

**“The Wall in the Head”: Reading “Berlin” in Selected Pre- and Post-Unification German
Films**

by

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the setting and thematization of Berlin in selected pre- and post-unification West German films. Give the symbolic importance of a divided Berlin to the Cold War period, the opening of the Wall and the subsequent unification of Germany in 1990 were read internationally as symbols of the end of an era. Yet the initial euphoria soon gave way to a more complex picture within Germany, as citizens of the former East and West Germany were faced with gaps in memory and history, alongside a material and economic divide.

This thesis reads the “meaning” of Berlin as a focus for these issues. It analyzes five representative films that negotiate issues of pre- and post-unification memory, history mediated through commercial genres, and questions of nostalgia. It raises questions about the difficulties still ahead for the new Berlin, as well as the new Germany.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge my thesis supervisor Barbara Gabriel who graciously agreed to supervise me despite being on sabbatical. I will not forget her reassurance and sage guidance. I also wish to thank the Film Studies professors at Carleton University who have offered me much support and advice. I would also like to show my appreciation to Gisela Ehrenberg and Eva Ledwig at the Goethe Institute for helping me begin to learn German. Thanks as well to all my friends and colleagues, for their tireless moral support and encouragement, especially Murray Leeder, Amy Ratelle, Lisa Johnson, Jessica Aldred, Chrystie McWade, Meghan Conly, Steve Rifkin, Alex Clark, and Matt Croombs. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Larry and Marie Beattie, who each, in their own way, provided invaluable assistance to me during the process of writing this thesis.

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“The Wall in the Head”: A Brief Introduction

Even before the infamous 13th of August, 1961, when East German border guards began the construction of the Wall, Berlin stood at the centre of the Cold War. Events such as the Berlin Airlift (1948), Soviet ruler Nikita Khrushchev’s “Berlin Ultimatum” (1958) demanding the withdrawal of the other Allied powers from the city, and threats of war between Khrushchev and American president John F. Kennedy in Vienna (1961)¹ solidified Berlin as the battle ground of ideological warfare on both sides. When, on November 9th 1989, the border at the Berlin Wall was unexpectedly opened, Berliners on both sides rejoiced. Millions of *Ossis* (East Germans) flooded into Berlin to finally see the capitalist zone that had been so long forbidden to them.² Although the Wall was dismantled and official unification took place on October 3, 1990, the concrete Wall was replaced by an equally daunting psychological Wall, what Berlin writer Peter Schneider famously called the “Wall in the Head/*die Mauer im Kopf*.”³ Despite the trials of unification,⁴ Berlin once more became the focus of the world. Internally, the fall of the Wall heralded the longed-for unification of Germany; externally, it marked the end of the Cold War, and even for some, the symbolic end of the Twentieth Century.

In my thesis I will examine five films by former West German directors that use “Berlin”⁵ as both a setting and what Andreas Huyssen calls a “city text”⁶ for staging individual lives caught up in moments of historical crisis. Due to the centrality of post-war German history to the issues at stake, my opening chapter reprises the history of the post-war period leading up to the debates surrounding unification and after the fall of the Wall. My intention is to analyze the way these filmmakers use “Berlin” (both in its

divided and reunified incarnations) to work through the history of the Cold War and the new dilemmas for German identity that arose from the post-unification era.

My initial intention was to examine West German films from the post-unification period exclusively.⁷ However, in doing so I could not possibly leave out one of the most important recent films about Berlin: Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire/Himmel über Berlin* (1987). It is for this reason that my study of filmic representations of Berlin begins with the filming of *Wings of Desire* in 1986 and not with the fall of the Wall in 1989. However, in using Wenders's film I am able to provide a striking "before-and-after" portrait of the city. In Chapter 2, I will analyze both *Wings of Desire* and Wenders's 1993 revisiting of Berlin: *Faraway So Close/In weiter Ferne so nah!* In the first film, Wenders uses the site of Berlin to examine issues of memory and history that follow from the trauma of World War II. In comparing these two films with the same director, setting, and leading characters, I propose to ask questions about shifts that took place after the Wall fell, including changes in tone and relative optimism about unification itself. My third chapter locates Margarethe von Trotta's *The Promise/Das Versprechen* (1995) and Roland Suso Richter's *The Tunnel/Der Tunnel* (2001) within the context of a more recent German commercial cinema that has been called the "Cinema of Consensus." How are attempts to look at German identity and history hindered by marketplace constraints? What can be retrieved or salvaged in spite of commercial imperatives which include the dominance of popular genres and frameworks?

This last question is also addressed in my final chapter, which examines Wolfgang Becker's commercially and critically successful film *Good Bye Lenin!* (2002) in terms of the particularly dramatic identity crisis faced by East Germans after the

dissolution of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In reading the most internationally popular German film in recent history, I will grapple with the pervasive but paradoxical phenomenon of *Ostalgia*, the ongoing former East German fascination with the trappings of the old communist regime.

Throughout this study, I will return persistently to several questions. How does Berlin focus the ongoing history and memory of the Third Reich? How does this “city-text” focus the challenge of reuniting two disparate sets of Germans who have completely different memories of the previous forty years and of their part in the Second World War? Finally, how are the identity-problems raised by the “*Stunde Null*” (“Zero Hour”) of Germany post-1945 intensified by the new challenges of the post-unification era? Because my thesis crosses issue of history and representation, these questions are raised in relation to a number of specifically cinematic concerns (the category of auteur, formal issues, material categories of production and reception). Yet, I accord a different emphasis to these issues in relation to the most pressing questions suggested by my films. In instances where the filmmaker has a large body of work and retains control of the project (such as Wenders, who follows the *Autorenfilm* tradition set out by New German filmmakers in the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962⁸), I use an auteurist approach. At other times where conditions of production are more complicated (such as the films in Chapter Three) I rely less on the notion of the auteur and more on an analysis of the film industry. Because my analysis is informed centrally by the historical events in Germany both at the time of unification and in its aftermath, I begin with a chapter that deals with the debates and issues surrounding unification.

My primary sources are the films themselves, which, with the exception of the television movie, *The Tunnel*, were released theatrically in Germany. I viewed these films on VHS or DVD format with English subtitles.⁹ My secondary sources are critical writings on the films in books and essays and interviews. These are supplemented by a range of historical studies that provide a historical background to the films.¹⁰

Post-unification Berlin is a topic that attracts interest across a wide range of disciplines. In addition to the numerous historical and sociological studies of the city,¹¹ studies have been published on topics such as art in post-war Berlin,¹² graffiti on the Berlin Wall,¹³ architecture and the reconstruction of Berlin.¹⁴ Berlin is also the setting for a great deal of German literature,¹⁵ in the West most notably, in the divided period, Peter Schneider's *The Wall Jumper/Die Mauerspringer* (1982) and in the East Christa Wolf's *The Divided Heaven/Der geteilte Himmel* (1963). After the fall of the Wall, writers like Günter Grass, in his book *Too Far Afield/Ein weites Feld*, used the city to deal with issues of unification. Ernst Schürer's, Manfred Keune's, and Philip Jenkins's *The Berlin Wall: Representations and Perspectives* collects a wide range of essays on representations of Berlin and the Cold War in literature, theatre, and popular culture. Thomas R. Nadar's contribution, "The German-German Relationship in Popular Culture: Recent Literary, Musical, and Cinematic Views,"¹⁶ features a brief discussion of partition era West German films. Film scholars have dealt with Berlin as well. In his introduction to the catalogue of the DEFA film library's¹⁷ touring film series: *Berlin, Divided Heaven: From the Ice Age to the Thaw*, Barton Byg provides a brief overview of the history of Berlin films from the early cinema experiments by the Skladanowsky brothers (1895) to post-unification films by former East Berliners.¹⁸ Byg provides excellent background on

the history of film representation of Berlin, particularly of films from the partition era from the East side of the Berlin Wall. In “Rebels with a cause: The development of the ‘*Berlin-Filme*’ by Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase,” Horst Claus details the uniquely East German “*Berlin-Filme*,” which borrows a gritty realist sensibility from Italian Neo-Realism in its portrayal of young East Berliners.¹⁹ Numerous other articles about cinematic Berlin and film exist that are tied to specific films, such as Wim Wenders’s *Wings of Desire* or Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin Symphony of a Great City/ Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) or, for post-unification film, *Sonnenallee* by Leander Haussmann.

In terms of general film scholarship on post-unification film, an important work that informs my project is Eric Rentschler’s “From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus.” This work charts the evolution of German cinema from the political and art cinema movement known as the New German Cinema of the 1970s to the more commercial and mainstream films of the late 80s and the 90s. Additionally, several recent English language studies of German film feature chapters on post-unification film.²⁰ Sabine Hake’s *German National Film* provides a good overview of the debates and films of the post-unification period. Randall Halle’s and Margaret McCarthy’s collection *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective* includes chapters on both contemporary film’s use of history and the re-emergence of genre in post-unification film.²¹ Tim Bergfelder, Eric Carter’s, and Deniz Göktük’s collection *The German Cinema Book* includes essays on the star in 1990s German film and the tradition of the *Autorenfilm*.²² Leonie Naughton’s book *That Was the Wild East* examines films about unification by both former East and West Germans, with a slight bias towards East

German film. Naughton has superb analysis of trends and stereotypes of the *Ossi* (East German) in post-unification western German film which informs my analysis of many of the films. None of these works focus specifically on films that use Berlin as a site for examination of the challenges of unification.²³ My thesis seeks to bring together the rich material both on cinematic Berlin and on post-unification film.

Wim Wenders has said that Berlin is “*the only* German city.”²⁴ While such a claim may be an exaggeration, Berlin was certainly the epicentre of both Cold War Germany and also the rapid unification of the country. While the films have different aims, and even intended audiences, they all deal with the way Berlin focuses post-war and post-unification German history. They confirm that this city which merges past and present is an ongoing site for reading the turbulent drama of German memory and identity.

Notes

¹ Pól O'Dochartaigh, *Germany Since 1945* (Houndsmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 30–32, 66–67.

² O'Dochartaigh writes, “4.3 million visas were issued to GDR citizens, while many thousands more crossed without a visa” (189).

³ See Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, translated by Leigh Hafrey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁴ There is much debate as to whether the term “unification” or “reunification” should be used for the events of 1989–1990 in Germany. I have chosen “unification” because the country that was united in 1990 is quite different geographically from the German empire that was created in the unification of 1871.

⁵ By putting Berlin in quotation marks, I acknowledge that Berlin is both a material and historical site and a locus of representation: a “city-text.”

⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 49.

⁷ Because I have chosen to focus on films by former West Germans, I am bracketing the important cinematic contributions of former East Germans. These contributions have been noted by scholars such as Leonie Naughton in her book *That Was the Wild East* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) as well as the tireless efforts of Barton Byg's German department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst which specialises in pre- and post-Wall East German cinema. Ongoing work along the lines of my current thesis would take the shape of the following questions: Are East German concerns met by these films from *Wessi* (West German) perspectives? What issues are not dealt with by West German filmmakers? These

questions could only be asked, and answered, within a fuller study that includes research around both the production and reception of post-unification films.

⁸ "The Oberhausen Manifesto (1962)," reprinted in *New German Cinema*, University of Victoria Germanic and Russian Studies homepage, <http://web.uvic.ca/geru/439/oberhausen.html>, accessed July 27, 2005.

⁹ While I have begun to learn German, I do not have sufficient grasp of the language to do away entirely with subtitles. Therefore, all quotations from the films are taken from the translated subtitles.

¹⁰ My sources are almost exclusively in English. As there is a rich tradition of writing about German film in English across the disciplines of history, film studies and departments of German literature, there is a wealth of critical commentary. Detailed studies of production and reception would clearly depend on German language sources. There is, of course, a large body of critical work on Wenders, who has worked in the United States on and off since 1982.

¹¹ My first chapter features a more complete review of the historical literature on Berlin and unification.

¹² For example, see Kynaston McShine, ed., *Berlinart 1961[-]1987* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1987).

¹³ See Hermann Waldenburg, *The Berlin Wall Book* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990).

¹⁴ See Elizabeth Strom, *Building the New Berlin* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001) and Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Most famously for the followers of New German Cinema, Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which was adapted by Rainer Werner Fassbinder for a television film.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Nadar, "The German-German Relationship in Popular Culture: Recent Literary, Musical, and Cinematic Views," in *The Berlin Wall: Representations and Perspectives*, edited by Ernst Schürer, Manfred Keune, and Philip Jenkins (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 250–255.

¹⁷ The University of Massachusetts, Amherst houses a nearly complete library of films from Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA), East Germany's state run film production company.

¹⁸ Barton Byg, "The Berlin Film," <http://www.umass.edu/defa/filmtour/essay.shtml>, accessed September 22, 2004.

¹⁹ Horst Claus, "Rebels with a cause: The development of the 'Berlin-Filme' by Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase," in *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946-1992* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 93–116. Films by Klein and Kohlhaase such as *Berlin – Schönhauser Corner/ Berlin – Schönhauser Ecke* (1957) and *A Berlin Romance/ Berliner Romanze* (1956) exemplify this sub-genre.

²⁰ The following review of literature is only partial as my first chapter acts as a review of the important writing about unification and the many debates staged in Germany in late 1989 to early 1990.

²¹ Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy, eds., *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

²² Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk, eds., *The German Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2002).

²³ While my thesis deals with post-unification film, it is informed by the canonical critical works on the New German Cinema, all of which end their analysis in the mid-80s. Critics like Thomas Elsaesser (*New German Cinema* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989]), Anton Kaes (*From Hitler to Heimat* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989]), Timothy Corrigan (*New German Film* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994]), and Eric Rentschler (*West German Cinema in the Course of Time* [New York: Redgrave, 1984] and *German Film and Literature* [New York: Routledge, 1986]) deal with the traditions and obsessions of the post-war generation of filmmakers.

²⁴ Quoted in Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy: An Interview with Wim Wenders," *Cineaste* 16, no. 4 (1988): 14.

“The Wall in the Head”: A Brief Introduction

Even before the infamous 13th of August, 1961, when East German border guards began the construction of the Wall, Berlin stood at the centre of the Cold War. Events such as the Berlin Airlift (1948), Soviet ruler Nikita Khrushchev’s “Berlin Ultimatum” (1958) demanding the withdrawal of the other Allied powers from the city, and threats of war between Khrushchev and American president John F. Kennedy in Vienna (1961)¹ solidified Berlin as the battle ground of ideological warfare on both sides. When, on November 9th 1989, the border at the Berlin Wall was unexpectedly opened, Berliners on both sides rejoiced. Millions of *Ossis* (East Germans) flooded into Berlin to finally see the capitalist zone that had been so long forbidden to them.² Although the Wall was dismantled and official unification took place on October 3, 1990, the concrete Wall was replaced by an equally daunting psychological Wall, what Berlin writer Peter Schneider famously called the “Wall in the Head/*die Mauer im Kopf*.”³ Despite the trials of unification,⁴ Berlin once more became the focus of the world. Internally, the fall of the Wall heralded the longed-for unification of Germany; externally, it marked the end of the Cold War, and even for some, the symbolic end of the Twentieth Century.

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by the old Wall which has disappeared so completely that “even native Berliners can’t exactly say where it used to stand. [...] Only the Wall-dogs move as if tethered by an unseen leash, with absolute certainty, following the old border along its wild zigzags though the city – just as though they were looking for, or maybe missing something.”⁶

Schneider’s anecdote neatly encapsulates many of the major issues of the unification debate. In a whimsical way it stages issues about the speed of unification, which led to unemployment, distrust, and inequity between former East and West Germans. It represents a violent German history which the East denies and the West has learned to acknowledge, however belatedly. Yet Schneider also demonstrates his West German bias in this story. The guard dogs are portrayed as simple and slightly incompetent, recalling the popular stereotypes of inefficient East Germans and their crumbling infrastructure. And, finally, the dogs – who seemed in need of rescue by their West German countrymen – instinctively long for the routine of their old lives.

November 9th of 1989⁷ marked the date of an historical occurrence that would have been unthinkable only a few short months before: the Berlin Wall was opened. The dismantling of the Wall and the reunification of Germany followed swiftly after, in a series of momentous events. Yet, although the collapse of the socialist East German state and ensuing unification with West Germany brought initial celebration, the long term effects proved to be more problematic. One of the immediate results of the turmoil was a vigorous debate about the very future of Germany.

The city of Berlin was, and remains, of special significance in this tumultuous unification process. As the cultural and political capital first of the German Empire, then of the Weimar Republic, then of the Third Reich, Berlin had known many faces in

history. While in the Weimar period it was a hotbed of creativity and, some argued, decadence, it became the centre of the murderous National Socialist regime. After the Second World War, Cold War Berlin was home to the ninety-seven-mile-long “*Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (anti-fascist protection dike)”⁸ or the “most obvious and vivid demonstration of the failures of the Communist system,”⁹ depending on whom you asked. The Wall that encircled West Berlin was designed, from the start, to keep East Germans in more than West Germans out. Both the communist¹⁰ and the capitalist sides of the city acted as showcases for their respective governments. West Berlin stood in defiance of the communist power all around it; money was pumped into the city so that it could survive as an outpost of capitalism.¹¹ East Berlin was also a point of exit for many frustrated East Germans, and thus the Wall needed to be guarded. It was most appropriate, then, that the opening of the Berlin Wall would become emblematic of the entire process leading up to unification.

In order to comprehend the significance of the fall of the Wall and to contextualize the films discussed in my thesis, it is necessary to explain something of the history of Germany’s post-war division in 1945 and then unification in 1990. In this chapter I will briefly convey some of the important debates and issues that surrounded unification in general. I will conclude by examining the complex and multi-layered effects of unification in Berlin. Given the intense relationship between private and public events in the internationally acclaimed New German Cinema of the post-war period (peaking in the 1970s and 1980s), it seems productive to look at the way in which German history is newly represented in the changing climate of West German post-unification cinema. I can think of no better place to start in examining key films which

use Berlin as both a setting for action and a locus for thematizing contemporary historical issues in the aftermath – with one notable exception – of unification.

Although the events leading up to the partition of Germany after the Second World War are well known, I want to rehearse them here to remind us of the centrality of Berlin in the second half of the Twentieth Century. As a result of the Allied victory, Germany was divided into sections between the four Allied powers: the Soviet Union, England, France, and the United States.¹² In the Allied zones, Germany was also divided into states (or *Länder*) and these *Länder* governments were given strong controls over their territories in an attempt to avoid the powerful centralized government that existed in pre-war Germany.¹³ In May of 1949 the western sector created a constitution and West Germany or the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)/ *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (BRD) was born.¹⁴ In October of the same year the Soviets granted their sector relative autonomy and it became East Germany or *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR)/ German Democratic Republic (GDR).¹⁵

Due to the Allied partition of Germany, Berlin, the country's capital, was located completely in the Soviet controlled Eastern zone. It was, however, considered such an important city that it, too, was divided into four zones. Thus, one part was Soviet controlled and the other three parts were controlled by the Allies.¹⁶ Until 1961 there was no physical structure or barrier separating the two areas of control in Berlin, which meant it was relatively easy to cross between East and West Germany.¹⁷ However, mass emmigration of skilled labourers and professionals to the capitalist West so weakened the East German state that on August 12, 1961 the Soviets began construction on a wall in Berlin that surrounded the western part of the city and thus separated the two sectors.¹⁸

The Wall made emmigration from East Berlin almost impossible. It also resulted in the deaths of, by some estimates, 200 would-be escapees, as border guards were instructed to shoot at anyone attempting to scale the Wall.¹⁹

On a deeper level, the building of the Wall helped to create what were already diverging identities of the people on either side. It sedimented the former Germans' new roles as *Ossis* (East Germans) and *Wessis* (West Germans), experienced nowhere more dramatically than in Berlin, itself. Although the Wall divided friends, families, and even lovers throughout Germany, two very separate societies grew up on either side of, in many cases, the same street in Berlin. Streets such as *Sonnenallee* were divided in two, leaving roads that came to an abrupt halt at the Wall. From the start, then, Berlin was both the material and symbolic embodiment of the Cold-War divide, a dual role that is central to the films I will discuss in this thesis.

German identities forged since the creation of the Nation state (under Bismarck in 1871)²⁰ were now fractured into two very separate national subject formations. Not only was one society socialist and the other capitalist but each side had different stories and memories of their shared past. Thus, "each nation formulated its own history and refuted its neighbour's version of the past."²¹ For example, officially, the FRG "saw itself, in legal terms, as the successor to the Third Reich."²² Yet, although the Republic was responsible for dealing with issues such as paying war reparations and conducting a process of de-Nazification,²³ a fuller reckoning would be delayed for at least two decades. West Germany had, in fact, entered a state of *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour) following the defeat, a new beginning for Germans; their history would start in 1945 and they would not speak of the events of the war.²⁴ Yet this history and memory gone

underground would eventually re-emerge. In 1967 Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich published a study that influenced many intellectuals and artists in West Germany. Their book *The Inability to Mourn* examined in psychoanalytic terms the lack of any serious emotional attempts to deal with the violent German past of the Third Reich.²⁵ The Mitscherlichs were struck by the fact that West Germany had not fallen into a deep depression when they lost not only the war but their *Führer* and father-figure, who had seduced the country and led them for the past twelve years.²⁶ The Mitscherlichs argued that when Hitler was exposed as a horrific criminal, the self-image of Germans was damaged collectively, a process in which “the ego of every single German individual suffered a central devaluation and impoverishment. This creates at least the prerequisites for a melancholic reaction.”²⁷ As Eric L. Santner explains, the Mitscherlichs rely on Freud’s conception of mourning and melancholy. Whereas mourning is the grieving for a lost love object that is separate and distinct from the ego, melancholy occurs when one grieves for the loss of something or someone that was not completely separated from the ego.²⁸ The Mitscherlichs maintained that this grieving process never took place; Germans had “managed to avoid self-devaluation by breaking all affective bridges to the immediate past,” thus preventing “a loss of self-esteem that could hardly have been mastered, and a consequent outbreak of melancholia in innumerable cases.”²⁹ Santner explains that these defences included “derealization of the past, the sudden and radical shift of (narcissistic) identifications with Hitler to the democratic allies, and finally, identification with the victim.”³⁰

While Margarete Mitscherlich later argued that the second and third post war German generations also lacked the ability to mourn, because their parents had so

fervently denied responsibility,³¹ there were attempts by some Germans, especially academics and artists, to begin the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastering the past).³² This process was continued through the student protest movements of the late Sixties, several high profile trials of Nazis such as Eichmann in Jerusalem (1960-61), or the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt a.M. (1963-1965). Then, with the birth of the New German Cinema movement whose filmmakers were obsessed with the moral as well as historical effects and residue of the Second World War,³³ West Germany gradually came to acknowledge officially its crimes during the Second World War.³⁴ However, the way that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was to be achieved was contentious in West Germany up until the fall of the Wall when, as I will suggest, the issue became even more complicated. As Charles S. Maier suggests, in *The Unmasterable Past* (1988), several controversies in the 1980s – such as then American President Ronald Reagan’s 1984 visit to the cemetery in Bitburg, where several *Waffen Schutzstaffel* (SS) troops were buried – confirmed that issues of German memory were far from resolved. The contentious museum debates of the 1980s also questioned the role of history and responsibility in German identity formation.³⁵

East Germany’s way of dealing with the trauma of the Hitler era took a decidedly different turn. After an intensive de-Nazification process that saw trials, imprisonment, and even executions of war criminals, as well as the repossession of land belonging to alleged Nazis, party officials were put in all places of authority.³⁶ Official state policy maintained that “the imposition of a socialist order in the GDR had opened the eyes of citizens to their previous mistakes and removed at one stroke all preconditions for a fascist revival.”³⁷ The end of the war was portrayed as a liberation by the Soviets, as

opposed to a surrender and defeat.³⁸ Thus the government instituted an official policy of denial.³⁹ East Germans, the ruling Socialist Unity party, or SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) argued, were anti-National Socialist freedom fighters, not Nazis.⁴⁰ Thus, the same soul searching about culpability for the war did not occur in East Germany.⁴¹ It was a gap in historical memory that would pose a significant problem post-unification.

The two Germanies remained divided for the better part of forty years. Berlin, with its infamous Wall, became a key symbol of this division. In 1982 West Berlin writer Peter Schneider published *The Wall-Jumper*, a fictionalized account of life in Berlin, which challenged the widespread idea of an unproblematic desire for unity, symbolized by the destruction of the Wall. “Once the initial panic died,” he writes, “the massive structure faded increasingly to a metaphor in the West German consciousness.”⁴² Schneider coins the term “*die Mauer im Kopf*” the Wall in the Head” to figure the complex phenomenon that would haunt the post-unification era: both halves of the former country of Germany (and even the city of Berlin) had internalized their country’s ideology to such an extent that, were they to unite, they would be forced to confront massive differences. Maier confirmed that West Germans “entertain no concepts for substantive German reunification,”⁴³ and no desire to return to the strong nationalist (and ultimately destructive) fervour of the Third Reich in spite of “a wider regret for a wider German community and concern about the other side of the Wall.”⁴⁴ Schneider’s novel suggested that although officially the Bonn government was committed to fight the “spectre of communism,” in reality, “they too have long since become used to the sight [of the Wall]; now they pretend to be alarmed only on holidays.”⁴⁵

However, East Germans were not so nonchalant about the partition of Germany and the dictatorship they had to endure since they often faced surveillance and restriction of movement in their everyday lives. It is estimated that as many as one in six-and-a-half East Germans were connected with the secret police force, the *Staatssicherheitsdienst* or *Stasi*.⁴⁶ Careers were destroyed, families were separated, and East Germans were tortured and killed in prisons for disobeying or even questioning the regime.⁴⁷ In 1989 massive protest movements against the totalitarian regime, coupled with growing freedom in the Soviet empire (as a result of Gorbachev's *Glasnost* policy), led to the fall of the East German government. A popular uprising with very little violence had succeeded in changing the government. However, German unification was far from a certainty in 1989. As Stephen Brockmann explains, "Particularly on the left, but also on the right, there was a consensus that détente, a policy of 'tiny steps,' cooperation, and mutual respect were the best policy toward a GDR that simply would not go away."⁴⁸ When unification did become an inevitability, there was a great deal of debate among German thinkers as to how and even *if* it should be accomplished. In "The Long Good-bye: German Culture Wars in the Nineties," historian Michael Geyer explains that unification started a great many debates about the future of Germany. These debates, coming from both the right and left, ranged from "the responsibility of intellectuals, xenophobia and multiculturalism, the culture of memory and German national identity, the out-of-area use of the *Bundeswehr* [The German army], globalization and industrial competitiveness, unemployment and the welfare state, to issues of citizenship."⁴⁹

West German official discourse was one of optimism, summed up by former Chancellor and mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt: "What belongs together can now once

again grow together.”⁵⁰ Many politicians portrayed German history in teleological terms, envisioning all the events of the last forty years as leading up to the final reunification of Germany. Helmut Kohl, West German chancellor and later first chancellor of the united Germany, waxed poetic about the “flourishing landscapes” that would result from unification, promising that, in spite of anticipated problems, “no one would be hurt economically by unification and that no extra sacrifices would have to be made.”⁵¹

The right saw unification as a chance for Germany to “become a wholly normal country” that would “start anew both as an emphatically sovereign nation and as a distinct national culture.”⁵² This new start, according to Geyer, would manifest itself in several ways: a return to a position of power while not fearing positions of ‘strength’, “a more active and self interested stance in Europe,”⁵³ a re-examination of Germany’s commitments to other countries (especially the USA), a reworking of the asylum and immigration laws, and an end to what the right called the “overly moral culture of contrition.”⁵⁴ In fact, the most extreme of the right wing thinkers wanted to “undo the memory culture of the FRG” altogether.⁵⁵ Karl Heinz Bohrer argued that “German intellectuals have lost the concept of nation and consider a kind of colonized consciousness to be advanced political rationality.”⁵⁶ Bohrer argued that the majority of ordinary East Germans supported and longed for unification, while the intellectuals resisted it.⁵⁷

Geyer recounts how much moderate right analyses were hijacked by radical right fanatics whose xenophobia and outright racist tendencies caused many of these debates to veer too close to the rampant nationalism of the pre-war era. While many Germans

agreed that a stronger sense of nationalism was needed, they wanted to avoid the “Germany for Germans” rhetoric that many extreme rightists espoused.

Many left wing intellectuals in the West were equally critical of unification, however. Günter Grass argued “that because of Auschwitz Germans did not have a right to a unified national state.”⁵⁸ Grass also sided with East Germans who feared that “the only agenda [of the West] remaining was annexation, which was not allowed to be called annexation.”⁵⁹ He was also wary of the negative economic results for East Germans, as “the onslaught of the D-Mark in the GDR confronts an unprepared economy and a population totally ignorant of the malice and advantages of the market economy.”⁶⁰ While Grass comes problematically close to simplifying life in the East, he was concerned with the effects of a rapid transformation from socialism to capitalism, pointing out that the mass movement of East Germans to the West on shopping trips left the eastern economy in ruins.⁶¹ Grass also feared that the inevitable economic hardships experience by former East Germans would lead to unemployment and resentment which would, in turn, fuel racism. In the end, he predicted, “the only place where we might expect growth is [...] in German right-wing radicalism.”⁶² When unification became inevitable, Grass pleaded for the pace to be slowed down, so that Germans could think their way through the process.⁶³ While he was criticized widely by other thinkers for his views (Bohrer, Huyssen, etc.), Grass remained a staunch critic of unification.

Jürgen Habermas, in turn, was concerned with how building a unified Germany could be accomplished without resorting to the dangerous nationalistic appeals to German identity that Hitler used. To this end, he examined the ways unification would affect the on-going process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. While still critical of the

West German attitude to the Nazi past, he felt that the East had an even worse track record, arguing explicitly that the “East hasn’t worked off the past as well or thoroughly as the West.”⁶⁴ He insisted that there were important differences between the Nazi and *Stasi* pasts. These differences related to the magnitude of the human rights abuses, the length of the regimes, and the differences in ideological backgrounds.⁶⁵ While the Nazis were “widely supported” nationally, East Germans had socialism “imported by conquerors and adopted by the population.”⁶⁶ The only common denominator was that they were both dictatorships. He explained that “the working off of a double *past* – made necessary by the GDR’s Stalinist legacy – is for the time being possible only in a double perspective.”⁶⁷ Unlike Grass, Habermas was not against unification, *per se*, but he felt that an opportunity to re-think and create an ideal democracy was being wasted by a failure to deal with the inevitable problems that a unified Germany would face.

A large and vocal number of former East and West Germans were even more cautious than Habermas. They called for “the independence and sovereignty of the GDR and the salvation of the idea of a ‘third path’ which would, for the time, realise the ideal of democratic socialism.”⁶⁸ Another problem for East German intellectuals was the spectre of past collaboration with the *Stasi*. This concern came to a head with some reviews of a novella by East German writer Christa Wolf published in the early 1990s. “*Was bleibt?* / What Remains?” charts Wolf’s anguish and loss of self while being under *Stasi* surveillance. Critics attacked Wolf’s text and Wolf herself on the grounds that she had been a privileged member of the GDR. Wolf wanted to have it both ways, they argued, “to be a privileged citizen of the GDR able, unlike other citizens, to travel all

over the world, and nevertheless to earn the reputation of being a ‘dissident,’ a critic of the regime.”⁶⁹

Yet, as anthropologist John Borneman reminds us, not all of the issues surrounding unification were of a lofty moral nature:

The initial response of most East Germans to the opening of the Wall – a meeting with the Other that was a resurrection of the repressed past – was not challenge but flight, away from murderous pasts and uncertain futures into a consumer’s fleeting and slightly drunken present. It is as though the pressure of *Dasein*, of history made vivid, of responsibility, were too much. Since the Wall opened the East Germans have continually evaded the consequences of that historic rupture, and instead have sought refuge in idealized hopes and incessant shopping sprees.⁷⁰

The unification debate on both sides of Germany resulted in a crisis in the intellectual community, especially among academics to the left of the political spectrum. Andreas Huyssen argues that, “East and West, the rhetoric and behaviour of German intellectuals seemed mostly out of step with events. It lacked sovereignty, perspective, and compassion.”⁷¹ It was also, Huyssen suggests, at odds with the views and experience of average citizens. When unification was negotiated in 1990, it was done by “ministerial bureaucrats behind closed doors,” which in turn led the media to comment on the failure of the intellectuals.⁷² It could not help but be noticed that “the voices that had been very prominent in the debate about unification had fallen strangely silent after the March elections.”⁷³ As the *Stasi* files were opened and citizens of the East began to talk about the past it was revealed that many intellectuals had been complicit with the *Stasi*, a

phenomenon crystallized by the Christa Wolf affair. Huyssen concludes his 1991 essay “The Failure of German Intellectuals” with the following challenge: “It is now up to the intellectuals – writers and artists, philosophers, social and political thinkers – to adapt themselves to the new terrain.”⁷⁴

When on October 3rd 1990⁷⁵ unification became a reality,⁷⁶ “the only thing all sides could agree on was that the pace of events was breath-taking.”⁷⁷ As Stephen Brockmann observes, “On October 7, 1989, the GDR had celebrated its fortieth anniversary [...]; less than a year later, the Zero Hour came at precisely midnight between October 2 and 3, when literally, from one second to another, all of Germany, including Berlin, became unified.”⁷⁸ When East Germany was basically subsumed into the West, it became a capitalist country virtually overnight, with disastrous results for eastern German industry.⁷⁹

Indeed, factory closures cost many East Germans their jobs. Thus, the economic disparity between East and West grew. In fact, in the mid 1990s, the average income of former East Germans was 60% to 70% of the income of former West Germans.⁸⁰ As a result of these financial woes a great deal of money was pumped into eastern Germany from the west, leading, in turn, to resentment by former *Wessis* who were propping up their fellow *Ossis* with their own tax dollars.⁸¹ Yet, there was another side to the story, one that will turn up in the final chapter of this thesis on Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye Lenin!* What was the cost of identity formation in a united Germany for those in the East who had become accustomed to a centralized state apparatus, with its pervasive ideology as well as social support system? Some of the problems were eased by the reciprocal accommodations of the unification process:

The German welfare state was also imported wholesale. In a way, this was the grand bargain of unification: people were happy to be colonised as long as money kept coming. But taken with promises such as Mr. Kohl's 'flourishing landscapes', this continuation of the old East Germany by other means slowed down a necessary change in mentality – as the state continued to take care of things.⁸²

Among the industries privatized were cultural industries like GDR television or DEFA, the state-run film industry, leading to feelings among *Ossis* that their culture was being taken from them.⁸³ This background is, in fact, integral to understanding the hegemony of the West German perspective in cultural industries, including those films I have chosen to read in this thesis.

Günter Grass's predictions also turned out to be all-too prescient. Racist skinheads exploited the rampant unhappiness in the east and blamed foreigners. There were several ugly episodes such as the one in Rostock, where a group of racist skinheads burned a building that housed refugees while many bystanders stood and cheered. The police did nothing except arrest anti-racist demonstrators "to avoid possible escalation."⁸⁴ There was also an overall rise in racist violence against the Turkish and Vietnamese "guest workers" which tragically resulted in seventeen deaths in 1992.⁸⁵ This horrific violence provoked mass protest in Germany while the government issued severe punishments to the perpetrators of the hate crimes. On the other hand, the generous asylum laws which allowed those fleeing persecution to come to Germany (a legacy from the reconstruction era and a point of personal pride for many West German leftists) were scaled back.⁸⁶

If there was discord between Germans and foreigners, the chasm between eastern Germans and western Germans was even greater. In fact, fifteen years after unification many westerners have still never been to the east, and vice versa. In Berlin (where East and West are much closer) only 7% of former West Germans and 10% of East Germans were willing to move to the other side.⁸⁷ Both sides still hold stereotypes about their fellow compatriots. *Ossis* see their western neighbours as conquerors and grasping capitalists, whereas *Wessis* see their eastern neighbours as lazy and freeloaders.⁸⁸ But there are more complicated stereotypes in the idealizing and sometimes infantilizing discourses of western intellectuals about the former East Germany and its citizens, summed up at times in a gendered narrative in which the West is male and the East is female, testimony to the fact that myths as much as material realities are at stake in the unification process.⁸⁹

Fifteen years later the cracks in unification, intensified by the speed of the process, have become all too apparent.⁹⁰ Though the former East Germany is still struggling economically and social tensions continue to grow, few *Ossis* wish to return to communism; it is, in fact, the *Wessis* who had to pay for the transitions with raised taxes, who are more likely to miss the partition. According to a survey by Forsa, a German pollster, “24% of western Germans believe that it would be better if the Berlin Wall were still up (against only 12% in the east).”⁹¹ This summary helps to contextualize many of the phenomena I note in the films that follow: the more sombre mood of Wenders’s post-war Berlin angel film, but also the simplistic binaries of East and West in the unification films from the Cinema of Consensus, and finally the attempts to bring together two divergent memory sets in *Good Bye Lenin!*

Paradoxically, in light of the poll highlighting the *Ossi/Wessi* divide, is one phenomenon that has sprung up in the East in response to the challenges and disappointments of unification. It is a nostalgic yearning for the security of the old GDR. This feeling has been dubbed “*Ostalgia*” a phenomenon I will foreground in my discussion of Wolfgang Becker’s *Goodbye Lenin!* It manifests itself in everything from interest in paraphernalia of the old regime to wishing a return to the communist government. Andreas Huyssen differentiates between two different types of this *Ostalgia*. He argues that one form, “a nostalgia of despair,” is motivated by “massive unemployment and imminent poverty,” consisting of those who “mourn the loss of former security without wanting the old system back.”⁹² The other form of *Ostalgia*, Huyssen argues, comes from left intellectuals who believe that compared to the FRG “the GDR was the better starting ramp for a democratic socialist society in the future.”⁹³ However, Huyssen is critical of these leftists and portrays them as slightly naïve. The process of unification is still an on-going one in Germany. Wolf Lepenies argues,

Only Germans born after October 1990 will be united, not only in the sense that they will have comparable opportunities in life, but also the sense that there will be an increasing correspondence in their life situation which includes a common outlook on the future as well as a shared historical identity.”⁹⁴

Clearly, while most of Germany has faced challenges in dealing with unification, no city was quite as changed *both* physically and emotionally as Berlin, itself both the mirror and microcosm of the larger German situation. Uniquely, up until the building of the Wall, Berliners had daily contact with their eastern/western neighbours. When the Wall was erected, it, therefore, entered into Berliners’ daily lives as a material as well as

symbolic barrier. In the same way, Berlin was figuratively pre-eminent once again as the capital of the new Germany. As John Borneman argues

To be in Berlin, East or West, is to feel oneself in some way central. Berlin now lies gratuitously in the center of a new 'common European house', to borrow the words of Gorbachev. [...] Berlin, containing both East and West, is now very much center stage, the Ur-metropole – mother to a new European polis.⁹⁵

Urban planner Elizabeth Strom argues that there are three “interrelated stories” in the unification and reconstruction of Berlin.⁹⁶ First of all, because the seat of German government was moved to Berlin, the once contested combat zone, it must relearn to become not only a proper German city, but once again the capital city.⁹⁷ Secondly, because much of Berlin’s centre lies in the former East, developers must deal with issues of who owns the land while simultaneously replacing, restoring, and acknowledging the old trappings of socialism, so as to properly deal with the past.⁹⁸ Thirdly, as Berlin struggles to become a major European city centre, it must become a major centre for business, culture, and politics but also maintain its German identity without raising the spectre of past transgressions.⁹⁹

Borneman notes that the differences between Berlin and other parts of Germany were conspicuous even in the results from the very first election of the unified Germany where Berlin voted more towards the left of the political spectrum than the rest of East Germany. One factor here was undoubtedly the location of the civil service, but Borneman cites two other factors that made East Berlin different: its exposure to the West and other European intellectuals, but also the fact that

the old regime had favoured Berlin in renovation, construction, and consumer goods. Berliners had it much better than others in the GDR and they did not feel the urgency of reform as did workers in Suhl or Karl-Marx-Stadt or Leipzig or Halle, where the air stinks and the water is poisoned, where the buildings are collapsing and the industries are producing at a great loss.”¹⁰⁰

Despite the fact that proximity minimized stereotypes in Berlin, it did not destroy them completely. In “The Banana and the *Trabant*: Representations of the ‘Other’ in a United Germany” Mary Beth Stein explains how unification challenged the identities of both *Ossis* and *Wessis*, particularly in the close contact zone of Berlin. Stein cites writer Peter Schneider’s statement that the destruction of the internal wall “will take us longer ... than any wrecking company will need for the wall we see.”¹⁰¹ Stein argues that “for forty years the two German states had been spatially demarcated and conceptually defined vis-à-vis the Other; each state required the existence of the Other against which its own identity was constructed and legitimated.”¹⁰² Once the actual as well as symbolic wall between the two Germanys came down individuals felt their identity threatened. As Stein argues, “The arrival of the Other German upset essentialized categories of East/West; us/them; here/there; order/disorder that the Wall had seemed to contain and by which it so conveniently defined postwar German experience and identity.”¹⁰³

This identity was constructed even through the telling of jokes, particularly those told by *Wessis* about *Ossis*.¹⁰⁴ The culture of joke telling, Stein explains, “served to reconstruct the cognitive and symbolic distance between East and West.”¹⁰⁵ She argues that the main symbols of the East and West were the *Trabant* and the banana respectively.¹⁰⁶ The *Trabant* was a poor quality car that nevertheless was a luxury item

because it took so long for a citizen of the GDR to acquire one. Stein explains, “More than any other object, [the *Trabant* or *Trabi*] facilitated and represented the arrival of the East German.”¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, the banana was a symbol of the richness of the West. Many East Germans bought bananas when they first ventured to the West because “the vitamin-rich fruit represented a diet and standard of living superior to that in the East.”¹⁰⁸ Many jokes about *Ossis* centred on either their love of bananas or their inferior *Trabants*, but these jokes also served the function of re-building an imaginary wall.

Stein’s analysis provides a helpful framework for looking at films that, arguably, stabilize this old East/West divide, notably those more commercial films examined in chapter 3, which Eric Rentschler labels the Cinema of Consensus. To what extent, then, are their shortcomings traceable to a need to assert old identities of *Wessi* against an Other: the *Ossi*?

Berlin has been the epicentre of some of the most turbulent events of the Twentieth Century. As the symbolic marker of the Cold War era, its place in a reunified Germany reflected a utopian promise that was bound to disappoint. The massive differences between the two halves of Germany, combined with the break-neck speed with which the unification process took place, created momentous challenges. Within the larger unification of Germany, Berlin makes a fascinating case study for the difficulties of unifying two separate states after forty years. While Berlin’s experience does not reflect the concerns and issues of many Germans who are far removed from their eastern or western compatriots, it is a distilled and intensified version of the issues of unification. Berlin remains a city full of contradictions where the strains and challenges of unification are both less and more acutely felt. It is not surprising, then, that in the West German

cinema that stages the dream of unification as well as the more sober reality of post-unification, Berlin is a setting. Given its charged place in a turbulent national history, however, it is equally clear that Berlin is less a locus for events than a place name for an ongoing struggle of nation and identity.

Notes

¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 48.

² Leonie Naughton, *That was the Wild East*, 12–13.

³ Peter Schneider, “Of Dogs and Germans,” in *The German Comedy: Scenes of Life After the Wall*, translated by Philip Boehm and Leigh Hafrey (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1991), 207–208.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁷ As I will discuss, the history of the Second World War continues to haunt present day Germany. For example, November 9th was also the date of the infamous *Kristallnacht* when the Nazis vandalized synagogues and terrorized Berlin’s Jewish population.

⁸ “The Berlin Wall,” *German Unification Case Study*, Foothill College, <http://www.foothill.fhda.edu/divisions/unification/wall.html>, accessed April 15, 2005.

⁹ John F. Kennedy, “John F. Kennedy: ‘Ich bin ein Berliner’ (‘I am a “Berliner””),” *Top American Speeches: Online Speechbank*, 2001–2005, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkichbineinberliner.html>, accessed July 9, 2005.

¹⁰ There is a great deal of debate as to whether East Germany was a true communist or socialist state (See Peter Schneider, “Some People Can Sleep Through an Earthquake,” in *The Germany Comedy*, 66–91). Many socialists maintain it was neither, that it was perverted by Stalin’s totalitarianism. However, for the sake of brevity I will use socialism or communism to describe the ideology and government structure in the GDR.

¹¹ John Ardagh, *Germany and the Germans*, Third Edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19–20.

¹³ J. K. A. Thomaneck and Bill Niven, *Dividing and Uniting Germany* (London: Routledge, 2001), 13.

¹⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 211.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶ John Ardagh, *Germany and the Germans*, 20.

¹⁷ Until 1961, many Berliners worked in the Western sector and lived in the East, or vice versa. According to Dana Ranga’s documentary *East Side Story*, many Easterners would go to the West for entertainment, especially to see Hollywood films, causing the East German film industry to suffer.

¹⁸ Thomaneck and Niven, *Dividing and Uniting Germany*, 39.

¹⁹ Heiko Burkhardt, “Berlin Wall History: Escape Attempts to the West,” *The Berlin Wall Online*, 1997, <http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/history/escape.htm>, accessed April 15, 2005.

²⁰ Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 125.

²¹ Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, 12.

²² Stuart Parkes, *Understanding Contemporary Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997), 47.

²³ Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 206–208.

²⁴ Ardagh, *Germany and the Germans*, 19.

- ²⁵ Eric L. Santner, "Postwar/Post-Holocaust/Postmodern: Some Reflections on the Discourses of Mourning," in *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁷ Quoted in Santner, "Postwar/Post-Holocaust/Postmodern," 2.
- ²⁸ Santner, "Postwar/Post-Holocaust/Postmodern," 2.
- ²⁹ Quoted in Santner, "Postwar/Post-Holocaust/Postmodern," 4.
- ³⁰ Santner, "Postwar/Post-Holocaust/Postmodern," 4.
- ³¹ Eric L. Santner, "Germany and the Tasks of Mourning in the Second and Third Generations," in *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 32.
- ³² Charles S. Maier describes this term as "mastering the past, coming to terms with the searing experiences of World War II and collaboration in Nazi crimes." See *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 7.
- ³³ Indeed, New German Cinema directors relied frequently on a psychoanalytic analysis in their staging of the trauma of the Hitler period. For example, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's broken masculinities (see Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* [New York: Routledge, 1992]), Helma Sanders-Brahms's oedipal dynamics in *Germany Pale Mother! Deutschland Bleiche Mutter* (1980) (see Susan E. Linville, "The Mother-Daughter Plot in History: Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Germany, Pale Mother*," in *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women's Auto/Biographical Film in Post-war Germany* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998], 41–63), Hans Jürgen Syberberg's Hitler as imago in *Our Hitler/Hitler – ein Film aus Deutschland* (1978) (see Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], 103–149) and the reading of German history as the return of the repressed in Edgar Reitz's epic television film *Heimat* (see Barbara Gabriel, "The Unbearable Strangeness of Being: Edgar Reitz's Film-Chronicle *Heimat*," in *Postmodernism and the Ethical Subject*, edited by Barbara Gabriel and Suzan Ilcan [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004], 149–202).
- ³⁴ Thomanek and Niven, *Dividing and Uniting Germany*, 81–82.
- ³⁵ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 9–11.
- ³⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *Interpretations of the Two Germanies, 1945-1990*, Second Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 14–15.
- ³⁷ Thomanek and Niven, *Dividing and Uniting Germany*, 83.
- ³⁸ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, 12.
- ³⁹ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York: Random House, 1996), 110.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., xv.
- ⁴¹ This difference in blame and level of honesty about the past can be seen most plainly in the difference between films made in the East and the West. While initially films avoided the Second World War or portrayed Germans as victims, eventually films of the New German Cinema dealt with the horror of the past and its effects on the future. These films were generally independently produced art films. East German film production was quite different. All film production was controlled by *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) a film industry run by the state that had to submit any film scripts to Moscow for approval. DEFA films generally portrayed Nazis as proto-capitalists and Communists as anti-Nazi (Christiane Mückenberger, "The Anti-Fascist Past in DEFA Films," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, edited by Seán Allan and John Sandford [New York: Berghahn Books, 1992], 69).
- ⁴² Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, 12.
- ⁴³ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 144.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, 29.
- ⁴⁶ Anna Funder, *Stasiland: True Stories from behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta, 2003), 57.
- ⁴⁷ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 165.
- ⁴⁸ Stephen Brockmann, "Introduction: The Reunification Debate," *New German Critique* 52 (Winter 1991): 4.

- ⁴⁹ Michael Geyer, "The Long Good-bye: German Culture Wars in the Nineties," in *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, edited by Michael Geyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 357.
- ⁵⁰ Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press), 11.
- ⁵¹ Stephen Brockmann, "Introduction," 12.
- ⁵² Michael Geyer, "The Long Good-bye," 359.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Karl Heinz Bohrer, "Why We Are Not a Nation – And Why We Should Become One," translated by Stephen Brockmann, *New German Critique* 52 (winter 1991): 74.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 73.
- ⁵⁸ Andreas Huyssen, "After the Wall: The Failure of the Intellectuals," *New German Critique* 52 (Winter 1991): 111.
- ⁵⁹ Günter Grass, "What Am I Talking For? Is Anybody Still Listening?," translated by Stephen Brockmann, *New German Critique* 52 (winter 1991): 67.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 69.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 69.
- ⁶² Ibid., 70.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 71.
- ⁶⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "What Does 'Working Off the Past' Mean Today?," in *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*, translated by Steven Rendell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 22.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 24–5.
- ⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "Replies to Questions from a Bundestag Investigative Commission," in *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*, translated by Steven Rendell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 47.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 40. Original emphasis.
- ⁶⁸ Stephen Brockmann, "Introduction," 7.
- ⁶⁹ Paraphrased in Brockmann, "Introduction," 23.
- ⁷⁰ John Borneman, *After the Wall* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 7.
- ⁷¹ Andreas Huyssen, "After the Wall," 110.
- ⁷² Ibid., 123.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 123.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 143.
- ⁷⁵ Officials had discussed setting November 9th, the date the Wall was opened, as the official date of unification. However, as mentioned, this was also the date of *Kristallnacht* so a new date was chosen.
- ⁷⁶ At the time, there had been some debate about how the two Germanys should be re-united. There was a choice between Article 23 (which allowed individual states to enter at will) or 146 of German Basic Law (which stated that Basic Law becomes invalid "on the day when the German people choose to reunify and ratify a new constitution" [Stephen Brockmann, "Introduction," 7]). There was some disappointment with this decision, especially on the part of Jürgen Habermas, because he saw article 146 as an opportunity to re-think the very basis of German democracy (Brockmann, "Introduction," 8).
- ⁷⁷ Stephen Brockmann, "Introduction," 9.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ East German firms, whose productivity was lower than expected, had too little time to adapt. Two other much-criticised decisions are almost secondary: the one-to-one exchange rate adopted for eastern and western marks, which meant high costs, and the rapid sale of eastern state firms by the *Treuhand* privatisation agency, which allowed western firms to buy and close competitors. See "Getting Back Together Is So Hard," *The Economist*, 18 September 2004, 58.
- ⁸⁰ H. A. A. Welsh, A Pickel, and D. Rosenberg, quoted in Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xii.
- ⁸¹ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xii.
- ⁸² "Getting Back Together Is So Hard," 58.

⁸³ See Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East* and Michael Geisler and Michelle Mattson, "Introduction: After the Bardic Era – German Television Since 1984," *New German Critique* 78 (autumn 1999): 10.

⁸⁴ Günter Grass, "On Loss," translated by Michael Hofmann, in *The Future of German Democracy*, edited by Robert Gerald Livingston and Volkmar Sander (New York: Continuum, 1993), 149.

⁸⁵ Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*, 209.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xi.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii–xviii.

⁸⁹ For more on the stereotypes of *Ossis* and *Wessis* especially around gender and childishness see Martin Ahrends, "The Great Waiting, or The Freedom of the East: An Obituary for the Life in Sleeping Beauty's Castle," translated by Stephen Brockmann, *New German Critique* 52 (winter 1991): 43; Mary Beth Stein, "The Banana and the *Trabant*: Representations of the 'Other' in a United Germany," in *The Berlin Wall*, edited by Ernst Shürer, Manfred Keune, and Philip Jenkins (New York: Peter Lang Press, 1996), 342; Stephen Brockmann, "Introduction," 29; and Geyer's discussion of Hans Jürgen Syberberg ("The Long Good-bye," 360).

⁹⁰ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xvii.

⁹¹ Quoted in "Getting Back Together Is So Hard," 58.

⁹² Huyssen, "After the Wall," 120.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Habermas, "'Working Off the Past'," 21.

⁹⁵ John Borneman, *After the Wall*, 5–6.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Strom, *Building the New Berlin*, 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁰¹ Mary Beth Stein, "The Banana and the *Trabant*," 333.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 334.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹⁰⁴ For example, one joke asks, "Wie verdoppelt man den Wert eines Trabi?/ How do you double the value of a Trabi?" The answer is "Indem man ihn volltankt/ Fill it up with gas." Another joke asks "Was passiert wenn eine Atombombe auf die DDR fällt?/What would happen if an atomic bomb was dropped on the GDR?" The answer is "Nichts, sie sind alle hier./ Nothing, they are all here." See Mary Beth Stein, "The Banana and the *Trabant*," 340, 342.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 338.

Angels in the Cities: Berlin and the Burden of German History in Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* and *Faraway, So Close!*

Cities do not tell stories. But they can tell history. Cities can show and carry their history; they can make it visible, or they can hide it. They can open your eyes, like movies, or they can close them. They can leave you abused, or they can nourish your imagination.
*Wim Wenders*¹

Berlin is a laboratory. Its historical richness resides in the prototypical sequence of its models: neoclassical city, early metropolis, modernist testbed [sic], war victim, Lazarus, Cold War demonstration, etc. First bombed, then divided, Berlin is now centerless, a collection of centers, some of which are voids.
Rem Koolhaas,² *Architect. On Cold War Berlin*

In his examination of Cold War-era Berlin and specifically the Berlin Wall, contemporary architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas states that “the characteristic mixture of mass and void, history and destruction, the coexistence of historical form and radically altered reality exists nowhere else as it does in Berlin.”³ A mixture of ruined city and post-modern architectural test ground, Cold-War Berlin’s history is written on the buildings, walls, and spaces throughout it. It is not only the surviving buildings and ruins that lend this Berlin its sense of history and make it a city of remembrance, but it is the fissures, absences, and the empty spaces that remind its citizens of the weight of their history. Therefore, for Koolhaas, “The island-like situation of West Berlin seemed to provoke questions of identity around the artificial organism of the metropolis in a wholly unique way.”⁴ West Berlin constantly needed to define its identity in relation to the communist country that bordered it on all sides. The Berlin Wall itself was a reminder of both the horrors perpetrated by Germany in World War Two, which caused the Allied forces to divide the city and the country, and the repressive rule of the East German government. For Koolhaas the city of the Wall and of the empty spaces it surrounded was perhaps the most honest monument to recent German history that existed.

New German Cinema filmmaker Wim Wenders would most likely agree with Koolhaas. When making film return to German subject matter, Wenders chose to set it in Berlin no doubt for the reason of the city's unique position within the country. Wenders called West Berlin "the *only German city*"⁵ because, as he explained, unlike other West German cities, West Berlin had maintained its identity. Wenders mused that this sense of identity might exist "because there is a wall around it. Or maybe because there is a healthier sense of history and the past."⁶ Berlin was, and is still, a city of memorials (especially to commemorate World War Two): both official (the Memorial to the liberating Russian soldiers and Peter Eisenmann's controversial Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe⁷) and unofficial (bullet holes that still exist in buildings). The filmmaker noted that it was the empty spaces as well as the ruined buildings that gave Berlin its history.

The notions of ruptures and voids, as well as history and memory, are central to the film *Wings of Desire/Himmel über Berlin* (1987), as well as its continuation⁸ *Faraway, So Close!!/In weiter Ferne, so nah!* (1993). Both films use angels watching over the city as focalizers in an examination of Berlin, its history, and the process of mourning for the Second World War. *Wings of Desire*, a film which, through its angelic protagonists, offers a moral allegory for the traumatic history of Germany, could have only been made in Berlin — and as I shall explain, it could have only been made in a divided Berlin. *Wings of Desire* is permeated with borders: the literal border between East and West, as well as the more ethereal borders between past and future, male and female, and time and space. These borders and gaps give the film its moral force, as it

stands as testament to Germany's tumultuous history and refuses the kind of mass national amnesia that occurred in post-World War Two Germany.

On the other hand, filmed after unification, *Faraway, So Close!* charts the effects of the *Wende* on Berlin. The film itself exemplifies some of the problems, concerns, and disappointments that arose with unification. For Wenders, Berliners must struggle to deal with ways of remembering their past when the most obvious symbol of that past, the Berlin Wall, has been removed.

While many fiction films⁹ have tackled some or all of these borders in Berlin as well as the topic of partition and unification from both sides of the Wall,¹⁰ Wim Wenders's angel films have the unique position of acting as a filmic "before-and-after" picture of Germany and the *Wende* (turn). In this chapter I will chart the ways Wenders examines Berlin through its empty spaces and voids, with just as much interest as he portrays the existing buildings and citizens. I will locate the films within both Wenders's *oeuvre* and the tradition of the New German Cinema movement as a whole, showing how Wenders's negotiation of history and memory and the collision of time and space is an attempt at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. My aim will be to examine Wenders's search for a usable narrative through a juxtaposition of image and words. My analysis will first focus on *Wings of Desire* and show how it examines these issues, before moving on to consider whether or not it succeeds in the work of mourning Germany's past. And, finally, I will examine the dramatic changes that took place within Berlin post-unification, which at once made another film necessary, but also problematic (as we shall see). *Faraway, So Close!* speaks to the new mood in post-unification Berlin through cinematic strategies that include a shift in tone and narrative as well as a self-reflexive

focus on the ethics of visibility — a complex and doubled term in Wenders's own lexicon.

Wings of Desire, according to Wenders, "began with [Wenders] wanting to have Berlin in a film; the city called the film into being."¹¹ There were a number of reasons why Berlin should stand in for the German dilemma, past and present. For example, the sins of the Third Reich are written on Berlin's body, through the empty spaces and through the bullet holes in the walls of buildings. These physical reminders of the Second World War are often stronger than official memorials because they are more raw, less institutionalized forms of memory. In a speech to architects, Wenders explained, "Berlin is a very peculiar city because it was so terribly damaged during the war, and because this destruction even continued afterwards through its dividedness. Berlin has a lot of empty spaces."¹² He notes that there are

houses that are completely blank on one side, because the neighbouring house was destroyed and is still missing. These bleak walls are called *Brandmauern* ('fire-walls') and you don't see them much in other cities. These empty spaces feel like wounds, and I like the city for its wounds. They show its history better than any history book or document.¹³

Wenders recalls, "I felt the city defined itself much better where it was empty than where it was full."¹⁴ For example, in the film the old man Homer (Curt Bois¹⁵) wanders in the deserted Potsdamer Platz. "I can't find Potsdamer Platz," he laments, "it can't be here." The link to history is made explicit by the colour documentary footage that follows Homer's reminiscences of the transition of Potsdamer Platz from a central square to a Nazi stronghold. The footage features crumbling ruins left in the wake of the war. It is

the empty space, the lack of the original Potsdamer Platz, that brings memories of the war and reminds Berliners of the destruction it wrought. The film now acts as a historical document because many of the locations Wenders used, most notably the Wall, no longer exist.

The setting of the “island” city is essential to the meaning and scope of Wenders’s film. Wenders notes, “It is only in Berlin that I could recognize what it means to be German . . . for history is both physically and emotionally present No other city is to such an extent a symbol, a place of survival. It is a site, more than a city.”¹⁶ If Berlin is a symbol of Germany’s survival, then the Berlin Wall is a constant wound, a gash through the city to remind everyone that while they survived, others didn’t, Wenders explains that “the (his)story that is [sic] elsewhere in the country is suppressed or denied is physically and emotionally present here [in Berlin].”¹⁷ The Wall forces Berliners to remember the past because it is a result of the Allied powers’ division of Germany both as punishment for the country’s war crimes and to prevent another war. Perhaps Berlin’s inability to forget is why, as Wenders says, “Berlin carries the idea of peace very powerfully. [...] Just as the freedom of the city is limited and its sense of freedom is more intense and almost unlimited.”¹⁸ The sense of place in Cold War West Berlin, perhaps because it is so contained, is incredibly strong in this film.¹⁹ As one character remarks: “Berlin! Here I am a foreigner, yet it is all so familiar. Anyway, I can’t get lost. You always end up at the Wall.”

Within this film about Berlin and its past, Wenders needed a perspective that would allow him to show Berlin in its entirety and complexity; to see its past and future. And so, he settled on angels because, he says, “The only point of view that would allow

me to see all the facets of Berlin would be that of somebody invisible, somebody who could go through walls literally.”²⁰ The film is full of moments where the angels simply watch the human citizens of Berlin. Thus, they become focalizers for the audience: they are our eyes and ears in the examination of Berlin’s present and, because of their immortal memories, past. Legendary French director of photography Henri Alekan created a sweeping, fluid camera style that lets the audience see, as if from the perspective of the angels, into the lives of the citizens of Berlin. Upon interviewing Wenders, Scott Derrickson remarks that Wenders “certainly moved the camera more than [he] ever had before.”²¹ The director states that the fluid camera was a way of representing the loving and benevolent gaze of the angels.²² This device also enabled the audience to hear the thoughts of both the angels and the mortals in a pervasive soundscape that often reflects the malaise of modern Germany. The angels lead the audience from person to person and from past to present with an almost childlike innocence. Wenders explains, “What they’re telling us really is that anybody can be his own angel and that as children, we all carry in ourselves an angel. We can still be in touch with that child.”²³ But he also explains that angels

don’t forget history — it is part of what they know. If there is any reproach to my parents’ generation or to the one before it, it is the way they treated history after 1945. They tried to make everyone forget, which made it impossible to deal with.²⁴

As well as remembering and mourning history, the angels’ moral authority is impeccable because, being unable to participate in that history, they are some of the very few Germans who are free from the taint of Nazism. However, their distance also means that

they are unable to contribute, even in positive ways, to society. Thus, the two angel protagonists of the film, Daniel (Bruno Ganz) and Cassiel (Otto Sander), continually bemoan their inability to interact with the human world.²⁵ Daniel reflects, “Instead of forever hovering above, I’d like to feel a weight grow in me, to end the infinity and to tie me to earth. I’d like, at each step, each gust of wind, to be able to say ‘now’.” The angels come to represent the audience’s position. The audience can also only watch the events on the screen. Just like the angels, we are not able to intervene. Our only choice is to observe and to remember. Wenders places his audience in the position of angel and asks them to remember what, in the case of the German audience, they have tried to forget.

Thus, the film travels in time between war-time Berlin and the film’s contemporary Berlin through the eternal memories of the angels. The film revolves around the two angels, Daniel and Cassiel, who wander through Berlin closely observing the interaction between people caught up in the daily life of the city. Daniel longs to be human to partake in the sensuality of life. Through the angels, the audience experiences the past scars of German history in the city, but they also sense joy and hope through Daniel’s fascination with a troupe of circus performers. And in a key narrative twist, he falls in love with a lonely French circus performer named Marion (Solveig Dommartin) who can also fly, through her trapeze act. At the end of the film, Daniel gets his wish and revels in the glory of being mortal. He drinks coffee for the first time, smokes a cigarette, experiences cold and hunger, and is united with his love Marion.

This extended narrative is only one of many separate human stories within the film. The bulk of *Wings of Desire* is made up of episodic scenes of Berliners going about

their daily business in love, pain, boredom, and ecstasy. Wenders emphasizes the fact that these characters, though they are never given names and appear only briefly in the film, are just as important as the characters who are named and who reappear.²⁶ Counter to the optimism and hope presented by the Marion-Daniel story is the narrative of Homer, an old man who wanders the city searching for the ruins of a once-great metropolis. Like his Greek namesake, this Homer wanders the city trying to build a story of the history of his nation. But unlike his namesake, the old man of Wenders's film is frustrated by his inability to tell a peaceful history.

The turn to national inwardness in this film also reflects Wenders's personal return to Germany. Born in Düsseldorf in 1945, Wenders grew up in the post-war period.²⁷ He became associated with the second generation of filmmakers of the New German Cinema movement, who reacted against the dying film industry in post-war Germany. They saw their films as '*Autorenfilm*', after the French model of the New Wave which assigned a central role to the director. Yet, while each of the filmmakers associated with this movement shared many similar obsessions (typically a preoccupation with the burden of recent German history), they were also widely divergent stylistically.²⁸

In order to situate Wenders's mythic Berlin films within a longer post-war German cinema tradition, it is worth rehearsing the announced aims of the New German Cinema. While this label is often applied to the group of German filmmakers from 1968 to 1982, there are two basic generations within the movement.²⁹ The first generation, called Young German Film,³⁰ refers to filmmakers like Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, Jean Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet. These filmmakers signed the Oberhausen manifesto (1962), which demanded a change to funding and distribution of German art

cinema and resulted, at first, in “mostly short, independently produced films.”³¹ The films were mostly non-commercial and even at times experimental (such as Jean Marie Straub’s and Danièle Huillet’s *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach/Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* [1968]). They were almost always political (such as Alexander Kluge’s *Yesterday Girl/Abschied von gestern* [1966]) and they worked through Germany’s traumatic recent past. The second generation of filmmakers, called New German Cinema, started in roughly 1971.³² These filmmakers, such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Margarethe von Trotta, Helke Sanders, Helma Sanders-Brahms, and Wim Wenders, as well as Young German Film directors Werner Herzog and Volker Schlöndorff, were younger and often benefited from the funding bodies the first generation had helped establish. They also worked in more commercial venues, including German television (producing such monumental films as Fassbinder’s mini series *Berlin Alexanderplatz* [1980]). Their work often made links from contemporary Germany to the previously repressed history of the Third Reich.

Although they belonged to a generation of Germans who were too young to be tainted by National Socialism, they distrusted traditional German culture. Wenders has explained that American rock and roll was “the only alternative to Beethoven [...] because I was very insecure about all culture that was offered to me, because I thought it was all fascism, pure fascism; and the only thing I was secure with from the beginning and felt had nothing to do with fascism was rock music.”³³ This early love of rock music can be seen in almost all of Wenders’s films. The Berlin Angel films, for example, feature live performances by rock icons Nick Cave and Lou Reed.

Wenders's work is frequently marked by a fascination with traditional American genres.³⁴ However, as Robert Seidenberg explains, "to some degree he always Europeanized them with stylish visual compositions (often in black and white), deliberate pacing and an entirely un-American lack of violence and aggression."³⁵ Through his obsessive adaptation, or reworking, of American genres, such as the thriller and road movie, Wenders demonstrates an ambivalent relationship to American culture.

But the picture is more complex. While the Americans were a source of culture untainted by National Socialism, they were also seen as colonizers who attempted to obliterate German culture in order to sell more films, records, or even soda pop. A character in Wenders's 1976 film *Kings of the Road/Im Lauf der Zeit* says famously, "The *Amis* have colonized our subconscious." Wenders's early German films such as *The American Friend/Der amerikanische Freund* (1977) and *Alice in the Cities/Alice in den Städten* (1974) deal with the ambivalent relationships between Germans and American culture. *Wings of Desire* and *Faraway, So Close!* both feature the figure of "the American." But at the same time, they rethink the genre of the road film (especially *Wings of Desire*) as a "vertical road movie" in Wenders's own words.³⁶ The issue of ambivalence towards Americans is even more complex in West Berlin where it was the "*Amis*" who kept Berliners alive during the Berlin Airlift (1948), when supplies were flown into the city to thwart a Soviet blockade. American actor Peter Falk, who has come to be associated with his gumshoe character Columbo, plays an "American friend" in both films. However, unlike Dennis Hopper's menacing character in the 1977 film, Wenders says, "If he's this movie's American friend, he is the most gentle one you can imagine."³⁷ It is Falk who finally convinces Damiel to become mortal. Richard Raskin

argues that it is Falk, a recognizable international star and former angel, who is the “guarantor of the *rightness* of Damiel’s plan.”³⁸ That German Damiel’s desire must be justified by an American authority figure creates a problematic reliance on American culture. The *Amis* have not only colonized the German subconscious, it would seem, but also their angelic guardians.

Uniquely among New German Film *auteurs*, Wenders worked through his obsession with American culture by moving to the United States and making films there. His American films include *Paris, Texas* (1983) and *Hammett* (1979-82), the production of which was so fraught with problems that Wenders ended up removing his name from the credits. Wenders reflects, “the longer I stayed in America, the more I did not become American, the more I realized I was always going to stay German in my heart, and a European director.”³⁹ *Wings of Desire*, then, marked, if not a psychological return to Germanness, then a return to German language films for Wenders. Yet, even this film is not completely purged of Wenders’s ambivalence to American culture.

However, Wenders’s German films also share many continuities with the films of the New German Cinema; most especially, he shares with the movement a preoccupation with post-war German history and memory. Films like Fassbinder’s *The Marriage of Maria Braun/Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (1978), von Trotta’s *Marianne and Juliane/Die bleierne Zeit* (1981), and Schlöndorff’s *The Tin Drum/Die Blechtrommel* (1979) take up the ethical challenge of confronting Germany’s past. While Wenders had not made a film specifically about Germany’s past until *Wings of Desire*, many of his films share the obsession with memory and history that marked New German Cinema from the start. For example, in *Kings of the Road* a young woman (Lisa Kreuzer) nonchalantly shows off the

lighter shaped like Hitler's head that she won at a carnival, demonstrating little or no understanding of the symbolic meaning of the object.

Like a number of New German filmmakers, Wenders started out less interested in narrative films (in this respect his use of American genre films needs to be qualified) than in experimental films. While attending the *Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film* in Munich, he made his first films, *Schauplätze* (1967), *Same Player Shoots Again* (1967), and *Silver City* (1968). These films feature Wenders's "preference for a single focus, his de-emphasizing of the story, his undercutting of representational aesthetics, his strategy of allusion, and his desire to allow the image to suggest emotion without the direct imposition of narrative."⁴⁰ While Wenders moved on to films which appear to conform to dominant Hollywood narrative cinema, *Wings of Desire*'s episodic nature confirms his ongoing interest in less-mainstream film strategies.

Many critics date the end of the New German Cinema as the year that Fassbinder died: 1982. This date coincides with the appointment of conservative Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmermann, whose rigid policies started a change in German cinema towards more commercial film.⁴¹ Yet, despite this shift there were films made after this date that clearly continue the themes and preoccupations of the New German Cinema. For example, Michael Verhoeven's 1990 political film *The Nasty Girl/Das schreckliche Mädchen* tells the story of a young woman who investigates her village's past during the Second World War in ways that take up the themes of history and responsibility, which mark earlier films of the New German Cinema. In the same way, while *Wings of Desire* was made in 1986, it "aligns itself with the dominant storytelling mode of the New

German *Autorenfilm* in a number of ways.”⁴² These include the film’s non-linear structure and, most importantly, the film’s obsession with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.⁴³

The episodic structure of *Wings of Desire* contributes in a major way to the central role that Berlin plays in the film, both as setting and subject. Even before the angels Daniel and Cassiel appear, the camera glides through an apartment building in Kreuzberg, while on the evocative soundtrack we hear the thoughts of lonely Berliners. These thoughts, Les Calvedt explains, are about the “suffering generation gap, adolescent depression, broken-down family or marital relations, loneliness, money problems which lead to emotional conflicts, etc.: i.e. the long-lasting catastrophe.”⁴⁴ The cumulative mood is one of melancholy (the analysis of the Mitscherlichs is never far away) and brokenness.

Many of Wenders’s films are generically, or contain elements of, road films. Although *Wings of Desire* is completely rooted in the city of Berlin, Wenders reasons that the film still involves a journey: “Of course the film was not linear, like the other movies I’ve made, where there was an itinerary. They always had horizontal movements. *Wings of Desire* is my vertical road movie.”⁴⁵ Turning the conventions of the road film on their heads, the film travels through not just space, but time. Michael Trussler argues that fluidity of time is central to the film’s message about the need for remembrance. He explains that while, for the angels, “the past is not made subordinate to the present — the angels recall a plurality of events that have also taken place on a given day. While this devotion to ‘calendar time’ would seem to be foreign to angelic temporality, it testifies against the human propensity for forgetting.”⁴⁶ He cites the angels’ notes wherein they record the day’s events, thereby preserving small details that would otherwise be lost.

More importantly, “the recognition that a plurality of events has transpired on the same date discourages the creation of selective historical narratives.⁴⁷” Through the angels’ fluid time memories, Wenders counters both the dangerous Nazi misuse of German history and the abdication of responsibility of his parents’ generation. For example, in one scene Cassiel rides in an old car that is being driven to a film set. Through the windows he sees documentary images from 1945 of the rubble of Berlin. As Cassiel “remembers” these images from documentary footage, the driver muses aloud,

Are there still borders? More than ever. Each street is a borderline. Between each lot there’s a no-man’s land strip disguised as a hedge or by a ditch. [...] The German people have divided into as many states as there are individuals. [...] But one can only enter each state with the password. The present-day German soul can only be conquered and governed by he who arrives at each small state with the password. Fortunately no one has that power.

Similarly, the character of Homer, in a reversal of his namesake, tries to find an alternative history. He exclaims, “My heroes are no longer the warriors and kings, but the things of peace equal one to the other.” The ideas of glorious war proposed by the Greeks but also Teutonic knights and great leaders, invoked by the Nazis, are no longer usable narratives for contemporary Germans. Wenders suggests it is the “things of peace” that can bring Germans together, but only if they are able to acknowledge and mourn the past, move beyond borders in every sense.

However, there is another storyteller in the film: Peter Falk, playing himself as a former angel. The generic detective film he is shooting in Berlin attempts to represent German history via Hollywood. While Homer tries to tell the story of “things of peace,”

Falk's story is about an American detective in 1945 who is hired by a German-American to find his nephew in Nazi Germany. In this version of German history, the Americans are essential; the German-American must rely on help from an American detective. Falk's film represents the Americans' paternalistic reconstruction of German history with themselves as saviours.

Wings of Desire is as much about space as time, however, and particularly the theme of borders: borders between countries, through Marion the French trapeze artist; borders within countries, embodied by the Wall; borders between past and present; and even borders between heaven and earth. Borders, both real and psychological, are everywhere in the film. The biggest border — that between East and West — is obviously signalled by the Berlin Wall. This wall is an ever-present reminder of Germany's past, but also an identity marker because it is a border that cannot be crossed without some change of state. Thus, when Damiel finally becomes human, he is on the East side of the Wall and Cassiel must carry him through the Wall. Damiel's 'fall' occurs at the Wall, where he enters into the folly of German history. Likewise, many of the discussions between him and Cassiel about becoming human occur near the Wall. Earlier in the film a man jumps to his death near the border; as he jumps he says, "The East, it's everywhere." Wenders explains that "Berlin, the divided city, of course, was just another metaphor. Like the angels themselves Berlin seems to be a city that well represents not only Germany, but also our civilization."⁴⁸ In a film so obsessed with the past and dealing with the horror of the Second World War, the Berlin Wall becomes the very image of the divisiveness of which humans are capable.

Xavier Vila and Alice Kuzniar argue that once Daniel becomes human, the notion of borders becomes even stronger: “Daniel is born at the Wall. Barriers are everywhere, from the guards who deny Daniel access to the film team to the fence separating him from Peter Falk, Berlin is a maze. The ex-angel finds himself confined to a city partitioned in zones, divided by walls, and strewn with barbed wire.”⁴⁹ However, while Daniel is born on the East side, Cassiel is able to carry him over to the West. This is the first time in the film that an angel has been allowed to interfere directly with human life. I read Cassiel’s act as a radical denial of the Berlin Wall. At this moment, Wenders, like the West German government, denies the Wall’s significance by allowing Daniel to do something that killed many others: jump the Wall.

Other thematizations of borders in the film include the connected oppositions of human/angel and heaven/earth, which are signified in the film through black and white versus colour cinematography. Wenders explains that he thought the angels should see in black and white because it “shows much more the essence than the surface.”⁵⁰ For Vila and Kuzniar, “the alternating play of color and monochrome throughout the film highlights the inadequacy of the partial view.”⁵¹ In the black and white images the angels are unable to see colour, which collapses some details. For example, the Wall appears in the film many times in the black and white scenes, but it is not until the film switches to colour that that audience realizes how beautifully coloured the Wall is with graffiti. Wenders chose a particularly colourful section of the Wall for Daniel’s first moments as a human, which emphasizes how much Daniel missed as an angel. However, the colour view also features absences, because the angels, whom the audience knows to be present, can no longer be seen. For example, during the first transition to colour where Marion

practices on the trapeze swing, Daniel is present but he is invisible in the colour footage. Yet, colour can also signify the absence of the angels. For example, after Daniel watches Marion for the first time, he accompanies her to her trailer and listens as she laments her lack of connection with other humans. She says she is “longing for a wave of love that would stir in me. That’s what makes me clumsy, the absence of pleasure. Desire for love. Desire to love.” Wenders underscores her feelings of aloneness by switching to colour, which signifies that Daniel has left and Marion is truly alone.⁵²

While the film contrasts colour and black and white, it also juxtaposes images and words. From its first moments, *Wings of Desire* is about the collision of words and image. The film begins with a hand (later we learn it is Daniel’s) writing a poem that begins, “When the child was a child...,” which are taken from a poem written for the film by Peter Handke. The next shots are of an eye superimposed over Berlin. Although these scenes set up the importance of both word and image, Wenders has explained that he believes in the primacy of the image: “Images contain possible truths; if they’re seen by children, a great many possible truths. Of course images are not hard to manipulate; here in Germany we know all about that.”⁵³ Despite these comments, the film subtly questions both word and image. For example, on the set of Peter Falk’s film, the actor discusses a book, *Das Double*, with a young extra. Falk says, “This story, to me it’s not too plausible,” and the extras counters, “So, it’s more realistic than the film we’re making.” Falk explains that everyone loves detective stories and that “it’s dopey, I grant you, but this is dopey too.” Both image and word have the capacity for deception. The very nature of the angels — as both mythical creatures and witnesses to history — reflects this juxtaposition. Wenders explains, “On one hand, the angels and their world

are strictly fantasy, poetic fantasy. On the other hand, there is almost a documentary aspect to the film. Two really opposite languages were brought together by Henri [Alekan, the director of photography].”⁵⁴ The film mixes highly constructed, almost painterly, scenes such as the circus scenes with archival footage of the Second World War and reconstruction period. The film’s equal uncertainty with words and images demonstrates the difficulty in finding a single style or medium to deal with Germany’s traumatic history.

Wenders contrasts Alekan’s masterly cinematography with references to both German literature and the poetic language of Peter Handke. Additionally, Wenders explains that while planning *Wings of Desire* he was reading Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, “with their angel-infested quest for spiritual transcendence,”⁵⁵ and that it played a role in his decision to use angels.⁵⁶ The words of Rilke are important to the film because they influenced its style and sensibility, but also because Rilke represents an example of usable German culture from the past.

Wings of Desire was a reunion between Wenders and Handke, who had worked together on several films, including Wenders’s film of Handke’s novel *The Goalie’s Anxiety at the Penalty Kick/Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (1971). Based on Wenders’s outline of the story, Handke wrote ten texts that appear throughout the film.⁵⁷ These sections “were like islands in the flood of ideas I had for the film.” For Wenders, “Shooting the film was like reaching one island, climbing onto firm ground, and then taking off swimming again. [...] Peter’s texts were the pillars that carried the film.”⁵⁸ Even Marion’s thoughts throughout the film are taken directly from Handke, in this case, his book *The Weight of the World*.⁵⁹ This collaboration with Handke intensifies the

poetic and often lyrical quality of the language throughout. In one of these Handke-penned scenes, Daniel and Cassiel compare notes of interesting and beautiful occurrences, such as a woman who folds up her umbrella and lets herself be soaked by the rain, or a bus driver who yells out “Tierra Del Fuego” instead of the stop name. All of these scenes demonstrate the evocative power of the word.

Pure Sound, beyond the conventions of language, also plays a very important role in the juxtaposition of image and sound. Beyond the ethereal music and choral singing on the soundtrack, Wenders has designed a mass “choir” of the voices of Berliners. Wenders explains that these sounds were not meant to always be understood, but to function as a mesh of sound that is like music.⁶⁰ Assenka Oksiloff invokes the work of Michel Chion to explain the workings of the soundtrack. She explains that the soundtrack in the library scenes functions as what Chion labels a “sonic superfield.” Therefore:

The noises we and Daniel hear are ambient, and at times unidentifiable: traffic, children playing on the street, radio music, “angelic” and non-diegetic musical chords, as well as a series of voice-overs, interior monologues of the various subjects observed by the angel. [...] this use of interwoven audio recordings does not simply place sound at the service of discrete and meaningful images; rather, sound functions to illuminate the fluidity of visual spaces in penetrating through walls and external forms.”⁶¹

The complexity of the soundtrack posed special problems for Wenders. “I was told that nobody, seeing the film for the first time, would be able to see it and hear

it. I was aware of this. I couldn't do it myself."⁶² He gradually realized the enormity of his undertaking:

In the post-production I had the feeling that I was making a film with sound for the first time. I had the feeling that I was shooting the whole film twice, once for the camera and once with the microphone, and during the mixing of the film I realized that the sound was even more complex than the images.⁶³

It was only when he added in the voiceovers representing the thoughts of the characters that Wenders felt the film was finished.⁶⁴

Wenders brings Handke's scenes and the soundscapes of the soundtrack together with Alekan's fluid camera movements and the visually poetic images of Berliners living their daily lives. For example, there is an early scene where the camera floats through a traffic jam on one of the main streets. We see a couple fighting while the man thinks about how women bring nothing but trouble; a woman talking to her dog about getting lost on the way to the cemetery; a family of Turkish guest-workers speaking in Turkish; and a variety of other ordinary people. Another scene features a man sorting through his recently deceased mother's belongings, musing that "she kept everything." There is Homer, who muses about history and stories. The angels watch as the world runs along and seemingly nothing happens. These scenes are beautiful and evocative. The fluid camera gives the film a sense of floating, but the focus on everyday life also conveys the feeling of history standing still.

Edward Plater argues that the images link the past to the present. For example, after Cassiel has witnessed a suicide, there is a montage sequence which reflects the dark side of Berlin. The camera flashes between shots of the effects of drug abuse, depression,

and crime, concluding with archival footage of bombs dropping and the devastation of World War Two-era Berlin. Plater argues that “the World War II footage in this montage seems intended to suggest a connection between the horrors of that period in Berlin’s history and the pain and suffering that are so prevalent in the city over four decades later.”⁶⁵

The juxtaposition of image and word occurs in the actions of some of the characters as well. Segments involving Homer detail the old man’s search for a way to accurately represent the past. He says in the style of his namesake, “Tell me, O muse, of the storyteller who has been thrust to the edge of the world, both an infant and an ancient and through him reveal everyman.” He speaks of the possibility of stories capturing human experience. But Homer knows too well the danger of stories; he laments, “But no one has suggested singing an epic of peace. What is wrong with peace that its inspiration doesn’t endure and that it is almost untellable?” The original Homer wrote stories about Greece’s glory through war, but this Homer knows the pain and destruction those wars can bring. Homer also searches through images for truth, rummaging in the library through a book of photography, symbolically turning the pages back to front. This triggers the film itself to move back in time to archival footage, which we presume represents Homer’s memories. While Homer would like an “epic of peace,” the images all around him in Berlin seem to foreclose this possibility, insisting, instead on the weight of history. That is the meaning of this bombed-out Berlin with its library and war monument. All of this, including Homer’s ruminations on the Potsdamer Platz and the clips of documentary World War Two footage point to Wenders’s concern with a past that is not really past.⁶⁶

Yet the film has also been criticized for its fairytale romantic conclusion in which Daniel finds mortal happiness with Marion. Kolker and Beicken argue, for instance, that “the poetic apotheosis of human passion and domestic need that ends the film trivializes its high concerns and endangers the complexity Wenders sets out to construct.”⁶⁷ Yet, while many critics question the romantic ending,⁶⁸ some argue that it is essential to the film.⁶⁹ My own sense is that the romantic end demonstrates Wenders’s faith that unity can one day be achieved in Berlin. This optimism is underlined in a scene earlier in the film where Cassiel and Daniel discuss the history of the world. One says to the other, “Do you remember our first visit here? History had not yet begun.” As they talk about the stages of the earth, the image shifts lyrically from water to grass as the angels walk along a canal and then mount a set of stairs. They are filmed in long shot, but the camera slowly tracks in towards them. When they begin to discuss the emergence of mankind, they reach the top of the stairs and the camera cuts to a medium shot with the Wall clearly visible in the background. Cassiel says, “Do you remember, one morning how, out of the savannah, its forehead smeared with grass appeared the biped, our image, so long awaited.” The juxtaposition of the dawn of humanity and the Berlin Wall illustrates the dual nature of mankind’s history: the destructive and the generative. In Daniel’s words:

A long story, the sun, the lightning, the thunder above [...] the round dances, the signs, the writing. Then one of them broke through the circle and ran straight ahead. As long as he ran straight ahead, swerving perhaps from joy, he seemed free, we could laugh with him. But then suddenly he ran a zigzag and stones flew. With his flight began another story: the story of wars. It is still going on.

However, Cassiel reminds Daniel that “the first story too, that of the grass, the sun, of the leaps and the shouts, that still goes on.” Thus, Peter Handke’s prose conveys a palpable sense of optimism from the beginning. Equally present from the start is Daniel’s sense that he must literally ‘fall’ into this history, become mortal himself. When Daniel speaks of his longing for humanity, Cassiel asks, “You really want...” and Daniel replies, “Yes. To conquer history for myself. What my timeless downward look has taught me. I want to transmute to sustain a glance, a short shout, a sour smell.” At this point the angels walk towards the Wall and begin to disappear into it while Daniel continues, “I’ve been on the outside long enough. Absent long enough. Let me enter the history of the world. If only to hold an apple in my hand.” Yet Daniel’s desire to become a new Adam, ‘to enter history’, is inevitably shadowed by the lesson of Genesis: he will have a mate, but he will also be mortal and imperfect, a fallen Adam.⁷⁰

Through Marion and Daniel the film unifies a variety of binary oppositions — man and woman, human and angel, German and foreigner, past and present — suggesting that the nation can finally confront its past in a spirit of mourning rather than melancholy. Yet, such an entirely optimistic conclusion is also undercut by the film’s ending. It is Homer who closes the film by lamenting, “Name me the men, women, and children who will look for me, me their storyteller, their spokesman, for they need me more than anything in the world.” As Homer speaks these words, the camera shoots him from behind, hobbling towards the Wall whose lessons of borders and history dominate the film throughout.

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“My plea and my contribution to this discussion is to keep these open spaces, those fire protection walls between separate buildings, this rim of no-man’s land which came about because of the war: leave it empty, leave it standing where it is.”

*Wenders addressing a symposium on the future of Berlin.*⁷¹

“Recently Germany has become ‘one country’ again, but are we actually ‘a country’ at all? And if so, which one? Exactly as before, there are two of us: one rich and one poor. One that exists in 1991, and the other in a sort of no-time, not a grey area but a grey era so to speak, between time zones.”

*Wenders on unification.*⁷²

When Wenders ended his episodic film of Berlin life, *Wings of Desire*, with ‘To be continued,’ it was a gesture against closure; he did not plan to make another angel film.⁷³ But the history into which Daniel had fallen changed rapidly and unexpectedly in ways that would have momentous consequences for Berlin, the whole of Germany, and the West, inaugurating the end of the Cold War period. In that sense, the film’s continuation, *Faraway, So Close!*, represents both an answer to the charges against the earlier film’s romanticism and a serious look at the realities of unification: this film could not end happily.

In his second angel film Wenders takes up many of the same characters to represent the historical issues that flowed from German unification. Berlin is, once again, both a literal setting and a scene of history and memory, whose central issues are staged through a cinematic representation which is also a self-reflexive ethics of vision.

During the filming of *Faraway, So Close!* in the fall of 1992, Berlin was in the midst of a huge reconstruction project. Traces of the Wall, so important to memory in Berlin, were being eradicated and massive construction projects were launched in order to make Berlin suitable to resume its role as the nation’s capital. The largest example of

this is the ongoing reconstruction of Potsdamer Platz, which went from wasteland to a flashy commercial centre complete with corporate offices, shopping malls, and luxury condominiums.⁷⁴ When Wenders made his continuation to *Wings of Desire*, he not only documented these changes, but was finally able to film in the eastern section of Berlin. In fact, the majority of *Faraway, So Close!*'s exteriors were shot in the East.⁷⁵ In what follows I want to argue that the mood of the city, and therefore that of the angels, has completely changed in the second film. When Wenders was asked how the angels see Berlin differently in 1992 than they did when he shot *Wings of Desire* in 1986, he responded,

They see a discontent[ed] and unhappy country. In '89, with the fall of the wall, we had the impression we were living in the beginning of a new world. [...] Reunification offered us the possibility to redefine ourselves. [...] the problem was that we had the economic force yes, but the moral strength was lacking. And you can see the effects of the absence of this moral strength clearly: East Germans are the most frustrated and unhappy people I know. And their dissatisfaction is diffusing to the West.⁷⁶

While Wenders's summing up of the *Ossis* seems quite unfair (and in light of analysis proposed in chapter one, untrue), it explains much of his second angel film's altered mood. But there are other shifts, as well. Stylistically, the episodic, fable-like nature of the first film has been replaced by a mystery narrative and a complicated plot. In this second film, it is the angel Cassiel (Otto Sander) who becomes human, but unlike Daniel (Bruno Ganz), it is not because he wants to live and experience life, but because he feels powerless as an angel and wants to help humanity (as a human, it turns out, he is almost

as powerless as he was in angelic form). *Faraway, So Close!* is also reliant on an (overly complex) plot unlike its predecessor. It features twists and turns and a multitude of interconnected characters. While the film has some scenes of random Berliners, most of the scenes involve recurring characters with whom the audience is familiar and who serve to advance the narrative. For example, after the opening shot the camera moves to the traffic circle that surrounds the *Siegestsäule* (Victory Column). The soundtrack is full of the thoughts of many drivers, including an Easterner in the famous *Trabant* car thinking to himself, “West Berlin looks like East Berlin. What’s the fuss?” However, this scene soon reveals its purpose as the camera finds Daniel singing and riding a delivery bicycle, thereby introducing the audience to Daniel’s new life, as a pizza baker.

Despite their continuities, the two films provide a study in contrasts. *Wings of Desire* was shot in a West Berlin still marked by the geographies of the Cold War, while *Faraway, So Close!* was shot in post-Wall East Berlin. Whereas *Wings of Desire* was a moral parable of mourning, with Berlin as a central character, the diegesis of *Faraway, So Close!* represents issues around unification, but is equally intent on self-referentially signifying issues of visual representation. Wenders explains that the film is about “the act of seeing and how we transform what we see.”⁷⁷ But what can be seen in Berlin has changed since *Wings of Desire*. The former divided city is being rebuilt, thus erasing many markers of the past. Yet in its material presence, East Berlin was actually more of a memorial site to World War Two than West Berlin had been. As Philip Kemp explains, the former East was a place where “ruins and bomb damage, long since tidied away in the West, still evoke the trauma of the war years.”⁷⁸ Even now, many buildings in the East have still not been rebuilt and bullet holes still scar the walls. However, the massive

construction that occurred everywhere in Berlin after the Wall threatened to change all this.⁷⁹

If the central meaning evoked by Berlin in the first film was that of a scar, with Berlin as historical body marked by empty spaces, the second film's Berlin suggests the act of building something from these former bombed-out sites. Yet, this image of Berlin as a construction site is far from unambiguously positive. Wenders laments that "all the empty spaces in [*Wings of Desire*] are filled now."⁸⁰ These absences were important to memory, mourning, and the acknowledgement of World War Two. An important aspect of *Faraway, So Close!* is the material absence of these empty spaces in Berlin over which, in the first film, Alekan's camera lingered. Arguably, without these empty spaces, or even the Wall itself, Berliners will lose their memory of the past; the new buildings will literally block their view.

By the time this film was made, it was becoming clear that unification would not be an easy or painless experience. Cassiel desires to join the rest of the world (the West), but upon "making the switch" he discovers challenges that are almost too much for him. In fact, Cassiel's problems reflect those actually encountered by the *Ossis* upon reunification. He is arrested, starts to drink heavily, wanders the streets like a homeless man, sleeps on park benches, and finally gets caught up with a corrupt American/German arms dealer, Tony Baker (Horst Bucholz), who trades pornography to East Germans in exchange for arms. Cassiel is able to redeem himself by destroying Baker's arsenal and saving Baker and his family from kidnappers, but he pays for this victory with his life and returns to Heaven. Cassiel's difficult change is almost the polar opposite to Daniel's idealized transition at the end of *Wings of Desire*. *Faraway, So Close!* finds Daniel

married to Marion with a young daughter, Doria (Camilla Pontabry), while running a pizza shop in Berlin. David Bremer and Ched Myers suggest that the differing reasons for the angels' transitions to humanity is what separates the two films. While "Damiel is lured over by a desire to experience the sensual dimension of human life; in *Faraway, So Close!*, Cassiel crosses because he is determined to make a difference in the mortal struggle between good and evil."⁸¹

I want to argue that the difference between Wenders's two Berlin films is also inextricably linked to the times in which they were made; it is a before-and-after that is shaped by transitions in Germany's own post-unification. Berlin as both material space and symbolic "city-text" is different this time round. Damiel's happiness is connected with a burgeoning trans-European identity (as seen in his French wife), just as Cassiel's troubles are linked to the problems of a recently united Germany. Unlike Damiel, who had many choices — he chooses to become a human being, and to love Marion — Cassiel has few options; he becomes human not by his own desire, as Damiel does, but by his need to save a child, Raissa⁸² (Aline Krajewski), from falling from a balcony at the top of a high-rise. Whereas Damiel made a wilful transition from angel to man, Cassiel literally *falls* from Heaven into humanity. Wenders says, "Unlike *Wings of Desire*, where their metaphorical choice was to become human, in *Faraway, So Close!* that was no longer an option. It does happen that the angel Cassiel becomes a man, but only so that he can return to being an angel."⁸³

Wenders represents the change of the *Wende* and its breakneck speed through a malevolent character, Emit Flesti (Willem DaFoe), whose name reads backwards in English as "Time Itself". As we have seen, many commentators on unification locate the

process's failure in the speed of the events of 1989-1990. Wenders explained in an interview that, at first, unification brought great promise: "For us it seemed that 'to be German' could assume a new meaning. Reunification offered us the possibility to redefine ourselves. But we have lived it too euphorically. It all happened much too quickly."⁸⁴ Flesti's destructive machinations and single-minded attempts to make Cassiel fail as a man (introducing him to gambling and alcohol) make sense when read as a parable for the failures of unification.

While Cassiel seems to represent the problems of the East, the family unit that is separated by the war and reunited through Cassiel could, in turn, be read as an allegory of the reunited family of Germany itself. Tony Baker escapes with his father (a propaganda film maker) from Germany during the end of the Second World War. Tony, who was raised in Detroit but moved back to Germany, conflates the problematic American figure in much of German cinema with West Germany.⁸⁵ Baker represents the Western half of the divided family, the half that has become part of American culture. However, Hanna (Monika Hansen), Tony's sister, remained in Germany and in the present day lives in the former East with her daughter Raissa and Konrad (legendary German actor Heinz Rühmann), the chauffeur with whom her mother entrusted her. She represents the East, reflecting the traditional gendering of East/West identities mentioned in Chapter One. There is some hope in this symbolic family, as at the film's end Tony (the West) appears to be reconciled with Hanna (the East).

Wenders made conscious efforts to distance the two films from each other: both Peter Handke's language and Alekan's cinematographic eye are gone and, with equal deliberation, Wenders changed the crew.⁸⁶ This time round, cinematographer Jürgen

Jürges replaces Alekan. Wenders collaborated on the script with East German poet Ulrich Zieger, and the guiding words of the film seem to be those of the Bible, not an earthly scribe. The film opens with a quotation from the book of Matthew and the angels often speak in quotations from the Old and New Testaments.⁸⁷ For example, Raphaela comforts a dying man by reciting chapter three of Ecclesiastes. However, even these biblical words point towards a thematics of vision, continuing the self-reflexive gestures of the first film.

Central to understanding the meaning of this thematics in terms of an explicit ethics of visual representation is Wenders's own elaboration of the German term *Einstellung*.⁸⁸ Wenders explains that this word has an important double meaning. It is a photography and film term that refers to the "take," "(a particular shot and its framing), as well as how the camera is adjusted in terms of the aperture and exposure."⁸⁹ But it also means "the attitude in which someone approaches something, psychologically or ethically."⁹⁰ Therefore, for Wenders, "Every picture indeed reflects the attitude of whoever took it."⁹¹ As the film's focalizers, the angels literally *see* with love. In this second sense of *Einstellung*, then, the film-maker's craft becomes an ethical act. Shooting a film puts viewers into the world of their subject; they can "remember better, understand better, see better, hear better, and love more deeply. (And, alas, despise more deeply too. The 'evil eye,' after all, exists as well.)"⁹²

The film begins with the biblical quotation "The light of the body is in the eye" and then cuts to an irised image of the *Siegessäule* (Victory Column), which recalls early pinhole camera techniques. In turn, the iris slowly widens to a full shot. Lutz P. Koepnick suggests that this sequence is deliberate:

Wenders's ocular nostalgia seeks to reverse the tactile aspects of modern
visuality, voyeurism, and pornography, as well as to reinstate the legitimacy of
the German film's desire for grand vistas, discredited ever since the monumental
displays of marching bodies, enchanted masses, and architectural wonders in Nazi
film.⁹³

Arguably, Wenders redeems these 'epic' images by connecting them to the innocent and
loving eyes of the angels. In his earthly incarnation, Cassiel tells Raphaela how mortals
see the world:

This light, for instance. I think it's neon. You can't imagine how cold it is, and
what harsh outlines it creates. It's light for travelers because it drives people into
high gear. We always wondered why they were constantly in a rush. Now I
know. It's the light. They've pitted it against the sun.

If humans have lost the ability to see angels, it is because they blind themselves with
material objects (the neon light of commerce). This was an omnipresent theme on the
Left's discourse post-unification, where the West's major appeal to former East Germans
was more and more consumer goods, but it is instructive that in *Faraway So Close!*, it is
articulated in a thematics of vision, once more.

Wenders's concept of *Einstellung* also helps to make sense of the pornography
and propaganda sub-narratives in the film, debased sites of visual technology that have
turned men away from angels. The exploitative representation found in the pornography
that Tony Baker peddles is linked to the damaging propaganda that Tony's father Anton
(Ingo Schmitz) created for the Nazis. Wenders suggests that pornography and
propaganda are similar modes of representation because they are false visions that only

cause their viewers to “despise more deeply.”⁹⁴ Pornography is to personal relationships what propaganda is to politics.⁹⁵ In the film, these two forms of seeing are symbolically linked when Cassiel destroys Tony’s stash of pornography by soaking it in alcohol and using an old reel of Anton’s film as a fuse.

Arguably, *Faraway, So Close!* also represents a change in Wenders’s own *seeing*, most specifically in his spirituality. “In the beginning [of *Wings of Desire*],” he has said in an interview, “the angels were just narrative tools to find a different point of view. But through the process of making the film and evoking these spiritual entities, my perspective on these figures slowly changed.”⁹⁶ He explained that it was seeing people’s reactions to the film that caused him to believe in angels: “I couldn’t make another film in which the angels were metaphors because they were no longer metaphors to me. If I made another film about angels, they would have to be messengers of God, the go-betweens.”⁹⁷ The danger was that he would become “too didactic” and he has said, upon reflection, “I was filled with too much missionary fervour.”⁹⁸ *Faraway, So Close!* contains much lamentation from the angels about humanity’s ignorance of them. Raphaela bemoans, “It’s so exhausting to love people who run away from us. Why do they shun us more and more?” Cassiel replies, “Because we have a powerful enemy now. People believe more in the world than in us.”

While there is a certain missionary zeal detectable in the second angel film, it would be a mistake to link the change in tone to Wenders’s spiritual transformation alone. The more pessimistic mood of this second Berlin film also reflects the historical and national disappointments surrounding the process of unification.⁹⁹

Wenders's characters are so much sadder and more tired of life than the angels of *Wings of Desire*. The film's private investigator, Philip Winter (Rüdiger Volger),¹⁰⁰ laments both the modern age and the modern city: "Long ago nomads must have been overcome by boredom, so they said, 'Let's build here and there and there, some hideous cities out of stone so that our world weariness lies in the squares and streets, houses and apartments.'" While *Wings of Desire* features melancholy characters, it also portrays the angels bringing hope to the citizens of Berlin. In *Faraway, So Close!* the whirl of construction drowns out the spiritual dimension of the angels, who seem as depressed as the citizens they watch. All that unification has brought in its wake is material progress while the very act of building effaces memory and history.

Like *Wings of Desire*, the film features flashbacks to war-time, only this time no archival footage is used. The suggestion, perhaps, is that one no longer has access to any unmediated past. The two major flashback threads — Tony's and his father Anton's escape to America and the mother's decision to stay in Germany with Hanna, as well as the scene in an art gallery, continue the thematics of seeing and visibility. In the first thread, in 1945, Anton flees from possible execution or imprisonment with his stash of propaganda films. The scene explains Tony's and Hanna's history, but also once more links propaganda to pornography and shows that the son follows in his father's footsteps. The scene in the art gallery is much more complex. Cassiel follows the detective Philip Winter and Tony Baker into an art gallery featuring paintings that had been part of the Nazis' "Degenerate Art/*Entartete Kunst*" (1937) exhibit. The paintings, particularly one by Max Beckmann featuring an angel, trigger painful memories for Cassiel as he remembers the last time he saw them. He falls to the floor clutching his eyes and the film

switches to black and white as the angelic Cassiel lies on the floor in the same manner. He and his fellow angels cower as the Nazis laugh and point at the pictures on the walls. Wenders explains that the Nazis “made fun of some of the greatest art made in this century.”¹⁰¹ Once again, *Einstellung* is implicitly invoked, in its double sense, to comment on Germany’s darkest period. Yet, if *Einstellung* in its ethical dimension remains crucial for Wenders, figured in the film’s quotation from the Book of Matthew: “If, therefore, thine eye be clear/thy whole body shall be full of light,” this is because his critique spirals forward into the historical present. In this new unified Berlin of *Faraway, So Close!* it would appear that humans continue to see neither clearly nor with love.¹⁰²

While Wenders clearly had qualms about the spiritual turn of his second angel film, there is a more historical criticism that might be brought to bear on *Faraway, So Close!*, one that returns us to the idea of Berlin as a city-text. Ironically, this film which purports to deal with German history is strikingly quiet on the history of the East German Communist regime. Nothing is made, for instance, of the pervasive use of propaganda and constant surveillance in the former GDR. Thus, despite its obsession with history and the shadows of the past that bleed into the present, and despite the metaphorical allusions to East-West German relations, *Faraway, So Close!* generally avoids East German history altogether. What’s more, although it is mostly shot in East Berlin, none of the characters directly refer to the recent socialist past. The problems faced by Cassiel, like the reunion of Hanna and Tony, may evoke current problems in East-West relations, but they do not confront the years between the end of World War Two and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Unlike many *Wende* films, there are no menacing *Stasi* officials or bitter easterners whose freedom was curtailed by the socialist government (the films of the

Cinema of Consensus in my next chapter deliver both in abundance). In fact, nothing is made of the fact that for the last forty years East Berliners had been constantly watched and listened to by the decidedly un-angelic *Stasi*. Nor are there any *ostalgic* former citizens of the GDR, as we shall see in Becker's film *Good Bye Lenin!* While Wenders alludes to the poverty and desperation in the former eastern sector, he never explicitly links it to the pains of unification.

The film effaces these issues so much that at one point Peter Falk (again playing himself as a former angel) jokingly says to a taxi driver unsure of how to find a street in East Berlin, "There was an incident a couple of years ago, they tore down a wall. I don't know if you recall."

The history of the Second World War is ever present and always around a corner, just as in *Wings of Desire*, but the history of the GDR is almost entirely erased. Paradoxically, then, Wenders associates the East with denial of the past while also denying the East's socialist past by not including it in his film, suggesting that Wenders's post-*Wende* film demonstrates a Western bias towards the events of unification. In the film, the *Ossis* have no sense of history and seem to have been asleep during the socialist period. Arguably, the simplistic way the Eastern characters are portrayed recalls Martin Ahrends's likening of the East as a simplistic Sleeping Beauty and the *Wende* to a "waking up" of East Germany.¹⁰³

In his return visit to post-Wall German history, then, Wenders has created a film that is obviously compromised by its overly complex narrative, its elision of East German history, and its conspicuous theological vision. However, the film's footage of post-

Wall-reconstruction-era Berlin serves as an important historical document. As well, the ethical injunctions to productive vision and memory remain important.

Clearly, in the end, these two films must be seen as a pair, having much in common. While they are completely different in tone and narrative structure, they both deal with the way Berlin acts as a site of memory. In *Wings of Desire*, the city is a map of memory; each location is permeated with a history that seamlessly springs forth through the use of stock footage from 1945. Wenders uses the fissures and absences of Cold War West Berlin to meditate on Germany's troubled past. The shadows of the war appear in the sad and frustrated faces of the people in their apartments; in the scarred, blank walls of the city; and, of course, in that largest of barriers, the Wall. While the visuals are rich and carefully composed, the soundtrack is equally intricate with the overlapping voices of Berliners in a chorus of sound, matched by violins and choirs. The film valorises Berlin as, says Wenders, the only city that is able to remember the German past.

Conversely, *Faraway, So Close!* aims to deal with memory and recent history. The film is full of characters who symbolize aspects of post-Wall Germany. But it also demonstrates the fear that the reconstruction of Berlin will lead to a mass forgetting as all the empty spaces are filled and the Wall disappears, removing the possibility of mourning forever.

Though it is tempting to compare the two films and declare *Wings of Desire* the better film, an emphasis on valuation misses the point of the overall project of the two films. Each film has an important place in the before and after of the historical moment of German unification. The films capture this momentous change that happened over the

space of only one year. While both films plead for memory, they become memory aids themselves by showing the many places in West Berlin, and then unified Berlin, that no longer exist.¹⁰⁴ If Berlin is a laboratory, as Rem Koolhaas suggests, then the unification process is simply another phase of the extended experiment. And in this experiment, Wim Wenders's films *Wings of Desire* and *Faraway, So Close!* provide important evidence of the momentous changes in a past that belongs to Berlin, to Germany, and to the whole of the West in the Twentieth Century.

Notes

¹ Wim Wenders, "The Urban Landscape from the Point of View of Images," in *Wim Wenders: On Film*, edited by Wim Wenders (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 381.

² Quoted in Fritz Neumeyer, "OMA's Berlin: The Polemic Island in the City," translated by Francesca Rogier, *Assemblage* 11 (April 1990): 37.

³ Fritz Neumeyer, "OMA's Berlin," 38.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quoted in Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 14. original emphasis.

⁶ Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 14.

⁷ For a discussion of the monument and the controversies surrounding its construction see Jane Kramer, "The Politics of Memory," in *The Politics of Memory*, 255–293, and Andreas Huyssen, "After the War: Berlin as Palimpsest," in *Present Pasts*, 72–84.

⁸ Wenders says in the DVD commentary for *Faraway, So Close!* (Columbia Tristar, 1994) that he does not see the second film as a sequel because it is so different, both in style and content, from the first. He prefers to think of it as a continuation of *Wings of Desire* because it features most of the same characters.

⁹ Beyond fictional representations of unification, Leonie Naughton explains, a new genre of documentary features sprang up as a result of the *Wende*. These so-called "Wall films" dealt with the challenges of unification. While not all of the films dealt with Berlin, the label "Wall film" applied to documentaries about unification, thus illustrating the importance of the Wall as an icon of German unification. See Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, 98–99.

¹⁰ For example, Margarete von Trotta's *The Promise* (1995), which will be discussed in Chapter 3, and Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003), which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

¹¹ Quoted in Peter Jansen, "The Truth of Images: Two Conversations with Peter W. Jansen," in *Wim Wenders: On Film*, edited by Wim Wenders (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 330.

¹² Wim Wenders, "The Urban Landscape," 380.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Veteran actor Curt Bois worked with Bertolt Brecht and Max Reinhardt before he escaped Nazi Germany in 1933. See Ira Paneth, "Wim and His Wings," *Film Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1988): 2. Bois had died by the time *Faraway, So Close!* was filmed, so Wenders dedicated the film to him.

¹⁶ Quoted in Paneth, "Wim and His Wings," 2.

¹⁷ Quoted in Roger Bromley, "Borderline Identities and the Experience of the Stranger," in *From Alice to Buena Vista* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 77.

¹⁸ Quoted in Paneth, "Wim and His Wings," 4.

¹⁹ Wenders had originally intended to film *Wings of Desire* in both the East and West sections of Berlin. However, upon visiting the Ministry of Cinema in East Berlin to obtain permission, the Minister laughed Wenders out of his office because Wenders intended to show the angels walking through the Wall, an act that the SED officials could not tolerate (See "Some Thoughts from Wim Wenders," excerpt from the US Press Kit, 1993, *Faraway, So Close!* website, <http://www.farawaysoclose.org/articles/uspresskit1.htm>, accessed April 22, 2004). The end result then was that the film features no East Berliners and no locations in the East.

²⁰ Scott Derrickson, "A Conversation with Wim Wenders," *Image: A Journal for the Arts and Religion* 35 (summer 2002), reprinted on *Wim Wenders Official Website* (December 2002), http://www.wim-wenders.com/news_reel/2002/dec12-interview.htm, accessed April 27, 2004.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Quoted in Robert Seidenberg, "The Man Who Fell to Earth," *American Film*, June 1988, 32.

²⁴ Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 16.

²⁵ Wenders's conception of the angels as witnesses to history who desire to join the mortals is no doubt informed by Benjamin's discussion of Paul Klee's painting "Angelus Novus." Benjamin sees the angel as the "Angel of History" whose "face is turned towards the past" but is blown forward by a storm that "irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned [...]. This storm is called progress." See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (Glasgow: William Collins and Sons, 1979), 255–266. The Benjamin/Klee connection is made in the library scene as a Berliner reads an essay on Benjamin and "Angelus Novus." For further discussion of the links between Wenders and Benjamin's "Angel of History," see Mark Luprecht, "Opaque Skies: *Wings of Desire* – Angelic Text, Context, and Subtext," *Post Script* 17, no. 3 (summer 1998): 47–54.

²⁶ Wim Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* Special Edition DVD (MGM Home Entertainment, 2003).

²⁷ Robert Phillip Kolker and Peter Beicken, "The Boy with the Movie Camera: Biography, Historical Background, Student Films," in *The Films of Wim Wenders: Cinema as Vision and Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6.

²⁸ While this movement is indebted to *Nouvelle Vague* (New Wave) in France, Ian Garwood warns of the dangers of seeing *Autorenfilm* as strictly a German version of auteur cinema. *Autorenfilm*, as a term, has existed since the Wilhelmine period. While it has meant slightly different things over time, Garwood explains that in relation to the New German Cinema it suggests film that is nationally representative, produced as art instead of business; the films constructed "a dialogue between film and 'higher' art forms such as literature and theatre." See Ian Garwood, "The *Autorenfilm* in Contemporary German Cinema," in *The German Cinema Book*, edited by Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk (London: BFI, 2002), 203.

²⁹ However, this distinction is not precise; some directors such as Volker Schlöndorff and Werner Herzog were active in both time frames.

³⁰ Timothy Corrigan, *New German Film*, xvi.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Quoted in Kolker and Beicken, "The Boy with the Movie Camera," 12.

³⁴ Robert Seidenberg argues that "many of Wenders's films — up to and including *Paris, Texas* — were inspired by such American genres as the road movie (*Alice in the Cities*, *Kings of the Road*, *Wrong Move*, *The State of Things*) or the thriller (*The American Friend*, *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*)." See Seidenberg, "The Man Who Fell to Earth," 30.

³⁵ Robert Seidenberg, "The Man Who Fell to Earth," 30.

³⁶ Quoted in Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 16.

³⁷ Graham Fuller, "Angel Heart," *The Listener*, 9 June 1988, 36.

- ³⁸ Richard Raskin, "What is Peter Falk Doing in Wings of Desire?" *P.O.V.* 8 (December 1999), reprinted at [http://imv.au.dk/publikationer/pov/issue 08/section 2/artc8A.html](http://imv.au.dk/publikationer/pov/issue%2008/section%20artc8A.html), accessed June 12, 2005 (original emphasis).
- ³⁹ Quoted in Robert Seidenberg, "The Man Who Fell to Earth," 30.
- ⁴⁰ Kolker and Beicken, "The Boy with the Movie Camera," 20.
- ⁴¹ See Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," in *Cinema and Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 265. This shift will be discussed in further detail in chapter 3.
- ⁴² Ian Garwood, "The *Autorenfilm* in Contemporary German Cinema," 205.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Les Caldvedt, "Berlin Poetry: Archaic Cultural Patterns in Wenders's *Wings of Desire*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (April 1992): 122.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 16.
- ⁴⁶ Michael Trussler, "Spectral Witnesses: The Doubled Voice in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 14, no. 1 (spring 2003): 30.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted in Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 16.
- ⁴⁹ Xavier Vila and Alice Kuzniar, "Witnessing Narration in *Wings of Desire*," *Film Criticism* 16, no. 3 (spring 1992): 56.
- ⁵⁰ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* DVD.
- ⁵¹ Vila and Kuzniar, "Witnessing Narration," 55.
- ⁵² Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* DVD.
- ⁵³ Quoted in Peter Jansen, "The Truth of Images," 327.
- ⁵⁴ Quoted in Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 17.
- ⁵⁵ Graham Fuller, "Angel Heart," 35.
- ⁵⁶ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* DVD. See also Charles H. Helmetag, "...Of Men and Angels": Literary Allusions in Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire*, *Literature/Film Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (October 1990): 253, for more on the film's connection with Rilke.
- ⁵⁷ Jochen Brunow, "Excerpts from Interviews with Wenders," in *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: Image, Narrative, and the Postmodern Condition*, edited by Roger F. Cook and Gerd Gemünden (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 67.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* DVD.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Assenka Oksiloff, "Eden is Burning: Wim Wenders's Techniques of Synaesthesia," *The German Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 34.
- ⁶² Quoted in Luca Antoccia, "Talking with Angels," *Film and Filming* 407 (August 1988): 18.
- ⁶³ Quoted in Antoccia, "Talking with Angels," 18.
- ⁶⁴ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* DVD.
- ⁶⁵ Edward Plater, "The Storyteller in Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire*," *Post Script* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 17.
- ⁶⁶ David Caldwell and Paul W. Rea, "Handke's and Wenders's *Wings of Desire*: Transcending Postmodernism," *The German Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1991): 49.
- ⁶⁷ Kolker and Beicken, "Between Heaven and Earth," 156.
- ⁶⁸ Some critics have criticized the film for both presenting a solely masculine gaze and failing to represent the racial diversity, through characters with speaking roles, in Berlin. See Kolker and Beicken, "The Boy with the Movie Camera"; bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness: Seeing *Wings of Desire*," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 165–171; and Les Caldvedt, *Berlin Poetry*. Tony Rayns argues that the love story results in a depoliticizing of the film. He complains that there is little of Berlin in the last half of the film and that Wenders elides issues of the division of Berlin ("Der Himmel über Berlin," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 55, no. 654 [10 July 1988]: 205).

⁶⁹ Vila and Kuzniar argue, "[The] individual story is bound with the collective one. Indeed, by ending with Homer's epic, the strength of this bond is underlined. For, like the lover's story, the story of history involves the desire for narration and the need for a witness" ("Witnessing Narration," 61).

⁷⁰ Thanks to Barbara Gabriel for this point.

⁷¹ Quoted in Jacques Derrida, Kurt Forster, and Wim Wenders, "The Berlin City Forum Symposium," *Architectural Design* 62 (November–December 1992): 52.

⁷² Wim Wenders, "Talk about Germany," in *Wim Wenders: On Film*, edited by Wim Wenders (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 436.

⁷³ Coco Fusco, "Angels, History, and Poetic Fantasy," 17.

⁷⁴ However, Potsdamer Platz may soon be returning to a wasteland as the Sony headquarters mainly sits empty and the luxury condos have roused little interest in Berlin.

⁷⁵ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Faraway, So Close!* DVD.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Gianni Canova, "Not Even Angels Can Save My Berlin," translated by Alexander Graf, *Faraway, So Close!* website, <http://www.farawaysoclose.org/articles/sette.htm>, accessed April 22, 2004.

⁷⁷ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Faraway, So Close!* DVD.

⁷⁸ Philip Kemp, "In weiter Ferne So Nah!!" *Faraway, So Close!* *Sight and Sound* 4, no. 7 (July 1994): 46.

⁷⁹ History has proven Wenders wrong because, perhaps due to Berlin's flailing economy, many of these bullet-scarred buildings still remain in East Berlin; however, the city is still very much under construction.

⁸⁰ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Wings of Desire* DVD.

⁸¹ David Bremer and Ched Myers, "The Flutter of History," *Sojourner*, July 1994, reprinted on *Faraway, So Close!* website, <http://www.farawaysoclose.org/articles/sojourners.htm>, accessed April 22, 2004.

⁸² Wenders explains that she was named for Gorbachev's wife.

⁸³ Quoted in Scott Derrickson, "A Conversation with Wim Wenders."

⁸⁴ Quoted in Gianni Canova, "Not Even Angels Can Save My Berlin."

⁸⁵ Actor Horst Bucholz is an intriguing casting choice to embody corrupt America/West Germany: he speaks English with a German accent and German with an American accent.

⁸⁶ Wenders, "Director's Commentary," *Faraway, So Close!* DVD.

⁸⁷ Scott Derrickson, "A Conversation with Wim Wenders."

⁸⁸ Although Wenders has previously discussed the concept of *Einstellung* in terms of his photography and it can certainly be applied to his other works (most notably *Alice in the Cities*), *Faraway, So Close!* is the first time Wenders explicitly applies this concept to Germany's National Socialist legacy and its infamous abuse of images. Thanks to Barbara Gabriel for suggesting this term.

⁸⁹ Wim Wenders, "Introduction," in *Once*, translated by Marion Kagerer (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel and Distributed Art Publishers Inc., 2001), 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹³ Lutz P. Koepnick, "Negotiating Popular Culture: Wenders, Handke, and the Topographies of Cultural Studies," *The German Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (autumn 1996): 387.

⁹⁴ Wim Wenders, "Introduction," 12.

⁹⁵ Pornography, like propaganda, holds a dubious position in German film history. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, the German film industry recovered from the war, in part, by producing cheap porn films. See Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Scott Derrickson, "A Conversation with Wim Wenders."

⁹⁷ Scott Derrickson, "A Conversation with Wim Wenders."

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ As Wenders says, unification resulted in "an incredible animosity and a paralyzing disorientation. It is the young people above all, those 16-18 years old, who are found to be living in an empty country. A country that for them does not have any definition. Germany is a kind of no-man's land today. It has no memory or recognition of its own history. Therefore, each day drags on for us without much dignity." Quoted in Gianni Canova, "Not Even Angels Can Save My Berlin."

¹⁰⁰ Volger has appeared in ten of Wenders's films and in a number of these films plays a character named Winter.

¹⁰¹ Gianni Canova, "Not Even Angels Can Save My Berlin."

¹⁰² At least one critic has argued that Wenders's critique of debased kinds of vision in relation to German history is clichéd. Lutz P. Koepnick argues that directors such as Herzog and Edgar Reitz have covered this ground earlier and more convincingly. See Koepnick, "Negotiating Popular Culture."

¹⁰³ Martin Ahrends, "The Great Waiting," 43.

¹⁰⁴ In fact, the Film Museum in Berlin sells a map of the city that leads tourists to some key locations from both films.

The Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus

“What would happen if, say, both German governments took a year’s vacation; if journalists fell silent for a year; if the border police took a year to recuperate on the Adriatic and the Black Sea; and the people started their own East-West negotiations? After a brief embrace, they would discover that they resemble their governments much more closely than they care to admit. It would become more evident that they have long since made their own crusade out of the biographical accident of growing up in different occupation zones — later, different social systems. As soon as someone asked which half offers a better life, the fight that both states carry on daily in the media would break out in the living room. Those who acted as bystanders would be forced to recognize their own crudely amplified shadows in the two-dimensional figures on TV.”

*From Peter Schneider’s 1982 book The Wall Jumper (Die Mauerspringer)*¹

“I gotta go over the Berlin Wall.”

*“Holidays in the Sun” by the Sex Pistols*²

In his examination of the growing global popularity of memory, cultural critic Andreas Huyssen argues that “the desire for narratives of the past, for re-creations, re-readings, re-productions, seems boundless at every level of our culture.”³ Yet within this cultural obsession with memory lies the problem of what is remembered “the act of remembering is always in and of the present, while the referent is of the past and thus absent. Inevitably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting and absence.”⁴ There are similar challenges for films that attempt to invoke memories. As Anton Kaes explains,

The past cannot be recovered and re-experienced, since it is not out there to be visited and photographed like a foreign country; the past always has to be reconstructed, reconstituted, represented based on representations that already exist. This of course is the aporia of historical representation in film: how to break out of the circular recycling of images that are mere replicas of previous images.⁵

brought these issues to the forefront of public debate. Uncertainties about a united Germany's role in Europe and the world as well as anxieties about its historical legacy found their way into many cultural industries, not the least of which was the film industry.⁶ Sabine Hake argues that these concerns appear less at the level of obvious content reflecting the new historical reality than symptomatically, cushioning the shock of this new beginning:

In their effort to address specific post-unification concerns, film-makers returned to the genres of the postwar period as a way of reclaiming the stabilising function of classical narrative and of utilizing these effects in the making of another Zero Hour.⁷

It seems that unification, as a milder version of the trauma of World War Two, had raised issues that were too painful to deal with.⁸ The post-Wall period has seen the resurgence of light romantic comedies, relationship dramas, broad comedies, and historical melodramas, mostly about the Second World War.⁹ Leonie Naughton argues that the many unification comedies, such as Peter Timm's *Go Trabi Go* (1991) are similar to the *Heimat* film in their reaffirmation of traditional family values.¹⁰ Additionally, Hake explains that many unification films also "repeated narrative formulas from the postwar period".¹¹ They recreated such clichés as the "all- powerful regime and its anonymous power structures; [... and] the essential decency of ordinary people."¹²

In his essay "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," Eric Rentschler examines this shift in German film from the experimental and political New German Cinema, such as that of Wim Wenders, to the more commercially driven Post-Wall cinema.¹³ Many filmmakers in this current cinema trend are reacting against

the experimental tendencies of the New German Cinema; these filmmakers “want the cinema to be a site of mass diversion, not a moral institution or a political forum.”¹⁴ Rentschler labels this trend “Cinema of Consensus” because the directors “consciously solicit a new German consensus.”¹⁵ He explains that funding tied to marketability and concerns about an increasingly global market mean that post-Wall films take fewer chances and prefer to entertain rather than reflect on national identity. Shifts in film subsidies began with the election of socially and economically conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Christian Democrat Union (CDU)-dominated government in 1982.¹⁶ Kohl’s similarly conservative Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmermann “declared war on the *Autorenfilm*, insisting on popular movies that would appeal to the average German taxpayer.”¹⁷ Zimmermann not only reduced public subsidies but also cancelled “already approved loans to controversial projects.”¹⁸ Government discouragement of daring films combined with an “intensified competition for audiences after the introduction of home video and, later, cable television”¹⁹ resulted in a cinema that was more concerned with profitability than its predecessor. The New German Cinema had always been controversial and pulled in smaller audiences within West Germany, perhaps because of its sometimes unflinching portrait of both the Second World War and the post-war boom. Indeed, “it was a curious cultural ambassador which at its best spoke for the nation by speaking (indeed: acting out) against it.”²⁰ Therefore, new funding policies from the Kohl government sought to create a more commercial cinema that would attract larger German audiences. Rentschler identifies four contributing financial factors to this trend in subsidies: increasing centralization of film financing; the “almost exclusive economic nature” of the subsidies; “greater powers of

television officials on film boards”; and collaboration between “film academies, television stations, and commercial producers.”²¹ Additionally, American distributors Warner, UIP, Columbia, Buena Vista and Fox have made inroads into German exhibition and distribution.²² Realizing that “German films, professionally packaged and appropriately marketed, can play well in German cinemas,” the American companies have taken an interest and begun to distribute German films.²³ These factors “have influenced the content and shape of productions, diminishing the possibility for political interventions and the presence of alternative perspectives and formal experiments.”²⁴ Thus, there now exists a German film industry that many critics attack as “vapid and anaemic, devoid of substance, conviction and deeper meaning.”²⁵ “Domestic fare,” they argue, “is a formula-bound profusion of romantic comedies, crude farces, road movies, action films and literary adaptations.”²⁶ Rentschler labels this trend the “Cinema of Consensus” because it does not challenge its audience, but rather seeks to entertain and make money.²⁷ For example, the work of filmmakers like Doris Dörrie, Sönke Wortmann, Katja von Garnier, Detlev Buck or Joseph Vilsmaier is often slick and stylish with German stars, calculated to sell tickets. Proponents of this cinema argue that it offers an escape for viewers and draws a far larger audience than what they regard as the ‘pretentious’ and difficult art films of the New German Cinema, the enemy that Zimmermann had identified as the *Autorenfilm*.

Did they succeed in capturing a mass audience outside of Germany? Certainly one of the motivations behind this new commercial direction was the imbalance in cultural assets (including film and the audiovisual industry) that dogs the whole of the European community to this day, an imbalance massively in favour of the United States of

America. Nils Klevjer Aas reports this deficit in trade is rapidly growing “from a little more than 2 billion USD in 1988 to more than seven billion in 1999.”²⁸

Yet, in capitulating to this pressure in the 1980s, German films may have gone both too far and not far enough. Criticism of this decade’s films suggests that this tradition is not generally successful outside of Germany because it is “both too German and not German enough. It has stars familiar only to German audiences and generic designs that are not readily exportable because they are done better and more effectively elsewhere.”²⁹ On the other hand, those who are critical of the Cinema of Consensus praise the New German Cinema for its political goals.³⁰ Such critics see the New German Cinema dealing with issues of the past and its effect on the future, unlike contemporary German film that avoids such topics. While Rentschler warns of setting up a simplistic binary opposition that sees New German Cinema as without flaws and the Cinema of Consensus as without merits, he maintains that the current trend does not allow for complex examinations of what it means to be German at this moment in history. This lack of examination is especially egregious at a time when, due to unification, such questions are important. Rentschler argues that “repeatedly the Cinema of Consensus presents characters whose primary sense of person and place is rarely an overt function of their national identity or directly impacted by Germany’s difficult past.”³¹

This is not to suggest that Cinema of Consensus films are never set in the past. For example, the late 1990s saw an upsurge in films portraying the history of the Third Reich.³² For many critics this cinema, in contrast with the internationally acclaimed New German Cinema, does not tackle difficult issues with the same honesty and self-critical gaze of the New German Cinema;³³ instead, the World War Two setting is used merely

as backdrop or mise-en-scène and not as a way to critique seriously, or even hold a mirror up to, contemporary German society.

While films about unification have not been produced in the same volume as those depicting the Nazi era, the few films that exist often suffer from similar problems. Hake argues that “for the most part, the films about German unification used classical narrative structures in presenting historical events and in measuring their impact on public and private lives.”³⁴ And like the World War Two films, these classical narratives neither question what it means to be German nor ask how the weight of history destabilizes the present.³⁵ In fact, they are often juvenile comedies such as *Go Trabi Go* or Detlev Buck’s *No More Mr. Nice Guy/ Wir können auch anders* (1993), which avoid the politics of unification and often portray East Germans as simple fools.

Yet films of weight and substance *have* been made in the post-unification period, even within the commercial and popular frameworks that characterizes the post-Wall Cinema of Consensus. Films such as Margarethe von Trotta’s *The Promise/Das Versprechen* (1995), Volker Schlöndorff’s *The Legends of Rita/Die Stille nach dem Schuss* (2000), Roland Suso Richter’s *The Tunnel/Der Tunnel*, Leander Hassmann’s *Sonnenallee* (1999) and *Herr Lehmann* (2003), Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye Lenin!* (2002), and Frank Beyer’s *Nikolai Church/Nikolaikirche* (1995) are among a small number of films that attempt to interpret the history of the partition and unification of Germany in interesting ways.

With Rentschler’s thesis on post-Wall film in mind, I want to discuss German commercial historical film to see whether it is always incapable of subtlety and papers over grave post-unification issue. I also want to examine the ways in which such popular

genres are mobilized to present the stories of the cold war period in Berlin, specifically issues around the Berlin Wall, and how they are influenced by industrial and ideological concerns. In other words, do commercial historical films always gloss over subtleties in favour of simplistic binary oppositions in which East and West Germany stand in for a relatively simple good and evil whose axis drives the narrative's escape trajectory?

I will use von Trotta's *The Promise* and Suso Richter's *The Tunnel* as case studies of contemporary historical film in Germany. These films are important among post-Wall reconstructions of divided Germany because they use representations of Berlin and the Berlin Wall as a background for generic stories (a love story and action adventure story, respectively). Additionally, von Trotta's film demonstrates that even a film produced by a member of the stridently non-compromising New German Cinema is subject to the pressures of commercial film. Like Wenders's films, these two films use Berlin as a microcosm of Germany. However, Wenders's films are moral allegories with Berlin as a key site of memory; these films use Berlin in a more literal sense as the actual border between the two Germanys. It is a city easily recognizable to audiences as ground zero of the Cold War.

Arguably, both films show the influences of the Cinema of Consensus, particularly its ideological shift to commercial rather than socially critical cinema. I will examine how, within this trend towards marketability, the setting of Berlin cannot help but be a magnet for central issues of Twentieth Century German history. I will ask why these films present the relatively Manichean image that they do of a divided Berlin,³⁶ mobilizing meanings about East and West Germany that could be both more complicated and

nuanced. However, before I establish how these films represent such an ideologically charged era, some historical background is in order.

After SED leader Walter Ulbricht's government built the Berlin Wall in 1961, the city became an ideological battle field for the Cold War. Cold War leader John F. Kennedy made his famous "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" speech from the *Rathaus* (City Hall) in June of 1963.³⁷ This war of words was waged even regarding the Wall itself. It was described as an "*antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (anti-fascist protection dike)"³⁸ by the East German government and as a symbol of the tyranny of Communism by the West German government and other Western powers. Before the Wall's construction there had been challenges to the government, such as the Workers' Uprising of June 17, 1953: thousands of workers took to the streets to protest the government's attempt to raise production quotas without raising wages. Soviet troops were then brought in to control the riots. Many East Germans were imprisoned and even executed following the uprising.³⁹ The Wall itself was constructed to prevent the mass exodus through Berlin of young skilled labourers.⁴⁰ After the Wall's construction, tensions mounted: there were tank standoffs and the televised shooting of Peter Fechter, one of the first people to be killed while attempting to jump the Wall.⁴¹ Behind the Wall, the East German government became increasingly strict and limited the rights of movement, speech and liberty of its people.

The key component in the SED government's control was their secret police, the *Staatssicherheitsdienst* (known as the *Stasi*). Founded on February 8, 1950, this secret police force was obsessed with gathering information about every single citizen of East Germany.⁴² In fact, "there was someone reporting to the *Stasi* on their fellows and

friends in every school, every factory, every apartment block, every pub.”⁴³ The destruction in 1989 of many key *Stasi* files makes it impossible to know exactly how pervasive the actions of the *Stasi* and their collaborators were, though the estimate is one informer for every sixty-three people. If part-time informers are also counted, the number is estimated as high as one per every six-and-a-half East Germans.⁴⁴ The *Stasi* imprisoned, tortured, banished, demoted, intimidated, and destroyed the lives of, thousands of *Ossis*.⁴⁵ After the fall of the Wall, information surfaced implicating many high-ranking officials and even numerous “dissidents” of the GDR as *Stasi* collaborators.⁴⁶

Despite the repressive political conditions in the GDR, as time went on the problem of the Wall became less immediate. In the 1970s Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* allowed East and West Germany to officially acknowledge each other’s legitimacy.⁴⁷ Relations between the two were thus improved and calls for unification became less frequent.⁴⁸ Perhaps another reason for the lack of interest in unification was the fact that the actual Berlin Wall was mirrored by a psychological wall in the consciousness of Berliners. In 1982, Peter Schneider coined the term “the Wall in the head/*die Mauer im Kopf*” in order to demonstrate that there were far stronger differences between East and West than different governments. He demonstrated the ways that East and West Germans had internalized the ideologies of their respective homelands and explained that his views were shaped “by a half-country that over thirty years has acquired an identity in opposition to its other half.”⁴⁹ Most notably, the basic founding myth of the GDR was a “myth of resistance, opposition to and struggle against not only National Socialism, but also opposition to the emerging FRG which openly claimed the problematical political

heritage of the German past.”⁵⁰ The West created an identity of a free democracy by pointing out the repressive tendencies of the East German government.⁵¹

Indeed, when the Wall was dismantled and the two cities again became one, the disappointments that followed the rapid unification of Germany proved Schneider right. These two peoples, who had been separated for forty years, found that they had little in common with their new countrymen and actually harboured a great deal of resentment towards each other. *Wessis*, who shouldered the cost of unification, resented the increases in taxes and feared that their standard of living would diminish as they joined together with the relatively poor East Germans.⁵² *Ossis*, who faced rampant unemployment, saw *Wessis* as conquerors who sought to take away their culture and demote them “to second-class citizens under unification.”⁵³ Additionally, both *Ossis* and *Wessis* had two completely different memory sets and conceptions of the traumas of recent German history.⁵⁴ As we have seen, the process of unification created much unrest and anxiety in Germany as well as the rest of Europe.

Both *The Promise* and *The Tunnel* begin in 1961, the year that the Berlin Wall was erected — and became the international symbol of Cold War divisions in the West. But for the characters in both films, the problems raised by the Wall are of a more literal and personal nature. They *must* deal with the partition of their country because the wall running through their city has divided them from their families, lovers, friends, and neighbours. Because these films cover the early years of the Berlin Wall, they have the potential to show the roots of the conflict. They are also virtually the only films dealing with this period that are widely available in North America. Renate Hehr argues that *The Promise* became “the ‘Wall film’ par excellence” because it was the only fiction film

about the Wall. While “the film had been planned as an ordinary personal story, portraying a segment of reality in the form of a few individual lives, critics demanded from it the total social truth of an era.”⁵⁵ However, as Anton Kaes suggests, because of their accessibility and immediacy, “cinematic images have created a technological memory bank that is shared by everyone and offers little escape. It increasingly shapes and legitimizes our perception of the past.”⁵⁶ In place of other representations of the partition, both *The Tunnel* and *The Promise* alone bear the burden of memory for this time.

Both films are arguably related to the emergence of a Cinema of Consensus. Even von Trotta, who has made politically relevant films in the past, succumbs to the pressures of this trend in her Berlin Wall film. Both films unquestioningly use those classic staples of commercial genre films (cause and effect narrative, unrestricted narration that allows the spectator to see things the characters do not, individual characters as causal agents),⁵⁷ as opposed to the subversive re-workings of popular genre found in the work of auteurs like Fassbinder or Wenders. They rely on the German star system and use recognizable stars (Heino Ferch in *The Tunnel* and Meret Becker in *The Promise*). Finally, both of these films are primarily concerned with creating audience identification through the subordination of historical contexts to either emotional impact (*The Promise*) or suspense (*The Tunnel*).

Roland Suso Richter, born in 1961 in Marburg, represents a newer generation of German directors who generally aim to make mainstream and commercially successful films. His first film *Kolp* (1985) received positive critical attention and a Youth Video award.⁵⁸ Suso Richter has also worked extensively in German television, directing series

and television movies. In fact, *The Tunnel* was originally a made-for-television movie, but was so successful that it received an international release.⁵⁹ His next film, *A Handful of Grass/ Eine Handvoll Gras* (2000), used social issues (immigrants from Kurdistan) as a backdrop to a standard thriller/action plot. Suso Richter's previous work is not widely available in North America⁶⁰; however, his subsequent film, *The I Inside* (2003), was an English-language American feature that went straight to video.

The Tunnel was made in 2000, ten years after the opening of the Wall, when many Germans' enthusiasm for unification had been replaced by bitterness and disappointment. At stake, as we have seen, were a number of issues, and these were widely aired in debates at the level of government and the mass media, as well as in the daily life of ordinary Berliners. However, instead of contributing to this charged contemporary debate, *The Tunnel* is a suspenseful and gripping action film that presents a fantastically uncomplicated picture of a recent past in which a repressive GDR and a prosperous FRG are the principal antagonists. The film thus offers an easy dichotomy between good (the beleaguered people of the GDR and their western saviours) and evil (the *Stasi*). Considering the growing gap between East and West in contemporary Germany, the film's Manichean distinctions seem comforting and almost nostalgic for the Cold War-era society, when the dominant discourse supported such binary oppositions.

The Tunnel tells the story of East German dissident Harry Melchior (Heino Ferch), who joins a group that engineers East/West escapes in an attempt to build a tunnel to rescue their loved ones from the GDR. Harry has left his beloved sister Lotte (Alexandra Maria Lara) and her family behind, and Harry's best friend Matthis (Sebastian Koch) wants to rescue his wife Carola (Claudia Michelsen), who was arrested in an earlier

escape attempt. The film ends with the successful completion of the tunnel and the rescue of over forty people to the West.

With a budget of \$7.10 million,⁶¹ Suso Richter clearly shaped *The Tunnel* to be a mainstream film, suitable for both national and international mass-market consumption. It is stylistically conventional, featuring action scenes with tight close-ups, rapid cuts and simulated hand-held camera work to increase the suspense and speed of the film. Dramatic events, such as the revelation of Carola's collaboration with the *Stasi* or the death of the fiancé of Fritz (Nicolette Krebitz), are sandwiched between action sequences, not allowing time for the viewer to dwell on any of the events. It has high production values, including an elaborate reconstruction of the Wall and divided Berlin. It features would-be stars like Ferch (Harry), and beautiful starlets Nicolette Krebitz (Fritzi) and Alexandra Maria Lara (Lotte). However, while the film is based on true events, it presents an action-adventure version of history with stock characters. For example, Harry is the determined stoic hero, Fritzi is the plucky love interest, Matthis is the beleaguered best friend and Krüger (Uwe Kockisch) is the evil antagonist. The characters' actions are motivated almost entirely by the narrative demands.⁶²

The Tunnel bears the marks of being designed for television.⁶³ The film consists of a series of 'close calls' and moments of heightened suspense, such as an East German pipe that bursts and almost floods the tunnel, or the border patrol hearing the sound of the tunnelers' tools, no doubt to encourage viewers to tune in to the next instalment of the mini series.⁶⁴ Thus history is turned into a suspenseful spectacle.⁶⁵ Events are staged to heighten suspense, often at the expense of historical accuracy. For example, tunneler Fred (Felix Eitner) wants to rescue his elderly mother Marianne (Karin Baal), but

Marianne is reported to the *Stasi* and kills herself to avoid questioning. While this event creates tension and sympathy for the characters, it makes little sense historically. Retired East Germans were not only allowed, but encouraged, to go to the West so that the East German government would not have to pay their pension.⁶⁶

Many Cinema of Consensus directors are influenced by American filmmakers and, according to New German Cinema filmmaker Alexander Kluge, “think a real director must be recognized with a telephone call from Hollywood.”⁶⁷ Thus, these filmmakers often mimic American genres. While New German Cinema auteurs such as Wenders and Fassbinder were well known for using such genres as a starting point for films of considerable complexity, the Cinema of Consensus uses these genres in a straightforward and naive way. There is little to no play with their conventions or attempts to graft them to Germany’s dark history. Thus their work is often simply derivative of Hollywood films. *The Tunnel* is no exception, prompting *Village Voice* critic Matt Singer to complain, “It’s distressing to learn how much German television looks like a Jerry Bruckheimer movie.”⁶⁸ In fact, *The Tunnel* is so lacking in historical context that it could just as easily be a prison escape film. Indeed, the film features many similarities with escape films like *The Great Escape* (1963), whose historical contexts are merely a pretext for suspense and action. Similarly, while the Wall is the provocative reality and obstacle in *The Tunnel*, Suso Richter fails even to engage with its symbolism in terms of Germany’s dark past. Tellingly, *The Tunnel* is set in the early 1960s. Despite the fact that the real-life escape took place in 1964,⁶⁹ the film starts in 1961 and ends in about 1962, when the tunnel is successfully completed. In this period, West Germans were still outraged at the existence of the Wall. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, many writers,

notably Peter Schneider, have argued that as time went by and the construction of the Wall became a distant memory, so too did general indignation. At the beginning of *The Wall Jumper*, Schneider's narrator remarks when questioned by a non-Berliner about the Wall, "I've long since come to answer like most Berliners: living here is really no different from living in any other city. I really don't see the Wall anymore."⁷⁰

Yet, by avoiding the later history of the Wall, this film sidesteps the differences between East and West. For instance, it was arguably after the Wall went up that Berliners began to drift apart. While East and West Germans generally had totally different experiences of the 1950s (the economic miracle in the West and Stalinism in the East), Berlin was something of an exception given the amount of contact between the eastern and western sectors. People could live in East Berlin — where there was cheap rent — and work in West Berlin, and young people living in East Berlin could go to West Berlin to socialise. Ironically then, Berlin at this time was more 'unified' than the rest of Germany. Therefore, the film's Berlin setting elides the growing gap between East and West Germans. Instead it becomes a story of a homogenous Germany that was kept apart by a harsh foreign regime.

Suso Richter not only avoids portraying differences between East and West, but also avoids the internal complications in the West where the student protest movement of the 1960s radically challenged the notion of the West as a utopia. This period and the 1970s (with its left-wing terrorism) questioned the assumption that capitalism was the answer to all problems. The students were repulsed by their parents' denial of complicity with the National Socialists. In fact, because many left-wing intellectuals believed that the West German system was "the successor of the old fascist state, they violently opposed it —

almost as if they wanted to show their parents how they should have battled the fascist state thirty years earlier.”⁷¹

Given this complexity on the ground, what are we to make of a film that suggests that the only people who didn't want to escape the GDR were the corrupt and evil *Stasi* agents who are linked to Germany's dark tradition of militarism? The film seems to suggest that Germans have always been the same and will once more thrive under the promise of a capitalist utopia.

The film further delivers a homogenizing message by locating the action in individuals as causal agents who come to stand for all Berliners. Thus, *The Tunnel* begins with the main character Harry Melchior preparing to escape to the West. As he applies a disguise to fool the border guards, the voiceover narration, which is Harry's voice, tells us, “My name is Harry Melchior . This is my story. A true story. On 26 August 1961 I left my country. If you want to call it that. I left the Eastern part of Berlin.” While this may be Harry's story, the film's end makes it clear that Harry's story is similar to that of many other East Germans. The title on the screen at the end reads: “No one knows how many tunnels there were,” suggesting boundless numbers of East German would-be escapees. The second scene of the film portrays the Swimming Championships where Harry, a former dissident who was jailed after the 1953 East German uprising, triumphs and wins first place. The scene introduces the film's other important characters: Harry's sister Lotte, along with her husband and child; Harry's friend Matthias; and Matthias's wife Carola. It also establishes Harry's hatred for the SED, as he refuses to shake hands with the party member who presents him with a medal. After these scenes, the film cuts to a credit sequence and presents stock footage of East

Berlin (politicians and the East German army) and the Wall. This footage lends historical credibility to the preceding images by mixing documentary with the film's fictional world. Therefore, the images move back and forth between politicians giving speeches and young soldiers with guns marching or driving tanks. There is almost no place in this footage, which suggests the complete militarization of East Germany, for average citizens. While the faceless East German army is present in the opening credits, this is the only instance of documentary footage. After several file-footage images, Suso Richter switches to black-and-white footage with his actors, which slowly becomes colourized. As the image turns to colour, it suggests a transition from the historical to the fiction of the story, thus attempting to legitimize the following action as coming from the documentary images. The camera follows Harry, Matthias and Carola as they watch the Wall being built in disgust and plan their escape. By focusing on images of authority (politicians and soldiers) and established characters, Suso Richter localizes the film to the experiences of these characters while at the same time emphasising their universal nature. They are not shown as one of many possible stories, but seem to represent all of East Germany because they come from 'true' documentary images.

Where the film does deal with the East German government, and more specifically the *Stasi*, it reduces the complexities of socialism versus capitalism to the simple dichotomy of a repressive state versus a land of freedom, an uncomplicated Western bias at odds with the more complex and typically leftist views of West Germany's artists and intellectuals. There is not a suggestion in the film of the problems with capitalism, or of the problematic links of West Germany to the Third Reich. Unlike *The Promise*, which presents a complex and ambiguous view of East Germany, *The Tunnel* is completely one-

sided in its view of cold-war German history. It presents East Germany as an inhospitable land ruled by the ever-present *Stasi*. For example, after Harry leaves, Lotte, her husband Theo (Heinrich Schmieder) and their child are questioned by the *Stasi*. The female *Stasi* agent who interviews the child tries to trick her into revealing details about her uncle. Later in the film Krüger, the *Stasi* agent assigned to the case, blackmails a very pregnant Carola into informing on Lotte by threatening to put her child up for adoption when it is born. The film's simplistic view of East Germany is that of a repressive police state that was not at all supported by its citizens. The East German government was no doubt criminal in its oppression of its people, but the film does not engage with why some citizens stayed and even wanted to stay. Nor does it deal with how the SED government was able, through institutions such as schools and its film industry, to make East Germans compliant. By contrast, the film presents the West as a utopia, never criticizing the bourgeois consumerism of the FRG. The only civilian character who supports the GDR is the initially unsympathetic Theo, who reasons, "We'd have no more than we have here Lotte. [...] We'd have a wall over there too." Theo often functions as a vehicle for the creation of suspense, as he vigilantly watches Lotte for signs of communication with Harry. But Theo eventually comes to face the horror of the GDR regime when he inadvertently causes the suicide of Fred's mother by reporting her to the *Stasi*. When his character redeems himself by rescuing Carola's baby, the *Stasi*'s cruel manipulations let East Germans off the hook.

In the end, *The Tunnel* presents an East Germany where individuals alternately wanted to escape or were simply too afraid to try. Thus, the film suggests the rightness of what many *Ossis* considered an annexation of the GDR by *Wessis*.⁷²

However, the film gestures towards representing a more ambivalent East in its examination of how decent, ordinary citizens could become *Stasi* informers. While the *Stasi* are portrayed as evil, Carola (for love of her unborn baby) and Theo (for fear of losing his job) both agree to spy on their friends and family. The film makes it clear that both only agree to spy after direct threats from Krüger. Thus, *Stasi* informers are portrayed as victims while East Germany is shown to be a state built entirely on an apparatus of fear.

The film's simplistic portrayal of the East is mirrored in its equally one-sided idealization of the West. For example, the problems of the characters are solved as soon as they are able to get their relatives out of East Germany. The film does not show the inequalities in standard of living created by the capitalist system, and ignores any of the concerns raised by West German intellectuals, particularly the generation of 1968. In *The Tunnel*, most of the characters except Fritz and Fred (West Berliners) and Vittorio (Italian-American) are East German. But the film actually avoids issues of the growing disparity between Berliners by making the East Berliners seem the same as the West Berliners. What's more, most of these East Berliners are atypical dissidents who have not internalized the ideology of their government. The film's ecstatic reunion between family members can thus be extended to a fantasy version of the actual reunion in 1989.

The film's actual portrayal of families also demonstrates its inability to engage with Germany's past. Rentschler argues that the New German Cinema was marked by its "Oedipal rage which reacted to the abuse of film under Hitler and the medium's affirmative status during the 1950s."⁷³ These filmmakers refused to forget the past the way their parents' generation wanted to; therefore, New German Cinema films were

filled with generational conflicts between child and parent.⁷⁴ Parental figures, by contrast, are curiously absent in *The Tunnel*. We only see three parents of major characters in the course of the film: Fritzzi's mother, who asks Harry about being tortured by the *Stasi*, thus allowing him to reveal details of the regime's brutality; Theo's mother (Sarah Kubel), who appears briefly to tell the *Stasi* agents that Lotte has escaped; and Fred's mother, Marianne, an old aristocrat whose husband was executed by the *Gestapo*. The parental figures are present only to reveal background information, advance the plot or heighten the suspense. Marianne's connection to the past, for instance, serves only to remind the audience of the horror of the East German government. Unlike many of the mothers in New German Cinema films (Fassbinder's real-life mother in the opening segment of *Deutschland im Herbst/Germany in Autumn* [1978] is exemplary), she is absolved of the guilt of her generation because she and her husband were vigilantly anti-Nazi. Marianne thus becomes a double victim of German history. Though her husband was executed for being in the resistance against the Nazis and she, in turn, is oppressed in the East because of her aristocratic roots, she is the only German character who has any explicit links to the Second World War (Vittorio, we are told, is an American soldier who stayed on in Berlin). This overall lack of parental figures in *The Tunnel* suggests a clean slate without the burden of the past. As such, the film can avoid dealing with the ways in which the legacy of World War — with its divided memories and histories — profoundly affected debates about unification.

In short, in 1961 Berlin, the brute materiality of this Wall seems to be the only thing that separates Berliners, and whatever conflicts exist are filtered exclusively through West German eyes. The film's main concern seems to be delivering a slick and

suspenseful narrative, with an eye on the future, which elides much of Twentieth century German history. Yet how can one understand the future if one is ignorant of the past and, particularly, when the past is as morally fraught as that of Germany's in the Twentieth Century?

Still, post-unification commercial film representations are not always vapid. Despite its reliance on popular conventions such as a melodramatic, linear plot and star power,⁷⁵ *The Promise* offers a more complex, though still problematic, picture of the partition of Germany. Von Trotta is not, strictly speaking, a Cinema of Consensus filmmaker. Born in Berlin in 1942, von Trotta is the leading female director associated with the New German Cinema movement. Von Trotta began her career in the film industry as an actress. She appeared in several films by Fassbinder (*Gods of the Plague/Götter der Pest* [1969] and *The American Soldier/ Der amerikanische Soldat* [1970].) She also appeared in *Coup de grâce/Der Fangschuss* (1976), a film by her then husband Volker Schlöndorff. Von Trotta's earlier films, from *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* (1975) — her collaboration with Schlöndorff — to her political films *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages/Das zweite Erwachen der Christa Klages* (1977) and *Marianne and Juliane/Die bleierne Zeit* (1981), deal with how issues of history and memory affect contemporary Germany.

After the movement began to fade,⁷⁶ von Trotta continued to make challenging films that were in line with the obsessions of the New German Cinema. For example, in *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986), von Trotta focuses on the private letters and personal life of the titular historical figure. Von Trotta also values women's stories and experiences of history. Her feminist films portray the effects of large-scale historical movements on individuals and,

as such, do not favour individuals so much as demonstrate the intertwined nature of personal and public history. For example, *Marianne and Juliane* focuses on the experience of two sisters who deal with the feelings of rage and helplessness caused by Germany's horrific past. Marianne⁷⁷ (Barbara Sukowa) becomes a terrorist and eventually dies in jail, while Juliane (Jutta Lampe) works as a journalist and tries to understand her sister's path.

Why the shift, then, in the subject matter of German films in the period we are considering? Certainly a full answer would require more concrete material data on the conditions of production and reception than I am able to furnish here. But at least part of the story relates to questions of film subsidies and, in the case of television, an increased attention to ratings.⁷⁸ *The Promise* demonstrates the Cinema of Consensus's conflict between art and commerce in its attempt to tell a story in a complex historical time while still remaining marketable. For example, von Trotta explains that she had wanted to call the film "The Wall Years," but the distributor thought that the word "Wall" would interfere with ticket sales. She was told, "Enough about the Wall, [sic] the title was somewhat depressing so we had to change it. In the end we chose *The Promise*, which is more American in its positive thinking."⁷⁹ While the change of a title is a relatively minor concession, it demonstrates what she and a whole generation of filmmakers were up against. Though the spectre of the American viewer and ticket-holder was present in the New German Cinema, that cinema consistently positioned itself as an art cinema and enjoyed support from international audiences and critics who were open to the conventions of non-commercial film.⁸⁰ The conditions for funding in post-unification Germany changed the playing field dramatically.

The film's genre — a romantic love story — is much more accessible than von Trotta's earlier films about the relationships between sisters or women's friendship in the face of patriarchy. *The Promise* features romance conventions such as an overly sentimental score by Jürgen Knieper, which cues emotional points within the film; and parallel editing, which demonstrates the distances between Konrad and Sophie in their different halves of Berlin. While the narrative features historical events, they are subordinate to events in the couple's relationship (their separation and several reunions). The film had a budget of \$7 million, most of which was public funding.⁸¹ In fact, according to Stuart Taberner, the film's funding from Helmut Kohl's conservative government is the reason for its "almost exclusive focus on the East."⁸² This government, he argues, is a "government that was against both the GDR and the dominance of the intellectual left in West German culture."⁸³ These elements combine to make the film, as one critic commented, von Trotta's "most commercial venture."⁸⁴

Although released in 1995, *The Promise* was scripted in 1991 just after unification, when the debate about the shape of a united Germany was fresh. Von Trotta's film, then, while considered mainstream, can be seen as a contribution to the debate about Germany's future as well as its past. *The Promise* tells the story of two Berlin lovers separated by the Wall. Sophie (played by Meret Becker as a young woman and by Corinna Harfouch as an older woman) and her friends escape successfully through the sewers. However, Konrad (played by Anian Zollner as a young man and by August Zirner as an older man) trips on his shoelace and cannot join them. The lovers meet again in Prague in 1968 and conceive a child, but the Soviet invasion tears them apart again. Later, in the 1980s, Konrad is able to visit the West and see his son, who is

subsequently allowed several visits to the East; however, the *Stasi* soon revokes these privileges. The film ends in 1989 with the opening of the Wall.

The Promise is a collaboration between von Trotta, who had been living outside of Germany at the time of unification, Italian journalist Felice Laudadio, and West German novelist Peter Schneider, who is most well known for his 1982 novel on the division of Berlin entitled *The Wall Jumper* (*Der Mauerspringer*) and its famous line (which provides my own title): “It will take us longer to tear down the Wall in our heads than any wrecking company will need for the Wall we can see.”⁸⁵ Schneider’s novel, though written eight years before the Wall actually fell, anticipates many of the troubles that followed unification. Schneider’s influence could explain much of the film’s obsession with the distances between the two sides of the Wall and, in fact, von Trotta provides this account of the genesis of the film.

I asked Peter Schneider, who is a well-known author in Germany, to help me. He lived in Berlin from ’61 (the year the Wall was built) on. [...] He had many friends in Berlin and was one of the leaders of the ’68 student movement. He was one of the first leftists who had been very critical of the East, so during the Wall years he did a lot of research about the situation.⁸⁶

Schneider’s participation, and long-standing critique of the SED, is perhaps important because of the Marxist position of many German leftists, including von Trotta herself. Both the widely reported abuses by the communists and the rapid abandonment of the communist system by the workers — the very people whom it was designed to help — threw these Marxist views into crisis when the Wall fell. This crisis of West German intellectuals is notably absent from von Trotta’s film, as are the voices of any East

German intellectuals. David Walsh argues that “in a work whose focus is political events and their consequences in the lives of various individuals, one would expect to encounter [...] serious thinking about the most difficult questions.”⁸⁷ For Walsh, those questions revolve around the Stalinist legacy of the GDR and whether it was a true socialist state. I would add that the film also glosses over the crisis unification caused among Marxist thinkers in the West. Thus,

countless revelations of neighbours spying on one another, propitious political conversions, supposed dissidents collaborating with state secret services, and ubiquitous social disintegration finally revealed the emptiness of the promise that the GDR had long embodied for West German intellectuals.⁸⁸

Indeed, as Stuart Taberner explains, intellectuals, including Margarethe von Trotta, were forced to rethink their ideas about both East and West Germany.⁸⁹ Yet while von Trotta succeeds in presenting a GDR that troubles past idealistic conceptions, she does not represent the West with the same nuances.

Von Trotta’s and Schneider’s script spans the entire history of the Wall. It begins in 1961 shortly after the Wall has been constructed and ends on November 9, 1989. The narrator says,

So began one of the strangest experiments in history. A people, once mad enough to want to rule the world slowly became two peoples. And soon only the wall kept up the illusion that all that divided the German people was a wall.

Von Trotta’s film thereby immediately links the partition of Germany to the legacy of World War II. Despite the ambitious time span of *The Promise*, it does not challenge classical narrative structure. It tells a linear story from beginning to end and it solicits

audience identification through a deliberately paced narrative consisting of “continual surprises and sensational developments.”⁹⁰ As a romantic drama, *The Promise* has the plight of Sophie and Konrad as its primary concern. However, these characters are so intertwined with the history of their country that the issues at stake are also political. Von Trotta explains that “the love story is conditioned by the Wall and by great history.”⁹¹ As Sabine Hake argues,

von Trotta in *Das Versprechen* (1995 *The Promise*) presents the postwar division as the tragic story of two young lovers divided by ideology but meant to be united; the happy ending for the nation comes with the post-ideological identity of a united Germany. In a significant departure from earlier West and East films about the German division, the gendered division now involves a West German woman and an East German man. Yet in accordance with allegorical representations of nation, the outcome still (or again) confirms the female principle (that is, of Germania) as the victorious one.”⁹²

I want to suggest that Hake does not read *The Promise*’s end closely enough. The film does not seek a triumphant return of the German state. In fact, the last scene — a freeze-frame as Sophie and Konrad see each other in the crowd of newly unified Berliners — is quite open-ended. The audience does not know if Konrad and Sophie will continue their relationship after 30 years of separation, misunderstandings and different ideologies. Thus, the end of *The Promise* is as ambivalent as the film itself. It “does make clear that there was more separating the Germans than the Wall, and that there is new potential for conflict in the reunification of Germany.”⁹³ In its ambiguous conclusion, then, the film

avoids the conventions of Cinema of Consensus films and also differs ideologically from *The Tunnel*, which suggests the inevitability of German unity.

The film begins with black and white documentary footage, which indexes German history by introducing images of politicians like Kennedy and Willy Brandt, who was important not only for his *Ostpolitik* program but also because he was considered by many left-wing intellectuals to be the first German chancellor not to be tainted by National Socialism.⁹⁴ This progresses to soldiers and then civilians of the GDR trying to escape. The scene then cuts to images of the tear-stained faces of East and West Germans as they long for the families, lovers or friends from whom they have been separated. Finally, there is a close-up of a woman waving a scarf to someone on the other side and the camera freeze-frames on her hand. Von Trotta has explained in interviews that this progression of images was part of her message of the personal, yet historical, agenda of the film:

I tried to show that it was not only a personal story that happened in Berlin, but an international situation. That's why I started with the international scene, showing [Nikita] Khrushchev and [John F.] Kennedy. Then I moved to Germany and Berlin. Then to people, groups of people, and the individuals. It became more and more personal. Then the individual stories began and that was my way of leading people to one of the stories, one of the possible stories. It's not the story of the whole nation.⁹⁵

It is this 'one of many' focus that allows for the film's ambiguity. *The Tunnel* suggests that Harry Melchior stands for all East Germans who ostensibly want out collectively. However, von Trotta and Schneider are able to create ambivalence about

the East. Thus, while they show the harsh repression, they also show that there were advantages to the system, or at least complex reasons why citizens stayed and obeyed the harsh government. For example, Konrad's father reminds him that East Germany offers advantages to workers, such as free education. Were the family to live in the West, he explains, Konrad would not be able to afford to attend university. Similarly, part of the reason for Konrad's reluctance to leave is his relative comfort in the East, where he is a respected scientist. However, this ambivalence is arguably undercut by the idealistic portrayal of the West. While *The Promise* demonstrates the ways the SED showered its citizens with social programs in order to ensure compliance with the state, it does not show how the West equally placated its citizens with capitalism and material goods. The film charts the gradual disappointment Konrad feels in his country. As Renate Hehr argues,

When his hope is shattered by the Soviet Union's military intervention and, at the mercy of increasing political pressure, he is also spied upon and subjected to restrictions, he openly opposes the GDR regime for the first time. Now he wants to defect to the West not only because of Sophie, but because he is repelled by the methods of those in power.”⁹⁶

Konrad goes from being a-political and timid to violently opposing the East German regime (by assaulting a *Stasi* agent). Yet the film also offers an alternative to Konrad. His sister Barbara (Susann Uge/Eva Mattes) is a minister who preaches resistance to the strict rules of the SED. She argues for changing the system from within. As bad as her life becomes (she and her husband are jailed and harassed), she steadfastly argues that leaving East Germany will not solve any problems. In this way, as Hehr explains,

Konrad and Barbara represent the possible responses of many East Germans to the SED. She says, "It explains why the East German state could remain in existence as long as it did, but also why it finally came to an end under pressure from a fast-growing opposition movement. The film examines the reasons for, and consequences of, conformity and revolt in their various manifestations, and tries to explain them."⁹⁷

Thus, von Trotta examines the actual differences between East and West ideologies, which can explain why the unification process did not go as smoothly as the politicians promised it would. Arguably, a notable failure in this is the fact that she does not include any *Stasi* agents or informers as main characters. Thus, the film reinforces Sabine Hake's assertion: "It may still be too early to expect any feature films about the political elites in the GDR, the power of the secret police, the work of political dissidents, and the role of artists and intellectuals."⁹⁸

Von Trotta's success in creating a complex picture of East Germany is demonstrated by the positive reception of the film among some East Germans. An article in *The Independent* states, "But the Dresden audience at the first public showing of *The Promise* reacted to one aspect of the film above all. Again and again they praised Von Trotta for avoiding a portrayal of East German life in purely black-and-white terms."⁹⁹ However, not all East Germans liked the film. For example, Corinna Harfouch, who plays the older Sophie, took great exception to the film. She pondered that it was perhaps too early to make a film like *The Promise* and said, "I cannot recognize my own country.... We didn't just have autumn and winter; we had spring and summer, too. There were days on which we didn't have problems with the *Stasi*."¹⁰⁰

In response to this critique, Von Trotta claims that Harfouch liked the script when she first read it.

When I gave her the script in '91, she was enthusiastic about it, and she said it was such a good story, it was all true, and I was not denouncing anybody. She told me the details from her own life. But when the film came out (and the film was exactly the same as the script), she was completely against it. She suddenly said East Germany had not been like that and that they had not suffered as much.

That was very interesting for me, and I couldn't blame her.¹⁰¹ They began to see their own past with softer eyes than in the beginning.¹⁰²

In the end, it is perhaps the film's idealized portrayal of West Berlin that is the most problematic. Sophie goes to the West and lives with a prosperous, bourgeois aunt. In fact, the film's only negative portrayal of West Berlin is when Harald (Pierre Besson/Hans Kremer) is deported. He stares in sadness and shock at the many drug-addicted and homeless young people in the *Zoologischer Garten S-Bahn* station. Yet this moment is nowhere sustained in the film, and Sophie remains completely a-political.¹⁰³ Nor does the film deal with the apathy and distain felt in the West (documented more fully in Schneider's book) towards the GDR. In fact, besides Sophie's aunt (Tina Engel), West German characters are strikingly absent from the film. In the second half of the film Sophie's lover, Gerard (Jean-Yves Gautier), is French, not German.¹⁰⁴

The closest *The Promise* gets to invoking the wider arc of German history is a speech Konrad hears Sophie give to some tourists as a tour guide at the Olympic stadium. She says, "If all those Germans hadn't cheered for Hitler, there would have been no war, no Soviet occupation, and no Wall." Yet, there is a certain erasure of the realities of German

history in that all the characters whose pasts are mentioned are conveniently anti-National Socialists. Konrad's father says to an official who bars him from attending Barbara's trial, "Even in the Nazi days they let my parents into my trial" and Lorenz (Otto Sander), in turn, tells Konrad that he returned to East Germany from Russia because the scientists who wanted to hire him in the West were former Nazis.

While the films feature different levels of subtlety, both engage in the kind of blame-shifting noted by American journalist Jane Kramer. Kramer suggests that in the East the official version was that all of the Nazis went to West Germany and the anti-fascists stayed in East Germany. On the other hand, the West Germans turned "'Communist East Germany' into another way of saying 'Nazi East Germany' — since in the new mythology of the West both words stood for the same 'bad German.'"¹⁰⁵ *The Promise* posits that "someone else" was a Nazi, not the characters in the films, buying into what was arguably the very problematic mythology in East Germany, but in another guise

Does this film in the end constitute a major compromise for von Trotta's film career and, if so, why? In the mid-1980s von Trotta was living and working outside of Germany; *The Promise*, then, marked her return to German film. In that it also marks a shift in her career to more commercial film, the film is a striking reminder of the way in which even auteurist film participates in the material conditions of production and reception. Von Trotta followed *The Promise* with two films for television:

Winterkind/Winter Child (1997) and *Dunkle Tage/Dark Days* (1997). The director explained to Renate Hehr that concerns such as staying within the budget, attracting viewers and filling a pre-determined time slot supersede artistic concerns.¹⁰⁶ Recently, von Trotta has returned once again to the scene of the Second World War, but with a

difference. Though it has a political edge, *Rosenstrasse* (2003) still fits into the category of Cinema of Consensus war films; it demonstrates how the past bleeds into the future, but features stars Katja Reimann and Maria Schrader — two of the biggest female stars from the Cinema of Consensus — as stock characters in a plot that is resolved through heterosexual romantic union.

While Margarethe von Trotta's Wall film represents a swing to commercial filmmaking, it also shows the possibilities within that system for redeeming subtlety. Unlike many portrayals of the East, it presents a relatively complex and more ambiguous portrait of the GDR. However, her West Germany is one unshadowed by leftist intellectuals or ideologies that critique capitalism, and it anticipates few of the internal conflicts — between *Wessis* and *Ossis*, Capitalism and Marxism, ethnic Germans and foreigners — that would dominate the post-Wall period. In the end, the film is compromised by the pressures on post-Wall films in an industry that is increasingly hostile to challenging and political art film, pressures to which even the most internationally acclaimed female director of the New German Cinema is vulnerable.

The Cinema of Consensus films I have looked at, then, can be said to be doing similar work to the monuments of Berlin, about which Andreas Huyssen remarks, quoting Robert Musil, "There is nothing so invisible as a monument."¹⁰⁷ They represent the past, but at the cost of evacuating all the traumatic elements that inform both the past and the future. The commercialism of the German film industry is an important part of the story, but it is only part of a wider response by Germans, Hake argues, to a past they are not ready to face.

When Peter Schneider coined the phrase “*die Mauer im Kopf*” he did not know just how productive this summing up would prove to be. *The Tunnel* and *The Promise* both portray Berliners attempts to “go over the Wall” but neither portray the complexity of what was on the other side — or what was to come. Yet if *The Promise* reflects a period in Germany of intense debate about unification, *The Tunnel* demonstrates a kind of West German nostalgia in its longing for a more simplistic time when the distinctions between good and evil were clear and easy to recognize. It is to that nostalgia, by another name, that I now turn in my next chapter.

Notes

¹ Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, 72.

² The Sex Pistols, “Holidays in the Sun,” Reprinted on Lyricsfreak.com, <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/s/sex-pistols/123560.html>, accessed on July 20, 2005.

³ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 5.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Anton Kaes, “History and Film: Public Memory in the Age of Electronic Dissemination,” in *Framing the Past: The Historiography of German Cinema and Television*, edited by Bruce A. Murray and Christopher J. Wickham (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 314.

⁶ Like everything else in Germany, there were two film industries. These did not merge so much as the West German industry subsumed the entire market. East Germany’s state-run film company, *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA), was dismantled and sold off. While many DEFA filmmakers continue to work, the predominant cinema is that of West Germany. For an excellent discussion of DEFA’s demise, see Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*.

⁷ Sabine Hake, “Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000,” in *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), 179.

⁸ After the war ended there was a sense of a need to deal with the past, but also a revulsion against the horror that resulted in a suppression of memory, figured in the idea of *Stunde Null* (zero hour) in West Germany. Hake explains that while the *Trümmerfilme* (rubble films) dealt with the horrors of the war, towards the 1950s the conservatism that came with the Economic Miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*) led to a cinema “whose visual and narrative strategies depended on the systematic suppression of politics in the discourse of humanism and the inevitable return of ideology in the form of rabid anti-communism” (“Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000,” 90). This cinema included genres such as the conservative *Heimat* film, nostalgic war films, costume epics (particularly the ‘Sissi films’, which turned the life of Elizabeth of Bavaria, later empress of Austria, into a fairy tale), comedies, melodramas, and thrillers (see Anton Kaes, “Images of History,” in *From Hitler to Heimat*, 18). Few films were made that really dealt with the horror of the war or the guilt of the Hitler era. Those that dealt with the war, such as Bernhard Wicki’s *The Bridge/Die Brücke* (1959), often configured the Germans as victims. Many commercial West German “films employed the Third Reich as a setting for comedy, love stories, even soft pornography.” For more on post-war German film, see Bruce A. Murray, “Introduction,” in *Framing the Past: The Historiography*

of *German Cinema and Television*, edited by Bruce A. Murray and Christopher J. Wickham (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 280–307.

⁹ Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 179–192.

¹⁰ See Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, 125–138.

¹¹ Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 189.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ In this chapter my analysis leans quite heavily on Rentschler's excellent identification of the cultural, financial and political pressures on contemporary German cinema. Rentschler synthesizes a wide range of information that is not directly available to me.

¹⁴ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 264.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 168.

¹⁷ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 265.

¹⁸ Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 168.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 264.

²¹ Ibid., 267.

²² Ibid., 269.

²³ Ibid., 269.

²⁴ Ibid., 267.

²⁵ Ibid., 262.

²⁶ Ibid., 262.

²⁷ Rentschler argues there are also exceptions to the Cinema of Consensus. He cites the gritty realist work of Heike Misselwitz and Hans Christian Schmid, as well as the marginalized Queer cinema of Monika Treut and Rosa von Praunheim; and the rich, multicultural cinema tradition of filmmakers like Harun Farocki, Thomas Arslan and Fatih Akin.

²⁸ Nils Klevjer Aas, "Challenges in European Cinema and Film Policy," *Online Publications* (1 March 2003), http://www.obs.coe.int/onilne_publication/reports/aas.html.en, accessed July 15, 2005.

²⁹ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 275.

³⁰ Ibid., 263.

³¹ Ibid., 272.

³² Films like Max Fäberböck's *Aimée & Jaguar* (1999), Joesph Vilsmaier's *The Harmonists* (1997) and *Stalingrad* (1996), Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Downfall/ Der Untergang* (2004), Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosenstrasse* (2003) and Caroline Link's *Nowhere in Africa/ Nirgendwo in Afrika* (2001).

³³ One only has to compare Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Our Hitler/Hitler – ein Film aus Deutschland* (1978) to Hirschbiegel's *Downfall* to observe this trend.

³⁴ Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 188–189.

³⁵ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 272.

³⁶ I do not mean to suggest that all commercial films are necessarily incapable of delivering a serious representation of post-Wall experience. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the possibilities of a commercially successful film: Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!*

³⁷ John Ardagh, *Germany and the Germans*, 36.

³⁸ "The Berlin Wall," *German Unification Case Study*, Foothill College, <http://www.foothill.fhda.edu/divisions/unification/wall.html>, accessed April 15, 2005.

³⁹ A. James McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13.

⁴⁰ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 215.

⁴¹ Gerhard Rempel, "The Berlin Wall," *Lectures of the History of Modern Germany* 39, <http://mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempel/courses/germany/lectures/39wall.html>, accessed July 11, 2005.

⁴² David Childs and Richard Popplewell, *The Stasi: The East German Intelligence and Security Service* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 33.

⁴³ Anna Funder, *Stasiland: True Stories from behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta, 2003), 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁵ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 165.

⁴⁶ See Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 153–212; also Andreas Huyssen, “After the Wall,” 109–143, and Stephen Brockmann, “Introduction,” 3–30, particularly for the controversy surrounding Christa Wolf.

⁴⁷ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 217–218.

⁴⁸ See Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁰ Robert D. Levy and Richard McCormick, “Mastering the Past and Present: Problems of Memory in Postwar and Post-Wende German Cinema,” in *Textual Responses to German Unification*, edited by Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 196.

⁵¹ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, xv.

⁵² Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁵⁴ I will deal with the separate memories of *Ossis* and *Wessis* in further detail in Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Renate Hehr, *Margarethe Von Trotta: Filmmaking as Liberation* (Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2000), 50.

⁵⁶ Anton Kaes, “History and Film,” 310.

⁵⁷ See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art*, Sixth Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 39–92.

⁵⁸ “Film Archive – Personal Info: Roland Suso Richter,” http://www.german-cinema.de/archive/film/person/view.php?film_person_id=11, accessed February 8, 2005.

⁵⁹ Kim Linekin, “*The Tunnel*,” *Eye Weekly*, 6 February 2003, http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_02.06.03/film/onscreen.html, accessed April 18, 2005.

⁶⁰ As such, I have only seen *A Handful of Grass*. While his early work may be less commercial, his frequent television work and the trajectory of his three recent films seem to suggest a mainstream director.

⁶¹ Lee’s Movie Info, “*Der Tunnel* Box Office,” <http://www.leesmovieinfo.net/wbotitle.php?t=3422>, accessed June 24, 2005.

⁶² For example, one critic took issue with a seemingly superfluous sex scene and concluded, “Unmotivated events like these suggest the protracted narrative controls its characters, not the other way around.” (See Matt Singer, “*The Tunnel*,” *Village Voice*, 26 April 2005, http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0517_tracking1.63397.20.html, accessed June 22, 2005.

⁶³ The original series was three hours long, but the North American release (the version I am working with), is twenty minutes shorter.

⁶⁴ See Heidemarie Schmacher, “From the True, the Good, the Beautiful to the Truly Beautiful Goods. Audience Identification Strategies on German ‘B-Television’ Programs,” translated by Karin Schoen and Michelle Mattson, *New German Critique* 78 (Autumn 1999): 152–160. While Schmacher does not specifically discuss made-for-television films, her thesis that advertising affects even the content of public and commercial programming informs my thinking.

⁶⁵ While television of the 1970s in Germany was just as daring and original as the film industry, with many New German Cinema filmmakers like Fassbinder and Reitz producing non-commercial television series, the situation had greatly changed by the mid-1990s, mostly due to the arrival of commercial television (see Michael Geisler and Michelle Mattson, “Introduction: After the Bardic Era,” 3–21). Commercial television was not introduced into Germany until 1985. This introduction was largely due to new technology, pressure from media groups and the support of the Kohl government (See Knut Hickethier, “A Cultural Break or Perhaps Things Didn’t Go That Far. Television in Germany: Commercialization, German Unification and Europeanization,” *New German Critique* 78 [Autumn 1999]: 53). This influx of, often, “lowest-common-denominator” programming caught public television executives unaware and they reacted by attempting to create programming that could compete with commercial fare (Geisler and Mattson, “Introduction,” 13).

⁶⁶ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 118.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Eric Rentschler, “From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus,” 266.

⁶⁸ Matt Singer, “*The Tunnel*.”

⁶⁹ “In the Shadow of the Wall,” *A Concrete Curtain: The Life and Death of the Berlin Wall*, http://www.wall-berlin.org/gb/ombre_tex3htm.

⁷⁰ Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, 7.

⁷¹ Anton Kaes, "Images of History," in *From Hitler to Heimat*, 24.

⁷² Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xvii.

⁷³ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 271.

⁷⁴ For example: the omnibus film *Germany in Autumn/Deutschland im Herbst* (1977), Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Germany Pale Mother/ Deutschland Bleiche Mutter* (1980) or von Trotta's *Marianne and Julianne/ Die bleirne Zeit* (1982) and Jillian Becker's book *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Gang*.

⁷⁵ While von Trotta uses stars of the Cinema of Consensus, she also uses a former DEFA actress, Corinna Harfouch. She has explained that she wanted to represent both sides of Berlin in her casting choices (See Ruthe Stein, "Von Trotta Film Mirrors Life after Reunification," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 November 1995, <http://www.sfgate.com/ea/stein/1115.html>, accessed June 24, 2005). Von Trotta also uses actors associated with the New German Cinema such as Eva Mattes or Tina Engel.

⁷⁶ As mentioned, putting exact dates on the end of the New German Cinema is a dubious undertaking. However, many critics agree that Fassbinder's death in 1982 symbolized the larger death of the New German Cinema movement.

⁷⁷ The film deals with the terrorism crisis of 1977, which saw the Red Army Faction (RAF) or Baader-Meinhof gang, a left-wing terror group, kidnap and murder Daimler-Benz CEO Hanns Martin Schleyer, as well as hijack a Lufthansa airplane and demand the release of the three of their members from prison. Marianne is based on Baader-Meinhof member Gudrun Ensslin who, along with fellow members Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe, died mysteriously in prison (See Anton Kaes, "Images of History," 23–28).

⁷⁸ Major New German Cinema directors had struck a canny balance between serious subject matter and commercial appeal, through the use of major stars, popular genres such as melodrama (Fassbinder's career is instructive here) or the American road film (Wenders). Yet, in this new era, with its obsession with "Wirtschaftlichkeit/ commercial potential" (see Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 267), even such canny marriages of high and low failed to suffice.

⁷⁹ Margarethe von Trotta, "The Personal and the Political: Interview with Margarethe von Trotta," in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, edited by Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valarie Raoul (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 80.

⁸⁰ Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," 261.

⁸¹ Ruthe Stein, "Von Trotta Film Mirrors Life after Reunification."

⁸² Stuart Taberner, "Das Versprechen," *European Cinema: An Introduction* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2000), 160.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ben Adac, "Margarethe von Trotta," *Senses of Cinema* (November 2002), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/02von_trotta.html, accessed February 8, 2005.

⁸⁵ Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, 119.

⁸⁶ Margarethe von Trotta, "The Personal and the Political," 81.

⁸⁷ David Walsh, "Margarethe von Trotta's *The Promise*: The Berlin Wall Comes Between Two Lovers," World Socialist Website (25 September 1995), <http://www.wsws.org/arts/1995/sep1995/trot-s95.shtml>, accessed February 8, 2005.

⁸⁸ Stuart Taberner, "Das Versprechen," *European Cinema*, 159.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (London: Wallflower, 2004), 80.

⁹¹ Quoted in Pauline Adamek, "The Promise – Interview with Margarethe Von Trotta" (3 October 1995), <http://www.ecst.csuchico.edu/~barbie/interviews.htm>, accessed February 8, 2005.

⁹² Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 189.

⁹³ Renate Hehr, *Margarethe Von Trotta*, 50.

⁹⁴ See the final images of Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. Anton Kaes writes, "Fassbinder considered Brandt an exception in the tradition of authoritarian political leadership of post-war Germany" (Kaes, "History, Fiction, Memory: Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979)," in *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, edited by Eric Rentschler [New York: Methuen, 1986] 278–9).

⁹⁵ Margarethe von Trotta, "The Personal and the Political," 82.

⁹⁶ Renate Hehr, *Margarethe Von Trotta*, 49.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sabine Hake, "Post-Unification Cinema 1989 – 2000," 189.

⁹⁹ Steve Crawshaw, "A West German Looks at the Wall – 'The Promise' A Motion Picture," *The Independent*, 3 March 1995, reprinted at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1353/is_n5_v42/ai_16883700/print, accessed April 5, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Steve Crawshaw, "A West German Looks at the Wall."

¹⁰¹ Harfouch's reaction suggests the beginning of *Ostalgia* in East Germany. This phenomenon will be discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁰² Margarethe von Trotta, "The Personal and the Political," 83.

¹⁰³ Thus, as David Walsh complains, the film does not analyze the difference between the SED and socialism (Walsh, "Margarethe von Trotta's *The Promise*").

¹⁰⁴ Leonie Naughton suggests that because many post-unification films made in the West were set in the East, filmmakers did not have to address the problems in their own country. See Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, 106–107.

¹⁰⁵ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, xv.

¹⁰⁶ Hehr, *Margarethe Von Trotta*, 51–2.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 32.

“I Love this *Scheissland*”: *Ostalgia* and Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye Lenin!*

As Berlin has left behind its heroic and propagandistic role as flash point of the Cold War and struggles to imagine itself as the new capital of a reunited nation, the city has become something like a prism through which we can focus issues of contemporary urbanism and architecture, national identity and statehood, historical memory and forgetting. *Andreas Huyssen*¹

If it’s truly a Reunification, they need to recognize that the east has something to contribute, too — perhaps not governments or cars, but other things.

*Cofounder of the ‘Save the Ampelmännchen Committee’*²

One of the major themes to emerge in the post-unification period is that of the disparate memories of the former East and West Germany. The citizens, who had the same recent history and spoke the same language, had been separated for forty years and, even more importantly, had grown up in systems with radically different ideologies. *Wessis* had become accustomed to the economic inequities and cut-throat environment, as well as the freedom of choice of capitalism, just as *Ossis* had learned to cope with a government that kept them in line with constant surveillance and the always-present threat of imprisonment, but also provided them with universal social programs and additional opportunities for those that supported the Party.

As we have seen, a notable difference between East and West was the way each regime faced its shared traumatic past. While neither side was immediately able to completely face their complicity with the murderous National Socialists, the West acknowledged that its government was the successor of the Third Reich.³ So eventually, due in part to the protest movement of the 1960s, *Wessis* came to try and face their past; to engage in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. On the other hand, the East German government (SED) denied any continuity with the Nazi regime. The SED used anti-Nazi films produced by state-run industry DEFA,⁴ a Communist-filtered educational system,

and pervasive public discourses⁵ to convince East Germans that “anyone born east of the Elbe was by definition an anti-fascist, and thus anyone born west of the river was a Nazi.”⁶ Consequently, after 1989 East Germans were faced with the task of acknowledging a history “that was specifically Germany’s history, and not the East’s history or the West’s history.”⁷ Gone was the *Ossis*’s alibi of resistance to the Nazis. Thus, as Jane Kramer explains, “They discovered it is hard to be ordinary folks — ordinary European folks — when you had a Holocaust in your history.”⁸

Ossis faced the additional challenge of working off their past under the GDR dictatorship. Like the post-war generations before them, East Germans faced the task of punishing or forgiving crimes of the regime. These crimes ranged from the tortures and murders committed by high-ranking *Stasi*, to shootings of would-be escapees by border guards at the Berlin Wall, and to the actions of rank and file *Stasi* collaborators who informed on their friends and family.⁹ The wide-spread controversies over *Stasi* collaboration among intellectuals, as well as a large percent of the general population, demonstrated that this past is more complicated than simple oppression under Soviet colonizers. As philosopher and cultural critic Jürgen Habermas explained, there was a double working-off of the past needed in Germany, but it was unequal because the West had not experienced the oppressive rule of the Party.¹⁰

There were also adjustments to capitalism, as the creaky East German infrastructure had to be brought up to West German standards. These adjustments resulted in the loss of millions of jobs as many East German industries were privatized.¹¹ When the Wall came down many East Germans flooded into the West to buy products they had been denied for so long.¹² With these factors in mind, it is surprising that a

population who had for so long dreamed of escaping over the Berlin Wall should then turn around after its collapse and be nostalgic for what they had lost; for their *Scheissland* (shitty country). Yet nostalgia, as we shall see, had its own name in the new Germany.

Upon visiting Berlin, one cannot help but notice how the pedestrian traffic lights in the East part of the city differ from those in the West. The West-Berlin lights are plain stick figures: a walking green figure for “go” and a stationary red figure for “stop.” However, the East Berlin *Ampelmännchen* (traffic light men) are chubby little silhouettes with wide-brimmed hats.¹³ Invented after the construction of the Wall in 1961 by Karl Peglau, these adorable little figures told East Berlin citizens for thirty years when to cross the street and when to wait.¹⁴ However, when Berlin was reunified, the city planned to replace all of the GDR *Ampelmännchen* with the more svelte West crossing lights. It was then that the *Ampelmännchen* became a rallying point among East Berliners to slow down the “colonization” of their country, and there were so many complaints the jolly little men were allowed to stay.¹⁵

The replacing of the East German *Ampelmännchen* was part of a larger campaign in Berlin to erase all traces of the former GDR. As Andreas Huyssen explains, the planned changing of street names and destruction of socialist monuments “was not just tinkering with the communist city text. It was a strategy of power and humiliation, a final burst of Cold War ideology.”¹⁶ After unification there was a general sense that the GDR had been inferior to the FRG. East Berliners had massive adjustments as they moved into capitalism. Kramer sums up the situation as follows:

With its war dead, and its professionals long gone, and its dissidents systematically exported, East Germany had reverted [sic]. It was a peasant state

in industrial clothes, more like Russia than Prussia. Nothing worked in East Germany. Its factories made terrible things no one wanted. Its farms produced, per acre, a third of what the West German farms produced. Its buildings started falling apart before the tenants had unpacked. Its schools taught a mixture of political propaganda and obsolete science. Its avant-garde — like the Berliner Ensemble, in East Berlin — was stuck in a kind of frozen modernism, and produced death masks of art and theatre.¹⁷

West Berliners grew bitter after having to bear much of the cost of unification and remain resentful of the special tax breaks and help their neighbours to the east receive.¹⁸ Many feel they have little in common with what they perceive as their poorly dressed and often shabby neighbours and their obsession with commodity items.¹⁹ Leonie Naughton notes that shortly after unification *Wessi* graffiti and t-shirts appeared that said “We want our Wall back and three metres higher.”²⁰

It was not just *Wessis* who wanted to erase traces of East Germany. Many young East Germans longed to be like their more fashionable fellow Germans.²¹ As Jana Hensel writes:

It's not easy for people of my generation — those who were kids growing up in the GDR — to remember the old days because back then we wanted nothing more than for them to hurry up and end. We threw ourselves into the process of assimilation. We never thought about the loss that might be involved.²²

There were certainly problems in East Germany's infrastructure and the government had, after all, been a repressive dictatorship, but it was also the home of sixteen million people for almost forty years.²³

Therefore, this devaluing of East German history by both *Wessis* and some *Ossis*, despite the fact that many of the disputed monuments and communist street names stayed intact, led to a widespread *Ossi* sense of being “increasingly deprived of their history and memories of four decades of separate development.”²⁴ What concerns me here is an even more paradoxical phenomenon: a rise in feelings of nostalgia for the old GDR and even a rise in support for PDS, the new Communist party.²⁵

The *Ampelmännchen*, then, became an icon for the benign nostalgia for the GDR, called “*Ostalgia*.” The word is “a combination of nostalgia and ‘*Ost*’, which means east.”²⁶ Paul Betts describes *Ostalgia* as “a fond glance backward to a fallen world based on socialist security and full employment, communal solidarity and progressive welfare programs.”²⁷ Ironically, for members of a formerly communist country, this glance backward is often facilitated in rather capitalistic methods by consumption of products from the GDR. For example, in addition to the *Ampelmännchen* craze, groups of former East Germans gather and show off their *Trabants*²⁸ while products from the old GDR are eagerly bought and sold on the internet.

While many of the products were substandard, the reclaiming of products like Spreewald pickles and *Ampelmännchen* is an attempt by East Germans to validate forty years of their history. Many East Berliners initially welcomed the end of the German Democratic Republic with the rule of the repressive SED, but since unification and the often unpleasant changes it brought, feelings have changed. In fact, Huyssen explains that as a direct result of campaigns to demolish the traces of Communism in East Berlin, the PDS had garnered support even among the generation who had agitated so hard against the state in the late 1980s.²⁹ Despite their PDS support, most East Berliners

would not want a full-scale return to the socialist past. However, there has been a huge boom in the nostalgia market for old trappings of East Germany. Everyday objects, like the *Ampelmännchen*, that were simply a part of life in East Berlin have suddenly become tourist attractions. And more importantly, through the *ostalgic* products' commodity value, it begins to stand in for German identity to outsiders. For example, the *Ampelmännchen* have almost become a symbol of Berlin; tourists do not identify them as from the East necessarily, but just as part of Berlin as a whole. There are even some *Ampelmännchen* traffic lights in West-Berlin tourist areas (such as Potsdamer Platz). While much of the tourist trade does not directly benefit the East Germans (most of the products are made in Taiwan), it does give *Ossis* pride in their past. In fact, the *Ampelmännchen* go beyond tourist trinkets and are a major recurring motif (often featured holding machine guns) in much of the graffiti that covers buildings in the East. Thus, the danger is of course that this pride is potentially divisive, interfering with East Germans' ability to both deal with their past under a dictatorship and to integrate with their *Wessi* compatriots.

Berlin filmmaker Wolfgang Becker deals explicitly with these issues in his 2002 film *Good Bye Lenin!* Despite Becker's disclaimers, the film could not exist anywhere but Berlin. It is intrinsically linked with the collisions of East and West, and identity negotiations so important to the new Berlin where, unlike in other parts of Germany, there is the possibility of day-to-day contact between *Ossis* and *Wessis*. If Wenders's Berlin was the body on which scars of Germany's past were written, and von Trotta's and Suso Richter's Berlin was a brand name, then Becker's Berlin is a space where East collides with West. In this chapter I will investigate the way Becker's film, a

phenomenal critical and financial success in German and international markets,³⁰ works through the trend of *Ostalgia* and life in the GDR to incorporate East-German memories into the memories of all Germans. While representing the fissures in Berlin and the vast differences between East and West, the film also creates a space wherein a vision of unity is possible. This vision sees Berlin neither as the capital of a homogenous “Germany” nor a place where two countries barely live together in one city, but a site of Janus-faced identity that is both East and West but still German.³¹

Becker’s film deals on a more immediate level with the issue of *Ostalgia* than that of traffic lights or cars. The recreation of the East becomes a matter of life and death for Alex Kerner (Daniel Brühl). Alex’s quest is explicitly linked to family unity, but such a quest could only arise in the concrete historical situation of Germany under partition and during unification. The first threat to the Kerner family comes with the father’s defection to the West, which is, as mother Christiane (Katrin Sass) tells her children, motivated by a mistress in the West. However, the audience later learns that this defection is prompted not by a mistress, but a response to *Stasi* harassment because of Mr. Kerner’s refusal to join the Party. Christiane at first withdraws after her husband’s defection, but then throws herself into socialism. As Alex says, “From then on our mother was married to the Socialist Fatherland. Since the relationship was not sexual, she had a lot of energy for us kids and for the realities of life under socialism.” The second and more serious blows are Christiane’s heart attack and subsequent coma, which lead to her ignorance of the *Wende*. Her heart attack, in October of 1989, coincides with the GDR’s fortieth anniversary and massive demonstrations in East Berlin; an event, like the coma for Christiane, that was the beginning of the end for the GDR. Christiane sleeps for eight

months and misses the opening of the borders and the process toward unification. In the meantime, her daughter Ariane (Maria Simon) quits school and gets a job at a fast-food restaurant and begins to date her manager, “class enemy” Rainer (Alexander Beyer), who is a *Wessi*. Alex begins a romance with a Soviet nurse named Lara (Chuplan Khamatova). When Christiane awakes, the family is warned that any shocks could kill her. Alex devises increasingly elaborate deceptions, mirroring those of the SED itself, to make Christiane believe that she is still living in a socialist state.

At first Alex only has to find old packaging of products like pickles and coffee or old newspapers to bring to his mother in bed. However, Alex’s schemes become larger and more complex as Christiane becomes more mobile. Finally, with the help of his new *Wessi* best friend Denis (Florian Lukas), Alex resorts to creating fake newscasts to explain strange phenomenon like the flood of West Berliners to the East and the commercial billboards for Coca Cola or IKEA that appear outside of her window. Eventually, the film implies that Alex’s girlfriend Lara cannot stand Alex’s deceit and tells Christiane about the *Wende*. In his final gesture, Alex gives the GDR the “proper send-off it deserves” by convincing Sigmund Jähn (Stefan Walz), a former cosmonaut who now drives a taxi, to pose as the newly appointed chancellor who opens the borders of the GDR to allow Westerners into the East. Christiane never shows her son that she knows he is lying. In this climactic scene Christiane looks at Alex in wonder, suggesting that she is overwhelmed and touched by the lengths that her son will go to out of love for her. Becker’s use of a family drama allows for the merging of private and public history in ways that recall the longer arc of the New German Cinema, which frequently married private lives and public history (Fassbinder is most conspicuous here). The film’s comic

antics and moving tragic scenes account in large measure for its success both at home and internationally. It has grossed approximately \$79 316 616 (US) worldwide to date³² and won numerous awards for its actors and director, including the 2003 “Lola” (Germany’s top film honour) for Best Picture.³³

While *Good Bye Lenin!* gives screen time to the East German perspective this time round — a situation at odds with films such as *The Promise*, *The Tunnel* or *Faraway, So Close!* — Becker and his co-script writer Bernd Lichtenberg are both West Germans. Becker explains that he put much effort into creating a balanced perspective on East Germany. He and Lichtenberg conducted research in which “it came out very early that there was no prototypical way of life then.”³⁴ Becker also created a team for the film that was a deliberate mix of people from East and West. The cast consists of East German actors — Katrin Sass, Michael Gwisdeck (Commrade Klappath), Alexander Beyer and Florian Lukas (who both portray Wessis) — and West German actors — Daniel Brühl, Maria Simon (Ariane) and Burghart Klaussner (Alex and Ariane’s father). The East German actors aided in the accuracy of the dialogue. Becker also tried to find actors who had lived in the city of Berlin and provided accent training for Cologne-native Brühl as Alex. The crew is likewise made up of East and West Germans. Many people from the prop department were from the East so as to ensure accuracy in the painstaking recreation of the Berlin of 1989-1990.³⁵ Becker’s purposeful mixture of *Ossis* and *Wessis*, on-screen as well as off, becomes vital to the film’s envisioning of unity.

Good Bye Lenin! comes out of, but is not completely a part of, two established sub-genres. The first is that of comedies about unification.³⁶ With its setting and sentimental, almost tragic moments, *Good Bye Lenin!* is quite different than these

comedies that feature broad humour and are mostly set in rural parts of East Germany, featuring good-natured but simple *Ossis* threatened by unscrupulous investors from the West.³⁷ Secondly, as I have discussed in my previous chapters, there are a series of films set in Berlin concerning the division or unification of Germany.³⁸ These films are often serious dramas that deal with the hardships encountered by Berliners. Dina Iordanova argues that *Good Bye Lenin!* sets itself apart from other Berlin films about unification “because of the film’s radical revision of the Wall’s narrative standing: in most other Berlin films the Wall is the problem; here it is its absence that causes complications.”³⁹

The removal of the Wall in Becker’s Berlin film leaves the characters, similar to actual *Ossis*, to search for new identities and deal with new realities. Yet Becker’s film is neither a slapstick comedy nor a hard-hitting drama of Cold War angst. There are moments when the film moves within a matter of minutes between comedy and tragedy. For example, when Alex and Ariane ask Christiane where she has hidden her savings, she cannot remember and becomes confused and asks them when their father will be home from work. The siblings give each other looks of despair at the extent of their mother’s damage from the coma, and Christiane begins to cry. However, immediately following this poignant moment the three hear the sounds of a West German television show in the apartment above. Alex creates a story about Herr Ganske having fallen in love with a West German woman while on vacation in Hungary. Alex concludes, “His Party loyalty has suffered a bit.” Moments such as these combine humour and pathos without weakening either. Thus, the film situates itself between comedy and serious historical drama and attempts to present a multivalent portrait of the GDR.

The film's tonal complexity mirrors the nuanced handling of its subject matter.

The population of the former East Germany, Wolfgang Becker explains, were not united, neither in hatred of nor love for their country. After interviewing many East Germans, he concluded that people "had very different feelings. Some really hated it and wanted to get away but couldn't, and others found arrangements with the system."⁴⁰ The film presents both points of view but focuses on those, like Christiane, who made their "arrangements." It makes sense that those who found ways to live in the GDR (for example, by focusing on children the way Christiane does) would have positive memories of that time. And it also makes sense that these people would be destabilized when they were told that such memories were false and that the GDR was a wholly negative place.

Memory in the post-unification era, as we have seen, is especially important because both East and West Germans had completely different memories of the previous forty years. Yet, memory in Germany is already problematic because of Germany's dark history during the Hitler era. In that re-doubled context, it is not surprising, Paul Betts argues, that the very idea of nostalgia was suspect. In fact, the concept was so unpopular that the word "nostalgia doesn't occur in German dictionaries of the 1950s and 1960s."⁴¹ Therefore, when such movements of nostalgia arose in both the West (during the 1980s for the Adenauer years) and the East (post-unification for the 1970s in the GDR), they were problematic. However, Betts argues that because it was so taboo to look positively at the past after WWII, "these often trivialized sentimental journeys act as decisive moments in each Germany's popular reworking of the meaning of history."⁴² Nostalgic recreations of the past comment on what many wish for and find lacking in the vision of

the future. In this regard, the *Ostalgia* movement is not unique in Germany or even the world. As many cultural critics, notably Andreas Huyssen, have commented, the culture of memory is growing on a global level. Huyssen argues,

Memory discourses are absolutely essential to imagine a future and to regain a strong temporal and spatial grounding of life and the imagination in a media and consumer society that increasingly voids temporality and collapses space.⁴³

Huyssen identifies advances in technology and the speeding-up of life in the present as creating anxiety about forgetting the past. For East Germans, *Ostalgia* combines the fear of an accelerating time and collapsing of space, but also the very material threat of assimilation into the West. When *ostalgic* films and television shows expose the impulse to return to some of the comfortable things about the GDR, such as sub-standard consumer products and the structured life, they are met with incomprehension.

Such suspicion of an idealized GDR should not be surprising. After all, when the GDR was first represented in films such as Margarethe von Trotta's *The Promise* and Helma Sanders-Brahm's *Apple Trees*, it was seen largely as an unremittingly harsh police state. However, later films, like *Sonnenallee*, took a more positive view of the former East. Critic Dina Iordanova comments that "earlier films about the Communist period may have over-stressed the bleakness, but many critics feel the '*Ostalgie*' films are going to the other extreme. How do memory and history relate?"⁴⁴ Yet, while it is no doubt vital for *Ossis* to work through the socialist past and their complicity with or (in many cases, and) victimisation by the government, there is a slightly different kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* needed for the Second World War past. As Jürgen Habermas explains, the GDR differs from National Socialism in terms of the duration and

magnitude of human rights abuses.⁴⁵ Additionally, there *were* positive aspects of the GDR, such as subsidized day care. Thus, positive thoughts about life in East Germany are not inherently impossible.

However, in many ways, as *Good Bye Lenin!* illustrates, *Ostalgia* requires some creative re-writing of the past. Paul Betts argues that the sudden interest in eastern commodities is a reversal of what East Germans felt when the GDR still existed. He notes that the “historical aura of German goods has been radically reversed: the former longing for the emblems of a glamorous Western present had now been replaced by those from a fading Eastern past.”⁴⁶ Instead of coveting products from the West, East Germans long for what they used to consider inferior products, like the Spreewald pickles for which Alex so desperately searches. Alex tries to protect his mother from a present that is less than ideal by re-creating a time that, by his own admission, never existed. Near the end of the film Alex muses that “the country my mother left behind was a country she believed in. A country we kept alive till her last breath. A country that never existed in that form.” Alex admits that what he created for her was, in effect, a fantasy of socialism.

However, *Good Bye Lenin!* is not simple *ostalgic* escapism. Its engagement with the mythologizing process of *Ostalgia* offers a subtle critique, while at the same time refusing a knee-jerk condemnation of the GDR. The film functions in a way that is similar to *Sonnenallee*, though its own alternating of dark and light moments on this theme might be unique; both films work “to obliterate ‘otherness’ for a West German viewer while preserving the ‘difference’ that makes visible the memory of lived experience in the GDR.”⁴⁷ *Good Bye Lenin!* does not portray East Germany through

rose-coloured glasses. Instead it allows that there were positive elements of the country, despite its repressive government. As Becker says, “Even in a dictatorship [...] you have your first kiss. You fall in love, you get married and have kids. Why should you forget it only because you had the bad luck to live on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain.”⁴⁸

Becker’s film allows a space for *Ossis* to feel that their past meant something. He shows the importance of a personal memory as ordinary people try to reconcile their memories with history. Yet the film does not gloss over the excesses of the past. While it lovingly recreates certain details, it also takes pains to represent the dangers of living in such a repressive state. For example, early on the film stages the violent reaction by the police in October 1989 to a peaceful demonstration against the SED. *Good Bye Lenin!* connects the self deception necessary for *Ostalgia* to the same deception required for survival in the GDR. The film arrives at this message through Alex’s and Christiane’s mirrored deceptions. Alex deceives for fear his mother could not survive the truth, and Christiane fears that she would have her children taken from her were she to attempt follow her husband to the West and not succeed. As White explains:

The underlying irony here is that the great historical deceit Alex struggles to uphold out of love for his mother can ultimately be traced to an even deeper family lie. While he keeps secret the demise of the communist state she apparently loved, it turns out that his mother was ultimately not a communist by conviction, but only out of love and concern for her children.⁴⁹

Mother and son are similarly involved in benevolent deceptions. This fact had been underlined even more strongly in an earlier cut of the film. In a scene that was later removed because of time constraints, Lara tells Alex he must say to Christiane, “I lied to

you; it is all different than what you thought.” This line is later echoed by Christiane at the summer cottage when she reveals the truth about their father.⁵⁰ Yet if Alex and Christiane are liars, it is a lesson they have been taught all too well by their government.

As Anna Funder notes:

In the GDR people were required to acknowledge an assortment of fictions as fact. Some of the fictions were fundamental, such as the idea that human nature is a work-in-progress which can be improved upon, and that Communism is the way to do it. Others were more specific: that East Germans were not the Germans responsible (even in part) for the Holocaust; that the GDR was a multi-party democracy; that socialism was peace-loving; that there were no former Nazis left in the country; and that, under socialism, prostitution did not exist.⁵¹

Yet even in a system that requires duplicity, Becker is able to separate the people of the GDR from the government of the GDR. He presents citizens like Christiane, who believe in the ideals of a government that provides for its people, but do not agree with the harsh methods of the SED. He explains that it

is not a matter of systems. It’s just that there were a lot of interesting, intelligent people and good characters living in the GDR. And they have a right to have their positive memories, even if these memories come from a country and a time of dictatorship. It’s not good to tell people they lived their lives in vain only because they had the bad luck to live under the wrong circumstances.⁵²

Christiane becomes a model GDR citizen, but despite her sacrifices is still able to resist the regime. Her constant letters to manufacturers about the inadequacy of their products provide the only avenue by which she can protest the system. In this way, she ultimately

emerges as a subversive character. Her quiet acts of defiance against the state refutes the assertions made by cultural critics such as Jane Kramer that

most East Germans were edgy, acquiescent, and bewildered people. Their education was distorted. Their 'history' was an invention. They had no way to evaluate what being German had meant, or could mean, no parallel truth about themselves with which to exorcise or investigate, or even balance, the official truths.⁵³

Kramer adds that only those who could "live in their heads," like ministers, musicians, or scientists, were able to escape from this fate.⁵⁴ Christiane is an ordinary East German, yet she maintains a sense of fairness and of scepticism against the regime and works from the inside to improve the system. Ironically, in this sense she exemplifies the ideas of socialism by caring for her comrades. Becker comments, "She's what we call a reformer, a Gorbachev fan. For her, capitalism is not the solution. The solution is, we have to help ourselves."⁵⁵

However, in the end Christiane is punished for her would-be benevolence. Professor Klapharth (Michael Gwisdeck) admits, "Some comrades in the collective thought she was too idealistic since your father left. With all due respect for her idealism, but in the daily running of a school that can be problematic." The film takes pains to show that Christiane is not simply a blind follower of the SED but that such a position required compromises.

Good Bye Lenin! acknowledges that the ideal of the GDR was far from the reality. Therefore, the nostalgia in Becker's film places itself squarely in the realm of fantasy, a fantasy that is both caused by the lessons of the regime and stands in opposition to it. The characters do not long for the past the way it actually was, but the way they hoped it

could have been. The GDR created by Alex is acknowledged to be “the one [he] might have wished for.” Of course, this is the traditional definition of a nostalgia that is conservative in its attempts to deal with — and possibly cover over — a less-than-perfect present by creating an idealised past.⁵⁶ However, Becker’s film does more than that: it gives an important sense of identity to East Germans. Within the film, Alex creates a space where Christiane can live in the country she had always fought to live in. This nostalgia is not simply an escape from the troubled future; it is instead a way for former East Germans to come to terms with their past by recreating it.

If Alex can create an ideal East Germany, does that mean he is exempt from dealing with the problems of the ‘real’ East Germany? In some ways the steps that Alex takes to save his mother mirror the very deceptions of the SED. Becker does not back away from this insight, nor does he avoid the problems of a West Germany integrated with global capitalism. For example, Ariane goes from being a student to a fast-food employee, implying that the *Wende* brought with it a shift to western values that privileged money over education. Similarly, Alex’s first trip to West Berlin includes a visit to a porn store. However, in the rare scenes that refer to or are set in West Berlin, the sector is not simply portrayed as a den of decadence and immorality. The sequence in which Alex visits his father in Wannsee represents one of the film’s more poignant moments. Alex’s exaggerated image of his father is that of a morbidly obese monster guzzling cheeseburgers; in fact, his real father is a relatively wealthy man who loves his new family as much as he misses his old one. The film refuses to vilify Mr. Kerner for remarrying; instead it shows his emotional confusion at seeing his son for the first time in years.

Alex creates a new East Germany and enlists his family and friends to be fellow actors: Rainer pretends to be a dispatcher while former cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn plays the new chancellor of East Germany. Many of Alex's neighbours enjoy the role playing because it gives them a renewed sense of identity. The three elderly neighbours cannot adjust to new identities and are only too delighted to pretend at Christiane's birthday that the Wall never fell. Lara, who is younger and more willing, on the face of it, to form a new identity, is enraged with Alex when he creates the fiction that Lara's father taught deaf children (he is, in fact, a cook). While Alex cannot allow his mother to know the changed historical realities (the premise is that truth equals death), Lara considers Alex's deceptions just as dangerous. Thus, Lara presents the view that fantasy is unhealthy and cannot last. She says, "It's just too creepy, what you're doing to her"[Christiane]." In the end, the film validates Lara's position when it is exposed that Christiane had lied about her devotion to the Party.

One of the great ironies of the post-Wall *Ostalgia* phenomenon is that this was a structure built from a feeling discouraged by the Party itself. According to Betts, "The ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) officially denounced backward-looking nostalgia as crass capitalist decadence and ideological cowardice in the face of iron laws of Marxist historical progress."⁵⁷ Of course, the SED discouraged its citizens from looking lovingly back at the time of WW II, or looking back at this time at all, for fear they would question the Party mythology. Becker flags this irony with a sign at the beginning of the film quoting Lenin's dictum, "Always ahead, never back."

It is not surprising that so much of *Ostalgia* manifests itself through collections of material objects like cars and household items. Betts argues that East Germans "have

channelled their affections toward the faded dreams and relative affluence of the 1960s when the country embarked upon its bold project of ‘consumer socialism’.”⁵⁸ It makes sense, then, that despite the characters’ attempts to rebuild a socialist society, *Good Bye Lenin!* is obsessed with commodities. Even Christiane, the ardent socialist, creates resistance to the regime by writing letters of complaint for women in her apartment building about the lack of quality in consumer goods such as dresses. Christina M. White speculates that “memories from childhood are less overtly political than they are pop cultural, and they are perhaps by necessity nostalgic. Just as children blindly love the parents who care for them, they also love the rituals and small pleasures filling their lives.”⁵⁹ These ‘rituals and small pleasures’ are what both Becker’s film and former GDR residents painstakingly recreate.

The film also stages the potential divisiveness of *Ostalgia*. Thus, part of the film’s effectiveness is the way it engages both East and West memories. By locating products from the GDR alongside allusions and references to West German and European culture, Becker tries to unify the two disparate memory sets.⁶⁰ He demonstrates that these memories can exist side by side and do not cancel each other out. White argues, “Of those films attempting to explore memories of growing up in the GDR (including *Sun Alley* and *Heroes like Us*), *Good Bye Lenin!* is by far the most serious, and the best.”⁶¹ Becker’s film is successful, arguably, precisely because it is ambivalent about its subject. It does not present a wholly negative view of East Germany like Richter’s *The Tunnel*, but it isn’t blissfully a-political like *Sonnenallee*.⁶² Becker makes the concept of *Ostalgia* completely understandable by refusing to demonize the former East Germany.

How long will it take for the “Wall in the Head” to disappear? Paul Betts says, “So intractable has been this mental Berlin Wall that most German histories written after 1989 have dispensed altogether with myths of common culture and national solidarity in favour of addressing the more pressing issue at hand, namely the roots of German-German difference.”⁶³ According to the grim predictions of Wolfgang Nowak, “[‘Germans] might be the first country which has, by unifying, created two peoples.’”⁶⁴

Good Bye Lenin!’s appeal worldwide, and especially in Germany, is best explained by Alison Landsberg’s notion of “prosthetic memory.” Landsberg coins this term to describe the way that mass media creates empathy for a group through “the production and dissemination of memory. Such memories bridge the temporal chasms that separate individuals from the meaningful and potentially interpellative events of the past.”⁶⁵ Landsberg argues that because these forms of artificial memories are not possessed by a single person, “the past that prosthetic memory opens up are available to individuals across racial and ethnic lines.”⁶⁶ While these memories are not “real” per se, they do allow empathy by individuals who have no connections to the group in question. Prosthetic memory has an incredible potential (and only potential because, as Landsberg comments, no film can control how an audience will receive it) to create empathy. *Good Bye Lenin!* creates prosthetic memories of East Germany; *Wessis* watching the film can understand the complex problems of loving a repressive dictatorship like the GDR.⁶⁷ In fact, the film could be used as an educational tool. On the cast commentary track, Florian Lukas relates an experience he had at a screening of the film. A man from the East sitting beside him used the film to educate his *Wessi* companion; in effect “he used the

film to explain his life to her.”⁶⁸ Lukas concludes, “I guess that contributed to the success of [*Good Bye Lenin!*] — the fact that you started talking to each other again.”⁶⁹

The film’s complexity extends to inter-textual references to major films. As Alex and Denis (Florian Lukas) redecorate Christiane’s room, the film is sped up and the “William Tell Overture” plays in the background, a nod to Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). When Christiane ventures out on the street, she encounters a helicopter flying a huge statue of Lenin through the city, which directly references Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* (1960). And in the fake newscasts created by Alex and Denis to explain the Coca-Cola banner flying outside Christiane’s window, they go to the Coca-Cola building that was used by German émigré director Billy Wilder in his film *One, Two, Three* (1961). This film was set in Cold-War Berlin and featured a clichéd representation of East Germans. All of these references work to extend the thematics of truth and lies by making it a self-reflexive film that foregrounds its own status as cinema.

The film’s imaginary is also always a national imaginary. Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities is helpful in understanding the importance of the identifications created by Becker. Anderson explains that all nations are really “imagined communities,” in part because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁷⁰ In the past, it was the invention of the printing press that enabled large countries to be unified because they could read books about their common history.⁷¹ Clearly, film and mass media take up this function in our own global and national imaginaries. Becker’s film interrogates Germany in the moment of its post-unification crisis, while at the same time providing its citizens with prosthetic memory.

Arguably, *Good Bye Lenin!* works as a film to unite these two memories in a structure of spectatorship that is new to post-unification Berlin. In fact, lead actor Daniel Brühl, a native of Cologne, comments that the film footage matches his memories of unification. Germans who lived through unification, in short, would recognize all of the film footage of the unification process and see it as their common history. Becker recreates the look of news footage and home movies, beginning with grainy home movie images of Alex and Ariane as children. The familiar style of film mediates what would be unfamiliar images for a non-*Ossi*, while at the same time images of the Young Pioneers and the Young Rocket Builders club are immediately recognizable to an East German. Later, Alex uses the television and his fake newscasts to convince his mother that they are still living in a communist country. However, Alex's well-intentioned invented newscasts end up being remarkably similar to the frequently falsified newscasts that actually aired in East Germany (Becker explains that he took great care to make the fake period footage look as much like the real footage as possible).⁷²

Thus, by unifying memory sets, the film creates a space of shared spectatorship between East and West Germans. *Ossi* Ariane and Rainer, her *Wessi* boyfriend, provide a more or less healthy example of German-German unity. The child that Ariane conceives comes to represent the hope for unity in Germany. As Alex says, "And thus unity was restored, at least in our little family. The baby would be both East and West German".

Is this, then, a fairy-tale ending? Certainly *Good Bye Lenin!* breaks away from the convention of negative unification films described by Leonie Naughton, which feature the almost total non-existence of German-German romantic relationships.⁷³ In

Becker's film, by contrast, Denis and Alex are able to build a friendship. In this way, *Good Bye Lenin!* presents the private space as a place to mend the fractures of public life.⁷⁴ It is not surprising that Becker merges public and private to deal with post-unification identity, a strategy central to the New German Cinema's exploration of post-war German history and subjectivity.

However, the focus on the private is important in the post-unification context for another reason. Christina M. White argues that *Good Bye Lenin!* "explores the relationship of those who grew up in the GDR to their generally happy childhoods — which is, in fact, one of the driving forces behind the wave of 'Ostalgie' in contemporary German literature and film."⁷⁵ While family was important in the former East Germany, the government and the secret police made the country so repressive that citizens were forced to leave their families to escape, or were coerced to spy and give evidence against their family members. *Good Bye Lenin!* features broken families and characters who long for a complete family unit that is lacking from their lives. Yet, these fractures in the private family life of the characters also gesture toward the broken family that is Germany itself. According to Katrin Sass, "It's not a film about the fall of the Wall. It's about a mother and son, a family. It's a story the audience should be able to relate to with or without the historical background."⁷⁶ Becker commented that the "'universal' family essence of the story can be 'totally separated from this specific past.'"⁷⁷ In the end, though, this is a film in which public and private stories reverberate reciprocally and *Good Bye Lenin!* would not make sense if it were set in any other country.⁷⁸

The private struggles of the Kerner family are unthinkable without the backdrop of public and national history. In fact, Alex concludes the film with a voice-over

monologue in which he states that East Germany is the “country that, in my memory, I will always associate with my mother.”⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, then, it is the formerly divided Berlin, in turn, that becomes the focus of this drama of family and nation.

How successful, then, is Becker’s film in capturing the mood as well as the anxious dilemmas of the newly united Germany? *Good Bye Lenin!* presents a popular version of unification, in line with Becker’s privileging of private memories. The film does not cover any of the intellectual debates about unification; it taps none of the still-weighty themes raised by thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas or Karl Heinz Bohrer about the ethics of memory and cultural responsibility in a united Germany with two recent histories and memories but one unmasterable past.⁸⁰ Nor does the film document the growing dissatisfaction with East German intellectuals. However, I do not agree with critics who call the film “depoliticised.” For example, Christiane voices the “third way argument” of the East German intelligentsia. On the 40th anniversary celebrations for East Germany, Christiane chastises Alex for complaining about the GDR by saying, “What do you want to do? Emigrate? Nothing will ever change if everyone emigrates.” Instead, Christiane fights against the system by holding fast to her socialist values. The film also deals forthrightly with the legacy of the Stasi and their widespread tactics of intimidation, as Christiane is questioned after her husband defects. Finally, the film’s message of unity is, in itself, political. The film envisions a space where East and West memories are equally valid and can co-exist.

Yet if the mood is never as dark as in Wenders’s *Faraway, So Close!*, in the post-unification moment of *Good Bye Lenin!*, the West is not the utopia envisioned in *The Promise* or *The Tunnel*. *Good Bye Lenin!*, like the *Ampelmännchen*, shows the ways

identity can turn into a commodity. The film, itself, has spawned money-making schemes such as t-shirts and merchandise. In fact, a company even rents out an apartment, like the one the Kerners live in, for “GDR parties.”⁸¹ However, both are important to the cultural climate in Germany. *Good Bye Lenin!* manages to both sell tickets and deal with complex issues of *Ostalgia* and identity in post-Wall Berlin. The film’s Janus-faced attitude allows it to do this. It is both comic and tragic, positive and negative about the GDR, specific to Berlin and universal. This duality collapses Manichean distinctions and creates and opens up a more realistic space of ambivalence for Berliners who are often of two minds, not surprisingly, about their newly configured place. *Good Bye Lenin!* acknowledges the positive and negative memories of the former *Ossis* and unifies them with the *Wessis*. The film imagines a unification that is a combination of East and West, and not merely a colonization of East by West. This imagining is not a corrupt deception promulgated by the Party, nor a regret-filled longing of former *Ossis*. It is, instead, a place of possibilities for the new Germany.

Notes

¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 49.

² Quoted in Paul Betts, “Remembrance of the Things Past: Nostalgia in East and West Germany 1980 – 2000,” in *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History*, edited by Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 198.

³ Robert D. Levy and Richard McCormick, “Mastering the Past and Present,” 196.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 193–210.

⁵ In fact, the word “*Führer*”, meaning leader, was banned from use because Hitler had been referred to as *der Führer*. So, a tour guide was called *Stadtsgbilderklärerin*, or “Town Plan Explainer”. See Anna Funder, *Stasiland*, 104.

⁶ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, xv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See A. James McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany*.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, “‘Working Off the Past’,” 38.

¹¹ See Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 101–152.

¹² Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xiv–xv.

¹³ See appendix.

¹⁴ “Klare Signale für Fussgänger,” *Ampelmannsgeschichte*, <http://www.ampelman.com/>, accessed July 3, 2005.

¹⁵ The chubby *Ampelmännchen* are generally only found in Berlin. With a few exceptions, most of the other cities have the traditional thin pedestrian lights. See “Jolly Green Man Given the Elbow,” *World News*, November 27, 2005, <http://www9.sbs.com.au/worldnews/region.php?id=99808®ion=3>, accessed July 3, 2005.

¹⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 54.

¹⁷ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 119.

¹⁸ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, xi.

¹⁹ For more on the negative stereotypes of East Germans, see Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 101–152.

²⁰ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East*, x.

²¹ See Jana Hensel, *After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next*, translated by Jefferson Chase (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

²² Jana Hensel, “*After the Wall*: Author’s Note,” Public Affairs Books website, <http://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/publicaffairsbooks-cgi-bin/display?book=1586482661&view=note>, accessed July 12, 2005.

²³ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 56.

²⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Jason Anderson, “Against the Wall,” *Eye Weekly*, 8 March 2004, http://www.eyenet.net/eye/issue/issue_03.18.04/film/goodbyelenin!.html, accessed April 20, 2004.

²⁷ Paul Betts, “Remembrance of the Things Past,” 191.

²⁸ The ugly, boxy, and fuel-inefficient car, also known as the *Trabi*, has become one of the enduring symbols of East Germany. It was a luxury item, despite its poor quality, because it took so long for a citizen of the GDR to acquire one. See Mary Beth Stein, “The Banana and the *Trabant*,” 333.

²⁹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 54.

³⁰ In fact, according to Jason Anderson, the film “has out-grossed Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run* (1998) to become the most internationally successful German film ever” (Anderson, “Against the Wall”).

³¹ In fact, it is arguably too ethnically German. The film is not interested in the many diverse groups living in Berlin. Aside from a Vietnamese family who appear briefly in the satellite-selling montage, *Good Bye Lenin!* completely ignores Berlin’s Turkish, immigrant, and queer communities. However, while important, this topic is beyond the scope of my chapter. Perhaps subsequent work could be done on how and why these groups are often left out of film representations of unification.

³² “*Good Bye Lenin!*,” *The Numbers*, current to August 5, 2004, <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2004/GBLEN.php>, accessed June 29, 2005.

³³ “*Good Bye Lenin!* wins German Film Prize,” *Deutsche Welle* (5 July 2003), <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,888132.00.html>, accessed June 29, 2005.

³⁴ Quoted in Cameron Bailey, “Missing Socialism,” *Now Magazine* 23, no. 29 (18–24 March 2004), http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2004-03-18/movie_feature.php, accessed April 20, 2004.

³⁵ Wolfgang Becker, “Director’s Commentary,” *Good Bye Lenin!* DVD (Seville, 2004).

³⁶ For example, Peter Timm’s *Go Trabi Go* (1991) and *Das war der wilde Osten/That was the Wild East (or Go Trabi Go II)* (1992), *Der Brocken/Rising to the Bait* (Vadim Glowna, 1992), *Wir können auch anders/No More Mr. Nice Guy* (Detlev Buck, 1993).

³⁷ For more on this sub-genre: Leonie Naughton, “Unification Comedies – *Rising to the Bait* and *No More Mr. Nice Guy*,” in *That Was the Wild East*, 139–164.

³⁸ This genre includes films such as the Wenders angel films, *The Promise*, *The Tunnel*, *Apfelbäume/Apple Trees* (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1992), *Berlin Is In Germany* (Hannes Stöhr, 2001), and *Sun Alley/Sonnenallee* (Leander Hassmann, 1999), which is somewhat an exception because it is a comedy.

³⁹ Dina Iordanova, “East of Eden,” *Sight and Sound* 27 (August 2003): 8.

- ⁴⁰ Quoted in Cameron Bailey, "Missing Socialism."
- ⁴¹ Paul Betts, "Remembrance of the Things Past," 180.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 182.
- ⁴³ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 6.
- ⁴⁴ Dina Iordanova, "East of Eden," 8.
- ⁴⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "'Working Off the Past'," 24–5.
- ⁴⁶ Paul Betts, "Remembrance of the Things Past," 195.
- ⁴⁷ Helen Cafferty, "Sonnenallee," in *Textual Responses to German Unification*, edited by Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 258.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted in Cameron Bailey, "Missing Socialism."
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Becker, "Director's Commentary."
- ⁵¹ Anna Funder, *Stasiland*, 96.
- ⁵² Jason Anderson, "Against the Wall."
- ⁵³ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory*, 119.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ⁵⁵ Quoted in Cameron Bailey, "Missing Socialism."
- ⁵⁶ See Linda Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," *UTEL University of Toronto Library* (19 January 1998), <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>, accessed June 10, 2005.
- ⁵⁷ Paul Betts, "Remembrance of the Things Past," 181.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.
- ⁵⁹ Christina M. White, "Good Bye Lenin!," 46.
- ⁶⁰ Besides having their own memories, both sides have different ideas about what the past on the other side was actually like. Paul Betts explains that the *Ostalgia* craze has even affected western Germans, but they "tend not to collect old consumer goods, but rather more political memorabilia (SED pins and flags)" (Betts, "Remembrance of the Things Past," 199).
- ⁶¹ Christina M. White, "Good Bye Lenin!," 46.
- ⁶² For more on *Sonnenallee* see Helen Cafferty, "Sonnenallee," 253–271.
- ⁶³ Paul Betts, "Remembrance of the Things Past," 178–179.
- ⁶⁴ Quoted in "Getting Back Together Is So Hard," 58.
- ⁶⁵ Alison Landsberg, "Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture," in *Memory and Popular Film*, edited by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 148.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.
- ⁶⁷ The success of such a project is immeasurable without an exhaustive reception study. Such a project is beyond the scope of my thesis, so I leave it open as to what the film actually achieves with a West German audience. However, the film's success at the German box office suggests that *Wessis* found much to like in this film about the struggles of *Ossis*.
- ⁶⁸ Daniel Brühl, Florian Lukas, and Katrin Saß, "Cast Commentary," *Good Bye Lenin!* DVD (Séville, 2004).
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991), 5.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁷² Becker, "Director's Commentary."
- ⁷³ Naughton includes the films like *The Promise/Das Versprechen* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1994), *Apfelbäume/Apple Trees* (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1992), *Ostkreuz* (Michael Klier, 1991), *Engelchen/Little Angel* and *Herzsprung* (Helke Misselwitz, 1996, 1992), *Burning Life* (Peter Welz, 1994), and even *Das deutsche Kettensäge Massaker/The German Chainsaw Massacre* (Christoph Schlingensiefel, 1991).
- ⁷⁴ Christina M. White argues that "the main strength of this crowd-pleasing film, distinguishing it from cruder forms of *Ostalgie*, is its careful blend of cathartic drama and incisive comedy on levels that strike both personal and political chords. It thus has a capacity to help German audiences work through the latest turbulent chapter of German history" (White, "Good Bye Lenin!," 46).
- ⁷⁵ White, "Good Bye Lenin!," 46.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Dina Iordanova, "East of Eden," 8.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Dina Iordanova, "East of Eden," 8.

⁷⁸ While many former East Bloc countries' transitions to capitalism were equally swift, the loss of identity that unfortunately came with German unification is unique.

⁷⁹ The Kerner family's division follows the same gender stereotypes that appear in the popular conception of the division of Germany. East Germany was often associated with femaleness and West Germany with maleness.

⁸⁰ See Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*.

⁸¹ DW-World.De (Deutsche Welle), <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/o..888132.00.html>.

Conclusion

If Berlin is a “city-text”, as Andreas Huyssen describes it, it is one with many varied chapters. Berlin was the centre of many of Germany’s most tumultuous periods: as the first capital of a united German empire in 1871, as the heart of the Weimar Republic, as the ground zero for the horror of the National Socialist regime, and as the place of the final European battleground of World War II. But the “Berlin” that I have read in this study is the centre of the Cold War and post-unification periods. The Berlin Wall was the literal symbol of the divided country and an ideological battleground for the whole of the Cold War era. Its citizens in the eastern and western sectors grew farther apart as time went on. By the time the actual Wall fell, it had already been replaced by a more powerful psychological Wall: in Peter Schneider’s words, the “Wall in the Head”. Economic disparities, different ideological frameworks and different stories about the past (the nation is still haunted by the Hitler era and the ethical problem of German normalization) created a seemingly insurmountable divide. Yet despite the ongoing problems of unification, the return of the capital from Bonn back to Berlin has once again placed Berlin in the centre of an era of change as the symbol of a united Germany.

The films I have chosen to examine are tied together by their representation of Berlin as “city-text”. In all of these films, Berlin or “Berlin” is not just the material city, but a site into which one can read multiple meanings. It becomes a locus for representations of the many questions facing the newly unified Germany. As Wenders’s angel films make clear, these periods are linked through the memories that Berlin holds. My second chapter looked at the ways in which Wenders represented the various

Cinema's obsession with memory and responsibility for the shameful legacy of the Third Reich. The film's continuation, *Faraway, So Close!*, has been widely critiqued for its overly complex plot and missionary zeal, yet this film also demonstrates the changing text of Berlin. The film's sombre mood, I have argued, represents shifts in Wenders's own worldview, but was also shaped and informed by the disappointments of unification.

Wenders's ability to deal with the weighty German past is not surprising given his auteur status within the New German Cinema. However, my third chapter asks whether it is possible to represent history adequately in the new commercially driven cinema. The German film industry has changed radically since the 1970s and is now more market-based, with funding going to projects that can "sell." This "Cinema of Consensus" produces films which rely on commercial genres and whose aim it is to sell tickets. Roland Suso Richter's *The Tunnel* demonstrates the way historical relevance is subordinated to action and suspense, and the result is a film that offers a basic binary of the East as an evil space from which all characters must escape and the West as a paradise to which all characters yearn to go. However, Margarethe von Trotta's *The Promise* shows that even in this new commercial film industry, films are made that can deal with some of the complexities of German history. Here we find a more ambiguous picture of how East Germans coped, and why they lived for so long, with their repressive state. But this is unfortunately countered by a simplistic portrayal of West as utopia that ignores West German intellectuals' critique of capitalism.

It is ironic that the most commercially successful recent German film also asks some of the most radical questions. It examines the obstacles for *Ossis* and *Wessis* in trading their solid identities for that of uncertain identities as unified Germans. It shows

that, while *Ossis* lived in a repressive state, they still valued their memories. The film deals directly with the two disparate memory sets of post-unification Germany. Through the concept of *Ostalgia* we can see the difficulty of overturning history and memory at the individual level.

The ongoing debates about memorials and museums noted by Andreas Huyssen, Charles Maier and Jane Kramer suggest that Berlin is still a “city-text,” it is a site that emits meanings around histories and memories that are still far from resolved. Yet Berlin also faces new challenges, and the text raises new questions: Can the city deal with its rich multiculturalism? How will the issues of post-unification identity affect Berlin’s many communities? What is Berlin’s place in a new, more unified Europe? All of these questions demonstrate that the process of reading Berlin as a text is still a vital exercise in the Twenty-First Century. What is clear is that new voices must and will enter into the representation of Berlin as site of both historical struggle and of identity formation within a more heterogeneous nation; women’s voices will have to be heard again (von Trotta’s earlier work is exemplary), but so too will those of a growing ethnic minority (whose representation was already staged in the work of Fassbinder). The struggle for memory between former East and West Germans also awaits fuller representation. Finally, German cinema will now have to redefine itself within and against the new European Union, where the material conditions of production and reception will test and transform the very idea of a national cinema. In this complex and overly determined history, Berlin is unlikely to lose its lustre as a setting of vitality and interest, redolent with history and memory.

Appendix

Green Ampelmännchen (Walk) (photo by author)



Appendix

Red *Ampelmännchen* (Don't Walk) (photo by author)



Filmography

- Faraway, So Close!!/In weiter Ferne so nah!* 1993. Dir. Wim Wenders. Perf. Otto Sander, Natassja Kinski, Horst Bucholz, Bruno Ganz, Solveig Dommartin, Peter Falk, and Heinz Rühmann. Columbia Tristar, 1994.
- Good Bye Lenin!* 2002. Dir. Wolfgang Becker. Perf. Daniel Brühl, Katrin Saß, Chulpan Khamatova, Maria Simon, Alexander Beyer, and Florian Lukas. Séville Pictures, 2003.
- The Promise/Das Versprechen.* 1995. Dir. Margarethe von Trotta. Perf. Meret Becker, Anian Zollner, Corinna Harfouch, and August Zirner. Alliance Video, 1996.
- The Tunnel/Der Tunnel.* 2000. Dir. Roland Suso Richter. Perf. Heino Ferch, Nicolette Krebitz, Sebastian Koch, Felix Eitner, Alexandra Marie Lara, and Uwe Kockisch. Séville Pictures, 2000.
- Wings of Desire/Himmel über Berlin.* 1987. Dir. Wim Wenders. Perf. Bruno Ganz, Otto Sander, Solveig Dommartin, Peter Falk, and Curt Bois. MGM Home Entertainment, 2003.

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