt Katharina's housework, since he tends to arrive after an extended driving job, sleep the entire first day he is with her, and leave his tracks with her after he departs: "Mountains of dirty dishes, the marks of his teeth on her arms, and extreme fatigue" ("Berge Geschirrs, die Spuren seiner Zähne auf ihren Armen und große Müdigkeit," 10). The narrator's tendency to communicate often in an unmediated fashion, through meaningful combinations and juxtapositions rather than through direct commentary, is evident in this connection as well. The description of Albert's "picture" in Katharina's apartment is a telling example; it is no typical photograph but rather a skat card—the king of hearts. "It doesn't have to be replaced as often" ("Brauch man nich so oft wechseln," 11), Katharina explains to her boyfriend, yet the appropriateness of this particular card figure for Albert's relationship to his "subject" is clear. The picture's significance is underlined by the narrator's comment that "the king looked at her benevolently with his four eyes" ("Der König sah sie mild aus seinen vier Augen an," 11). Nor is the picture's location—"in the bookcase in front of Stendhal's *On Love* and Charles de Bono's *Learn to Think in Two Weeks*" ("im Bücherregal vor den Werken Stendhal Über die Liebe und Charles de Bono In fünfzehn Tagen Denken lernen," 10)—without irony.

But the greatest ironization of Albert occurs after Katharina's metamorphosis. Arriving from the road, he makes no mention of the change and seems not to notice it, since he never asks where his girlfriend is. He appears to be dominated instead by his creature needs, exclaiming on his arrival that "I have to sleep first!" ("Ich muß erst mal schlafen!" 17); when Max broaches the subject of the transformation—"That was like a bolt from the blue" ("Das war wien Blitz aus heiterm Himmel")—Albert interrupts him with the question, "What is there to eat, I've got to get something into my stomach" ("Was könn wir denn essen, ich muß erst mal was innen Bauch kriegen," 21). He remains unperturbed even during his shower with Max; when Max gets an erection, his response is to imitate it. In retrospect, the "wondrous tales" ("wunderbare Geschichten," 9) that Albert brings back from his driving jobs assume a highly ironic character in the face of his blindness to the truly wondrous thing that has happened to Katharina.

It is thus not surprising that Max, modeling himself on Albert, is also treated ironically. That Katharina's transformation from "she" to "he" is a bit too smooth is especially evident in the narrator's observation soon after

the change, " 'What's done is done,' she sang, and went into the bathroom" (" 'Passiert ist passiert,' sang sie und ging ins Badezimmer," 14). The narrator's tone in describing Max's initial thoughts about the ramifications of his metamorphosis for Albert is similarly ironic: "He caught sight of Albert's enormous bathrobe, and his heart burst like an egg in boiling water" ("Sein Blick fiel auf Alberts enormen Bademantel, und sein Herz sprang wie ein Ei im kochenden Wasser," 14). The tone of this introduction prepares us for Max's assumption of a male way of life that borders on caricature in its stereotypicality. Just as Katharina had been trapped, despite her job as a research technician, in the stereotypically feminine tasks of housecleaning and laundry, Max immediately takes on activities and viewpoints that he has perceived as masculine: in addition to watching the sports news and soccer matches, he rubs himself with 4711 cologne as he has seen men do in television commercials; resolves to order a car, to learn skat, and to leave the Democratic Women's League of Germany; decides that the apartment needs tablecloths that are not so brightly colored and more right angles and fewer curves in its furniture arrangements; and makes up riddles that deal with topics like trucks and gasoline instead of love and sex, the subjects of the riddles Katharina had posed.

But perhaps most ironic of all is the new combination of Max and Albert, whose apparent harmony is described near the end of the story: "They were happily making plans, speaking as quickly and just as compatible as always when they were together" ("Sie waren fröhlich am Entwerfen, so schnell in der Rede und so im Einklang miteinander wie immer, wenn sie beieinander waren," 24). Particularly in view of the importance Katharina had attached to sensual pleasure and of Albert's subordination to his drives, the reader cannot help but envision the unsatisfactory results of this sexless partnership. As Wolfgang Emmerich writes of the story's superficially idyllic ending, "Here a disguised criticism of the social status quo of the GDR becomes evident, a country which now as before allows for only *one* means of self-realization at a time—eros *or* solidarity—but not both together" ("Damit wird eine verhüllte Kritik an dem gesellschaftlichen Status quo der DDR erkennbar, die nach wie vor zu einer Zeit nur *eine* der beiden Selbstverwirklichungsmöglichkeiten—Eros *oder* Solidarität—zuläßt, nicht aber beide zugleich").[11]

Ultimately, then, we see that for all the thematic, syntactic, and linguistic combinations evident in "Bolt from the Blue," the story's intention is to demonstrate its characters' failure to achieve the one combination that would bring them happiness—the combination of conventionally masculine and conventionally feminine traits in a single human being. Locked into gender stereotypes, Katharina never thinks to venture into "male" spheres of behavior as a woman, in the same way that Max, imitating Albert, becomes confined to stereotypically male activities and patterns of

thinking after his transformation. Just as the superficially lighthearted tone of this story belies its underlying irony, the seemingly harmonious "she" and "he" are in fact as far apart as the male "I" and the female "me" of de Bruyn's narrative.[12]

Wolf's "Self-Experiment" introduces yet a third mode into our analysis. In this "Appendix to a Report," as the story's subtitle designates it, a woman scientist adds to her official report about her sex-change experiment her candid explanation, addressed to the professor whom she secretly loves and who launched the experiment, of why she broke it off before her transformation to a man was complete. In contrast to the masculine-feminine split expressed in de Bruyn's "I-me" and Kirsch's "he-she," the narrative situation of Wolf's "appendix," in which a first-person female speaker addresses a man in the second person, functions as a textual model for the author's synthetic vision of ideal relations between the sexes. The fact that the first pronoun to appear in the text is "Sie"—the professorial "you" to whom the narrator is writing her appendix—announces her awareness of the need to engage the male Other in dialogue (albeit here one-sidedly, since the story does not contain his response).[13] Yet despite what some critics claim,[14] this narrator is not unbrokenly feminine, but is rather the synthetic product of a dialectical process. The story's mention of the myth of Tiresias is far from gratuitous, for like Tiresias this narrator has been "on the other side," has experienced the opposite gender and left it behind.

In relating the genesis of the narrating subject "Self-Experiment," like so much of Wolf's other work, itself demonstrates "the process of becoming a subject" ("das Subjektwerden des Menschen"), the process she believes prose fiction should nurture in the reader.[15] Concomitantly, the story of how the narrating "I" of "Self-Experiment" came into being manifests the author's much-discussed notion of the "difficulty of saying I," thematized in *The Quest for Christa T. (Nachdenken über Christa T.)* and at the heart of her subsequent work. In "Self-Experiment," the difficult story of how the female scientist attained narrative subjectivity is bound up with her sliding gender identity, best grasped through a close analysis of the relationship between herself and the professor, between the "I" and the "you" of the text.

Scrutiny of this relationship reveals that the narrator's sex-change experiment is merely the culmination of wishes and tendencies she has had for some time. We learn that she had already conceived the idea of becoming a man fourteen years before, when the professor had mentioned the possibility of such an experiment during a lecture she was attending, and that she has hoped for the chance ever since. Having subordinated her personal life to her career, she is still single and childless at the age of thirty-three, unlike the "typical" woman. In her appendix she notes to the professor that she was at the outset of the experiment "capable of summoning up mas-

culine courage and manly self-control, each of which would be required in its own time" ("Imstande, männlichen Mut und mannhafte Selbstüberwindung aufzubringen, die beide zu ihrer Zeit gefragt sein würden") and "that I was, in your opinion, the equal of any male scientist" ("daß ich Ihnen jeden männlichen Wissenschaftler ersetze").[16] Hence we find that the narrator's gender identity was blurred even before she undertook the experiment.

As her teacher and the object of her love, the professor is also the narrator's model. Just as Kirsch's Katharina imitates Albert after becoming Max, Wolf's narrator emulates her professor by wanting to become, like him, a male scientist. Thus his story is crucial to an understanding of her sliding gender identity. And close examination discloses that "Self-Experiment" is as much the story of the "you" addressed as of the narrating "I." This feature of the second-person technique has been discussed by Michel Butor, whose novel *La modification* (1957) is one of the most extensive and best-known examples of second-person narrative. Making typological distinctions with regard to person, he writes that "It is here that the use of the second person appears, which in the novel can be characterized as follows: the one to whom one tells one's own story" ("C'est ici qu'intervient l'emploi de la seconde personne que l'on peut caractériser ainsi, dans le roman: celui à qui l'on raconte sa propre histoire").[17] In telling the story of the "you," he explains, the second-person narrative reveals something the "you" is hiding, is unable to narrate for himself. In the process the "you" is taught, and even judged, since the implied first person serves as a kind of conscience for the second. Hence the tone of second-person narrative is didactic. In Butor's words, "It is because there is someone to whom one tells one's own story, something about oneself which is unknown, or which at least has never been verbalized, that there can be a second-person narrative, which will accordingly always be a didactic narrative" ("C'est parce qu'il y a quelqu'un à qui l'on raconte sa propre histoire, quelque chose de lui qu'il ne connaît pas, ou du moins pas encore au niveau du langage, qu'il peut y avoir un récit à la seconde personne, qui sera par conséquent toujours un récit didactique," 941).

Much of what Butor says about the novel applies to short fiction as well, and even though the implied first-person presence of *La modification* is not embodied in any character and the text does not constitute an address, there are nevertheless similarities between his thoroughgoing use of the second person and the narrative situation of "Self-Experiment." For instance, Wolf's second-person forms recount "true narrative action" as defined by Bruce Morrissette: "a single, unique past or present action. (For example, 'You could look out of your window and see . . .' is not narrative 'you.' 'Attracted by a sudden noise outside, you went to the window and saw . . .' *is* narrative 'you'.)"[18] Correspondingly, the narrator's formulation

of her real reason for undertaking the sex-change experiment, for wanting to become a man like the professor, recalls Butor's generic description of the second person: "At that point all my good and bad reasons no longer carried any weight compared to the one which was sufficient in itself: that I wanted to find out your secret" (116) ("Da fielen alle meine guten und schlechten Gründe nicht mehr ins Gewicht gegenüber dem einen, der allein ausreichte: daß ich hinter Ihr Geheimnis kommen wollte," 73). Having discovered through her experience as Anders—named, appropriately, by his model the professor—what makes the professor tick, she now teaches her former teacher (and us) what he is unable to admit consciously to himself, unable to bring up to the level of language. Hence the mode of the narrative in which she transmits this secret can aptly be designated didactic.

In teaching the professor what she has learned about him, the narrator constantly judges him, recalling the judgmental quality of the implied first person in *La modification*. She reproaches him for his scientific rigidity, evident in his "superstitious worship of measurable results" (113) ("abergläubischen Anbetung von Meßergebnissen," 68) and his "fanaticism for impartiality" (114) ("Gerechtigkeitsfanatismus," 68); for his impersonal coldness and calculated invulnerability—"You make every effort never to get caught. . . . Either you know all the answers or you're too proud to risk losing face by asking" (113) ("Sie geben sich alle Mühe, niemals ertappt zu werden. . . . Entweder wissen Sie alle Antworten, oder Sie sind zu stolz, sich durch Fragen eine Blöße zu geben," 68); and for his machinelike "always-prepared-for-everything attitude" (124) ("Immer-auf-alles-gefaßt sein," 88): "Since you would never permit the term 'crisis,' we tacitly agreed to use 'turning point' " (126) ("Da Sie den Begriff 'Krise' niemals zulassen würden, einigten wir uns stillschweigend auf 'Peripetie,' " 92). As Anders she comes to believe that these qualities of the professor are typical of men in general: "The partial blindness contracted by almost all men began to attack me as well, for otherwise it is not possible to enjoy unlimited privileges these days" (128) ("Die Teilerblindung, die fast alle Männer sich zuziehen, begann auch mich zu befallen, denn anders ist heute der ungeschmälerte Genuß von Privilegien nicht mehr möglich," 96); in her post-experimental voice she observes that "above all else we prize the pleasure of being known. But to you, this expectation of ours is pure embarassment from which you try to protect yourselves, for all we know, behind your tests and questionnaires" (124) ("Höher als alles schätzen wir die Lust, erkannt zu werden. Euch aber ist unser Anspruch die reine Verlegenheit, vor der ihr euch, wer weiβ, hinter euren Tests und Fragebogen verschanzt," 87).

The sliding gender identity evident in the preceding two quotations, in which a masculine "me" alternates with a feminine "we," manifests itself at

other points in the narrative as well. The narrator formulates the "secret" of the professor (and of men in general) as follows: "that the activities you immerse yourselves in cannot bring you happiness, and that *we* [women] have a right to resist you when you try to drag us into them" (128) ("daß die Unternehmungen, in die ihr euch verliert, euer Glück nicht sein können, und daß *wir* [Frauen] ein Recht auf Widerstand haben, wenn ihr uns in sie hineinziehen wollt," 96; emphasis added), yet proceeds on the same page to write "*We* men, on the other hand, hoist the world onto our shoulders, almost collapsing under its weight" ("Während *wir* Männer die Weltkugel auf unsere Schultern laden, unter deren Last *wir* fast zusammenbrechen"; emphasis added). A similar pronoun confusion characterizes the narrator's description of the process by which Anders learns to redefine words in keeping with his new gender, here, the word "city": "For him—that is, for me. Anders—it was a tight cluster of inexhaustible opportunities. He—that is, I—felt intoxicated by a city which was ready to teach me that my duty was to make conquests" (122) ("Ihm—also mir, Anders—eine Ballung unausschöpfbarer Gelegenheiten. Er—also ich—war betäubt von einer Stadt, die mich lehren wollte, daß es meine Pflicht war, Eroberungen zu machen," 84). Obviously the technical reason for these instances of pronoun confusion is that the narrator alternates between an "I" that refers to his period as Anders and a postexperimental "I." But as the last example in particular suggests, the effect of such gender blurring is to underline the narrator's decreasing ability, in the course of his weeks as Anders, to identify with the masculine in general and the professor specifically.

As the professor's value as a model for Anders declines, Anders's own sense of identity as a man is steadily eroded. The climax of his education about the professor—the moment when Anders says that he feels "like at the movies" ("Wie im Kino") and the professor responds, "You too?" (130) ("Sie auch?" 99), revealing himself to be one who perceives and lives life only superficially, from a distance—leads Anders to break off the sex-change experiment. Ironically, the single moment of complete identity between the "I" and the "you" of the story represents "the admission of a defect" (130) ("das vertrauliche Eingeständnis eines Defekts," 100)—leading the "I" to the realization "that you cannot love, and know it" (130) ("Daß Sie nicht lieben können und es wissen," 99)—and causes him to move away from the masculine "you" and return to womanhood. Yet only now, through this dialectical progression from femininity to partial masculinity to a state informed by both, has the "I" achieved authentic subjectivity; in learning the truth about the beloved, emulated masculine Other, the narrating subject has come to genuinely know herself, to be able to say "I." Her second-person narrative is the result. Instead of wanting to *be* the "you" of this text, as Anders, her goal is now a dialogue with him. She has

progressed from loving the professor to understanding him to judging him to wanting to attempt a realistic mutual love that joins judgment and affection, a goal evident in her observation that "language, you'll be surprised to hear, can help me; our language which grew out of an amazing mentality that could express 'to judge' and 'to love' in one single word: *meinen*, 'to think, have an opinion' " (122) ("Die Sprache, das wird Sie wundern, kann mir helfen, mit ihrer Herkunft aus jenem erstaunlichen Geist, dem 'urteilen' und 'lieben' ein einziges Wort sein konnte: 'meinen,' " 83).

Thus this didactic appendix ends with an emphasis not on gender separation, such as is conveyed by the existential angst of de Bruyn's "I-me" constructions or by the wry irony of Kirsch's "he-she," but with a call for a synthetic reconciliation between the sexes. The story's penultimate sentence sums up the narrator's dialogic program: "Now my experiment lies ahead: the attempt to love" (131) ("Jetzt steht *uns* mein Experiment bevor: der Versuch zu lieben," 100; emphasis added). The first-person plural, blending the female "I" and the male "you" into an androgynous "we," implies that for the narrator sexual love necessitates the dissolution of rigid gender boundaries. With this experiment of love, clearly set up as an alternative to the scientific experiment she has just undergone, the narrator will continue her education of the professor, begun in the appendix she has addressed to him: just as she has ventured into the masculine realm of science and even into the male gender, so must the professor allow the "feminine" activity of loving to encroach upon his imperviously masculine world.

Hence the common designation of "Self-Experiment" as "utopian" cannot refer to the sex-change experiment, which is, more accurately, a "left-brain utopia," as Nancy Lukens calls it; such utopias, she writes, "represent Hybris . . . , since they disregard essential elements of the whole picture of human life. . . . They create the illusion of progress toward perfection and thereby kill the ongoing process of life."[19] It is rather the story's conclusion that is utopian, in its suggestion that the answer is not to privilege one sex (men), and then allow women to "become men," or acquire these privileges too, but instead to encourage both sexes to appropriate features of the other and thereby become more human. To borrow a distinction from Wolf's narrator, the author's goal is "humane" and not "manly" (123) ("menschlich"/"männlich," 86). Thus the second-person technique of "Self-Experiment" is the perfect vehicle for its message, as is again underlined through comparison with Butor: in the opinion of Roland Barthes, "Butor's *vous* sets up a metaphysics of creator-creature full of humanistic, if not religious, meaning."[20]

NOTES

My thanks to Eric Downing for calling my attention to the epigraph to this essay. I would also like to thank Irene Kacandes and David Scrase for their comments on an earlier draft. This essay was completed before the events that followed November 9, 1989.

1. On the anthology's difficult publication history, for example, see Edith Anderson, "Genesis and Adventures of the Anthology *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*," in *Studies in GDR Culture and Society*, ed. Margy Gerber et al., vol. 4 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 1–14. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text.

2. For a survey of recent fantastic literature in the GDR, see Sibylle Ehrlich, "Use of the Fantastic in Recent GDR Prose," in Gerber, *Studies in GDR Culture*, vol. 2 (1982), 68–75.

3. See my "Imagining the Other: Sexual Transformation and Social Reality in GDR Literature," *German Life and Letters* (1990).

4. Franz Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. Charlotte Goedsche (1979; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 80. Subsequently page references are given parenthetically in the text. The close study of person by Stanzel, Dorrit Cohn (*Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978]), and others has successfully refuted Wayne Booth's view of the distinction of person as "overworked"; see Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 150.

5. Jeanette Clausen, "The Difficulty of Saying 'I' as Theme and Narrative Technique in the Works of Christa Wolf," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 10 (1980): 325.

6. Günter de Bruyn, "Geschlechtertausch," in *Frauen in der DDR: Zwanzig Erzählungen*, ed. Lutz-W. Wolff (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976), 201; emphasis added. Except where otherwise noted, the translations are mine. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text. For the sake of simplicity my use of pronouns to refer to transformed characters will be determined by their external sex; hence "she"/"her" for Karla despite her male inner self.

7. Leonore Krenzlin, "Wirkungsvorstellung und Werkstruktur bei Hermann Kant und Günter de Bruyn," in *Funktion der Literatur: Aspekte—Probleme—Aufgaben*, ed. Dieter Schlenstedt et al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975), 329–30.

8. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. Stanley Corngold (1972; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1986), 3; Franz Kafka, "Die Verwandlung," *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, ed. Paul Raabe (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1969), 56 (emphasis added).

9. Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 14. See further Cohn, "Narrated Monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style," *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966): 97–112, and *Transparent Minds*, 99–140.

10. Sarah Kirsch, "Blitz aus heiterm Himmel," in *Geschlechtertausch: Drei Geschichten über die Umwandlung der Verhältnisse* by Sarah Kirsch, Irmtraud Morgner,

and Christa Wolf (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1980), 8. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text.

11. Wolfgang Emmerich, "Identität und Geschlechtertausch: Notizen zur Selbstdarstellung der Frau in der neueren DDR-Literatur," in *Basis: Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, vol. 8 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 142.

12. Sigrid Damm and Jürgen Engler's use of the phrase "heiter-ironische Gelassenheit" to characterize the tone of the stories by de Bruyn and Kirsch overlooks the darkness of the message both works convey in the end; see Damm and Engler, "Notate des Zwiespalts und Allegorien der Vollendung," *Weimarer Beiträge* 21, no. 7 (1975): 57.

13. As Anne Herrmann points out, "In Wolf's text it is not the feminine but the masculine that is 'Anders' (that is, posited as Other)"; Herrmann, "The Transsexual as *Anders* in Christa Wolf's 'Self-Experiment,' " *Genders* 3 (1988): 47. But the narrator's addressee constitutes another masculine Other of importance in Wolf's story.

14. E.g., Jürgen Nieraad, "Subjektivität als Thema und Methode realistischer Schreibweise: Zur gegenwärtigen DDR-Literaturdiskussion am Beispiel Christa Wolf," *Literatur-Wissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 19 (1978): 300.

15. See Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben," in Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben: Aufsätze und Prosastücke* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1972), 220.

16. Christa Wolf, "Self-Experiment: Appendix to a Report," trans. Jeanette Clausen, *New German Critique* 13 (1978): 114, 115; "Selbstversuch: Traktat zu einem Protokoll," in Kirsch, Morgner, and Wolf, *Geschlechtertausch*, 69, 71; ellipsis Wolf's. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text.

17. Michel Butor, "L'usage des pronoms personnels dans le roman," *Les temps modernes* 16, no. 178 (1961): 941; subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text.

18. Bruce Morrissette, "Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 2 (1965): 4. Irene Kacandes, to whom I am grateful for the references in this note and the previous one, is currently at work on the first comprehensive, systematic study of second-person narrative.

19. Nancy Lukens, "Future Perfect?: Language and Utopia in Christa Wolf's Chernobyl Narrative," manuscript, 9–10.

20. Morrissette, "Narrative 'You,' " 16.