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Memory and the Politics of Emotion in *Das Leben der Anderen*

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The ability of cinema to structure identification and feelings about the past has sparked heated debate about representational politics and historical accuracy, most recently in relation to Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's critically acclaimed film *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006). Set in East Berlin in the mid-1980s, the film centers on the figure of Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler, who comes to discover his own humanity through his active surveillance of the celebrated playwright Georg Dreyman and his partner, the popular stage actress Christa-Maria Sieland. Slowly distancing himself from a corrupt state and increasingly drawn to the world of love, literature and music he witnesses, Wiesler transforms from the staunch ideologue who in the opening scene ruthlessly interrogates a prisoner in the Stasi remand prison Hohenschönhausen to the quasi guardian angel of the couple under his surveillance. At the film's close, the camera lingers on Wiesler's smile after he reads Dreyman's dedication to him «in gratitude» of his first post-Wall novel, *Sonata vom guten Menschen*. Asked by the sales clerk at the Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung if he would like the novel gift-wrapped, Wiesler utters the final words of the film: «Es ist für mich.»

In «Wieslers Umkehr,» an essay published in von Donnersmarck's 2006 *Filmbuch* for *Das Leben der Anderen*, the film's historical advisor Manfred Wilke addresses a question that historians were quick to debate and viewers would likely also ask themselves: Were there really Stasi officers who refused to carry out their assigned duties or in other ways defied the Party? In anticipation of such questions Wilke emphasizes, «In der verkürzten Debatte über die Stasi wird gern vergessen, daß sie nur durch Menschen lebte und funktionierte. Es gab nicht viele, aber es gab MfS-Angehörige die opponierten oder ausstiegen» (201). In other words, because dictatorships require submission and the cooperation of the people to function, the human factor cannot be dismissed. Although there is no specific historical precedent for the figure of Wiesler, Wilke notes a number of relevant cases: the first two Ministers of State Security, Wilhelm Zeiser in 1953 and Ernst Wollweber in 1958, opposed Walter Ulbricht and lost their positions (201). Erich Mielke succeeded Wollweber and maintained his position as Head of the Stasi until

1989. During his time in office two Stasi officers were sentenced to death for treason and executed, Major Gerd Trebeljahr in 1979 and Captain Werner Teske in 1981. Wilke emphasizes that Mielke knew no mercy, quoting Mielke in 1981 as follows: «Wir sind nicht davor gefeit, daß wir mal einen Schuft unter uns haben. Wenn ich das schon jetzt wüßte, würde er ab morgen nicht mehr leben. Kurzen Prozeß! Weil ich Humanist bin, deshalb habe ich solche Auffassung» (201). This justification of lethal methods with the de facto humanism of socialist ideology underscores the Stasi's power and the corruption of socialist ideals. Through this logic, committing evil becomes «good» if it serves the greater cause.

Von Donnersmarck explains the genesis of his screenplay for *Das Leben der Anderen* in Lenin's famous words to his friend Maxim Gorky that he could not listen to Beethoven's *Appassionata* because it made him want to stroke people's heads and say sweet, beautiful things, when to carry out the revolution he had to smash in those heads without mercy. «It showed me how much the ideologue has to be at war with his own humanity to pursue his ideological goals. I thought, let's see if I can find a way of telling a story where a Lenin figure would be forced to listen to the *Appassionata* just as he was getting ready to smash in someone's head» (qtd. in *BBC Collective*). From his attic surveillance point, Wiesler sheds a tear as Dreyman plays a moving piano rendition of «Die Sonata vom guten Menschen» upon hearing of the suicide of his close friend and former colleague, the theater director Albert Jerska. Because of a petition he signed seven years earlier—recalling the petition artists signed in support of Wolf Biermann upon his expatriation in 1976—Jerska was no longer able to practice his art. Focusing on the contrast between the humanitarian vision of socialism and the abuse of power of the GDR dictatorship, von Donnersmarck creates a film that he characterizes as «more of a basic expression of belief in humanity than an account of what actually happened» (qtd. in Funder). Rather than to tell a «true story,» then, his ultimate aim was to explore what could have been true—to chart a course history could have taken.

This focus on universal themes of human motivation and human conflict in a film that combines elements of a political thriller with melodrama helped contribute to the great domestic and international success of *Das Leben der Anderen*. Among other prestigious awards, the film garnered seven Lolas (German Film Awards) in 2006 and the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2007. In the United States the popular media response to the film was overwhelmingly positive: writing for the *New York Times*, A. O. Scott described it as a «suspenseful, ethically exacting» and «beautifully realized» drama. Others praise it as a «powerful but quiet film, constructed of hidden thoughts and

secret desires» (Ebert), as «true to its self, and in its depiction of human nature — and human spirit» (Lawson). Anthony Lane concludes his review for the *New Yorker* by remarking on its seemingly universal relevance: «You might think that *The Lives of Others* is aimed solely at modern Germans—at all the Wieslers, the Dreymans, and the weeping Christa-Marias. A movie this strong, however, is never parochial, nor is it period drama.» Playing on the final words of the film, Lane concludes, «*Es ist für uns*. It's for us.»

While many of its themes are universal, *Das Leben der Anderen* is set in a very specific time, place and milieu: the cultural scene in East Berlin primarily in the years 1984 and 1985. The main section ends with the election of Gorbachev to power in the Soviet Union in March 1985. Jumping ahead four years, the Wall falls. Cutting to two years later, Dreyman discovers he was the subject of Stasi surveillance (the «OV Lazlo») and reads through the stacks of files on him. The film ends in 1993 with the publication of *Die Sonata vom guten Menschen*. With the film specifically focused on the control of cultural and literary activity by the Stasi Hauptabteilung XX/7, all major characters represent either the Stasi (Captain Wielser, Lieutenant Colonel Anton Grubitz, Minister of Culture and Central Committee member Bruno Hempf) or the cultural intelligentsia (Dreyman, Christa-Maria, Jerska, the journalist Paul Hauser). The only minor characters not belonging to these two groups are Dreyman's neighbor, Frau Meineke, and a ball-playing boy whose family lives in Wiesler's *Plattenbau*. Both of these characters play an important symbolic role in demonstrating the Stasi's power and reach into micro-level of everyday life and, for the boy, Wiesler's process of dissent as well.

In 2006, a report by the Sabrow Commission pointed to the need officially to represent the complexity and ambiguity in the range of lived experiences in the GDR.¹ Headed by Martin Sabrow, director of the Center for Research on Contemporary History (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung) in Potsdam, it included scholars, experts in GDR history and former members of the opposition movement of the GDR. The commission based its report on research into the role of museums, monuments and archives in creating a memory of the GDR, as well as on interviews with experts and victims. The report's suggestions provoked heated debate, some critics fearing that a greater focus on the social world and everyday life of the GDR would serve to downplay the actual terror of the regime—a fear echoed in critiques of Wiesler's representation. For example, Anna Funder, the Australian author of *Stasiland. Stories from behind the Berlin Wall* stresses that the film is nothing less than pure fantasy, a narrative «that could not have taken place (and never did) under the GDR dictatorship.» In «Tyranny of terror,» Funder cites structural obstacles such as the thorough division of tasks and inner surveil-

lance that made it impossible for Stasi members to save their victims. More disturbingly, she argues that they did not want to do so: «The institutional coercion made these men into true believers; it shrank their consciences and heightened their tolerance for injustice and cruelty «for the cause.»» Indeed, through vivid stories of Funder's post-GDR interactions with former Stasi members and their victims, *Stasiland* paints a harrowing picture of oppression in the former GDR. Funder thus sees *Das Leben der Anderen* as having «an odd relation to historical truth, a truth that is being bitterly fought for now.» Pointing not only to the terror wreaked by the Stasi in the GDR, Funder also addresses the «creeping rehabilitation» of former Stasi who are fighting against their designation in united Germany as former perpetrators in Germany's second dictatorship, a contested «truth» that potentially influences how the GDR is remembered now and in the future.

In «*Das Leben der Anderen* oder die «richtige» Erinnerung an die DDR,» Lu Seeghers details how, both pre- and post-production, von Donnersmarck employs numerous plurimedial strategies to market the film under the cache of authenticity. Lending credence to his ability as a privileged 32-year-old West German to offer a differentiated representation of the GDR past, von Donnersmarck stresses in pre-release the four years he spent intensively researching for the film, which included interviews with experts, former Stasi members and their victims. He also sets his project apart from the *Ostalgie*-films *Sonnenallee* (Leander Hausmann, 1999) and *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003), which had to date been the largest commercial successes dealing with the former GDR in united Germany. «Bei mir steht nicht die Spreewaldgurke im Mittelpunkt. Ich bin detailversessen, aber ich will nicht die äußere, sondern die innere Wahrheit der DDR zeigen,» von Donnersmarck insists (qtd. in Lichterbeck). Publication by Suhrkamp of his *Filmbuch* in 2006 represents an additional plurimedial strategy Seeghers notes. Beyond the original screenplay, the book includes an essay by von Donnersmarck explaining the genesis of the film in Lenin's reaction to Beethoven's *Appassionata*. An interview with GDR actor Ulrich Mühe, who plays Wiesler, reveals Mühe's own stories of Stasi surveillance and betrayal. In a case of life imitating art, Mühe discovered during the filming of *Das Leben der Anderen* that his former wife, actress Jenny Gröllman, had informed on him throughout their marriage in the 1980s. In the *Filmbuch*, Mühe explains how he was drawn to the screenplay for its ability authentically to capture the feeling of the time and his own experiences in the theater world: «Und plötzlich war da ein Buch, wo sich alles richtig anfühlte [...] Für diese Zeit habe ich ein Empfinden, weil ich in ihr gelebt habe, unter genau den Menschen, um die es in dem Film geht. Und die waren sehr authentisch, sehr einfühlsam geschildert, in ihrer

Beziehung zueinander, zur Kunst, zum Staat, zur Stasi» (182–83). The final essay, «Wieslers Umkehr,» is by Manfred Wilke, well known as a consultant for the Enquete Commission and co-director of the *Forschungsverbund SED-Staat* at the Freie Universität Berlin. Wilke contextualizes and lends scholarly authority to the film's representation of GDR history in general and Wiesler's dissent in particular. Highlighting that *Das Leben der Anderen* is based on a fictional screenplay, Wilke nonetheless stresses its authenticity by situating the film squarely in the late phase of the GDR, stressing the realism of the major actions and situations in the film, and by citing actual cases of dissent within the Stasi and relevant paragraphs of GDR criminal code that support the plot. Beyond the *Filmbuch*, the promotion of the film in German schools and the production of a *Filmheft* by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* further functioned to validate *Das Leben der Anderen* as an informational, educational and authentic memory film.

While it conjures memories for spectators familiar with the GDR, *Das Leben der Anderen* creates memories for those for whom this past really is a foreign country. Not the product of lived experience, the memories of this latter group can be termed «prosthetic,» to use the term coined by Alison Landsberg. «Prosthetic memories,» to quote Landsberg, «emerge at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or a museum.» Landsberg argues that these settings facilitate experiences through which a person «sutures him or herself into a larger historical narrative.» This process of suturing favors emotion and experience and involves taking on «a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past which he or she did not live through in a traditional sense» (222). Looking at the world through someone else's eyes, taking on another's point of view can be both meaningful and formative. Important for how they shape our thinking about the world, prosthetic memories, as Landsberg asserts, also have the ability potentially to foster an ethical relationship to the Other, often through means of the imaginative act of empathy (see 222)—an important aspect of von Donnersmarck's tale of Wiesler's redemption.

Film scholar Johannes von Moltke takes the «emotional turn» in cinema of the last decades as the starting point for an analysis of how cinematic forms mediate affective attachments. In discussing emotional address in Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* (2004), a film that represents Hitler's final days in the bunker, von Moltke speaks of «Sympathy for the Devil.» Owen Evans questions in his article on the legacy of the Stasi in *Das Leben der Anderen* if the film's production of empathy does not in fact «[r]edeem the daemon.» To varying extents both films can be viewed as representing perpetrators in German dictatorships as figures of audience identification. Beyond *Der*

Untergang, recent historical representations he views as «characterized by strong affect and emotion» include television docudramas such as ZDF's *Dresden* (2006) and *Die Flucht* (ARD, 2007) and feature films such as Sönke Wortmann's *Das Wunder von Bern* (2003; 18). In adding *Das Leben der Anderen* to this list, I seek to highlight the tension between the film's creation of a «feeling for history» or so-called *Geschichtsgefühl* and its historical reference point, the Stasi and the cultural intelligentsia of the GDR.

Like the elusive term *Heimat*, which proves difficult to translate precisely because it involves not just a place of childhood, but a strong emotional attachment and feeling of belonging to that place, *Geschichtsgefühl* defies easy definition. Martin Walser, to whom the term is attributed, describes his *Geschichtsgefühl* related to Germany as «der Bestand aller Erfahrungen, die ich mit Deutschland gemacht habe.» Grounded in personal experience, *Geschichtsgefühl* can be understood as a rebellion against «die verordneten Geschichtsbilder der Republik»—a rebellion of an individual sense of history against a normative and politicized public memory culture. In the Berlin Republic, contested memories have included those of Germans as victims of air war, flight and expulsion, the personal stories long communicated in families but now also packaged in glossy coffee table books and aired in moving television docudramas such as Guido Knopp's documentary on flight and expulsion *Die große Flucht* (2001). *Geschichtsgefühl* exasperates those historians who favor fact over emotion, the archive over the image. The editors of a double volume of *Ästhetik & Kritik* (2003) dedicated to *Geschichtsgefühl* conclude that, whether ultimately perceived as a danger or not, «Geschichtsgefühl ist eine eigene Macht, die sich nicht mehr mit den alten Koordinaten Vergessenheit/Versessenheit einfangen lässt.» It is what obtains outside these traditional coordinates of German memory work, «ideologische Restmasse—bisher kaum organisiert oder adressiert» (Cammann et al 13).

The *Ästhetik & Kritik* volume includes three contributions focused on the GDR. In «Phantom Ost,» Eva Behrendt focuses on what she terms «West-Ostalgie,» the exotic post-Wall attraction of the East for young Westerners perhaps best summed up by Behrendt in Philip Roth's pre-*Wende* description that in the East «[n]othing goes, but everything matters» and in the West «anything goes, but nothing matters» (119). Alexander Cammann argues in his essay that contemporary historians have «forgotten» and «ignored» the revolution of 1989. A final piece by Wolfgang Engler centers on what Engler views as mass media's banal representations of *Ostalgie* but also on the more differentiated and diverse «sounds» of a younger generation of «GDR» writers. These include Claudia Rusch, daughter of GDR dissidents who in

Meine freie deutsche Jugend offers a highly personalized view of the *Freie deutsche Jugend* (FDJ) through ironic and oftentimes humorous vignettes of everyday life. All three essays center on experiences not captured in the Federal Republic's dominant memory culture of the GDR, focusing instead on the sense of everydayness at the heart of *Ostalgie*, the serious desire to anchor in the past a longing to belong in the present for which objects such as *Spreewaldgurken* have become homey metonyms. With *Das Leben der Anderen*, von Donnersmarck himself strove to establish a serious memory of the GDR based on lived experiences. Although he sets his films apart from *Ostalgie*-films such as *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye, Lenin!* and includes no consumer markers of everyday life in the GDR, through Wiesler he represents a contested memory of the GDR. Similar to *Good Bye, Lenin!*, which Hodgin describes as providing a view of the GDR «uncoupled from its corrupted ideology, a view of what the GDR might have been» (183), *Das Leben der Anderen* moves beyond corrupted socialist principles to depict the latent possibility of socialism with a human face. Von Donnersmarck thus goes beyond the prevailing discourse in united Germany of the GDR solely as an *Unrechtsstaat* to focus on the complex relationships between the power of the state and everyday life. Through these relationships, the multiple hierarchies of power become apparent.

One way von Donnersmarck (re)creates the «real feeling» of the GDR is through mis-en-scène. In manipulating the film's color palette, von Donnersmarck and cinematographer Hagen Bogdanski seek to elicit identification and also clearly distinguish the memory of the GDR from that of the Federal Republic. In an interview entitled «A World Without Red and Blue,» von Donnersmarck explains, for example, how he created a distinct color palette to capture the feel of the GDR.² «I really tried to reconstruct that [East German] world and by looking at pictures I realised that red and blue, two colours that seem the most shocking to the eye and which have very extreme qualities to them were largely absent. It occurred to me that we could reconstruct the East by simply leaving out these two colours all together» (229). After experimenting with this idea, he showed his drawings and designs to friends and relatives from the East who found that this «GDR without red and blue» really reminded them of the GDR. «Of course, there was red and blue in the GDR,» von Donnersmarck adds, «but eliminating them made it feel more like the GDR than it would if you reconstructed things exactly as they were» (230). Touring the East with the film, he found that people were astounded how the film allowed them to «re-enter their past,» a past which appeared more real than the «real» images of the GDR: «I decided not to tell them about my little trick with colour,» he notes (230). The GDR without red and blue is

one saturated in muted tones of gray, brown, green and beige—a GDR that at once recalls and goes beyond the grayness of everyday life, the Wall and the so-called «graue Herren» of the Stasi. Regarding color, Paul Coates argues that while the artists and Stasi occupy distinct physical spaces and emotional lives in the film, they share a uniform palette. This leads Coates to conclude that the «[t]he German Democratic Republic itself becomes a fusion of colour and monochrome whose «sleeping sepiaisation» of reality may have sought to anaesthetize the populace, neutering oppositions than could have engendered change» (47). Lending credence to Coate's theory are the similar trajectories away from the State of Wiesler and Dreyman.

As with the manipulation of color, the clothing of the writers and artists is consciously more appealing than GDR clothes of the time would have been, an additional means of heightening identification. In an interview, costume designer Gabriele Binder explains that the goal in creating costumes was to fashion people who from our current perspective appear respectable. Using actual GDR clothing styles and colors from the mid-1980s would likely have made the characters seem somewhat laughable. Costume design was thus driven by the following questions: «Was mögen wir? Wie wollen wir die Menschen sehen? Was wollen wir ausblenden, weil es aus der heutigen Sicht nicht mehr verstanden würde oder gegen die Würde des Menschen arbeitet?» Interestingly, because of the dearth of GDR photos of certain settings, such as of a premiere party, the book chosen to guide costume choices was a small volume depicting Croatian artists from the years 1978–1983. A goal was to keep the costumes minimalist and fitting to the individual without appearing eccentric or glamorous. Dreyman sports the same worn corduroy jacket throughout the film. At the premiere, Christa-Maria wears an authentic GDR dress whose lines were changed to give it more sex appeal. It maintains a hint of the East, however, as the dress's synthetic silk lacks real silk's natural flow. The narrow lines of Wiesler's uniform were designed to stress his containment and isolation. Its buttons, Binder stresses, eerily appear as another set of eyes. A GDR jacket but not originally a Stasi uniform, it becomes one in the film through Ulrich Mühe's masterful performance.

For some critics, however, such as British historian Timothy Garton Ash, author of *The File*, the costume design contributes to the sense that von Donnersmarck is getting things wrong. Ash, who lived in East Berlin in the late 1970s, is deeply moved by the film yet also responds,

No! It was not really like that. This is all too highly colored, romantic, even melodramatic; in reality, it was all much grayer, more tawdry and banal. The playwright, for example, in his smart brown corduroy suit and open-necked shirt, dresses, walks, and talks like a West German intellectual from Schwabing, a chic

quarter of Munich, not an East German. Several details are also wrong. On everyday duty, Stasi officers would not have worn those smart dress uniforms, with polished knee-length leather boots, leather belts, and cavalry-style trousers. By contrast, the cadets in the Stasi training school at Potsdam-Eiche are shown in ordinary, student-type civilian clothes; they would have been in uniform.

Ash is of course right, yet precisely such details enhance the audience's emotional investment in the film. The colors offer a beautiful filmic experience; Dreyman's clothing helps those more familiar with the West relate to him as a bohemian cultural intellectual; the Stasi uniforms function to enforce their role in the second German dictatorship; and the student-type clothing worn by the Stasi cadets facilitates identification. One cadet responds to the audio recording of Wiesler's merciless interrogation of 227 with the question why the prisoner had to be kept awake for so long. «Das ist doch unmenschlich,» the cadet asserts. In response, Wiesler scans the seating chart and places an «x» by the student's name to mark his audacious breaching of one of society's invisible but very real borders.

Other aspects of the mise-en-scène have greater historical authenticity. Music by GDR bands recreates acoustic experiences. For example, the Manfred Ludwig Sextett plays at the premiere party, and «Wie ein Stern» by GDR pop musician Frank Schöbel provides background music in the bar scene. When possible, the film was also shot in original Berlin locations. These include the former Stasi Headquarters in the Normannenstraße and the office of the *Bundesbeauftragte für die Stasi-Unterlagen* or Gauck/Birthler/Jahn Behörde, both symbolic memory sites in the Berlin Republic. The director of the memorial site at the former Stasi prison Hohenschönhausen, Hubertus Knabe, however, denied von Donnersmarck permission to film on location on the grounds that the screenplay falsifies the site's history. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Knabe asserts, «Der Stasi-Vernehmer als Held: Das verletzt die Gefühle vieler Opfer und führt die Zuschauer in die Irre.» Von Donnersmarck also scouted Berlin for streets that retained a GDR look, something so important to him that even after realizing the impossibility of keeping Berlin graffiti artists under wraps, he stuck with his original plan and had the streets repainted daily before shooting. The Stasi equipment used in the film was procured from museums and collectors—everything down to the machine at the end that steams open the letters is, in the director's words, «real Stasi.»

In *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, Martin Sabrow highlights three memory discourses of the GDR today: the *Diktaturgedächtnis*, the *Arrangementgedächtnis*, and the *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*. The dominant public memory discourse of the GDR, the *Diktaturgedächtnis*, focuses on the East German

state's power and modes of repression and on the binary relationship of perpetrators and victims (19). This is the black-and-white, state-sanctioned memory of the GDR exclusively as an *Unrechtsstaat* as opposed to the Federal Republic as a *Rechtsstaat*. *Das Leben der Anderen* initially reflects this prevalent memory by depicting the GDR solely as a repressive dictatorship, a country of the *Stasi* and Wall. The film begins with the following text: «1984, East Berlin. Glasnost is nowhere in sight. The population of the GDR is under strict control by the Stasi, the East German Secret Police. Its force of 100,000 employees and 200,000 informers safeguards the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Its declared goal: «To know everything.»»³ In the opening scene, a uniformed guard leads a prisoner in civilian clothes down a long empty corridor at Hohenschönhausen. In the interrogation room is Wiesler, who forces the prisoner, referred to with the depersonalized label «Häftling 227,» to sit with his hands under his thighs. Wiesler proceeds with a harsh interrogation of 227, who is suspected of aiding in the *Republikflucht* of one of his friends, a crime that highlights the most iconic and repressive symbol of the GDR, the Wall. Initially 227 denies any knowledge of his friend's planned escape and thereby implies that the state has arrested an innocent man. To this Wiesler responds, «Wenn Sie unserem humanistischen Staat so etwas zutrauen, dann hätten wir ja schon recht, Sie zu verhaften, auch wenn sonst gar nichts wäre» (15).⁴ Not only real transgression, but the thought of transgression is a punishable offense. Wiesler pries a confession from 227 with brutal tactics that include 40-hours of sleep deprivation and threats to arrest his wife and have his children taken into the custody of the state and placed in a state-run home for children. A sign of the multiple levels of observation in the film, the recording of the interrogation is then put to didactic use at the Stasi school in Potsdam-Eiche where Wiesler trains cadets. In his lecture on surveillance, Wiesler issues the blunt proclamation, «Bei Verhören arbeiten Sie mit Feinden des Sozialismus. Vergessen Sie das nie.» Here the film diverges from the screenplay, which goes further by having Wiesler state in much more ideologically laden terms: «Vergessen Sie nie, sie zu hassen» (21).

After the opening scenes in Hohenschönhausen and the Stasi training school, the viewer encounters a world of community, feeling, and humanity, first on stage in Dreyman's play *Gesichter der Liebe* and then in the rich emotional lives of the artists themselves.⁵ The clear «Hass/Liebe» division between the Stasi and the Others becomes obscured, however, through the drama that plays out between these poles. It is here, in the complex relationships within and amongst the Stasi and its Others, that the film creates a «feeling for history.» This is the space of a second and less prevalent

GDR memory discourse in Germany today, the *Arrangementgedächtnis*. Sabrow describes the *Arrangementgedächtnis* as concerned with the relationship between the power of the state and everyday life. Predominant today among former East Germans, this memory discourse centers on individual conflicts, solutions, and successes in a society where the Stasi had the power to control lives. Unlike the *Diktaturgedächtnis*, which affords a neat separation of the system of power on the one hand and biographies of everyday life on the other, the *Arrangementgedächtnis* highlights the interconnectedness of these two realms. In focusing on this interconnectedness, *Das Leben der Anderen* clearly hit what historian Stefan Wolle terms «an invisible nerve»: «[Der Film] wirft Fragen auf, die durch Wissenschaft nicht zu klären sind. Er zeigt, dass zwischen dem Alltag in der DDR und dem Stasi-System keine Grenze verlief» (498). These ultimately subjective questions posed by the film have to do with courage, cowardliness, and an omnipresent fear—emotions of everyday life that defy scholarly categorization (Wolle 499). When asked to contribute an essay on the question of «Anpassen oder Widerstehen?» to Roman Grafe's volume of the same name, Wolf Biermann describes the GDR as a «buntes Grau,» arguing that collusion and resistance can be variously defined. Resistance was widespread and had many facets in the GDR, Biermann argues, «vom Ulbricht-Witz über den Fluchtversuch bis zur offenen Opposition.» Mary Beth Stein sees the film's greatest achievement as its creation in Wiesler of a sympathetic «perpetrator-victim» who represents and observes the contradictions of life in the GDR. I concur with Stein that the film «has moved die *historische Aufarbeitung* about the East German past beyond the fundamental opposition of victims and perpetrators and the black-and-white rhetoric of the 1990s» (577).

The third and much less prevalent official memory discourse, the *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*, describes the memory of progress that still clings to the idea of a Socialist or post-capitalist alternative to capitalism. This memory is maintained by former members of the GDR elite and left-wing activists of the PDS or other leftist political parties. In the post-Wall world of the film, Hempf represents this memory discourse. Meeting Dreyman in the lobby during the premiere of a modernized *Gesichter der Liebe*, he states, «Es war schön in unserer Republik. Das verstehen viele erst jetzt.» Hempf's son, we learn in the screenplay, has become a PDS representative (149).

The broader question of what it meant to work within the system—even in critique of it—can be seen by looking at the individual stories of collusion, accommodation and dissent of the three main characters: Wiesler, Dreyman and Christa-Maria. Wiesler represents Stasi Hauptabteilung XX/7, which at the time of its dissolution had a network of over 400 *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*.

Playing out in this cultural realm, *Das Leben der Anderen* thus also highlights the complex relationship between institutions of power and the socialist public sphere.⁶ While many critics equate the film's representation of the Stasi with its depiction of Wiesler, his fundamental belief in socialism distinguishes him from the outset from his cynical and self-interested superiors Grubitz and Hempf. When Wiesler learns from Grubitz that the reason for the entire surveillance operation of Dreyman is to get rid of Hempf's rival for Sieland's affections, an important difference between the two becomes apparent: Grubitz views the «OV Lazlo» as a fortuitous opportunity for career advancement while Wiesler responds, «Sind wir dafür angetreten? Weißt du noch unseren Eid? <Schild und Schwert der Partei>» (60)? Wiesler's interactions with the self-promoting and hypocritical Grubitz highlight his growing disaffection with his role. In the Stasi cafeteria, Grubitz is shown as cruel and emotionally manipulative in his treatment of *Unterleutnant* Stigler. Unaware of the presence of his superiors at his table, Stigler begins to tell his friends a Honecker joke. Upon seeing Grubitz and Wiesler, Stigler's fear is well founded and palpable, yet he is mocked by Grubitz because of it. Grubitz prods Stigler to continue with the joke. After having a good laugh, Grubitz curtly asks for Stigler's name and rank. He then further asserts his status through his own telling of an equally damaging joke about Honecker. The screenplay contains the following note for this scene: «Wieder einmal wird [Wiesler] damit konfrontiert, wie anders als er andere ihren Glauben an den Kommunismus leben» (62). Stigler, we later see, ends up steaming open letters in a basement.

Hempf further provokes Dreyman by quoting Stalin's dictum that poets are the engineers of the soul and appears as a callous glutton who abuses his power for personal gratification. Grubitz appears as a careerist who plays the game to get ahead. Portrayed in comparison to Wiesler as having been a weak student, Grubitz nonetheless receives the *Dokortitel* (without actually having the schooling for the degree). He boasts to Wiesler about the pseudo-scientific thesis on the five different artistic types in the GDR written by his first doctoral student, «Haftbedingungen für politisch-ideologische Diversanten der Kunst-Szene nach Charakterprofilen» (105–06). While historian Jens Giseke critiques the film's representation of Wiesler as unrealistic by arguing that the Stasi was in fact characterized much more by «Antiintellektualismus, Machtbewusstsein, [und] ... Bedenkenlosigkeit» (583), these attributes epitomize both Hempf and Grubitz.

Das Leben der Anderen further develops empathy with Wiesler through filmic techniques. Through affective mimicry, we see that Wiesler shares the emotional tensions of Dreyman und Christa-Maria as he emulates their

physical acts. For example, he tilts his head and wraps his hands around himself as Dreyman comforts Christa-Maria in a similar pose in their apartment below.⁷ Frequent shared point-of-view shots also emphasize how he shares in the lives of the others, for example when he hears Dreyman's playing of «Die Sonata vom guten Menschen.» After Dreyman utters the words, «Kann jemand, der diese Musik gehört hat, wirklich gehört hat, noch ein schlechter Mensch sein?» the director's comments in the screenplay describe Wiesler's facial expression, as shown in a close-up, «Wiesler von vorne. Auf seinem Gesicht liegt ein vorher noch nie gesehener Ausdruck» (77). Moreover, Wiesler comes to occupy the same physical spaces as Dreyman in relation to Christa-Maria: he hides behind the inside door of Dreyman and Christa-Maria's building from the Stasi, who have come to search for the typewriter he has removed from their apartment and hidden under his jacket. It is the same position Dreyman stood in to hide from Christa-Maria after he sees her getting out of Hempf's car. Both men know one of Christa-Maria's secrets and work to protect her. Upon Christa-Maria's suicide, Wiesler is the first to appear, kneeling over her in a position then taken up by Dreyman after he appears on the scene. Wiesler's growing emotional attachment to the artists and the world they represent parallels his distancing from «real existing socialism,» for which there is no distinct turning point but rather an accumulation of smaller acts—a lifting of the eyebrow about Grubitz; catching himself when, in the elevator of his *Plattenbau*, he begins to ask a young boy his father's name in order to report him for defamation of the *Stasi*. Instead he asks «Wie heißt denn dein...Ball» (78)? Wiesler thus comes to represent the idealism and the belief in socialism «with a human face» that could no longer be sustained in the GDR of his time. In this Wiesler ultimately has history on his side—his demotion coincides with the election of Gorbachev as General Secretary. After Grubitz tells Wiesler he'll be steaming open letters for the next twenty years until his retirement, the headline of *Neues Deutschland* from March 11, 1985 and a large picture of Gorbachev are visible on the passenger seat of Wiesler's car: «Neuer Generalsekretär der KPdSU gewählt: Michael S. Gorbatschow.»

Like Wiesler, Dreyman is a conformist, idealist and committed socialist. In the cultural sphere, he at first occupies a position distinct from that of his closest friends, the blacklisted theater director Albert Jerksa and the journalist Paul Hauser. *Linientreu*, Dreyman is a celebrated and privileged playwright, a *Nationalpreisträger* (2. Klasse) who arouses no suspicions and is a personal friend of Margot Honecker. «Für ihn ist die DDR das schönste Land der Welt,» Grubitz jests (25). The implications of Dreyman's collaboration come to the fore upon Jerksa's suicide, a fate linked in the film to Jerksa's

blacklisting, isolation and inability to practice his art: «Was hat ein Regisseur, der nicht inszenieren darf? Nicht mehr als ein Filmvorführer ohne Film, ein Müller ohne Mehl. Er hat gar nichts mehr. [...] Gar nichts mehr...» (46). After the suicide, Hauser, who had previously chided Dreyman for his «charming bedfellows,» criticizes Dreyman outright for his untenable position, «Du bist so ein jämmerlicher Idealist, daß du fast schon ein Bonze bist. Wer hat denn Jerska so kapputtgemacht? Genau solche Leute: Spitzel, Verräter und Anpasser! Irgendwann muß man Position beziehen, sonst ist man kein Mensch» (55)! While Hauser directs his moral judgment at the *Anpasser* Dreyman, the spectator sees that it also addresses Wiesler, who listens in on the conversation from the attic. For both Wiesler and Dreyman, the two characters the film initially casts as most genuinely committed to the socialist cause, the imperative of «Mensch sein» ultimately requires a distancing from the State. At Jerska's funeral, Dreyman begins to confront the truth of his privileged position by silently composing an article on the GDR's unpublished and high suicide rate. The article's title, «Von einem, der rübermachte,» entwines the crossing over to the next life with the crossing of borders in this one, thus linking death and dissent in an homage to a lost friend. Eventually published anonymously in *Der Spiegel*, it marks Dreyman's shift from a collaborator also published in the West to a dissident published only in the West.

Through Jerska, the film conjures the symbolic significance of the oppositional GDR song-writer Wolf Biermann, whose expatriation during a concert in Köln in 1976 signaled for many of the GDR's cultural intelligentsia the impossibility of working within the limits set up by the State. Like many others, Jerska signed the petition in support of Biermann and suffered the consequence of *Berufsverbot*, a fate linked in the film to his suicide. Critical of what he sees as the films unrealistic depiction of GDR writers in the figure of Dreyman, Slavoj Žižek states, «The film takes place in 1984—so where was [Dreyman] in 1976...?» To answer Žižek one must look at Jerska. Unlike Jerska and Hauser, Dreyman operates within the borders set by the State, is unwilling to speak out against the system and initially is not the object of surveillance. Knowing how far one can go, for example, he expresses no sense of surprise when Hauser is banned from professional travel to the West. Through the different positions vis-à-vis the state occupied by Dreyman, Jerska, and Hauser, *Das Leben der Anderen* highlights the complex nature of collaboration, conformity and critique in the GDR public sphere.

At the premiere party for *Gesichter der Liebe*, Dreyman attempts to appeal to Hempf on Jerska's behalf through a presumed shared belief in socialist progress: «Wir müssen die Menschen doch mitnehmen, alle. Und [der Jerska]

glaubt fest an den Sozialismus,» Dreyman asserts. Hempf's cynicism resounds in his retort: «...das lieben wir ja auch alle an Ihren Stücken: die Liebe zum Menschen, die guten Menschen; den Glauben, daß man sich verändern kann. Dreyman, ganz gleich, wie oft Sie es in Ihren Stücken schreiben, Menschen verändern sich nicht» (34). In other words, while Dreyman's play enacts the ideology of socialist humanism, the Minister of Culture himself rejects one of its central tenets—the development of the «new human being.»

Das Leben der Anderen further represents the price of adopting a critical stance through the fate of Christa-Maria, who, like Jerska, loses her position in the public sphere. Quite literally, she decides no longer to be «in bed» with the regime and breaks off her affair with Hempf, who thereupon attempts to destroy her career by having her arrested for illegally procuring the prescription stimulants to which she is addicted. Interrogated by the Stasi, threatened with never again appearing on a German stage, she is blackmailed into revealing Dreyman as the author of «Von einem, der rübermachte,» an act of betrayal that leads to her suicide.

Dreyman, Wiesler and Christa-Maria all distance themselves from the State: Dreyman by taking a position with the article in *Der Spiegel*, Wiesler by falsifying his surveillance reports from the «OV-Lazlo,» and Christa-Maria through her final rejection of Hempf. A montage scene with the GDR band Bayon playing «Versuch es,» a poem by Wolfgang Borchert, in the background beautifully represents how to be «good» means to face the elements. Borchert's poem reads:

Stell dich mitten in den Regen,
glaub an seinen Tropfensegen
spinn dich in das Rauschen ein
und versuche gut zu sein!

Stell dich mitten in den Wind,
glaub an ihn und sei ein Kind –
laß den Sturm in dich hinein
und versuche gut zu sein.

Stell dich mitten in das Feuer,
liebe dieses Ungeheuer
in des Herzens rotem Wein –
und versuche gut zu sein

The music sets in as Wiesler leaves Grubitz's office, still clutching the manila folder containing incriminating evidence that he decided not to pass on to Grubitz. The film then cuts to Dreyman as he types his *Spiegel* article. We then see Wiesler as he falsifies his report by typing that Hauser, Wallner and Dreymann are working on a play about the 40th anniversary of the GDR.

Next we see Christa-Maria as she leaves the dentist practice where she gets her illegal prescriptions. She looks around cautiously yet fails to notice that she is under Stasi observation. When Christa-Maria enters the apartment, she sees Dreyman hiding the typewriter used to compose «Von einem, der rübermachte» under the doorsill. To this point his authorship of the suicide article had been kept from her. In their conversation in bed that follows, Dreyman starts to tell Christa-Maria what he and his friends are really writing about, yet she says: «Du brauchst es mir nicht zu erzählen.[...] Ich bin jetzt ganz bei dir, ganz egal was» (111–12). The scene then cuts to a rejected and dejected Hempf sitting at the edge of a bed in a lonely hotel room. As the music fades, Dreyman passes on his article to *Spiegel* editor Gregor Hessenstein. The sequence ends as Dreyman and Christa-Maria watch the breaking news of the publication of «Von einem, der rübermachte,» an occurrence that would ultimately have been impossible without the dissent of Wiesler, Dreyman, and Christa-Maria.

In depicting the effects of the limits of speech in the public sphere and in the private realm of interpersonal relationships, *Das Leben der Anderen* succeeds in establishing what Owen Evans terms «authenticity of affect»: «An affect is what lingers, ... «residue», something we feel which is in excess of the representational system that produced it» (Phillips qtd. in Evans 173). This emotional authenticity ultimately explains the response of Joachim Gauck, a former Lutheran pastor and prominent GDR civil rights activist, upon seeing the film: «Ich bin im Kino, ich kenne, was ich sehe. Ja, sage ich, so war es.» Biermann, whose Stasi-files number 10,000 pages and contain 215 cover names of *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, also remained deeply moved by *Das Leben der Anderen* despite Wiesler's unprecedented transformation: «In diesem Film nun sah ich, freilich als Kunstfigur verfremdet, zum ersten Mal solche Phantome als lebendige Menschen, also auch in ihrem inneren Widerspruch. Die Gespenster treten aus dem Schatten. Manchmal hat das Kunstwerk mehr dokumentarische Beweiskraft als die Dokumente, deren Wahrheit (sowieso?) angezweifelt wird...» In conclusion, *Das Leben der Anderen* ultimately leaves the viewer not with the image of «good Stasi» — that is not the «emotional residue» that sticks—but with a sense of the very human struggles in a Stasi land. In so doing it reflects not only a GDR *Geschichtsgefühl*, but prosthetically helps us to imagine a GDR with color. This is its *Appassionata*.

Notes

- ¹ For more on the Sabrow Report and official memory debates in the GDR, see Silke Arnold-de Simine and Susannah Radstone's «The GDR and the Memory Debate.»
- ² In the *Projections* interview, von Donnersmarck also comments on color patents developed in the 1960s to which the East did not have access. «I was very aware that the Eastern bloc had a very different palette of colours to the West. I even talked to a chemist who explained that the reason for this was that there were certain patents developed from the 1960s onwards that people in the East did not have access to. In the East the colours stayed similar to what they had been in the late 1950s: more subdued and less neon than those in the West. This also gave the East a more dignified and calm look; I was very aware of that from my trips to the East and the two years I spent in the Soviet Union just as the Soviet Union collapsed» (229).
- ³ The Sony DVD, which is in German and includes optional English subtitles, presents the text in English only.
- ⁴ Quotations of the film's dialogue cited from the published screenplay in the *Filmbuch* are noted with page numbers.
- ⁵ For a thought-provoking analysis of *Gesichter der Liebe*, see Herrmann 100–101.
- ⁶ David Bathrick points to this in his conclusion to *The Powers of Speech*: «The story of the Stasi and the poets does not just tell of individual literary figures or the empirical workings of the intelligence service. It is also about restructuring and reclaiming one's history; the nature of complicity, control, and dissent in the process of everyday GDR life; the search for new and different norms of morality and values...» (221). See also Bathrick's more recent article directly related to *Das Leben der Anderen* «Memories and Fantasies about and by the Stasi.»
- ⁷ For an insightful analysis of affective mimicry (in *Der Untergang*), see von Moltke.

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