

THE POST-REUNIFICATION AUFARBEITUNG OF THE SED-DICTATORSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine attempts in post-reunification Germany to process or deal with (*Aufarbeitung*) the second German dictatorship of the twentieth century, the German Democratic Republic. Part I deals with Germany's attempts to address politically the East German past. The first chapter focuses on the legal and political actions taken by the German government to help make right the wrongdoings of the dictatorship of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED). This chapter pays special attention to the trials against the East German border guards and political figures. Moreover, this chapter looks at the policies made by the federal government that address what was to be done with the enormous amount of documents left over by the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Stasi).

Part II focuses on the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. The artistic *Aufarbeitung* comprises the body of literature and films that was created in the post-reunification era that helps the collective coming to grips with the SED-dictatorship. Chapter two examines the foundations of a literary discourse on the topic of state control in the GDR. This chapter looks mostly at autobiographical texts written from personal experience in the GDR, as well as the early conflicts among the East German literati concerning the role of the writer in the GDR.

The topic of chapter three is the use of fiction to analyze the experiences of East Germans. The primary example in this chapter is Erich Loest's *Nikolaikirche* which this thesis treats as the quintessential *Wenderoman*. Chapter four examines the usage of humor in depicting life in the GDR which ultimately led to the movement known as *Ostalgie*. This movement—which began with the comeback of East German consumer products, but produced literary and

filmic representations of the GDR—caused a great deal of reaction from critics who claimed that to represent the GDR with nostalgia is to trivialize the misdeeds of the *Unrechtsstaat*. The final chapter assesses recent developments concerning the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship and questions whether or not these new developments mean a new paradigm of representing the GDR.

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## PART I

### THE POLITICAL *AUFARBEITUNG* OF THE SED-DICTATORSHIP

*Kaum eine Frage zum Komplex des  
Stasi-Überwachungsapparates ist so  
schwer zu beantworten wie die: Wer  
waren die Täter?*

*-Joachim Gauck,*

*Die Stasi Akten: Das unheimliche Erbe  
der DDR (1992)*

## INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolized the collapse of the second German dictatorship of the twentieth century. After 1949, when the Third Reich had ceased to exist, the German people had to confront their past both politically and culturally. The German people—West Germans and East Germans—had to put themselves on political courses that rehabilitated their standing in the international community. Political measures alone, however, were not enough to distance the German people from the wrongdoings of the Nazis. Therefore, there also had to be a cultural element to the confrontation of the Nazi past. In both West and East Germany, authors, filmmakers and other artists worked to create new forms and styles that provided distance from and were critical of Nazi culture. By the 1980s both West and East Germany were successful states and had produced cultural forms that confronted the past.

After Germany reunified in 1990 it was apparent that in order for the German people to grow together as a nation, there would have to be a confrontation with the East German past. After the collapse of communism, the German Democratic Republic had a unique experience compared to other former East Bloc countries because it was simply incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany. East Germans, therefore, did not have to build new institutions from scratch as did other former East Bloc countries. This meant that the time and energy which was expended on building institutions in other East Bloc countries could be used by East Germans to confront the wrongdoings that took place under the communist GDR. The result of this is that the German effort to confront or deal with the past—which will be referred to as the *Aufarbeitung* in this study—has far exceeded the efforts of other former East Bloc countries in terms of political measures and cultural expressions.

The first part of this study will focus on the political realm of the *Aufarbeitung*. This part explores the political and legal measures the German government took after reunification in order to confront the misdeeds of the GDR. As shall be seen in the first chapter, the political *Aufarbeitung* was and has been a difficult undertaking because of Germany's cautious approach. For some, the political *Aufarbeitung* has done too little in terms of providing a sense of justice to those who suffered under the GDR. For others, however, the political *Aufarbeitung* has done too much and has kept East and West Germans from growing together.

The next part of this study focuses on the cultural realm or the literary *Aufarbeitung*. This part examines the formation of a post-reunification literary discourse on the GDR. Although this study calls it the literary *Aufarbeitung*, filmic expressions have been included as well. Once again, in no other former East Bloc country has there been a more intense and dynamic literary discourse on the wrongdoings that took place under communism. This certainly has something to do with the fact that while in the early 1990s other Central and East European countries were focused on the present—building institutions—Germany was afforded the luxury of being able to focus efforts on confronting the past. One goal of this study is to demonstrate how the literary *Aufarbeitung*, in many ways, has been the more successful than the political *Aufarbeitung*. It is by far the more vibrant of the two; moreover, it is more democratic. Whereas the political *Aufarbeitung* consists primarily of policies that are mandated from the top down, the literary *Aufarbeitung* offers a wide variety of perspectives on the East German past.

## CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL AND LEGAL *AUFARBEITUNG*

The sudden unexpected collapse of the German Democratic Republic stood in the spotlight of international attention in 1989. For most of its forty years, this small country of some fourteen million inhabitants had conveyed to the world a sense of stability and success—a paragon among socialist countries—making its collapse a shock to many. The collapse resulted from a deteriorating economy, pressure from citizens and the inability or unwillingness of the Soviets to provide assistance. In 1990 the crippled regime was dealt a final *coup de grace* when East Germans voted in favor of reunifying the territories of the former GDR with the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the GDR's collapse an unraveling ensued, in which the world—and most East Germans for that matter—learned the degree to which the regime had abused basic human rights of its citizens. At the very heart of these abuses was the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, better known as the Stasi, which had recruited a large percentage of the population to spy on one another, including trusted friends and family members.<sup>2</sup>

This great revelation prompted outcries for justice, to which newly reunified Germany responded. Drawing upon precedents of international justice, Germany sought summarily to address these issues of the past in order to make the transition to reunification as smooth as possible. In the process, Germany realized the limitations of these precedents, given the unique circumstances of the German case. Nevertheless, holding fast to its self-image as a *Rechtsstaat*, Germany subjected itself to a period of legal purgation, which included the prosecution of East Germans thought to be culpable of crimes against humanity committed in the GDR. This resulted in several guilty verdicts, for which sentences were handed down. However, the sentences were light and those probably most responsible for crimes against humanity, were never sentenced.

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<sup>1</sup> There was not actually a referendum, but that is how Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union interpreted their victory.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* will be referred to as either *MfS* or Stasi.

These trials were paradoxical in that they were successful in handing down sentences, while staying within the boundaries of German law. These trials, however, also demonstrated the restraints of the *Rechtsstaat* in implementing punitive transitional justice. In addition to the penal measures, the German government also implemented non-punitive policies of transitional justice. These policies were especially important in regulating the enormous paper trail left behind by the MfS. This chapter will discuss some of the political and judicial actions taken by the German government after reunification that were intended to address the crimes against humanity committed in the GDR. As shall be seen, the East German case was unique among former East Bloc countries because it was incorporated into the already existing West German state. This meant that the effort, which was used to build institutions from scratch in other former East Bloc countries, could be used in Germany to make right the wrongs of the past.

### ***The SED-State and its End***

The Stasi, more or less, came to be the symbol for human rights' abuses in the GDR after 1989. The Stasi, however, must not be condemned as a unit acting separately from the governing party, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*.<sup>3</sup> From the founding of the GDR in 1949 until its demise in 1989, the SED was the sole governing authority of the GDR. The SED was always right (*die Partei hat immer recht*). The Stasi, therefore, was in essence merely an organ of the SED, acting only in the interest of the party. Mary Fulbrook writes that "although it is possible to describe the separate institutions and their spheres of competence and activity, it is virtually impossible to suggest that any of these were beyond the control of—or even in any serious respect 'separate' from—the SED" (*Anatomy* 44). It is thus not without justification that

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<sup>3</sup> Henceforth SED.

the Stasi has become the face of the inhumane aspects of the GDR, as the Stasi was in fact the primary executor of the system's human rights abuses.

The MfS was established in 1950, shortly after the GDR was founded. In 1957, however, Erich Mielke became Minister for State Security. He held this position until the demise of the GDR. Under Mielke the MfS first achieved the characteristics by which it is known today. Perhaps most significant was the expansion of the Stasi that took place under the oversight of Mielke. In 1953 the Stasi employed a staff of approximately 4,000, but by the time the GDR collapsed in 1989, the Stasi had grown to somewhere around 100,000. In addition to the increase in workers, the Stasi also became more organized and specialized (Fulbrook, *Anatomy* 47-48).

It is certain that the Stasi created a degree of constant fear among East Germans. Everyone knew that saying or doing the wrong things could mysteriously cause one to lose a chance to study at a university or even to be arrested. It is doubtful, however, that East Germans knew the extent and magnitude of the Stasi's activities before 1989. During the rapid unraveling of the GDR in 1989, East Germans became aware for the first time just how far-reaching the tentacles of the Stasi actually were. Finally, in December of 1989 reports of the abuse of power by the Communist government triggered angry crowds to storm the secret police buildings in Dresden after it was rumored that "the police were destroying incriminating documents or escaping with briefcases of illicit cash" (Diehl). Newspaper reports of the time reveal the pervasive angry mood of East Germans. Jackson Diehl, a journalist, observed that "East Germans have instinctively turned against the last and greatest bulwark of Communist power in the country," the Stasi. He went on to write that on the side of the Stasi compound in Dresden was written "Stasi are Nazis" and crowds gathered outside "demanding the names of Stasi officers, with militants shouting that they should be seized and lynched." What is most worthy

of attention in this report, however, is that the crowd protected the documents. One 50-year-old truck driver went to the compound and “demanded that citizens’ watchers look harder for hidden caches of documents.” Peter Schrofer, a renowned activist, was asked why he was at the Stasi compound. He replied, “It’s my duty now to get all of these people cleanly and orderly into a courtroom . . . I don’t want revenge, but all of these people must face their crimes in court” (Diehl).

An article in January, 1990, in the *New York Times*, reports similar occurrences in East Berlin. This time, however, anger overcame a crowd of East Germans as they “invaded the 3,000-room state-security headquarters today, destroying files and furniture in a show of popular frustration with the pace of change” (Schmemmann, “Upheaval”). The journalist observes that the word Stasi had become a “bitter epithet,” demonstrated by a woman seen writing on the wall of the headquarters “Stasi, Gestapo, K.G.B., *Securitate*: all bloodsuckers” (Schmemmann, “Upheaval”).

Clearly, the Stasi had become a personification of human rights abuses in the GDR and public discourse concerning the abuses of the GDR called for justice. To add to this, a book came out in 1990 which captured the *zeitgeist*—“*Ich Liebe euch doch alle. . .*”: *Befehle und Lageberichte des MfS, Januar-November 1989* by two renowned East German historians, Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle.<sup>4</sup> The book is a collection of fifty-one documents from the Stasi files which graphically convey to the public the amount of spying, force and coercion the SED-Regime used on its citizens in the tumultuous year 1989.

### **Transitional Justice**

#### ***“Aufarbeitung” and “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” after World War II***

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<sup>4</sup> The title is an actual partial quotation from Erich Mielke

The years 1989 and 1990 symbolize a period of drastic change for East Germans. In 1990 East Germans went to the polls and voted in favor of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's party, the Christian Democratic Union, which, in turn, was a vote for reunification. When Germans took to the streets in 1989, some held placards which read, "We are one People" (*Wir sind ein Volk*). After forty years of separation, however, East and West Germans had very different experiences and subsequently, different mentalities. It was therefore necessary for the newly reunified German government to implement programs that would augment a sense of unity among East and West Germans. In addition to promoting a sense of unity among Germans, the German government had an interest in expediently confronting the abuses of the GDR, which is referred to as the "working through the past" or *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. The readiness to confront these issues on the part of the German government was an attempt to correct past mistakes. After the fall of the Third Reich, the FRG legitimated its existence on the premise that it was facing up to and dealing with the atrocities committed by its predecessor. This process is often referred to as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. By many accounts, the process of de-nazification in the FRG was incomplete, as discussed below; united Germany's efforts at dealing with the Stasi past were an attempt to rectify this.

The concepts of *Aufarbeitung* of the past and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* both fall into the category of what is now referred to as transitional justice. According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, the term *transitional justice*

refers to a range of approaches that societies undertake to reckon with legacies of widespread or systematic human rights abuse as they move from a period of violent conflict or oppression towards peace, democracy, the rule of law and respect for individual and collective rights. (*International Center*)

It states furthermore that transitional justice applies to both judicial and non-judicial approaches aimed at creating a sense of healing for societies in transition. The German people, of course, had experienced transitional justice after 1945. It would be beneficial now to examine transitional justice after World War II.

The Nuremberg trials, which took place after the defeat of the Third Reich in World War II, mark Germany's first experience with transitional justice and the first international prosecution for war crimes altogether. The Nuremberg trials were imposed on the German people by the allied victors on account of the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis. Although the trial was international in scope, the location of the trials was chosen to make sure the German people received the maximum effect (Kritz 127). The concept of prosecuting those guilty for crimes against humanity was designed to provide victims—especially those who suffered in extermination, concentration and prisoner of war camps—with a sense of justice. The trials were also designed to mete out punishment to the perpetrators, thereby purging the German people of the guilty. Not every perpetrator received the sentence that he/she deserved; nevertheless, the trials were necessary for Germany's reconciliation with the international community after the war.

In addition to the judicial approach to transitional justice, both East and West Germany engaged in non-judicial approaches to transitional justice. The methods, however, differed greatly. The FRG "übernahm als Rechtsnachfolgerin des Dritten Reiches die Verantwortung für dessen Verbrechen" (Weidenfeld and Korte 650). To rehabilitate the German nation, the FRG financially compensated victims of the NS-regime, especially Jews and the State of Israel. Moreover, the government took it upon itself to educate its citizens and the world about what its predecessor had done. Already in the early 1950s the FRG established the Institute for

Contemporary History in Munich which assumed the role of *Aufarbeitung* of the Nazi past. East Germany, on the other hand, went through a more rigorous stage of de-nazification in the early years after the war. The GDR, then again, officially based its existence upon the argument that it was the true anti-fascist state. This meant that the GDR saw itself as by no means responsible for the crimes of the NS-Regime (Weidenfeld and Korte 650-1). Therefore there were two varied models of *Aufarbeitung* of the Nazi past within one nation. A full reconciliation of the German nation would be incomplete as long as the people were divided.

### ***Transitional Justice since Nuremberg***

Stanley Cohen explains that, “Although the Nuremberg precedent (and the Japanese War Crimes judgements [sic]) followed defeat in an international war, an imposed peace, and then an externally constituted political-judicial authority, this remains the template on which all similar issues—moral, legal, jurisprudential—are judged” (8). There have been myriad regime changes throughout the world since Nuremberg, most of which happened internally and without significant foreign intervention. Nonetheless, many of these new governments have undergone official attempts at addressing the wrongs of the past regime. In observing efforts to implement transitional justice—sometimes simply referred to as “democratization”—in places such as Eastern Europe, South Africa and Latin America, Cohen has broken down the “justice in transition” discourse into five aspects:

- (1) truth: establishing and confronting the knowledge of what happened in the past;
- (2) justice: making offenders accountable for their past violations through three possible methods: punishment through the criminal law, compensation and restitution, and mass disqualification such as lustration;
- (3) impunity: giving

amnesty to previous offenders; (4) expiation; and (5) reconciliation and reconstruction. (7)

In some cases, each individual aspect could be observed as a separate debate on what a society must do to dismantle the injustices of the previous regime. On the other hand, each aspect represents only a single phase of the process of creating a just society. For the purpose of brevity, this study will focus on truth, justice and reconciliation.

The first aspect, ascertaining truth by “establishing and confronting the knowledge of what happened in the past,” is perhaps the most important and consequently the most difficult to accomplish. Any time a society in transition forms a commission to establish the “truth” about what happened in the past, the observer must take into consideration that this is an elusive, sometimes impossible objective. As the historian knows, finding the unadulterated, objective truth about what happened in the past is oftenn a quixotic ideal; one can only hope to find a shade of the truth. Cohen writes that the enterprise of seeking the truth runs the risk of the “slippage of the ‘past,’ ‘truth,’ and ‘facts’ down the postmodernist black hole” (12). In spite of the problems with establishing truth, it is the fundamental aspect of the justice in transition discourse, and therefore the prerequisite of all the other aspects. The establishment of truth is powerful enough to stand on its own. “After generations of denials, lies, cover-ups, and evasions, many people have a powerful, almost obsessive desire to know exactly what happened . . . People do not necessarily want their former torturers to go to jail, but they do want to see the truth established” (Cohen 18).

Also highly important to the discourse of transitional justice is the judicial aspect: the phase of accountability. This is the part of transitional justice that has been most directly affected by the Nuremberg precedent. After a transition there is usually a great desire to see those directly

responsible for state crimes punished. The justice phase, however, often does not provide satisfaction for those who want “eye-for-an-eye” justice. The Nuremberg precedent suggests that the new government should demonstrate restraint in order to maintain the moral high-ground.

Cohen states that after the collapse of a regime, the new government

has a moral and legal responsibility not to ignore the violations of the past, and it must also prevent crude revenge, settling of accounts, lynching, the Robespierre justice of summary trials and executions. In some cases, of course, ‘accountability’ is still translated—as it has been throughout history—into a traditional tool to purge the country of supporters of the old regime and legitimate further repression. This is not exactly the accountability that the human rights community has in mind. (22)

This means that not all crimes against humanity that are brought to court are punished with the traditional means of incarceration or execution, as were the Nazi defendants found guilty at Nuremberg. In some cases punishment entails a financial restitution by those found guilty in order to compensate victims. Yet another important punishment is the policy of lustration, or removing people from their positions of employment. For instance in some Latin American countries military officials found guilty of or accountable for human rights violations have been removed from their positions in the military (Cohen 24). This method of punishment has been most pervasive in former Warsaw Pact countries in the post-communist era. Before focusing on transitional justice implemented in East Germany, it would be helpful to examine first the discourse of transitional justice in other East European countries to put the East German case into perspective.

*Transitional Justice in the case of Post-Communist Eastern and Central Europe*

The challenge in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism was the question of what was to be done about the past. Until then, almost all regime transitions had been from right-wing authoritarian governments to democracies. At the core of the debate surrounding transitional justice in Eastern Europe lay two fundamentally opposed notions of the means to achieve the goal of reconciliation. One side argued that public institutions needed to be purged of elite members of the former regime. The other side argued that only a policy of leniency is capable of fostering the desired result of reconciliation. The policy of lustration gained considerable popularity in Eastern Europe after communism. Lustration was appealing because it was seen as a moderate path to de-communization. The primary purpose was to punish members of the state security apparatuses and high-ranking party members, while leaving the low-ranking members or regional officials alone. However, in Czechoslovakia (and in East Germany, as shall be explained later) any collaboration with state security was enough to bar someone from public service (Welsh 13-16). Helga Welsh has proposed a framework in which to analyze the transition to democracy and policies of lustration in Eastern and Central Europe. She argues that the policy of lustration can be explained by the way communism collapsed in each country. She points out that in nearly all of these countries the old elite were able to enter into some degree of negotiation with the emerging elite (421). In Hungary, the official policy was leniency because it was mostly the reformist wing of the communist party that brought the system down. In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, the sudden collapse of the system ruled out the possibility for communists to negotiate their fate (Welsh 421).

After the fall of communism a wave of vengeful sentiment swept across Czechoslovakia. In 1991 Czechoslovakia passed a de-communization law which required the dismissal or

demotion of all party high-ups, party police and other collaborators. A list compiled by the secret police served as proof of party collaboration. Anyone whose name showed up could vacate their position or fight the charge, thereby drawing humiliating attention. A feeling of apprehension pervaded among Czechoslovakians of the prospect that their name might show up on the list. The president, Vaclav Havel, warned against creating a climate of fear through these purges. Considering that roughly eight million people passed through the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, Havel asked, “Where is this going to end? . . . When will it be recognized that each of us is guilty in some way? We were all [part of] communism, we all voted for the Communists. They received 99.99 percent of the vote in most elections. Yet people are now kowtowing to the de-Bolshevizers” (Battiata). It is ironic that Havel, perhaps the most famous Czechoslovakian dissident, was a proponent of lenient lustration. It was charged, moreover, that the most prominent backers of the hard-line position were not opponents of the regime and never had any notable clashes with the communist system.

The Polish model has been regarded as the opposite of the Czechoslovakian model, in that there was no vigorous policy of lustration after the collapse of the communist regime. In fact, the transition to democracy in Poland is said to have included a “gentlemen’s agreement” which was arranged “to prevent a future witch hunt against former communists” (Welsh 421). Through these negotiations some elites were able to maintain political positions. To many, the post-communist Poland of the early 1990s looked like the communist-forgiving state of Eastern Europe. Aleks Szczerbiak, however, opposes this notion, pointing to the fact that lustration did in fact occur in Poland in the late 1990s. He cites two important factors which account for the lustration policies in Poland, which could be helpful in a comparative analysis. First, a majority of Poles had always favored a policy of lustration, although they were not included in the

decision making process. Second, the late policy of lustration in Poland is accounted for with, what is termed, the “politics of the present” (Szczerbiak 559). This means that the public opinion of dealing with the communist past is subject to whatever is happening politically at the time. In 1997 a lustration law was finally passed. Szczerbiak explains the three justifications which parliamentarians advanced to justify their reason for passing such a law. The first reason was the belief that the Polish people had a right to know the background of their representatives. The second reason was the argument that “lustration was necessary for national security because it would ensure that individuals in prominent public positions were not vulnerable to blackmail on account of their past associations with the communist security services.” The third reason “was to de-politicize the issue of secret service collaboration by subjecting it to a judicial process and, thereby, to improve the quality of public life” (563-4). This means that slander and baseless accusations could be regulated.

In the discourse on post-communist legal *Aufarbeitung*, or *Abwicklung*, of the communist past, the Czechoslovakian model and the Polish model offer two different perspectives. Whereas the Czechoslovakian model represented a hard-line, tough-on-crime approach, the Polish model was characterized by restraint and light punishment. If these two models represent binary positions on a spectrum, the East German model falls somewhere in the middle

After the fall of the second German dictatorship of the twentieth century, transitional justice became once again a relevant issue, this time in the newly reunified Germany. The obvious significance of the post-World War II experience for Germany after 1990 is that it provided at least somewhat of a precedent in implementing both judicial and non-judicial aspects of transitional justice. Germans, nevertheless, did find out that some aspects of the *Aufarbeitung* of the past were this time significantly different, and in many ways more complicated. This

chapter will now examine the judicial measures implemented in post-reunification Germany in order to foster reconciliation and a sense of justice.

### **Judicial Expressions of Transitional Justice in East Germany**

#### ***The Honecker Trial***

Considering the number and severity of human rights abuses, it comes as no surprise that after reunification there was significant public clamor for the perpetrators of the most heinous crimes in the GDR to be punished. Newspaper reports at the time offer insight into the degree of this sentiment. One journalist wrote in December 1989 that “the popular clamor for the punishment of corrupt Communists was more than matched by demands for retribution against the hated ‘Stasi’ political police” (Schmemmann, “Clamor”). In addition to the clamor from below, the political sector of German society had a vested interest in prosecuting those responsible for crimes against humanity in the GDR because it would be a symbolic demonstration of Germany’s *Rechtsstaat* status (McAdams 55). This was, of course, no simple task. First, it needed to be determined which crimes should be prosecuted. Since many actions committed in the GDR were unconstitutional under West German law, but perfectly legal in East Germany, this proved to be a formidable undertaking. Second, it had to be resolved who was in fact culpable of the crimes. Third, perhaps most complicated was establishing an argument for employing retroactive justice. Most of the actions which the FRG had an interest in prosecuting could, in some way or another, be justified under GDR law. Great caution was taken, however, in pursuing trials, because, as James McAdams points out, FRG officials were concerned to keep the prosecutions from looking as if the West Germans were exacting “victors’ justice” on the defeated East Germans (54).

The wish for a public trial eventually materialized in 1992. The problem, however, was that the justice served was different from the expectations of the masses. Bärbel Bohley, the famous East German activist, is reported to have said about the prosecution, “We expected justice but we got the *Rechtsstaat* instead” (McAdams 54). This complaint owed to the FRG’s insistence of observing its own constitutional boundaries when prosecuting East German perpetrators; even members of the SED party elite (i.e. Erich Honecker, Erich Mielke, Willi Stoph etc.) were equals under the West German Basic Law. The delay in bringing the worst perpetrators to trial frustrated the public. Moreover, it was difficult for the public to understand why some of the defendants were protected by the Basic Law.

In contrast to the so-called “Honecker Trial,” German courts found criminal guilt in a majority of the cases against border guards who shot and killed those trying to flee to the West (Quint 323). This sparked substantial outcry because of the defense that these border guards were merely following orders. Saxony’s environmental minister, for example, reacted by commenting, “One hangs the little guy, but lets the big shot get away” (McAdams 69). Nevertheless, there were eventually other prosecutions that went up the chain of command. High-ranking GDR officers were tried and given prison sentences for the instructions which they gave to border guards. “Two of the convicted defendants were highly placed members of the Defense Ministry, Heinz Keßler and Fritz Streletz” (Quint 306-7). Also, several members of the SED Politbüro were prosecuted for their role in the shootings at the border. As mentioned above, some of the highest-ranking officials were not sentenced due to health reasons; however, Egon Krenz, Günter Schabowski and Günther Kleiber were all charged and sentenced to prison. In any case, there was some consolation for those who wanted to see someone held accountable for the abuses of the regime. In spite of this, the sentenced were not the most culpable, nor were the sentences as

severe as many would have liked. The fact that the top leader of the GDR, Honecker, was never rightfully punished left a lingering sense of injustice. One lawyer complained that Honecker was the highest-ranking and most important East German border guard. The famous Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal is reported to have expressed his desire to see Honecker charged saying, “It is exactly as if Hitler were suddenly to appear. He belongs before a court on the charge of murder” (Kinzer). After the conviction of Keßler and Albrecht, an article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* described the significance of the trial:

Das Urteil ist gefällt. Ein Prozess ist zu Ende, den manche sogar auf eine Stufe mit den Nürnberger Kriegsverbrecher-Prozessen stellen wollten. Ein Kapitel im Buch Aufarbeitung der DDR-Vergangenheit wurde geschrieben—mehr nicht. Es war eine mühsame Wahrheitssuche, die Suche nach einer Antwort auf die Frage, inwieweit die drei Angeklagten Verantwortung trugen für die Schüsse an der Mauer. Besonders schwierig auch deshalb, weil der Hauptverantwortliche, Erich Honecker, unter dessen Namen der Prozess zunächst firmierte, nicht mehr auf der Anklagebank saß, ebenso wie die in der DDR Hierarchie über den Beschuldigten stehenden Willy Stoph und Erich Mielke. (“Die Urteile”)

In the end, what was missing for the prosecution to trump up a more serious charge was written evidence of a direct order for border guards to shoot at those fleeing the GDR. During the course of the trial it became common belief that no evidence of such documentation existed because officials gave the orders by word of mouth so that there was no tangible evidence of it (Henard). In post-reunification transitional justice discourse, the word *Schiessbefehl* carried the connotation of incriminating evidence (Winters). The search for a written *Schiessbefehl* in the archives became somewhat of a search for the Holy Grail.

### *The Stasi and its Remains*

Besides prosecuting those blatantly guilty of crimes against humanity committed in the GDR, Germany, after reunification, still had a rather daunting quandary: the question of what was to be done with the abundance of Stasi documents. This was a problem that nearly all Eastern and Central European countries faced after the collapse of communism. East Germany, however, was a unique case. Whereas all other newly formed democracies had to begin from scratch, the former GDR territories were merely combined with the FRG. Thus, after East Germans voted in favor of reunification in 1990, there was immediately a functioning government in place. John Miller explains that this shaped the way in which the *Aufarbeitung* of the communist past was handled: “Energies that elsewhere were expended on institution building could here be directed towards an accounting with the past, a task (it was widely felt) that had been mishandled after the Third Reich” (306). After the fall of the GDR the Stasi quickly became the symbol for state control and inhumanity in East Germany. This tremendous organization is said to have employed two percent of the adult population in the GDR. The documents left behind amounted to 180 and 200 kilometers of shelving (Miller 307-08). It was clear to all that the remnants of the Stasi would have to be dealt with. A December 1, 1990 article in the *Economist* captures the essence of the Stasi problem:

OF ALL the problems facing newly united Germany, the legacy of the Stasi—the former East German Ministry for State Security (*Staatssicherheit*)—looks the most pernicious. The worst strains of economic and political merger will be over after a few painful years. But the poison of the Stasi, for nearly four decades a

master of spying abroad and snooping at home, could linger on much longer.

(“The Undergrowth”)

In late 1989, shortly after the complete collapse of the GDR, East Germans began to dismantle the elaborate spying institution, the Stasi, which had wreaked terror on the citizens of the SED-State for decades. By mid December the institution was officially shut down due to the stark demands of oppositional groups. Already “crowds of demonstrators around the country had occupied or besieged the regional and local offices of the Stasi in cities around East Germany, in part to prevent the destruction of evidence of corruption” (Diehl, “Scrapping Police”). The suspicion was justified; files were being destroyed. Just as Nazis tried to destroy incriminating evidence when their defeat had become imminent, in the fall of 1989 the MfS began to destroy their monstrous paper trail. It is estimated that they successfully expurgated the files of about 500,000 people. The MfS had, furthermore, shredded documents and placed them in sacks, the amount of which equaled about 30,000 meters of shelf space. After this action was stopped in early 1990, 17,000 sacks were saved (Wagner 86). The provisional Modrow Government—between the collapse of the GDR and reunification—was accused of assisting the Stasi in covering its tracks. Hans Modrow, during his short tenure, unsuccessfully tried to transform the MfS into a Department for National Security. Joachim Gauck argued that this idea was not in the interest of the people but rather in the interest of the Stasi clientele. By early 1990, however, the Modrow Government understood that the public outrage over the Stasi was so great that East Germans would not tolerate anything less than the disbanding of the GDR (Gauck, *Die Stasi Akten* 81-2).

And then accusations of Stasi collaboration began to fly. Many prominent political figures in the provisional East German government were discredited through accusations of

being Stasi informants. Even renowned opponents of the regime were accused of having Stasi ties. Some of these accusations were substantiated, others were completely baseless, and still others had substance but with mitigating factors. The problem was the fact that the provisional East German government kept an aura of secrecy surrounding the files; therefore, allegations could not be checked (“East Germany’s Stasi”). Amidst all of this, a March 31, 1990 article in the *Economist* asked, “Is this a last effort by the Stasi, now being wound up, to capsize the new democracy almost before it sets sail?” (“From Stasi with Love”) It was clear that the files would continue to be a problem until they were properly dealt with. The question of what was to be done about the Stasi and its legacy was, perhaps, the most pressing issue at hand for Germany in the early 1990s aside from the trials and the acute economic issues.

With outrage concerning the Stasi so pervasive in East Germany, it is no wonder that there were significant differences of opinion on what was to be done with the files. A September 22, 1990 article in the *Economist* explains the different opinions.

Sifting out the truth is hard because of the row about what should now happen to the Stasi files (all 6m of them). The government believes that allowing people freedom to their files would cause social chaos. According to Mr de Maiziere, once people found out who had informed on them there would be ‘murder and violence’. So the files remain under lock and key. This is not popular with either the East German population or the civil-rights groups that were the motor for last autumn’s peaceful revolution. They believe that the Stasi past needs to be confronted and that people have a right to see their files. (“East Germany’s Stasi”)

Still, other people feared that the files, if opened to the public, could cause a never-ending witch-hunt. They proposed, therefore, that the files be burnt (“From Stasi with Love”). Helmut Kohl, for example, favored this method. This, however, is not what happened to the files.

### **The *Rechtsstaat* and the Stasi files**

#### ***The Birth of the Gauck-Behörde***

The question of what was to be done with the Stasi archives first took on a serious form in early 1990 before the March election which, in turn, brought reunification. The question was made into an issue at the Round Table. After the collapse of the GDR, the Round Table<sup>5</sup>—a quasi parliament at which delegates from different interest groups met—became the structure where dialogue took place at the national level (Maier 176). In a journal article that explains the fate of the Stasi remnants, Joachim Gauck, an important figure in this process who will be discussed later in the chapter, describes the nature of the Stasi question at the Round Table:

Die Frage war: Was sollte mit diesem schlimmen Erbe geschehen? Es galt einerseits zu verhindern, daß mit hochbrisantem Material weiteres Unheil angerichtet würde. Andererseits wollte man Untaten und Funktionsweise des Repressionsapparates aufdecken; vor allem aber verlangten viele Betroffene Aufklärung darüber, Opfer welcher Machenschaften sie geworden und wer die Täter gewesen waren. (Gauck, “Das Erbe” 189)

As Gauck explains, the question of what should be done with the copious amount of Stasi files remained a struggle between those Round Table members who believed they should be destroyed before they could do further harm and those who wanted to preserve them so that victims might learn the truth about their past. In February 1990, sympathizing with the former

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<sup>5</sup> The Roundtable is perceived by some as an attempt by the government to preserve its legitimacy by allowing the oppositional thinkers a voice. By the time of the collapse it had lost all relevance.

argument, the Round Table decided to destroy the electronic data of the MfS. This decision was stopped before all of it was lost; however, portions were destroyed.

After the election in March 1990, the question of what was to be done with the Stasi documents took on a more elaborate form. John Miller maintains that the reunification makes the German case in this regard unique among the former Bloc countries. He writes,

First and most important, an efficient administrative and legal system was available from the moment of unification. Whereas elsewhere post-communist institutions have had to be built up from scratch, in societies often inexperienced in law, democracy and the market, in East Germany, with only minor exceptions, Federal law simply extended to the ‘new *Länder*’, together with thousands of qualified West German personnel. Second was the transition’s unusual focus. Energies that elsewhere were expended on institution building could here be directed towards accounting with the past, a task (it was widely felt) that had been mishandled after the Third Reich. (306)

The leftovers of the MfS were now, first and foremost, made subject to the intricacies of the German *Rechtsstaat*. In 1990-91 the debate about the Stasi files focused on three major points. First, there was a motion to remove the management of the files from the government to an independent institution. The lesson learned from other post-communist societies was that politicians could use the files in order to gain personal political capital. Second, confidentiality was necessary in order to protect the rights of individuals, both victims and perpetrators. Third, an effective system must be produced to deter revenge and vigilantism (Miller 309).

In 1990 the federal government decided to regulate the archival MfS documents by putting them under the supervision of a “specially commissioned” official (*Sonderbeauftragter*)

elected by the parliament. An East German pastor, Joachim Gauck, was nominated for this position and nearly unanimously elected. Gauck's commitment to bringing the past to light and his role as a critic of the SED-regime, who had been watched by the Stasi, made Gauck a perfect candidate. His candidature has much to do with the leading role of the East German Protestant clergy in opposing the regime. The primary task that was given to Gauck was to build a functioning organization to manage the archive (Gauck, "Das Erbe" 190).

By the end of 1991 the federal government passed a comprehensive law concerning the management and regulation of the documents called "das Gesetz über die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz – StUG)" (Gauck, "Das Erbe" 190). This law replaced the number of provisional regulations that were in or related to the Unification Treaty. Miller explains the changes this law brought about in terms of regulating the documents: "The Law puts the Stasi records in the charge of a Federal Commissioner (*Bundesbeauftragter*) for the Documents of the State Security Service of the Former GDR, an independent official elected by the Bundestag for a five-year term, and removable for reasons, and by procedures, similar to the dismissal of judges" (310). Joachim Gauck maintained his position as the overseer of the documents by becoming the first Federal Commissioner of this authority (*Die Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten* BStU) which became simply referred to as the *Gauck-Behörde*.

The greatest significance of this law, however, is stated in the first paragraph, which addresses its purpose.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>§ 1 Zweck und Anwendungsbereich des Gesetzes

(1) Dieses Gesetz regelt die Erfassung, Erschliessung, Verwaltung und Verwendung der  
Unterlagen des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit und seiner Vorläufer-und

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Nachfolgeorganisationen (Staatssicherheitsdienst) der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, um

1. dem Einzelnen Zugang zu den vom Staatssicherheitsdienst zu seiner Person gespeicherten Informationen zu ermöglichen, damit er die Einflussnahme des Staatssicherheitsdienstes auf sein persönliches Schicksal aufklären kann,
2. den Einzelnen davor zu schützen, dass er durch den Umgang mit den vom Staatssicherheitsdienst zu seiner Person gespeicherten Informationen in seinem Persönlichkeitsrecht beeinträchtigt wird,
3. die historische, politische und juristische Aufarbeitung der Tätigkeit des Staatssicherheitsdienstes zu gewährleisten und zu fördern,
4. öffentlichen und nicht öffentlichen Stellen die erforderlichen Informationen für die in diesem Gesetz genannten Zwecke zur Verfügung zu stellen. (*Ein Service der juris GmbH*)

As one can discern, this law was intended to address two major themes: the protection of the rights of those whose names and information—both victims and perpetrators—appear in the documents, as well as to stipulate and define the public usage thereof (Miller 310). With this law serving as its basic foundation and Joachim Gauck as its leader the *Behörde* went forward as the legal keeper of the MfS's remains in post-reunification Germany.

Within one year after the Law was passed the *Gauck-Behörde* employed nearly six hundred, and by the mid 1990s the number of personnel stood around 3,000, the vast majority of whom came from the former GDR. At the core of the *Gauck-Behörde* was the archive. Therefore, the first major problem was the organization of the enormous amount of documents. One task included having to sort out the 17,200 sacks of shredded papers that were left over in

the Berlin Central Archive—1.2 kilometers of these documents were salvaged (Gauck, “Das Erbe” 191-92). All the while requests from people who wanted to review their files were accumulating. Gauck calculates that the average number of monthly requests in 1992 was 52,000; not counted among these, of course, was the work done in coordination with parliamentary committees and state attorneys. Gauck explains that for every individual file examination there were thirteen necessary steps between checking the legalities and re-filing the documents (“Das Erbe” 194). In addition to helping individuals with their personal *Aufarbeitung* of their past experience, the *Gauck-Behörde* was intended to foster public education and discourse on the crimes committed by the dictatorship of the SED.

### ***Controversy Surrounding the Aufarbeitung of the Stasi***

Gauck and his colleagues assisted many in bringing closure to their past. Nevertheless, the *Gauck-Behörde* came under severe criticism by some for not being at all conducive to the public *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Gauck writes, “Es gibt in der Öffentlichkeit – in erster Linie natürlich von einschlägig interessierter Seite – den polemischen Vorwurf, der Bundesbeauftragte leite eine Art ‘Inquisitionsbehörde’” (“Das Erbe” 195). The fact that the MfS had been so expansive with so many personnel—more than 100,000 former agents and a much larger number of informants—makes it not surprising that there was a backlash, primarily in East Germany, against the activities of the *Gauck-Behörde*. One newspaper article from late 1991 addressed this backlash. “A leading Protestant Bishop from eastern Germany, Gottfried Forck, recently asserted that the pursuit of Stasi agents was creating an ‘unbearable climate’ of mistrust among Germans. He urged that investigations of Stasi activities be halted and that ‘the whole thing be allowed to fade away’” (Kinzer, “Germany’s New Custodian”). This particular brand of

criticism of the *Behörde* evinces a perspective on the *Aufarbeitung* of the past that maintains the best way to deal with the past is to lay it to rest in the annals of history.

Criticism of the activities of the *Behörde* increased as files were processed and subsequently more East Germans were revealed as *Mitarbeiter*. Many East German politicians—Wolfgang Schnur, Ibrahim Böhme, Lothar de Maizière and Heinrich Fink to name a few—were revealed as “unofficial collaborators.” “But as denunciations increased, so too did the charges that the Stasi had set up ‘hit lists’ of denunciations to discredit the new politicians” (Maier 312). In the midst of these accusations the *Gauck-Behörde* came under heavy criticism. As mentioned already in this chapter, Chancellor Helmut Kohl was skeptical of activities with the Stasi records and supported the motion to close them off. Manfred Stolpe, the *Ministerpräsident* of the state of Brandenburg, concurred with this notion and expressed his doubt that any truth at all could be attained from files written by the Stasi. Gauck, however, defended the work of the *Behörde*, claiming that he and his colleagues had received a great deal of positive feedback from people whom they had assisted. In a 1994 article which appeared in *German Studies Review*, Gauck cites a letter from a woman, who had used the *Behörde* to find out the truth about her own personal history. The woman wrote about the service the *Behörde* provides, “Auf diese Art kann der Aussöhnung zwischen Opfern und Tätern und der noch ausstehenden geistig-moralischen Vereinigung zwischen Ost und West am besten gedient werden” (“Das Erbe” 194).

Perhaps the general opinion about the *Gauck-Behörde* is best described as ambivalent. In an Op-Ed article that was printed in a November 1993 edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Heribert Prantl sums up the arguments for and against the *Behörde*. He believes that despite the shortcomings, the *Behörde* still provides a necessary service for those who were affected by the Stasi.

Natürlich weiss jeder, dass die Stasi-Akten nicht nur objektive Wahrheiten enthalten. Das ganze Stasi-Unterlagengesetz trägt den Stempel: Vorsicht – die Stasi-Akten geben nur einen Ausschnitt der Wirklichkeit wieder! Vorsicht – diese Akten zeigen nur die Sichtweise der Stasi! Und trotzdem: Diese Akten sind ein wichtiger Schlüssel zur Vergangenheit der DDR; diese Akten helfen den Opfern der Staatssicherheit, sich ihre eigene Biographie wieder anzueignen. Wer es nicht wissen will, stellt keinen Antrag. Indes: Fast zwei Millionen Anträge auf Akteneinsicht sind bislang im Berliner Stasi-Aktenarchiv eingegangen, achthunderttausend davon sind erledigt. Will man dem Rest, also über einer Million Antragstellern sagen, sie mögen doch lieber die Vergangenheit ruhenlassen? (“Das Recht der Opfer”)

This ambivalence persists even at the present, although Gauck has since retired from his post. Recent events, which will be addressed in a later chapter, have once again brought the question about the existence of the *Behörde* back into the media spotlight.

### ***Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur***

In 1998 the “Foundation for the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-Dictatorship” was founded through the passage of a law in the German parliament. The law came into existence at the suggestion of the *Enquete-Kommission*,<sup>7</sup> which was twice assembled (1992 and 1995), in order to find ideas to cultivate the historical *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. At the head of the Foundation is a council whose members are elected on a five year basis. The Foundation takes on various projects that have to do with the SED-dictatorship and its implications for reunified Germany. At

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<sup>7</sup> An *Enquete-Kommission* is a non-partisan committee that is employed at the request of the German parliament either at the federal or the state level in order to find an acceptable way in which a certain problem or question should be solved.

its disposal is an archive of various sources from the GDR. The *Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* defines its objectives as follows:

- fördert und berät Projekte der gesellschaftlichen Aufarbeitung, privater Archive und von Opferverbänden, der Wissenschaft und der politischen Bildung;
- trägt zur Sicherung, Sammlung und Dokumentation von Materialien und Dokumenten insbesondere aus Widerstand und Opposition gegen die SED-Diktatur bei;
- unterstützt Beratung und Betreuung von Opfern politischer Verfolgung;
- fördert die internationale Zusammenarbeit bei der Aufarbeitung von Diktaturen;
- meldet sich mit eigenen Publikationen und Veranstaltungen in der öffentlichen Debatte zu Wort;
- vergibt Stipendien und Preise (*Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung*)

The objectives of the *Stiftung* clearly define its role as the leader of the public *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship in post-reunification Germany. The objectives to collect historical sources about the dictatorship and promote research and publication on opposition within the GDR are similar to the objectives of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, which was established in Munich in the early 1950s to lead the public *Aufarbeitung* of the NS-dictatorship (Weidenfeld and Korte 650). The nature of the research produced through the *Stiftung*, however, suggests that besides the public *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship there is also a motive to legitimize the reunification of Germany by de-legitimizing the existence of the GDR. By producing historical publications that contribute to this collective national narrative, the public *Aufarbeitung* in this case could also be called political *Aufarbeitung*.

### **Conclusion**

The crimes of the SED-regime, primarily those concerning the secret police, the Stasi, presented a rather unexpected roadblock to German reunification in the early 1990s. Most Germans reasoned that there would be some type of legal and political action taken to hold those

most responsible for crimes committed against humanity accountable. This point was not only argued from the standpoint of those who had fallen victim to state crimes committed in the GDR, but was also propelled by the post-World War II West German concept of “working through” or *Aufarbeitung* of the past. After World War II, West Germany moved forward with the belief that in order to become and maintain a healthy and free society it would have to deal with and address the atrocities of the Third Reich. This included recognition of both perpetrators of the crimes and the victims, which, in turn, led to judicial and non-judicial actions. This concept of *Aufarbeitung* was carried over to the German reunification process. It was believed that in order for an East German-West German reconciliation to occur, the reunification process would need to include an element of transitional justice for those who were victims of state crimes committed in the GDR. This proved to be a complicated and difficult task.

There was, of course, among the public a sense of urgency to see those most responsible for the crimes held culpable. The judicial process which ensued, however, did little to satisfy the public desire for the judicial *Aufarbeitung* of the crimes committed by the SED-regime. The German government found itself restricted by its own constitution in terms of what it could do in this area of transitional justice. Nevertheless, some actors were held responsible and received sentences. At the very least, this provided some victims a sense of justice and closure. Next, there was the issue of the Stasi. After the collapse of communism in Europe, the question of what was to be done with the secret police was an important issue all over the former Bloc. Most of these secret police networks were enormous; therefore, mass trials and sentences were not feasible or practical. *Lustration*, the purging of former secret police from government positions, became the primary solution to this in most cases. This provided the public with a sense that some measure of punishment had been taken.

The German case, however, was an exception. Shortly after the collapse of the GDR, Germany was reunified. Whereas most other countries had to build new institutions from scratch after the collapse of communism, the former GDR was merely incorporated into the existing West German government. This saved time, energy and resources which in other countries were used to build new institutions. The Germans, therefore, were able to spend more time and energy on details of the *Aufarbeitung* of the past. This is manifested in what was done with the enormous amount of documents that were left over from the Stasi. Instead of destroying the documents—as some wanted to do—or closing them off from the public, the German government passed a law, *das Stasi Unterlagen-Gesetz*. This law dictated that the Stasi documents would be stored, organized and protected in an archive to be controlled by a federally commissioned authority, which would oversee that the files were used in a way that contributed to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship: this authority was the *Gauck-Behörde*.

The *Behörde* was and still is the subject of much debate. Some have argued that this is not conducive to dealing with the past because it is the source of much conflict; thus, the *Aufarbeitung* would be better served by laying this part of the GDR past to rest. In regard to the *Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*, there is no question that this organization makes a contribution to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Nevertheless, it could be speculated that the projects and research produced at the *Stiftung* are not completely independent. In conclusion, it is not the purpose of this chapter to judge whether or not the *Behörde* or the *Stiftung* is good or bad for the *Aufarbeitung*, but rather the purpose is to show that this all belongs to the realm of the political and legal *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR past which is comprised of official undertakings. The next chapter will focus on some expressions from another realm of

the *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR past: the unofficial literary realm. This realm consists of textual expressions since 1989 that depict the German Democratic Republic.

## PART II

### THE LITERARY *AUFARBEITUNG* OF THE SED-DICTATORSHIP

*Each stage of this process builds on the last.  
Cognitive scientists tell us that the repetition of  
words and images strengthens the synapses  
connecting the neurons in the neural circuits  
that compute, in our heads, the meaning of those  
words and images. With time, these mental  
associations become electrochemically hard-  
wired.*

-Timothy Garton Ash,  
“The Stasi on Our Minds” (2007)

## CHAPTER 2: FOUNDATIONS OF THE STASI DISCOURSE

Part I of this thesis deals with the political and legal measures the German government enacted to address the wrongdoings of the GDR in order to make the transition to reunification as smooth as possible; in other words, the official *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Part II focuses on a different realm of the *Aufarbeitung*, the artistic context. To the unofficial realm belong the cultural representations of the GDR which contribute to the collective German memory of the GDR. Cultural representations, which will be examined as cases in point, include both literary and filmic forms and comprise both autobiographical and fictional narratives. Due to the fact that the accounts span an array of personal experiences in the GDR, the representations are varied and the opinions espoused are mixed. The political and legal *Aufarbeitung*, which is mostly a top-down process, has in some ways attempted to standardize the memory of the GDR, whereas the literary *Aufarbeitung* is led by the cultural sector and contains an assortment of different representations of the GDR. The literary realm has been the more dynamic realm of *Aufarbeitung*, and in many respects, more democratic in that it is open to alternative opinions of the GDR as shall be seen.

### **Background**

#### ***East German Literature 1976-1993***

To say the least, throughout the forty years of the GDR's existence, the East German literati maintained a peculiar relationship with the political elite. In Marxist-Leninist tradition the arts were allotted a specific purpose in socialist society: to advance the revolution. Artists whose art was deemed conducive to the revolution were met with praise and favor. Artists whose works did not meet these standards were censored and sometimes persecuted. In the GDR many intellectuals who were at one time dedicated communists fell out of favor with the regime for

their criticism of socialist society and were subsequently pushed out of the GDR. The most famous case of this was the poet and balladeer Wolf Biermann. In 1976 Biermann, who like other accomplished GDR citizens had a visa to travel outside the GDR, performed a concert in Cologne during which he mocked the regime. At the end of Biermann's tour, he was denied reentry into the GDR (Maier 31). The Biermann affair was a major turning point: thereafter many intellectuals became disillusioned with the system and remained so until its demise. Some of these took on an openly critical stance *vis-à-vis* the regime, while others repressed these feelings and remained quiet. Those who were most vociferous in their criticisms of the regime were well aware they would catch the watchful eye of the Stasi. Many writers were nonetheless surprised at the degree to which the Stasi would become involved in their lives.

After the collapse of the GDR, a wave of literature that dealt with the Stasi and state control came out shortly after the collapse of the GDR because it was the first time writers were able to express openly their opinions on such topics without the threat of censorship and further retribution. The topic of writer and Stasi became a dominant theme of German literature in the early 1990s for several additional reasons. First, in 1990 the GDR author *par excellence*, Christa Wolf, published *Was bleibt*, an account of a writer's experience with the Stasi, which she had already written in 1979. *Was bleibt* "resulted in strong public rebuke of the author for her depiction of self as victim and her failure to speak out against state repression during the decade prior to the fall of the regime" (Bathrick 219). Second, authors, such as Erich Loest, who were openly critical of the regime and subsequently came under Stasi surveillance, were able to look into their personal Stasi files and find out for themselves how much the Stasi had been involved in their personal affairs. Loest published material from his personal files in two autobiographical accounts, *Der Zorn des Schafes* (1990) and *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann: oder mein Leben mit*

*der Wanze* (1991), in order to demonstrate how much the Stasi was involved with his everyday life. Third, it was revealed that two influential East German poets, Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski, had worked as “unofficial informants” (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* or IM) for the Stasi. This revelation turned out to be the impetus for the so called *Literaturstreit* which ensued. Explaining the significance of this disclosure, David Bathrick writes that “to have the leading spokesperson and chief literary entrepreneur of the dissident Prenzlauer Berg artists, Sascha Anderson, outed as a Stasi agent was taken by some as further proof of an all-pervasive, ever-corrupting control of GDR intellectuals from above” (219). The final event to shake the world of German literature came in 1993 when it was revealed that Christa Wolf herself had been in contact with the Stasi. Each of these occurrences would be interesting to examine at greater length on its own.<sup>8</sup> However, this thesis will examine these developments with a certain question in mind: what significance do they have to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship?

### ***Christa Wolf Controversy Begins***

German reunification caused a series of intense intellectual debates which at times attained the spotlight of international media attention. Among the most intense and most famous of these debates belongs the *Literaturstreit*. The origins of this particular debate can be traced to Christa Wolf’s decision to publish her semi-autobiographical work *Was bleibt*. It is difficult to determine whether the controversy that the piece caused is representative of how tense and full

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<sup>8</sup> For further reference on this subject see: Thomas Anz, ed., *“Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf”: Der Literaturstreit im vereinigten Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995); Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1996).

of emotion this era was or of how contentious the substance of the work is. It is likely that the great splash the book caused can be attributed to both reasons.

As already mentioned, *Was bleibt* had been written by Wolf in 1979 following the Biermann expatriation in 1976. Already in the aftermath of the Biermann affair, Wolf's behavior can best be described as ambivalent. She signed a letter protesting Biermann's expatriation which she later retracted under government pressure. Wolf, therefore, showed both signs of courage and weakness vis-à-vis the system. The manuscript of *Was bleibt* was tucked away in a drawer until she decided to bring a revised edition of the manuscript into print in the spring of 1990. The release of *Was bleibt* opened up, on the one hand, the post-reunification discourse on the Stasi. Many more works, autobiographical and fictional, were to follow. On the other hand, however, *Was bleibt* forced the question of who among the East German literati was victim and who was a *Mitläufer* (conformist) or even *Mitarbeiter* (collaborators). For the purpose of this thesis it is important to ask what contribution the text *Was bleibt* provides to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Before concentrating anymore on the aftermath of *Was bleibt*, the focus should now turn to the content of the text.

*Was bleibt* is a semi-autobiographical account of life as an author under Stasi surveillance in 1979. The first-person point of view—in addition to other similarities between the narrator and the author—allows the reader to assume that there is for Wolf some definite personal connection to the narrative. The story spans the length of a day, from the time she wakes up in the morning to when she goes to bed at night. This day is filled with the mundane, ordinary comings and goings a renowned author might experience on a daily basis. But there is also something very unusual about this journal-like narrative: one gets the sense that the Stasi is

keeping a close watch on the narrator as she writes. With the Stasi lurking in the shadows, this account of a day in the life of an author, then, is by no means normal at all.

As the author wakes up in the morning the thought of the Stasi spying on her is among the first things that come to her mind. Before she begins her day, even before she brushes her teeth, the narrator must check to see if the Stasi agents are outside of her apartment building at their usual outpost in the parking lot. She reflects on this routine, “So stand ich also, wie jeden Morgen, hinter der Gardine, die dazu angebracht worden war, daß ich mich hinter ihr verbergen konnte, und blickte, hoffentlich ungesehen, hinüber zum großen Parkplatz jenseits der Friederichstraße” (10). It is clear in this passage that the narrator perceives herself to be confined or imprisoned in her own home. The idea that the curtains were installed for the sole purpose of keeping the watchful eye of the Stasi at bay seems to be her meek but only defense against the spying of the Stasi.

Although the civil liberties of the narrator are clearly being violated, this account is written in a moderate tone, especially when compared with the literary accounts about state control in the GDR that followed *Was bleibt*. This moderate tone is also evident in the title *Was bleibt* (*What Remains*). When interpreted as a question, the title seems as if it were something of a sigh of hopelessness. This is in stark contrast to literature about the Stasi that directly followed the release of *Was bleibt*. The title of Erich Loest’s first autobiographical account of his experience with the Stasi, for instance, is titled *Der Zorn des Schafes* (*The Wrath of the Sheep*). This moderation also extends to the narrator’s feelings toward the Stasi agents who observe her from a car outside her apartment on a daily basis. But as they observe her comings and goings, she also observes them. At nine o’clock in the morning the young agents are at their outpost outside her apartment. She observes the traits of the young agents and finds them to be human,

perhaps all too human. As she familiarizes herself with the hair of one, she thinks to herself, “Einen Augenblick lang hatte ich mir in der Vorstellung gefallen, daß ich als erste die beginnende Glatze des jungen Herrn bemerkte, eher als seine eigene Frau, die womöglich nie derart aufmerksam auf ihn herabsah” (16). The narrator cannot find it in herself to hate these young agents, whom she makes out to be not the most skillful and seasoned secret police as she is quite aware of their presence, appearance and takes note of their vehicle colors. The reason for her ambivalence toward the young men is that they are merely following orders from their superiors, “Sie waren Abgesandte des Anderen” (21).

As the narrator observes the young Stasi agents the figure of Martin Luther passes through her thoughts. “Doktor Martin Luther, der mir weismachen wollte, daß wir nur zustimmen oder ablehnen, Freund oder Feind sein können. Deine Rede sei ja, ja und nein, nein. Was darüber ist, ist vom Übel” (18). From this passage one can detect that Luther is presented as a symbol of moral rigor and with that said, a bifurcating morality. This absolute morality can also be ascribed to the fierce opposition to the GDR from the West. Throughout the day, the author searches for a language. In one of the first sentences of the narrative, she asks, “Würde ich meine Sprache je finden?” (7) Stephen Brockmann has linked the search for language in *Was bleibt* to the binary support for and opposition to the GDR. Brockmann believes she is seeking a new language “between two possible masculine uses of language, embodied, on the one hand, by the opposition or by the West, with their moral denunciations of the GDR, and, on the other, by the state and the Stasi, the narrator seeks a feminine third” (78). This so called “third way” causes her not to hate the young men outside her apartment who are doing their job. “Was mir fehlte, war wahrscheinlich ein gesunder nivellierender Haß” (18). In fact she even entertains the thought of bringing the young men tea,

Daraus hätte sich eine Gewohnheit entwickeln können, persönlich hatten wir doch nichts gegeneinander, jeder von uns tat, was er tun mußte, man hätte ins Gespräch kommen können – nicht über Dienstliches, Gott bewahre! - , aber über das Wetter, über Krankheiten, Familiäres. (20)

The statement about state control in the GDR that Christa Wolf articulates in *Was bleibt*, as Brockmann points out, seems to anticipate the literary debates that were about to ensue in reunified Germany. Wolf argues for a mediation between the two binary positions. *Was bleibt* reflects Wolf's personal place as a writer in the GDR. Wolf was the long-time author *par excellence* in the GDR and because of that she enjoyed special privileges; nevertheless, after Biermann's expatriation Wolf became critical of the regime. Georgina Paul writes,

Wolf's position after November 1989 was shaped by the legacy of this ambiguity: renowned around the world for her critical stance towards the SED regime, she was, as public figure, nevertheless inextricably bound up with the existence of the GDR as a socialist state, to the extent that she had become a kind of totemic figure in the public perception. (91)

After *Was bleibt* appeared in print in 1990, it created a tidal wave of responses that shaped the post-reunification literary discourse on the Stasi. *Was bleibt* was the object of many critics' scorn in 1990. Her critics accused her of lacking courage for not releasing it until after the collapse of the GDR. They argued that if she had released it earlier it would have proven her opposition to the system. The most famous critiques came from Ulrich Greiner and Frank Schirrmacher who both charged Wolf of being a sympathizer of the SED state. Brockmann, however, points out that what the critics did not understand was the fact that the narrator in *Was*

*bleibt* is already self-critical, perhaps more hard on herself than any critic was on Christa Wolf (81).

The importance of *Was bleibt*, though, should not be sought in the swirl of controversy which surrounds it, but rather it is found in its significance within the realm of the unofficial *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Georgina Paul argues that *Was bleibt* was the forerunner among literary texts that contributed to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. She compares and contrasts *Was bleibt* to *Die Stasi-Akten*, Joachim Gauck's *Sachbuch* or non-fictional account of the Stasi that was published around the same time as *Was bleibt*. Paul believes that both kinds of accounts are essential to the unofficial *Aufarbeitung*. However, *Was bleibt* created a special place for literary accounts within this space. She writes,

If both works can be understood as contributions to a social process of coming to terms with the socio-psychological legacy of the Stasi, Wolf's text, as a literary text, of course functions very differently. By unfolding a first-person literary narrative about the effects of Stasi surveillance, it offers an identificatory figure in respect of whom individual readers can consider their own personal experiences, an account which they can (in the terms of Schlenstedt's 'Wirkungsästhetik,' cited earlier) 'mit ihrem Erleben, ihren Erfahrungen, ihren Werten, ihren Haltungen anreichern.' Moreover, the nature of the narrative allows far greater psychological detail than is to be found in Gauck's book. And, to the extent that it offers in the second half a very personal narrative about her public role as writer, Wolf's text also raises characteristic questions about the author's personal weakness and failure which shift the onus of authority away from her as public figurehead to

those who emerge as the bearers of the utopian hope of community in the future in the narrative's later stages. (99)

The fact that the reader can relate *Was bleibt* to his/her personal experiences demonstrates the importance of the literary text to the *Aufarbeitung*. The fact that the narrator felt trapped in her own house, the fact that she knows someone who works for the Stasi, the fact that she had fear, the moral ambiguity that is conveyed, these all are things someone might have experienced. Gauck's book, on the other hand, is written from the perspective of a post-GDR hero, someone who experienced the repression of the GDR because of his unrelenting moral positions, who became a hero after the Wall fell.

### ***Sascha Anderson versus Wolf Biermann***

Wolf Biermann, who had always been a moralist, transformed into an absolute moralist after his expatriation from the GDR in 1976. This absolute moralism of Biermann was demonstrated in his position in the *Literaturstreit* in the early 1990s. As hinted at above, some, such as Brockmann, have credited *Was bleibt* for having prophetic qualities, in that it predicted the taking of extreme moral positions. The narrator tells herself that she would not be a Martin Luther and moralize in terms of black and white, but rather she would seek a more in-between route. In the context of the *Literaturstreit*, Wolf Biermann, in contrast to the narrator, took the Martin Luther position against East German literati who had collaborated with the Stasi.

The figure onto whom Biermann directed the brunt of his Luther-like fury was Sascha Anderson. Although much has been written on the *Literaturstreit*, Anderson remains, in some ways, a sort of enigmatic figure. In Joachim Walther's thorough study of the relations between East German authors and the Stasi, he finds that "in der Vita Andersons gibt es einige

bemerkenswerte weiße Flecken” (639). There are several areas of Anderson’s past, such as his whereabouts and dates that do not add up. Nevertheless, one can surmise, as does Walther, what he was doing during these times. For instance, Anderson was sentenced to a year incarceration in 1979; however, prison records do not indicate that he ever spent time as an inmate. Walther speculates that Anderson perhaps received training for his later work during this time period.

After his “release” from prison at the end of 1979 Anderson took up a job as janitor at a church in Dresden. Around the same time he worked his way into the East German alternative art scene, as he also wrote poetry. It appears that Anderson systematically worked his way up within this subculture becoming one of the most renowned persons among the young authors and painters in the Prenzlauer Berg, which is considered the bohemian district of East Berlin. By 1984 Anderson had attained recognition as a leader within the artist scene. It should be mentioned that also by this time he was already a long-time unofficial collaborator of the Stasi. However, Anderson, as Walther points out, embodies a new kind of collaborator: “Da das intelligente Konzept des MfS in den achtziger Jahren, wie bereits beschrieben, nicht mehr das ‘Zerschlagen’ solcher Gruppen, sondern das Beherrschen und Umprofilieren von innen heraus vorsah, war es Andersons Hauptaufgabe, die Szene am Prenzlauer Berg zu entpolitisieren” (Walther 640). Anderson, who was seen as a provocative, but yet influential poet in the Prenzlauer Berg artist scene until his “exile” in 1986, informed and spied on fellow artists. Anderson, however, was not the only Stasi collaborator within the art scene. Rainer Schedlinski, another figure associated with the scene, was also active as a collaborator of the Stasi in the 1980s. After the fall of the GDR these two figures were no longer able to hide their past from the public eye.

Not long after the appearance of *Was bleibt*, it was made public that the Stasi was quite extensively involved with East German authors. In 1991 Biermann was awarded the Büchner Prize at the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. It was in his speech at this event that he called attention to the fact that, while some from the literary scene, such as himself, had suffered at the hands of the SED, figures such as Sascha Anderson assisted the Stasi in persecuting others. Biermann roused a conflict with his provocative language, for instance by referring to Anderson as the “unbegabte Schwätzer Sascha Arschloch” (Hoebel). In doing so, however, Biermann polarized the issue; German literary figures either aligned themselves with the Biermann camp or they sympathized with Anderson. This formed a new phase for what is referred to as the *Literaturstreit*.

Biermann’s forceful moral absolutism—his condensing the debate to black and white, good versus evil—caused many to find his tactics distasteful. In fact, his refusal to accept the notion of a gray area in between good and evil gave some people a reason to sympathize with Anderson. Biermann complained about the irony in the fact that it was he, not those like Anderson and Schedlinski, who was being taken to task by some critics for pointing out the culpability of those who informed on their friends and colleagues. One can discern the tension surrounding this issue in a 1991 newspaper article by Wolfgang Hoebel:

Man solle bloß nicht den Täter zum Opfer stilisieren, haben kluge Kommentatoren in den vergangenen Wochen immer wieder gewarnt. Tatsächlich sind die Sympathien des Publikums nicht mehr so klar verteilt wie zu Beginn dieser Affäre, als Sascha Anderson in einem Fernsehstudio dem Ankläger Wolf Biermann gegenüber saß. Damals belehrte Biermann, Bundesbürger seit seiner Zwangsausreise aus der DDR 1976, den Ostberliner Dichter Anderson mit

höhnisch auftrumpfender Geste und jener etwas dumpfen Eitelkeit, die den Selbstdarsteller Biermann auch für seine Liebhaber mitunter schwer erträglich macht, damals also belehrte Biermann den jüngeren Kontrahenten über die Feinheiten des menschlichen Umgangs in der bundesrepublikanischen Gesellschaft: Hier sage man nicht so leicht “Du” zueinander wie seinerzeit in der DDR, eine solche Vertraulichkeit müsse man sich hart erkämpfen. Der onkelhafte Rachegott belehrte einen verunsicherten, stammelnden Sünder eine Gruselnummer. (Hoebel)

This passage conveys how volatile the subject of literature and Stasi had become. If Wolf's *Was bleibt* began the literary discourse on the Stasi, the Biermann and Anderson conflict added a certain intensity, which in turn expanded it.

### ***Christa Wolf in the Spotlight again***

This chapter has thus far argued that the publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* marks the beginning of this early period of the literary discourse of the Stasi, which was shortly afterward followed by the *Literaturstreit* beginning with the conflict between Biermann and Anderson. The *Literaturstreit*, however, did not begin and end with the Biermann/Anderson affair, nor would this early period of the literary discourse of the Stasi end without Christa Wolf returning once more to the limelight. In early 1993 Wolf disclosed that she, beginning in 1959, had served for three years as an unofficial collaborator for the Stasi. As one might imagine, critics who had accused Wolf of trying to play the victim card with the publication of *Was bleibt* in 1990 felt vindicated by the release of this information. Wolf's defense was that she was then not fully aware of what she was doing and that she did not provide the Stasi information that

damaged anyone's life. What ensued was a full assault on Wolf's character, while her camp tried to lay stress on the mitigating factors surrounding the ordeal.

It all began in 1992 when Christa Wolf decided to look into her *Opferakte*, the files the Stasi had kept on her beginning with the year 1969. The way in which the Prague Spring was put down by the Warsaw Pact forces in 1968 marks the year in which her personal feelings toward her country changed. As the story goes, while Wolf was finding out for the first time exactly how much the Stasi had spied on her she found evidence that there existed a Stasi file for her of another nature: that of an unofficial collaborator, *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (IM). These files, unlike the *Opferakte*, are open to the public but closed to those who were involved with the Stasi. This file was dated from 1959-1962.

In January of 1993 Wolf decided to go public with this information. Of course many critics questioned why she had waited so long to go public with this information. To this Wolf commented:

Of course, I asked myself whether I should go to the public with this discovery. . . . I was very reluctant to allow my criticisms of the G.D.R. to be attested to by the Stasi: I wanted my books and my behavior, which are well known and of which I need not be ashamed, to be valued as evidence. I have nothing to 'confess' except for the fact that I did not see the role of the Stasi more than 30 years ago with the same severity as later. (Gitlin)

In this statement Wolf is responding to articles in *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit* which were quick to attack her. One of these by Fritz J. Raddatz, who had previously considered himself a loyal fan, wrote: "How can one produce significant work, indeed, turn oneself inside out, and at the same time share a sofa with these bloodhounds? . . . Did you blindfold your eyes, stuff your ears and

turn off your brain? . . . One does not speak with murderers” (Gitlin). As one might discern from the passages above, this development was another factor that intensified the literary discourse on the Stasi.

While critics unleashed their fury upon Wolf, others, however, found her explanation plausible. In a 1993 interview she explained that she did not know what she was doing, since the Stasi did not have the same meaning for her then as it did in the 1990s or even the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, she expressed her disenchantment with the fact that the media was not telling the whole story, that she was also a victim of the Stasi (Gaus 21-23). Shortly after she went public, other literary figures such as Gunter de Bruyn and playwright Heiner Müller disclosed that they too had been unofficial collaborators. The importance that this development had for the literary discourse on the Stasi was that it blurred the distinction between victim and perpetrator, even though some such as Biermann had attempted to make black and white the distinction between good and evil. In terms of the unofficial *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship, this case further complicated it and showed that there were many more questions to be answered.

### ***The Outrage of East German Authors***

As the Stasi files were opened up to its victims after reunification, East German authors were able for the first time to learn the truth about how the regime had affected their personal lives. For some authors, such as Erich Loest, it came as no surprise that the Stasi had kept records on him. However, the methodical and systematic way in which the Stasi had stretched its tentacles into all facets of his personal life shocked him. He was certainly not the only author to be shocked after finding out to what degree the Stasi had involved itself in his personal life, so his extensive publications on his discoveries stand for many others. The works that were

produced in the wake of these revelations mark a distinct trend in the literary discourse on the Stasi most characterized by the outrage authors directed at the SED and its loyalists.

Perhaps there is no better figure among East German authors than Erich Loest to represent the outrage that characterizes this moment in the literary discourse on the Stasi. Loest, who was sentenced to seven years incarceration for political reasons in 1957, suffered at the hands of the state as much as any other author in the GDR. After his release from prison he avoided having further problems with the state by writing apolitical detective novels. Upon Wolf Biermann's expatriation, which was a turning point for many others, Loest remained quiet. He recalls, "Still saß ich im fernen Leipzig. Ich war Biermann nie begegnet. Jetzt fragte mich keine der streitenden Parteien, ob ich mich auf ihre Seite schlug. Gut so, meinte ich, ich muß nicht in jede Kreissäge, die sich da dreht, den Finger stecken" (Loest, *Der Zorn* 91). Still, Loest was not able to avoid the attention of the state for long.

Loest's two books *Der Zorn des Schafes* (1990) and *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann: oder mein Leben mit der Wanze* (1991) both document his life from the time the Stasi focused its sights on him to the collapse of the GDR and the discovery of his Stasi files. *Der Zorn des Schafes* is the more autobiographical of the two, in which Loest recounts his life in this time period as he remembers it. He supports these memories by inserting comprehensive Stasi reports on his daily life that eerily correspond to his memories. In this sense, *Der Zorn des Schafes* is not a typical autobiographical work because the narrative is not singularly expressed through the first person point of view, but rather is expressed through a combination of Loest's first person and the Stasi's third person point of view. By combining his point of view with that of the Stasi, *Der Zorn des Schafes* functions as a dialogue between Loest and the Stasi about his own past. On one hand it is one man's struggle to come to terms with a troubled past. But when taken into

consideration that this story is just one among many, it demonstrates the monumental workload of an entire society that still needed to be done with the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship.

Like Wolf's *Was bleibt*, *Der Zorn des Schafes* demonstrates the hardships of East German authors under the GDR. It especially demonstrates the Kafkaesque process of getting something published in the GDR. Authors had to go to great lengths to get a manuscript in the works for publication only to be denied for unclear reasons by a nameless and faceless censor. The search for a voice in *Was bleibt*, then, is also a theme in *Der Zorn des Schafes*; what use to society are authors if they have no voice or at least no authentic voice? Unlike Wolf, however, Loest does not search for a moderate voice between absolute moralism and moral relativism to explain his experiences in the GDR. Loest's tone is clearly that of outrage.

As mentioned above, after Loest was released from his seven-year incarceration in 1964, he went through a period of nearly two decades of political aloofness. In 1979, however, Loest became a prime target for the Stasi after he and several other authors signed a text directed at Erich Honecker which protested the punishment that author Stefan Heym had received after publishing a book in the West without first seeking clearance in the GDR. After this, the Stasi began closely watching Loest. Moreover, he was in contact with a church group, which was frowned upon in the GDR. Loest's son Thomas warned him to be careful because the Stasi was probably watching him: "Du wirst abgehört, Vater, sie kontrollieren deine Post, sie überwachen dich in jeder nur denkbaren Weise!" (Loest, *Der Zorn* 148) Loest dismissed this assertion, assuming that they would not waste their time on an author of modest fame. He found out how wrong he was when he got hold of his Stasi file which consisted of over 900 pages of detailed reports on his personal life (Schoeller).

Loest and the seven others who signed the text quickly lost all standing as authors in the GDR. He was soon forced to resign from the GDR writer's association. Loest recalls, "Für mich schlossen sich nun in der DDR alle Tore, es blieb nur noch die Ausreise" (*Der Zorn* 163). In 1981 Loest left Leipzig with the understanding that upon leaving the GDR he would not be granted reentry for three years. The chapter titled "Die Stasi war mein Eckermann" describes the year between his resignation from the writer's association and his departure from the GDR. What is unique about this chapter, however, is that he uses Stasi documents to narrate this year of his life. "Über dieses Jahr gebe ich den anderen das Wort" (*Der Zorn* 189). It makes a powerful impression on the reader to know that his life was so closely monitored in this year that the documentation can tell the story on its own.

This personal *Aufarbeitung* of Loest's troubled past functions in one respect as a catharsis of his outrage toward the injustices he experienced in the GDR. Then again, *Der Zorn des Schafes* also is an expression of the sadness involved in having to leave one's *Heimat*. For Loest, an author whose favorite topic is his home state of Saxony and more specifically Leipzig, this was especially troubling, since, as Wilfried Schoeller points out, Loest is "wie gegenwärtig kein anderer, als 'Saxozentrist' der Künder seiner Gegend und ein gebeultelter dazu." Of course there were many disadvantages that accompanied leaving the GDR. The idea of leaving his family and friends was especially disheartening to Loest, but they understood his difficult position as an author. One Stasi document describes a conversation he and his wife had with a friend in their bugged apartment in early 1981 in which Loest tells his reason for wanting to leave the GDR. The report reads:

L. [Loest] sagt dazu, für ihn ist es entschieden: Schreiben für die Schublade kann er nicht. Er muß wissen, er schreibt das nicht für sich, sondern für eine

Veröffentlichung, die relativ nahe, greifbar und absehbar ist. Lange empfindet es auch nicht besonders gut, wenn ein Schriftsteller nicht für hier, für unsere Leute, schreibt. (*Der Zorn* 214)

Loest's argument for leaving is particularly interesting when one recalls some of the criticism Christa Wolf received for keeping the manuscript of *Was bleibt* in a drawer and publishing it only after the GDR had collapsed. For Loest, however, "Schreiben für die Schublade" was not an option.

After the Stasi documents narrate their perspective on the events concerning his departure to West Germany, the narrative returns to Loest's point-of-view on leaving his home in the first person. In doing this, he breaks from the pure factual autobiographical style he uses to narrate the majority of the book and introduces a partially fictional subplot: Loest and his fictional lover Lipsia. Loest portrays Lipsia—the Italian name for Leipzig—as his lover. This of course is a personification of his love for his home city Leipzig. In this scene Lipsia accompanies him to the train station as he is departing the GDR. Lipsia asks him, "Kommst du wieder?" He replies, "Ich weiß es nicht." As the train is departing he shouts out the window, "Aber ich werde über dich schreiben!" (*Der Zorn* 226) In this scene Loest expresses the uncertainty that lay ahead of him and the heartbreak that accompanied his departure from his home. The only way in which he could stay connected to his home was to write about it.

After Loest's departure, *Der Zorn des Schafes* then describes his time living outside the GDR. In between the accounts of the adventures Loest experienced as an East German author outside the GDR, Loest continues to include Stasi documents about himself in order to show that even though the state had pushed him into exile, it continued to spy on him and his family. Loest returned to Leipzig for the first time in 1988 on a week-long excursion with an educational

delegation of West German teachers. As one might suspect the Stasi followed his every move. In describing his return to Leipzig, Loest uses once again the subplot with his fictional lover Lipsia. As they are once again reunited Loest affectionately tells her, “Ich habe immer an dich gedacht” (*Der Zorn* 344). Not long after this visit, in December 1989, Loest returned once again to East Germany; by this time, however, the circumstances were different because the GDR had already collapsed: Loest was once again a “Leipziger.”

The last chapter of the book Loest dedicates to explaining what he did in terms of the *Aufarbeitung* of his own past and his thoughts on what still needed to be done concerning the public *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. In 1990 Loest was back in court. This time, however, he was there to have his name cleared of the charges that landed him a sentence of seven years incarceration more than thirty years beforehand. Loest also gathers the strength to revisit the prison in Bautzen which was for seven years his home. In doing this Loest is able to provide himself with some sort of closure in order for him to be able to move forward. In closing Loest writes, “Es gibt zu tun in Leipzig, Bonn und anderswo. Autor und Verlag möchten dabei sein” (*Der Zorn* 395). With this closing statement Loest is expressing his opinion that literature is and will be an important part of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship and that the *Aufarbeitung* not only consists of the official *Aufarbeitung* which the politicians in Bonn and Leipzig mandate, but it also includes the unofficial *Aufarbeitung* of literature.

In 1991 Loest published another book, *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann: oder mein Leben mit der Wanze*. Like *Der Zorn des Schafes*, *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann* is an autobiographical account of Loest’s personal life. However, the narrative of this book is told mostly through Stasi documents. A similar book is Reiner Kunze’s *Deckname >>Lyrik<<* (1990). Unlike Kunze’s work, which is almost exclusively made up of Stasi reports on him,

Loest begins by telling the story of how these documents came into his possession. Loest also includes a short section at the end that consists of newspaper articles.

Loest begins, “Es war wie im Krimi: Eine Frau ließ sich ausrichten, eine andere Frau möchte mir einige Zettel zeigen, auf ihnen stünde mein Name. Und der eines Stasi-Majors. Die Papiere stammten von 1978, ob ich wohl an ihnen Interesse hätte?” (*Die Stasi* 9) This is a befitting introduction because of the detective-like narrative that unfolds. Loest went on to meet with this mysterious woman and eventually bought the 300 page set of documents about him. He clarifies this strange sale by explaining that while some Stasi documents were going through the shredders in 1989, others were going through copy machines. What Loest found both confused and shocked him; he had to further investigate the terms and abbreviations in the documents in order to understand them. Like Kunze, Loest found many shocking details in the papers. Their mail was opened, their telephones tapped and they were reported on. The latter was probably the most hard for them to stomach. For Kunze “it is sad to note that people [he] liked and trusted are included in this group” (Glenn 186). The same goes for Loest. Many could probably not stomach reading hundreds of pages, word for word, about how people they trusted spied on them. Loest writes, “Ich wußte: Manche wollten gar nicht wissen, wie sie gelebt worden waren. Ich mußte da durch” (*Die Stasi* 15). It is his belief that only the pure, albeit harsh, truth could bring closure to this issue. Loest ends his commentary on his personal *Aufarbeitung* on a positive note. He explains, “Jetzt heißt der oberste Hüter aller Stasi-Akten Joachim Gauck. Ich setze auf ihn” (*Die Stasi* 16).

After reading the accounts from Kunze and Loest one notices that these works were partially intended to expose the Stasi agents who interfered in their lives. In this sense these works are mild reprisals directed toward those who had interfered greatly with their personal

lives. It is, however, disturbing to see that in both cases the officers in charge landed political positions after reunification. In a 1990 interview Loest expressed disgust that after reunification it “ist zu schnell und zu ausnahmslos über die Pension für die Täter geredet worden” (Schoeller). Clearly, Loest and Kunze had much to be angry about.

It appears that the primary motive for both Loest and Kunze to produce these works was to expose the activities of the Stasi, especially those agents who worked on their cases, and to provide themselves with a sense of closure. To be sure, both of these works served an important purpose in the discourse concerning state control in the GDR. Now, nearly twenty years since the collapse of the GDR, hardly anyone would argue that human rights abuses were non-existent in the GDR. However, in the early 1990s a battle over the legacy of the GDR was being waged. It was important for victims of the SED-dictatorship to enter this discourse and to present evidence of how they were victims. This is exactly the intention of Loest and Kunze. They offer to this discourse proof of the transgressions against them and proof for the ages and the full extent of the crimes against humanity perpetrated in the GDR.

### **Conclusion**

The year 1990 witnessed the beginning of the literary discourse on the Stasi with the publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*. For this publication Wolf was thoroughly attacked by critics who accused her of cowardice for publishing the piece only after the GDR collapsed so that she no longer faced the danger of being reprimanded by the state. Furthermore, she was accused of trying to pose as a victim when in fact she was a privileged author in the GDR. Throughout the early 1990s tensions were high as emotions spilled over. Nothing symbolizes this tension more than the *Literaturstreit* in which some East German authors were singled out as Stasi collaborators in the early 1990s. The *Literaturstreit* reached its climax when poet and

ballad singer Wolf Biermann took poet Sascha Anderson to task with a Luther-like fury for his former collaboration with the Stasi in spying on other artists. The *Literaturstreit*, however, took a bizarre turn when Christa Wolf revealed that she too had unofficially worked for the Stasi. This admission was mitigated by the fact that her collaboration was when she was young and before she even had an informed idea of what the Stasi was. Moreover, her file as a Stasi collaborator was dwarfed by her file as a victim of the Stasi. Among this chaos some authors such as Erich Loest and Reiner Kunze learned the truth about the degree to which the Stasi had interfered in their lives. Both went on to put together autobiographical works that document the transgressions the Stasi had committed against them.

At this juncture attention should be refocused on the central theme of this study, the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Part I deals with what this study has defined as the “political *Aufarbeitung*.” The political *Aufarbeitung* includes all of the efforts exerted by the post-reunification government of Germany to right some of the wrongdoings of the SED-dictatorship. Part II deals with, what this study has defined as, the “literary *Aufarbeitung*” of the SED-dictatorship. This chapter has sought to trace the foundation of the literary *Aufarbeitung* by examining the post-reunification literary discourse on the Stasi in the early 1990s. The political *Aufarbeitung* was limited in scope due to complex legalities; therefore further *Aufarbeitung* was relegated to the literary realm. Whereas the arena for the political *Aufarbeitung* was mainly the courts and parliament, the literary *Aufarbeitung* was and still is mostly carried out in cultural texts. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the early period of the literary *Aufarbeitung* is mostly characterized by an outpouring of emotion conveyed by the heated debates. However, in terms of texts produced, this period is characterized by autobiographical works about the authors’ experiences with the Stasi and their search for the truth. Chapter three will examine the

subsequent developments in the literary discourse on the Stasi beyond autobiographical writing in fictional representations.

### CHAPTER 3: FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF STATE CONTROL IN THE GDR AS ANALYSIS

Upon the collapse of the GDR many East German writers were eager to put accounts of their personal experiences into book form. The second chapter of this study uses the works of Christa Wolf, Erich Loest and Reiner Kunze as examples. It should come as no surprise that works of fiction accompanied the personal accounts in the 1990s. The dominant theme in fictional works produced early on did not deviate far from the themes presented in the personal accounts: the challenges that state control posed to daily life in the GDR. Nevertheless, this is also where fictional works differ from the personal accounts. Each personal account examined in this study tells the story of the difficulties of life as a writer in the GDR. East German writers were both persecuted and privileged under the SED-dictatorship but to the general public they only represented an elitist minority. For the common East German the autobiographical narrative of life as a writer in the GDR certainly only had a limited appeal. Works of fiction, on the other hand, are able to depict the daily lives of East Germans in the GDR and their confrontations with state control. Indeed, for the average reader works of fiction were more appealing and they could more easily relate to the narratives they presented. Discourse on state control in the GDR was further expanded through cinematic representations. By expanding the audience, fiction, in this sense, also expanded the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship.

#### **Background**

##### ***Aufarbeitung through Fiction***

As fictional representations of life in the GDR were fueling the expansion of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship, sub-discourses—not surprisingly—began to arise. One sub-discourse that this study will pay particular attention to is that which is embodied in two

diverging paradigms of fictional representations of state control in the GDR. The first paradigm is represented by Erich Loest's historical novel *Nikolaikirche* (1995). This paradigm is characterized by its realism and somber tone. It stresses the negative effects of state control through the psychological effects it has on its victims. This paradigm fosters a sense of understanding in post-reunification Germany for those who lived under such conditions. The second paradigm is represented by Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, which incidentally was published in 1995, the same year as *Nikolaikirche*. This paradigm is in many ways the exact opposite of the first. It is characterized by humor. Unlike the realism of *Nikolaikirche*, Brussig uses a writing style that appears to imitate Bertholt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, in that the humor and unrealistic qualities of the figures allow one to disassociate oneself from them. The next chapter will be dedicated to fictional representations of the GDR *a la* Brussig. The focus of this chapter will be the fictional paradigm represented by Loest's *Nikolaikirche*.

International events so profound as the division and subsequent reunification of a country occur only seldomly. Spectacles such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, with all of its symbolism, happen but once in a generation. The image of a reunion of a divided people provides myriad creative writing opportunities. Having said that, it is no wonder that the collapse of the GDR and German reunification are themes that have worked their way into so many fictional texts. However, few works of fiction—if any—have so comprehensively analyzed East German society at the time of the *Wende*<sup>9</sup> as does Erich Loest's *Nikolaikirche*. In *Nikolaikirche*, Loest depicts many different aspects of East German society without too harshly judging any one. The purpose of this novel was to foster a sense of understanding for East Germans and their history in post-reunification Germany. The main case in point for this chapter will be *Nikolaikirche*.

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<sup>9</sup> Here the term *Wende* denotes roughly the period from 1985 to 1990 in which changes were occurring in the GDR which ultimately led to reunification.

Nonetheless, this chapter will briefly discuss another example which directly falls under this paradigm: Margarethe von Trotta's film *Das Versprechen* (1994). The final text examined in this chapter, Stefan Heym's *Auf Sand gebaut* (1990), differs from the other examples in that it is moving in another direction that will be examined in the next chapter, satire. Therefore, Heym's text falls somewhere between the *Nikolaikirche* paradigm and the Brussig paradigm.

Nevertheless, *Auf Sand gebaut* and *Das Versprechen* both have similarities and differences to *Nikolaikirche*. This chapter will analyze the similarities and differences, as well as explain in what ways they belong to the *Nikolaikirche* paradigm of fictional representations of GDR society.

### **Fictional Representations**

#### ***Nikolaikirche***

As mentioned above, Erich Loest's *Nikolaikirche* is a historical novel whose many different characters represent different aspects of the crumbling GDR society during the *Wende*. It could be argued that this novel, a work of over 500 pages, is the single greatest novel written to date about the *Wende*. Nearly at the same time the book was released a made-for-TV film version of *Nikolaikirche* was produced by Frank Beyer which was met with equal acclaim. In contrast to Loest's other works, which were examined in the previous chapter, one might maintain that *Nikolaikirche* is written in a moderate tone. This tone adds to the realistic style in which the novel is written. All figures in the novel are psychologically complex characters; elements of both nurture and nature can be detected in them. Rüdiger Steinlein has identified four groups of figures around whom the narrative revolves: the Bacher/Protter family, representatives of the Stasi, associates of the Protestant Church and the representation of those

East Germans who emigrated to the West (290-292). In any case, it is the Bacher/Protter family that serves as the nucleus for this novel.

The narrative of the novel begins with the prologue set in the year 1985, the same year that generally marks the beginning of the *Wende*, as it was the year Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union. The first scene takes place in Stasi headquarters. Alexander Bacher, a young Stasi officer, is in a meeting with his co-officers. The highest-ranking official, the General, explains the purpose of the meeting: “Wir müssen herausfinden, was sich im Umkreis der Kirchen abspielt, wer subversive Aktionen betreibt oder dahinter steckt” (7). The short prologue is important to the structure of the novel because the narrative begins where it also ends four years later in 1989. The unity of location with the beginning and ending scenes demarcates the primary timeframe of the novel (1985-1989) which truly makes it a *Wende* novel.

The figures within the Bacher/Protter family are representative of many aspects of GDR society. The young and upcoming Stasi officer Alexander Bacher is a complex figure but cannot be understood apart from his father, the family patriarch, Albert Bacher. As the narrative unfolds one learns that Albert Bacher, who at the beginning is one year deceased, was the General of the *Volkspolizei* (19). In the first chapter this deceased champion of state control gets a street named after him in Leipzig. The success of Albert Bacher sets up a father/son complex in the narrative. Alexander’s ambition within the ranks of the Stasi is his drive to live up to the name of his father whose pictures with Stalin in Moscow made lasting impressions on his children. Albert Bacher’s desire to see his son follow in his footsteps is made obvious by the name Alexander, which immediately calls to mind Russian connotations, even more so does the nickname Sascha by which he is often called.

Astrid Protter, the oldest daughter of Marianne and Albert Bacher, stands in sharp contrast to her younger brother Alexander. Astrid never had the ambition to climb the socialist ladder in GDR society. Contemplating how disappointing this must have been to her father she consoles herself, “Wenigstens hatte er einen tüchtigen Sohn” (32). As the novel begins Astrid is going through a nervous breakdown. She fears her husband Harald Protter is having an affair which is causing the recent decline of affection in their marriage. However, it is also the entire political situation under which Astrid is suffering. This is demonstrated later in the novel as her apparent recovery from the affliction is tied to her finding a purpose in life by becoming politically active with church groups. Here, the daughter of General Bacher is making a conscious break from her family roots as well as from the political system. Alexander, on the other hand, in working his way up the Stasi ranks, represents the continuation of the family tradition and the political status quo.

Harald Protter is symbolic of the average East German at the time of the *Wende*. Astrid sees her husband become increasingly more aloof and apathetic. He has recently begun to regularly drink a significant amount of alcohol at home. Steinlein explains that Harald is symbolic of the “innerlich abgedrehten Mitläufers, der nach außen hin sein gesellschaftliches Soll – wie die meisten DDR-Bürger – eben erfüllt, weil er zu resigniert ist um sich noch aufzulehnen gegen das, was auch ihn kaputtmacht (stattdessen trinkt er abends)” (290). Moreover, Harald’s family background further adds to this sense of ordinariness. “Sein Vater war kein proletarischer Kämpfer und auch kein Nazi gewesen, bloß ein gewöhnlicher Deutscher” (228). He was an ordinary German who first had the Third Reich imposed on him and then had to live in the SED-dictatorship even though he did not believe in either. Harald’s father is a stark contrast to Albert Bacher who, as a young communist, fought against the German army in the

East as a partisan and was therefore awarded a privileged lifestyle in the dictatorship of the SED. What East Germans such as Harald needed was inspiration to take a stand against the political system under which they were suffering.

The daughter and only child of the Protters, Silke, is nearly fifteen years old at the beginning of the novel. But by the end, four years later, she has already come of age. For Silke, the *Wende* takes place at an impressionable time in her life. Like a good young socialist Silke is a member of the socialist youth group the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ). She has, therefore, experienced some degree of socialization in the GDR. Nevertheless, Silke does not seem to have any significant attachment to the system. Perhaps it is that she is still young and resilient enough for the system to not have made a lasting impact on her life. At the end of the novel she represents the next generation which will carry forth her parents' break with the system (Steinlein 290).

Marianne Bacher, the wife of Albert and mother of Astrid and Alexander, appears to draw her importance in the narrative from her love triangle with Linus Bornowski and Albert. It is revealed that Marianne had an affair with Bornowski, a one-time friend of Albert who emigrated from the GDR to West Berlin. In West Berlin Albert Bacher and the Stasi kidnapped him and brought him back to the GDR where he was charged and sentenced to ten years at the prison in Bautzen for political reasons. Bautzen is noteworthy because that is where Loest served seven years on account of similar charges. Eventually West Germany pays for Bornowski's freedom and he makes a successful career for himself as a photographer in the West. Bornowski symbolizes the West and those who left the GDR on account of political persecution (Steinlein 292). The affair Marianne had with Bornowski signifies a break with Albert. In this way

Marianne is similar to Astrid in that she makes a break from Albert and Alexander's patriarchal system.

Besides the Stasi, the other major focus in the novel outside of the Bacher/Protter family is the Protestant Church. The church had an important role throughout the history of the GDR. Religion had a precarious position within socialist society. In the early years the church was intermittently persecuted but eventually solidified its position even though its activities were closely observed by the state. In the 1980s, as grassroots opposition movements were organizing throughout the GDR, churches offered sanctuary for these groups; the church also organized its own peace movements in opposition to policies of the GDR. By the mid 1980s churches and the activities that went on within them became a primary focus of the Stasi. After the collapse of the GDR Stasi documents revealed how much of their resources were exerted on monitoring activities in the churches; Stasi informants had infiltrated many of the church activities. Especially in Leipzig churches played an important role in organizing demonstrations in the fall of 1989 that peacefully toppled the system. On Mondays people gathered at the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig for an evening prayer session which simultaneously served as a demonstration for civil liberties and political reform in the GDR. Week after week people gathered peacefully while the police responded to the demonstrators with violence.

Loest presents the church as the opposition to state control represented by the Stasi. In the novel, Loest presents several church figures who are similar to some of the historical actors who were involved with the demonstrations at the Nikolaikirche. But these figures are of peripheral importance to the purpose of this study and the central theme of the book. Important, though, is Astrid Protter's discovery of the church and her finding self-purpose within the church movement. After explaining to a doctor her family and work situation Astrid is told that

“Traurigkeit ist keine Depression” (176). This diagnosis indicates that she must search for something that offers her a sense of meaning. Her search for self-meaning ends when she meets Gabriele Heit, who was suffering from depression due to her child’s death in an accident with a Soviet tank. Gabriele finds solace in religion and takes Astrid with her to a prayer service in the Nikolaikirche. While in church Astrid catches herself contemplating her family’s reaction to her attendance of a church service. “Was Mutter und Sascha von dieser Predigt halten würden, überlegte sie und ärgerte sich sofort über ihre eigene Unselbständigkeit” (185). At the end of the service it is clear that Astrid has found something to believe in as she donates two marks while a collection bag is being passed around.

As Astrid becomes more involved with the church, Alexander finds out through his work that his sister is taking part in these anti-revolutionary activities. He arranges a meeting in order to confront his sister and prevent her from taking part in any further church activities. His first tactic is the use of guilt; she is reminded of their father and his esteemed political position. “Wie meinst du wohl, wie Vater das fände: Ein Schild, auf dem diese windelweiche pazifistische Losung aufgemalt ist, und seine Tochter tritt hinterher” (324). The memory of her father and the career of her brother do not convince her anymore. With reference to Alexander’s work concerning the surveillance of church activities, Astrid says: “Sascha, ihr spielt Indianer” (325). After their conversation Astrid contemplates:

Das Gespräch eben war so schief gegangen wie nur möglich. Vielleicht hätte er noch massiver kontern sollen: Wer nicht für uns ist, ist gegen uns, es gibt keinen dritten Weg – so klangen gute alte Argumente, die Astrid genauso herbeten konnte. Die Erinnerung an Vater wirkte nicht mehr, was wirkte dann? Es würde keinen Zweck haben, sich hinter Mutter zu stecken. (326)

This scene marks Astrid's rite of passage; she makes a clear break from the tradition of her family as well as their will. From now on Astrid will put her own needs before the name and status of her family.

From Alexander's perspective the world which he and his cohorts inherited from the pioneers such as Albert Bacher was caving in. The first blow came when it was revealed to him through his work that his sister was participating in the church activities. The next shock came when he found out that his girlfriend Claudia was a participant in an environmentalist group viewed by the Stasi as subversive. As they are breaking up because of their differences Claudia asks, "Vor zwei, drei Jahren hätte ich nichts dabei gefunden, du bei der Polizei und ich in einer Kirchengruppe. Was ist bloß aus uns allen geworden?" (365) This statement indicates the drastic societal changes that were going on in the GDR during the *Wende*. The differences between the state and the church groups had become irreconcilable. Alexander's career has canceled out his personal relationships. He reflects, "Warum hatte er bloß solches Pech – darüber könnte er vielleicht mit Schmalbank reden, nicht mehr mit Astrid, niemals mit Mutter, die würde ihm wie schon einmal vorhalten, es lebten immerhin eine Million Genossinnen in der DDR und Zehntausende, die vom Alter her zu ihm paßten" (366). His work is all that he has left.

While Alexander's choices have brought him loneliness, Astrid's choices have provided her with a new sense of purpose which saves her marriage to Harald. As she forces herself to explain to Harald the kind of hazardous activities her church group is about to organize, she expects a negative reaction from him. To her surprise he answers "Ich komme mit . . . Weil du meine Frau bist" (410). Hereafter their marriage is once again in order. Astrid, though, has not only saved their marriage, but has also led Harald out of his repressive shell. Harald no longer has to drown his feelings with alcohol. His affliction is also cured through activism.

As the story reaches the fateful autumn of 1989 the church activities become more dangerous due to the state's increase in the usage of violence to curb the demonstrations. At one such demonstration Claudia spots Alexander among the security forces. The sight of him does not evoke any strong feelings in her. She ponders the irony that her actions at the demonstration have more than likely ruined her career and that Alexander's actions will probably earn him a promotion. Marianne Bacher reflects on all that Alexander has told her about the activities of Astrid and Harald. Marianne has neither the socialist zeal of Albert or Alexander, nor the will to protest against the system like Astrid and Harald. She is visiting old family friends, when demonstrations are shown on the television. The friends grumble about the disrespect and thanklessness of the demonstrators. These family friends represent the myopia of the old generation and their inability to understand the plight of the youth. Marianne, however, gets another perspective when her old lover Linus Bornowski tells her the truth about his abduction at Albert's behest. She is devastated to learn the truth about Albert's work (452).

The novel ends with the peaceful demonstrations overcoming police actions to prevent them. The ending is set in an oval shaped office at Stasi headquarters, the same place as the beginning. Four years later, however, the Stasi has been defeated by the will of the people. After years of silence Leipzig came back to life in the fall of 1989. Loest writes, "Die Göttin Lipsia war wohl auf die Erde gekommen, sie hatte ihre Stadt lange genug im Stich gelassen, nun brachte sie Güte und Heiterkeit mit. Was sollte sich ihnen noch in den Weg stellen wollen" (510).

At this point it is important to ask what *Nikolaikirche* offers in terms of *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Published in 1995, this comprehensive novel of the *Wende* is an attempt to make sense of the history of the GDR. Five years after reunification there was still a significant

lack of understanding between West and East Germans who before that had been divided for forty years. Despite his own harsh treatment in the GDR, Loest does not judge any one character too harshly in *Nikolaikirche*, including the Stasi. *Nikolaikirche* connects the events of the *Wende* to the greater picture of twentieth century German history. This is demonstrated in the form used by Loest. Throughout the novel he includes flashback sections carrying the subtitle “*Damals.*” These flashbacks make clear to the reader the truth of what happened in the past. These occasional breaks with the main plot elucidate what kinds of experiences the characters carry with them. This form makes it easier to understand the choices the characters make later in the novel. As the narrative unfolds the flashbacks dig deeper into the past—back to 1932, the year before Hitler came to power. Here, Loest is demonstrating that the events of the *Wende* are not mutually exclusive from all of German history, even before Hitler.

Perhaps the most interesting of these flashbacks are those that explain Albert Bacher’s complicated history. The reader learns that as a young communist in 1932, Albert killed a fascist in self-defense and was forced to flee Germany. During World War II Albert fought against the Nazis with the partisans in the East. In one scene during the war the partisans capture a German soldier who apparently was a deserter. Albert was ordered to kill this harmless German; he fulfills this task without question. Although those who fought against fascism were fighting for a moral cause, it does not mean that they are incapable of wrongdoing themselves. The SED’s fundamental justification for all of its unpopular activities was that they were anti-fascist measures. Perhaps what was done to the German soldier can be described as morally ambiguous because it was war. However, the flashback of Linus Bornowski’s time at the Stasi prison at Bautzen conveys a clearer sense of immorality on the part of Albert concerning his role in kidnapping Bornowski. Albert Bacher’s past demonstrates that at one time the anti-fascist cause

was noble, but it does not justify the wrongdoings of the SED-dictatorship. *Nikolaikirche* seems to predict a brighter future for the German people, but warns them not to forget the past.

### ***Das Versprechen***

*Das Versprechen*, directed by Margarethe von Trotta, screenplay written by Peter Schneider, was released in 1995, the same year that *Nikolaikirche* was first published. Many of the same themes of the *Wende* are presented in this film. *Das Versprechen* examines the history of the GDR in the narrative of a love story. This narrative is about Konrad and Sophie, spanning nearly thirty years from 1961 to 1989. The story begins in East Berlin with Konrad, Sophie and several of their friends planning to escape to the West through the sewer system. However, Sophie and the others make it down a manhole, but Konrad trips on his shoelaces. By the time he gets up a police vehicle is coming down the street and he is forced to hide. This scene leaves the viewer guessing whether or not Konrad hesitated to join the others out of personal reasons. From this point until the ending Konrad and Sophie's relationship is challenged. There are two parts in the film where real video footage is inserted. The first is the erection of the Berlin Wall. The second time is when Konrad and Sophie briefly meet in Prague in 1968. Kristie Foell questions the purpose of the footage in the film: "Is history merely a backdrop for the personal here and elsewhere, or is it in fact the decisive force in the film?" (245) Perhaps the footage is inserted into the film as a sort of reminder that even though the love story is fiction, much of what is depicted in the film was at one time—and still is in the minds of those who experienced the events—a reality.

Similar to Albert Bacher in *Nikolaikirche*, Konrad's father is a convinced socialist and member of the SED. It appears that he too was politically opposed to the Third Reich, as he

refers to a trial against him in the Nazi days. Konrad, like Alexander Bacher, is constrained by the will of his father. Konrad is forced to serve a brief stint in the army, so that he is allowed to study afterwards. Sophie, on the other hand, seems to have an extravagant lifestyle in the West. In 1968 Konrad is allowed to travel to Prague for an astrophysics convention. He meets Sophie there and for a brief time they are reunited in the milieu of hope that was the Prague Spring. However, this hope—for the East Bloc and for Sophie and Konrad's relationship—came to a harsh and sudden end via the Brezhnev Doctrine. Sophie is allowed a onetime entry into the GDR to visit Konrad. She informs him that she is pregnant with his child. He explains to her that he is going to a conference in Stockholm and will take the opportunity to defect to the West to be with her. His plan, however, does not work out; the Stasi is watching him and preempts his intentions by denying him travel. After this it is too painful for Sophie and she breaks off contact with Konrad.

The narrative, then, moves forward twelve years. Konrad and Sophie are both married to other people and Konrad has another child. Konrad is allowed to travel to West Berlin for his work. There he meets his son Alexander for the first time and gets to see Sophie. After an illicit interview with a western newspaper, Konrad is denied travel outside the GDR. Thereafter Alexander must go to East Berlin to visit Konrad. *Das Versprechen* also shows the Protestant Church as a symbol of resistance to state control. Konrad's sister Barbara is a pastor. She and her husband Harald are in conflict with the state throughout the narrative. Because of Barbara's civil disobedience, Alexander is not allowed entry into the GDR anymore. Like Harald Protter in *Nikolaikirche*, Konrad drowns his sorrows in alcohol and withdraws himself from his relationship with his wife Elizabeth and daughter Lena. He vents his anger by assaulting a Stasi agent. Afterwards he is shown working as a janitor. The narrative jumps forward once again to

1989. The Berlin Wall has opened up and Konrad goes out into the celebrating crowds. He unexpectedly meets his son Alexander. In the crowd he catches Sophie's face and the film ends with the two main characters gazing at one another.

*Das Versprechen* ultimately functions on two different levels. On one level, as Foell suggests, the film "seems to follow the melodramatic recipe with very few exceptions updated for the nineties" (243). But when looking beyond the love story portion of the film, one realizes that an interpretation of post-war German history is present; a representative for nearly all groups of historical actors of the *Wende* era makes an appearance in the film. Konrad and Sophie, for example, represent the typical East and West German, who are divided by manmade barriers. Konrad's father stands for the founding generation of the GDR whose ideals ultimately failed. Konrad's sister Barbara and her husband Harald are symbolic of the dissident movement that was born out of the Warsaw Pact's squashing of the Prague Spring. Sophie's aunt in West Berlin, to whom she goes after her escape from East Berlin, embodies the materialist culture of the West, which did not concern itself with the welfare of others. Of course representations of state control are also ubiquitous in the film. Many scenes come to abrupt ends with the intrusion of the Stasi. There are two Stasi agents who appear multiple times in the film.

One Stasi agent is particularly interesting, especially when compared to Konrad's father. Konrad's father, the convinced socialist, realizes in the narrative that the GDR was not the worker's paradise he and his generation fought to build. When his daughter Barbara is on trial for subversive activities he is not allowed to attend. He comments, "Sogar in der Nazizeit, als ich abgeurteilt wurde, durften meine Eltern an der Verhandlung teilnehmen" (von Trotta). While Konrad's father laments the death of a dream, the Stasi agent views the GDR as the realization of a dream. In one scene Konrad confronts the agent and asks him how one can do such morally

compromising work. The agent replies that it was always his dream to work for the Stasi. He reflects that as a child watching documentaries on the horrors of the Nazis made him want to make sure nothing like the Third Reich could ever happen again. Nothing can stand in the way of the anti-fascist cause. For this agent and his Stalinist *Weltanschauung* the pain and suffering caused does not matter, it is the end that justifies the means. For Konrad's father, on the other hand, the means and the end cannot be separated.

The contribution that *Das Versprechen* makes to the unofficial *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship is that, like *Nikolaikirche*, it attempts to foster a sense of understanding of post-war German history. The references to Nazis let the viewer know that the *Unrechtsstaat* that was the GDR does not compare to the atrocities of the Third Reich. All the same, lives and relationships were destroyed in the name of anti-fascism in the GDR. The ending—Sophie and Konrad gazing into each other's faces—seems to anticipate the possibility of happier times to come. Still, shortly before this the audience is prompted to remember the suffering of the victims. Amidst the throngs of Berliners celebrating the opening of the Wall at the end of the film, one older woman is interviewed for her take on the opening of the Wall. She answers, "Für mich kommt es zu spät" (von Trotta). The message is clear: the *Aufarbeitung* of this chapter of German history must be carried on; the German people must not forget the past in order to move forward.

### ***Auf Sand gebaut***

Stefan Heym's *Auf Sand gebaut* is a collection of seven short stories that all deal with themes from the *Wende*. Published in 1990, the same year as Wolf's *Was bleibt*, these seven stories were a contribution to the discourse on the problems of the day, as well as a contribution to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship in general. Each one of these short stories "aus der

unmittelbaren Vergangenheit,” as the cover describes them, points out and questions a specific problem of the *Wende* era. In these parable-like short stories Heym looks past the euphoria that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall. Unlike other fictional works of the early 1990s, such as *Nikolaikirche* and *Das Versprechen*, which seem quick to pronounce reunification a victory for the German people, *Auf Sand gebaut*, conversely, takes a more cautious approach. Additionally, Heym’s text separates itself from the two previous works in that it uses satire. These stories address problems not only of the near past but also in the present and the future.

For the purpose of this study, two of the seven stories in *Auf Sand gebaut* are of particular interest. The first story, “Der Zuverlässigsten einer,” is about Arno Bobrich who works for the Stasi. The story takes place as the Stasi is being gradually dissolved. As Bobrich’s coworkers become fewer, his department pushes responsibilities off onto him. His coworker, “Genosse Kuhnt,” compliments Bobrich in these difficult times for the Stasi, “Der Zuverlässigsten einer” (7). As Bobrich seems to be working his way up through the Stasi ranks, his wife Martha warns him that nothing good can come of this. She senses the societal changes that are taking place. Martha tells Bobrich that “der Staat ist eines, aber ein Menschenleben ist ein anderes, und kein Staat auf Erden, auch unserer nicht, ist wert, daß man ein Leben dafür opfert” (13). Moreover, Bobrich’s son tells him that he is ashamed of his father’s work. Bobrich questions this, “Was hat ein Sohn, frage ich, sich zu genieren wegen einem Vater, der nur seine Pflicht tut, seine Klassenpflicht und seine Dienstpflicht und seine Vaterpflicht” (9). Bobrich complains to his colleagues about the opinions of his family.

One day while Bobrich is at work a crowd of demonstrators raids his office scattering documents everywhere. Amidst the chaos Bobrich hears his son shouting “keine Gewalt, bitte!” (17) Right then the words of his colleague Kuhnt race through his mind: “Der Zuverlässigsten

einer.” Bobrich wonders why was it that when the going got tough none of his colleagues were there to help him. Among the scattered documents Bobrich sees the file that contains last names from *Bat to Bur*, in it are documents about his wife. Listed, he finds statements his wife said to him. He wonders which one of his colleagues had spied on his wife but as he reads through he suddenly realizes that it was he himself who had reported this material. Bobrich’s son comes into the office, helps him off the floor and says, “Komm, Vater, wir können jetzt gehen” (19).

Through this short story Heym articulates several important messages. Bobrich appears to be generally a good family man. His work, however, forces him to do things against his values. Here Heym expresses that it is the institutions that corrupt humans. After his office is torn apart, in self-reflection Bobrich is astounded at the things he did for his work, namely report on his wife. But when Bobrich is in distress it is not his colleagues who come to help him; rather, it is his son.

The other story, “*Alte Bekanntschaft*,” is about the narrator and his relationship with a Stasi agent, Major Friederich Wohlrabe. Wohlrabe’s task is to get some information from the narrator concerning instructors at the school of engineering. They develop a kind of mutual friendship through this contact. As the GDR collapses the narrator feels badly that his friend will be out of work. He says to Wohlrabe sympathetically, “Eines Tages werden die Leute sich noch zurücksehnen nach einer Zeit, wo man wußte, wer zu fürchten war.” Wohlrabe replies, “Es wird . . . eine große Unsicherheit sein im Volke, und sie werden nach neuen Feinden suchen: Juden, Kommunisten, Fremden, allen, die irgendwie aus der Reihe reden” (68). As they depart the narrator asks Wohlrabe what he plans on doing for work now that the Stasi is dissolved. Wohlrabe says he is uncertain of what is in store for him in the future. Time passes on and drastic political changes are underway in Germany. The narrator gets involved in politics and

goes to a political conference. There at the conference hotel's bar he senses Wohlrabe's presence. He does not want to acknowledge Wohlrabe's company but he eventually turns to him and asks, "Sie sind wieder im Dienst?" (72) Wohlrabe nods, and the narrator asks for whom. Wohlrabe retorts: "Was ist der Unterschied . . . Hier oder dort: solange die einen die Macht haben und die andern keine, bleibt die Rollenverteilung immer die gleiche" (72).

This story seems to warn of the future. For Wohlrabe it did not matter for whom he was working. Heym is warning that it is not unthinkable that the Stasi could make a comeback in the new Germany. Wohlrabe's final statement suggests that fundamental changes must be made if the Stasi is not to be resurrected. These fundamental changes include democracy and transparency. Heym also seems to care little about the actors who carried out the work. Conversely, he is concerned with the institutions that allowed the activities of the Stasi.

### **Conclusion**

As much as autobiographical accounts in the early 1990s added to the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship, fiction seems to have taken it a step further. The autobiographical accounts provided the authors with a personal sense of relief and closure. However, autobiographical accounts had limited appeal in a public sense. Fiction, on the other hand, was able to do what autobiography could not; that is to reach mass audiences. Fiction was able to present state control from a variety of angles. Autobiography, for example, typically presented state control from the perspective of the literati. It was far more appealing for the general public when the common man/woman was the protagonist. Fiction also empowered the reader with choice through variety and interpretation.

Erich Loest's *Nikolaikirche* stands as perhaps the most comprehensive novel about the *Wende* in terms of social groups represented within it. Loest does not treat any one group in the

novel too harshly. Instead he presents all figures as complex beings with psychological depth. Loest portrays the Stasi as the side effect and proof of a failed experiment. To the table of the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship, Loest brings a complex picture of the corruption and collapse of the GDR. Margarethe von Trotta's *Das Versprechen* is a fictional representation of the history of the GDR in cinematic form. *Das Versprechen* also depicts the Stasi as the proof of a failed system. Both *Nikolaikirche* and *Das Versprechen* present the implosion of the GDR as the end of state control. Stefan Heym's *Auf Sand gebaut*, however, treats the Stasi differently. Heym treats state control in the GDR as something that will not necessarily end with the GDR; after all there is also a secret police in the West. He warns that unless fundamental changes are undertaken the Stasi could be resurrected in the new united Germany.

The fictional representations of the GDR that were analyzed in this chapter are all written in a serious tone, except for, of course, *Auf Sand gebaut* which is has somewhat of a satirical quality. Each acknowledges the fact that the lives of East Germans were deeply affected by aspects of state control. This variety of fiction contributes to the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship by seriously questioning the root and cause of state control in the GDR. The next chapter, however, will analyze another variety of fiction that represents state control in the GDR in a very different way.

## CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTING THE GDR WITH NOSTALGIA

The previous chapter analyzed several examples of fictional representations of the GDR written in the post-*Wende* era. Despite differences in form and opinion, all of the examples portray the aspect of state control in the GDR in a somber tone (*Auf Sand gebaut* to a lesser extent); they take into account the fact that people's lives were destroyed. The works that belong to this literary paradigm all acknowledge the serious consequences of state control. The primary contribution that this paradigm made to the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship is that it draws attention to the faults of the GDR and analyzes how and why things went wrong. The mentality behind this literature seems to adhere to Santayana's famous statement: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

This chapter, however, will analyze a different paradigm of fiction. This paradigm is best represented by the works of East German author Thomas Brussig. Brussig's works are most known for their use of humor and lightheartedness. Aspects of GDR culture are often portrayed in a nostalgic manner. This style which Brussig has crafted has been since referred to as *Ostalgie*—a portmanteau of the German words for east and nostalgia. Since Brussig's screen play for the Leander Haußmann film *Sonnenallee* (1999), the *Ostalgie* phenomenon has solidified as a cult movement in East Germany. After reunification many products that existed in the GDR quickly disappeared and were replaced by Western counterparts. The *Ostalgie* movement revived food and household products of the GDR as well as the pop culture. Television shows were aired that nostalgically documented this culture and tested the viewers' competency in GDR trivia. But what did this literary paradigm mean for the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship? The reception of this paradigm seems to be mixed. On one hand, *Ostalgie* is a harmless cult movement that has only to do with superficial GDR culture

not unlike other retro trends. It offers some East Germans a chance to look back, and perhaps even be proud of some aspects of their past. On the other hand, some critics have questioned the effects of *Ostalgie*, which they believe minimizes aspects of state control in the GDR.

## **Background**

### ***East Germany after Reunification***

It was not long after reunification that its concomitant euphoria subsided. By the mid 1990s it became clear to many that Helmut Kohl's predictions of a "blooming landscape" in East Germany had been an overstatement. In economic terms, East Germany lagged far behind West Germany. After forty years of separation, reunification did not provide the instantaneous economic parity many had hoped for. Already in 1991 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* observed that unity had been achieved in political terms but a more far-reaching sense of the term was still to come (Minkenberg 53). Although the most serious roadblock to unity was economic disparity, there were also differences in mentality that had come into being after forty years of separation. In a 1993 article Michael Minkenberg describes problems with the reunification:

Overall, the 1989 revolution and the process of unification have deeply challenged cultural patterns in the GDR and contributed to losses of identity on various levels. Because of the West German takeover strategy, both the old socialist identity, which was often transformed into adaptation, cynicism, and retreat into the realms of privacy, and the newly emerging democratic revolutionary identity were lost. But with the discovery of capitalist realities the image of the 'golden West' which provided a constant threat to the legitimacy of the old regime and a sign of hope for dissatisfied GDR citizens was also lost. If

the transformation of the East German political culture into a ‘civic culture’ is to succeed, the short-lived democratic spirit of the revolution and the positive image of the “westernized” culture of West German society must now be reconstituted in a slow and socially painful process of collective learning. (Minkenberg 64)

As time passed after the reunification, the economic situation there seemed to stagnate. Unemployment—non-existent in the GDR—hit alarming rates in post-reunification East Germany. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* explains, “Die DDR bot ihren Bürgern keinen Anlass, Arbeitslosigkeit als etwas Alltägliches zu betrachten, wenn auch nicht aus wirtschaftlichen sondern aus – ruinösen – ideologischen Gründen” (“Arbeitslos in Ost und West”). According to polls in the early 1990s, frustration in the new Germany prompted many to question some of the aspects of reunification. According to one poll in 1991 seventy-five percent of East Germans saw themselves as second-class citizens and between sixty and ninety percent of East Germans expressed bitterness towards the West German “colonial conquest” behavior after reunification (Minkenberg 64). The feeling that West Germany was imperializing East Germany resulted in a general resentment of things specifically West German. By the mid 1990s it was commonplace knowledge that the reunification was not going as smoothly as planned. A 1995 article in *The Economist* observes, “Liberal-minded western Germans seem almost embarrassed by their eastern brothers (‘Ossis’), fearing that their benighted ways will somehow taint Germany as a whole. One young journalist likens unification to ‘sharing a bathroom with a stranger.’” The article goes on to state:

From the other side, western Germans are seen as the people who took over institutions, destroyed industries and jobs through swift privatisation, stole markets from local producers of beer and soap powder, reclaimed property they

had not seen in decades and, in a few cases, plundered public coffers. They joke bitterly that the difference between Wessis and Russians is that they could get rid of the Russians. (“Eagles Embrace”)

Even though the majority of East and West Germans believed reunification was the right thing, there was definitely a divide between them that was not becoming any narrower.

Products from the former GDR increased in popularity throughout the 1990s and beyond. As mentioned above this phenomenon is called *Ostalgie*. The success of the films *Sonnenallee* (1999) and *Good Bye Lenin* (2003) brought *Ostalgie* to international attention. A 2003 article in *The Economist* titled “Ostalgie,” notes that *Ostalgie* seems to have transcended East Germany, as Westerners have also bought into the craze. The article observes the availability and popularity of East German products: “Popular items include gherkins from the Spree forest and sausages from Thuringia, as well as Rot-Weiss toothpaste, Spee washing powder and chicken-shaped plastic egg cups in various colors. Clothing bearing DDR symbols has become the height of fashion, not just a tourist souvenir” (“Ostalgie”). The article notes that the most recognizable *Ostalgie* icon is the little green man who signifies “walk” on pedestrian traffic lights. It goes on to question whether, in fact, *Ostalgie* was not giving Germans something to be proud of and help bring them together.

The little traffic-light man may be helping free Germans from the collective guilt that many still feel, which is all to the good. And *Ostalgie* may also be a sign that the gulf in self-confidence between easterners and westerners is closing in an ambiguous way: the Wessis have become a lot less snooty about their own fashions and economic prowess. (“Ostalgie”)

Not everyone, however, is convinced that *Ostalgie* is a harmless trend that, if anything, is contributing informally to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship by bringing the German people together. Some critics have argued that the sentimentality toward the GDR has gone too far in some instances. They maintain that *Ostalgie* minimizes the misdeeds of the SED-dictatorship. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* cites a quote from 1999 in the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*, which reflects this point of view.

Es wächst eine unverständliche Art von Verherrlichung des totalitären SED - Regimes, "Ostalgie" genannt. Auf der Suche nach der verloren gegangenen Führung und Ordnung brach in den fünf neuen Ländern eine Welle von Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Rechtsextremismus aus, die europaweit ihresgleichen sucht . . . Die letzten hässlichen Deutschen scheinen im hoch subventionierten Osten zu leben und fühlen sich den Westdeutschen laut Umfragen auch noch moralisch überlegen. Dabei wäre es eine Bringschuld der Ostdeutschen, ihrer zehnjährigen Freizügigkeit gerecht zu werden. Immerhin hatten sie ja - anders als bei den restlichen Reformländern des ehemaligen Ostblocks - ihre reichen Brüder im Westen, die einem völlig maroden und heruntergewirtschafteten Staat finanziell unter die Arme griffen . . . ("Bringschuld")

Other *Ostalgie* criticisms were not as abrasive as the one articulated in *Der Standard*; nevertheless, there was a great deal of skepticism concerning the trend. The manager of the Foundation for the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship, Wolfgang Kusior, pleaded that *Ostalgie* not block the remembrance of the victims of the SED-dictatorship. He commented, "Wenn schon Ostalgie, dann bitte mit der Erinnerung an die Kultur der Opposition in der DDR" (Küpper). Others have voiced the concern that *Ostalgie* exacerbates the divide between East and

West Germans. The East German author Günter de Bruyn, for example, represents this point of view. He commented that the ways in which East and West Germans have attempted to demarcate themselves from each other has impaired the process of German reunification (“De Bruyn”). The fact that *Ostalgie* has caused so much fanfare is a telltale sign of the impact this trend has had on the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. On one hand there are those who believe the humor and light-heartedness of the *Ostalgie* trend assist the *Aufarbeitung* because the act of laughing is a therapeutic way of overcoming a situation. On the other hand, critics of *Ostalgie* believed the wrongdoings of the SED-dictatorship demonstrate irreverence to the victims; therefore, *Ostalgie* has no value in terms of contributing to the *Aufarbeitung*.

This chapter will examine several pieces of fiction that belong to the paradigm of *Ostalgie*. Whether or not this paradigm is conducive to the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship will not be the focus. The focus, however, will be to analyze examples which belong to this paradigm in order to shed light on the discourse surrounding *Ostalgie*. Thomas Brussig, the spokesperson for this literary trend, will be given the most attention in this chapter. The first example will be his novel about the *Wende*, *Helden wie wir* (1995). *Helden wie wir* will not be examined as belonging directly to the *Ostalgie* paradigm but rather as a satirical prelude to it. The novel will also be treated as a counterpart to Erich Loest’s *Nikolaikirche*. The second Brussig related work will be a film for which he wrote the screenplay, *Sonnenallee* (1999). This film will be presented as the defining work of the *Ostalgie* paradigm. The third and final piece by Brussig, *Leben bis Männer* (2005), a monologue by a soccer coach, is an expression of *Ostalgie* in that it demonstrates the difficulties of the post-*Wende* era. The final and only non-related work to Brussig will be the film *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003), which brought *Ostalgie* to international

attention. *Goodbye Lenin!* will be examined as belonging to this paradigm, but also as being in some ways different from the style of *Ostalgie* expressed in *Sonnenallee*.

### **Thomas Brussig and *Ostalgie***

#### ***Helden wie wir***

Thomas Brussig's breakthrough novel, *Helden wie wir*, made its debut in 1995, the same year in which Erich Loest's *Nikolaikirche* made its appearance. Like Loest's novel, *Helden wie wir* makes the milieu of the *Wende* its primary setting. Both novels call attention to the systemic flaws of the GDR and both novels offer explanations for its collapse. Loest glorifies the East German people for rising up and taking control of their own future. Brussig, on the other hand, shows the people as the passive beneficiaries, not the creators of their own freedom. The striking difference between the two, however, is that *Nikolaikirche* depicts state control in the GDR in a critical fashion and *Helden wie wir* presents a light-hearted portrayal. Brussig's humorous approach to depicting the GDR was at once a groundbreaking work of fiction that ultimately resulted in the *Ostalgie* paradigm and at the same time an object of sharp criticism.

The narrative of *Helden wie wir* is a series of recordings Klaus Ultzscht, the protagonist, made for a *New York Times* reporter. Klaus is seeking credit for what he believes to have been his role in bringing down the Berlin Wall. Klaus is convinced that his penis is responsible for opening up the Berlin Wall: "Die Geschichte des Mauerfalls ist die Geschichte meines Pinsels" (7). The recordings go on to recount Klaus's life story up to the point at which he made history. Klaus begins with his birth in the historical year of 1968, when the Brezhnev Doctrine put down any serious hope in the Bloc countries for reforms independent from the Soviet Union. Klaus's family life is an important part of the narrative. The only child of an overbearing mother and a Stasi agent, Klaus describes his childhood in the tapes as though he were talking to a

psychologist. His mother is too involved with his life. He did not have privacy from his mother even in terms of his own sexuality. For example, she did not allow him to lock the door in the bathroom in order to prevent any possible form of onanism. Klaus's father, on the other hand, was rather aloof and uninterested in his life except for meting out punishment. Moreover, Klaus's father avoids giving out details about his place of employment. Klaus contrasts his parents by explaining their different reactions to his drawings as a child. He explains that his mother "strahlte, sie lachte, sie lobte, und wenn mein Vater zum Feierabend nach Hause kam, präsentierte sie ihm überschwenglich meine 'Malbilder.' Er allerdings interessierte sich nicht für meine 'Malbilder,' und ich hatte immer das Gefühl, dass es nicht das ist, was er von mir erwartet" (20). Klaus's oedipal relationship with his parents is symbolic of the relationship individual East Germans had with the state. Brussig presents the GDR as a state that was both paternalistic and maternalistic. On the one hand the state—like Klaus's father—was secretive, not concerned with people's happiness, and ready to meet any disobedience with a heavy punishment. On the other hand, the state wanted to control the lives of its citizens to a ridiculous extent. Brad Prager shares this opinion. He writes, "Brussig's novel equates Klaus's parents and the police, the private and public spheres, rejecting the bourgeois notion of autonomous private life" (989).

As a child, the Stasi headquarters across the street from his home offered him a sense of security. He says, "Einzigster Trost war das Karree auf der anderen Straßenseite, das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit" (36). He believed the Stasi would protect him from dangers wrought by his imagination. Prager notices that "from his perspective, the home, rather than the State, is the real locus of disciplinary action" (988). Only after he has worked for the Stasi himself does Klaus change his opinion about it. After the *Wende*, when the activities of the Stasi were revealed to the

public, Westerners were astounded that East Germans could have tolerated the state control in the GDR. Klaus Ultzscht symbolizes the East German who knows no other state system besides the GDR. Here, Brussig is articulating that to East Germans of Klaus Ultzscht's generation who knew of no other state system, the GDR—even with the Stasi—was completely normal. In fact, a system without the protection of the secret police was for him unimaginable. For Klaus, his parents are the real authority.

As the narrative progresses the reader is made aware of the impact the over-involvement of Klaus's mother has had on his sexuality through his confession of random acts of sexual perversion. As Klaus himself becomes a Stasi agent "the domestic and institutional mechanisms of power, the voice of his mother, and that of the chief minister of operations for the Stasi, who ultimately becomes his boss, completely converge" (Prager 990). After the act of masturbating in a stairwell of an apartment building, Klaus is tortured by thoughts of how ashamed his mother and the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* would be toward him: "Was würde ich dem Gerichtspsychologen sagen? Was meinem Richter, meiner Mutter, meinem Minister? Mr. Kitzelstein, das waren sehr konkrete Fragen, die mir durch den Kopf gingen, als ich mir weiß-ich-wie-oft die Trompete polierte. Und meine *Angst!*" (194-195). Klaus, however, is consoled after he convinces himself that he commits perverted acts for the wellbeing of socialism.

Mr. Kitzelstein, ich lege Wert auf die Feststellung, daß ich pervers wurde, um dem Sozialismus zum Sieg zu verhelfen. Mein Forschungsgebiet war heikel; das Verhältnis von Sozialismus und Perversion nirgends geklärt. Wie gefällt Ihnen die dialektische Einheit *Sozialismus braucht Perversion, Perversion braucht Sozialismus!* (247)

Here Brussig is certainly parodying the tendency in the GDR for many abnormalities to be justified in the name of socialism. The excessive spying of the Stasi, for instance, was also justified in the name of socialism.

After explaining his childhood and how he became a Stasi agent, Klaus Ultzscht recounts how he brought down the Berlin Wall. It all began when he was suddenly summoned by the Stasi to the headquarters. He was at first fearful that the Stasi had learned of his sexual perversions and he was going to have to pay for them. However, he also entertained the hope that he was going to be commissioned with a special task. When he arrived at the headquarters he was told that his blood was needed because of his exceptional metabolism. Before the blood was drawn Klaus was given a special serum which rendered him unconscious. When he awoke he was taken to the person whose life was saved through his donation of blood: General Secretary Erich Honecker. It is autumn of 1989 and demonstrations against the regime are swelling and the Stasi is busy arresting the protestors. One of Klaus's coworkers loses his faith in the system. His vision of the workers' paradise rapidly unravels before him as he stares at the scores of demonstrators. He exclaims, "Die dürfte es theoretisch gar nicht geben!" (277) Klaus makes his way to a demonstration on Alexanderplatz. There speaking to the masses is who he believes to be the famous East German figure skating coach Jutta Müller, but in fact it is Christa Wolf. As he tries pushing himself to the front of the crowd he slips down a subway station staircase, severely injuring his genitalia, and is brought to a hospital. Through the accident, Klaus finds that his genitals have become exponentially larger. He decides to venture out into the excitement outside. It is November 9, 1989. Klaus reminisces, "Ein Mann ging hinaus in die Nacht, ein Mann mit seinem Schwanz. (Ich rede von mir, wie Sie sich denken können.) Ich hatte ein Glied, das diese Bezeichnung verdiente" (313). After Klaus had worked his way through the throngs of people

gathered at the Berlin Wall, he exposes himself to the border guards, shocking them into unintentionally opening the gates to West Berlin. The rest is history.

The primary difference between *Helden wie wir* and texts such as Loest's *Nikolaikirche* is Brussig's use of humor. Rüdiger Steinlein comments, "Die Wende wird im Gegensatz zu Loests letztlich doch aufklärerisch-pädagogischer Inszenierung zum Satyrspiel verfremdet. Der Mauerfall ist ein Mauer-Phall – stürzt sie doch am 9. November 1989 beim Anblick von des Helden hypertrophiertem, ins Riesenhafte erigiertem Glied einfach in sich zusammen" (303). Brussig's satirical style makes the concept of state control funny and has been criticized heavily for that reason. Brad Prager gives his explanation for Brussig's use of humor regarding the Stasi. He states that "the author may have de-emphasized the brutality of the police in order to avoid falling into a mode of criticism of the GDR that valorizes other—by default Western European and American—police" (992).

Surely Thomas Brussig has not been the first German author to have written humorously about the troubled German past. Günter Grass, for example, has written humorous texts that relate to World War II. Steinlein believes that Brussig's use of humor in depicting the Stasi is fully warranted. The fact that the feared Stasi suddenly and unexpectedly became powerless exactly fits Immanuel Kant's definition of humor. Steinlein writes,

Die Repräsentanten der Stasi in Brussig's *Helden wie wir* erweisen sich als geradezu lehrbuchmäßige Beispiele für die Erregung Komik anzeigenden Gelächters, wie es Kants berühmt gewordene Definition des Lachens aus der *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) erfaßt: "Das Lachen ist ein Affekt aus der plötzlichen Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts." Mutatis mutandis heißt das: die Lächerlichkeit der Stasi ergibt sich daraus, daß die "gespannte Erwartungen" –

nämlich die Erwartung ihrer furchteinflößenden Omnipotenz wie Omnipräsenz und Omniszienz – sich angesichts der geschilderten Vertreter des MfS, ihrer “Philosophie” wie ihrer Praxis, die an Selbstfälligkeit und Borniertheit kaum zu überbieten sind, buchstäblich “in nichts” auflöst. (303)

Another perspective could be that the use of humor in depicting state control symbolizes that it is gone and it is time to laugh. Perhaps Brussig believed that laughter is the best method for *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship.

Critics called out Brussig for minimizing the dangers of the Stasi through his use of humor. Wolf Biermann, who actually liked the book, still “laments that the Stasi are rendered harmless in Brussig’s work and speculates that it may be for that reason that some who are nostalgic for the GDR have taken so much pleasure in the book” (Prager 991). Some critics, such as Roberto Simanowski, even went so far as to say that *Helden wie wir* was damaging to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Simanowski writes,

Was aber bewirkt Brussig mit seinen bagatellisierenden Übertreibungen? Was empfindet der Leser, wenn alles im Ulk endet? Wenn nichts aufgearbeitet, sondern alles niedergelacht wird. Er fühlt allmählich, daß es in Wahrheit gar kein Vergangenheitsproblem gibt. Es gibt keine Geschichte zu besichtigen, es gibt nur Geschichten zu erzählen, und die enden alle früher oder später unter der Gürtellinie. Im Obszönen liegt die Erlösung. Brussig hat den Wenderoman geschrieben, weil er die “system-kompatible Spätlings-Generation” (Christoph Dieckmann) von ihrem schlechten Gewissen und vom Nach-Wendetrauma der Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung befreit. Man wird ihm irgendwann vorwerfen, dem großen Vergessen gedient zu haben.

*Helden wie wir* was the object of much debate. Some believed that Brussig's use of humor was an expression of the victory over the Stasi. Others argued that it was disrespectful of the real terror of state control. With its usage of humor, *Helden wie wir* was the first of its kind, and there was more to come. The next example shows the development of a different brand of humor: the nostalgic.

### *Sonnenallee*

On 7 October 1999, *Sonnenallee*, a film directed by Leander Haußmann and written by Thomas Brussig, made its debut. If Brussig's *Helden wie wir* was a step in the creation of literature characterized by *Ostalgie*, *Sonnenallee* marks the creation of *Ostalgie* on film. Like *Helden wie wir*, *Sonnenallee* was the cause of much fanfare, exceeding expectations at the German domestic box-office with 1.8 million spectators (Cooke, *Representing* 111). This comedy depicts the sentimental story of young people in the GDR going through the universal human experiences of friendship and falling in love. A descriptive press piece that was circulated to promote the film stated:

Es wird Zeit, daß man darüber spricht, was die DDR noch war außer Mauer, Stasi und Zentralkomitee. In der DDR gab es z.B. Menschen, die es woanders nicht gab, wie Pionierleiter und Westverwandte. Im Westen hatte man wiederum vieles, was man im Osten nicht bekam: Stones-Platten, Friesennerze und Krönung. Einige Dinge teilten Ost und West aber auch miteinander. Wie zum Beispiel die Sonnenallee. Im Westen lag das längere und im Osten das kürzere Ende. Die Mauer ging mittendurch. (Cafferty)

The narrative is about the life of Micha Ehrenreich, a sixteen year old East German, and the lives of his friends and family on Sonnenallee, a street that was divided by the Berlin Wall

and whose shorter end lies in East Berlin. This is obviously a reference to the Western perception that the East Germans got the “shorter end of the stick” after World War II. Set in the 1970s, Micha and his friends spend their adolescence getting acquainted with the opposite sex only a short distance from the “golden West.” Throughout the film Westerners are shown on platforms looking over the Wall down onto the East Germans. West Germans and East Germans refer to each other as *Wessi* and *Ossi* which are slightly pejorative terms still used today.

The main storyline is Micha’s attempts to win the heart of Miriam, the most beautiful girl in *Sonnenallee*. However, many of the other characters are awarded their own sub-plots. Micha’s mother has found a West German passport and deliberates throughout the narrative as to whether or not she should use it to leave for the West. At the end she decides to stay and strikes up a new found romance with Micha’s father, Hotte. Hotte grumbles about conditions in the GDR but has no intention or desire to leave. Uncle Heinz is a *Wessi*, who comes to East Berlin to visit. He thinks of himself as a smuggler but has only courage to “smuggle” things into the GDR that are legal. Micha’s best friend Mario falls in love with Sabrina, who, as Cafferty points out, represents the stereotypical GDR-hippie (259). Sabrina defines herself as an existentialist, is shown as unemployed, untypical for women in the GDR, and expresses her aversion towards the institution of marriage. Towards the end of the film Mario impregnates Sabrina and they get married. To support their soon-to-be family Mario goes to work for the Stasi, whereupon his friendship with Micha is destroyed showing the vicissitudes of adolescence.

The police, the Stasi and the border guards—the representatives of state control—are all shown as stupid and are easily fooled. This makes them look less dangerous to the audience. Earlier post-reunification fictional representations of state control, such as that in *Das Versprechen*, were almost omnipotent and omniscient. Representatives of the West, like those

who look down upon the East Germans over the Wall from the platforms, are shown as being arrogant and condescending, treating East Berlin like a zoo. This is how many East Germans felt about West Germans before and even after reunification. West German stereotypes for East Germans are ubiquitous in the film. One prime example for this are Olaf and Udo, members of the *FDJ* (Free German Youth) from Dresden who the Ehrenreichs host in order to demonstrate patriotism to a neighbor falsely suspected of being a Stasi agent. Olaf and Udo speak with hyperbolic Saxonian accents that are the epitome of things West Germans hated about East Germans. As they enter the apartment Hotte is watching West German television, which was fairly common in East Germany, especially in East Berlin. They are mesmerized by the programs such as if they had never seen a television before.

The end of the film shows everything working out for all of the characters except for Uncle Heinz's death. All characters in the film, police and Stasi included, sing and dance in the streets as if the film was a musical. The film ends with a narration from a much older Micha who is reminiscing about the time of his life shown in the film. He says, "Es war einmal ein Land und ich habe dort gelebt. Wenn man mich fragt wie es war, es war die schönste Zeit meines Lebens, denn ich war Jung und verliebt."

Similar to Brussig's *Wende* novel, *Sonnenallee* cultivated the debate on what is acceptable and unacceptable in depicting the SED-dictatorship. However, in the case of *Sonnenallee* it seemed as if this debate hit a boiling point when "Help," an organization that assists victims of political violence, filed a lawsuit against Leander Haußmann. The organization founded their lawsuit upon paragraph 194 of the German penal code which makes the insult of victims of political oppression a punishable crime. The organization stated that Haußmann portrays how "Jugendliche 'vor der Mordmauer tanzen aber nicht etwa nach dem Fall der Mauer,

sondern zu Zeiten, als diese Mauer blutige Alltagsrealität war” (“Sonnenallee”). A speaker for the organization explained that the main reason they filed the claim is because in one scene a character gets shot by a border policeman but was saved by a Rolling Stones album hidden under his jacket. The figure begins to cry not because he almost died but because his album was destroyed (“Sonnenallee”). A 29 January 2000 *Berliner Zeitung* article also takes exception to the film’s portrayal of state control. The article expressed the opinion that the final scene in the movie, instead of showing civilians dancing together with soldiers, police and Stasi agents, should have shown the people being brutalized by the symbols of the state control (“Beleidigend”).

Haußmann fired back at the accusations saying that he welcomed a lawsuit as a possible resolution to the debate concerning what is acceptable and unacceptable in depicting the GDR. It could possibly be solved by discussing “inwieweit man, wenn man Geschichte aufarbeitet, überhaupt in der Lage ist, jemanden zu beleidigen” (“Beleidigend”). Brussig defended *Sonnenallee* saying that ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall it was time for the image of the GDR to be somewhat transformed. Not all memories of life in the GDR are negative, he argued (Sundemeier). Furthermore, Brussig stated that what people should find offensive about the film has actually nothing to do with the film. Offensive, however, is the fact “dass sich kaum jemand für die Opfer politischer Gewalt in der DDR interessiert, dass es keine Reue gab und gibt, sondern nur allgemeines Schulterzucken von Menschen, die plötzlich keine Täter mehr gewesen sein wollen” (“Brussig: Anzeige”). One newspaper interviewed the Blümels, an East German couple, who had lived on Sonnenallee since 1962 to find out how they felt about the film. They found it funny and understood that it was a satirical portrayal of life in East Berlin. They also

concurred with the underlying theme of *Sonnenallee*; they enjoyed their lives in the GDR in spite of the post-reunification presentations of life there (Naumann).

Paul Cooke recognizes *Sonnenallee* as a shift in the cinematic depictions of life in the GDR. He argues that German cinema in the 1990s mostly showed the GDR as a dismal and gray place where everyone wants to escape. This representation reflects a Western perspective of the GDR. He writes that

in the early 1990s the focus of popular examinations of the GDR was almost exclusively on its insidious structures of control, and in particular on the role of the Stasi. The result of representing the GDR as nothing more than a “Stasi state,” in which it was impossible to have a “normal” life, led to a growing sense of alienation amongst many ordinary East Germans, who felt that their everyday experience in the East was being devalued and ignored. (Cooke, *Representing* 112)

*Sonnenallee*, however, showed everyday life in the GDR using humor. Aspects of state control portrayed in the film do not have that much of an impact on the outcomes of the narrative and do not detract from the wellbeing of the characters. In one scene, of course, Mario and Micha physically fight because Mario decides to work for the Stasi. Nevertheless, everyone is happy at the end of the film. Perhaps this deviation from other cinematic depictions of the GDR accounts for the success of *Sonnenallee*.

The film has two values that separate it from other fictional representations of the GDR. On one hand the film is a typical expression of *Ostalige*; GDR decoration and products are sentimentally displayed. Moreover, the narrative evokes a feel-good emotion. On the other hand the film makes fun of Western ideas and representations of how life was in the GDR.

*Sonnenallee* captured the *zeitgeist* for many East Germans in 1999. The basic story of the film—Micha and his rite of passage—could easily be the story of a Westerner with a few substitutions. The point of this is that Micha had the same adolescent experience as Western teenagers on the other side of the Wall. Critics, however, did not focus their attention on the story of adolescence. Instead, they aimed their condemnation at the depiction of state control. They argued that the film completely ignores the fact that while civilians are dancing with border guards in the film, in reality border guards were shooting at the civilians. Both sides of the debate on whether or not such a representation of life in the GDR is appropriate believed their way was the correct path to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship.

### ***Leben bis Männer***

The final Brussig text that this study will examine is *Leben bis Männer* (2001). This text is a monologue of an East German soccer coach in which aspects of soccer are related to life after the *Wende* as well as life in general. Unlike the other texts examined thus far, this piece has little to do with state control in the SED-dictatorship. Rather, this piece criticizes the failures of reunification and the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Typical for Brussig, there are some parts of the monologue that could be offensive for some, especially the borderline racist and sexist comments of the coach. Brussig, however, does not include these attitudes to glorify them. Instead, Brussig applies this way of thinking in order to make the coach look uneducated and one-track minded: soccer is everything. In the world of soccer gender equality is no pressing issue. An article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* explains: “Frauen müssen sich zudem damit abfinden, daß sie in diesem Universum nicht vorgesehen sind. Genetisch bedingt verstehen sie nichts von der Sache, weil ‘Fußball ein Bekenntnis erfordert’” (“Freistoßmauer”). Besides the

myriad sexist comments, he also makes some questionable remarks about foreigners. Here, Brussig addresses the issue of post-reunification *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*<sup>10</sup> which became particularly pronounced in East Germany after reunification.

At the very center of the monologue is the coach's relationship to his star player, Heiko, who he has coached since he was a child. Both the coach and Heiko are losers of the *Wende*. The coach has nothing to live for aside from soccer. His wife divorced him and he does not have a relationship to his son. His players are the only family he has left. Like many others, the financial situation in East Germany has affected him negatively. He explains that he pursued the capitalist dream after reunification and opened up his own sporting goods store. This dream was shattered when the financial realities of the reunification set in. He explains, "Die Kunden für so n Sportgeschäft, also die tüchtigen Jungen, sind alle weg und haben im Westen Arbeit gesucht. Und von Baseballschlägern allein kannst du auf Dauer nicht überleben" (51). The reader can discern that not only his own financial situation but also the general economic situation in East Germany has something to do with his cynical *Weltanschauung*. "Ich kanns einem Menschen ansehen, ob er Arbeit hat oder nicht. Ich spiel immer Arbeitslose rauskriegen: Der ist. Der auch. In unserer Gegend gibts massig Material" (53).

Heiko, however, is a different kind of loser. Throughout the duration of the monologue the reader gathers that Heiko was forced to stand trial for his activities as a border guard in the GDR. Heiko's situation after the *Wende* demonstrates that reunification did not translate into happiness for all. The coach explains the trial: "Die ganze Scheiße fing erst an, als die Mauer gefallen war. Für Heiko war das mit dem Mauerfall ... Da macht er einen um an der Grenze, und ein Jahr später ist es vorbei – das ist doch nix" (89). Even though Heiko was only following

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<sup>10</sup> The English word that is closest to the term *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* is xenophobia. The German term, however, has somewhat of a stronger meaning than does *xenophobia* which is broader.

orders when he shot the man at the border, after reunification he was called to stand trial for it. The year in which Heiko had to go to court was the same year that the soccer team had an excellent season and was on the verge of being able to advance to a higher-ranking league. The deciding game for the team was scheduled on the last day of Heiko's trial. The coach wanted to make sure that Heiko would be able to make it to the game afterwards so he accompanied him to the trial. He says, "Das Urteil steht ja da noch nicht fest, angeblich, im sogenannten Rechtsstaat, und deshalb hab ich den Heiko schon verstanden. Also gut, hab ich gesagt, ich fahr dich" (90-1).

The coach retells his impressions of the trial and his disillusionment with the judicial system calling it an "Affenzirkus" (91). He expresses his antipathy toward the female judge, calling her oblivious. The coach took the stand under oath in court to make a statement about Heiko's character. He said "daß der Heiko einfach ne andere Beziehung hat zu Autoritäten; der macht, was man ihm sagt, und fragt nicht und diskutiert nicht herum" (92). The coach's defense of Heiko for the shooting at the border concurs with the opinions of many during the real border guard trials in the early 1990s which were discussed in the first chapter of this study. Many believed that the border guards were simply the pawns of the situation and should therefore not be forced to stand trial for obeying orders. The border guard trial was a cause for some to lose faith in the "sogenannten Rechtsstaat." Why were the border guards being punished for following orders but not those who made up the orders? During Heiko's trial the coach exclaimed his frustration in court, "Und so was ist nun Gerechtigkeit! . . . Wollt ihr mich nicht gleich mit anklagen?" (92) Heiko was only sentenced to two years of probation and they were able to make it to the game on time. However, the trial left Heiko in psychological ruin. Heiko was unable to play aggressively which in the game of soccer, the coach explains, spells defeat.

For Heiko, the game “hatte keinen Sinn mehr” (95). The player who the coach had carefully trained for more than a decade was suddenly not there anymore.

The wave of negative feelings towards foreigners, articulated in the text, cannot be understood apart from what has been called the “colonialization of the GDR.” In the opinion of some, the GDR was socially and economically subjugated by the FRG during the time after the *Wende*. What East Germans saw was the complete dissolution of their economy. Reunification was actually the integration of the former GDR into the West German system. This inevitably meant East Germany would need to be economically restructured to fit the West German model. In order to achieve this, livelihoods that had no value to the capitalist system, were uprooted. As jobs were lost, unemployment, which did not exist in the GDR, became an acute problem. The fate of East German university professors after reunification aptly demonstrates the economic impact the reunification had on East Germany. After reunification three-fourths of all professors lost their jobs, and between 1994 and 1998 only 104 out of 1,878 professors who were employed in East Germany were actually from the East (Cooke, *Representing* 3). This, of course, resulted in East Germans feeling like second-class citizens in a reunified Germany.

But what do the post-reunification economic problems of East Germany have to do with the rise of *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* in East Germany? In comparison to Western standards, the GDR was a relatively homogenous country due to limited immigration. After reunification East Germans’ lack of experience with non-European immigrants coupled with a feeling of being second-class Germans caused xenophobia to rise. The soccer coach expresses this attitude in his monologue with comments such as, “Sind wir jetzt etwa die Neger Deutschlands” and “Ich mach da keine Unterschiede zwischen den Ausländern – ob das nun Asylanten sind, Gastarbeiter, Juden, Neger, Polen, oder, oder, oder – spielt keine Rolle. Das sind Ausländer, und fertig” (55).

Although the coach makes some detestable comments, the reader builds up an understanding for the flawed protagonist. The audience is challenged to look beyond the superficial ignorance of the coach and try to understand his *Weltanschauung*. In this way, *Leben bis Männer* is an attempt to foster greater understanding for the average East German. After reunification many West Germans grew impatient with East German complaints about the economic disparity between the East and West. Brussig presents the soccer coach as the average East German. Although he is perhaps ignorant, knowing little beyond the soccer field, his attitudes were shaped by his experiences in Germany after reunification.

*Leben bis Männer* is an interesting contribution to the discourse surrounding the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. It questions the benefit of undertakings such as the border guard trial which was done in the name of the *Aufarbeitung*. Furthermore, the text calls attention to the conditions in post-*Wende* East Germany which is interesting because most texts produced on East Germany focused on the GDR past. What good is it to focus on the past when there are so many problems in the present?

### **Hello Honecker!:: Ostalgie on the International Stage**

#### ***Good Bye Lenin!***

So far this chapter has shown that at some point in the mid to late 1990s nostalgia for the GDR took form in a movement called *Ostalgie*. This movement is represented by the revival of products and cultural relics of the GDR.<sup>11</sup> *Ostalgie*, however, also took the form of literature, film and television shows. After his breakthrough novel *Helden wie wir* in 1995, Brussig became a touchstone for this cultural movement. The works of Brussig, although subjected to much

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<sup>11</sup> A wave of television programs about the GDR appeared sometime around 2003. For example, *The Ostalgie Show*, *Ein Kessel DDR*, *Die ultimative Ost-Show*. East German consumer products such as *Rotkäppchen*, *Club Cola* and *f6* cigarettes also experienced a major revival.

criticism, enjoyed impressive success. His success, however, came largely from his positive reception among East Germans. Brussig called for the normalization of the East German past, as well as highlighted problems of the present in East Germany. In 2003 Brussig's domination of *Ostalgie* was challenged with the debut of Wolfgang Becker's film *Good Bye Lenin!*, which achieved a level of success that is rare for German films, bringing in thirty-five million euros. The success of *Good Bye Lenin!* dwarfed that of its predecessor, *Sonnenallee*, and catapulted the concept of *Ostalgie* to the international spotlight.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Good Bye Lenin!* is the fact that its director Wolfgang Becker, lead actor Daniel Brühl and screenplay writer Bernd Lichtenberg are West Germans. Critics were astounded at how such a mostly West German production could provide such an accurate picture of life in the GDR (Cooke, *Representing* 129). In many ways the film's portrayal of life in the GDR differs from that in the works of Brussig. Although humorous, *Good Bye Lenin!* treats some aspects of life in the GDR and the transitions to reunification very seriously. Nevertheless, most critics have turned to *Sonnenallee* when finding comparisons for the film. In doing so they are not completely wrong. There are plenty of aspects in *Good Bye Lenin!* that are easily comparable to *Sonnenallee* such as the presentation of East German products and styles. But as Cooke points out, *Good Bye Lenin!* has a far more political message than does *Sonnenallee* which simply presents aspects of daily life in the GDR through the *Ostalgie* lens. The point Haußmann and Brussig wanted to get across was that it is perfectly normal for East Germans to have happy memories of everyday life in the GDR. Becker and Bernd, on the other hand, make a more far-reaching statement concerning the socialist project that was the GDR.

The narrative begins in East Berlin during the late 1970s with the school teacher Christiane Kerner being harshly questioned by Stasi agents in the apartment kitchen regarding the flight of her husband to the West as her children Alexander and Ariane watch television in the living room. After this she suffers a nervous breakdown but returns to her children and life rehabilitated and with socialist zeal. Alexander narrates, “Mutter hat sich mit unserem sozialistischen Vaterland verheiratet.” The narrative skips ahead to 1989 amidst the grand preparations in East Berlin for the celebration of the GDR’s fortieth anniversary and the protests that followed it. As Christiane is going to an SED event, she witnesses a crowd of protesters being brutally subdued by the police and Stasi. Among the protesters being brutalized and carried off is her son Alexander. Upon seeing this, Christiane suffers a heart attack and goes into a coma. What follows is a “modern Rip Van Winkle” story as she wakes from the coma eight months later after the Berlin Wall has fallen and German reunification is about to take place (Theil).

The world in which Christiane awoke was a very different place from the GDR just eight months before. In this case the film highlights lightning-speed changes that took place during the *Wende*. The doctors tell Alexander that if his mother experiences shock she is at high risk of suffering another heart attack. Considering her love for socialism, Alexander must mask the changes of the *Wende* from his mother in order to preserve her health. What ensues is a comical effort by Alexander to create an “ersatz East Germany in their tiny apartment, complete with homemade TV news that ‘explains’ the increasingly capitalist goings-on outside” (Theil).

The changes that took place in East Germany during the *Wende* far outpaced changes in other post-communist societies. Alexander narrates, “Mutter verschlief den Siegeszug des Kapitalismus” as Coca-Cola trucks drive by GDR soldiers withdrawing from their posts.

Alexander explains the great change that occurred in his mother's eight-month coma and the uncertainty it brought for East Germans: "Ihr Schlaf ignorierte, wie Helden der Arbeit arbeitslos wurden . . . Die Zukunft lag ungewiss in unseren Händen." Much of the humor in the film comes from Alexander's efforts to find artifacts from the GDR just eight months after its collapse. For example all of the food Alexander serves his bedridden mother must be GDR brands. In grocery stores, however, Alexander finds that all of these products have been replaced by Western products. He must painstakingly gather and recreate GDR products to hide the changes from his mother. For example, his mother asks for the East German product *Spreewald* gherkins which are no where to be found. Therefore he has to take the label off of an old jar and pastes it onto a jar of gherkins from Holland. Despite Alexander's great efforts to suppress signs of capitalism, his mother notices changes such as a gigantic Coca-Cola advertisement on a neighboring apartment building.

One day as Alexander sleeps, Christiane wanders out of the apartment building into the drastically changed world. She notices the differences and Alexander is forced to explain the changes. However, he decides to explain the changes as the victory of socialism. In his fake news program he presents the changes as the result of an influx of immigrants who fled capitalism. His mother is convinced that socialism has won the Cold War before she dies as the result of another heart attack.

*Good Bye Lenin!* accurately portrays different aspects of the GDR and the drastic societal changes after its collapse. Elements of state control and brutality are lucidly depicted. Protesters carrying signs that say "Keine Gewalt" are beaten with batons by police. It is this revelation of the abuses of state control that causes the convinced socialist Christiane Kerner to have a heart attack upon seeing her son Alex being maltreated by the police. Christiane Kerner represents

those who truly believed that socialism was more humanitarian than capitalism. This belief, however, was shattered for many in 1989 when the state put down peaceful demonstrations with excessive force. After its collapse, it became even more obvious that the GDR was far from being a humanitarian system as the secrets of the Stasi were made public. This revelation is shown in the film by real video footage from 1989 of demonstrators who had stormed the Stasi headquarters, tearing the documents and throwing the remains out the windows while chanting, “Stasi raus!” Christiane Kerner, however, awakes with no recollection of what caused her collapse. She believes the changes that she notices in the GDR are the victory of socialism; she is able to die content.

Alexander Kerner is depicted at the beginning of the film as being disillusioned with the socialist system. His participation in the protests against the system confirms this impression. Alexander, however, experiences somewhat of a *rapprochement* with socialism. In the eight months his mother was in a coma, Alexander experienced firsthand the realities of the West’s colonization of the East as he loses his job. In having to recreate the illusion of socialism for his mother’s wellbeing, Alexander rethinks the socialist system in which his mother so strongly believed. He narrates, “Irgendwie muss ich zugeben, dass ich mein Spiel verselbstständigte. Die DDR, die ich für meine Mutter schuf, wurde immer mehr die DDR, die ich mir vielleicht gewünscht hätte.” By the end of the film Alexander understands why someone like his mother firmly believed in the socialist values of GDR even though he has learned his mother believed in the ideal and not necessarily actually existing socialism. Before his mother dies he makes one last fake news video to complete his revised GDR. Alexander finds a taxi driver who either is in fact or is a *doppelgänger* of Sigmund Jähn, the famous East German cosmonaut and his childhood hero. He makes Jähn the new president of the GDR and has him give a speech—

written by Alexander—in the final news video for his mother exactly one year after her collapse. In the speech Jähn, or his look alike, says: “Sozialismus das heißt nicht sich einzumauern, Sozialismus das heißt auf die anderen zuzugehen, mit den anderen zu leben, nicht nur von einer besseren Welt zu träumen aber sie wahr zu machen.” At the end of the speech he announces the opening of the GDR borders. Paul Cooke comments on this scene, “In the words of Jähn we have Alex’s conception of what the GDR should have been about: socialism with a human face, which could urge the population on to new heights of achievement (*Representing* 132). Alexander concludes with a narration over real video footage of everyday scenes in the GDR: “Das Land das meine Mutter verließ war ein Land, an das sie geglaubt hatte. Ein Land, dass es in Wirklichkeit nie so gegeben hat und das wir bis zu ihrer letzten Sekunde überleben ließen. Ein Land das in meiner Erinnerung immer mit meiner Mutter verbunden sein wird.”

The success and critical acclaim that *Good Bye Lenin!* enjoyed can perhaps be partially attributed to its complex portrayal of the GDR. On the one hand, the film includes many aspects—such as the special attention to East German products, customs and sentiment—that make it an *Ostalgie* film. Nevertheless, the police state side of the GDR is not hidden or distorted as was the accusation against *Sonnenallee*. Whereas *Sonnenallee* focuses on everyday life in the GDR, *Good Bye Lenin!* undertakes a reevaluation of the socialist system with the difficulties of reunification in mind.

After reunification much of the attention paid to the GDR focused on the misdeeds of the state. Some East Germans believed the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship had gone too far in demonizing it. One university professor argued that *Ostalgie* films create space in the realm of public discourse for East German culture. He explains, “These shows are trying to show everyday life because there is no room in public debate about the party, the Stasi and the system

for the music, the special humor, the food and the lifestyle that make East Germans' memories more lively. There are already so many retro shows, and there is no place in them for the GDR, as if cultural history is only from West Germany" (Fitzgerald).

There were others, though, who took issue with *Good Bye Lenin!*. The psychologist Hans-Eberhard Zahn, who spent seven years in a GDR prison on account of his political views, represents this dissatisfaction with *Ostalgie* films like *Good Bye Lenin!*. In a *Berliner Zeitung* article, Zahn accused the film of trivializing the *Unrechtsstaat* aspects of the GDR ("Zeitzeuge"). One West German, who wrote a letter in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, expressed disdain for the fact that such a film could be considered a comedy. The author of the letter went on to make an interesting point by recognizing that West Germans and East Germans probably have different interpretations of such films (Dienel). This demonstrates the degree of difference there was between East and West Germans with regard to their own history. Furthermore, the emotion a film such as *Good Bye Lenin!* still evoked in 2003 showed that the *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR would go on.

### Conclusion

Perhaps the only thing one can say with certainty about the concept of *Ostalgie* is that it has different meanings to different groups. This chapter has hopefully provided enough evidence to demonstrate that *Ostalgie* has been the subject of much debate. Throughout the earlier part of the 1990s discourse on the GDR was dominated by the topic of state control in the GDR and its *Unrechtsstaat* image. *Ostalgie*, which began to form in the mid 1990s, represents a widening of the discourse on the legacy of the GDR. People began to question the early post-reunification representations of the GDR as a dark and miserable place; *Ostalgie* challenged these images. Nobody has done more for the movement than Thomas Brussig. Brussig caused an uproar with

his *Wende* novel *Helden wie wir*. In this novel Brussig highlights the many ironies of the GDR and the *Wende*. The story Klaus Uhltscht recounts in the narrative—bringing down the Berlin Wall with his penis—is a parody of the many memoirs and other personal accounts that came out directly after the collapse of the GDR. Brussig’s mocking tone struck a nerve with many critics who believed his treatment of this chapter of German history was too much of a serious matter to mock. By the time Haußman and Brussig’s film, *Sonnenallee*, appeared in the theaters, the term *Ostalgie* was already being used. *Sonnenallee* was the cultural piece that consolidated *Ostalgie* as a cultural movement. The principal message this film evokes is that East Germans should reclaim memory of the GDR as their own. For too long the hegemonic Western image of the GDR was that it was a dark gray place that was at all times miserable. Brussig argues that East Germans laughed, loved and sang in the GDR and it is normal to have nostalgic feelings for those times. Needless to say, this production caused even more controversy than *Helden wie wir*. Haußmann was nearly sued for the comical depiction of state control. The final work of Brussig that this chapter analyzed is *Leben bis Männer* (2001) which deals primarily with post-*Wende* problems in East Germany. This work calls into question the benefit of efforts done in the name of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship.

The last text examined in this chapter is Wolfgang Becker’s 2003 highly successful film, *Good Bye Lenin!*. Critics generally place this film into the category of *Ostalgie* film, next to *Sonnenallee*. Becker’s film, however, is a different kind of *Ostalgie* film. *Good Bye Lenin!* belongs to the *Ostalgie* movement in that it pays special attention to recreating everyday life in the GDR. *Sonnenallee*, however, has much more to do with everyday living in the GDR. In *Good Bye Lenin!* everyday life is just one element of the film. It evaluates everyday life in the GDR in comparison to everyday living in post-*Wende* East Germany. The major contrast between *Good*

*Bye Lenin!* and *Sonnenallee* is largely due to the difference in diegetic time; one is set in the 1970s and one is set around 1989-1990. *Good Bye Lenin!* is also comparable to Brussig's *Leben bis Männer*. At the end of the film it is lamented that through German reunification, the baby (the socialist ideal) was thrown out with the bathwater (the GDR as the police state).

To bring all of this back into the primary focus of this study, it should now be asked what does *Ostalgie* have to do with the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR? First, the *Ostalgie* movement greatly expanded the discourse concerning the *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR. *Good Bye Lenin!*, for example, brought *Ostalgie* to international attention. Germany's difficulties with reuniting and coming to grips with its past were exposed to the rest of the world, which had written Germany off as one big happy family since reunification. Second, *Ostalgie* made the discourse surrounding the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship more energetic and dynamic. The *Ostalgie* movement even paid criticism to the way in which the *Aufarbeitung* was being executed. This is evident in the efforts of *Ostalgie* works to reshape the image of life in the GDR which had been dominated by the Western version since reunification. The final chapter will focus on a 2006 film that has moved away from the *Ostalgie* movement, *Das Leben der Anderen*.

## CHAPTER 5: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: A NEW PARADIGM?

As the preceding chapters have shown, discourse concerning the legacy of the GDR has been vigorous and wide-ranging to say the least. The body of literature—comprising what this study has termed the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship—that followed the collapse of the regime has created space for diverging perspectives of the historical legacy of the GDR. This means that the literary *Aufarbeitung* has allowed for more participation. Consumers can choose from a broad range which films or books on the GDR they want to view, read and even identify themselves with. The same cannot be said of the political *Aufarbeitung* which has been, for the most part, a top-down process. Although the German government has gone to great lengths to ease the growing pains of reunification through creating policies and laws aiming at dealing with the second German dictatorship, what a state can do has its limits. In the future the state's role in the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship will more than likely diminish. Therefore, it will be up to authors, filmmakers, historians, and journalists to keep the discourse on the GDR alive. In closing this study will address some recent developments.

### **Focus on the Stasi: a New Paradigm?**

#### ***The Lives of Others***

In 2006 the filmmaker Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck made Germany a world champion—something the German soccer team failed to do at the World Cup in Germany that year—in the foreign film category at the Academy Awards with his film *The Lives of Others*. Von Donnersmarck, who happens to be West German, created with *The Lives of Others* a cinematic representation of the GDR which brings that which made the GDR a totalitarian society back into the limelight.

*The Lives of Others* is a narrative about the devout socialist and Stasi captain Gerd Wiesler and his profound transformation of character. The film begins in a lecture hall with Wiesler teaching future MfS employees inhumane ways in which one can interrogate a suspect. He demonstrates by playing a recording of him questioning a man. The scene flashes back and forth from the lecture hall to the East Berlin Stasi prison Hohenschönhausen where Wiesler is wearing down the suspect through his torturous methods. In the lecture hall, after he plays the recording, one student comments, “Das ist doch unmenschlich,” whereupon Wiesler looks to the seating chart and puts a mark by the student’s name. Already in the first minutes of the film, Ulrich Mühe, the actor who plays Wiesler, gives a bone chilling depiction of the Stasi and the character Wiesler.

The plot unfolds as Wiesler’s boss and school friend Lieutenant Grubitz takes him to a play by Georg Dreyman. Grubitz explains that Wiesler’s next mission is to put Dreyman under surveillance in order to find any anti-socialist activities. The real reason, which Wiesler does not find out until later, is that the high-ranking minister of culture Bruno Hempf is infatuated with Dreyman’s life partner and famous actress Christa-Marie Sieland. Hempf wants Dreyman out of the way so that he might advance on Sieland unhindered. Grubitz explains to Wiesler that this mission means big dividends or consequences if he fails. He and his team immediately go to work wiretapping Dreyman’s entire apartment and setting up a makeshift Stasi station in the attic of Dreyman’s building. As Wiesler is finishing up setting up the surveillance he sees that the neighbor witnessed their activities. In this frightening scene he tells the neighbor that if she tells Dreyman that they were there her daughter will lose her right to study at the university.

Wiesler’s ultra-serious, insensitive personality and Spartan lifestyle show him as a socialist Frankenstein, a frightening realization of the new Soviet man. The inside of his

apartment resembles a hotel room with nothing but the most basic objects. His only social contact in the film is a fifteen minute appointment with a prostitute. Eventually Wiesler finds out the true reason for the operation against Dreyman. In a scene in the Stasi headquarters lunchroom Wiesler and Grubitz are walking with their trays. Wiesler sits down at a table and says, “Irgendwo muss der Sozialismus doch beginnen.” At this point his socialist convictions are genuine and unshaken. Grubitz, however, sees his position in terms of personal advancement rather than contributing to socialism. Grubitz hears an underling telling an inappropriate joke about the GDR. Grubitz at first scares the underling and then tells him that he is only joking, whereupon he tells a joke about the GDR himself. Later in the film, however, the viewer realizes he was not joking when the underling is shown working in the basement of the headquarters. At the table Wiesler learns the real reason for the operation against Dreyman. Disgusted, he asks Grubitz, “Sind wir dafür angetreten?” All of this shows the hypocrisy of the system and the degree of corruption at the higher levels of the GDR.

Shaken by this revelation, Wiesler begins losing the zeal that he once had for his job. The first sign of this comes when Wiesler secretly tips off Dreyman that his life partner has been meeting with Hempf to appease him. Over the course of the surveillance, Wiesler’s character begins to transform and, as several reviewers have put it, a sort of reverse Stockholm-syndrome occurs. Instead of trying to bring down Dreyman he becomes a guardian-angel figure for him. This becomes important because Dreyman has begun to engage in “subversive” activities after his friend and fellow playwright, who cannot cope with being forbidden to write anymore, commits suicide. Dreyman begins writing critical, anonymous essays about the GDR for *Der Spiegel*. He has no idea his every movement is being watched.

The Stasi Agent Wiesler's melodramatic transformation is fostered through a side-effect of his spying: his exposure to the aesthetic. As Wiesler's interest in art is aroused, he is shown breaking into Dreyman's home, this time not to set up more spying equipment, but rather to take a book of poems by Bertolt Brecht. In another scene the transformation in Wiesler's character is noticeable as he eavesdrops while Dreyman plays a song on the piano from a book titled *Sonate für guten Menschen* in his wire-tapped apartment. After playing, Dreyman recites part of a quotation from Lenin which von Donnersmarck credits as the inspiration for the film (Kilb). Lenin explains he cannot listen to Beethoven's *Appassionata* "because it makes him want to say sweet, silly things and pat the heads of little people, whereas in fact those little heads must be beaten, beaten mercilessly, to make the revolution" (Garton Ash 8). The quotation is meant to expose the less-than-humane origins of the GDR, and after reciting it Dreyman says that anyone who has really listened to the music cannot be a bad person; Wiesler, of course, has listened to the music, and the transformation is complete.

The plot thickens when Sieland stops meeting with Hempf. Furious, he orders Grubitz to have her arrested. Grubitz, however, is suspicious as to why Wiesler has found nothing against Dreyman. During her interrogation, Sieland breaks down and informs that it is Dreyman who is the author of the critical essays. A Stasi team heads to Dreyman's apartment in order to find the one piece of evidence that would incriminate Dreyman, the typewriter. When they arrive they look to where Sieland informed them the typewriter was hidden. Sieland sees them going to where it was hidden and then sees Dreyman gazing at her with a look of disgust. This is too much for her and she runs outside in front of oncoming traffic, presumably to commit suicide, and is killed. To the dismay of the Stasi team, however, the typewriter has been removed.

Wiesler drives Grubitz home from the scene and is told that his career is finished. The newspaper left in Wiesler's car has a picture of Gorbachev on it, change is on the horizon.

The film then moves ahead to after reunification. Dreyman encounters Hempf at a theater performance. The depiction of someone like Hempf, who is so culpable of wrongdoings, walking around like anyone else is a profound statement. It shows that many of the political elites did not receive an appropriate punishment for their wrongdoings. Hempf tells Dreyman, "Es war schön in unserer kleinen Republik. Das verstehen Viele erst jetzt." Of course, a perpetrator such as Hempf would be nostalgic for the GDR. Dreyman asks him why the Stasi never spied on him. Hempf replies that they did spy on him and that they knew everything including that of his sex life. Dreyman can tolerate Hempf's presence no longer and says to him, "Dass Leute wie Sie wirklich mein Land geführt haben." He goes home to find traces of the wiretapping throughout his apartment.

Confused by the situation, Dreyman goes to the research and memorial site on Normannenstraße to read his Stasi files. There he learns that agent HGXX/7, who is Wiesler, falsified the reports and hid the typewriter to save him. The final scene shows Wiesler walking into a bookstore to look at Dreyman's newly released novel titled "Sonate vom guten Menschen." Wiesler opens up the book and sees, "HGXX/7 gewidmet, in Dankbarkeit." He goes to the register to buy the book and is asked if he needs it wrapped. Wiesler replies with pride, "Nein, es ist für mich."

A major theme in the film is the concept of personal choice which is articulated through the characters of Wiesler and Sieland. At the beginning of the film Wiesler appears to be heartless Stasi agent who cares for nothing besides the meticulous execution of his job. Sieland, on the other hand, has a brilliant career as an actress but also someone who loves her, Dreyman.

It is Wiesler, however, who consciously decides to put himself and his career at risk in order to save a man with whom he had no personal relations. Sieland, in contrast, ultimately betrays her loved one to save herself and her career. If human beings are defined by their actions then it is not a matter of whether or not someone is “good” or “evil,” but rather it is a matter of how a person acts in a given situation. The psychology experiments of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo have shown that situational pressures can influence seemingly normal people to commit despicable acts. When asked if Nazism could occur in the United States, Milgram replied: “If a system of death camps were set up in the United States of the sort we had seen in Nazi Germany, one would be able to find sufficient personnel for those camps in any medium-sized American town” (Sunstein).

Von Donnersmarck’s debut film received outstanding reviews from critics and won numerous awards. This begs the question of what inspired the young West German filmmaker to create a film that makes such a profound statement about this chapter of German history. Was *The Lives of Others* intended to be a response to its *Ostalgie* predecessors? This film stands in bold contrast to the *Ostalgie* films already discussed, the primary difference being that von Donnersmarck has moved away from *Ostalgie*’s focus on the gentler aspects of life in the GDR and has brought attention to that which made the GDR a totalitarian society. Comparing his film to *Ostalgie* films, von Donnersmarck said in an interview:

I really liked *Good Bye Lenin!* and *Sonnenallee*, but I was not happy with the way in which history was being written through the scenes and songs . . . This way in dealing with the past was going pretty far . . . Surveys have been done of young people from Eastern Germany. They have been asked if life in the German Democratic Republic was a totalitarian state or a dictatorship. Most replied, “No,

of course not. It's ridiculous" . . . People tend to think that because people don't have scars to show, the damage was not there. If my film has a different side effect and people see those times differently, I would be glad. (Dempsey)

Despite the film's contrast to the *Ostalgie*, Thomas Brussig—the name most associated with the movement—praised *The Lives of Others*. Brussig expressed his opinion that von Donnersmarck's film was long overdue; there had already been comedies made about the GDR but not enough serious films. Brussig admired what he described as von Donnersmarck's realistic style. However, he feared that the realistic style would cause a new wave of criticism for the comedies about the GDR. Brussig writes,

Ein Hinweis in eigener Sache sei gestattet: Als Co-Autor des Filmes *Sonnenallee* werde ich in den nächsten Wochen des öfteren hören, dass man es so (wie in *Sonnenallee*) "nicht machen kann," weil man es nämlich so (wie in *Das Leben der Anderen*) "machen muss." Das ist natürlich Quatsch. Man muss es weder so noch so machen; man kann es sowohl so als auch anders machen. Nicht die DDR-Komödien haben das DDR-Bild verzerrt, sondern das schlichte Nichtvorhandensein solcher Filme wie *Das Leben der Anderen*. (Brussig, "Klaviatur")

Brussig essentially argues there is room enough for various and contrasting representations of the GDR. After all, not every East German had the same experience there.

In terms of reaction to the film, remarkable feedback came from many other prominent names that have already been discussed in this study. Wolf Biermann, for instance, wrote an interesting newspaper article on it. Biermann, who praises the film, argues that *The Lives of Others* is exactly what is needed at this juncture of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship:

greater involvement by those who did not experience the *Unrechtsstaat*. What is truly remarkable about von Donnersmarck's film is that he provided such a graphic depiction of a totalitarian society without out having ever experienced one (von Donnersmarck is a West German who was not yet of age when the Wall fell). Biermann says that many people in his age group have grown weary of debating the GDR. But he optimistically includes, "Der Film des Debütanten bringt mich auf den Verdacht, daß die wirklich tiefere Aufarbeitung der zweiten Diktatur in Deutschland erst beginnt. Womöglich machen es jetzt besser die, die all das Elend nicht selbst erlitten haben" (Biermann). He even says that this film has helped his understanding for the perpetrators. Biermann explains

In diesem Film nun sah ich, freilich als Kunstfigur verfremdet, zum ersten Mal solche Phantome als lebendige Menschen, also auch in ihrem inneren Widerspruch. Die Gespenster treten aus dem Schatten. Manchmal hat das Kunstwerk mehr dokumentarische Beweiskraft als die Dokumente, deren Wahrheit angezweifelt wird – von den Tätern sowieso, aber schmerzhafter noch von den bald schon gelangweilten Zuschauern.

Similarly, Joachim Gauck, the East German pastor and former Federal Commissioner for the Records of State Security, articulated his appreciation of the film. Gauck stated that until *The Lives of Others*, the only realistic filmic depictions of the GDR were the nostalgic ones. He praised the absence of nostalgia for the GDR in the film, calling it a medicine for nostalgia. For him the film could be titled "The Other Life," the one he left when the GDR collapsed (Gauck).

Timothy Garton Ash, the British scholar who wrote a book about his experiences with the Stasi titled *The File: A Personal History*, wrote a captivating review on *The Lives of Others* which appeared in the *New York Review of Books* and is titled "The Stasi on Our Minds." In this

review he not only analyzes the film but connects it to German history. Ash credits the Germany of today for its dedication to “getting its *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, its past-beating, just right” (Garton Ash 2). The degree of German concern and carefulness for the brutalities of the Stalinist system far exceeds that in other former East Bloc countries. The debates about the GDR that a film, such as *The Lives of Others*, still stirs, is proof of this. Garton Ash writes,

A generation of West German contemporary historians, trained in the study of Nazism, turned their skilled attentions to the GDR, and especially to the dissection of the Stasi. Only the existence and character of West Germany, with its fiercely moral and professional approach to dealing with a difficult past, explains the unique cultural transmission of the Stasi phenomenon. (Imagine that the former Soviet Union had been taken over by a democratic West Russia, equipped and motivated to expose all the evils of the KGB). (8)

Germany’s preoccupation with the past has to do with its fear of repeating it and its dedication to maintaining its *Rechtsstaat* status.

Is *The Lives of Others* really an antidote for *Ostalgie*? Despite its bold contrast to *Ostalgie* in terms of depicting the GDR, the happy ending shows a coming to terms with the past. Dreyman discovers the truth at the end and thanks Wiesler for his good deeds. What is still left to be desired at the end of the film is to see someone like Hempf or Grubitz be held accountable for their abuse of power. An ending to the film that would have made it a real antidote to *Ostalgie* would have been to show Hempf on trial for his misdeeds. Instead, Wiesler is awarded for his heroic actions. The primary way in which *The Lives of Others* differs from representations of the *Ostalgie* paradigm is the realism. Unlike *Ostalgie* representations of the GDR such as in *Sonnenallee*, the plot in *The Lives of Others* is plausible. Although some details in the film were

altered for dramatic effect, much of what is shown in the film is historically accurate. Perhaps it is the film's adherence to realism that did not allow the ending to show Hempf or Grubitz on trial because unlike the war criminals of World War II, few of the political elite in the GDR have been punished for their misdeeds.

### ***The Stasi and the Post-9/11 Era***

*The Lives of Others* was not merely a reaction to the *Ostalgie* phenomenon that had become dominant in cultural representations of the GDR; it also makes a statement about the geopolitical conditions of the time in which it was made, the post-9/11 era. No work of art is produced in a vacuum; art is influenced either directly or indirectly by current events. The same is true of *The Lives of Others*. September 11, 2001, caused repercussions felt around the world. Privacy has become a major issue after 9/11, this time in democracies. A 2007 article in the *Economist* titled "Learning to Live with Big Brother" opens with the observation: "It used to be easy to tell whether you were in a free country or a dictatorship. In an old-time police state, the goons are everywhere, both in person and through a web of informers that penetrates every workplace, community and family" ("Learning to Live"). Interestingly, the article is accompanied by a picture of Stasi files with the caption, "That old-time data: East Germany's files." The article argues that today in democracies "data about people's whereabouts, purchases, behaviour, and personal lives are gathered, stored and shared on a scale that no dictator of the old school ever thought possible" ("Learning to Live"). The cutting-edge technology used to fight terrorism, protect public health, and assist corporations to deliver goods and services makes the spying devices in *The Lives of Others* look primitive. The point here is that in 1984, the Orwellian year in which von Donnersmarck's film begins, democratic countries viewed the

absence of civil liberties as a problem among totalitarian societies. Without doubt, the chipping away of privacy in democracies began long before 9/11. Nevertheless, the erosion of civil liberties has accelerated at alarming rates since then.

Von Donnersmarck has fostered a revival of discussion on state control in the GDR, especially when coupled with the new find in the Stasi archives—an order for border guards to shoot at East Germans trying to escape to the West. As discussed in the first chapter of this study, a command for border guards to shoot at those fleeing from the GDR was missing in order to implicate the higher-ups for the wrongful deaths in the border guard trials in the early 1990s. The 1973 directive which was found in the summer of 2007 stated: “Zögern Sie nicht mit der Anwendung der Schusswaffe, auch dann nicht, wenn die Grenzdurchbrüche mit Frauen und Kindern erfolgen, was sich die Verräter schon oft zunutze gemacht haben” (“Zögern Sie nicht”). Before this it was believed that guards were ordered to use violence as a last resort in order to prevent East Germans from escaping to the West. One expert observed that it was common knowledge that such commands existed. However, the announcement of the find caught the public by surprise. He writes,

In den ersten Jahren nach der Wende sei das Unrechtsregime der DDR stärker im Gedächtnis der Menschen verankert gewesen – Mitte der neunziger Jahre habe sich dann das Bewusstsein geändert: “Seither wird in Ostdeutschland das Soziale der DDR verklärt. Es herrscht die Ansicht vor: ‘So schlimm war es nicht.’ Und der Westen interessiere sich ohnehin nicht für die DDR. (Hans)

This new find revived discussion about the necessity to push forward with the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. Although no legal actions have taken on account of the new find, German legal expert believes there is still a possibility. About a new trial the expert said: “Wenn es

gelingt, den Verantwortlichen für Befehl zu finden, und man nachweisen kann, dass der Befehl Tötungen oder versuchte Tötungen zur Folge hatte, ist das schon denkbar” (Hans).

As Brussig has pointed out, there is certainly room enough for more filmic representations of the GDR, á la von Donnersmarck. To a certain extent, in the wake of *The Lives of Others*, there has been more focus on the *Unrechtsstaat* aspect of the GDR on film. *Das Wunder von Berlin*, a made-for-television movie which debuted in January 2008, also portrays state control in the GDR in a serious fashion. The film is about the Kaiser family, in which the father, Jürgen, works for the Stasi. The film shows the history of the GDR in the microcosm of the family. Jürgen went to work for the Stasi out of rebellion against his father’s World War II generation. It shows how Jürgen’s youthful idealism has turned into arrogance and oppression within and outside the family as his wife and son turn against him and the oppressive regime for which he works.

For a foreign-language film, *The Lives of Others* was an immense success in the United States, achieving much critical acclaim and winning the Academy Award for best foreign language film in 2007. The film has even inspired a Hollywood remake from award-winning filmmakers Anthony Minghella and Sidney Pollack that is currently in the works (“Lives of Others Set for Remake”). Perhaps the interest for such a theme in the United States is in some way related to the expansion of government powers in the last seven years under the Patriot Act. Under one of the Patriot Act’s provisions, a person’s house can now be searched without his knowledge or a prior court warrant. This, along with a warrantless eavesdropping program that has also become a reality in the United States, has some striking similarities to the police state portrayed in *The Lives of Others* (“Learning to Live”).

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined Germany's attempts at coming to grips as a society with its partition after World War II and the different experience of East Germans under the German Democratic Republic: the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. The first chapter focused on the policies and legal proceedings made by the German government after reunification to assist the *Aufarbeitung* and cultivate a sense of closure for those mistreated in the GDR so that a reunified Germany could move forward as a democratic society. This stage is referred to in this study as the political *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. In terms of policy making and legal proceedings, Germany has far surpassed other former East Bloc countries. Nevertheless, despite these efforts there remains much to be desired. Some have even speculated as to whether or not some measures, such as the border guard trials, have been counterproductive.

The next stage of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship examined in this study is the literary *Aufarbeitung*. This refers to the texts produced—both fiction and autobiographical—after reunification that represent the GDR. Chapter two concentrates on the formation of a literary discourse on the legacy of the GDR with the release of Christa Wolf's autobiographical text *Was bleibt* and the controversy that it stirred. The hullabaloo that began with Wolf's piece culminated into what is known as the *Literaturstreit* in the early 1990s. Wolf, whose *Was bleibt* tells the story of a writer being under Stasi surveillance, was called out for being a Stasi informant. This revelation produced a number of accusations about other writers having ties to the Stasi. The *Literaturstreit* polarized the German literati into two camps. One rallied behind the absolute moralist Wolf Biermann, who advocated harsh treatment for those who truly worked for the Stasi. The other advocated a forgive-and-forget approach to those with Stasi ties. Beyond the *Literaturstreit* there was a wave of other personal accounts about personal experiences with the

Stasi published in the early 1990s. Erich Loest and Reiner Kunze, for example, put together autobiographical texts by using documents from their personal Stasi files that they were able to access after the *Wende*. These texts embody the outrage of writers whose lives were affected or altered by totalitarianism.

The other side of the literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship examined in this study is the body of fiction about state control in the GDR that was produced after reunification. In chapter three, Loest's *Nikolaikirche*—perhaps the most comprehensive novel written about the *Wende*—receives most of the attention. The novel examines the milieu of the GDR during the *Wende* and questions where the GDR went wrong. In terms of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship, *Nikolaikirche* depicts the events of the *Wende* as East Germans confronting the oppressive system. Loest shows the collapse of the GDR as a logical ending to that chapter of German history. The next piece of fiction, Margarethe von Trotta's 1994 film *Das Versprechen*, also portrays the GDR as an oppressive system. The film is about the enduring love of two people divided by the Wall. The end of the film leaves the viewer with the impression that the love outlived the oppressive system as the pair is reunited with the opening of the borders in 1989. Similar to *Nikolaikirche*, *Das Versprechen* also promotes the idea of a happy ending for East Germans. Stefan Heym's *Auf Sand gebaut*, conversely, offers a more skeptical perspective on the events of the *Wende*. In several short stories that read like a comic strip, Heym shows the absurdity of the GDR but also warns of the hardships that will accompany reunification.

Reunification also had undesirable side effects. When the euphoria surrounding the reunification process subsided, many were left—mostly due to the enormous economic difficulties of reunification—dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction with the overall results of reunification, coupled with a growing sense of being colonized by the West, produced a reaction

in East Germany. This phenomenon is called *Ostalgie*, a German portmanteau of the words east and nostalgia. *Ostalgie* marks a shift away from the (usually Western) depiction of the GDR as a totalitarian state, to a depiction that focused on the more mundane, everyday aspects of life in the GDR (Cooke, *Representing* 104). *Ostalgie* produced a comeback for many East German products that had disappeared after reunification. In addition to consumer products, the *Ostalgie* movement produced its own paradigm of fictional texts, several of which are examined in chapter four of this study. Thomas Brussig is the name most associated with the authorship of *Ostalgie* fiction. The first of Brussig's works examined is this 1995 breakthrough *Wende* novel *Helden wie wir*. This novel is not quite *Ostalgie* but rather is more of a prelude to this phenomenon. This is especially the case when one compares *Helden wie wir* to Erich Loest's *Wende* novel *Nikolaikirche* that was also published in 1995. The contrast between the two novels is significant. The primary difference is that Brussig uses humor to portray life in the GDR. He believed that humor was the best remedy to cure the scars of the past; therefore, the best approach to the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship.

The next piece is Leander Haußmann's 1999 film *Sonnenallee*, for which Brussig wrote the screenplay. This film marks the true arrival of *Ostalgie* as a paradigm of fictional texts. *Sonnenallee* tells the trials and tribulations of a teenage East German boy and his group of friends. The film depicts aspects of state control in the GDR as mere side notes in a happy universal story about love and friendship. The portrayal of state control caused uproar among critics, even resulting in a lawsuit being filed for trivializing the brutality of the regime. The significance of the film was the way in which its representation of the GDR contrasted to earlier images of it. The section of Brussig related works is concluded with *Leben bis Männer*, the monologue of a fictional East German soccer coach. The coach tells the hardships he

experienced as a result of reunification. This text is a criticism of the way in which reunification negatively impacted the lives of many East Germans. Moreover, Brussig points out that some of the efforts that were implemented in the name of the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship—such as the border guard trials—were actually damaging.

The final text in this study that is examined as being related to the *Ostalgie* paradigm is Wolfgang Becker's 2003 blockbuster film *Good Bye Lenin!*. The success of the film and its strong association with *Ostalgie* has brought this East German phenomenon to international attention. The narrative of *Good Bye Lenin!* depicts the collapse of the GDR and the immediate Western takeover of East Germany. By the end of the film the main character Alexander learns to appreciate the socialist ideal that his mother tenaciously believed in even though he understands this ideal was never achieved. It is interesting to note that both Becker and the screenplay writer Bernd Lichtenberg are both West Germans. *Good Bye Lenin!* was highly acclaimed for its accurate depiction of life in the GDR and during the *Wende*. Nevertheless, critics accused *Good Bye Lenin!* of painting a rosy picture of life in the GDR and not giving enough attention to that which made the GDR an *Unrechtsstaat*.

Recent developments in the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship have once again put the issue of state control in the spotlight. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's award-winning film *The Lives of Others* seems to have produced somewhat of a revival concerning the discourse on the GDR. The film stands in bold contrast to the *Ostalgie* trend in portraying life in the GDR. Instead of depicting life in the GDR in a nostalgic fashion, *The Lives of Others* shows the negative consequences the state control in the GDR had on the lives of East Germans. Moreover, the act of state spying in the GDR so accurately portrayed in the film demonstrates to audiences in democracies today what it is like to live in a society without civil liberties. Recently, the long

searched-for discovery of a *Schiessbefehl* in the Stasi archives has cemented the image of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*. Hopefully this new find, coupled with the success of von Donnersmarck's film will inspire new efforts of political and literary *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship. In comparison to Germany, Timothy Garton Ash writes: "No nation has been more brilliant, more persistent, and more innovative in the investigation, communication, and representation—the representation, and re-representation—of its own past evils" (7). On one hand, the German persistence to deal with its past is a demonstration to the world of the damage that an *Unrechtsstaat* leaves behind. However, the *Aufarbeitung* of the SED-dictatorship could serve as a model for other societies to confront their pasts.

### *In Closing*

Since the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, both the political and literary *Aufarbeitung* of the second German dictatorship have continued to expand and become more dynamic. Today, the discourse on the GDR includes a variety of opinions and perspectives. Although interest in this has fluctuated with time, recent developments suggest a new-found interest in exploring that which made the GDR a totalitarian society. Just as the *Aufarbeitung* of the Third Reich has continued through the generations, it is hoped that this will also be the case with the SED-dictatorship. This is important in order to keep the memory of this chapter of German history alive. Of course, this is important for the historical development of Germany as a democratic nation. But the GDR could also stand as an example to the international community. More cinematic and literary representations of spying and other misdeeds could also help to foster understanding in the world today of what it is like to live in a society without civil liberties. Now in the post-9/11 era this discussion is needed more than ever.

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