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## **A Few Good Men: Gender, Ideology, and Narrative Politics in *The Lives of Others* and *Good Bye, Lenin!***

Jennifer Creech

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This article examines two influential post-*Wende* (fall of the Wall) films about the former GDR and German unification, Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006). The films radically differ in terms of cinematic strategies, ideological positioning of the spectator, and the narrative function of gender. Considering the two films in terms of their critical reception, feminist theories of narrative, and Mary Fulbrook's "octopus theory" of the GDR, I argue that gender plays a key role in the films' diverging reconstructions of the former East. While the narrative and cinematic organization of *The Lives of Others* provide the viewer with an ideologically distinct, nostalgic reconstruction of a Cold War narrative of the GDR, in which the female protagonist and the GDR are clearly vilified, *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s narrative and cinematic strategies position the viewer as simultaneously sympathetic and critical, constructing the female protagonist as the site of contradiction between real existing socialism and the utopian impulse at its heart. (JC)

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While contemporary filmmakers take a variety of approaches when considering the *Wende* in German history, two post-*Wende* films in particular take markedly different views of the past: Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*, released in 2003, and Christian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others*, released in 2006. As the two most popular, influential and debated post-*Wende* films about the former East Germany and German unification, Becker's and Donnersmarck's films radically oppose each other in terms of narrative tone, cinematic strategies, ideological positioning of the spectator, and the role of gender in the films' narrative trajectories. The films have elicited fundamentally different responses from critics and scholars: *Good Bye, Lenin!* has been

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received as the most popular example of post-*Wende Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East), while *The Lives of Others* has been received as a serious reconsideration of the repressive nature of East German totalitarianism. I consider the two films in light of their critical reception, in terms of feminist theories of narrative, and in the context of Mary Fulbrook's "octopus theory" of the GDR, in which she argues for the necessity of resisting black-and-white historical narratives of "heroes, victims and villains," and for a more nuanced reconstruction of East German history and culture. I examine the narrative function of the female protagonist in the context of Fulbrook's reconceptualization of East German history to demonstrate the ways in which both films use the female figure to either reinscribe or challenge residual Cold War ideologies of the GDR. In particular I consider the use of gender in mapping out clear ideological distinctions, in the case of *The Lives of Others*, and the complex relationship between utopia and political violence, in the case of *Good Bye, Lenin!* I assert that the narrative and cinematic organization of *The Lives of Others* provides the viewer with a nostalgic reconstruction of a Cold War narrative of the GDR, a story of "heroes, victims and villains," in which the female protagonist is clearly constructed as an obstacle to be overcome, while *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s narrative and cinematic strategies position the viewer as simultaneously sympathetic and critical, constructing the female protagonist as the site of contradiction between ideology and dialectics, between real existing socialism and the utopian impulse at its heart.

*Good Bye, Lenin!* tells the story of Alexander Kerner's attempt to prevent a fatal relapse in his mother's fragile health by recreating the GDR in a 79m<sup>2</sup>-apartment in the former East Berlin. The film begins just before the *Wende*. Alexander lives with his mother Christiane and sister Ariane in the East; his father has supposedly abandoned his family and fled to the West. In his absence, Alex's mother has become a model socialist, leading Alex's Young Pioneer group, writing letters of constructive critique to state authorities, sitting on local committees and being active in the community. On her way to a state function in which she will be honored for these commitments, she witnesses Alex's arrest at an anti-government demonstration and suffers a near-fatal heart attack, falling into a coma. Shortly afterward, the Wall falls, eight months pass, and she finally awakes. However her weakened physical and mental state leads the doctor to diagnose that any further shock could cause another fatal attack. Alex realizes that her discovery of recent events would be too traumatic and decides to maintain the illusion that the GDR still exists. Thus, he and Ariane return the previous drab decor to the apartment, dress in their old clothes, and feed their bedridden mother new Western

products from former East German jars. Their increasingly complicated and elaborate deception is successful, culminating in Alex editing old tapes of East German news broadcasts and creating fake special reports on TV to explain any westernization efforts that his mother accidentally encounters. A sudden relapse, however, returns Christiane to the hospital and Alex is pressured to reveal the reality of unification. Alex then convinces a taxi driver, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Sigmund Jähn, the first German in space, to serve as head of state and give a speech in which he declares the borders open. Christiane, moved by her son's efforts, which she has since discovered (unbeknownst to him), is also moved by her son's desire to give her "a country that never existed as such in reality."

*Good Bye, Lenin!* has been celebrated throughout Europe, winning the French César, the Munich DIVA, the Danish Robert, the British Directors' Guild prize, and the Spanish Goya. Hugely popular, it drew millions of European viewers by the end of 2003 and played twice daily in one Hamburg and one Berlin theater for over a year. In its attempt to come to terms with the suppression of East German cultural memory after the *Wende*, *Good Bye, Lenin!* has been received by many as "wonderful, touching and comic," a story of one son's attempt to "restore his mother to health—and keep her in the belief that Lenin really did win after all!" (German Cinema Archive). While the press tends to focus on the comedic aspects of the film, *Good Bye, Lenin!* is in fact a rather complex attempt at mourning: of the mother's passing and of the passing of a particular historical moment.<sup>1</sup> Claudia Schwartz has suggested that the sentimentality of Becker's film is an attempt to counteract post-*Wende* representations of the GDR in which personal experiences are completely subsumed under ideology and totalitarianism. In fact the film does much more. Specifically through the figure of Lenin and the female protagonist, Christiane Kerner, Becker's film recuperates the utopian impulse at the heart of the failed socialist project, mourning the passing of utopian desire while also confronting the viewer with the violence of East German institutions.

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's 2007 Oscar winner, *The Lives of Others*, on the other hand, is a sober, dramatic story of state surveillance, political and artistic oppression, in which the sympathetic Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler rejects his oppressive role and engages in political dissidence. Donnersmarck's film portrays Wiesler as an idealistic Stasi spy who is moved to conversion while observing the state's most celebrated poet, Georg Dreyman, and his actress-girlfriend, Christa-Maria Sieland. As Wiesler slowly discovers that the true enemy of the state is the state itself, he decides to protect his objects of surveillance by

fabricating stories to hide their dissident activities and actively removing incriminating evidence from the scene of the crime. On the other hand, Sieland, given the choice between informing on Dreyman or facing interrogation and blacklisting without the aid of her compensatory pills, chooses the former. Fraught with the guilt of having informed on Dreyman in order to save herself, she commits suicide by running in front of a truck. Wiesler and Dreyman briefly stand in mourning over her body. Wiesler, whose boss is suspicious that there is no evidence to be found, is banished to the depths of the Stasi apparatus: he spends the next four years until the fall of the Wall in the “mail room,” secretly opening letters from the West on the Stasi assembly line. Upon unification, Dreyman discovers that he was, in fact, an object of state surveillance and, using the newly opened Stasi archives, he reads the files of the operation against him. The film ends two years later as Wiesler, passing the famous Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung, discovers Dreyman’s new novel, which the author has dedicated not to the memory of his beloved Sieland, but rather to Wiesler, his Stasi observer.

Donnersmarck’s film has been celebrated both in Germany and the US, having won numerous German awards, including the “Golden Lola” from the German Film Academy, and the 2007 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Some Germans have read its Oscar award cynically, suggesting “that the German cinema is also good for new totalitarianisms” (Nicodemus).<sup>2</sup> Others, however, have received the film as a welcome answer to the *Ostalgiewelle*, the “tide of nostalgia for the East” that was threatening to inundate the German viewing public. As such, Donnersmarck’s film has been described as “the first German feature to deal seriously with the legacy of the MfS [Ministry of State Security or Stasi]. It does not trivialize the GDR in the manner of some post-unification German comedies to which it has been compared” (Stein 568). In particular, it has been heralded as “more political than *Sonnenallee* and more philosophical than *Good Bye, Lenin!*” and a refutation of “the popular fallacy that an East German could have chosen to do the right thing as easily as a West German could have chosen the right car” (Finger).<sup>3</sup> Finger’s overt use of ideological distinctions—good/bad, West/East, truth/fallacy—reveals a popular resistance in post-unification Germany to understanding the complexities of the *Ostalgie* phenomenon.

This resistance is present in Donnersmarck’s film which, in contrast to its so-called *ostalgic* predecessors, in particular *Good Bye, Lenin!*, asserts a cleaner, more ideologically distinct picture of life in the GDR, a clear rejection of Fulbrook’s call for a more differentiated *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past).<sup>4</sup> Although one could potentially view Wiesler as the type of differentiated GDR citizen that

Fulbrook discusses, he in fact functions to reinscribe the dichotomies that Fulbrook is precisely attempting to question. This becomes most clear when we consider Donnersmarck's use of the erotic triangle. This narrative structure positions the viewer within a particular economy of gender difference that, in turn, serves to anchor Donnersmarck's larger system of ideological distinctions. Thus, in the erotic triangle, Donnersmarck maps out his "heroes" and "villains" as both "embodied" and gendered: both Dreyman, the poet, and Wiesler, the surveillance officer, are aligned with intellectual labor and political resistance. Dreyman produces high art, while Wiesler functions (along with the spectator) as the "intended audience," whose aesthetic appreciation completes the artwork by transforming theory into praxis. This narrative trajectory enables the intellectually rigorous, politically active, male subjects of the film to move from ideal conformists to ideal resisters.

In direct contrast, the female protagonist's primary function in the film is that of mediation: she facilitates the heroes' narratives of resistance and progression. She thus functions as what Teresa De Lauretis has called a "figure or marker of position—a place and topos—through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning" (109).<sup>5</sup> Further, femininity is consistently aligned with political complicity (self-service at the expense of others) and corporeal production (prostitution as a means of survival). In the case of both Dreyman and Wiesler (and mirrored in the film's other "resistance" figures, all clearly aligned with aesthetic production and political *engagement*) masculinity is aligned with moral strength, and with the primacy of aesthetic and political "truth" over personal advancement. Thus, although Wiesler is Stasi, he is essentially a "good man"; although Sieland is a victim of Stasi surveillance and state exploitation, she is not a good woman. Sieland's function as "prostitute in the service of art" is reiterated not only through her sexual exploitation at the hands of Minister Hempf, but also in the artistic references throughout the film, namely the *Sonata vom guten Menschen* (Sonata for a Good Man) and the Brecht poem "In Remembrance of Marie A." ("Erinnerung an die Marie A.").

### One Bad Woman

The film's economy of gender difference is anchored by positioning the viewer from the very beginning of the film to identify equally with the male protagonists, Wiesler and Dreyman—the Stasi observer and the artist observed. Wiesler functions as our cinematic surrogate in the classic sense—he is our eyes and ears, the diegetic representation of our

scopophilic desire. The film goes to great lengths to establish Wiesler as our primary object of identification. Even more than Dreyman, Wiesler is the subject of emotionally complex close-ups, dramatic orchestral arrangements and pregnant silences, and circular panning that clearly establishes his movement from “villain” to primary “hero.” Yet, what truly roots Wiesler and, secondarily Dreyman, in a historical and narrative trajectory of agency and progression is the woman who stands between them.

Sieland functions to map out the ideological positions against which Wiesler and Dreyman come to be defined. As an actress, she is immediately established as representative of the corporeal and its correlative ideological meanings: sexuality, aesthetic mediation, and political cooptation. In fact, she succinctly represents what Christine MacKinnon has identified as the inseparability of the female *gender* and *sexual* stereotype:

Each element of the female *gender* stereotype is revealed as, in fact, *sexual*. Vulnerability means the appearance/reality of easy sexual access; passivity means receptivity and disabled resistance [ ... ]; softness means pregnability by something hard. [ ... ] Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms. (530–31)

Sieland clearly functions as the object of Dreyman’s, Wiesler’s and Minister Hempf’s (and hence, the spectator’s) erotic desire. Her “complicity” (receptivity, disabled resistance, “pregnability”) is established in one of earliest scenes as simultaneously political and sexual: at the premier of Dreyman’s most recent play, Sieland is presented on the left of the screen with the Minister, who gropes her ass as he tells Dreyman that “the Party needs artists, but artists need the Party more.” This complicity is confirmed just a few scenes later, when both Dreyman and Wiesler, hard at work, both producing—one a play, the other a sketch of Dreyman’s apartment—are contrasted with Sieland, whose mode of “production” consists of whoring herself out to the Minister. While the Minister gives her the opportunity to “say she doesn’t need it and [he will] let her go,” she is silent. Sexual weakness and exploitation are projected onto the female artist and linked to her character in general: she is consistently over-sexualized in the film, always portrayed in low-cut or tight blouses or form-fitting skirts, occasionally teasing us with a glimpse of garter-belt or nipple.

This portrayal is in direct contrast to representations of women in DEFA film, in which women's "everyday" roles as workers, mothers, artists, and wives were emphasized. Rather than being represented as weak and exploited sexual objects, they often played the role of conflicted socialist subject, having to negotiate the tensions between private needs and desires, and public expectations. As such, they served as sites of resistance, embodying the contradictions between socialist idealism and real existing socialism.<sup>6</sup> Even in films such as *Solo Sunny* (dir. Konrad Wolf, 1980), which tells the story of a female singer and her eventual success, the protagonist is not glamorized and her sexuality is not what enables her stage presence nor her narrative agency. Instead, it is her experience of sexual oppression (threat of rape by a band member) that partially influences her decision to strike out on her own and seek out more productive and fulfilling artistic relationships. Donnersmarck's film, however, reinforces femininity as inherently aligned with moral inferiority, sexual weakness, and prostitution in the advancement of personal interests and at the cost of aesthetic and political integrity, which Wiesler and Dreyman increasingly come to represent.

The male protagonists' first step in overcoming their feminine obstacle occurs as Dreyman is forced by Wiesler to "face bitter truths": Wiesler rings Dreyman's doorbell just in time for Dreyman to witness Sieland tucking her blouse back into her skirt as she emerges from her tryst in the Minister's Mercedes Benz. As Dreyman follows her unseen into his apartment, the film suggests that his sole solace can be found in art: he sits down at the piano and gently plays several notes that blend into the film's melancholic musical score. While Dreyman plays, Sieland washes away her sins in the shower. Dreyman later enters the bedroom and discovers Sieland curled up on the bed, asking him to hold her. The two lovers' embrace is then mirrored in the camera's cut to Wiesler's embrace of his swivel chair. While the viewer is moved to sympathize with Sieland's situation as a female artist, who must prostitute herself to the state, the next scene in Wiesler's apartment, however, reminds us that it is femininity in general, and feminine sexuality in particular, that defines Sieland's position. In an attempt to recreate the lovers' embrace, Wiesler hires a prostitute, whose facial features and voluptuous curves uncannily resemble Sieland's. While Wiesler tries to recreate the warm embrace shared between Dreyman and Sieland by burying his face in the prostitute's breasts, she pushes away and reminds him that she has to get to her next client.

In conflating Sieland with the prostitute, the film threatens to make obvious what it so pertinently attempts to cover over: within the narrative trajectory of the erotic triangle, female subjectivity is relegated to sexual



objectification. Questions of (male) force and (female) consent, of sex's signifying relation to power and of the relationship of sexual alienation to political oppression, are elided. An erotic fascination with and simultaneous desire to overcome feminine sexuality becomes the bond between the two male rivals in this triangle.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the erotic triangle is the prototypical narrative structure for considering the continuum of male homosocial desire. In summarizing René Girard's work on the erotic triangle, Sedgwick emphasizes his point that the bond that links the two rivals is stronger and more heavily determinant of actions than the bond they each have with the female object. Sedgwick takes this point further to argue that, "there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (25). In Donnersmarck's film, the erotic triangle functions as the narrative structure through which the residue of western, Cold War ideology establishes itself as a master narrative of German history. The "patriarchal power" that is negotiated and transferred within the erotic triangle operates through ideological distinctions: good/bad, West/East, truth/fallacy, freedom/totalitarianism, etc. As the uncompromised, ideal resisters, both Dreyman and Wiesler are more closely aligned with one another than either is with Sieland or East German institutions, although, as the film elides, both are in professions that are inextricably linked to the state. In overcoming the corrupted (female, erotic) object of desire, the "revolutionary" artist and "dissident" Stasi officer become our metaphorical winners of history, who loosen their bonds to the GDR state and, historically speaking, retroactively stand in as the (western) democratizing forces at heart of the *Wende*.

It is at this moment that Donnersmarck provides his male heroes (and the viewer) with their first weapon against the moral and political corruption of female sexuality: Brecht. As the prostitute leaves, the camera lingers in a medium shot of Wiesler looking despondent on the sofa. Donnersmarck again uses the film's melancholic score to transition from the silent emptiness of Wiesler's recent sexual exchange to the spiritually meaningful intellectual consumption of Brechtian poetry. As the music begins, the camera cuts from Wiesler on the sofa to Wiesler entering Dreyman's apartment in search of something, the camera cuts to a close up of Dreyman's pen on the desk, then to a medium close up of Wiesler contemplating it, then to a long shot of Wiesler as he kneels to gently caress Dreyman's bed. Here, Wiesler lingers, not yet relinquishing his desire for Sieland. The next sequence shows us, however, what will become Wiesler's true object of desire. The music ends as the camera cuts to Dreyman at his desk, asking Sieland if she has seen his yellow edition

of Brecht. True to form, Sieland answers with little interest, while Dreyman is puzzled at its absence. The music then swells as the camera cuts again to a close up of Wiesler reading from Brecht's "In Remembrance of Marie A." as Dreyman's voiceover can be heard:

An jenem Tag im blauen Mond September  
 Still unter einem jungen Pflaumenbaum  
 Da hielt ich sie, die stille bleiche Liebe  
 In meinem Arm wie einen holden Traum.  
 Und über uns im schönen Sommerhimmel  
 War eine Wolke, die ich lange sah  
 Sie war sehr weiß und ungeheuer oben  
 Und als ich aufsah, war sie nimmer da. (film subtitles)<sup>7</sup>

The extra-diegetic music functions to remind us of the film's seemingly "tragic" motifs: the state's stifling of individual freedom, the muting of art's political potency under a socialist regime, the danger of resistance. This first stanza, spoken to Wiesler by Dreyman, suggests a melancholic tone that the viewer recognizes in both Dreyman's and Wiesler's desire for Sieland. The "silent, pale beloved" being held by the narrator resembles the image of the lovers' embrace from the previous sequence, and the coming tragedy (Sieland's death, the obstacle in the hero's narrative trajectory) is foreshadowed by the disappearance of the cloud. Thus, the viewer is emotionally drawn into Wiesler's conversion. Wiesler's overwhelming emotional drive to become the hero, to fuse with Dreyman, is partially achieved with the incorporation of Dreyman's voiceover as Wiesler silently reads.

Yet, Donnersmarck's textual choice begins to unravel the film's supposed critique. While it seems most likely that he chose the poem because its title phonetically alludes to his own female protagonist, "Marie A."/"Maria,"<sup>8</sup> the content and form of the poem is an overt critique of the sentimentality of bourgeois art and, as such, it functions to deconstruct the narrative trajectory of Donnersmarck's film. In his notebooks, Brecht first titled the poem, "Sentimental Song No. 1004," writing, "[W]hen the seminal vesicles are full, man sees Aphrodite in every woman" ("Erinnerung" 425). Brecht composed the song as a reaction to the popular German love song, "Verlor'nes Glück" (Lost Happiness), by Leopold Sprowacker, that was widely played in various arrangements at the beginning of the century ("Erinnerung" 426). The title, "Sentimental Song #1004," alludes to Don Juan, who supposedly seduced 1,003 women in the course of his lifetime. With number 1004, Brecht's narrator has actually outdone the famous "Trickster of Seville."

Thus, the title alludes to roguish philandering, a direct contradiction of the seeming seriousness of the first stanza, emphasizing the sentimentality of the song's content.

Further, the poem was originally published in the third lesson (*Lektion*) of *Bertolt Brechts Hauspostille* ("domestic sermon" or "commentary") The term, *Hauspostille*, is an ironic reconfiguration of the *Kirchenpostille* ("Biblical sermon" or "commentary"), a domestic manual used to aid religious edification. Brecht's version of the *Hauspostille* is meant to educate the reader/listener by establishing an ironic distance between the events of the *Hauspostille* and the recipient of the "lessons." Amidst poems and songs of adventurers, pirates, soldiers, hobos, and whores, "In Remembrance of Marie A." teaches us a modern lesson about romantic love. Brecht's narrator cannot remember much about the woman he kissed under the plum tree, her face is a blur. She is likely a mother of seven now, and, while the plum trees are likely also blooming again, the cloud, ah the cloud is gone! Thus, sentimentality "clouds" our reason: love is simply lust, a woman is just a woman, and a man is usually thinking with his proverbial dick. Taken out of context, the first stanza of Brecht's poem functions in the film to underscore Wiesler's melodramatic progression toward overcoming his erotic object and devoting himself to aesthetic appreciation and political action. In the context of the poem as a whole, however, the stanza outlines the sentimentality of romantic love as constructed by bourgeois "art" that is best followed up with materialist social critique in an ironic and alienating aesthetic form.<sup>9</sup>

Like the Brecht poem, the musical piece *Sonata vom guten Menschen* also serves as an aesthetic substitute for erotic pleasure and as a path for Dreyman and Wiesler to overcome the female protagonist. The *Sonata* figures prominently in two key scenes: the death of Jerska, Dreyman's blacklisted colleague, and the film's conclusion. Upon receiving the call regarding Jerska's death, Dreyman goes directly to the *Sonata*, not to Sieland, for solace. Here the telephone and surveillance headphones function as the material connections between Dreyman and Wiesler, while the musical score creates a spiritual connection of mourning. Sieland is cut out of the frame except for her hand on Dreyman's shoulder, while the camera pans slowly around Dreyman playing the *Sonata*. This panning is then repeated as we see Wiesler in a medium shot, silently weeping as the aural recipient (like the viewer) of Dreyman's grief. Here, the female character is marginalized while the men are united in an aesthetic act of mourning. This sequence in particular serves visually and aurally to recuperate the Stasi officer, proving that he is a "good man"; he is, in fact, the *Sonata*'s intended audience. This is then verbally articulated by Dreyman: "You know what Lenin said about

Beethoven's *Appassionata*? 'If I keep listening to it, I won't finish the revolution.'<sup>10</sup> Can someone who has heard this music, I mean truly heard it, really be a bad person?'<sup>11</sup>

Again, Donnersmarck's choice of intertextual reference threatens to deconstruct the film's critique. The *Sonata* can be read twofold. First, Dreyman's fleeting reference to Lenin and the *Appassionata* suggests that we read the reception of bourgeois art as a revolutionary act, and that this is a good thing. In quoting Lenin, Dreyman suggests that art has the power to transform the Marxist revolutionary into a good bourgeois subject who, rather than ruthlessly pursuing his revolutionary goals, is moved to feel empathy with the class enemy he had set out to crush. Yet, there is a subtler meaning to be found if one considers this reference to Lenin in light of the heroes' narrative trajectory of resistance. If one reads Dreyman and Wiesler as the metaphorical "winners of history" who, as "revolutionary" agents (of the state—state poet/state surveillance officer) retroactively stand in as the democratizing forces at the heart of the *Wende*, then Lenin as the potentially "good bourgeois listener" becomes the revolutionary of liberal-democratic capitalism. That is, if Dreyman's mention of Lenin becomes a rallying call for himself and Wiesler to "revolt," that is to listen and then to act, then Dreyman and Wiesler's turn toward the west turns Lenin's revolution on its head.<sup>12</sup>

Further, while Dreyman remarks on Lenin's aesthetic appreciation of the *Sonata*, he fails to reveal Lenin's dialectical response: while Lenin "knew the *Appassionata* inside and out" and was "willing to listen to it almost every day," he was highly critical of the emotional manipulation he experienced at the hands of this sentimental art. Like Wiesler, Lenin supposedly wept upon hearing Beethoven's sonata. What Dreyman explicitly covers over is Lenin's answer to this:

On hearing it I proudly, maybe somewhat naively, think: "See! people are able to produce such marvels!" [ ... ] I would like to stroke my fellow beings and whisper sweet nothings in their ears for being able to produce such beautiful things in spite of the abominable hell they are living in. However, today one shouldn't caress anybody—for people will only bite off your hand; strike, without pity [ ... ]. (Lukács)

Thus, while Dreyman would have us convinced, along with Wiesler, that the truly revolutionary act is aesthetic appreciation, Lenin would likely have resisted Donnersmarck's use of medium close ups, dramatic panning, and emotive music as sentimental, anti-revolutionary, and bourgeois.

Second, the *Sonata* could also be read in light of Donnersmarck's consistent references to Brecht. The title of the piano piece, *Sonata vom guten Menschen*, undeniably evokes one of Brecht's most famous plays, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (*Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*) a choice that, yet again, threatens to complicate Donnersmarck's narrative trajectory across gender and German history. In Brecht's play, three gods visit the Earth in search of a "good person" in order to prove that one can "be good and still live." Only the prostitute Shen Te proves to be "good": she makes personal sacrifices in order to do good for others. The gods reward her. With the money, she opens a store and abandons her life as a prostitute. In return for her good fortune, she promises to do only good in the future, which becomes increasingly impossible in the capitalist society in which she lives: her selfless commitment to helping the poor and needy quickly saps her financial reserves and she is in danger of losing her business. In order to maintain her promise "to be good, but also to live," she disguises herself as her imaginary cousin, Shui Ta, and saves herself, her business, and her unborn child by ruthlessly exploiting others in rebuilding a flourishing business. The play ends with Shen Te at trial, explaining to her accusers the incommensurability (within a capitalist system) of "being good and also living" (*Der gute Mensch* 291). For Brecht (as for many former East German artists) the female protagonist functions to illustrate the contradictions of social experience, the impossibility of ethics and capital. In the final act, she sits, staring out into the audience as if to ask, echoing Lenin, "what is to be done?" For Donnersmarck, the female protagonist serves as an erotic distraction, a political obstacle, a black hole in the discursive field of goodness and truth.<sup>13</sup>

If, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Donnersmarck's film has been received as a sobering answer to post-*Wende Ostalgie*, then the question of how the film engages socialist iconography and femininity differently from its supposedly nostalgic predecessors is necessarily of consideration. While *The Lives of Others* incorporates both Brecht and Lenin into a nostalgic reconstruction of a western Cold War narrative of the GDR (Brecht the "romantic," Lenin the "weepy bourgeois subject") and uses the female character as a space through which the male protagonists move to achieve their heroic agency, in Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*, both Lenin and the female protagonist serve to reference the tensions between ideology and dialectics, between the institutions of real existing socialism and the revolutionary and critical impulses that served as the utopian bases for those institutions. While Lenin's monument swings over the former East Berlin referencing monumental art made in the service of the state, the title's exclamatory

farewell alludes to the film's attempt to mourn Lenin's ideas and the passing of a female protagonist who embodies the contradictions between real existing socialism and the utopian desire that brought that system into being.

### Woman As Locus of Contradictions

In considering both the potentialities of the *Wende* and the post-*Wende* representations of that "turning point" (against socialism and toward liberal democratic capitalism), both Lenin and the mother become symbols of that turn and its failures. In taking its leave of Lenin, Becker's film culminates in a painful departure from the icon that stood at the heart of the utopian longing and the failed socialist project in the Eastern bloc. Becker achieves this act of mourning by engaging the problem of *Ostalgie* through a reconsideration of the tensions between dialectics and ideology. This is most obvious in Becker's use of state socialist and western capitalist symbolism, in Alex's historical revision of the *Wende*, and in the portrayal of the mother figure, Christiane Kerner.

One way in which Becker's film engages the problem of ideology is by reconsidering the dominant narrative of East German liberation by conflating state socialist and capitalist symbolism. In one ironic sequence, Becker playfully interrogates the traditional narrative of East Germans' oppression under and freedom from totalitarianism in a kind of "changing of the guard" juxtaposition of images, in which symbols of state socialism are simply replaced with logos of western capitalism: East German tanks roll out of the city and *Coca-Cola* trucks parade in, the ever-present GDR flag is supplanted by monstrous *Coca-Cola* and *Ikea* ads, Party slogans are replaced with lingerie ads, and Lenin's statue is schlepped off by helicopter as car dealerships envelop the city. Here, Becker is most interested in drawing parallels between the reified objects of consumer capitalism and socialist dogmatism, suggesting that the history of the *Wende* can be read as a kind of colonization, in which the shift from socialist authoritarianism to western imperialism is not simply experienced as "freedom from oppression."<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to these symbols of state and corporate power, Becker's use of Lenin, like his use of the mother figure, engages a more dialectical understanding of everyday experience in the GDR, in particular the tension between utopian desire and state violence. This is most obvious in the film's opening sequence. Here, Lenin is associated both with the utopian kernel of the socialist project, and also with the institutions of real existing socialism. The almost melancholic score accompanies images of

the socialist ideal: the *Plattenbau*, prefab high-rise apartments that would house the masses of the East; science and industry, which would ensure that the masses would be clothed, fed and productive; and finally space travel, which overtly references the utopian desire itself, the desire for the place unknown, unachieved, much like the communism that socialism would eventually lead to.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the hope that Lenin embodies dissolves, both historically and cinematically, into the state's instrumentalization of power against the masses they are supposed to represent. As the opening credits dissolve into footage of the first East German astronaut Sigmund Jähn in space, the camera tracks outward from inside the television to the Kerner living room, where Alex sits alongside his sister, watching Jähn board the space shuttle. Using a tracking shot, the camera then creeps into the kitchen, where we discover Christiane being interrogated by the Stasi about her husband's flight to the West. This contradiction between state oppression and utopian ideals is what the melancholic score attempts to articulate: while Becker's film urges us to mourn the passing of the utopian impulse, we are simultaneously confronted with the violence of institutions.<sup>16</sup> However, the moment of loss associated with both Lenin and the mother, not state violence, is what comes to the fore.

Becker's dialectical engagement with this loss is centered around the mother, who embodies for Alex both the failed socialist project and the utopian desire at its heart. This tension is brought to a climax in the film as Alex rewrites the history of the *Wende* from a revolutionary perspective that is only possible in retrospect, after a decade of post-*Wende* economic failure and the repression of East German cultural memory: West Germans flee over the border "seeking an alternative to the tough struggle for survival under capitalism," and East German astronaut, Sigmund Jähn, is appointed as East German head of state, declaring, "We know that our country isn't perfect. But the ideals we believe in continue to inspire people all over the world. We might have lost sight of our goals at times, but we managed to regain our focus. Socialism isn't about walling yourself in. It's about reaching out to others and living with them. It means not only dreaming of a better world, but making it happen." The ideals Jähn hails are those Alex comes to learn as a child, visible in the home movies and experienced under the adoring gaze of the mother, ideals that stand in direct contrast to the state power Alex confronts as a young man in the street protest. Because Alex's revision of history takes place after the *Wende*, it, like the rest of the film, functions as an act of mourning, at the heart of which stands Lenin, whose revolutionary moment is past, and the mother, whose idealized role has been uncovered. While at the beginning of the film we see Christiane being decorated by the state for her model citizenry, we come to discover that, given the

chance, she would have fled the GDR with her husband many years ago. In her performance of model socialist subjectivity, therefore, the viewer is confronted with the conflicted and often split nature of socialist identity. In saying good-bye to Lenin and to the mother, we take our leave from both the utopian potential of the socialist project and its contradictory and often violent implementation.

*Good Bye, Lenin!* has been read as a coming of age film, in which the young male protagonist's narrative trajectory actually functions to subordinate and pacify those of the women in the film (e.g., Alex determines the historical revision and forces Ariane and his girlfriend, Lara, to submit to the roles he writes for them).<sup>17</sup> Yet, it is in the unification sequence in particular that the camera retreats from Alex's perspective and aligns us with the female gazes in the room. As Jähn is announced as the new First Secretary, Ariane bursts into laughter, which Alex silences with a single look. However, as he turns to look at his mother, assuring himself of her uninterrupted reception of his historical revision, and then back at the television, the *mise-en-scène* frames the characters in a new hierarchy of vision. In the bottom right of the film frame we see the top of the television, at the left of the screen we see Alex as spectator, and behind Alex sits Christiane in her hospital bed, gazing not at the television but at the back of her son's head. She smiles as Alex turns to look at her, and continues to observe him as he returns to watching his revised history play out on television. We may interpret this as a "knowing" look, given that, prior to the presentation of Alex's climactic final sequence of GDR history, we witness Lara in Christiane's hospital room, telling her that the Wall has fallen. The positioning of Christiane at the center of the frame and the camera's focus on her look confirms that she (and all the other women in the room) are in the know and establishes her as the narrative agent in the final instance. We can read Christiane's choice to allow Alex his historical revision as a result of maternal love, but her cinematic framing suggests that this look also contains the residue of the utopian potential she has come to represent for her son.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, while the images of Lenin, Spreewald Gherkins, and *Aktuelle Kamera* (Current Camera—the state television newscast of the GDR) in Becker's film threaten to become fetishized commodities for the former East German (or sympathetic) viewer, that fetishization is held in check by the film's narrative structure and by the figure of Christiane, who embodies the film's emphasis on the "ideal that never was." While the individual might truly believe in socialist ideals, that utopianism is subverted by the perpetuation of an often oppressive state, which failed, in Marx's and Lenin's words, to "wither away." Thus, like the numerous



female characters she embodied during the 1970s and 80s<sup>19</sup> and in stark contrast to Sieland in Donnersmarck's film, the former East German actress, Katrin Saß, who plays Christiane Kerner, again comes to represent the typical East German subject: she is the site of social contradictions, the embodiment of conflict between socialist ideals, and real existing socialism.

### What Is To Be Done?

Becker's film culminates in a final utopian gesture: upon his mother's death, Alex bottles Christiane's ashes, places them in the cockpit of the rocket he built as a Young Pioneer under her direction, and sends her into the stratosphere. Becker returns in this penultimate sequence to the iconic utopian images from the opening sequence (science, space travel, *Plattenbau*, etc.) linking their passing once again to the passing of his mother. As the viewer witnesses Christiane's space flight, the camera shifts to a grainy image of Sigmund Jähn and the *Sandmännchen* (East German TV Sandman) in space and then to shots of Schönhauser Allee, to a man pushing a baby carriage, and finally to his mother organizing yet another summer camp trip to the beach. As we see Alex's childhood memories recounted through home movie footage, we hear Alex's final voiceover as an adult: "The country that my mother left behind was a country she believed in, a country we kept alive until her last breath, a country that never existed as such in reality, a country that, in my memory, I will always associate with my mother." Similar to the tensions his mother embodied, the tensions between image and voiceover persist in a dialectical engagement with the memory of the GDR. While the viewer knows that Christiane was performing model socialist subjectivity, the warmth and love she exudes in these images is poignant and honest. In emphasizing the "ideal that never was," Alex privileges the utopian dreams at the heart of his personal experience of the GDR without dismissing or contradicting the violence his family experienced in a "country that never existed as such in reality [ ... ] that [he] will always associate with [his] mother."

By the end of *The Lives of Others*, on the other hand, the male protagonists Dreyman and Wiesler have overcome the traps of feminine deceit. As the only member of Dreyman's artistic circle who facilitates rather than creates art, and who informs on him in order to save herself, Sieland performs a narrative function traditionally marked as "feminine": much like the Sphinx or Medusa, she is an "obstacle man encounters on the path of life, on his way to manhood, wisdom and power; [she] must be

slain or defeated so that he can go forward to fulfill his destiny" (De Lauretis 110). In overcoming the erotic temptress (through her death), Dreyman achieves his narrative progression and fulfills his destiny as "resistant artist," while Wiesler, the Stasi careerist, is recuperated as an idealist, a "good man" at the film's heart. In mediating the male protagonists' shift from aesthetic appreciation to political action, Sieland functions as what Gayle Rubin has described as the "gift" exchanged between men: she is a conduit of the relationship between Dreyman and Wiesler, rather than a partner to it (174). In her death, the two heroes are brought together in what might be considered the true "love story" of the film: the marriage of art and politics in the service of a Cold War narrative of East German history.<sup>20</sup>

This narrative culminates in the East German artist's semi-autobiographical novel of persecution, purchased at the local *Ossi* bookstore. In this final sequence, we see Wiesler, two years after the fall of the Wall, walking past the Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung, in which a large poster advertises the release of Dreyman's most recent novel, *Sonata vom guten Menschen*. The camera tracks left, following Wiesler's movement across the screen, but stops on Dreyman's larger-than-life face, which stares intently at the viewer (and Wiesler). While the camera contemplates Dreyman's stare, Wiesler continues to move off screen, then returns to stand in front of Dreyman's image. As Wiesler turns to enter the store, the camera cuts to wide-angle long shot of the Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung. Situated in the Karl-Marx-Allee (formerly Stalinallee), the Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung was housed in one of the earliest and most famous Stalinist architectural spaces of the former East Berlin. Wiesler is made miniscule as he enters the monumental, ornate, high-Stalinist building. Once inside, a medium shot of Wiesler shows him picking up Dreyman's book, whose cover overtly refers to one of the few former East German publishing houses to have survived the *Wende*, the Aufbau Verlag.<sup>21</sup> In opening the book, Wiesler discovers that it has, in fact, been dedicated to him, "HGW XX/7" (the code name given to Wiesler in Dreyman's Stasi file), "in gratitude." The melancholic score is lightly introduced, and as Wiesler walks to the front to purchase the book, the sales clerk asks if it should be gift-wrapped. Wiesler's answer is, "No, it's for me." The camera holds Wiesler in a still, medium close up shot as the score plays itself out, and Wiesler's image fades into the final credits.

It is here, in particular, that Donnersmarck's film evades those issues of post-unification society that give so-called *Ostalgie* films like *Good Bye, Lenin!* a critical edge. Donnersmarck's long shot of the (now downsized and relocated) Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung, the close up on the name of the former East German publishing house (one of a few

remaining), as well as the references to Brecht and Lenin in the film, remind us vaguely of the cultural markers of official ideology in Becker's film. Yet, *Good Bye, Lenin!* consistently asserts the dialectical nature of the public and the private spheres: Lenin and Christiane's face-to-face meeting in the film's now famous shot-reverse shot, the perpetual presence of the state through violent institutions and utopian icons, the mediation of east and west identity through commodities, and the mediation of history through narrative and its revision. In Donnersmarck's film, however, the long shot of the Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung serves to fetishize the post-socialist space of commodified "resistant" art by seamlessly covering over art's inextricable link to the state in the GDR. In East Germany the political weight of "subversive" art was inherently linked to the state's valorization of art as a political medium. Further, as Fulbrook's "octopus theory" suggests, the paternalistic party and state depended on the compliance and collaboration of the East German people, especially those "dissident" state poets, who, like Dreyman in Donnersmarck's film, enjoyed a considerably comfortable lifestyle.<sup>22</sup> Donnersmarck, however, insistently asserts a clear division between the "good" and the "bad," placing us comfortably in the post-*Wende*, globalized space of capitalism. The totalizing effect of Donnersmarck's monumental, long shots of the Karl-Marx-Allee throughout the film, and of the Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung in the final sequence, are in stark contrast to Becker's dialectical engagement with clear ideological distinctions. While Becker's iconic images of Lenin are shown as always mediated (as a monument in service of the state, as a utopian icon on the television, even as a potential nostalgic image for sympathetic post-*Wende* viewers to consume),<sup>23</sup> in *The Lives of Others* the totalizing eye of the camera and instrumental soundscape refuse the viewer a position from within the film to think critically about representation, its ideological and political meanings.<sup>24</sup> Further, Becker's focus on commodities as they supplant the everyday objects of "real existing socialism" allows the viewer to see the palimpsest of history. In *Good Bye, Lenin!* the various signifiers of capitalism cover over the *Plattenbau* and Lenin is visibly erased from public spaces, whereas *The Lives of Others* creates a tableau of the GDR, in which long, monumental shots freeze the movement of history, locating the viewer in a perpetual, a-historical space of "freedom from totalitarianism," that is experienced in late capitalism as the "end of history."<sup>25</sup> In *The Lives of Others* the viewer forgets, through these seductive monumental images, the material processes that continue to erode the few remaining, viable institutions of living socialist culture: the East German publishing houses that specialize in GDR and post-*Wende* literature, as well as the significant spaces in which those works were

sold, bought, and discussed.<sup>26</sup> Instead, those spaces merely serve as a backdrop for the traditional identificatory patterns of the filmic narrative, made all the more problematic by the film's insistence that we identify with Wiesler's omniscient, panoptic eye. Although this mode of identification may seem to echo Fulbrook's call for a "greyer" representation of the GDR (for, seemingly, what could be greyer than a Stasi officer who is, at heart, a good man?), its instantiation appears in a film that refuses the viewer a necessary moment in which our own post-*Wende* perspective may be troubled by the "real" of a Cold War past that never quite was.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See also Paul Cooke 135–36.

<sup>2</sup> This reading is certainly worth considering, given that out of a total sixteen German Oscar nominations for "Best Foreign Language Film," ten films deal with Hitler, the Holocaust, or the East German state: *Sophie Scholl—Die letzten Tage* (Sophie Scholl—The Final Days, 2005); *Der Untergang* (Downfall, 2004); *Schtonk!* (1992); *Das schreckliche Mädchen* (The Nasty Girl, 1990); *Bittere Ernte* (Angry Harvest; FRG, 1985); *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum; FRG, 1979—won); *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar; GDR, 1976); *Der Fußgänger* (The Pedestrian, 1973); *Die Brücke* (The Bridge; FRG, 1959); *Nachts wenn der Teufel kam* (The Devil Strikes at Night, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> See also Cheryl Dueck 599. For a more critical engagement with the problems of asserting *Lives of Others* as the first "serious" engagement with the GDR, see Thomas Lindenberger and Jens Gieseke. Lindenberger in particular sees this as an unfair assertion, given that "*Sonnenallee* is above all about growing up in the shadow of the Berlin wall, and [that] *Good Bye, Lenin!* begins by showing a double-stance of arbitrary violence by the communist state: the splitting up of the family in the early childhood of the main protagonist because of the Berlin Wall, and the police attack against the peaceful demonstrators on the evening of October 7, the sight of which leads the protagonist's mother to fall into a coma" (559).

<sup>4</sup> Mary Beth Stein alludes to this in her analysis of the film's focus on victims and perpetrators, which, she asserts, addresses no more than four percent of the total GDR population (569). Lindenberger also misses any engagement with everyday people, including workers, students, youth, and children (565). Gieseke expands on this problem by quoting Henry

Hübchen, a dissident actor under direction of Frank Castorf at the Theater in Anklam, who was most disturbed by the one-sided image of the GDR that the film constructs: “I would prefer not to be told an American fairy tale of contemporary German history [ ... ] that is exactly the problem: the constant trivialization, abbreviation and oversimplification. In the 1980s popular artists were also able to shake down state power and not just the other way around. The Stasi wasn’t just a governmental body that invoked fear, it was first and foremost despised, mocked and ridiculed” (586; my translation). Hübner insightfully compares Donnersmarck’s “maudlin political kitsch” to the GDR’s most overt socialist propaganda film, *Ernst Thälmann—Sohn seiner Klasse* (Ernst Thälmann—Son of His Class), suggesting it functions to resurrect the GDR in terms of a western Cold War imaginary.

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting, though brief examination of the film’s “more or less evident misogyny,” see Lindenberger 562.

<sup>6</sup> For analyses on women’s roles in DEFA films of the 1970s and 80s, see Bahr, Creech, Feinstein, Rinke, and Schieber. A brief list of films from the 1970s and 80s that focus on women as conflicted socialist subjects in such roles include *Die Schlüssel* (The Key; dir. Egon Günther, 1974), *Sabine Wulff* (dir. Erwin Stranka, 1978), *Das Versteck* (The Hiding Place; dir. Frank Beyer, 1979), *Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet* (Until Death Do Us Part; dir. Heiner Carow, 1979), *Alle meine Mädchen* (All My Girls; dir. Iris Gusner, 1980), *Bürgschaft für ein Jahr* (On Probation; dir. Hermann Zschoche, 1981), *Die Beunruhigung* (Apprehension; dir. Lothar Warnecke, 1982), *Das Fahrrad* (The Bicycle; dir. Evelyn Schmidt, 1982), as well as numerous documentaries, including DEFA’s most famous feminist film, *Winter adé* (Good Bye to Winter; dir. Helke Misselwitz, 1988.)

<sup>7</sup> “On that day in blue-moon September / Silent under a plum tree / I held her, my silent, pale love / In my arms like a fair and lovely dream. / And above us in the summer skies / Was a cloud that caught my eye / It was white and so high up / And when I looked up, it was no longer there.”

<sup>8</sup> Lindenberger provides two interesting readings of Christa-Maria Sieland’s name: “Christa-Maria” as an overt reference to both the sacrificial Christ and his virgin mother, and “Sieland,” as a play on *Heiland*, “the savior” (562). I would add a reading based on De Lauretis that asserts her actual function as site or *topos*, the space (she-land) through which the hero must pass.

<sup>9</sup> For more sympathetic readings of Donnersmarck’s use of Brecht, see Stein 575–77 and Dueck 606–07. While I agree with both Stein and Dueck that the Brecht poem enables Wiesler’s “aesthetic education,” it can do so only as a result of Donnersmarck’s truncated, anti-Brechtian

use of the poem. Further, Stein recognizes that the film's aesthetics are clearly anti-Brechtian, but asserts that this is precisely what makes the film successful: "Von Donnersmarck's film succeeds because the Brechtian technique fails to prevent the audience from identifying with the *Stasi* protagonist" (577). In contrast, I assert that the abridged, melodramatic mobilization of Brecht, as an example of the film's emphasis on aesthetic "resistance," is part of the film's attempt to position the spectator sentimentally, rather than critically, vis-à-vis the film's Cold War imaginary.

<sup>10</sup> A more precise, contextualized translation of the Lenin quote can be found in Lukács' essay, "Lenin—Theoretician of Practice": "Gorky recorded Lenin's very characteristic words spoken after he listened to Beethoven's *Appassionata* sonata: 'I know the *Appassionata* inside out and yet I am willing to listen to it every day. It is wonderful, ethereal music. On hearing it I proudly, maybe somewhat naively, think: See! people are able to produce such marvels!' He then winked, laughed and added sadly: 'I'm often unable to listen to music, it gets on my nerves, I would like to stroke my fellow beings and whisper sweet nothings in their ears for being able to produce such beautiful things in spite of the abominable hell they are living in. However, today one shouldn't caress anybody—for people will only bite off your hand; strike, without pity, although theoretically we are against any kind of violence. Umph, it is, in fact, an infernally difficult task!'"

<sup>11</sup> We are then immediately reassured that Wiesler is "no bad man": in the following scene he resists the temptation to ask for the name of the "papa" who tells his son that the Stasi is, "bad men who lock others up."

<sup>12</sup> Here, I am reconsidering what Lindenberger has read as a *Wunschvorstellung* (a desire to imagine) on the part of Donnersmarck to "imagine a specific course of events in the past to which there are no correlates in the historians' narratives" (560). Lindenberger asserts that Wiesler is Donnersmarck's imagined substitute for Lenin. I see this *Wunschvorstellung* as willful ignorance and/or rejection of Lenin's position as a dialectical listener. In asking himself "what would have happened, if one had been able to *force* Lenin to listen to the *Appassionata* [ ... ] to realize he *must* listen to the *Appassionata* for the revolutionary cause" ("was wohl geschehen wäre, wenn man einen Lenin hätte *zwingen* können, die *Appassionata* zu hören [ ... ] die *Appassionata* für die revolutionäre Sache hören zu *müssen*"), Donnersmarck fails to engage two things: first, that Lenin in fact listened to the sonata often and knew it "inside and out;" second, that Lenin's refusal "to listen to the *Appassionata* for the revolutionary cause" is a result of his critical position vis-à-vis bourgeois art. In the moment of weeping, Lenin

dialectically engages with his own emotional manipulation—a critical position that is not afforded the viewer by the melodramatic aesthetics of Donnersmarck's film. See also Jens Gieseke's reading of this scene, which hints at Donnersmarck's abbreviated and maudlin representation of Lenin as a reluctant bourgeois listener (584–85).

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis comparing Shen Te not to Sieland but rather to Dreyman and Wiesler, see Stein 576–77.

<sup>14</sup> For a salient analysis of *Good Bye, Lenin!* as a post-colonial narrative in comparison to *Sonnenallee* and *Die Unberührbare* (No Place to Go), see Cooke 103–40.

<sup>15</sup> See also Cooke 132.

<sup>16</sup> On the simultaneity of violence and idealism in the film, see also Matthias Uecker 193–94.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Cooke in particular has read the film as a “rights-of-passage narrative, in which Alex, the film's narrator, emerges from the shadow of his problematic childhood and his relationship with his mother to start a new life with his girlfriend, Lara” (130). For an interesting analysis of the masculine narrative trajectory taken by Alex's historical revision, see Muriel Cormican. While my reading asserts a different interpretation, I find Cormican's quite compelling.

<sup>18</sup> This utopian residue can also be read dialectically: Jähn's act of public self-criticism becomes a corrective to Stalinist show trials, the fact that Jähn is portrayed by a taxi driver reinforces the “worker” at the heart of the socialist dream, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Examples include the abused wife in *Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet* (dir. Heiner Carow, 1979) and the single mother in *Bürgschaft für ein Jahr* (dir. Hermann Zschoche, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Ulrich Mühe's own “tell-all autobiography,” in which he denounces his ex-wife, Jenny Gröllmann, a former East German theater actress, as an official Stasi informant, accompanied the premier of *The Lives of Others*. While Mühe had already accused Gröllmann in 2001 of spying on him, his 2006 suggestion that his ex-wife Jenny “had spied on him just as the female figure Christa-Maria had spied on her partner” in Donnersmarck's film, is a clear attempt to make Donnersmarck's film more authentic in the eyes of the viewer by linking it to Mühe's personal experience of persecution. During the filming of her 2008 documentary film about Gröllmann, *Ich will da sein* (I Want to Be There), director Petra Weisenburger discovered that the accusations were, from what she could deduce, false: parts of Gröllmann's Stasi file were falsifications made by a Stasi careerist and there were no documents containing Gröllmann's signature. See “IM Jenny Gröllmann: Irrtum oder Wahrheit?,” Gabriele Michel's “Noch immer da,” and Dueck 605–06.

<sup>21</sup> The choice of font, cream-colored book jacket, and the name “Avon Verlag” clearly suggest that this is an Aufbau publication.

<sup>22</sup> See also Stein 569. Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf, both convinced socialists who were also critics of the party, as well as the famously “dissident” Prenzlauer Berg poet Sascha Anderson and Ulrich Mühe himself, were all celebrated state artists. While Mühe contests any collaboration with the Stasi, the others have all confessed their cooperative sins. What is most interesting about these cases is the variation in degrees of co-optation. While Müller’s answers to questions were supposedly too cryptic for the Stasi to understand and Wolf’s limited to what the Stasi supposedly already knew, Anderson proved to be a rather reliable informant. See David Bathrick’s *Powers of Speech* 1–24, 219–42.

<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Kapczynski reads *Good Bye Lenin!* in the context of Lutz Koepnick’s notion of the “heritage film” (79) and interprets the film’s aesthetics slightly differently. While she agrees that the film presents a differentiated image of the GDR precisely by simultaneously invoking and calling into question nostalgia for the former East, she asserts that “Becker adopts a style that engages in the very fetishization of history that his film questions. [ ... ] [T]he film is consumed with conjuring authentic details, and from the outset, Becker takes great pains to imitate the look of GDR life” (86). I argue, however, that this attempt at authenticity has less to do with fetishization and more to do with constructing an image of the GDR that both criticizes state power and simultaneously validates the personal memories of life in a culture that, in official (political, educational, historical) discourse has increasingly come to be represented as totalitarian. In particular, the home movies of Christiane, when viewed in the context of her appearance on the East German news at a state award ceremony, do not fetishize GDR aesthetics as Kapczynski asserts, but rather assert the authenticity of her conflicted status as “model socialist subject.” Further, while Kapczynski criticizes Becker’s style, which is “steeped in the muted tones of outdated color technologies [ ... ] [evoking] the ephemeral and fading nature of GDR memory,” the overtly comic constructedness of Alex’s *Aktuelle Kamera* segments reconstruct the former East German viewer’s experience of critical distance when consuming East German “news” in the context of readily available western television media (87). Thus, the ideological implications of “authenticity” as constructed by Becker’s film aesthetics are quite different from those of Donnersmarck’s, which assert a nostalgia for a western Cold War image of the GDR. For an alternate, though similar, reading of the film’s critical employment of “authenticity,” see Cooke 134 and Uecker 193.



<sup>24</sup> This also extends to the film's and the director's consistent allusions to "authenticity," be it the "distinctive color palette" (Dueck 601), or the "intensive historical research" that Donnersmarck emphasizes in each interview (Gieseke 581). For a sustained critical analysis of this assertion of authenticity, see Lindenberger and Gieseke. While Dueck accepts Donnersmarck's exclusion of the colors red and bright blue as a result of his assertion that "these colors were not very present in images and films within the GDR" (601), this could be contested with a brief list of DEFA "blockbuster" films such as *Revue um Mitternacht* (Midnight Revue), *Heisser Sommer* (Hot Summer), and *Frauenschicksale* (Destinies of Women; in which a very bright blue dress plays a prominent role); the daily *Sandmännchen* TV-episodes that feature the sandman in a blue-turquoise or red coat and hat; the numerous advertisements and consumer products visible in the collections assembled by Simone Tippach-Schneider; as well as the prevalence of both colors as markers of the state (red) and of the state-sponsored youth programs, the *Junge Pioniere* (Young Pioneers) and the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth; blue).

<sup>25</sup> In effect, Donnersmarck's film, if read as a reaction to what has been termed the *Ostalgiewelle*, effects what Žižek has outlined as the *Denkverbot* (prohibition of thought) that sustains today's liberal-democratic hegemony: "[T]he moment we show a minimal sign of engaging in political projects which aim seriously to challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: 'Benevolent as it is, this will inevitably end in another Gulag!' The ideological function of constant references to the Holocaust, the Gulag, and more recent Third World catastrophes is thus to serve as the support of this *Denkverbot* by constantly reminding us how *things could have been much worse*. [ ... ] What we encounter here is the ultimate example of what Anna Dinerstein and Mike Neary have called the project of *disutopia*: not just the temporary absence of Utopia, but the political celebration of the end of social dreams" (168). For an analysis of the ways in which *ostalgtisch* consumption can function as a site of resistance against the "illusion of a united capitalist consumer society," see Blum 244.

<sup>26</sup> See Christoph Links.

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