

***Unrechtsstaat* or “Normal” State?**
Authenticity and the Portrayal of the German Democratic Republic on Film

by

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Author's Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the display of authenticity in Wolfgang Becker's 2003 film *Good Bye, Lenin!* and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's 2006 film *Das Leben der Anderen* provides a common basis for accepting both films as critical engagements with the historical legacy of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). This thesis first outlines the historical discourses that dominated post-1989 discussions of the GDR, namely the competing notions of *Ostalgie* and the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*. The genre of historical film is then examined with regard to the role authenticity plays in the portrayal of historical events on the screen. It is argued that as historical films, *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen* present the individual at the centre of recent events in order to convey a more personalized and condensed version of complex historical processes. The main protagonist in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, Alex Kerner, by nostalgically holding on to and recreating the GDR *Alltag* displays historical authenticity since his life experiences correspond to *Ostalgie*. He represents the struggles of an Eastern population coming to terms with the changes brought on by the *Wende*. In *Das Leben der Anderen*, the dedicated Stasi interrogator Captain Gerd Wiesler is similarly authentic: his character's actions underscore the terrifying way in which the Stasi dealt with those it considered to be the enemies of socialism, thereby supporting the view of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*. Ultimately, by analyzing specific sequences within each film, this thesis demonstrates that the films do not merely present the GDR past as an *Alltag* or *Unrechtsstaat*; rather, because their display of authenticity is integral to their presentation of history, these films can influence the general public's views of GDR history in ways not available to traditional historiography.

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Introduction

Background

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was relegated to history. However, in the years since, the GDR has taken on a new afterlife of its own in the discourses that have come in its wake. These discourses have attempted to come to terms with this very complex past. In particular, two discourses in seeming opposition to one another have emerged: the first, seeking to shed light on the misdeeds of the SED regime and the Stasi (the secret police), characterizes the GDR as having been an *Unrechtsstaat*; while the second seeks to nostalgically “normalize” life in the GDR.

In the immediate post-*Wende* years, the discourse that focused on portraying the GDR as a dark place where the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (MfS or the “Stasi”) spied on everyone was the first to come to the fore, but by the closing years of the decade, a counter-discourse had appeared. This second discourse refuted this dark perception and instead demonstrated how average citizens had been able to lead very normal lives in spite of living in a dictatorship. With the explosion in popularity of this discourse in the *Ostalgie-Welle* that came to exemplify it, the GDR past was often dealt with in a nostalgic, rose-tinted fashion. In fact, this discourse became so widespread that it came to dominate media discourses on the GDR — thus effectively “normalizing” the GDR. Suddenly, the GDR was reborn: there were nostalgic Eastern consumer products to be bought everywhere, *Ostalgie* TV shows on many stations, and there was literature and film that also demonstrated this point of view. In fact, it was a film – Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) – that became famous as the archetypical representation of *Ostalgie*. It

could even be argued that the popularity of the film itself served to heighten this fascination with the Eastern *Alltag*, thus helping *Ostalgie* reach the height of its popularity during the summer of 2003 (Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, 141).

Despite the commercial success and dominance of this “counter-discourse,” many felt that there was an inherent danger in it: that this could result in the very real crimes and human rights abuses committed by the SED¹ and the Stasi falling out of public view and thereby being white-washed from history. Particularly for those who suffered under this regime, it was very important that this not happen. As a response to the growing dissatisfaction with the *Ostalgie* counter-discourse, the original negative discourse establishing the narrative of the GDR as a Stasi-dictatorship returned to the fore. So the release of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s film *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) came as relief to those who believed that the public once again needed to be reminded of the GDR’s victims. It is in portraying this darker version of GDR history that *Das Leben der Anderen* has come to be viewed as the much-needed corrective to the supposedly overly idealized vision of the GDR presented by *Good Bye, Lenin!*

Authenticity and the Historical Film

In order to understand how these films play such an important role in representing their respective historical discourses, the way authenticity is displayed in historical film must first be considered. Jonathon Stubbs describes historical cinema as films that “engage with history or which in some way construct a relationship to the past” (19). Furthermore “these relationships to the past are created not only by the films themselves but also by cultural contexts in which they operate and the discourses that they generate” (Stubbs 19). Set in East Germany and during the time of the *Wende*, *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen* both can be considered

¹ The ruling party of East Germany was called the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED).

historical films. Although both films' narratives reference the authentic historical context in which they are set (particularly *Good Bye, Lenin!*), the main narratives are entirely fictional. Thus, the historical authenticity in these films comes not from how closely these characters resemble their real historical counterparts, for example, but rather from general historical truths and processes that are communicated through the film. While main character Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler in *Das Leben der Anderen* is not a real historical figure, he does still serve an important function in depicting history, namely that in his general deportment and cruel ways of dealing with "enemies" of the state, he represents in a dramatic fashion the *Unrecht* of the regime and corroborates the victim narratives. Wiesler even becomes aware of this *Unrecht* himself through his turn to dissidence, where he comes to realize how empty leading such a life has left him. Similarly, the experiences of main character Alex Kerner in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, largely serve as an allegory for *Ostalgie*: where after experiencing difficulties adjusting to the sweeping changes brought on by the *Wende* (he loses his job like so many other Easterners), Alex reacts by trying desperately to hold on to his familiar GDR *Alltag* for as long as he can under the guise of solely preserving his ill mother's state of mind. Alex, like *Ostalgie* itself, presents an increasingly surreal version of the GDR: not only does he maintain the existence of the state, he begins to create one that never did exist. In this, Alex's actions serve as not only a critique of the GDR (through demonstrating how the positive one did not exist), but also as a critique of united Germany and the existence of a separate Eastern identity.

This thesis will argue that the use of authenticity in these two films provides a common basis for accepting both films as critical engagements with the historical legacy of the GDR. To this end, Robert Rosenstone's view of the historical film as presenting the individual "at the centre of the historical process," in place of more complex processes (*Film on History* 15-16)

will be at the forefront of consideration. Furthermore, analyses of specific sequences in each film will demonstrate that the display of authenticity serves a function in not only placing these films within their discourses of representing GDR history in united Germany, but of how the convincingly authentic presentations of the individuals Alex and Wiesler legitimate the respective discourses of *Ostalgie* and the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* in ways not available to traditional historiography.

Chapter One: Historical Discourses

1.1 The issue of unification

As the years passed following the foundation of two separate German states in 1949 — the western part into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the eastern part into the German Democratic Republic (GDR) — the prospect of unification seemed an ever more remote possibility. Indeed, the rapprochement between West and East through the *Ostpolitik* of the Willy Brandt government in the 1970s, and the subsequent recognition of Western nations of East Germany as a sovereign state through the Basic Treaty of 1972, made unification seem nearly impossible. Unsurprisingly, during these forty years the two Germanies spent as two countries, they slowly drifted apart: West Germany became part of NATO and was firmly in the Western sphere of influence, while East Germany was, in effect, a satellite state of the Soviet Union. As a result of these differences in influence spheres, the people in each state developed their own different ways of life. However, with Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev's progressive policies of Perestroika and Glasnost during the late 1980s in combination with the ever-worsening economic condition of East Germany, this separation of the two Germanies came to an abrupt end on November 9, 1989 with the opening of the Berlin Wall. Given the highly sudden and unexpected nature of this event, citizens in both the East and West were jubilant.

This optimism can be seen in the summer of 1990, when the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl addressed citizens in the GDR, promising that following unification, their *Länder* would be transformed into “blooming landscapes,” where it would be worthwhile to live and work again (Kohl “Fernsehansprache von Bundeskanzler Kohl am 1. Juli 1990”). Such a positive speech promoting a promising future conformed with the euphoria and optimism that Germans

on both sides felt in those very early days. A survey done by *Der Spiegel* in November 1990 investigating differences between East and West affirmed this: for example, 73% of Easterners appeared not overly perturbed that their living standards were lower than in the West. Rather, they showed great optimism, and believed it would only take an average of 7.3 years to attain par with Western living standards. Westerners were also optimistic: on average they estimated it would take 9.4 years (“Den Neuen fehlt Selbstvertrauen” 118). So amidst all of this jubilation, the many difficulties that would result from unifying two different countries with different, yet still intertwined histories, were generally not foreseen.

However, in the following few years, both Easterners and Westerners became deeply disappointed in the unification process. Firstly, while it had been clear from the outset that the East would suffer economic hardship to some extent, and that higher taxes would surely be imposed upon Western Germans, the full consequences of this were not immediately realized (McAdams 304). Events such as the collapse of much of the manufacturing sector in the East and the resulting widespread unemployment (Wolf 73) soured Easterners’ perception of the whole unification process. As G. E. Edwards explains, Easterners were psychologically unprepared for this lack of job security in a capitalist state, something which they had never before experienced in the GDR. With many having to endure the loss of their life savings, retrain for new jobs, watch as their property was taken away and given to private companies, or with some even having to emigrate to western Germany, this was all simply too much to bear (Edwards 57). Wolfgang Seibel describes this economic depression as having had a long-lasting impact seriously affecting the Eastern “political psyche” (99).

1.2 Eastern feelings of inadequacy resulting from the problems of unification

These hardships, in combination with the knowledge that the West was clearly more affluent, eventually led to feelings of inadequacy, which resulted in the formation of a separate Eastern German identity. Scholars have debated the meaning of this, and whether unification indeed amounted to a western “take-over,” or as Paul Cooke refers to it, a “colonization” of the East by the West (*Representing East Germany* 61-62). At the time of unification, Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble made clear that “we are not seeing here the unification of two equal states” but rather, the “accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic” (Schäuble quoted in Cooke, *Representing East Germany* 4). Writing in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 1992, historian Christian Meier reflected on the current differences between East and West:

Warum sollen die Westdeutschen sich oder ihre Ordnung in irgendeiner Hinsicht der Ostdeutschen Wegen ändern? Schließlich hat sich das eigene System doch bewährt, und das andere ist zusammengebrochen. So versteht es sich doch wohl von selbst, dass die Ostdeutschen alles von den Westdeutschen übernehmen, auch die Parteien (samt deren Vorsitzenden), auch die Demokratie, bis in die Einzelheiten hinein.

Meier also refers to the sense of Eastern pride that prevailed, and mentions that while the Eastern economy did indeed collapse, this proved difficult to accept since most had worked their entire lives for the Eastern economy, whether directly or indirectly: “Sie war, wenn auch unzulänglich genug, das Lebenswerk der meisten im Lande.” Meier further explains that these East-West differences were stemming from unrealistic expectations:

Dass etwas schon klappt, wird wenig vermerkt, was schief läuft, so gerne erzählt, dass die Fälle sich gleichsam durch das Herumerzählen multiplizieren. Und es

wird sehr viel auch vorwurfsvoll geschwiegen. Allzu oft schleicht sich sogar schon die Vorstellung ein, man habe nur das eine ungerechte, willkürliche Regime gegen das andere getauscht (obwohl die Zahl derer, die die Vereinigung mit der Bundesrepublik für richtig und gut halten, nach wie vor klar überwiegt).

Instead, Meier characterizes the differences between East and West as stemming from three separate issues: namely that the negative sides for many people were very great, which had thus dimmed hope for the future; secondly, that this negativity stemmed from inequality in comparison to the West Germans; and thirdly, that such processes resulted in making the Eastern identity come strongly to the fore.

Joseph F. Jozwiak and Elisabeth Mermann liken what the Easterners experienced at this time as comparable to other minority cultures or populations who are forced to undergo assimilation into mainstream society, which in this case was West German culture. Jozwiak and Mermann use the frameworks as developed by sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman in order to explain that what East Germans experienced was not any type of cross-cultural exchange, but indeed assimilation, a so-called “declaration of war on foreign substances and qualities” (Bauman cited in Jozwiak and Merman 782). Jozwiak and Mermann explain the overall purpose of assimilation to “support the drive for unity and homogeneity, which is the goal of the nation-state and crucial to the social experiment of integrating two countries/nations that have been estranged from each other over time” (782). Thus arises the opinion that because the East was in the process of being assimilated, the direct result of this was the development of a feeling of nostalgia for their former state (783). It is, however, still important to note that while this process may indeed be called “assimilation,” the East did at first welcome this western “invasion” with open arms. Konrad Jarausch argues this very point: that while this wholesale

transition from East to West can be viewed as a western takeover, it can just as easily be viewed as “an overdue liberation from within” (“Germany 1989” 24).

Even still, regardless of whether the West actually did “take over” the East or not, the fact remains that people were not happy with the processes of unification and many Easterners felt they were at a disadvantage in comparison to Westerners. By 1995, this sense of inequality had become pronounced enough that *Der Spiegel* conducted a survey on it. While most Easterners agreed that life had improved since GDR times, and only a small fraction of respondents reported wanting the GDR back (Anonymous “Stolz aufs eigene Leben” 41), 75% reported feeling like second-class citizens in united Germany (Anonymous “Stolz aufs eigene Leben” 49). Furthermore, in contrast to the immediate aftermath of unification, three quarters of respondents now said they felt pride regarding their former lives in the GDR, for example regarding aspects such as social cohesion, which most people felt had been far stronger in the GDR (Schöppner).

1.3 Working through the GDR past: the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*?

What is interesting about the belated development of a specific “Eastern German” identity is that this became so noticeable *after* the state had met its demise. In fact, alongside the jubilation in the very early years of the newly united republic had been widespread public discussion and condemnation of the former state. During these years, the crimes of the SED’s spy service, the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS)* – known more commonly as the Stasi – were to be found at the forefront of this discussion of the crimes of the former state. With the opening of the Stasi archives shortly after reunification, people suddenly had access to the files compiled by the Stasi on them: and the result was that many were outraged to discover betrayal by those close to them — from close friends to even spouses — who had worked informally for

the Stasi as *Informelle Mitarbeiter (IM)*. As Andrew H. Beattie explains, the media soon became fixated on such stories of betrayal and ended up over-emphasizing the role of the Stasi in comparison to that of the SED (54-55). Time and again, person after person was “exposed” in public as having collaborated with the Stasi.

Unsurprisingly, this fascination with the far-reaching arm of the Stasi spilled over into the literary sphere. The very first stories to be told were very much those of the Stasi’s victims, who finally were able to explain their version of events (Cooke, *Representing East Germany* 61). Yet, such black and white narratives could be rather limiting in their approach: Mary Fulbrook describes the sometimes rather dramatic fashion in which many of the Stasi perpetrators were exposed as if it were “the means to expunging all evil” (*German National Identity after the Holocaust* 224). Furthermore, Fulbrook sees such black and white narratives as a reversion to Cold War discourses of the 1950s-60s where the West viewed the GDR as nothing more than “a totalitarian dictatorship imposed by the Communists on an unwilling populace” (*German National Identity after the Holocaust* 225). While these views had been discredited since about the time of *Ostpolitik*, Fulbrook views their return as stemming from the many stories of Stasi victims coming to light at this time, as well as from a sense of “superiority” many in the West felt for having “won” the Cold War (*German National Identity after the Holocaust* 225-26). Furthermore, as Andrew H. Beattie explains, viewing the GDR as a dictatorship at this time was partially a result of the desire of many German politicians to link the GDR with the Third Reich. In this way, the GDR was seen as now the second dictatorship with which Germans would need to come to terms. Beattie points out that referring to the GDR using words such as *SED-Diktatur*, *Unrechtsstaat*, *Unrechtsregime* or *Gewaltherrschaft* only further served to firmly link the state to the Nazi past (199). Beattie explains it thusly: “The fact that the East German regime had not

committed genocide was not to be allowed to prevent it being condemned as vigorously as the Nazi regime” (198). This resulted in a connection developing between the two regimes in the public imagination. Helga Welsh connects this all to Germany’s self-perceived failure at having thoroughly come to terms with the Nazi past – hence the importance laid on correctly and thoroughly completing an *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR past (138). In contrast to dealing with the Nazi past, which is generally referred to as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, meaning “coming to terms with the past,” dealing with the GDR past is usually described as *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*, a “working through the past” (Beattie 30). Based on the decades of experience in coming to terms with the Nazi past, it was felt that *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* would be more appropriate because this latter term “acknowledges the need for active participation as well as the illusion of completion and resolution that conquering the past implies” (Welsh 138). Thus, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* acknowledges that the process of dealing with the past is ongoing and that it may never reach a firm conclusion.

1.4 Portraying the GDR past on film

The very first treatments of unification and the GDR past on film in the early 1990s were characterized as having a lack of critical engagement with the past, something Eric Rentschler places in the era belonging to what he famously has called “consensus cinema” (“The Lives of Others” 245-47). Brad Prager attributes this lack of critical engagement with GDR history to the fact that very little time had passed since unification: only with the passage of time could a more nuanced view begin to develop (96). One of the most frequently cited examples of a non-critical take on unification is that of Margarethe von Trotta’s 1995 film *Das Versprechen*. Rentschler, Cooke, Prager and others all list this film as one that seeks consensus, which Prager explains:

The message of *Das Versprechen* is clear, and it affirms the overall impression that East German history was wholly defined by a diabolical state and its Stasi [...] With respect to the construction of cultural memory, her work dramatized what had been seen all over German television, reflecting the general sentiment, rather than taking the opportunity to cut against it. *Das Versprechen* struck a chord, telling the story as many Germans wanted it told. (97)

This film has a simple plot, and ends with two lovers, both originally from East Germany, reunited after the Wall comes down. Another type of film interested in the GDR past but which did not critically engage with it, were the so-called “Trabi comedies” of the early 1990s. John Davidson criticizes these films as having presented “an escapist vision of the present, promising a bright new future for the nation” (quoted in Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, 106). Cooke also criticizes these films as not only dealing with unification problems on a superficial level, but also as purely “East German” problems, not as problems concerning Germans in both the East and West. For example, *Go, Trabi, Go!* (1991; Timm) presents the divergences between East and West as merely a problem of the East needing time to catch up to the West, while the more serious and divisive issues of social integration are not even remarked upon (Cooke, *Representing East Germany* 107).

Cooke sums up the issues of East versus West in 1990s German cinema as West German filmmakers creating either an escapist vision of a contented and united Germany, or else portraying the problems of unification as only concerning Easterners and not Westerners. Yet Cooke does mention the few directors, such as Christoph Schlingensiefel, who (in the auterist tradition) were taking a critical approach to these issues, but who largely remained on the peripheries (*Representing East Germany* 110). This non-critical approach was part of a larger

trend in popular German cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, which Rentschler has famously characterized as a cinema that is “a site of mass diversion, not a moral institution or a political forum” (“From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus” 249). Rentschler goes on to say: “Quite empathically, the most prominent directors of the post-wall era aim to please, which is to say that they consciously solicit a new German consensus” (“From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus” 249).

1.5 *Ostalgie*

By the end of the 1990s, this non-critical phase in dealing with the issues of unification came to an end. The naïve optimism of the early years had now been replaced with a now much darker, but more realistic outlook on the future given the experience of a decade of changes and resulting frustrations. Besides the obvious early troubles regarding jobs and adjustments to Western culture, there were still lingering difficulties between East and West even ten years after unification. The “blooming landscapes” that Kohl had promised in 1990 had failed to appear, and while there had been economic growth and much money invested into *Aufbau Ost* (the rebuilding of the East) by the West, the East had not yet achieved parity with the West. Thus, the 7.3 years the East and 9.4 years the West had predicted (in that survey done by *Der Spiegel* in November 1990) it would take for the East to catch up with the West in order for full integration to take place had proven to be hugely unrealistic. Theoretically, there should have been more convergence between the two cultures by this point: this had failed to occur and the scars of unification were still visible.

Given the difference in mentality towards unification, this time during the late 1990s and early 2000s heralded an altogether different and indeed more critical view towards unification

and the portrayal of the GDR. While in the earlier, simpler narratives there was hardly any critical reflection of the GDR past or the integration problems between East and West, and where the differences between victim and perpetrator were once made to seem so clear, this all changed by the late 1990s. With the euphoria of the early years having died down, the everyday experiences of having lived in united Germany for a decade brought home the fact that East German history was more nuanced than originally supposed. Cooke links the sudden appearance of critical texts with the associated problems Easterners had now been facing for ten years. He explains that such texts and films displayed “a sense of dissatisfaction amongst eastern, and indeed some western intellectuals” that eventually gave rise to “what has been defined, often pejoratively, as an ‘identity of defiance’” (Cooke, *Representing East Germany* 93).

This new “identity” may have its roots in the portrayal of the GDR as the *Unrechtsstaat*. Eventually, after years of media hype, many Easterners began to resent this discourse that focused primarily on the Stasi and their victims. This negative view was not only a construction of the media, though, and existed even in the findings of the Enquete Commissions² – where the portrayal of the GDR was simply not a representative view of East German society in general, given that not everyone had had confrontations with the Stasi, and not everyone’s memories of the state were negative ones. Beattie notes that the conclusions of the Enquete Commissions, while having done a very thorough exploration of the past, were still limited in some respects, namely in their focus on victim narratives to the neglect of the *Alltag* view (232). As Mary Fulbrook argues, there was “a ‘normality’ about the history of the GDR that need[ed] to be recaptured” given many citizens of the GDR had been able to lead “perfectly ordinary lives” despite having lived in a dictatorship (*The People’s State* 10). For example, one former

² The Enquete Commissions were two separate commissions of inquiry by the German *Bundestag* in 1992 and 1995 regarding a thorough examination of the GDR past.

prominent member of the opposition movement in East Germany, Friedrich Schorlemmer, stated in an interview in *Die Zeit* that there were many things regarding the Stasi that simply did not involve him or that he did not know about and which had not affected his everyday life. When responding to a question regarding whether the media had perhaps been too strongly fixated on the Stasi, Schorlemmer replied:

Diesen Eindruck habe ich seit 1990. Ich möchte gern darauf bestehen – als ein Mensch, der sich in der DDR die Freiheit hat nehmen können, die sich manche so nicht haben nehmen können –, dass es ein Leben außerhalb der Stasi-Informationen und Treffberichte gab. Viele Dinge haben die glücklicherweise nicht gewusst. Dieses Leben verschwindet bei einer bestimmten Form von Aktenfixierung. Was haben wir nicht alles trotz Stasi gesagt und getan!
(Dieckmann “Welche Wandlung”)

As Schorlemmer explains here, not all aspects of life had involved the Stasi, and so what many other Eastern Germans were remembering were the good times in the GDR – their *Alltag* – and they often found they missed certain aspects of it. This feeling resulted in the development of nostalgia for the “good-old” times in the past. Hans-Guenther Eschke explains this nostalgic phenomenon as an “entire mindset,” where “the glorification of the past — the conditions of which have been lost or destroyed — becomes the dominant impulse” (quoted in Blum 230). Furthermore, “the mourning for this loss is thus elevated to a largely positive view of the entire nature [of this past] as well as its individual properties, and consequently dominates the entire view of society and the individual’s place in it” (Eschke quoted in Blum 230).

This “glorification” of the past, specifically of the everyday experiences of the GDR *Alltag*, soon became famous as *Ostalgie*, a specifically Eastern kind of nostalgia for the socialist

past that as a trend lasted from the late 1990s through the early 2000s in contemporary German consumer and media culture. Martin Blum describes the phenomenon thusly: “While the old GDR is dead and gone, a significant number of its material products has left a legacy that is indeed very much alive these days” (230). This was something unthinkable only a few years previously with the introduction of the Deutsche Mark and western consumer products into the Eastern market. The fact was that many of the older Eastern products had vanished after the currency union because they simply could not compete with their more marketable western counterparts, which were often better made (Blum 229). However, the old brand names and products made a comeback during the late 1990s due to consumer demand. These products took on different forms: some were originals (having survived the transition), some others were reintroduced, and some were completely new, being produced by western companies looking to profit from a popular trend (Blum 229). Blum describes such consumer products as having “found a second life as representations” (229).

This *Ostalgie-Welle* was not only found in a reappearance of GDR material goods, however, but in other media as well. Cooke identifies this nostalgia as being dealt with critically for the first time in Thomas Brussig’s novels, *Helden wie wir* and *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* in the mid to late 1990s (*Representing East Germany* 111). From there, Cooke states the phenomenon spread to film, beginning with Leander Haußmann’s filmic adaptation of Brussig’s novel, *Sonnenallee* (1999). Haußmann explains his motivations behind portraying Ostalgie thusly: “Man will sich nicht laufend an die schlechten Sachen erinnern. Man möchte ja ein schönes Leben gehabt haben, wenn man mal stirbt” (Martenstein, “Schön war die Zeit”). Despite this rather rosy (and almost revisionist) view, Haußmann does admit that there were negatives: “Das System war das Grauen. Ich habe es gehasst“ (Martenstein, “Schön war die

Zeit”). *Ostalgie* next appeared in films such as *Die Unberührbare* (2000; Roehler) and *Berlin is in Germany* (2001; Stöhr). However, the most commercially and internationally and certainly most famous expression of *Ostalgie* was found in Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003). Indeed, it can be argued that it was this film that launched the so-called *Ostalgie-Welle* that reached its height following the release of the film in the summer of 2003 (Cooke, *Representing East Germany* 141). Following hard on the heels of *Good Bye, Lenin!*’s success were a plethora of television shows on most TV networks dealing with some aspect of *Ostalgie*, for example the “ultimativen Ost-Show” from Sat.1, moderated by Axel Schulz und Ulrich Meyer or the more famous “Ostalgie-Show” from ZDF (Martenstein, “Schön war die Zeit”). This wave of nostalgia was wide-reaching, as Werner van Bebber writes:

Die Zeichen und Farbenwelt der DDR findet sich in der Mode, nicht bloß in Gestalt von FDJ Hemden. Sie findet sich auch auf ‘Ostalgie Partys.’ Und sie findet sich nun auch in vielen Fernsehshows, die hohe Einschaltquoten haben. DDR-Ästhetik, DDR-Kult, DDR-Ikonen als Transportmittel für eine richtig schöne Vergangenheitsdiskussion.

There have been many theories as to why this *Ostalgie* wave became as popular as it did. Werner Van Bebber quotes politician Stefan Liebich in saying that the *Ostalgie-Welle* functioned as a “Gegenbewegung zum Niedermachen von allem, was aus dem Osten kam. *Ostalgie*, sagt er, sei ’nach fast 14 Jahren Dämonisierung und Dramatisierung des Lebens in der DDR eine fast natürliche Gegenreaktion.’” For his part, Martenstein explains the popularity of this trend in this way:

Die Filme und die Shows haben allerdings auch mit der großen Verwandlung zu tun, der Verwandlung der ganzen Welt in Pop [...] Und jetzt werden eben auch

die Biografien und die Geschichte zu Pop. Sie sind Songs, optische Signale, Image. Sie sind Inszenierungen. Man kann die DDR so inszenieren oder auch anders, es kommt ganz auf den Regisseur an.” (“Schön war die Zeit”)

Author Thomas Brussig, himself having contributed to the discourse in its early stages in the late 1990s, was of the opinion in 2003 that the current popularity of *Ostalgie* actually had much to do with the success of *Good Bye, Lenin!* itself — and that the sudden appearance of TV shows nostalgic for the GDR was actually driven by TV executives wanting to make a profit:

Ostalgie gibt’s nicht erst, seitdem das Fernsehen sie entdeckt hat. Vor mehr als zehn Jahren hat der Dresdner Kabarettist Uwe Steimle den Begriff geprägt, und mindestens ebenso lange ist diese Stimmung virulent. Um sich den Boom an Ostalgie Shows zu erklären, muss man wissen, wie Fernsehleute denken. Die sehen, dass der Kinofilm *Good Bye, Lenin!* ein Riesenerfolg war, und sie denken neidisch: Oh, sechs Millionen Zuschauer hätten wir auch gern. Und dann machen sie mit den Mitteln des Fernsehens das, was sie in *Good Bye, Lenin!* zu sehen glaubten. Zu allererst übersehen sie, dass jener Film es unterließ, unseren Geschmack zu beleidigen. (“Murx, die deutsche Einheit”)

Brussig further explains why he thought *Good Bye, Lenin!* had affected the population in such a way: namely that the film, in effect, could be thought of as a final act of farewell to the GDR, something that had never been able to occur during the rush to unify in 1990. Brussig writes: “Der Erfolg dieses Films – meine Theorie – rührt daher, dass er etwas nachholt, was 1990 nicht geleistet wurde: den Abschied von der DDR. Sie wird mit Anstand unter die Erde gebracht. ’Ne Handvoll Sand drauf und noch mal das Sandmännchenlied. Abspann” (“Murx, die deutsche Einheit”). Indeed, Brussig might be on to something: at the end of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, only a few

days after unification, in a final favour to the mother for whom Alex had recreated the GDR, the mother's ashes are shot in the form of a rocket with fireworks into the night sky over Berlin: a final farewell to the woman who had, for her son at least, represented his main connection to the GDR. Regarding accusations that *Ostalgie* merely celebrates overly idealized elements of the GDR that had never actually existed, Martenstein explains he believes the roots of *Ostalgie* stem from a notion that everything was more stable, understandable and ordered: "Damals war die Welt noch geordnet. Sie schien verständlicher zu sein. Nicht alles war gut, vieles war sogar schlecht, aber die Verhältnisse waren wenigstens stabil. Man konnte sich auf sie einstellen. Die Zukunft lag nicht im Dunkeln, so wie heute. Man glaubte damals, die Zukunft zu kennen. Sie würde so ähnlich sein wie die Gegenwart" ("Schön war die Zeit").

1.6 Competing representations of the East German past

Following the international success of *Good Bye, Lenin!* and the ensuing widespread popularity of *Ostalgie*, many were unhappy with the large amount of attention lavished on the GDR *Alltag*. Much of this backlash centred on two main points: one, that by presenting the *Alltag* of the GDR and leaving out the role played by the Stasi, people were wilfully misrepresenting the GDR and actually insulting the victims of the Stasi. Second, it was thought that this misrepresentation could actually lead to the white-washing of history: not only was this insulting to the victims, but it also meant that the crimes of the regime could potentially be left out of public discourse, thus preventing a full engagement with the past. This was not necessarily a realistic fear given that the crimes of the Stasi were well-known and never truly disappeared from public discourse, and also because the Stasi archives remained open for public viewing. As Anna Funder wrote in *The Guardian* in 2007, the public had been greatly interested in the outing

of members of the Stasi that took place throughout the 1990s, but that by 2007, many of those Stasi officers had begun suing their victims for accusing them of various crimes instead (“Tyranny of Terror”). Even the German publisher of Funder’s own book *Stasiland* was taken to court for a particular reference to an alleged crime and was forced to remove the reference in newer editions of the book (Funder, “Tyranny of Terror”). Funder describes their motivations as such: “The Stasi men are furiously fighting so as not to go down in history as the second lot of incontestable bogeymen thrown up by 20th-century Germany” (“Tyranny of Terror”). Yet, as Helga Welsh points out, in the early transitional years, bringing people to justice had been treated as a very important issue – and public opinion had been united on holding to account those who had committed crimes (139). While there was delay in actually achieving this justice, the open Stasi files did still contribute to a working through of the past. This was only possible for former East Germans through their direct transition to an already stable state, something not possible in the other former communist satellite states (Young in von Donnersmarck “Seeing a Film Before You Make It,” 20).

One of the most famous counter responses to the *Alltag* discourse associated with *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Ostalgie* can be seen in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s 2007 film, *Das Leben der Anderen*. For example, Christopher Young refers to *Das Leben der Anderen* as a “corrective to films such as *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye, Lenin!* in its portrayal of the GDR’s totalitarian reality and the way the Stasi terrorized millions of East German citizens” (von Donnersmarck, “Seeing a Film Before You Make It” 20). In a typical review, the film is lauded in *Der Spiegel* as:

der erste deutsche Spielfilm, der sich durchgehend ernsthaft, ohne Trabi-Nostalgie, Spreewaldgurken-Romantik und anderen folkloristischen Klamauk mit

dem Kern der 1989 untergegangenen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik auseinandersetzt – der systematischen Einschüchterung, Drangsalierung und Unterdrückung ihrer Bürger im Namen der Staatssicherheit. (Mohr)

Reinhard Mohr is also highly critical of the rather light-hearted and romanticized aspects of *Ostalgie* and applauds *Das Leben der Anderen*'s departure from this tradition. Similarly, Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* describes *Das Leben der Anderen* as a “fierce and gloomy drama” that provides an “effective antidote to Ostalgie.” Former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives (and current President of Germany) Joachim Gauck wrote in 2006 that while he was aware that some of his friends may not like the film's portrayal of a “good” Stasi officer given that there is no historical evidence such a person existed, he still viewed the film as an authentic presentation of East Germany: “Ja, sage ich, so war es. Wenn das geschieht, wird es normalerweise nostalgisch. Aber jetzt: keine Nostalgie - nirgends, kein Erinnern also, das ohne Schmerz auskommt.”

Von Donnersmarck took pride in such reviews that praised his film – particularly as he believes they present a view that *Das Leben der Anderen* “caused a shift in how the Germans see the GDR, and caused people to re-think the new German phenomenon of ‘Ostalgie’” (“Thirteen Questions” 12). Furthermore, he hopes that the showing of his film in history classes in schools will help to educate students about the GDR, and thereby undo the “damage” done by *Ostalgie* (“Thirteen Questions” 13) and fill in the huge gaps in the students' knowledge of history. To prove his point, he demonstrates how this supports the victim-narrative discourses: “Not only was the GDR a dictatorship, it was a dictatorship that even called itself ‘dictatorship’: ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ was the official Marxist term for the phase between ‘Capitalism’ and ‘Communism’ that the GDR never passed” (“Thirteen Questions” 13). Furthermore, von

Donnersmarck claims that “the Ostalgie Shows in [sic] German television and the nostalgic comedies in our cinema [have] been too effective in re-writing history, and portraying the GDR as a place of humor and humanity” (“Thirteen Questions” 13). Rentschler, however, counters von Donnersmarck, and writes that what the film actually is doing is nothing more than merely attempting to create consensus by “craft[ing] comforting and conciliatory images from out of time, post-ideological tableaux that in fact reintroduce well known Cold War panoramas which claim to be the way things were, scenes from an imagined past marked by an emotional suasion that eschews reflective distance” (“The Lives of Others” 257). Thus, Rentschler actually ties von Donnersmarck’s film back to the stark black and white narratives of GDR history, which, as mentioned by Fulbrook, are so very limiting and one-sided in their approach to history.

Overall, Harald Martenstein explains these two divergent perspectives of GDR history (as either evil or normal state) in this way: “Seit 1989 gab es, vereinfacht gesagt, zwei Deutungsmuster zur DDR, deren Vertreter in den Medien und an den Kneipentischen um die Meinungsführerschaft gekämpft haben: die DDR als politischer Unrechtsstaat und die DDR als Ort von geglückten privaten Biografien” (“Die dritte DDR”). In another article, Martenstein further defends the existence of the *Alltag* narrative, explaining it thusly: “Es hat nicht viel Sinn, DDR-Nostalgie und DDR-Unrecht verbittert gegeneinander auszuspielen. Die Leute versuchen eben, unter allen Umständen, glücklich zu sein. Sie suchen, obwohl es angeblich nicht geht, im falschen Leben nach dem richtigen” (“Schön war die Zeit”). Instead, Martenstein concludes that essentially, both versions of GDR history are valid:

Eine böse und eine gute oder halbwegs gute DDR. Dieser Kampf musste unentschieden ausgehen, weil beide Seiten Recht hatten. Die DDR war nun mal beides. Man konnte, je nach Situation, mal für die private DDR und mal gegen die

politische DDR sein, natürlich im Wissen, dass diese Dinge miteinander zusammenhängen – so widersprüchlich ist das Leben. (“Die dritte DDR”)

1.7 Conclusion

Despite the initial euphoric rush to unify the two Germanies, many problems resulting from this hurried unification process appeared throughout the 1990s. One was that while the Easterners at first welcomed what essentially was a “take-over” by the West, they soon became disillusioned with the entire process, especially given the economic hardship and job losses that they suffered in contrast to the “blooming landscapes” they had been promised. These factors, in combination with an over-emphasis on portraying the dark side of the GDR, led to an appearance of a separate Eastern German identity by the end of the 1990s, one that revived the memories of the everyday aspects of the *Alltag* in the GDR. Thus, in many ways, the appearance of the film *Good Bye, Lenin!* and the *Ostalgie-Welle* of GDR consumer memorabilia that it produced was a welcome focus on the more positive and often neglected aspects of the GDR.

This over-emphasis on GDR nostalgia eventually caused a backlash, where it was feared that the over-representation of the positive aspects of the GDR could potentially become the dominant version of the GDR. Such concerns were largely unfounded, however, given that the Enquete Commissions had completed a thorough examination of the GDR past, as well as the fact that the Stasi archives remained open, and that the topic of the Stasi never really disappeared from public discourse. Despite this, many lauded von Donnersmarck’s film *Das Leben der Anderen*’s focus on the dark side of the GDR as a welcome “antidote” to *Ostalgie*, given the way in which this film supposedly portrayed the “authentic” version of the GDR.

Chapter Two: Authenticity and the Historical Film

2.1 Overview

Robert Burgoyne asks: “Why should dramatic fiction films be considered a medium of historical reflection in the first place? What is gained by analyzing films such as *Spartacus* or *Schindler’s List* as examples of ‘historical thinking?’” (9) The purpose these films can serve is to “provide a vivid experiences and a powerful emotional relationship with a world that is wholly unfamiliar” (Burgoyne 11). This image largely derives from the power of the detailed imagery the film is able to display: “Films can show people at work, from medieval peasants sowing and harvesting, to Chinese dyers staining crimson cloth in their great vats, to early twentieth century seamstresses bent over their sewing machines” (Davis, *Slaves on Screen* 6-7). The historical film is capable of exploring a wide range of topics, including large themes dealing with politics or society, or smaller themes that explore personal lives. In combination with the visual power of film in general, the historical film can thus be viewed as a good tool with which to view the past: one that, while certainly different from the history found in scholarly books, is nevertheless able to provide a critical view on a subject. By engaging such issues at all, film can work through history by contesting interpretations or uncovering stories that have been suppressed (Burgoyne 9-10). Furthermore, as Burgoyne explains, historical films both “carefully and insistently cultivate a sense that they faithfully represent the past” while at the same time “construct[ing] the past in a way that is shaped and informed by its own context, its own way of imagining the past” (11). Yet, despite film being “a source of valuable and innovative historical vision,” (Davis, *Slaves on Screen* 15) precisely to what extent this is the case and how historical film can be used as a way of exploring the past is debated.

Although East Germany only ceased to exist a mere thirteen years prior to the release of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, and the difference in time between the setting of events in *Das Leben der Anderen* and the release of the film was only twenty-two years, both of these films can still be called “historical” films, given that, among other factors, they present a world that no longer exists. Firstly, in order to better understand how exactly these films can even be considered “historical films,” and how this enables them to fit in to the two opposing discourses established in Chapter One and contribute to the dissemination of the discourses on the GDR past, the issue of authenticity in historical film must first be considered. For the way in which film presents “authenticity” as meaning the ability to suspend disbelief is a much different definition than the traditional written definition synonymous with historical “veracity.”

2.2 Defining the “historical film”

Films labelled “historical films” are generally seen as having the potential to interact with and to explore the meaning of the past. Yet, scholars have differing opinions as to what type of film should be defined as a “history film” or “historical film.” A typical (stricter) definition of the term would be that of Burgoyne, who defines “historical films” as “dramatic feature films whose main plotline is based on actual historical events, or ... an imaginary plot that unfolds in such a way that actual historical events are central and intrinsic to the story” (5-6). Davis categorizes historical films similarly, labelling those films “with a central plot based on documentable historical events” as well as films “with an imagined plot, but where historical events are intrinsic to their action” as history films (*Slaves on Screen* 5). In these definitions of the term, the “historical film” is made distinct through what is perceived to be the film’s level of “critical engagement” with historical issues. This critical quality is then applied equally to films

that either have entirely fictional narratives or narratives based on real documentable events, those which are often referred to elsewhere as “biopics” or “docudramas.” What does not count as a critical engagement with the past in this stricter definition of a history film is the “costume drama.” Robert Rosenstone scathingly dismisses such films as ignoring the discourses surrounding the history in which the films are set, and which instead “[use] the exotic locale of the past as no more than a setting for romance and adventure” (*History on Film* 45). Robert Brent Toplin similarly warns that one should not “sanction filmmaking activities that treat historical evidence recklessly or that render the past without much sophistication” (*History by Hollywood* 17). From this point of view, the costume drama, which often depends on fictional literature (Jane Austen, for example) to frame the film rather than documented historical events, is often dismissed as being overly preoccupied with displaying emotion and the sumptuous period detail of the era (Burgoyne 47-48).

A more inclusive categorization of the historical film can be found in David Eldridge’s definition, where all films, be they musicals, westerns, romances or comedies, are treated as capable of engaging with historical discourses. Thus, Eldridge does not draw a line between those films which could be seen to be more critical in their approach to displaying the past. Instead, Eldridge writes:

all films which utilize the past contain and reflect ideas about history, whether or not they are explicitly conceived of as ‘historical.’ [...] Each film is a product of the historical consciousness of the individuals who made it, and the industry and culture in which it was developed, no matter how ‘trite’ that consciousness might appear. (5-6)

Eldridge's only qualifying (and seemingly arbitrary) factor in labelling a particular film a historical film is that "the setting of the film's action [must] predate[e] the year in which it was released by more than five years" (5). A similarly inclusive definition comes from Jonathon Stubbs, who defines historical films simply as those that "engage with history or which in some way construct a relationship to the past. [...] ...[T]hese relationships to the past are created not only by the films themselves but also by cultural contexts in which they operate and the discourses they generate" (19). Stubbs clarifies that this applies to all history films, whether or not they are dealing with "real" documented people or events (19). In contrast to Rosenstone, Stubbs notes that while some such connections with the past may be weaker than others, "all should be considered to be historical films" (20).

A further category in which to place the historical film is suggested by Toplin, who calls those dramas which have a looser connection to verifiable historical people and events "faction-based films." In this definition, faction-based films have largely fictional-based narratives "blended" with a few historically verifiable people, events or facts (Toplin, *Reel History* 92). This means that the leading characters are often composites of several real historical people, while the events depicted are often condensed-forms of larger and more complex historical events. According to Toplin, one major benefit of the "faction-based" film is that the fictional aspect of its main narrative leaves it less open to attack over questions of factual accuracy. As Toplin explains: "Drawing inspiration from myths and legends as well as traditional practices of cinematic history, the creators of faction employ history in a manner that is less subject to debate over veracity... Faction references history but does not represent it specifically" (92). Both *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen* could be said to fall under this category of "faction;" there are direct references to real historical events as well as clear allusions that connect the films

to the time period in which they are set (during the final years of East Germany and the *Wende*), while the main narratives of both films are entirely fictional.

2.3 What does the historical film do?

Burgoyne explains that the importance of historical filmmaking lies in its ability to enable the present to better understand the past, in order to “challenge the culture’s wider understanding of itself” (19). While this often results in criticism and controversy, particularly over the historical veracity of the film, making a historical film can prove a very valuable undertaking. Burgoyne explains this potential of a historical film in serving society thusly:

Certain historical films link past and present in a way that allows a national dialogue to unfold, one that links different generations of viewers and different periods of critical response, and that ultimately reaches back to the reference period of the film itself. These works become part of the public sphere in ways that only a few artistic artifacts can claim. (19)

In the case of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the fact that this film provided much of the impetus to launch a very popular nostalgia “craze” for the old and supposedly inept and non-flashy consumer products of the GDR certainly supports the idea that a historical film may impact a society’s view of itself. As mentioned in Chapter One, *Good Bye, Lenin!* helped launch debate in the summer of 2003 on the value of asserting the importance of the GDR *Alltag* in the face of so much discussion over the experiences of those oppressed by the state and victimized by the Stasi. Leger Grindon compares this role of the historical film as similar to (but distinct from) that of the historian because both provide interpretations on important events of the past. However, Grindon goes even further, and argues that film can actually exert more influence on the public than

scholars, saying the historical film's interpretive role effectively places it "in a context of historiography and enables [it] to have an impact on the public that often exceeds that of scholarship in range and influence" (2). What films can contribute to discussions about history is in terms of an overall feeling or sense of the past being brought to life through "a separate realm of representation and discourse, one not meant to provide literal truths about the past... but metaphoric truths which work, to a large degree, as a kind of commentary on, and challenge to, traditional historical discourse" (Rosenstone, *History on Film* 8-9).

Davis explains that historical films can be viewed as contributing to historical discourse by "mak[ing] cogent observations on historical events, relations, and processes" in two main ways: through historical biography or through a micro-history (*Slaves on Screen* 5). Similarly, Rosenstone explains that a historical film "engages... discourse by posing and attempting to answer the kinds of questions that for a long time have surrounded a given topic" (*History on Film* 45). Grindon lists several underlying reasons behind the making of the historical film, which include appealing to authority, using a narrative about history to veil modern criticism, a search for origins (looking for strength in forebears or taking a critical view to see 'where it all went wrong'), and finally, as "an escape into nostalgia" where the film presents a "golden age" or "paradise lost" (2-3). Grindon explains this final factor of escaping into the nostalgia of past lost paradises as "implicitly criticiz[ing] the present as deficient in the values and energy that fortify culture" (3).

A very early example of a history film seriously raising such questions about a particularly important episode of history can be found in D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). While the film, judging by today's standards, is undoubtedly racist and full of stereotypes, at the time, it was one of the first history films to make real attempts to explain and

understand the past it was presenting (Burgoyne 26). Essentially, it demonstrated how a film could offer an understanding of the causes and consequences of large scale historical events, which in this case was on the topic of “the most troubled and damaging period in US history” (Burgoyne 26). *Birth of a Nation* did this through presenting the tale of a family romance set against the backdrop of more serious issues of “national trauma” and “national reconciliation” that in the end, effectively “accurately reflected the prevailing knowledge of the era in which it was produced” (26). In this case, what the film depicted was a particular view on the Reconstruction Era [the period following the American Civil War], namely that of a very powerful and influential group of American historians that included then-US President Woodrow Wilson. Another more famous example that demonstrates the power of the discourses historical films can generate is the American TV miniseries *Holocaust* (1978) — which, at the time of its release caused much indignation because foreigners were supposedly appropriating German history (Rosenstone, *History on Film* 4). However, in retrospect, this series can be viewed more positively, and it is now credited with opening up debate on the Holocaust, thus providing a certain impetus for new interpretations and scholarship on the subject (Rosenstone, *History on Film* 4).

2.4 Accuracy in film versus that of traditional written history

Despite their often valuable contribution to public discourse, many criticisms are still levelled at historical films for not portraying history “authentically” or “accurately” enough. In Grindon’s view, this is a result of the display of authenticity in these films often being misunderstood as “a disinterested reproduction of the past” (4). Predictably, this “authenticity” as displayed in historical film is then found to be wanting because it does not always match the

history found in the written version of those same events. However, this goal of achieving historical “accuracy” is not necessarily always achievable. In Rosenstone’s opinion, it is not sufficient to merely judge historical film’s contribution as a “serious vehicle for thinking about the past” by only assessing “how true a work remains to ‘the facts’” (*Visions* 3; 7). Instead, Rosenstone argues it is vital to understand that the “authenticity” that the history book can offer is fundamentally different from the one that can appear on screen. Rosenstone states that to actually render all of the facts in a film in a way that would be considered “accurate” by the standards of a scholarly history book would actually result in failure because “those films that try most literally to render the past lose the power of the medium” (*Visions* 14-15). For unlike written history, which particularly since the nineteenth century has created an almost “linear, scientific world on the page,” film is full of elements that occur simultaneously (image, sound, language, text) and which “support and work against each other to render a realm of meaning different from written history” (Rosenstone, *Visions* 15).

Rosenstone’s premise throughout his books *Visions* and *History on Film* is that historical film should be judged by its own standards; it simply cannot present “authenticity” the same way the written book can. So, for example, Grindon explains that in demonstrating historical cause (that is, speculating on/representing why something happened the way it did), the screen “bases its histories upon dramatic and visual signs; it presents a comprehensive field rather than a sequential argument” (6). Historical forces are displayed on screen through “dramatic elements such as characterization and plot, and spectacle elements, such as the historical setting and the handling of mass action” (Grindon 6). Rosenstone argues that the historical film departs from written history in its presentation of the individual “at the centre of the historical process,” in place of more complex processes (*Film on History* 15-16). This focus on the individual in

historical film provides the viewer with a much more intimate treatment of history, where “through their eyes and lives, adventures and loves, we see strikes, invasions, revolutions, dictatorships, ethnic conflict, scientific experiments, legal battles, political movements, holocausts. [...] But we do more than see: we feel as well” (*Film on History* 15-16).

Still, criticisms (or indeed praise) of the display of authenticity in a historical film comes from scholars and members of the ordinary viewing public alike. Rosenstone explains that the strong reactions to these films stem from “something more widespread and more deeply seated in our psyches” – essentially that the historical film can somehow alter how the past is conceptualized by the present (*History on Film* 4-5). One particularly common view (one that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a large part of the criticism of *Good Bye, Lenin!*), is that the general viewing public does not necessarily get its history knowledge from scholarly history books, but rather from the historical film. So when impressionable members of the public go to the cinema and watch historical films, they may thereafter be inclined to believe whatever particular view of historical events or people the film present, whether historically verifiable or not. Thus, the fear is that these historical films have the power to dominate the public’s interpretation of history. This is why, given their potential influence on society, filmmakers are viewed as having a “moral obligation” to avoid overly distorting historical facts in their films, particularly if it is a film dealing with significant events of national importance (Toplin, *Reel History* 10). For example, Charles Colson (a top aide to US President Richard Nixon), heavily criticized Oliver Stone’s film on Nixon in *Nixon* (1995) for this very reason, and described the media’s influence on young people as the area in which “falsehoods and distortion work their greatest harm” (quoted in Toplin, *Reel History* 9). However, such a negative view is not particularly helpful, given the popularity of film with this very demographic among others.

Presenting history “as it actually was” simply does not meet with the goals of filmmakers in making dramatic film, as it likely would not be accepted amongst much of the viewing public.

As Toplin explains:

Those who berate filmmakers for giving primacy to entertainment values should recognize that cinematic history will never come to screen if it cannot excite the interest of a wide range of viewers with different income levels, cultural interests, and educational achievements. These audiences will quickly turn away from cinematic history if they do not find its dramatic presentation compelling. (*Reel History* 10)

Rather than see the “inaccurate” historical facts presented on film as posing any particular “danger” to scholarly source-based history, Rosenstone concludes that film in fact “adds to the language in which the past can speak” (*History on Film* 6). A film does not need to be based entirely on documented events in order to communicate a “truth” about the past. For example, while many historical inaccuracies can be found in James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997), the film does still critically engage with history: it presents many of the most important factors that explain why the Titanic sank, it serves as a good commentary on social classes of the era, and it also presents a very detailed reconstruction of many objects from that time period (and the Titanic itself) through its extensive set decoration (Toplin, *Reel History* 69).

2.5 What is “authenticity” in the context of the historical film?

Given all of the research effort that often goes into historical films, Rosen infers that mainstream cinema cares a great deal about “‘getting detail right’ or at least getting [it] to look right” (161). But what does this mean, exactly? In historical film, what audiences would accept

as being “authentic” is not necessarily contingent on the historical “accuracy” of these elements (that is, their verifiability in the historical record). In describing this paradox, Stubbs cites a famous quote from the head of production of the film *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), who describes this process of the audience accepting the details as accurate:

I realize that we have a very highly fictionalized story and that it bears no relation to the historical facts but, at the same time, if we are to save ourselves from a lot of grief and criticism in England, we must make our picture as historically accurate as possible, or at least surround our Battle of Balaclava and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* with historically correct incidents and detail. (quoted in Stubbs 37)

Thus, as this quotation demonstrates, what the filmmakers decided would be most effective in continuing the suspension of disbelief for the moviegoer was to focus on the “historically accurate” supporting detail. Here, authenticity is more about conforming to viewers’ expectations than it is about matching reality. As Michele Pierson points out, what the filmmakers do is appeal to the “conventionality, familiarity, and accessibility of [the audience’s] historical references” (148). The filmmakers need to make sure that nothing interferes with the suspension of disbelief: that something in the surrounding mise-en-scene will not seem believable, or perhaps something in the dialogue or on the clothing. Toplin explains it thusly: “Quite easily, the movie can communicate phoniness to the audience, drawing attention to the fact that the portrayal is staged and that the characters are only pretending that they are living in the past” (*Reel History* 15). Eldridge explains this delicate balancing act in a similar fashion:

Production values [have] to be sufficiently high for audiences to suspend disbelief and be ‘convinced’ that they [are] reliving genuine experiences. Obvious

anachronisms and inaccuracies would undermine their credulity and jar audiences out of the sense of immersion and participation that the filmmakers [seek] to engender. (128)

Essentially, the viewers need to be convinced that they are “witnessing history” (Eldridge 128).

2.6 How do historical films display authenticity?

Rosenstone states that all the detail we see on screen – from people to faces, landscapes, weapons, or clothing – consist of “material objects that belong to a culture at a given historical period, objects that are used and misused, ignored and cherished, objects that sometimes can help to define livelihoods, identities, and destinies” (*History on Film* 16). The camera demands all of these details in order to give the film its “authentic” feeling. Rosenstone describes these details as “reality effects” that are very important elements that help create historical meaning because they can tell us much about the society and time period (*History on Film* 16). Yet, Eldridge argues that objects such as props, costumes and even location alone cannot “automatically” imbue a film with history – something which he describes as “reduc[ing] history to a mere patina of authenticity” (128). As Davis describes it:

Objects, apparel – the world of things – are important for what they meant to the people of the time, for the way things were used to shape space, time, and body, and for the way they make statements about social relations. The farm machines in Roman Polanski's *Tess* lend reality and credibility through their connection with nineteenth-century work rhythms. (“The Challenge of Authenticity” 271)

In order for historical films to re-enact this past in the dynamic way Davis suggests, the filmmakers must employ different techniques “to produce a heightened sense of fidelity and

verisimilitude, creating a powerfully immersive experience” (Burgoyne 8). For example, in Burgoyne’s opinion, *Birth of a Nation* largely achieved its powerful reckoning power through different camera shots, editing techniques, in addition to the presentation of the mise-en-scene and its insistence on “authenticity:”

it employs a visual vocabulary consisting of wide panoramic shots, elaborate cross-cutting, and the use of close-ups as a form of historical commentary and analysis; and it insists upon the authenticity of its representations by closely imitating battlefield daguerreotypes, by asserting the authenticity of its depiction of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, and by dwelling on the lived spaces of the historical past, the porches, picket fences, and dirt roads of the South (26).

One way of rendering this “authenticity” is through the appropriation of documentary techniques into the dramatic film. This ranges from the use of little lighting, to black and white or de-saturated colours, to handheld camerawork, to the use of prologues, inter-titles and epilogues listing locations, dates, and even, in some cases, mentions of primary sources (Hughes-Warrington 133-34). Another way is to insert real documentary footage into a film and then splice it together with re-enactments by the film’s characters made to match the original footage. The documentary footage or pseudo-documentary footage proves its use as an authenticating device due to the “aura of authenticity” that is associated with the documentary as a genre (Burgoyne 138). Furthermore, the use of archival footage can be seen to function almost like “a certificate of authenticity... suggest[ing] that there is a relation of continuity between the fictional dramatic narrative unfolding on the screen and the actual historical events it purports to represent” (Burgoyne 138). One famous example of the insertion of archive footage spliced together with re-enactments can be found in *Forrest Gump (1994)*, which, as Hughes-Warrington

explains, allows the film to thus present itself “not as a reconstruction of the past but as the archived past remade” (134).

Another technique employed in giving a historical film this feeling of documentary-quality “authenticity” is the manipulation of the colour scheme. For example, scenes could be shot through filters that remove or manipulate the colour scheme in various ways, thereby giving the film the look of a documentary, of an old faded photograph, or even of an early Technicolor movie (Toplin, *Reel History* 13). One particularly famous example of this is that of Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and the “authentic” opening scene of the D-Day landing on Omaha beach. The colouring in this sequence is de-saturated, which helps liken it to old war footage that is mostly in black and white. Such techniques lend themselves to making the atmosphere “feel” authentic because that is often the image the audience has envisioned through watching other films or documentaries, where there was a lack of colour. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck himself used such an effect in *Das Leben der Anderen* in order to give the film a darker feel as well as to match the colour-scheme of the GDR, purposely removing blue and red hues (von Donnersmarck, *Das Leben der Anderen* Director Commentary).

Despite this high level of “trust” placed in the documentary format, adding documentary techniques to the historical film only makes the film more “authentic” to its audience, and not any more historically accurate. Hughes-Warrington describes the result of this as a “hyper-reality,” where what is presented in film becomes regarded as “more legitimate, more believable and more valuable than the real” because of a loss of ability to actually distinguish “reality” from “artifice” (Baudrillard, cited in Hughes-Warrington 103). A good example of this can be found in war films, which are often lauded by critics for their “authentic” depiction of events. However, when director D. W. Griffith (who made *Birth of a Nation*) was able to get his first glimpse of a

real battlefield in 1918, he was very disappointed in what the reality was: general monotony with the long-drawn out battles of trench warfare lacking sufficient drama – where soldiers often did not see the enemy for months at a time (Burgoyne 30). With the actual battles also too dangerous for a camera crew (especially with the equipment of the time), Griffith decided that the artifice would be better than the real, and that the best way to depict battles on screen would be to film them in a studio (Burgoyne 30).

Another specific strategy in which filmmakers can display authenticity in their films is through the use of a prologue and epilogue – whether in text or in voice-over form. Stubbs describes prologues and epilogues as providing factual information (such as dates, places or biographical details) which, in the case of the prologue serve to contextualize the film and establish the setting and tone of the drama, while the epilogue serves to bring the narrative to a close (21). This can be seen as a form of “authenticating” the films through the reference to the long held authority of written history, which Stubbs interprets as “narrative transitions which attempt to stitch the events depicted in the main body of the film to written accounts of history” (21). By thus establishing the setting through the connection to the outside world in the prologue, Stubbs argues that the films can propose “a method for addressing ‘problems in history’ and thus [allow] the audience to ‘understand the truth’” (22). Furthermore, a spoken prologue (which *Good Bye, Lenin!* makes use of to set the nostalgic tone of the film) can explain “in explicit terms the broader historical lessons to be drawn from the film” (Stubbs 22). In a similar function, the epilogue text can “serve to pass judgement on historical characters represented in the drama and to suggest that unsettled scores have been resolved in posterity” (Stubbs 25).

In turn, the use of these various techniques, be they colour manipulation, use of props, lighting, etc. all end up contributing to that specific film’s interpretation of history. As Davis

explains it: “These choices all have an impact on what is being stressed or questioned in the film, on the different reactions of participants to what is happening, on explanations for why events have taken place, and on claims for the certainty or ambiguity of the historical account” (*Slaves on Screen* 7).

2.7 Conclusion

Both *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Good Bye, Lenin!* can be classified as “historical” or “history films” not only because they are merely set in a past world and there are references throughout the films to this outside world, but because of how they can comment on and interact with the past. While historical films are often criticized for skewing certain historical facts, what would be considered “authentic” in scholarly history work is not the same thing when it appears on film. Rather, filmmakers are working to create films that will be “authentic experiences” that conform to audience expectations and fulfil their purpose in furthering the suspension of disbelief, regardless of whether the historical facts presented can be substantiated from written sources or not. In this sense then, the film “creates” its own form of authenticity in different ways, mostly through using various editing techniques that “authenticate” their films that include manipulating the colour scheme or even of anchoring their films in the outside world through prologue or epilogue. Thus, it would actually not be possible to change elements of a film in order to appease those who would like to see more historically accurate details of the written sort in the films. As Rosenstone explains, it is the “dramatic aspect of film” that prevents this, “the fact that a screenplay is a kind of intricate machine which, if one part is pulled out, may no longer function properly” (*History on Film* 29).

Chapter Three: Film Analyses

3.1 Overview

As discussed in Chapter Two, Rosenstone argues that it is not sufficient to merely judge historical film's contribution as a "serious vehicle for thinking about the past" by only assessing "how true a work remains to 'the facts'" (*Visions* 3; 7). Such an analysis serves to hinder a critical analysis of a film's contribution to historical discourses. *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen* both have fictional narratives, but are set against the backdrop of historical events and in a historical setting. These two films can thus be categorized as "faction-based" historical films which "reference history but [do] not represent it specifically" (Toplin, *Reel History* 92). Toplin states that due to the fictional nature of their main narrative, these films can therefore avoid much of the heavy criticism levelled at other history films that portray historical events and people (*Reel History* 92). Despite not necessarily portraying verifiable historical events or people, faction-based films are still able to provide valuable insights into the historical processes displayed on screen.

One way in which historical film achieves this reckoning capability is, as discussed in Chapter Two, through the placement of the individual "at the centre of the historical process" (Rosenstone, *Film on History* 15-16). Due to the short amount of screen time available to them, filmmakers are forced convey their messages in a more concise manner than can be done in traditional scholarly history. Thus, complex historical truths are instead conveyed through the experiences of individuals, making the history both more manageable and even more meaningful because of the interwoven individual experiences. Rosenstone explains it thusly: "through their eyes and lives, adventures and loves, we see strikes, invasions, revolutions, dictatorships" (*Film on History* 15-16). In these films the viewer sees the version of the GDR that the main

protagonist experiences, which for Alex Kerner in *Good Bye, Lenin!* is the nostalgic GDR *Alltag*, the place of his childhood memories of his mother, but also the fictional and inauthentic place of his imagination that he creates for his mother on video: a good place to live where even Westerners, tired of capitalism, want to be. By contrast, through the eyes of Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler in *Das Leben der Anderen*, we see the opposite version of the GDR: a place where no one would want to live and one where the population is terrorized and under surveillance by the Stasi, a fact of life that is made clear from the very first few opening frames of the film. This is a place where vibrant and talented actors and playwrights, even the Stasi captain himself, fall victim to the merciless *Unrecht* of the regime. In this way, both of the discourses as detailed in Chapter One are mediated through the experiences of these characters, Alex and Wiesler. It is this convincingly authentic telling of these characters' experiences and their interactions with their surroundings that help the audience accept (or reject) these particular perspectives on the GDR. Through the experiences of Alex in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the workings of *Ostalgie* can be better understood, and by looking at Wiesler in *Das Leben der Anderen*, the *Unrecht* in the *Unrechtsstaat* becomes clearer. Although both of these narratives remain fictional tales, the authenticity displayed in these historical films then gives them the weight needed to advance their version of history.

3.2 How scholars view the authenticity presented in both films

3.2.1 *Good Bye, Lenin!*

As discussed in Chapter One, *Good Bye, Lenin!* was often viewed as finally portraying the GDR in a manner consistent with the *Alltag* that many people remembered. Describing this time period during which nostalgia films such as *Sonnenallee* as well as *Good Bye, Lenin!*

appeared, Christoph Dieckmann notes: “Wehrhaft gesagt: Inzwischen gewann der Osten seinen Kampf um die Unterscheidung von SED Staat und DDR-Alltagswelt [...] Zunehmend akzeptierte der Westen, dass es im Osten vergleichbare Normalitäten gab: ein wahres Leben im falschen” (“Zonenkindereien”). Thus, the display of the everyday in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, ranging from the blue FDJ scarves appearing in the home video footage at the beginning to the display of many authentic-looking labels of various consumer products, all act as small bits of confirmation (and reminders) of a normal, but now lost, existence.

For many reviewers, however, *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s show of authenticity in this way was insufficient. As Nick Hodgkin explains, the film was criticized for its “moral expediency” and “revisionism” (29). So while the comedic element in *Good Bye, Lenin!* certainly was a large contributor to its success, for some, this was simply too serious a topic to not deal with in a serious manner, and many felt the film was “trivializing” life in the GDR (29). For example, Katja Nicodemus, in *Die Zeit*, describes these German nostalgia films’ treatment of history as a “parasitäre Unverschämtheit.” Nicodemus goes on to describe how shallow and unoriginal these films are:

[...] und es scheint, als habe sich das deutsche Kino mit seiner Requisitenschieberei, seinen übereifrigen Rekonstrukteuren, die für jede Epoche das passende Schublädchen herausziehen, mit ebenjener historistischen Hure eingelassen, die immer nur das vermeintlich ewige Bild der Vergangenheit sucht. Es ist ein Bild, in dem die Geschichte auf immergleiche Schlüsselreize reduziert wird, auf dass die Vorstellung in ihren altbekannten Bahnen bleibe.

Similarly, Jennifer Kapczynski argues that Alex’s entire version of the GDR is not authentic, but “remains a fake” because it is “an idealized version that celebrates East German potential while

excising its darker side. [...] Alex's mock broadcasts craft a GDR that is open, rather than repressive, that incorporates the multiplicity afforded by Western capitalism, but not at the expense of East German experiences" (85). Finally, Kapczynski explains that the "only authentic aspect of the GDR products that Alex so patiently collects is their labels, and Christiane never seems to notice any change in her favorite foods; the packaging becomes, quite literally, an empty symbol" (85).

Anthony Enns, by contrast, believes that rather than rendering the past inauthentic, nostalgia can actually be used as a critical way to engage with the past, despite its lack of distance to the past, because "it still retains the potential to foster a critical distance from the present" (477). Rather than "childish," Enns sees Alex as becoming "a kind of archeologist sifting through the detritus of a vanished culture and transforming his family home into a kind of time capsule or living museum" (484). Furthermore, Enns explains that *Good Bye, Lenin!* and the other nostalgic films like *Sonnenallee* are actually not regressive interpretations, but instead "incorporate a form of 'reflexive' or 'critical' nostalgia by addressing and critiquing cultural stereotypes associated with the history of the GDR and East Germans more generally, and they thus offer a valid criticism of contemporary attitudes towards the GDR and its often neglected socialist past" (480). Paul Cooke also argues for the critical potential of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, characterizing the film as presenting "a more ideologically-based version of *Ostalgie*" due to Alex's eventual realization by the end of the film that the GDR he created for his mother is not one that actually existed, but rather, the one he wished had existed, "namely a truly socialist utopia in which the population can live together in harmony without fear" ("Watching the Stasi" 121). Cooke describes the film as "giving expression to the dream of intellectuals and writers

who demonstrated at Alexanderplatz on November 4, 1989, that of ‘socialism with a human face’” (“Watching the Stasi” 121).

Nick Hodgkin argues for a similar view, noting that in contrast to the characterization of *Good Bye, Lenin!* as overly trivial, darker elements are not wholly absent from the film. In Hodgkin’s opinion, these elements are instead “subordinated within the narrative” (Hodgkin 29). Indeed, in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, while the scene showing this is very brief, the Stasi agents who hound Christiane on her knowledge of her husband’s plans on fleeing the GDR could be said to be playing a pivotal role, as Christiane is then too fearful to follow through with the original plan to follow her husband to West Germany, out of fear that her children could be taken away from her. Even still, this subordinated darker side is not comparable to the darker version of the GDR presented elsewhere. From his viewpoint of 2004, Hodgkin writes that the media’s deep focus on the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* until 2003 had created a problem for anyone trying to present an alternate version of the GDR, that is, to risk being accused of amnesia or even of “misremembering” the GDR (30). Overall, Hodgkin sees the role of *Good Bye, Lenin!* as one comparable to *Helden wie wir* in that both films “invoke the East German state in order to bid it a final farewell” (44-45). Alex’s recreation of the state for his mother serves to remind us that “the past may be (re)packaged, bottled and preserved, but it cannot be perpetuated” (45).

Mattias Frey notes that the narrative in *Good Bye, Lenin!* is authenticated largely through the continued references to the historical time in which the film is set. This means that important moments in the plot seem to coincide with major events in the unification process: for example, Alex’s father leaves the family as GDR cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn blasts off from Earth; Alex’s mother Christiane collapses the night of the Alexanderplatz demonstration; the signing of the *Staatsvertrag* on June 22, 1990 is the day of Alex and Lara’s first kiss as well as the day when

Christiane awakes from her coma; the day that Christiane is taken home in the ambulance is, as we hear on the radio, July 1, 1990, the day of the currency union; finally, and perhaps most importantly, Christiane dies a mere three days after official re-unification (112). Alex, as the film's narrator, often describes these historical events in an ironic tone, such as describing the night of East German demonstrations as "an evening stroll," and this, in Frey's opinion, "provides a counter-perspective to the authoritative documentary footage of well-known political events" (113-14). Frey concludes that Alex representing himself as older and wiser than in the past events he is narrating serves as a contemporary critique of dissatisfaction with the unification process, where "the implication is that not just Alex, but the whole nation 'knows better' in the meanwhile" (114-15). Furthermore, Frey remarks that "just as Alex has matured since his mother's death, so has — or better, should — Germany come of age and come to grips with the political events of the late twentieth century" (115).

3.2.2 Das Leben der Anderen

Rentschler points out that *Das Leben der Anderen* has over time "become for memories of the GDR what *Schindler's List* now represents for recollections of the Holocaust: a master text" ("The Lives of Others," 253). Indeed, this does appear to be true. Not only has director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck taken every opportunity to assert the authenticity of his film (as explained in Chapter One), but many former (prominent) East Germans have confirmed this assessment in their reviews of the film. One of the most famous assessments (and previously quoted) comes from former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives and current President of Germany Joachim Gauck, who describes von Donnersmarck's film as portraying the GDR as it really was: "Ich bin im Kino, ich kenne, was ich sehe. Ja, sage ich, so war es." Manfred Wilke, the historical advisor for *Das Leben der Anderen* (and who was also a member of the Enquete

Commissions) insists on the historical authenticity of the film, and that von Donnersmarck intended to “create a script telling a fictitious story about the SED state, narrated in the style of a thriller, but based on historical material. He wanted his film to be both truly authentic and touching” (54). As Wilke explains, the film is authentic in several different ways, namely in its basis on a few real historical events, the research that went into the film, and the character of Wiesler as breathed to life by Ulrich Mühe, who himself had been investigated by the Stasi: “His experience allowed him to portray Wiesler in a cold, yet compelling manner and thus evoke the social climate of the final phase of the GDR in a way that captivated audiences the world over” (38). Furthermore, some of the narrative does indeed have a basis in real history: the interrogation procedures shown in the film are based on dissident Jürgen Fuchs’s *Vernehmungsprotokolle* – an account of his detention in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen from November 1976 to August 1977, published in *Der Spiegel* in West Germany in 1977 after his eventual release and deportation (Wilke 39-40). Another documented event that serves as a historical basis for the film (specifically, Dreyman’s *Der Spiegel* article) is the scandal caused in 1978 by *Der Speigel*’s publishing of a critique of the current situation in the GDR, later discovered to have been written by a Professor Hermann von Berg (Wilke 40). All of this, Wilke argues, contributes to an overall authentic atmosphere.

However, not everyone necessarily agrees the film is as historically accurate as Wilke touts it to be. British historian Timothy Garton Ash, who not only spent time in the GDR, but on whom the Stasi also compiled a file, considers von Donnersmarck deserving of the Oscar he received for the film, but points out that there are inaccurate details in the film. Writing of his first viewing of *Das Leben der Anderen*, Garton Ash writes: “...I was powerfully affected. Yet I was also moved to object, from my own experience: ‘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.” For example, the playwright Dreyman does not ring entirely true and convincing: “in his smart brown corduroy suit and open-necked shirt, [Dreyman] dresses, walks, and talks like a West German intellectual from Schwabing... not an East German” (Garton Ash). Furthermore, the language spoken in the film seemed to Garton Ash at times too “high-flown, old-fashioned, and simply Western,” such as Wiesler’s use of “gnädigste Frau,” which seemed to Garton Ash to be “more the vocabulary of the uprooted German aristocracy among whom the director and writer Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck grew up—both of his parents fled from the eastern parts of the Reich at the end of the Second World War—than that of the real East Germany in 1984.” Garton Ash goes on to list the further smaller details that the film got wrong: that the Stasi cadets Wiesler instructs on how to conduct an interrogation would in reality have been dressed in uniform, not in ordinary clothes; that the Stasi officers on duty during the day would not have dressed in the “smart dress uniforms” shown throughout the film; and that it would have been far too obvious had a Stasi surveillance operation installed itself in the same building as the people they were observing.

Despite his criticism of what he sees as departures from historical fact, Garton Ash does recognize that von Donnersmarck, above all else, had to make the film seem “authentic” in the sense of being believable to the audience, so as not to break the necessary suspension of disbelief. Recounting a meeting with von Donnersmarck, Garton Ash says that von Donnersmarck responded by “fiercely defend[ing] the basic historical accuracy of the film” but agreed that “some details were deliberately altered for dramatic effect” (Garton Ash). As von Donnersmarck explained to Garton Ash,

if he had shown the Stasi cadets in uniform, no ordinary cinemagoer would have identified with them. But because he shows them (inaccurately) in student-type civilian dress and has one of them (implausibly) ask a naive question to the effect of “isn’t bullying people in interrogations wrong?,” the viewer can identify with them and is drawn into the story.

What von Donnersmarck is explaining here, as discussed in Chapter Two, is the same problem that every filmmaker of historical film must take into consideration: how best to draw the audience into the story. Garton Ash sums up this point in this way:

But these objections are in an important sense beside the point. The point is that this is a movie. It uses the syntax and conventions of Hollywood to convey to the widest possible audience some part of the truth about life under the Stasi, and the larger truths that experience revealed about human nature. It mixes historical fact (several of the Stasi locations are real and most of the terminology and tradecraft is accurate) with the ingredients of a fast-paced thriller and love story.

Evelyn Finger, in her review of *Das Leben der Anderen* in *Die Zeit*, writes that what von Donnersmarck is aiming to create is not “Realismus” but rather, a “metaphorischen Hyperrealismus.” This hyperrealism takes on several different forms in the film, not the least of which is created in the setting, where, like in other successful historical films as discussed in Chapter Two, the filmmaker achieves “hyperrealism” by making the film resemble not reality, but an image that conforms more to what the audience perceives as being real. Finger explains it thusly:

Donnersmarck hat den Mut, mit unseren Klischees von der Gesinnungsdiktatur zu spielen. So inszeniert er eine spätsozialistische Schwermutshöhle wie aus dem

Bilderbuch: graubraune Amtsstuben, blaugraue Verhörräume,
Künstlerwohnungen mit knarrenden Dielen und durchgesessenen Sofas. Hier gibt
es Bonzen, die auf Premierenfeiern Stalin zitieren und dazu Buletten fressen. Hier
gibt es Theaterleute mit Berufsverbot, die sich in Brechts Gedichte vergraben.
Renitente Journalisten mit Lederjacke. Starschauspielerinnen mit Russenschapka.
Nur Wiesler passt nicht ganz hierher. Oft wirkt er wie ein melancholischer Mister
Spock, der sich ins DDR-Milieu der Achtziger verirrt hat und dort eine rätselhafte
Mission erfüllt.

Additionally, as Finger points out, the film's conformance to audience expectations lies not merely in the details of the setting, but derives from the believable way in which Ulrich Mühe presents Wiesler and is also indebted to the meticulous research that went into creating the story. Although Finger believes the film oftentimes appears cliché and melodramatic, it still manages to provide a serious analysis: "Es steckt voller Pointen und besticht zugleich durch unerbittliche Nüchternheit in der Analyse." Yet, despite this critical potential, Frey explains that *Das Leben der Anderen* is still mainly a "reform/redemption plot," the kind which is a "magnet" for awards and audiences, where the main character chooses to go down the so-called "right path" (127). In this respect, Frey lumps it together with *Good Bye, Lenin!*, arguing that both films are "ultimately — despite all of their obvious aesthetic differences — European 'quality films' that smooth over the historical trauma of unification by depicting the nation as a cabinet of mass cultural curiosities or a laboratory of universal material 'authenticity,' respectively" (110). A comparable assessment comes from Paul Cooke, who writes that:

while the film revisits a view of the GDR as a 'Stasi state,' where all activity, even that which was supposedly 'dissident,' was controlled by the MfS, it also

challenges this image, ironically recalling elements of the type of ideological Ostalgie we find in *Good Bye, Lenin!* Through his exposure to art, Wiesler, an instrument of state oppression, becomes a liberal maverick intent upon seeing good prevail. (“Watching the Stasi” 123)

An entirely different perspective on both these films comes from East German Director Andreas Dresen, who has another view on the way these films present authenticity. In an interview, Dresen explains:

it seems people prefer getting the simple truths, stories about the Stasi agent who turns against the system ... or the GDR as a picturesque system with funny cars and odd objects.... That’s not to say that these films are necessarily bad films, but for me they have relatively little to do with the GDR or with being a reflection of GDR history. (Abel)

Instead, Dresen advocates showing the duality of the system from the perspective of the Stasi: that is to say, that “most agents had families; they lived a perfectly normal life, having BBQs on the weekends with friends in their dachas, and on Monday they went back to the office and denounced people” (Abel). Dresen is saying here that it is not only the life of the average citizen of the GDR that needs to be normalized, but also the lives of the Stasi agents. Dresen goes on to emphasize the benefit to the people of the present in critically engaging with this past in this way and who should ask questions such as: “Where would betrayal begin for me? Would I be susceptible to being seduced by the system?” (Abel). What becomes clear from this interview is that Dresen feels that the images of the GDR presented by both Becker and von Donnersmarck are neither “authentic” nor sufficiently critically engaging. From Dresen’s perspective, then, both

discourses have failed to engage themselves with “normalizing” the Stasi, and he himself would seek to correct this if he made such a film in the future.

3.3 Sequence Analyses

3.3.1 Alex as representative of *Ostalgie* in *Good Bye, Lenin!*

Alex Kerner as an individual is representative of the phenomenon of *Ostalgie*, where he, like many of his fellow Easterners, is struggling to come to terms with his socialist past and capitalist present. While the film is critical of *Ostalgie*'s (and Alex's) rose-tinted version of the GDR through constantly undermining its authenticity, at the same time, the film seeks to establish legitimacy for this “normalized” Eastern point of view. Thus, the experiences of Alex serve to contradict the public discourses of the 1990s obsessed with portraying the GDR as a dark and repressive state.

Good Bye, Lenin! opens by overwhelming the viewer with nostalgia through presenting Kerner family memories on 8mm film. This scene does much to advance the view of an *Alltag* existing in the GDR, especially by enabling the viewer to become emotionally involved in the family's story. Devices employed in achieving this attachment begin already in the opening frame, with a tune of nostalgic non-diegetic piano music playing accompanied by the sound of a whirring camera projector wheel. The viewer is shown a small projection of shaky, sepia-toned 8mm old home video footage of children playing outside at a cottage, under which the date and setting are given as “Unsere Datsche, Sommer '78.” These clips are very *alltäglich* in their content: they show children playing in a wheelbarrow and in a hammock, even stealing sweets off of a plate, all while their father is behind the camera recording these family memories.

Jennifer Kapczynski remarks that this all “aims to produce nostalgia for a bygone era. Steeped in the muted tones of outdated color technologies, the film’s flickering flashback sequences and ‘found footage’ evoke the ephemeral and fading nature of GDR memory” (87). Indeed, the effect of scenes such as these on the viewer are profound: old home video clips accompanied by nostalgic music and a projector wheel whirring in the background all assist in authenticating the scene by making them seem like “normal” old family videos that could belong to anyone’s childhood – certainly not of those who lived in an *Unrechtsstaat* – and which could even act as the prelude to a documentary. For as Toplin states, a scene can be imbued with authenticity through manipulation of the colour scheme in order to give a film the look of a documentary, of an old faded photograph, or even of an early Technicolor movie (*Reel History* 13).

In addition to its authentic “look,” the film’s interactions with its historical setting are also invaluable in legitimating this “normalized” version of history. As previously mentioned, Mattias Frey points out that there is a close intertwining of the personal with the national in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, where important national events coincide with important events in the narrative (112). Indeed it is here where the film’s potential for seriously engaging with history lies, for this strong connection to its historical setting further legitimates Alex as representing real historical processes. So, in one scene, by showing Alex being photographed standing in front of East Berlin’s *Fernsehturm* wearing a shirt commemorating the flight of the first German astronaut into space – the GDR’s Sigmund Jähn – Alex’s happy childhood is integrated with the national memory of the GDR. This interaction with the historical setting is further linked when the viewer, for example, sees a TV screen (the top of which is adorned with family photographs) in a living room showing actual archival video and audio footage of the launch of the spacecraft Soyuz 31, the spacecraft about to carry Sigmund Jähn into space. As Burgoyne has argued, the

use of archival footage within a film works almost like “a certificate of authenticity... suggest[ing] that there is a relation of continuity between the fictional dramatic narrative unfolding on the screen and the actual historical events it purports to represent” (138). Meanwhile, the viewer sees the children (Alex and Ariane) from the 8mm footage sitting in front of the television intently watching this historic moment unfold.

Despite such scenes outwardly presenting a seemingly idyllic childhood, *Good Bye, Lenin!* is self-reflective through its subtext, simultaneously criticizing this rose-tinted view of the GDR it presents on the surface. As previously mentioned, Nick Hodgkin specifically describes this criticism as “subordinated within the narratives” (29). One of the best examples of this exists in the very same scene with the children watching Sigmund Jähn on television. This happy picture is thrown into doubt by an older Alex as the narrator, explaining that although this was a great and historic day for the GDR (as can be proven by the display of archival footage of the launch on the family’s television screen), it was also on that day that things went downhill for his family. The scene is made dramatic by the continued playing of the nostalgic non-diegetic music, and is now combined with the extra layer of the audio from the historical world of the shuttle launch on the television set, all while we see Alex’s mother Christiane being questioned by the Stasi. While Alex (as the off-screen narrator) continues to inform the viewer of his version of what is happening, the camera cuts back and forth between young Alex focusing on the TV screen to Christiane becoming ever more visibly and audibly upset by the Stasi officers hounding her on the whereabouts of her husband. Significantly, young Alex is shown covering his ears with his hands (00:03:42) while watching the shuttle launch, trying desperately to shut out what he can clearly hear is his mother in distress behind him. Much like in the rest of the film, Alex is not only ignoring the grim realities of the GDR, but he is also trying to literally block the sounds

of reality from reaching his ears and entering his brain. Meanwhile, two Stasi officers are interrogating his mother, and, as the viewer find outs later, actually succeed in frightening her into not following her plan of fleeing west to join her husband. Instead, Christiane remains in the GDR and has a mental breakdown (and even contemplates suicide as she later confesses to Alex). As Cooke explains it, this breakdown results in “a profoundly damaging effect on the rest of the family, particularly on her young son” (*Representing East Germany* 130). But rather than acknowledge this dark reality, Alex, as both the child on screen and the adult off screen narrating this scene, instead makes a great effort to focus on the positive image the GDR is presenting to the world, such as his hero Sigmund Jähn blasting off into space.

It is happy memories such as these of his childhood that Alex at first seeks to preserve of the GDR because during the eight months his mother is in a coma, Alex’s life changes drastically, as do the lives of all GDR citizens from October 1989 – June 1990. These changes are displayed through a montage of scenes that provide the film with a documentary-like authentic quality. It includes a narrator (Alex), and begins by showing archival video footage of the GDR news program, *Aktuelle Kamera*, announcing Erich Honecker’s resignation as leader of the GDR (beginning at 00:17:42), and then alerts the viewer to the fall of the Wall by showing close-up shots of newspaper headlines announcing this (beginning at 00:18:05), after which the viewer sees footage of people sawing through the Wall (beginning at 00:18:19). Not only does this documentary footage serve to place Alex’s experiences in an authentic historical context, but by demonstrating how quickly the Wall fell and how suddenly changes came about (namely the Western way of life “invading” the East), it also serves to demonstrate where Alex’s later criticisms of the West stem from. For example, Alex speaks of himself and his fellow Easterners as having been “Helden der Arbeit” in the GDR, but who are now no longer needed and have

become unemployed. Alex remarks that he was the last to depart his workplace, being the one who turned off the lights. As explained in Chapter One, high unemployment figures in eastern Germany caused bitter resentment for the West and are also a likely contributing factor to the development of the Eastern “identity of defiance.”

Although Alex (as narrator) does not dwell on these scenes and indeed describes them in an ironic and humorous tone, the effect these changes had on him becomes evident throughout the film. Although no more than a fast-paced montage, this sequence is especially important for its historical commentary, for it works as a critique of the speed with which unification took place – that because so many things happened at once, all that can be remembered are a blur of images and newspaper headlines. As Ewa Mazierska explains, “this mad speed of history is an important reason why the East Germans, as much in ‘reality’ as on screen, feel disoriented and anxious, and cling to memories of the old times” (192). This scene thus not only explains Alex’s own eventual desperate clinging to the past, but also helps to provide some of the underlying causes of *Ostalgie* itself. As Enns explains: “the nostalgia for the east expressed in recent German films thus implies the moral bankruptcy of a capitalist system that has failed adequately to address current economic and cultural challenges” (480).

One particular scene that provides another underlying cause for *Ostalgie* – namely the idea that the West came in as colonizers and then assimilated East Germans into their culture – comes later in the film when Alex unsuccessfully tries to exchange his mother’s life savings in East German currency for the Deutsche Mark. This ends in him angrily yelling at the bank teller (a Westerner), shouting: “Das sind 30 000 Mark! Das war unser Geld, verdammte 40 Jahre lang! Jetzt willst du Westarsch mir sagen, das ist nichts mehr wert?” (01:08:50 – 01:09:00). He then exclaims to the people in line behind him: “Und was glotzt Ihr so? Das war doch auch Euer

Geld!” (01:09:03 – 01:09:08). This scene serves to hint at the problems of unification and that Alex is having a hard time adjusting, thus telling the viewer that Alex is also recreating the GDR for himself in order to help him better come to terms with the present, rather than solely as a benefit to his mother’s state of mind. Mazierska remarks that scenes such as this serve as examples of “the downgrading of East Germany’s history to a meaningless rubbish heap” (195). Specifically, the importance of this incident at the bank lies in its enabling of the viewer to sympathize with Alex’s predicament: “We share Alex’s frustration, because, like him, we are aware of the disparity between the life-long effort of his mother to save for her children and her own dark hour on the one hand, and the ultimate futility of her efforts” (Mazierska 195). Thus, it is because of incidents such as these, which highlight the changes and difficulties Alex experiences in the present, that cause him to become nostalgic for the past.

Alex begins what essentially amounts to a blocking out of reality (his revival of the GDR) as soon as his mother awakes from her coma. Wanting to shield his mother from the excitement of the outside world in order to prevent another heart attack, he seeks to preserve the GDR that existed before Christiane’s collapse, so he does all he can in order to demonstrate that nothing has changed: from instructing visitors to not mention the *Wende* and to wear the old and outdated clothes from the year before, to restoring his mother’s bedroom exactly the way she had left it. However, this state of affairs does not remain for long because the changes in the outside world soon intrude. A major outside catalyst that causes problems in the narrative is the currency union of July 1, 1990. The result of this is that Alex can no longer find the GDR consumer products he needs in order maintain the status quo for his mother (such as the famous *Spreewald Gurken*). It is at this point that Alex now progresses from merely wanting to shield his mother from any excitement (news of the fall of the Wall), to becoming obsessed with finding GDR

consumer projects in order to maintain the image he wants to present to his mother (as well as hold on to as much of the old world as he can). Much of what this film has become so famous for, and what helped to create the famous *Ostalgie-Welle* of 2003 was indeed how much effort Alex puts into finding the products and then gluing old labels onto jars or placing new product into the old jars. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, it is also these ironic dealings with GDR products that caused such a backlash in German society and where the film was accused of trivializing GDR history. The prominent display of these products in this film stood in contrast with *Das Leben der Anderen*, which reviews described as being free from such kitsch. This is epitomized by the title of the *Der Spiegel* review of the film, which happily declared *Das Leben der Anderen* to be dealing with “Stasi ohne Spreewaldgurke.”

Alex’s eventual transition from merely preserving the past to actively inventing it, thereby making him fully representative of *Ostalgie* (in presenting a rosy image that does not exist), can be seen in the scenes leading up to and including his mother’s birthday party. This scene begins with Alex driving one birthday guest on a moped through the busy streets of Berlin, which are filled with the sights and sounds of people driving and waving German flags, excited for the World Cup Final against Argentina the following day. The irony in this scene is that rather than looking forward to the future as all of the fans on the streets are, Alex and the guest are hurrying to travel to the past instead. Alex in a voice over makes this particularly clear: “Während sich viele schon lautstark für die Meister von morgen hielten, drangen aus Mutters Schlafzimmer Klänge von gestern“ (00:57:44 - 00:57:50). This is further exemplified by the continuation of the tracking shot of these two speeding through the traffic, the sounds of which are slowly drowned out by the sounds of the old world, with two Young Pioneers singing: “Unsere Heimat, das sind nicht nur die Städte und Dörfer...” The scene eventually transitions to

Christiane's bedroom and a medium shot of the two school children singing for Christiane at the foot of her bed, whilst Christiane's neighbours, family and friends are standing all around the room. In contrast to the busy, modern westernized scene immediately prior, this room has a particularly comfortable and old feeling: the wallpaper is a dark yellow pattern, there are family photographs on every surface, and landscape photographs are hanging above Christiane's bed. The honey-brown colour scheme with brown cupboards filled with books and binders gives off a very homey *Alltag* atmosphere – the comforts and assurances of the past. But this contrasts sharply with the guests gathered in the room: everyone seems very uncomfortable and behaves awkwardly, except Alex, who is standing calmly with a smile on his face with his hands clasped in front of him (00:58:01). When Christiane is presented with a gift basket filled with old GDR consumer products that Alex can no longer find on the shelves, such as *Mocca Fix Gold* and *Globus Grüne Erbsen*, the camera cuts to a close-up of Alex watching his mother (00:59:33), seemingly pleased with his efforts (at his luck at having found these artefacts). While it is clear that no one else in the room shares his feeling, Alex continues on to further embellish his presentation of “normality:” saying to his mother: “Ja, Mama. Wieder ist ein Jahr rum. Was hat sich verändert? Eigentlich nicht viel. Paula hat ihre Zähne bekommen und einen neuen Papa” (01:02:06 – 01:02:15). The inauthentic nature of this scene – and the impossibility of the old world still existing – becomes even clearer with the appearance in the window over Alex's shoulder (as Alex is giving the speech above) of a very large bright red Coca-Cola banner being unfurled down the façade of a neighbouring building. When Christiane interrupts her son to ask what is happening, the curtains are pulled shut, and Alex reassuringly tells his mother, “Es gibt für alles eine Erklärung” (01:03:10). The point here being, that, once again, Alex will resort to blocking the sound or image of reality from filtering in for him to deal with.

The purpose this scene serves is to demonstrate how hard Alex is fighting to ignore the western invasion into his comforting eastern *Alltag* – but it is done in a particularly ironic and stark fashion, with a Coca-Cola banner becoming visible behind him as he tells his mother that nothing has changed in the outside world she no longer experiences. Alex's disconnect from reality is further shown through how uncomfortable even his elderly neighbours (who often criticize the West) are with Alex's charades. Meanwhile, in this entire scene, Alex's body language of complete calm is comparable to his general attitude towards the situation – namely that he will not acknowledge that which he does not want to see. Jennifer Kapczynski characterizes the *Ostalgie* that Alex is demonstrating as “a childish attachment, grounded in myth and destined to be outgrown” (85). Much like when he was a child sitting in front of the television set watching Jähn blast off into space, Alex again clings to what he finds comforting (the GDR *Alltag*) while actively shutting out reality. In fact, the only thing that is authentic about this scene is the array of consumer goods in Christiane's gift basket (authentic GDR products Alex found in an abandoned apartment in a previous scene). Not only did Alex carefully coach everyone at this gathering not to mention the *Wende*, but now it becomes clear to the viewer that Alex not only is willing to merely ignore reality, but also to completely reinvent his own facts to suit his own version of events.

The result of this incident (the intrusion of the western world represented by the unfurling of the Coca-Cola banner) is an escalation in Alex's level of denial, bringing him to a whole new take on how truth works: “Als ich an diesem Tag in die Wolken starrte, wurde mir klar, dass die Wahrheit nur eine zweifelhafte Angelegenheit war, die ich leicht Mutters gewohnter Wahrnehmung angleichen konnte” (01:05:17-01:05:24). In effect, Alex has now discovered that he can easily create a new truth that suits his own purposes, and that he need not adhere to the

facts of real life: “Ich musste nur die Sprache der *Aktuellen Kamera* studieren und Denis’ Ehrgeiz als Filmregisseur anstacheln” (01:05:29 - 01:05:34). From this point on, Alex begins to invent his own version of the GDR, the version that he would have wished for himself. With his co-worker Denis’ help, rather than merely show his mother old archive *Aktuelle Kamera* news segments as part of his previous attempts to maintain the past, he and Denis now make their own *Aktuelle Kamera* segments, thereby not only inventing a new past but a new future as well. Denis and Alex begin this in small ways – initially splicing old *Aktuelle Kamera* segments with new footage of Denis as a field reporter (saying, for example, that Coca-Cola has just been discovered to be a socialist invention of the 1950s), but then later progressing to more dramatic inventions, like that people from West Germany, tired of capitalism, have begun to flee to the East. It is at this point where Alex’s *Aktuelle Kamera* segments become entirely invented, and no old anchor footage is used: only manipulated real documentary footage complete with Denis at the anchor desk. As Mazierska explains, these broadcasts “provide [Alex] with a refuge from the world outside which due to its speed and instability threatens his sense of self-hood” (194). Because, as Svetlana Boym explains, “the threat of losing one’s history and oneself is an important reason why... outbursts of nostalgia are most common after dramatic changes, especially revolutions” (Boym, cited in Mazierska 194).

One of the most critical segments in the entire film is the final one, where Alex clearly presents an inauthentic GDR of his own imagination. In it, Alex as narrator informs the viewer that he will finally tell his mother the “truth,” but not before he gives the GDR the farewell it deserved but never received in reality. Alex says: “Der Sommer war vorbei. Ich beschloss dem ganzen Spuk ein Ende zu machen. Ein letztes mal noch sollten wir den Geburtstag unseres sozialistischen Vaterlandes feiern. Aber im Gegensatz zur Wirklichkeit als einen würdigen

Abschied” (01:48:15 - 01:48:29). However, as soon becomes clear through the content of this final “broadcast” of *Aktuelle Kamera*, Alex has actually now lost his ability to distinguish “reality” from fiction (and not only merely trying to ignore the truth). Not only is he giving his country the goodbye he feels it deserves, but he is actually perpetuating his denials of reality to the utmost extreme, and completely reversing the history of the *Wende*. Indeed, by completely reversing what was occurring in the real world (the merging of East Germany with West Germany), and presenting it in these scenes as the merging of West Germany with East Germany, Alex could be said to be acting almost dictatorially in his invention of a false founding myth for his new country, complete with his childhood hero Sigmund Jähn as its first leader. Peter Bradshaw, in his review in the *Guardian*, argues that Alex is becoming ever more like his former state:

Without knowing it, Alex has mobilised almost every agency of a communist state. He distorts and concocts the news media; he coerces people into acting against their real natures and principles by a mixture of bullying and emotional blackmail, manipulating their loyalty to a ‘leader’ figure. It is a farce, founded on dishonesty: like the old regime itself. And Alex has become the neurotic, control-freak prime minister, acting on behalf of an ageing, debilitated monarch.

In fact, the viewer is shown how Alex actually goes about concocting his imaginary GDR, which he does for example by recruiting the taxi driver “Sigmund Jähn” and then buying and setting up props for the *mise-en-scène* for his broadcast. The viewer also sees Denis and Alex first filming the sequence, and then later splicing together archival footage of Honecker and the real Sigmund Jähn in 1978.

The significance of this final “broadcast” is that it is here where Alex can live out the ultimate nostalgic dream by creating history not the way it was, but how he wished it could have been. Indeed, Enns argues that these newscasts as a whole serve as examples of how *Ostalgie* “functions as a form of political engagement, as it integrates a critical or ‘reflective’ nostalgia with the utopian desire to imagine new social possibilities” (486). In this way, Alex can be viewed as criticizing both the GDR (by not re-creating the state that existed) as well as united Germany (by inventing all of this in the first place). Instead, Alex is creating his very own socialist utopia, where his childhood hero, Sigmund Jähn becomes leader of the GDR, a state that is self-critical, not repressive, and open and welcoming of others. It is through “Jähn’s” speech that the viewer hears what Alex’s ideal GDR would have been like. “Jähn” says:

Wir wissen, das unser Land nicht perfekt ist. Aber das, woran wir glauben, begeisterte immer wieder viele Menschen aus aller Welt. Vielleicht haben wir unsere Ziele manchmal aus den Augen verloren, doch haben wir uns besonnen. Sozialismus, das heißt auf den anderen zuzugehen, mit dem anderen zu leben. Nicht nur von einer besseren Welt zu träumen, sondern sie wahr zu machen. Ich habe mich daher entschlossen, die Grenzen der DDR zu öffnen (01:51:14 – 01:52:36).

Jennifer Kapczynski describes this final voice-over as “pinpoint[ing] the central concern of *Good Bye, Lenin!* as the intersection of personal and national memory, staging the attachment to nation as a complex psychic bond. Alex and Christiane’s relationship serves as a metaphor for the love of motherland and foregrounds the commemoration of a disappearing GDR culture” (83). At (01:52:15) the camera cuts to a perfectly composed close-up of Christiane sitting back in her hospital bed looking at her son with love and appreciation while triumphant diegetic music

begins playing from the broadcast. As the viewer hears “Jähn” continue to speak about the benefits of socialism, there is a touching medium shot of Alex (01:52:18) and then a reverse shot of Christiane (01:52:20), with him looking at her bright eyed for approval, and of her returning the gaze with a look of pride and love. Archival footage of the opening of the Wall begins to play on the TV set, but because this is Alex’s inauthentic version and not real history, the footage is playing in reverse: people are being put back down over the Wall, while Denis as the anchor explains: “Viele wollen bleiben. Sie sind auf der Suche nach einer Alternative zu dem harten Überlebenskampf im kapitalistischen System” (01:52:56). The viewer is reminded at how inauthentic this whole broadcast is by a medium shot of Ariane looking downwards and giggling and of Alex’s girlfriend Lara biting her lips in disbelief at what she is seeing (01:52:56). Denis continues on, fully giving life to Alex’s vision of the ideal GDR, and directly criticizing the western culture that has taken over:

Nicht jeder möchte bei Karrieresucht und Konsumterror mitmachen. Nicht jeder ist für die Ellbogenmentalität geschaffen. Diese Menschen wollen ein anderes Leben. Sie merken, dass Autos, Videorecorder und Fernseher nicht alles sind. Sie sind bereit mit nichts anderem als gutem Willen, Tatkraft und Hoffnung ein anderes Leben zu verwirklichen.(01:53:00 – 01:53:33)

As this triumphant music continues, the viewer now sees authentic archival footage of the stroke of midnight October 3, 1990 giving way to a unified Germany. This show of archival footage of fireworks at the Brandenburger Tor and people celebrating unification, works as a way of giving the viewer the “authentic” story now, the version not shown on the television in the hospital room.

As Jonathan Stubbs explains, the potential the epilogue text can serve in a historical film is to “pass judgement on historical characters represented in the drama and to suggest that unsettled scores have been resolved in posterity” (25). With the same nostalgic piano music playing as in the opening scene, and also over both archival footage of streets of the GDR as well as the 8mm home video footage from the summer of 1978, Alex says: “Das Land, das meine Mutter verließ, war ein Land, an das sie geglaubt hatte. Und das wir bis zu ihrer letzten Sekunde überleben ließen. Ein Land, das es in Wirklichkeit nie so gegeben hat. Ein Land, das in meiner Erinnerung immer mit meiner Mutter verbunden sein wird” (01:56:05 – 01:56:28). *Good Bye, Lenin!* ends on this voice-over, which as the epilogue does serve to tell the viewer that Alex has not been able to recognize that the world he so carefully crafted was not only for his mother. Rather, much like *Ostalgie* itself, he also needed to create this fictional GDR for himself in order to work through the drastic changes the *Wende* brought about in his life, which caused his comforting GDR *Alltag* to be lost to history.

3.3.2 *Das Leben der Anderen: Displaying the Unrecht in the Unrechtsstaat*

As previously discussed, much debate centres on *Das Leben der Anderen*'s protagonist, Wiesler, and whether he is an “authentic” character. Despite examples of dissidents amongst the ranks of the Stasi listed by historical advisor to the film Manfred Wilke, Wiesler is not a verifiable historical person. However, Wiesler is “authentic” from the viewpoint of what he represents and experiences: namely, the *Unrecht* in the *Unrechtsstaat*. A closer examination of how he conveys this sense of terror can be seen through the interrogation he conducts at the beginning of the film. Yet further developments in the film demonstrate that the state is loyal to no one, not even to Wiesler. That this very devoted ideologue has cause to turn to dissidence and then has the *Unrecht* of the regime visited upon himself, makes a strong case for the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*.

The opening sequence in *Das Leben der Anderen* is similar to *Good Bye, Lenin!* in that it also sets the tone for the entire film to come by grounding it in authenticity. By opening the film on an interrogation (especially one that has several layers of watching and listening) and then ending the sequence on the interrogator teaching techniques to his class, the viewer is already able to take sides against the Stasi and their intrusion into life in the GDR. One important facet that gives the film this “authentic” look is the manipulation of the colour scheme. In *Das Leben der Anderen*, as von Donnersmarck himself remarks in the director's commentary to the DVD, his goal was to make a film that reflected the “colour scheme” of the GDR – which for him meant a lack of the brighter colours that existed in the West. Thus, von Donnersmarck purposely shot the film emphasizing the colours black, green, grey, brown, and beige, and not showing any real reds or blues in order to “capture the essence of the GDR” (*Das Leben der Anderen* Director Commentary). The only noticeable appearance of blue and red in the film is on Christa's face:

her signature blue eye shadow and red lips (as can be demonstrated at 00:27:00). This dark hue in the film affects the tone of the entire film. When it is not night time, during which a large portion of the film takes place, the skies are overcast and grey, and this combined with the grey streets and buildings, leaves a rather stark impression of dullness and banality. Furthermore, the lack of wide, panoramic shots in favour of tight close-ups exudes a claustrophobic-like atmosphere. From the perspective of this colour-scheme and location shots, then, the GDR was a rather dull place to live.

As Jonathan Stubbs argues, a further technique used in this film to give a feeling of authenticity is through the use of title cards, which serves to link the film to the historical setting in which it takes place, thereby “attempt[ing] to stitch the events depicted in the main body of the film to written accounts of history” (21). In the English version of the film, the first card states: “1984, East Berlin. Glasnost is nowhere in sight. The population of the GDR is kept under strict control by the Stasi, the East German Secret Police.” Card two reads: “Its force of 100,000 employees and 200,000 informers safeguards the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Its declared goal: ‘To know everything.’” Being the very first thing the viewer sees, these title cards serve to set the terrifying tone for the film: given these figures, there will surely be spies everywhere, presumably lying in wait to ruin lives. There is a marked absence of background music and other non-diegetic sounds, which continues when the first shot of the film appears as a following shot of a guard marching a prisoner down a hallway. The viewer can only hear the sound of the guard’s boots hitting the floor as he marches the prisoner down a dimly-lit hallway and it is here that the viewer sees for the first time the overall colour scheme of the film: pale green, black, grey, and yellow. The dates that then appear at the bottom of the screen further give the viewer the Orwellian setting of “November, 1984,” at the Untersuchungsgefängnis des Ministeriums für

Staatssicherheit in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, This statement of the specific, terrifying historical location is another method of rendering the setting authentic, due to what Hughes-Warrington refers to as an example of an appropriation of documentary techniques into a dramatic film (133-34).

This feeling of terror only intensifies once main character Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler is revealed fittingly for the first time in a close-up of him at work doing what his superior Lieutenant Grubitz later states that he does best: interrogating. As Maggie Hoffgen explains, a major strength of this film is found in Mühe's portrayal of Wiesler: "We are captivated by Wiesler because of Mühe's performance: through him, particularly his face, we follow a distilled history of Cold War surveillance; we sympathize with him as his tight features begin to soften ever so slightly" (208). The composition of this scene, coming as it does at the very beginning of the film, serves to firmly establish Wiesler as part of the terror of the regime. Sitting in a chair with his palms under his thighs directly across from Wiesler, the slightly dishevelled appearance of the prisoner contrasts sharply with Wiesler's upright manner and sharp and tidy uniform. The interrogation begins with an important exchange:

Wiesler: Was haben Sie uns zu erzählen?

Prisoner: Ich habe nichts getan. Ich weiß nichts.

Wiesler: Sie haben nichts getan, wissen nichts. Sie glauben also, dass wir
unbescholtene Bürger einfach so einsperren, aus einer Laune heraus?

Prisoner: Nein, ich...

Wiesler: Wenn Sie unserem humanistischen System so etwas zutrauen, dann
hätten wir ja schon recht, Sie zu verhaften, auch wenn sonst gar nichts
wäre. (00:01:14 – 00:01:36)

The camera then cuts to a medium close-up of the prisoner for his reaction to this, and he blinks, and looks mournfully downwards. There is a certain threatening calm and irony in Wiesler's voice in this opening exchange, and indeed throughout the entire interrogation scene. His ideology comes through with his reference to the state as a "humanistic system," which, as Manfred Wilke explains, was part of the Chekist tradition. Wilke explains that the use of violence and repression was "a means of waging 'class war' with the purpose of protecting socialism and accomplishing its victory over Western imperialism worldwide" (45). So the methods used such as "espionage, the denunciation and persecution of dissenters and the execution of 'traitors' and attacks on 'dangerous enemies'" were all justified because of the "humanist purpose of their action" (45). Wilke comments that the way in which this interrogation is conducted places Wiesler as being firmly part of those "combatants in the name of ideology" (45). Wiesler makes his identification with this ideology clear with the advice he gives to his students: "Bei Verhören arbeiten Sie mit Feinden des Sozialismus. Vergessen Sie das nie" (00:05:46 – 00:05:54). From this beginning set-up alone, the viewer can already infer that, in fact, this is not actually a humanistic or just system, and that there is likely little evidence against this prisoner. This is made even more evident when Wiesler addresses the prisoner directly as "Häftling 227" rather than by name, which serves to take away his humanity and instead replace his name with a number, already contradicting Wiesler's statement about his "humanistic" system just a moment previously. The feeling conveyed here that is that the prisoner will be coerced through fear into admitting any guilt.

The camera work does much to convey the terrifying feeling of this scene. Hoffgen remarks: "the scene is shot very tightly: there is not one superfluous gesture or word, everything counts" thus enabling the scene to show "how the state created and sustained the hatred of

‘enemies.’” (208). When the camera faces the prisoner, typically he is shown in over the shoulder shots so as to keep the viewer aware of Wiesler’s presence. These shots are often medium shots that include some of the stark surroundings such as the door, the telephone on the desk, Wiesler’s shoulder and head, as well as the picture of Honecker hanging beside and slightly above the prisoner’s head. The camera angle is tilting slightly downwards, thereby making the prisoner seem smaller and even more helpless. The prisoner often shrugs and his eyes avert Wiesler’s gaze. The prisoner’s entire manner – constant blinking, eyes flickering, slight confusion, with his head tilting down and slightly to the side, all points to him having a guilty conscience. Only once he finishes speaking does he look up and meet Wiesler’s eyes. The medium close-up reverse shots of Wiesler by contrast are closer to his face, making him appear larger and more powerful. Also, because the camera is sitting at desk level, the shots of Wiesler are looking slightly upwards, giving even more authority to this imposing, neat, tidy, cold and entirely unsympathetic figure in uniform. He is very much in control of this situation, something which can be seen in his emotionless face. His training and command of this process is evident even when he speaks, as only the lower part of his face is moving, while his eyes remain hard and cold. The large discrepancy in the mode of dress between these two men also serves to tell the viewer how much more power Wiesler commands. The prisoner appears to be a very ordinary man, who sits in his chair slightly dishevelled, with his jacket slightly open and crumpled, and his face unshaven. In contrast, Wiesler is clean shaven, sitting upright in a very neat uniform. As Anthony Lane mentions in his review of the film, it is this “seething stillness” of character that makes Ulrich Mühe’s portrayal of Wiesler so convincing, as though he could be an ideologue in any system throughout history: “You can imagine him, with his close-cropped

hair, as a young Lutheran in the wildfire of the early Reformation, or as a lost soul finding a new cause in the Berlin of 1933.”

While this scene clearly shows the level of terror, the scene that comes after it (the transition that takes place then via a close-up of a tape recorder playing) only serves to provide an added layer of fear and injustice for the viewer. Wiesler is no longer the interrogator, but the teacher at the Stasi-Hochschule in Potsdam-Eiche, and is standing at the front of a class, where he informs his students coldly: “Die Gegner unseres Staates sind arrogant. Merken Sie sich das. Wir müssen Geduld haben mit ihnen. Etwa 40 Stunden Geduld” (00:02:28 – 00:02:36). Now the audience knows that not only was the previous exchange recorded (unbeknownst to the prisoner), but is now also being played back to others as well. As Hoffgen describes it, the horrifying element to the classroom scene is that a recording of the interrogation Wiesler conducted is now being held up before new recruits as “a perfect example of how to break a human being down and to reduce him to nothing but an enemy of the state” (209).

Wiesler “breaking” the prisoner is shown through displaying a later stage of the interrogation, where a lack of daylight streaming through the windows in the interrogation room suggests it is now night and that a considerable amount of time has passed since Wiesler’s original questioning of the prisoner. The unfairness of the whole thing is demonstrated once more through the contrast between Wiesler and the prisoner: while the former is as composed and in control as ever, the reverse shot of the prisoner shows that his condition has deteriorated considerably due to sleep deprivation. The prisoner is in a pitiful state: he lips are chapped, his face is ashen, his eyes are red with tears and he can barely hold himself up (a Stasi officer has to set him upright in his chair when he attempts to fall asleep sitting up). This inhumane treatment

of the prisoner (again, in direct contradiction to Wiesler's earlier statement) is demonstrated through the following exchange:

Prisoner: Bitte... lassen Sie mich schlafen.

Wiesler: Die Hände unter die Schenkel.

Schildern Sie mir noch einmal, wie Sie den 28. September verbracht haben.

Prisoner: Bitte, bitte... nur eine Stunde schlafen, nur einen Moment... schlafen.

(00:02:45 – 00:02:51)

The importance of this scene for the film as fitting into the discourse of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* is that, barely a few minutes into the film, it already is proving itself to be doing what historical films are best capable of: portraying a historical occurrence authentically (better— believably) enough that it convinces the viewer of the version of history it is presenting. In this scene, compared to unflinching and cruel Stasi man Wiesler, surely most viewers will now sympathize with the quivering and crying victim being interrogated and tortured, whether he is guilty or not. Furthermore, the fact that this particular interrogation is being used as a teaching model tells the viewer that it cannot be dismissed as merely an unfair example of a particularly harsh interrogation: if this is good enough to teach with, then it likely is seen as a “good” example of how to conduct an interrogation. Once again, this makes the viewer wonder what kind of horrible regime thinks this is something that should be used as a shining example of a good interrogation technique (that Wiesler is a “good” interrogator is confirmed by Grubitz later in the film).

The film then further proves how much of a dictatorship this is by demonstrating how little tolerance there is for critical inquiry. After the viewer sees the prisoner crying and begging,

there is a cut to the classroom, where the camera pans across the room of students sitting in their seats, so that the viewer might catch a glimpse of what they are thinking as they listen to the rising intensity of this interrogation. One student seems particularly upset by the poor treatment of the prisoner and asks: “Warum müssen Sie ihn so lange wach halten? Das ist doch unmenschlich!” (00:03:00). Wiesler scowls at the student’s question and then places a small “x” beside his name on a seating plan before justifying both the fact that he is right, but also that such measures are warranted because he is an enemy of the state: “Ein unschuldiger Häftling wird mit jeder Stunde, die man ihn länger dabehält, zorniger, wegen der Ungerechtigkeit, die ihm widerfährt. Er schreit. Er tobt. Ein Schuldiger wird mit den Stunden immer ruhiger und schweigt oder weint – er weiß, dass er zu Recht dort sitzt. Wenn Sie wissen wollen, ob jemand schuldig ist oder unschuldig, gibt es kein besseres Mittel, als ihn zu befragen, bis er nicht mehr kann” (00:03:24 – 00:03:48). As mentioned previously in the chapter, this particular exchange is what Garton Ash found so inauthentic: that there would be a student who would actually dare to criticize his superior in such a direct manner. However historically inaccurate it may be, it still is important to the film as a historical film displaying a point of view. If the viewer has not already come to this conclusion, this exchange can certainly serve to make clear to the viewer that this whole system is inhumane, particularly Wiesler, who is so obviously convinced of the rightness of what he is doing: that it is *he* who is humane in defending his state from its enemies. Wiesler’s response to the student shows intolerance for dissenting views, once again belying his earlier claim of being in a humanistic system, where people are only punished with justifiable cause (the viewer never finds out what becomes of the student for his defiance).

During this scene, Wiesler interrogates the prisoner “ruthlessly, mercilessly. He is a true professional. Every trick of the Stasi’s trade is played out” (Hoffgen 209). Indeed, many Stasi

“tricks of the trade” are on display throughout this film, even down to the removing of the cloth on the prisoner’s chair to be saved for later analysis. This enables the audience to feel compassion for the injustice suffered by the prisoner. Indeed, as Davis says in referring to historical film, a major purpose of the small details in historical films are to enable the audience to see and “experience” history in action (Davis, *Slaves on Screen* 6-7). One such “trick of the trade” on display and which Wiesler is sure to point out to his students, is the intensification of the pressure on the prisoner:

Wiesler: Wenn Sie uns den Namen des Fluchthelfers nicht nennen, muss ich noch heute Nacht Ihre Frau verhaften lassen.

Wiesler: Jan und Nadja kommen in eine staatliche Erziehungsanstalt. Wollen Sie das? Wie heißt der Fluchthelfer? Wer war es?

Prisoner: Gläske...

Wiesler: Noch mal! Deutlicher!

Prisoner: Gläske, Werner Gläske.

Wiesler: Werner Gläske. (00:04:39 -- 00:5:12)

Although this entire introductory scene serves to provide evidence to the viewer of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*, further proof is given by Wiesler’s own discovery through his “turn to dissidence” how unjust the system actually is, and that it is his devotion to it that has resulted in a life that is devoid of emotion and vitality. Cooke explains Wiesler’s existence thusly: “He lives alone, excluded from the rest of society, able only to find companionship for a few moments in hiring a prostitute” (“Watching the Stasi” 122). What this reveals about Wiesler’s private life outside of work is that he does not have one. His apartment is comparable to his appearance in the beginning of the interrogation scene – barren, cold, hard, and devoid of all emotion and life.

However, Wiesler seems unaware this gaping hole in his life exists. It is only through performing his job at work (listening through the wires to what is going on in the artists' apartment) that his heart eventually begins to soften. By listening to the artists' daily struggles, Wiesler is able to realize for himself that his life is lacking an important facet. In his search for meaning, Wiesler even sneaks into the artists' apartment searching for something that could possibly alleviate his emptiness, ultimately stealing a book of Brecht poems from Dreyman's desk, and beginning to read "Erinnerung an die Marie A." As Marc Silberman argues, Wiesler reading the Brecht book is important because Brecht "functions on the story level first as a representative of the kind of high art to which Wiesler never before had access but which he now discovers through his gradual sympathy for and identification with Dreyman.[...] It is the first step of his 'moral education' that will succeed by means of the humanizing power of Art, be it a piano sonata, a novel or a poem" (151).

It is the following scene that definitively affirms Wiesler's transformation from cold Stasi captain to dissident. Following the phone call Dreyman receives informing him of his good friend theatre director Jerska's suicide (his depression stemming from the *Berufsverbot* placed on him by the state), Dreyman sits down at his piano and begins to play the piece Jerska gave him for his birthday entitled "Sonate vom guten Menschen" (00:52:54). Wiesler, sitting in the attic at his post, listening to what is happening below, is completely transfixed by the music he hears. During this scene there is no dialogue, and only music is playing as the camera pans over Dreyman, sometimes focusing on his hands playing the piece, sometimes showing a close-up of his face as he sits at the piano playing with Christa standing immediately behind him. The camera then cuts to Wiesler sitting in his lonely attic hide-out listening to this music through his headphones. At first the viewer only sees Wiesler from behind surrounded by his equipment as

the camera pans left, but the camera soon cuts to a frontal medium shot of Wiesler, whose face is now full of so much emotion that his eyes are welling up with tears, and one actually rolls down his cheek. The camera then cuts back to Dreyman, who finishes playing the piece and then remarks to Christa:

Ich muss immer daran denken, was Lenin von der Appassionata gesagt hat: 'Ich kann sie nicht hören, sonst bringe ich die Revolution nicht zu Ende.' [Pause] Kann jemand, der diese Musik gehört hat, wirklich gehört hat, noch ein schlechter Mensch sein? (00:54:19 – 00:54:41).

The importance of this scene lies in the turning of the cold hard interrogator into the sympathetic figure. While this changing of sides via art might be problematic from a realistic perspective, the point the film is conveying is that as a truly good person, Wiesler comes to realize that the methods and beliefs of the ideology of his profession to which he had clung were not “humane” and furthermore, they had left him devoid of life himself. As Cooke explains it: “Wiesler’s faith would seem to exist despite rather than because of his experience in the GDR” (“Watching the Stasi” 122). This can be viewed as being made possible through the way the historical film works: that Wiesler’s drastic change of heart is necessary in order to show that even a devoted ideologue could give up, not necessarily in his belief in socialism, but in his belief in a system that rewarded those who had less pure motives, such as the careerist Grubitz and lecherous Minister Hempf. The way this is achieved is through the feature of the historical film allowing more complex historical processes, events, time and even characters to be simplified into a more manageable occurrence. Thus, this change of heart in Wiesler is a simplified way of conveying the larger truth, which is that of the version of the GDR as told in the victim narratives, that of the *Unrechtsstaat*. This is a place where even those who loyally

served the state are not rewarded, and where Wiesler's protection of the artists earns him a demotion to the mail room, steam opening letters for the next five years. However, he is redeemed from this *Unrecht* when the *Unrechtsstaat* ultimately meets its demise with the fall of the Wall and Wiesler is released from his "prison."

3.3.3 Conclusion to the Analyses

David Bathrick classifies *Das Leben der Anderen* as similar to other historical films such as *Schindler's List* or *Der Untergang* because of the powerful potential these popular films have in being able to "speak, simultaneously, yet in starkly varying ways, to local, regional and transnational audiences" ("Memories and Fantasies About and By the Stasi" 230). However, in the end, regardless of the historical inaccuracies that exist in the film, ranging from small details to larger questions about whether it is possible for someone as ideologically committed as Wiesler to convert to dissidence, what makes this film so "authentic" is its corroboration of the Stasi victims' version of history. By presenting what effectively is "evidence" substantiating the darker image of the GDR, von Donnersmarck is telling history as seen through the eyes of the victim/perpetrator. The effect this has is to cast doubt on the authenticity of the more positive *Ostalgic/Alltag* narrative as seen through the eyes of Alex Kerner, for whom the GDR, while not perfect, was still importantly the land of his childhood memories and which he lovingly associated with his mother. The dramatic way in which von Donnersmarck's film contradicts this *Ostalgic* and seemingly naïve version of history, in fact does more than speak, it argues for the authenticity of its version of history.

Conclusion

How “authentic” are these filmic portrayals?

As Rosenstone has stated, the historical film has the potential to aid traditional historiography by providing a more personal perspective of history through placing the individual at the centre of the historical process. Wiesler and Alex are both authentic then in the sense that through their experiences as played out on the screen, the viewer is able to see historical processes at work from the personalized view of the individual. Alex Kerner, while a fictional character, is historically authentic as his life experiences correspond to *Ostalgie*. He represents the struggles of an Eastern population coming to terms with what amounted to the sudden elimination of the entire world he had known and the following “colonization” by western culture. While the filmmakers constantly make clear that the world Alex creates in response to being overtaken by Western culture is inauthentic, even laughably so, this depiction of his struggles in coming to terms with the present (and past) remind the viewer of similar changes and struggles faced by Eastern German society not only in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Wall, but also in the following ten years, and even at the time of the film’s release in 2003. By following Alex’s story and the reasons he gives via the voice-over as to *why* exactly he is doing this (for himself as well as out of love for his mother), the viewer sympathizes with him and is thus better able to understand this *Ostalgie* phenomenon.

Although reviews of the film typically focus on the display of consumer products, epitomized by the *Spreewald Gurken*, *Good Bye, Lenin!* is much more than that. The *Gurken* are important insofar as they represent the familiar old world which Alex has lost and is desperately trying to recreate. While the film is ultimately critical of the GDR (as well as of united Germany), it mainly serves to facilitate a sympathetic reading of a “normal” family’s struggles

and joys while living in a dictatorship. As is demonstrated from the beginning of the film, while the darker sides of the state do adversely affect the family, Christiane represents how it is possible to carry on with a “normal” life despite being in less-than favourable circumstances. In a way Alex is also doing this by trying to work through his current difficulties with the present national and personal changes by nostalgically (and inaccurately) remembering and recreating his past in the present. For, as Alex himself says, by creating his final broadcast, he is able to give the GDR the goodbye it never really had in real life. Through Alex’s imaginative recreations, the viewer sees a GDR that never existed in reality: the ideal socialist utopia. Although the filmmakers make clear Alex’s revisionism is inauthentic, it still provides an interesting what-if scenario of a history that disappeared perhaps far too quickly. This, combined with Alex’s personal struggles (intertwined closely with the national), all collude to give us a historical film that presents an authentic picture of the GDR and *Wende* not as they really were, but as they could have been.

In the case of Stasi man Wiesler, the cold, hard interrogator the viewer sees at the beginning of the film is at once unsympathetic and terrifying as his interrogation techniques underscore the horrifying way in which the Stasi dealt with those it considered to be the enemies of socialism. The opening scene demonstrates how devoted he is to the Chekist ideology of hating the enemy. It is scenes like these which corroborate the victim narratives by thoroughly displaying the *Unrecht* in (what this film presents as) the *Unrechtsstaat*. By enabling the viewer to thus sympathize with the victims and take sides against the Stasi and the restrictive regime, it convincingly throws Alex Kerner’s more positive take on the GDR into doubt. This also serves to make Alex’s focus on consumer products and preserving his *Alltag* as particularly naïve and even unfair to the victims who Wiesler and his ilk so clearly terrorized. It might even be unfair to

someone like Wiesler himself, who, as a “guter Mensch” is ruined by this system: at first it emotionally bankrupts him, and then when he does find meaning, his career is ruined. For as the film makes clear about this system, no one, not even its own, are safe from its *Unrecht*. This is a ruthless and merciless regime that appears hopelessly beyond redemption. In fact, redemption is only possible after the state has self-destructed, and the artist Dreyman sees in his now accessible Stasi files the sacrifice Wiesler made for him. Thus, however historically “inaccurate” Wiesler’s character might be with regards to the lack of historical record of a specific dissident like him, his character is nevertheless authentic in the sense that through this individual, the viewer is able to clearly understand the greater historical process of the *Unrecht* in the *Unrechtsstaat*. It is this simplifying power of the individual in the historical film that has the potential to condense and then convey what are more complex historical processes to the masses at large, thus affecting the way history is depicted in the public memory, an ability that is limited in traditional historiography.

Are these opposing versions of the GDR sufficient?

As this thesis has established, these two historical films do much to advance very convincing perspectives on the GDR past, namely the GDR *Alltag* as well as the *Unrechtsstaat*. But the versions of events these two narratives present are, as described by both Rentschler and Fulbrook in Chapter One, most certainly too black and white. For as Martenstein points out: “Eine böse und eine gute oder halbwegs gute DDR. Dieser Kampf musste unentschieden ausgehen, weil beide Seiten Recht hatten. Die DDR war nun mal beides” (“Die dritte DDR”). The extent to which these two films have represented the two opposing discourses has occupied the attention of scholars during the past decade. As the GDR recedes further into history and the understanding of its essence and nature continues to evolve, there will be new opportunities to

consider the place of these two films in discussions about the GDR. At the present time, however, the space between these two discourses will be subject to greater scrutiny. The contributions of other historical films to these “in-between” discourses, especially with regard to their authentic representation of the time and society being portrayed, will be fertile ground for future scholarship.

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