Before and After the Wall:
A Social History of German Cinema

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the perception of the Cold War in selected German feature films. *Sonnenallee* (Leander Haussmann, 1999), *Die Unberührbare* (Oskar Roehler, 2000), *Good Bye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003), *Herr Lehmann* (Leander Haussmann, 2003) and *Das Leben der Anderen* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) have been selected for a comparative analysis that focusses on narratives of the Cold-War era after reunification, and for an examination of how the social impact of German unification has been addressed in these films. In terms of methodology, the thesis uses Pierre Sorlin’s social history of cinema and Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieu de mémoire* to describe the social imagination and nostalgic representation of memories. There is a research gap in previous studies concerning how the Cold War has become a topic in recent German feature film production, and this study aims to complement those earlier works.

**Keywords:** collective memory, identity, the fall of the Berlin Wall, nostalgia, *Ostalgie*, *Westalgie*. 
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## Table of Contents

Abstract  
Acknowledgements  

1. Introduction  
1.1 Problem Statement  
1.2 Methodology  

2. Theoretical Framework  

3. Historical and Social Context  
3.1 German National Identity and German Cinema  
3.2 East German Identity and Culture  
3.3 The German Unification  

4. Film Analyses  
4.1 Sonnenallee (Leander Haussmann, 1999)  
4.2 Die Unberühbare (Oscar Roehler, 2000)  
4.3 Good Bye Lenin! (Wolfgang Becker, 2003)  
4.4 Herr Lehmann (Leander Haussmann, 2003)  
4.5 Das Leben der Anderen (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)  

5. Conclusion  

References  

## List of Figures

Fig.1. The Wende, as experienced through the eyes of Christine in *Good Bye Lenin!*  
Fig.2. Alex broadcasts his own fake news channel with Dennis in *Good Bye Lenin!*  

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

This thesis focusses on German political and social attitudes towards the Cold War era, as they have been articulated in selected feature films. My central aim is to describe cultural values as they became apparent in German film culture before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Such research seems necessary, as there is a lacking awareness of the ways German cinema has addressed the Cold War era. The main part of this thesis discusses two key terms in German reunification discourse, Ostalgie and Westalgie, by analyzing the films Sonnenallee (Leander Haussmann, 1999), Die Unberührbare (Oskar Roehler, 2000), Good Bye Lenin! (Wolfgang Becker, 2003), Herr Lehmann (Leander Haussmann, 2003), and Das Leben der Anderen (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006). Through the methodologies of social historians such as Pierre Sorlin, Pierre Nora, Michèle Lagny, Marc Ferro, Robert A. Rosenstone, and others, I will explore the social implications of concepts such as Ostalgie and Westalgie in post-wall German cinema.

While German cinema naturally continues to constantly change in its relation to both political and social history, the fall of the Berlin Wall was influential enough to have a more lasting effect on German film culture at large, and on German cinema’s relation to political history more specifically. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Ostalgie and Westalgie have emerged in both German film and literature as a way to invoke a nostalgia for the past, or more precisely and in the words of Daphne Berdahl, as witnessing “the birth and boom of a nostalgia industry in the former East Germany that has entailed the recuperation, (re)production, marketing, and merchandising of GDR products as well as the ‘museumification’ of GDR life.”¹ Somewhat ironically, socialist life in the GDR today has turned into the commodified experience of Ostalgie that is as popular as its West German counter-model of Westalgie. In addition, levels of a ‘communist nostalgia’ have increased surprisingly in Central and Eastern Europe over the past years, and the propagandistic discourse around recent crises such as in the Ukraine demonstrates that some of Europe’s citizens still dream of a return to some form of communist-style authoritarian rule. One reason for this tendency is political socialization, to which cinema and other media certainly have contributed.

If history is a society’s memory of the past, and if the functioning of that memory depends on the way historical incidents are identified, isolated, and mediated, than any nostalgic presentation of history in media matters to political and historic analysis. Germany’s communist nostalgia, however, is related more to generational differences and general discontent. More precisely, it rather relates to dissatisfaction with the current political and social system than to genuine non-democratic values.²

1.2 Methodology

I am interested in post-reunification German cinema for three reasons. First, the unification of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1989-1990 remains of course an important geopolitical and historical event that left its mark on film history, and still keeps doing so. Second, recent German cinema started to become widely succesful since the 1990s, with films like Good Bye Lenin! and Das Leben der Anderen succeeding locally, in Europe, and even in the United States. Finally, the spaces of the former GDR have been popular setting for the films of the so-called Berlin School and young directors who have a common dedication to producing challenging depictions of life in Germany after unification.³

Studying how values of East and West German societies are related to films made after the fall of the wall, the thesis focusses on the filmic appropriation of the concepts Ostalgie and Westalgie. Its basic premise follows Hayden White’s famous thought experiment in assuming that feature film, as opposed to written forms of historical discourse, may be described as “historiophoty,” the study of history through film.⁴ Rather than simply socially “constructing” history, feature films mediate a shared understanding of the past, in this case, a cultural and historical perception of the Cold-War era. Good Bye Lenin!, Sonnenallee or Das Leben der Anderen articulate and negotiate political thought regarding the normalization of

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East-West relations.⁵ In the words of Anthony Enns,

[the nostalgia for the East expressed in recent German films thus implies the moral bankruptcy of a capitalist system that has failed adequately to address current economic and cultural challenges, and it often reflects a more widespread desire to reevaluate the current state of a country that is still in flux more than fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁶

The films chosen for analysis in this thesis are indicative of how the effects of the fall of the wall have been understood by their makers – how the social and historical consequences of the reunification are seen to impact German citizens. Two films, Good Bye Lenin! and Das Leben der Anderen, develop narrations on life in the GDR and thus are proper examples for understanding historical views on the Cold War era. All of the chosen films contribute to a politics of memory; they constitute *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory in Pierre Nora’s sense, points of crystallization for the collective memory of a given social grouping.⁷

As Robert Rosenstone noted many years ago, cinema indeed has the power to re-interpret the past.⁸ Think, for instance, of Good Bye Lenin!, a film that was tremendously successful in condensing and re-articulating reflections about the fall of the wall and the consequences of this historical event on the people of East Germany. Following its premiere on February 9, 2003, the X-Filme production was seen by more than million people in German cinemas alone and keeps circulating non-theatrically today, with regular screenings in schools around the country, supported by materials on political education published by the German government.⁹ In March 2003, the entire Bundestag, the German parliament, watched and discussed the film collectively during a closed session in Kino International, the GDR’s former top premiere house at Karl-Marx Allee.

Years before Hayden White coined the notion of historiophoty, the French social historian Pierre Sorlin already had suggested to study cinema as a “document of social

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⁸ Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 47.
history” that aims at illuminating the way in which “individuals and groups of people understand their own time.”

In other words, cinema can be thought as producing an unofficial social history. Such unofficial representations of the past, however, may turn into official ones, and they even may include alternative histories. Such is the case in *Good Bye Lenin!*, for instance, where one of the main characters, Alex, attempts to re-create an artificial, ‘better’ version of the GDR for his mother Christine who had missed the fall of the wall while being in a coma. In one key scene from that film, a Coca-Cola banner appears outside the mother’s window, prompting Alex and his friend Denis to produce a fake television news broadcast about Coca-Cola being a GDR invention. Later, when Christine manages to leave the apartment in which she is recovering from her illness, she encounters large groups of West Germans strolling through the streets of East Berlin. Again, Alex and Denis turn this into what could have been GDR history, namely the claim that Erich Honecker ‘allowed’ thousands of West Germans into the country. As Mattias Frey put it, “in this alternative history, the fall of Berlin wall becomes socialism’s final victory rather than its demise. Alex admits that his nostalgic image of the GDR depicts the imaginary country of his dreams.” Yet such fictional nostalgia is not without actual political consequences when being widely discussed in relation to history.

History is not static; it is always in motion and changes rapidly. Sites of memory exist to crystallize memory precisely because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments or repositories of memory that Nora associates with pre-industrial times more generally and the traditions of peasant culture in particular. Ever since, Nora argues, memory has been impermanent and related to a dialectic of remembering and forgetting. Given that the circumstances of German unification have led to a contradictory culture of remembrance, retrospection, and nostalgia, memory needs media as sites for re-articulating the past. Despite the shifting political, social and cultural circumstances, the GDR never sank into oblivion, and GDR remembrance has a continued relevance in the united Germany; yet some

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12 Ibid., 111.
narratives dominate while others are marginalised. The films selected for this thesis are successful in terms of what Alison Landsberg calls prosthetic memory: they make us experience memories which are not our own.

The power of media technologies to provide such emotional identification for memories distant to other generations or cultures even extends to what in post-1989 Germany is called, again, Ostalgie or Westalgie. Both concepts are important for questioning and understanding German cultural identity. Ostalgie and Westalgie are attitudes or perceptions in mediated form. In the words of Elaine Kelly and Ami Wlodarski,

over the last two decades, perceptions of the GDR have evolved in response to this post-Wende positioning; most notably, very negative portrays of the state as Germany’s second dictatorship have been superseded in certain arenas by a wave of so-called Ostalgie, which has resulted in warmer depictions, a nostalgic alternative to modern German society.

The phenomenon of Ostalgie emerged during the 1990s, in the form of an increasing nostalgia for the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) in post-unification German literature, television and films. Its reverse or mirror concept, Westalgie, emerged as a nostalgia for the former West and the bygone era of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The employment of Ostalgic or Westalgic representation changes the public’s perception of history, hence it may also be considered as a trope of manipulation. This form of representation creates a dual effect: it both softens the collective trauma which it aims to represent, and simultaneously sabotages through the manipulation of personalized narratives any attempt to deal with the past in a historically more complex, supra-individual manner. Both forms of nostalgia leave their mark on the films this study is going to analyse.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“The old ‘enemy’ has been domesticated, and those who remember or are defined by it turn into a fetish. It is the privilege of a victor to make a victim cute, and the opportunity of a victim to collaborate in the process. Only at a safe distance from the original events is it possible to laugh about dictatorship whose cruelty seems forgotten and even forgiven because it was so conveniently defeated.”

Nostalgia is a longing for the past which does not exist anymore or never existed; in general, it is defined as a sentiment of loss and displacement. Svetlana Boym describes cinematic images of nostalgia as a “double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.” With the loss of milieux de mémoire or traditional repositories of memory in the twentieth century, the concept of nostalgia turned into a modern condition or, more precisely, into an “historical emotion.” While literature and cinema developed futuristic utopias at the beginning of the last century, nostalgia began to be particularly stressed in the arts since the 1990s – as a wide-spread affect or attitude that may have worked as a defense mechanism against historical upheavals after the ‘end of history’.

Following the collapse of the GDR and the end of the Cold War, history as a discipline became displaced by psychologized notions of subjectivity and collectivity. The post-ideological era of Cultural Studies was characterized by approaches rooted in theories of social psychology. In addition, historians started to problematize traditional historiography, arguing for forms of historical writing that would be open to include a plurality of different...

21 Ibid., xiv.
22 Ibid.
discursive constructions of memory. These methodological trends worked towards a new interest in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, an engagement with the past first experienced, and politized, in the Federal Republic of Germany at the beginning of the 1950s, when the term and its associated practice of facing and ‘overcoming the past’ was related to judicial, scholar, public, private, legislative and administrative dimensions of National Socialist rule. Introducing a generational model that would go beyond the first generation of adult NS survivors, their children (the second generation) to include a “third generation” (the grandchildren of the first), Sigrid Weigel has pointed to the new sobriety characterizing attitudes towards National Socialism after 1990, and to the significance of generation as a theoretical concept and as a way to grasp history. However, it remains difficult to apply such a generational, subjectivized approach to the memories of the GDR, given that GDR history was officially represented by historians from the Federal Republic who would turn it into “a monolithic and undifferentiated historical narrative.” While the personal traumata of both GDR citizenship and the collapse of the system initially remained underrepresented in official forms of history writing, German films such as *Die Unberührbare* came to reflect that era in both personal and emotional terms.

After unification, two broad trends became popular in post-wall German cinema. One concerns the subject of the films which are about Germany’s past. Another is to problematize German identity. *Good Bye Lenin!* focuses on the demise of the GDR and the transition to a united Germany. Both *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye Lenin!* thematize everyday life before the fall of the wall. They employ *Ostalgie* for expressing a post-*Wende* attachment to GDR culture and to GDR products in particular. As Jennifer Kapczynski put it, “in these GDR-and-after films, nostalgia functions frequently through brand recognition, so that the former socialist republic becomes an imagined consumer community, bound together by the goods

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26 Ibid., 2.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 80-81.
30 Ibid.
that the culture once both produced and used.”\footnote{31} Post-Wall German cinema shows the particularities of East Germans’ experiences during reunification, focussing on questions of German identity and the dislocation of Germany.\footnote{32}

Historically, Germans had to cope with problems of national integration. From the 
\textit{Kulturkampf} to the separation of East and West Germany, people had been mobilised in a desire to unify. Significantly, however, the former citizens of the German Democratic Republic cannot be integrated completely.\footnote{33} East Germans expected that unification would bring more political freedom, more democracy, and guarantee of human and civil rights, but as new institutions from the West were established, many Easterners felt that the legal system did not protect them nor treat them fairly, producing greater dissatisfaction with democracy as well as the market than is expressed by Westerners, and by Easterners themselves immediately after the wall came down.\footnote{34} While East Germans often expressed disappointment about the unification, West Germans had growing concerns about social integration.\footnote{35}

Memory is related to a sense of identity, place and things. In other words, memory is connected with material culture. After unification, West German public discourse insisted on East Germans forgetting their past, by abandoning large parts of their material culture.\footnote{36} To preserve material traces of the GDR is related with Pierre Nora’s \textit{lieux de mémoire}. It means that preservation of the relics of a past resurrects memories.\footnote{37} Because of the failures of democratization, people memorialize the past.\footnote{38} Material culture, in its many forms, provided sites of memory in post-Wall Germany, with unification leading to fast-paced changes concerning national and social identity that would include the introduction of new, and the abandonment of traditional daily products, not to speak of the media that once had structured

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{31}{Jennifer M. Kapczynski, “Negotiating Nostalgia: The GDR Past in Berlin is in Germany and Good Bye, Lenin!,” \textit{The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory}, vol. 82, issue 1 (2007): 80.}
\footnotetext{32}{Ibid., 97.}
\footnotetext{34}{Ibid., 179.}
\end{footnotes}
the GDR everyday. In this context, the concept of Ostalgie emerged. As Timothy Barney observed, however, this historical form of nostalgia quickly turned into a popular consumerist sentiment attached to products designed for tourists, as Ostalgie became detached from the experience of identity-crisis: “The GDR was literally not on the map anymore and a popular culture of nostalgia began to try to make sense, and fun, out of the temporal and spatial void.” German Cinema went beyond that ‘fun’ in addressing, albeit in entertaining ways, traumatic experiences, such as Good Bye Lenin! does with its ostalgic narrative of an East German family before and after reunification.

According to Robert Rosenstone, historical feature films literally do history. Doing history on film includes to arouse emotions. Unsurprisingly, all the films selected for this thesis aim to arouse the viewer’s emotions. Ostalgie is a strong historical emotion related to the GDR’s consumer goods and lifestyles rooted in a form of resistance against hegemonic power structures, while not intending to idealize or re-establish the former political system of the past. When it comes to Eastern Bloc nations, nostalgia is often perceived as being a dangerous political sentiment, as it is understood as an obstacle for democratization; for many, nostalgia just offers an “idealized version of an unattainable past that can stunt the cultural imagination by discounting and excluding real viable options for social change.” Yet Ostalgie also can be interpreted as a form of opposition.

In factual terms, a film like Good Bye Lenin! portrays the Wende inadequately. One of the references related above is that Christiane finally realizes reality when she sees the gigantic statue of Lenin being junked; another reference includes the appearance of the red

41 Robert A. Rosenstone, History on Film/ Film on History (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2006), 2.
42 Robert B. Toplin, Reel History: In defense of Hollywood (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 2002), 1.
Coca-Cola logo in the film. Fictionalizing history through narrative, these ‘untrue’ references still ‘do’ history, by suggesting an aesthetic and emotional perspective on the unification process. For instance, replacing the Soviet flag, Coca-Cola indicates a replacement of ideology. All these images and sounds are related to the nostalgic through cultural consumption and individual memory. Also, Good Bye Lenin! prompts public memory by showing specific places.47

Figure 1. The Wende, as experienced through the eyes of Christine: Production still from Good Bye, Lenin!

On the one hand, there are similarities between history and cinema. Actual public events and personally experienced moments are crucial for both history and cinema.48 Visual media even are a preferred means for articulating the past.49 On the other hand, cinema has a power to change history; a film can affect our understanding of the past.50 Good Bye Lenin! and other films made after 1990 develop alternative histories of Germany, by telling stories that soften institutionalized images of the GDR, or by inventing characters that have more complex, or simply different attitudes to the past than the historical beings that actually experienced it.51

Figure 2. Alex broadcasts his own fake news channel with his close friend Dennis. It is the power of fake visual media in Good Bye Lenin!.

48 Robert A. Rosenstone, History on Film / Film on History (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 2.
49 Ibid., 5.
50 Ibid., 6.
3. HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

“In the years following the fall of the Wall, the saying “the wall exists in the mind” was used to denote the psychological feelings of many East Germans who saw their entire way of life and history extinguished overnight. These feelings have certainly not gone away have recently been replaced by a kind of pop culture longing for the “good times” of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Novels and films comically depict the former oppressed and totalitarian-ruled East Germany as a kind of benign, party-loving society where everything was slightly wacky due to the rigors of communist life.”

3.1 German National Identity and German Cinema

German cinema has continued to constantly change in conjunction with its political and cultural history. Yet there are some particularly important events to understand the development of German Cinema and the concepts of Ostalgie and Westalgie. These political and social developments are elaborated upon below.

German national identity could have been problematic from the beginning. In other words, the German people could not have been united that easily. Indeed, German national identity was questioned still as of 9 November 1989. Long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Cooke observed that “if unification were to take place, there would be problems integrating the peoples of the FRG and GDR” which was a widely held belief between intellectuals since the 1960s. Particularly, people in the East experienced an increasing alienation towards the West. The unresolved problem of Germany’s national identity continued through the 1970s. While Germany was divided into East and West, the Nazi past continued to affect West Germany society.

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Since the 1970s, New German Cinema began to articulate an alternative German identity. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the problem of national identity became more debated in public. Post-East and West Germans had no sense of national identity and this problem was not likely to be solved. In this context, nostalgia has come to stand for a feeling that may include both individual and collective remembrance. Also, it can be related to a person or community attached to the past. As Ben Gook has pointed out, in discussing cultural forms – films or otherwise – “we gain access to one juncture of the individual-collective interaction, be it set up in distinction, be it set up in distinction or compliance with the common understanding of particular plots of collective memory.”

As concepts, both Ostalgie and Westalgie remain problematic. Both terms are interrelated. Ostalgie is defined as a nostalgia for Eastern Germany, and vice versa; yet given the inner-German unification, such historical feeling states increasingly lack substance. In addition, the Ostalgie phenomenon has been criticized in certain quarters as a form of historical revisionism, an attempt to glorify what was for many GDR citizens a repressive regime. Certainly, it involves a more positive portrayal of the GDR than was common in the years immediately following unification. Yet the focus of Ostalgie is extremely narrow: the emphasis is placed squarely on consumer rather than artistic or intellectual culture. As Paul Cooke crucially observes, this results in an attempt to normalize the GDR on what are effectively Western terms. Discussing the rise of Ostalgie television programs he remarks that these programs ostensibly try to include the mainstream and thus normalize the experience of living in the GDR. Also, Cooke claims that Ostalgie is preoccupied with preserving the cultural values of East Germany from the forces of global capitalism.

In the years following the fall of the Berlin wall, the phenomenon of Ostalgie emerged and became connected with the cultural paraphernalia of the former German Democratic Republic; communist flags, portraits of Karl Marx or the Trabant (the East German state-}

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56 Julia Knight, “German Identity, Myth, and Documentary Film,” in A Companion to German Cinema, ed. Terri Ginsberg and Andrea Mensch (Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 84.
57 Ben Gook, Really-Existing Nostalgia? Remembering East Germany in Film (University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association, 2008), 125.
58 Ibid., 125.
produced car) turned into popular icons of the recent past. Historically, both East and West Germans had of course stereotypical assumptions of each other. Since East Germany faced the economical problems towards the end of the Cold War, with most East Germans factories closing or being privatized after 1994, West Germans assumed that East Germans wanted to join West Germany. Such parting may simply be another manifestation of the trauma at the core of German society and the need to deal with it. ‘Ossis’ and ‘Wessis’ are different in terms of what should be remembered, forgotten and in relation to cultural values. More importantly, solidarity among East Germans was stronger than among West Germans.

For some, Ostalgie relates to an oppositional culture which resists Western German hegemony. Ostalgie first appeared in the middle of the 1990s, and actually not only in relation to consumer culture; it also related to the community-oriented nature of the GDR. After unification, East German identity faced problems which Hilary Silver compared to those of immigrants. The Ostalgie phenomenon thus questions the trauma of German society; Ostalgie is a popular way for representing historical events and it portrays a reconstruction of post-traumatic memory. Similarly, Joseph Jozwiak and Elizabeth Mermann claim that East Germans like many immigrants or colonized people had experienced the assimilation of the West and had felt like second class citizens. Hence, they employed Ostalgie to protect their own social and cultural identity. While West Germany was powerful and developed, East Germany was perceived as peripheral and backward. And while the former German Democratic Republic had been destroyed, the nostalgia among East Germans had not easily disappeared.

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61 Ibid., 1.
65 Barbara Fedotov, “The Capricious Nature of Ostalgie: East Germany in Popular German Cinema” (paper, University of Hebrew, 2010), 34.
67 Ibid., 782.
Ever since, Ostalgie has been controversially discussed. While Cook claims that Ostalgie affected German unification negatively, Betts sees it glorifying the communist regime. Meanwhile, the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) used elements of Ostalgie for its own political purposes, building on the dissatisfaction with the re-unification process. Obviously, nostalgia has a strong relation to identity, nation and memory. People, social practices, and cultural objects were important for East German identity construction, a process that continued during the period of unification. An example for a filmic reflection of that process comes at the beginning of Good Bye Lenin!, when Sigmund Jähn, East Germany’s cosmonaut and an object of East German national pride, is introduced as a Berlin cab driver. Another, widely visible “site” for East German cultural memory was the Trabant (Trabi), a car that briefly created a cult in the mid-1990s even among Westerners, before turning into a tourist vehicle, used for Berlin city “safaris”.

For former citizens of the GDR, however, the aim of returning to GDR products was to preserve memories. As stated above, Ostalgie also came as a resistance to an alleged Western colonization of East German values, identity, and lifestyles. During the unification process, and increasing rates of unemployment especially in the East, East Germans started to search for different identity, based on “the revival of products and symbols of the GDR which could at first not be buried quickly enough.” More specifically, Ostalgie came to be related to two forms of nostalgia. The first one is what Jonathan Bach calls modernist nostalgia, while the second he calls for a nostalgia of style. Both East and West Germans had experienced nostalgia after the unification. Eastern nostalgia was related to “modernization” whereas Western nostalgia came from experiencing “postmodernization”. Furthermore, the

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72 Ibid., 39.
74 Christine Polzin, Ostalgie: A Part of a New East German identity? (Nordstedt Germany: GRIN Verlag, Books on Demand GmbH, 2003), 3.
76 Ibid., 554.
consumption practices of Ostprodukte are related with “counter-identities” (Gegenidentitaten) which emerged as East German political and social culture before the collapse of the GDR.\textsuperscript{77} While nostalgia is strongly related to a longing for the past, nostalgia for the GDR is connected to a fetishism of western material culture, as Bach claims.\textsuperscript{78}

Simultaneously, Westalgie emerged in West Germany, as a comparable form of nostalgia for the Federal Republic of Germany.\textsuperscript{79} Responding to what appeared as the total hegemony of the West German economic and political system, East Germans felt a need to reconstruct a sense of identity. Ostalgie developed in this disadvantaged position, as a defence mechanism,\textsuperscript{80} but undoubtedly, cultural isolation had led to a feeling of nostalgia among East Germans even before the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Westalgie, in turn, emerged as a nostalgia for the pre-unification Federal Republic, with the concept being based on materialism, that is, on West German lifestyle and fashion; again, the political sentiment of Westalgie was based on dissatisfaction with the unification process and the economic problems it caused.\textsuperscript{81} At first, Westalgie was not deemed to be an important historical feeling, since West Germans did not need a new political and economic system.\textsuperscript{82} Sabine Hake claims that Westalgie is an expression of West German youth and counterculture with political convictions and commitments.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, to simply “define Westalgie as a reverse form of Ostalgie, a straightforward nostalgia for the old FRG, it commodities and everyday culture before unification, would mean completely disregarding the historical and social circumstances.”\textsuperscript{84} In the films about the former Federal Republic of Germany, Westalgie is characterized as nostalgia for the prosperous West during the Cold War era.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 547-548.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 45-46.
\textsuperscript{82} Sabine Hake, \textit{German National Cinema} (New York: Routledge, 2007): 211.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 211.
3.2 East German Identity and Culture

Undoubtedly, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had a negative image that stemmed from its totalitarian regime during the time of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{86} Yet as Nick Hodgin and Caroline Pearce put it, retrospectively “the GDR was also a melancholic enterprise; nostalgic retrospection and the sometimes sorrowful realization that the GDR past was indeed a foreign country proved to be as significant a feature as was the energetic historical analysis.”\textsuperscript{87} From the perspective of the Federal Republic, however, the end of the GDR was a triumph for democracy and capitalism. Consequently, the intellectual culture of East Germany was seen as morally bankrupt.\textsuperscript{88} In the years immediately following unification, the intelligentsia came under widespread attack: writers were criticized for their compliance with an oppressive regime; professors were removed en masse from university posts, and East German art was removed from galleries.\textsuperscript{89} In short, the totalitarian state of the GDR affected its cultural history even after the demise of the state.

As a result, many commercial films and television programs about the life of GDR have appeared and also commercially selling products and museums have emerged in Germany.\textsuperscript{90} In fact, the term Ostalgie originated from within the commercial entertainment context, as it was introduced through the cabaret programs of East German cabaret artist Uwe Steimler. The concept thus is related to cultural representations of and the ordinary life in the former GDR which is not bound to an historical understanding of the totalitarian Stasi state.\textsuperscript{91}

Foregrounding the everyday life of East Germans and their commodities,\textsuperscript{92} the ostalgic form of nostalgia came to stand for an emotional yearning for the past,\textsuperscript{93} not necessarily reflecting “socialist values but [...] an attempt by East Germans to reconcile themselves with the past.”\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{88} Elain\textsuperscript{e}e Kelly and Amy Wlodarski, ed., \textit{Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture} (Editions Rodopi B.V., 2011).
\textsuperscript{90} Elain\textsuperscript{e}e Kelly and Amy Wlodarski, ed., \textit{Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture} (Editions Rodopi B.V., 2011).
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
Despite this origins of the term and the associated feeling state, however, *Ostalgie* was quickly exploited for party purposes, as I have already indicated above, instrumentalizing the “growing skepticism towards the West and disappointment and dissatisfaction about the reality after unification, which didn’t bring the ‘blooming landscapes’ that politicians had promised and the people had eager to believe in at first.”

According to an empirical survey conducted in 1999, former GDR products constituted 35 percent of the East German market share. 71 percent of the interviewees declared that they were buying Eastern products. Undoubtedly, there was a strong relation between East products and *Ostalgie*. Immediately following the unification, East Germans did not want to use GDR products and started to use western products; however, ten years later, the situation was reversed. Feeling that the history of their pre-unification lives had been reduced to only negative memories of life in the GDR, East Germans quickly endorsed the possibility to have their past pictured and experienced in a more positive and multi-faceted light. *Ostalgie* also lend itself for criticizing the West, given that socio-economic differences between East and West were an obstacle for social integration.

*Ostalgie* may be defined as an ethnological politics of memory and politics of the future, whose conjuncture developed a nostalgia for the GDR. Also, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dichotomy of East/West still remained important for identity construction, contributing to what Cooke calls a “selective form of amnesia” characterizing the new Germany. Western filmmakers such as Wolfgang Becker and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck have subsequently been criticized by other Westerners for their representations of East Germany and for prompting ostalgic sentiments, based on an understanding of *Ostalgie* that sees it as a “nostalgia for the east”, as a romanticization, objectification and commercialization of the GDR. In turn, Katrin Sass, the reputed East German actress playing Christine in *Good Bye

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96 Christine Polzin, *Ostalgie- a Part of a New East German Identity?* (GRIN Verlag, 2003), 5.
98 Christine Polzin, *Ostalgie- a Part of a New East German Identity?* (GRIN Verlag, 2003), 3.
Lenin!, claimed that Becker knew East German history well, and that he presented an accurate historical representation.\textsuperscript{102}

3.3 The German Unification

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the political consequences appeared not as positive. German unification was affected by neo-liberalism, globalization and multiculturalism.\textsuperscript{103} Consequently, both the concerns for and the questions of nation and national identity were widely debated in media.\textsuperscript{104} As Sabine Hake has pointed out, “with the gradual passing of the generation of the Third Reich and the Second World War, the terms of historical narrative had to be redefined from the perspective of post-memory; that is: of those who did not live through these events but are part of them through collective process of forgetting and remembering.”\textsuperscript{105} In other words, the negative circumstances of the Nazi regime and the Second World War led a ‘third generation’ of Germans to forget – and remember.

East Germans expected economical developments from a German unification. In January 1990, many East German protesters revolted against the GDR. In December 1990, Helmut Kohl won the first national elections, and became the first chancellor of the united Germany.\textsuperscript{106} With growing historical distance to the German unification and the economic hardships it had caused, the life and importance of the GDR started to draw attention in German cinema. Yet even the German cinema sector was affected by the financial crisis. Therefore, film production initially steared towards comedic and popular forms of entertainment drawing wide audiences.\textsuperscript{107}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} Katrin Sass, interviewed for publisher Schwarzkopf, \url{http://www.schwarzkopf-schwarzkopf.de/film/goodbyelenin/katrinsass/} (accessed 2 November, 2013).
\item \textsuperscript{103} Sabine Hake, \textit{German National Cinema} (New York: Routledge, 2008): 211.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 211.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 211.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson, ed., \textit{A New History of German Cinema} (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2012).
\item \textsuperscript{107} Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinford, ed., \textit{Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities} (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
\end{itemize}
4. FILM ANALYSES

In this section, I will describe the perception and experiences of people living in the GDR during the Cold War by discussing the selected films Sonnenallee, Die Unberührbare, Good Bye Lenin!, Herr Lehmann and Das Leben der Anderen. Throughout the discussion, I will compare the effects of German unification on German people as well as explain how each film comments on to the concepts of Ostalgie and Westalgie.

The selected films show the everyday life and memories of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and a range of different perspectives on East German identity. These films are crucial because of the political juncture and the breakdown of national identities. Indeed, the history of personal and collective memory of the German Democratic Republic is reflected and debated in each of these films.\(^{108}\)

These films are different in terms of cinematic strategies and ideological positioning of the spectator.\(^{109}\) For example, two of the films, Good Bye Lenin! and Das Leben der Anderen have a different approach to the Wende. Good Bye Lenin! is the most popular example of post-Wende Ostalgie whereas Das Leben der Anderen represents the repressive nature of East German totalitarianism while offering the viewer a nostalgic reconstruction of the GDR.\(^{110}\) In Sonnenallee and Good Bye Lenin!, the young protagonists who experience the collapse of the GDR, witness the transformation from the Neue Bundesländer (New states of Germany) into the new post-1990s Federal Republic.

Die Unberührbare is more personal story compared with the other selected German films. It is based on Oscar Roehler’s mother, Gisela Elsner. The film has a dark mood.\(^{111}\) Roehler approaches a problem of history into a dystopia of space. The main protagonist tries to find a solution for her survival but she only finds the voids of lost promises. Her compelling journey in East Germany shows the failure of socialist theory.\(^{112}\)


The concept of Westalgie became popular and was used in various films. The most known and successful one was Herr Lehmann, adapted from Sven Regener’s book, Herr Lehmann.\textsuperscript{113} The film is set in the fall of 1989 in the bohemian West Berlin district of Kreuzberg. This district was enclosed with three sides by the Wall and hence people felt like an isolated microcosm. The everyday life of a group of young West Germans is depicted in the film. These people generally have moved to West Berlin from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to avoid being drafted for military service or to live a more easy life with little responsibilities. The main protagonist, Herr Lehmann, is almost 30, has not any regular life, works in a bar, spends the time between drinking beer and discussing redundant pseudo philosophical issues, and he is not concerned about anything outside of his neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{114} On the other side, there is the reality of GDR. Otto indicates, “the GDR is accepted as a given but is mainly ignored in the lives of the Kreuzberg people.”\textsuperscript{115}

4.1 Sonnenallee (Leander Haussmann, 1999)

Sonnenallee was the first post-unification film about the GDR and was written and directed by East German writer Thomas Brussig with the director being Leander Haussmann.\textsuperscript{116} This film is the adaption from the novel Am Kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee (At the Shorter End of Sonnenallee, Thomas Brussig, 1999). Sonnenallee is a place which is located the East side of Berlin and the film was set on the East Side of Sonnenallee. Sonnenallee succeeded and gained popularity in Germany. The life in the former GDR is portrayed in a positive and nostalgic way in Sonnenallee differently from Das Leben der Anderen.

The film’s plot is about 17-year old Micha who is obsessed with rock ‘n’ roll and the love of a young woman named Miriam. She symbolizes wealthy youth from the West and remains largely unreachable. The story takes place around the characters who live under the communist regime. Enns mentions, “Haussmann purposefully constructs this film as a universal tale of adolescent growing pains, not unlike George Lucas’s American Graffiti

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
(1973), and in the end Micha eventually overcomes his teenage angst and wins over Miriam once she snubs her West German boyfriend.  

_Sonnenallee_ attempts to normalize everyday life in the GDR. The life of this East Berlin neighborhood in the 1970s is presented in the film. The image of the GDR is perceived negatively especially because of the brutal activities of the Stasi. After the political unification of Germany, image makers tried to change the negative depiction of the former GDR. This film was a part of this plan. _Sonnenallee_ tries to change and correct the major misunderstandings and false interpretations of the GDR. Since West Germans did not believe that East Germans had a normal life. One way it achieved this was through the use of nostalgic memories of youth. Immanual Kant states, “Nostalgia does not represent to return to the place where a person spent his childhood, but rather it represents a desire to recapture childhood itself.”

Haussmann was interested in the phenomenon of Ostalgie and this phenomenon was deconstructed of 1990s German society in the film. He first analyzes the reasons why East Germans feel nostalgia for their past. East Germans feel the sense of alienation because their life had been devalued. Secondly, the film uses both humour and the brutality of the system. As Gook argues, “Stylistically, the film deploys the subversive critique of post-unification triumphalism by echoing the form and appeal of New German Comedy in an Eastern setting.

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118 Paul Cooke, _Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia_, (Berg Publishers, 2005), 115.
119 Ibid., 124.
121 Ibid., 115.
122 Immanuel Kant, _The Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View_ (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 32.
The film seems to be affirming that ‘we had fun over there too, you know.’

During the film, Micha describes the GDR where citizens have no problems with employment and everyone can afford main needs such as food and housing. However, in the closing shot of the film, the camera shows an empty street and the border between East and West. The screen color turns to black-and-white. This scene can be interpreted as the uncertain future of German unification.

On the other hand, Micha’s parents do not support the GDR regime but they seem to be average GDR citizens who are neither regime supporters nor seriously considering to leave the country. Schutte reflects, “Micha’s father openly criticizes inadequacies in the GDR and has no qualms about watching Western television […]. They were not content with the GDR regime and wanted to have a Western lifestyle.

In the film’s story, rock ‘n’ roll music is banned in the GDR. For this reason, Micha and his friends find creative ways of purchasing illegal records by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and T.Rex. For instance, one of the characters, Wuschel, is obsessed with the Rolling Stones. His ultimate aim in life is to have a copy of Exile on Main Street (Rolling Stones, 1972). Finally, he obtains a copy of it. When he is running home, he is ordered to stop by a police officer but he fears that the record will be taken by the police. Then he is shot by the police. Fortunately, the record blocks the bullet and saves his life. Mischa also records a forbidden song Moskow (Wonderland, 1968) which is confiscated by the police. Despite the personal and political differences, Micha’s neighbors, who are Stasi informers, black marketeers, party administrators, young pioneers, and rebellious youth, dance together in the

129 Ibid., 13.
130 Ibid., 13.
street. In the closing scene of the film, the entire neighborhood get together by the power of rock ‘n’ roll.  

Comedy played a crucial role in German popular culture of the 1990s, particularly in film. *Sonnenallee* uses comedy elements for narrating the life in the GDR. This is one of the reasons, this film gained popularity in Germany. However, the film also was severely criticized by several viewers. Critical comments centered around the belief that it does not represent the historical reality of everyday life in the GDR during that period.

4.2 *Die Unberührbare* (Oskar Roehler, 2000)
The film is about a writer, Hanna Flanders, who is critical of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German unification. She is deeply depressed by the events since she is a strict supporter of the communist states but she is intellectually dishonest. According to her, the opening of the Wall does not lead to freedom. She perceives the collapse of the Wall as a traumatic event and she does not believe and accept the end of the Federal Republic. She begins to panic because she fears that she will lose her political positions. The English title *No Place to Go* is a metaphor that for the loneliness and homelessness of the character Hanna Flanders.

The effect of *Wende* led to a sudden dislocation of Hanna, and her fear is rooted in her profound isolation. Webber suggests, “[…] what we know about Hanna, her “proper rite of sacrifice” would be to leap from the Berlin Wall in a public act of resistance contrary to the prevailing mood. Instead, however, as Webber points out, Hanna falls to what is likely her death in the virtual silence and near total isolation of a sanatorium.”

In *Die Unberührbare*, the final days of Flanders is presented from the fall of the Berlin Wall to her suicide. The opening of the film makes the spectator to be confused. When people are celebrating the opening of the Wall, Hanna Flanders attempts to take a medicine bottle

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134 Ibid., 117.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
containing arsenic, stating that she is “going to kill myself.” She is shocked and cannot understand why people are celebrating the fall of the Wall. According to her, capitalism would lead many problems for East Germans. During a conversation with her boyfriend, the camera comes closer and frames her against a photograph of Lenin in the background. It can be understood as her reaction to German unification which is the film’s theme.

Throughout the film, German unification is characterized through Hanna’s projections. Johannes von Moltke states that, “Hanna becomes a figure for this shock, registered not only the critique of unification that she voices explicitly at different moments in the film but also in her somatic reaction: [...] generally with the help of make-up, the wig, the coat, and cigarettes, and physical breakdown such as crying, trembling, and the headlong fall into unconsciousness toward the end.”

In the scene of her interview, she claims that she is more respected as a writer in the East compared to the West. She states,

I find it all really unfair. I’m pretty depressed. Consumer society is now eating us all up. I know what you mean. But a few will survive, don’t you think? I don’t know. I don’t know if I care anymore. It makes me sick to see these clones all over. It nauseates me how they rummage through the underwear, grabbing. Now, suddenly, I see the depressing reality, that they’re fighting for Mon Cheri cherry cordials. And so they can stuff Western tampons, cola bottles and bananas into their cunts. They aren’t fighting for truth the way Lenin meant. These people have lost all sense of respect and self-esteem. The truth is, disfigurement has become a prayer. The truth is, I have no dream anymore. I believed in Lenin. If I have to admit that Lenin was wrong, and this parasitic mob that’s taking over was right, then life has lost all meaning for me.”

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142 Johannes von Moltke, “Terrains Vagues- Landscapes of Unification in Oscar Roehler’s No Place to Go,” in Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media Series: Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty- First Century, ed. Brad Jaimey Prager (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010),170-171.
143 Ibid.
Ironically, by now she has adopted a Western lifestyle, spending money on luxury goods. Furthermore, the spectator understands that West German publishers rejected her manuscripts. She could not find a publisher for her novel *Sacred Blood*. Hanna was successful in the GDR whereas her novels have been perceived as too Marxist for West German publishing houses. She feels that the demise of real existing socialism ends her career. Similar to West German publishers, Flanders’ East German publisher does not admire to publish her books anymore. This new reality starts to change the understanding of East and West Germans. Hanna attends a strange party held by her East German publisher, Volk und Welt. One of the publisher’s employees says to her that she was a “spoilt cow from the West”. It means that she never understood the political conditions of the GDR and she only believed in the GDR because her books were published there.

The character of Hanna Flanders is inspired by his mother of Oscar Roehler, Gisela Elsner who is also a well-known German writer. The first novel of Elsner, *Riesenzwerge* (“Giant Dwarves”) gained a popular success in 1964. Later, she joined the Stalinist party of DKP (West German Communist Party). In the 1960s, radicalism lost its popularity and she was despised by West German publishers. Elsner’s father was an executive board member of the Siemens who also disdained her writings. She was addicted to alcohol, drugs and her last books. She committed suicide in 1992.

Oscar Roehler has created a highly psychological portrait. Actress Hannelore Elsner (she is not related to Gisela Elsner) succeeds in her portrayal of Hanna Flanders to make this character visible to the audience. In an interview, the actress Elsner claimed that there are similarities between her and the character, yet such statements routinely are made by actresses attending press junkets. Still, as Rheinhardt noted, “without lapsing into shallow didactics, the film shows in the figure of Hanna the disillusioned balance-sheet of a whole stratum of

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149 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
artists and intellectuals who were drawn spontaneously and with great enthusiasm into the radical movement of the 1960s.”¹⁵²

After the fall of the Wall, German literature begins to be interested in German unification and the effects of the fall of the Wall. Similar to German literature, cinema reconsiders this topic. Die Unberührbare and other German films portray the fall of the Wall and the German unification through recasting the past.¹⁵³ Roehler has reflected on the effects and wake of the fall of the Wall in his films similar to the directors, Thalheim and Petzold. He approaches critically the effects of Wende by stressing the difference between personal and historical time. Prominently, the Wende’s effect on Germany’s intellectual class, which is embodied by the character, Hanna Flanders, is emphasized in Die Unberührbare.¹⁵⁴

Hanna Flanders may remind audiences of a character from an American film noir, specifically, she is affected by the character Norma Desmond from Sunset Boulevard (Billy Wilder, 1950).¹⁵⁵ Indeed, the genre of Die Unberührbare is film noir due to the careful negotiation of architecture and space. Roehler’s film constitutes a centrifugal and centripetal space similar to that observed American film noir.¹⁵⁶ Die Unberührbare develops a space that is both natural and built, with the character of Hanna Flanders dramatizing millennial German spatial anxiety about Berlin, a city that often has been described by city planners and architecture critics as one without center.¹⁵⁷ Other aspects of film noir are stressed by the main protagonist, Hanna, for instance Hanna’s paranoia and neurosis and her excessive chain smoking alcohol and drug consumption are presented as being dangerous and out-of-control.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the set design, props, and costumes in the film present a story of exile and displacement which is reminiscent of works directed by Willy Wilder, Sam Fuller, Franz Kafka, Orson Welles and Wim Wenders, Alexander Kluge and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Jeffrey Anderson and Eric Langenbacher, ed., From the Bonn to the Berlin Republic (Berghahn Books, 2010).
¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
More specifically, *Die Unberührbare* seems influenced by *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1979). Both female protagonists are presented as allegories for Germany’s transformations.

When it comes to the film’s style, the most obvious choice made by director Oscar Roehler is that of black-and-white cinematography. Roehler’s use of black-and-white creates an aesthetics that is evocative of melancholy and nostalgia; an aesthetic that can be found in other post-Wende films.\(^{160}\) The use of black-and-white also has been interpreted as indicating that Hanna does not live in the current time, and as a visual reference to German Expressionism.\(^ {161}\)

In the narrative of *Die Unberührbare*, East Germans are portrayed as honest, warm and as being respectful to their own community. The film does not claim that the East is better politically but East Germans are morally better than West Germans.\(^ {162}\) For instance, Hanna randomly enters a bar in the East Germany. A drunken history teacher insults her. And yet, an Eastern family sees this and comes immediately to her rescue.

Throughout the film, Flander is portrayed as being isolated from her community. In her conversation with Eastern family, she said that “I had a lot of trouble, with life in the West since returning from England. And I often thought of moving to East Berlin. Now it is all collapsed and it’s as if I too have fallen apart.”\(^ {163}\) However, Hanna cannot live with the Eastern family. She finds them very different. As Rheinhardt points out, Hanna is unprepared for the political changes she encounters, and although she “defends herself, she has neither the powers of resistance nor the social adaptability with which to find solid ground again. With the source of her former strength gone, she has nothing left to hold on to.”\(^ {164}\) In one emotionally charged scene of the film, she is talking to her boyfriend inside a telephone kiosk outside Bahnhof Zoo. In terms of image composition, framing, and narrative, this scene explicitly reflects Hanna’s isolation and loneliness, with her desperateness shown against the


\(^ {164}\) Ibid.
background of the city. Another key scene summarizes her presence in the film. Hanna is walking against the flow of people on their way to work, then walks across a barren strip of land flamed by distant highrises. She has been crying; her heavy mascara runs down her cheeks. Finally, she is walking towards a food stand which is located in the middle of this urban wasteland. Hanna orders coffee, while Can sings She Brings the Rain (1969) on the radio.

Even in the scene of Hanna’s visit to her son, the spectator understands that they do not have close relationship. Her son, Victor, is an occasional writer living in West Berlin. He is not happy about her arrival. He used to take drugs like his mother. He is content about the fall of the Wall and interested in East German culture: “We spent the day in East Berlin. There’s an incredible feeling here. It’s amazing, really.”

Towards the end of the film, Hanna’s economical situation becomes more problematic and she returns to Bavaria and asks her wealthy parents to lend her money. She does not want to ask her parents but she has to do it due to her limited finances. They do not help her. Her mother criticises harshly and says, “Are you still taking all those pills? You have that harsh facial expression again. We are not going to pay for another withdrawal treatment.” She tells Hanna to get insurance because they are tired of “astronomical health bills”. Her parents do not always accept their daughter’s political views, too. Their thoughts are confirmed within the fall of the Berlin Wall. Hanna cannot tolerate with her mother and leaves her parent’s house on the same day. Then, she accidentally meets her ex-husband Bruno, who is also her son Victor’s father, at the train station. He invites her to come to Darmstadt. Hanna accepts the invitation. Hanna recalls her past for a short moment. However, after they get drunk, the personal gap between them becomes more apparent. Bruno looks like depressed, sickly and lovesick for Hanna.

166 Johannes von Moltke, “Terrains Vagues- Landscapes of Unification in Oscar Roehler’s No Place to Go,” in Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media Series: Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century, ed. Brad Jaimey Prager (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 157.
168 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
Hanna’s addiction to alcohol and pills becomes more problematic therefore she stays in a sanatorium.\textsuperscript{171} The tragic final scene reflects Hanna’s perception of the passage of time. The doctors say her if she continues to smoke, she probably loses her leg. When she sits in a sanatorium, she wonders whether she will lose her leg and if she has any future at the new Germany. She stares at a large analog clock. The camera moves to a close up to her face, and then cuts to image of the clock. The clock ticks away the seconds, and Hanna is disturbed by the clock. She attempts to remove the clock from the wall, and she throws it upon the ground. She looks tiny in this large empty room that is shown from the perspective of low-angle shot.\textsuperscript{172} A nurse enters the room, the nurse warns her: “You’re lucky, you could have broken it.” Hanna replies: “What do you mean, lucky?”\textsuperscript{173} She intended to break the clock to stop time but she failed.\textsuperscript{174} Anderson and Langenbacher suggest that this scene “moves along a circuit created by Hanna’s face and that of the clock, one in which the apparently actual passage of time comes up against the virtual time she perceives. Hanna feels herself diminished, but she fights back. As a precariously balanced subject in the new, post \textit{Wende} Germany, it takes very little to send her failing off the ledge.”\textsuperscript{175}

The film won several awards for directing, cinematography, and the performance of Hannalore Elsner (for her role as Hanna Flanders) in both Germany and abroad.\textsuperscript{176} Theoretically, the film confronts the recent German past through a Western perspective. The approach of film also criticises the popularity of \textit{Ostalgie} (nostalgia for the former East Germany).\textsuperscript{177} Eventually, \textit{Die Unberührbare} addresses a feeling for the depression and trauma that followed the fall of the Wall.\textsuperscript{178}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{171}] Robert Blankenship, “No Place to Go,” in \textit{Directory of World Cinema-Germany} (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect and The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 297.
\item[\textsuperscript{172}] Jeffrey Anderson and Eric Langenbacher, ed., \textit{From the Bonn to the Berlin Republic} (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).
\item[\textsuperscript{173}] \textit{Die Unberührbare}, Oscar Roehler, 2000.
\item[\textsuperscript{174}] Jeffrey Anderson and Eric Langenbacher, ed., \textit{From the Bonn to the Berlin Republic} (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).
\item[\textsuperscript{175}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{176}] Robert Blankenship, “No Place to Go,” in \textit{Directory of World Cinema-Germany} (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect and The University of Chicago University Press, 2012), 298.
\item[\textsuperscript{177}] Johannes von Moltke, “Terrains Vagues: Landscapes of Unification in Oscar Roehler’s No Place to Go,” in \textit{Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media Series: Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century}, ed. Brad Jaimey Prager (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 170.
\end{itemize}
4.3 Good Bye Lenin! (Wolfgang Becker, 2003)

The year is 1989, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, East Germany celebrated their 40th anniversary. The characters of the film live in this period. The main protagonist, Alex Kerner, resides with his mother Christiane and his sister Ariane in the East Germany. His father has abandoned his family and fled to the West. There is no father figure for Kerner’s children. Due to this reason, they had to cope with difficulties without their father. Alex’s mother has become a model socialist and is active in the community. Early in the film, she suffers a heart attack and falls into a coma when her son is attached by the police during an anti-government demonstration. She only awakens when the Wall falls. Her doctor warns that she should not realize the fall of the Berlin Wall. Therefore, Alex decides to make an illusionary world, where the GDR still exists since the historical events would be too traumatic for his mother to cope with. The film ends with the death of Christine Kerner three days after the unification.

Similar to Sonnenallee, Good Bye Lenin! presents the daily life of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), but more particularly a discourse one one family. At the same time father Robert Kerner leaves home, the astronaut Sigmund Jähn appears on television from outer space. All these important historical and fictional events- the GDR’s fortieth anniversary, the democracy movements’ demonstrations and Christiane’s heart attack- come together on the same day.

In recent years, German films have increasingly employed comedy elements to deal with the poignant past of East Germany. Fedotov comments that, “Many of these films use humor to depict the reality of everyday life in East Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification in a less grim fashion.” This strategy is advantageous because the films are defined as “easily digestible” and successively became popular in both Germany and abroad. The film does not directly stress the problematic expression of loss, although, it emphasizes popular contemporary thought and practice. It shows the increasing use of various

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180 Paul Cooke, Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia (Berg Publishers, 2005), 128.
183 Ibid., 4.
184 Ibid., 4.
media and new technology, reviving the re-created past again. Films such films as Good Bye Lenin! can be understood to aim at the construction of a sustaining common German national identity. In other words, in Good Bye Lenin!, the reason for nostalgia of the GDR is to maintain a sense of identity despite German unification. Conversely, the supportive attitude Christiane has toward the socialist state is understood in the scene of her confession as to why she did not go to West Berlin. Here Christiane admits that she is concerned about losing her children. Also, she realized that socialist system was imperfect and oppressive one.

Good Bye Lenin! has gained popularity and success both in Germany and abroad because it thematically addresses universal issues. The film also stresses the nature of utopian ideals in a post-industrial world. As Longden observed, it questions perceptions of historical processes, as well as perceived wisdoms regarding ideal societies. Good Bye Lenin! constructs different versions of utopia. The comedic treatment of utopian themes leads to a more sophisticated, self-reflexive perspective on the social, cultural and individual transformation processes that accompanied the fall of the wall. As Longden rightly observed, “the film not only portrays the disillusionment with one experimental utopian society and the embracing of another seemingly more successful one, but it also portrays utopian desire and change on a more personal and individual level.”

Two different readings of Ostalgie is offered in Good Bye Lenin!. First, the film emphasizes an emotional attachment to nation and a nostalgia for East Germany’s lost culture. Second, the GDR’s past is important for both East and West Germans. The success of Ostalgie does not just relate with East German mourning, it also connects East Germany with capitalist strategies. This becomes apparent in the scenes surrounding Alex’s journey to the West to find his father. In his father’s house, his younger half-siblings are watching the East German version of the Sandmann cartoon.

189 Ibid., 300-301.
*Good Bye Lenin!* has been promoted in Germany and other countries. For instance, the film’s website advertises East German products and even *Good Bye Lenin!* T-shirts.\(^{191}\)

Berlin plays a crucial role for understanding the Cold War era and the post-unification of Germany. The history of Berlin has always been chaotic and eventful, and the city has been linked to personal and communal memories.\(^{192}\) Berlin’s past and present have been represented through a range of cinematic images and film narratives.\(^{193}\) In the beginning of *Good Bye Lenin!*, for instance, a montage of former socialist images such as stamps, postcards and public buildings is shown as the nostalgic elements of the GDR. Then the spectator sees original television footage broadcast on August 26, 1978, a rocket launch that made Sigmund Jähn the first East German in space. Another important, historical image that appears in the film is an image of the Fernsehturm, or television tower, one of the most important instances of socialist modernism and an East Berlin landmark. Here, the tower appears as a symbol of the German cultural transmission that took place since 1989.\(^{194}\) In the film’s narrative, both the Fernsehturm and Sigmund Jähn form part in Alex’s childhood memories, evoking a fictional coming of age and historical transition to the post-socialist period. Moreover, these images strongly reinforce an idea of GDR culture related to collectible kitsch.\(^{195}\)

The concept of historical reality is is questioned throughout the film. *Good Bye Lenin!* indeed provides a good, if not over-explicit example for the subjectivity of historical reality. Alex manipulates the reality of post-Wall East Berlin to prevent his mother’s realization of historical change.\(^{196}\) Alex and his friends believe that his mother will die if she finds out that the GDR has disbanded. They think that Christiane has a strong sense and connection to the symbols and rituals of the communist state. In order to protect his mother, they recreate their

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apartment in a way which is similar to her former life. Alex reorganizes their house with old GDR furniture which is no longer available. For example, he starts to find “Mocca Fix” coffee and “Spreewaldgurken” pickles. After 1990, socialist products started to decrease in popularity and did not compete well with western products. As Godeanu claims, “by consuming Western products, these societies were also appropriating the idea of the West, the freedom and capitalism that had been denied them for a half a century.” Furthermore, the fall of the Berlin Wall affected the fashion of East Germans. Indeed, there was an enormous shift as East Germans quickly discarded their old-fashioned clothes in favor of new Western imports. Therefore to maintain the fantasy world created for his mother, Alex must search for old clothing for his family to wear. Material objects and images are important for cultural and collective memory. Alex attempts to carry out his nostalgic project to protect his mother from the new world order. Also, his loss of childhood is symbolized by the collapse of the GDR. As Allan remarks, “Just as Christiane’s temporary awakening from her coma provides the young protagonists with an extended opportunity to prepare himself for the eventual trauma of losing his mother, so too the ‘extra time’ the GDR enjoys, gives him an opportunity to make the transition from the old to the new world order.” Therefore, Alex tries to create the GDR with ‘real existing socialism’. He attempts to construct an utopian version of socialist GDR which is similar to the aspirations and ideals of his mother. Indeed, Good Bye Lenin! stresses Alex’s personal development which is both personal and political. For example, he has an emotional attachment to both his mother and his girlfriend, Lara on a personal level. In his fragile emotional state, he braces himself for the German unification. Moreover, Alex and Christiane’s relationship serves as a metaphor for the German motherland and emphasizes the commemoration of a disappearing GDR culture.

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200 Seán Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema,” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 12.
There are some interesting characters in *Good Bye Lenin!* One of them is Alex’s grumpy neighbor, Herr Ganzke, who represents an ideologically motivated person and is strongly attached to the past. The most important of the characteristic of Herr Ganzke is his ability to ignore the opportunities that the present brings.  

Alex broadcasts his own fake news channel with his close friend Dennis in order to rewrite the country’s history. When Alex’s mother, Christiana takes a walk outside, she sees a large number of Westerners in her neighborhood. Alex finds a solution for this, that is, the president of the GDR, Erich Honecker has decided to take West German refugees. Eventually, this world is the creation of Alex reflecting his own nostalgia. Enns suggests that, “Alex’s creation of the GDR does not simply represent a conservative restoration of the past, but rather it also represents an idealized version of the past.” Also, it is a perfect example of Svetlana Boym’s *countermemory*. This is a phenomenon which emerged in Eastern Europe before the collapse of the Soviet Union and also as a prototype of a public space which emerged under the Communist regime. Countermemory is an alternative vision of the past, present and, future.

In *Good Bye Lenin!* the story is also shaped by counterfactual approach. Counterfactual history is a means of understanding the past. It intentionally falsifies the past in order to approach it better. The director of the film was born and grew up in the former West Germany. In the film, he creates an alternative history of the GDR in the last year of its existence. However, in reality, the GDR started to be assimilated into the Federal Republic.

The different habits of consumptions of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and GDR are stressed in the film. Rather elements of an American way of life have been experienced in Germany. New social brands such as Coca-Cola, Burger King have appeared since the German unification. Consumer goods have a central role in creating an understanding of the reconstruction of the GDR and the cultural and political developments

204 Ibid., 122.
206 Ibid., 61.
since the fall of the Berlin Wall.\textsuperscript{209} For example, Alex’s sister Ariane starts a new job at a Burger King in West Berlin after the unification. Symbolically, Ariane becomes a stereotype of the Americanized West through the use of her Burger King uniform. Throughout the film, the spread of the Western products into the East is also emphasized. However, Alex stands on the opposite side of this point of view.\textsuperscript{210}

The most important problem for the German society is to create a new identity for the united Germany.\textsuperscript{211} For many critics, Alex’s mother symbolizes a better GDR. Vecker states that \textit{Good Bye Lenin!} is primarily concerned with the vulnerable position of Alex’s mother who in the course of the film turns into a symbolic representation of a better, utopian GDR.\textsuperscript{212} On a national level, the East German people’s sense of loss turned into trauma following the unification process.\textsuperscript{213} Christiane’s coma (Alex’s mother) is a metaphor for that traumatic state of East-German society. Furthermore, both the public and the private spheres are asserted in \textit{Good Bye Lenin!}. For instance, in a classic scene of the film, Lenin and Christiane meet face-to-face due to a shot-reverse shot montage that may be understood as symbolizing the mediation of East and West identity through commodities.\textsuperscript{214}

In brief, \textit{Good Bye Lenin!} emphasizes the sense of isolation experienced by East Germans as they try to survive despite the end of the GDR. Secondly, the film comments on television’s significant power to influence and change society. Thirdly, \textit{Good Bye Lenin!} shows the importance of the family on society and highlights the relations between members.\textsuperscript{215} Also, the final scene shows the deep trauma of Kerner family. Alex’s sense of loss and his realization of the truth about his father’s disappearance and moreover his mother’s true feelings about the GDR are one of the nostalgic scenes of the film.\textsuperscript{216}

\textit{Good Bye Lenin!} is also a movie that is easily assessable, to different kind of audiences

\begin{footnotes}
\item[210] Ibid., ,220.
\item[212] Ibid., 192.
\item[214] Ibid., 117.
\item[216] Ibid., 196.
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because it is funny, sad, and emotional. Moreover, the film reinvigorates the socialist past and East German’s collective identity. Obviously, it is a part of a new marketing strategy which aims to get profit from the East German past. Lastly, there are many different characters in the film. For example, Denis, Herr Ganzke, and Rainer are authentic characters. It means that German society might be heterogeneous in future.\footnote{Seán Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7 2009), 17.}

4.4 \textit{Herr Lehmann} (Leander Haussmann, 2003)

Herr Lehmann is an adaption of a novel \textit{Herr Lehmann} (Sven Regener, 2001). In the film, German society and politics are examined in a humorous way. The writer of the film belongs to the ‘78 generation’ which was a nostalgic generation and was affected by the earlier ‘68 generation’. However, Sven Regener was not completely influenced by the nostalgia both in the novel and film, it is much more influenced by pop culture and literature.\footnote{Dorethea Otto, “Westalgie” in Leander Haussmann’s \textit{Herr Lehmann},” \textit{Senses of Cinema} 60, (2011).}

The main protagonist Herr Lehmann is in search of his own identity.\footnote{Stefano Beretta, “Kreuzberg 36 und die Bremer Lehrjahre: zu Sven Regeners Romanen ‘Herr Lehmann’ und ‘Neue Vahr Süd’,” \textit{in Gedächtnis und Identität: die deutsche Literatur nach der Vereinigung}, ed. Fabrizio Cambi (Würzburg: Köninshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2008), 108.} Herr Lehmann who is an ordinary citizen from West Germany, who had moved to West Berlin from the Federal Republic of Germany Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), is 29-year-old bartender and barroom philosopher. He prefers everything in order to escape from the military service for living more comfortable.\footnote{Stefano Beretta, “Kreuzberg 36 und die Bremer Lehrjahre: zu Sven Regeners Romanen ‘Herr Lehmann’ und ‘Neue Vahr Süd’,” \textit{in Gedächtnis und Identität: die deutsche Literatur nach der Vereinigung}, ed. Fabrizio Cambi (Würzburg: Köninshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2008), 108.} He has eccentric friends such as his best friend Karl who is a café manager and Herr Lehmann’s love interest is Katrin who is a nervous cook at Karl’s café.\footnote{Ibid.} Herr Lehmann believes that Katrin will be his future wife.

The film was filmed in the former bohemian West Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg. Herr Lehmann does not care about the development and activities in his area of the city. Although, the Berlin Wall stands at the edge of Kreuzberg, he and his friends do not notice or are unaffected by the Wall. For example, in one of the scene, Herr Lehmann and his friends do not plan to visit their friend, Karl’s future exhibition in Charlottenberg which is very close
to Kreuzberg. First and foremost, the selection of Kreuzberg is as the main setting of the film is suitable to emphasize the isolated character of Herr Lehmann. People who live in Kreuzberg, felt isolated during the Cold War and also after the fall of the Wall. For Herr Lehmann, Kreuzberg is the only important place. As Backman and Sakalauskaite state, “Haussmann’s film appears to celebrate the distinctiveness of a peculiar West German subculture that is, rather, under threat from the fall of the Wall. Yet here too, it is argued, the prescriptive logic of normalisation comes into play as the Kreuzberg scene is revealed as an oddity to be consigned to history from the perspective of the Berlin Republic.” Hence, the film stresses both an act of mourning for culture lost after 1989 and the old-fashioned values. Also, according to Kaak, this place is defined as an utopian island. Because it is unique and different kinds of people live in this neighborhood. The spectator understands that the inhabitants of Kreuzberg are philosophers, artists, beer drinkers, punks, and homosexuals who are against any form of change. They rejected any political commitment, authority or political organization.

Herr Lehmann does not represent idiosyncratic subject matter or an episodic narrative. It is useful to apply Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality to understand the historical and political apathy of Herr Lehmann. According to this theory, history has become meaningless. The manner of Lehmann is describes as slow and immobile, which is similar to Baudrillard’s claim in Fatal Strategies (1983). Mattson believes, [...] could have interpreted a figure like Lehmann as representing one of the only practicable modes of resistance to the hyperreality of

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225 Donald Backman and Aida Sakalauskaite, Ossi Wessi (Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2008), 90.
226 Ibid., 90.
227 Heinrich Kaak, Kreuzberg (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1988), 10.
contemporary society and as a response to the oversaturation of media images circulating at any one time.231

The apolitical attitude of Herr Lehmann is unrealistic in the political atmosphere of both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.232 It shows the discrepancy between the political reality of Kreuzberg and the fictional reality of the film.233 The most important things for Herr Lehmann and his friends are their freedom and independence. However, the society needs development and progress.234 According to the public debate, the apolitical stance of Herr Lehmann is thought as negative.235

In recent years, numerous novels and films of autobiographical narrative and non-fiction accounts have been published or filmed about German life in the 1980s. Critics have defined this era as the “nostalgia boom of the eighties”236 Reinhard Mohr, the author of Generation Z, stated that there has recently been a popularity in the “wave of sentimental memories” due to the need for “collective recollection” in Germany.237 Westalgic books and films have gained success in the current German market because audience are looking for the retro products of literature and film.238

The director, Leander Haussmann, was born in Quedlinburg in 1959. He attended the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art in Berlin. Then, he started to act in the theater for several years. He was the artistic director of Schauspielshaus Bochum from 1995-2000. In 1996, he appeared in Jailbirds (Detlev Buck, 1996). Apart from Herr Lehmann, he has directed such films as Sonnenallee, NVA (2005), Kabale Und Liebe (2005), Warum Männer Nicht Zuhören und Frauen Schlecht Einparken (2007).239

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235 Ibid., 10.
238 Claudia Gremler, “‘But Somehow it Was Only Television’: West German Narratives of the Fall of the Wall in Recent Novels and their Screen Adaptations,” in Processes of Transposition: German Literature and Film (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 274.
Similar to many recent literary texts about the Federal Republic of the 1980, *Herr Lehmann* has nostalgic elements at the least. However, the film does not do this to the same extent as the book which it is based on. Plowman asserts, “As in the texts by Wagner and Henschel, a striking feature of the representation of the “old” Federal Republic is that from the perspective of those living there the division of Germany is taken for granted and accepted as unremarkable.”  

First and foremost, Lehmann’s indifference to the geopolitical situation of the German nation in the Cold War can be interpreted as Haussmann and Regener’s support for left-wing ideology.  

The film reflects nostalgia for pre-unification Berlin. The term *Westalgie* is described as Herr Lehmann’s nostalgia for the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In the film’s final scene, in which Lehmann discovers the fall of the Berlin Wall, the characters are unsurprised over the event. Herr Lehmann tells his drunken friend Sylvio: “The Wall is open.” Sylvio suggests seeing it but Herr Lehmann responds: “First, let’s drink up.” It can be understood that young people were apolitical.

Similar to *Sonnenallee*, the characters in *Herr Lehmann* are shown as innocent whereas the fall of the Berlin Wall is represented as a lamentable and uncertain event. It can be understood that the fall of the Wall is not perceived as a positive event. Herr Lehmann is not really aware of what exactly happens. In contrast, the character of Katrin and Herr Lehmann’s mother are placed as the representatives of real life. For example, his mother finds Herr Lehmann irresponsible. As she says, “Nobody sleeps at this hour. I’ve been on my feet since 7.” However, Herr Lehmann is happy with the view of “failure” society. He forms his own concept of life with the main goal being to enjoy life.

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243 Ibid., 119.


247 Ibid., 258-260.
The private life of Herr Lehmann diminishes the reality of the historical context of Germany. In the final scene, when Herr Lehmann realizes the fall of Berlin Wall, he and other characters do not celebrate or care about the event.\textsuperscript{248} The film’s relationship to the term of \textit{Westalgie} can be seen in two ways. First, is the comfortable and “slaphappy” bohemian lifestyle which is an escapism from reality. Second, is a nostalgia to memorialize the “good old days”.\textsuperscript{249} The character of Herr Lehmann is happy-go-lucky and apolitical.

The writer and director criticize the life of those who lived in East Germany. Their life is perceived as being outdated. In one of the conservations between Herr Lehmann and Karl, Karl says that people always meet at the world clock in East Berlin. Herr Lehmann responds with “What do communists want with world time?”\textsuperscript{250} Also, in the same conversation, he says “Anyway, Katrin is excited about seeing East Berlin.”\textsuperscript{251} This can be interpreted as West Germans perception of Easterners as being exotic. After this scene, the spectator observes the interrogation of Herr Lehmann. In this scene and in general, the brutality of the GDR is not shown and seems to be unreal. However, Herr Lehmann does not represent the reality of life in the Federal Republic before unification. It renders the era with politically and aesthetically contrasting images.\textsuperscript{252} For instance, GDR commanders are shown as tranquil.

Haussmann and Regener also criticize life within Kreuzberg as well as young people of the West. This can be noted in the hospital scene in which Karl seeks medical attention for his psychological mood. In this section of the film, Karl’s doctor (Christoph Waltz) says that he gets depressed because he is an artist yet worked in a bar for 10 years. Also he copes with his exhibition. When you are young, life is easy in Kreuzberg. Young people of this area work a little, live cheaply, and have fun. However, many people need something more from life, a true purpose. Therefore, people without goal can experience depression.”\textsuperscript{253}

Karl is both a bartender and independent artist. Artists began their public installation in West Berlin, especially in Kreuzberg in the late 1970s. Their works were genereally based on the material aspects of the postwar city space, and they used the objects to expressing their

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Donald Backman and Aida Sakalauskaite, \textit{Ossi Wessi} (Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2008), 98.
point of view. They used a visual language or iconography similar to East German artists. Their works were affected by the modernist styles of Surrealism and Expressionism. The endeavoring work of Karl is modernist.

Interestingly, both the writer and director give a role to the stray dog. In the film, the stray dog is seen in many scenes. In the beginning of the film, Herr Lehmann is frightened of the dog. Yet at other times he does not notice that it passes him. Later in the film Herr Lehmann finds a solution and he pickles the dog. In the final scene, when the Wall falls down, Herr Lehmann and the dog meet. The use of the dog has symbolic meanings. For instance, it represents past, present and future. In addition, the dog symbolises “transience” or “the coming to an end” in many cultures.

One of the distinct differences between West and East Germany can be seen in Herr Lehmann. West Germany is more Americanized, hedonistic and individualistic. For example, Herr Lehmann, Katrin and Karl go to the cinema and watch an American film, Star Wars (George Lucas, 1977). Because Katrin is really interested in science fiction films. Therefore, they go to watch this film because Herr Lehmann wants to attract her attention.

In Sonnenallee, the director uses the image of wall in most of the scenes. However, despite Herr Lehmann living close to the Wall, it is never shown in the film. Take for instance, in one of the scenes of the film, he tries to deliver his parents’ money to a relative in East Berlin, but he fails. Even in this scene, the wall is not shown. Instead of the wall, an interrogation room is shown. This questioning leads to change his understandings about East Germany. In other words, he realizes that there is more serious life beyond Kreuzberg. The comfort of Herr Lehmann shows the political ‘state of emergency’ has started to change and become normal in 1980s West Berlin. He has never really goes into the East Germany.
Otto comments, “In his delusional state, Karl references the more symbolic level of growing up in the movie, that is, looking beyond the wall and accepting the (eastern) world outside, as he says to Lehmann “ We need to engage more with the East” to which Lehmann, still in denial, responds “The East can wait. Lie down now.” Furthermore, the role of visual media and location in constructing representations of the past are understood in this scene.

The film shows different levels of engagement and participation in the event of fall of the Wall Kreuzberg. Herr Lehmann and Silvio, for example, feel apathy over the fall of the Berlin Wall which is understood in a conversation between the two. Herr Lehmann says: “Slyvio wake up, the wall is coming down”. Slyvio says: “What does it mean? And again Herr Lehmann replies: “No idea. That they’ll all be coming over.” In an earlier scene, a woman enters the bar and says “the wall is coming down.” At this she looks directly at the camera and appears to be talking the spectator than the others at the bar. After this sentence, the spectator observes that the Kreuzbergers continue to sip their beer. Their disbelief is easily seen in this scene. According to Assmann’s communicative dimension of collective memory, the participation of people is crucial in the remembrance of shared memories of recent events. Moreover, Martin Schulz points out that eye witnesses are crucial for first hand recollections of events.

In the midst of the film, during dinner, there is a conversation between Herr Lehmann and his family. They do not understand how he can live very close to the Wall. Moreover, they find East Berlin very interesting whereas their son does not. The spectator observes that Herr Lehmann’s birthday is the same date of the fall of the Berlin Wall. One

262 Iwona Maczka, “Pictures of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in German Cinema,” in Berlin’s Culterescape in 20th Century, ed. Thomas Bredohl and Michael Zimmermann (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2008), 191.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
267 Iwona Maczka, “Pictures of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in German Cinema,” in Berlin’s Culterescape in 20th Century, ed. Thomas Bredohl and Michael Zimmermann (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2008),185.
268 Ibid., 189.
interpretation of this that the fall of the Berlin Wall leads to the new beginning for Herr Lehmann.

The end of the film stresses the normalization of the postunification. The fall of the Berlin Wall is a local as well as international event. However, it is also a personal crisis in which Herr Lehmann begins to question his solipsism. Plowman reflects, “[…] it is crucial to the meaning of the scene that the opening of the Wall comes just as Lehmann has finally been confronted with the emptiness of his Kreuzberg existence.” Plowman goes on to describe the final scene of the film as a late 1990s “love parade” with a party atmosphere as the musical background of the final scene, is a version of I will survive (Cake, 1996) which stresses the new confrontation.

The perception and description of Germany’s past by recent directors are different from their earlier German presentation and Hollywood’s perception and representation of the nation. Herr Lehmann and the other similar German films are optimistic about the future of Germany compared to the past.

The fall of the Berlin Wall leads to reconciliation. For example, Katrin and her new boyfriend Rainer say compliment and send good wishes to Lehmann, and ask about Karl and his own plans. After this scene, a guy who comes from East Berlin, rushes through the Wall to greet Herr Lehmann. Herr Lehmann turns to the camera and he responds: “I am Herr Lehmann. But go ahead and use the familiar form of you.” The attitude of Herr Lehmann also is more positive in the film compared with the book. It is interesting to note that, like the young East German man, 41 percent of East Germans were content about the unification, while the rest were enthusiastic. In contrast, West Germans were hostile towards the state of

271 Ibid., 100.
272 Ibid., 101.
274 Nick Hodgin, Screening the East (Berghahn Books, 2013), 2.
East Germany but not to East Germans. In the final scene of the film, Haussmann stresses the happiness of the East Germans. The fall of the Berlin Wall was their first interaction and led to great euphoria. But, this initial euphoria soon disappeared and people realized that they were different.

4.5 *Das Leben der Anderen* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)

*Das Leben der Anderen* is about three individuals who have personal-political dilemmas. The film is a political thriller which set in the last years of the German Democratic Republic. It is considered as the first accurate depiction of the psychological terror executed by the Stasi. The era and atmosphere of East Germany in the mid-1980s are reflected successfully. Diamond states, “The mechanisms through which Weisler comes to emphasize and identify with the subjects of his investigation, as he observes and listens in on the rich blend of passion, poetry, and politics that characterizes their lives, are explored in depth.”

Georg Dreyman is a talented and famous playwright, and is also a GDR patriot. His lover, Christa-Maria Sieland, is a talented and ambitious actress but a drug addict. She has sexual relations with a villainous government Minister Bruno Hempf in order to protect both Dreyman and herself. Minister Hempf appoints the Stasi with surveillance of the couple, which is operated by Captain Gerd Weisler. Apart from the personal affair of Hempf, the circles of artists or ‘cultural creators’ (‘Kulterschaffende’) which included writers, filmmakers, actors, and singers were perceived as dissidents by the Stasi. Hoffgen points out that, “these people were perceived as particularly dangerous by the state because they had great visibility within society and at the same time they were quite unpredictable in their options and in how they expressed them.”

Gerd Weisler is a teacher of interrogation techniques at the Stasi training college. He is a honest but rigid supporter of the communist regime. This is seen in the beginning of the film

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278 Nick Hodgin, *Screening the East- Heimat, Memory and Nostalgia in German Film since 1989* (Berghahn Books, 2011), 16.
while, Weisler teaching new recruits. He plays the tapes of a recent interrogation which was conducted with a young man accused of helping someone flee to the West. He says: “The enemies of our state are arrogant. Remember that. […] Your subjects are the enemies of Socialism.” He stresses that cruelty can be understood and is justified in order to protect socialism. Despite his success at work, is also a lonely man in his private life. However, his personality changes over the period of the film. When he eventually realizes the wrongs of the Stasi and therefore attempts to help Dreyman.

Another character is Grubitz, who is Weisler’s commanding officer. He focuses on his career and uses his position himself. His definition of socialism means to his own ends. According to him, Stalin’s quote “writers are the engineers of the soul” should be eradicated. He gives orders for an ‘Operative Procedure’ (Operativer Vorgang) directing Weisler and his operation team to bug the apartment of Dreyman and Sieland, phones as well as follow their movements outside of the house. Hoffgen states, ‘These operations meant to be ‘preventative measures’ against ‘hostile-negative acts’ in order to ‘contribute to the continuing implementation of the policies of the state’. Also, Christa-Maria Sieland is addicted to drugs therefore it makes the operation more easier. Towards the end of the film, they blackmail her.

The surveillance of Dreyman begins at the party after the play. At the party, Dreyman appeals to Minister Hempf to take Jerska off the blacklist so he can return to being a theater director. He says, “He could work for any theatre in the West. But he wants to stay here. Because he believes in Socialism and in this country.” Hempf tells Dreyman, “That’s what we all love about your plays…the idea that people can change. People don’t change.”

The fictional characters of the film reflect the real life experiences of people during this time. This is especially true characters of Georg Dreyman and his actress lover, Christa-

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288 Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 209.
289 Ibid., 209.
293 Ibid.
Maria Sieland. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, the director, had some personal contact with the Stasi in his childhood as his mother was on a Stasi list due to her defection to the West. He and his family, were humiliated at the border when visiting their relatives in East Berlin. Again, as an adult von Donnersmarck maintains that four of the members of his theater group were ordered by the Stasi to monitor another actor, Mühe. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck only found the real names of two who pursued him. Then, he found his Stasi files similar to the character of Dreyman.

Ulrich Mühe is the actor who plays the character Weisler in the film. Aspects of his life also mirror those of the characters in the film. For example, he was a theatre actor living in East Germany although he was allowed to travel to the West. While he believed in the principle of socialism and he was also critical of the state. He accused of his former life, Jenny Gröllmann, a famous Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA) star, of having spied on him for the Stasi during their marriage.

When the Wall collapsed, Ulrich Mühe was disappointed at first which is similar to the character Hanna Flanders in Die Unberührbare. He was skeptical that people voted conservative party (CDU) in the first German elections. He moved to West Germany for personal reasons and began to criticise of his former country. Due to his criticism of the former GDR, East Germans did not behave well when he visited his former country. The main criticism of Mühe was, East Germans did not admit that GDR was a dictatorship. In the West, he left his past behind him. He got the heading role as a Stasi agent in Das Leben der Anderen. The role was an interesting experience for him because he was chased and harassed by the Stasi. Also, he was the advisor of Donnersmack in Das Leben der Anderen. Ulrich Mühe won several ‘Best Actor’ awards with this role. Significantly, Mühe’s performance is affected the spectator, they empathise with him.

296 Seán Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema,” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 13-19.
297 Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 207-208.
298 Ibid.,208.
299 Ibid., 208.
Similar to Ulrich Mühe, some other actors had some experiences with the Stasi. For example, Volkmar Kleinert (the character of Albert Jerska) was a successful actor in the GDR. He is still a very good actor in Deutches Theater in Berlin. Before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Stasi tried to recruit him as a former employee. They said that if he helped them to build socialism in the country, they would help him to go abroad. They gave one week to think about this decision. He did not sleep the entire week. He did not know how he would answer. He said no and they did not bother him again.\(^{300}\) Also, according to the musician Wolf Biermann, the film mirrors the era of GDR as he too. He was persecuted and blacklisted by the Stasi.\(^{301}\)

The film’s costume and set are authentic. The director, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, employed a costume and set-designers team, many of whom were from the former GDR. \textit{Das Leben der Anderen} emphasizes the characteristic ‘never-before-seen-authenticity’and, the selection of locations was successful to depict the GDR in the mid-1980s.\(^{302}\) The film is also realistic in the ideologically portrayed.\(^{303}\)

Von Donnersmarck shows the abuse of power by figures like Hempf and Grubitz. The historical reality of the GDR is not represented completely but it questions the GDR.\(^{304}\) Allan comments, “[…] \textit{Das Leben der Anderen} is perhaps best approached not as a historically accurate account of the GDR itself, but rather as a study of the potential of love as an instrument of resistance and redemption in an abstract totalitarian milieu.”\(^{305}\) The relationship of the couple is shown so vulnerable against the cruel state security apparatus.

There are a number of criticisms about the film. One of them is that the film’s main focus is male protagonist. Hence the character of Christa-Maria Sieland is not as active as that of Dreyman. Therefore this character may be interpreted by some a patriarchal to of all totalitarian societies.\(^{306}\)


\(^{301}\) Maggie Hoffgen, \textit{Studying German Cinema} (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 212.

\(^{302}\) Seán Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR \textit{Alltag}, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 14.

\(^{303}\) Ibid., 14.

\(^{304}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{305}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{306}\) Ibid., 16.
In one of the scenes, as Wiesler listens to Dreyman’s rendition of the ‘Sonate des guten Menchen’ (Sonata for a Good Man), tears runs down his face. It means that music has the power to help someone show empathy in the situation.\textsuperscript{307} In this scene, Dreyman said that “You know what Lenin said about Beethoven’s ‘Appassionata’? If I keep listening to it, I won’t finish the revolution. Can anyone who has heard this music, I mean truly heard it, really be a bad person?”\textsuperscript{308} When Wiesler listens to the music during the surveillance of Dreyman, Dreyman starts to play Sonata for a Good Man, which has a strong influence on Dreyman, Sieland and Weisler. The important point is that all of them are humans and they have a change to be better people.\textsuperscript{309}

The love affair between Dreyman and Sieland helps the personal development of Weisler and he changes his side and point of view.\textsuperscript{310} Also, an important scene is between Grubitz and Weisler. This scene takes place in the Stasi headquarters canteen. They witness one of the Stasi employee’s telling a joke involving the Socialist Unity Party (SED) party leader, Erich Honecker. When the younger Stasi employee notices that his two superior officers are sitting at a nearby table, he stops and looks worried. He knows that telling jokes is an important offence.\textsuperscript{311} Grubitz says, “No, carry on, colleague!”, and then he asks, “Name? Rank? Department?”\textsuperscript{312} Weisler is considerably disturbed by the event.\textsuperscript{313} Also, this scene shows the tone of the film.\textsuperscript{314}

The transformation of Weisler is understood in a scene in the film. He comes across a small child with a football ball at the elevator of his apartment block. The boy stares at Weisler and asks: “Is it true that you work for the Stasi?” Wiesler answers: “Do you know what the Stasi is?” The small child responds: “Yes. They are bad men, who put people in prison, says my dad.” Weisler asks:”What’s the name of your…”, but he corrects himself and finishes the question.\textsuperscript{315}

\textsuperscript{307} Seàn Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 16.
\textsuperscript{308} Das Leben der Anderen, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006.
\textsuperscript{309} Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 211-212.
\textsuperscript{310} Seàn Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 16.
\textsuperscript{311} Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 211.
\textsuperscript{312} Das Leben der Anderen, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006.
\textsuperscript{313} Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 211.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{315} Das Leben der Anderen, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006.
Gerd Weisler’s personal and political change is the main point of the film. His concept of identity was challenged and changed throughout the film. Thus showing the notion of identity a fluid and dynamic.\textsuperscript{316} Diamond states, “[…] Wiesler actively enters the lives of the couple, not only to make reparation for his role in threatening their relationship, but also to revivify and recharge his own internal object world.”\textsuperscript{317} The introduction shows Weisler’s deftness as a Stasi spy and his first surveillance of playwright Georg Dreyman and his lover, the actress Christa Maria Sieland. The action becomes more complicated when Weisler is first seen to sympathize with them. After this, he realizes the surveillance is only a career move for his boss Grubitz, who hopes to clear the way for Minister Hempf’s sexual advances on Christa Maria Sieland.\textsuperscript{318}

The most important problem of the film is the credibility Weisler’s character. He is a fictional character. In fact, there is no clear evidence of any such conversations being made by members of the Stasi.\textsuperscript{319} Also, some officers of the Ministry of State Security were skeptical of the GDR.\textsuperscript{320} However, some people who lived in the era of the GDR, does not believe the transformation of the Weisler.\textsuperscript{321} Cooke states, “Consequently for its critics, the film was seen as a worrying form of revisionism that sought to trivialise the devastating effect the Stasi had on its real victims.”\textsuperscript{322}

According to Anna Funder, who is the writer of \textit{Stasiland}, the Stasi was a powerful institution, and the East German feared from this institution. Stasi officers were strict at their work. Therefore, Captain Weisler is not credible.\textsuperscript{323} The film tends to humanize the Stasi and trivializes the brutalities of the East German state.\textsuperscript{324}

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\item \textsuperscript{316} Seàn Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR \textit{Alltag}, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 11.
\item \textsuperscript{318} Seàn Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR \textit{Alltag}, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 11.
\item \textsuperscript{320} Maggie Hoffgen, \textit{Studying German Cinema} (Bedfordshire: Auteur, 2009), 211.
\item \textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 303.
\item \textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 577.
\end{itemize}
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Donnersmarck’s concern about the East Germans’ nostalgia is shown in one of the final scenes of the film. The character of Bruno Hempf comments: “Life was good in our little Republic. Many people only realize that now.”

Donnersmarck points that Ostalgie is not celebrating the ordinary and is separating from personal experiences. Hodgin reports, “The implication is that only those who benefited from high ranking and corrupt office might look wistfully back to those days; one might infer, moreover, that these people seek to mobilize such nostalgia in an effort perhaps to defend their own (mis)conduct.” In other words, the understanding and depiction of Ostalgie is different from Sonnenallee and Good Bye Lenin!.

The film was a counterpoint to Ostalgie, it stresses the repressive dictatorship of the GDR and the corrupt of the Stasi.

Das Leben der Anderen is placed as an important German film for understanding the transition of the new Federal Republic in the post-unification era. Furthermore, the love between Dreyman and Sieland shows and emphasizes the cruelty of the system of GDR. The film highlights the negative and stark difference between the conservative concept of identity and performative model of identity.

The film is the first popular feature film which shows brutal activities of the state security (Stasi) in East Germany. Also, the film criticizes the Stasi but on the other hand, humanizes one of the Stasi officers, Gerd Weisler. Stein argues, “it does not sentimentalize or trivialize the GDR in the manner of some post-unification German comedies to which it has been compared.” Rather, the film shows the trauma of GDR. The repressive nature of East German totalitarianism is addressed in the film.

Dreyman is affected strongly by the suicide of Jerska, who is his mentor. For this reason, he goes to Christa and implores her not to see Hempf again. Christa’s response is: “But you get in to bed with them too. Why do you do it? Because they can destroy you too despite your

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327 Ibid., 179.
328 Ibid., 183.
329 Seàn Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 17.
talent and faith? Because they decide what we play, who is to act and who can direct? You
don’t want to end up like Jerska and neither do I. And that is why I’m going now.”

In the bar scene, Weisler attempts to talk with Christa. He says: “I’m your audience.”
and Christa responds: “Selling herself for her art.” She tells of her struggle between Hempf
or staying loyal to Dreyman. The dialogue between Christa and Weisler is interpreted that
Weisler understands Christa and Dreyman. He knows she is in danger. This is an informal
scene. Weisler’s intervention with Christa leads to changes in Christa’s thoughts. Also,
Weisler covers up the subversive activities of the couple in his official reports. Dreyman
writes an article with two fellow dissidents. In this article, they write about the high suicide
rates in the GDR. Dreyman uses a special typewriter which is smuggled in by an editor of a
West German weekly who publishes the piece in West Germany. His attempt is interpreted
as an act of espionage according to the GDR penal code. The clandestine meetings are defined
as ‘illegal contact’ with ‘imperialist forces’. Dreyman knows it is a risky but he is not aware
of the extent of the surveillance on him.

In reality, some of these events took place in 1960s and 1970s in Germany. Der Spiegel
published texts written by dissidents within the Eastern bloc and smuggled them into West
Germany. This story is parallel with ‘Spiegel Manifesto’, written in 1978 by high level
representatives of East German public life.

Wiesler realizes the true face of the GDR in this article. However, he decides to report
Dreyman when he hears that Dreyman and his friends ridicule the Stasi. He prepares a report
documenting the subversive activities of Dreyman. Grubitz tells him about his classification
system for artists. He says: “Your guy, Dreyman, is a type 4. A ‘hysterical anthropocentrist.’
Can’t bear being alone…always talking, needing friends. That type should never be brought
to trial. They thrive at trial. They thrive on that. Temporary detention is the best way to deal

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333 Ibid.
334 Diana Diamond, “Empathy and Identification in Von Donnersmarck’s The Lives of
335 Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire, Auteur, 2009), 211.
336 Diana Diamond, “Empathy and Identification in Von Donnersmarck’s The Lives of
337 Ibid., 823.
338 Maggie Hoffgen, Studying German Cinema (Bedfordshire, Auteur, 2009), 210.
339 Diana Diamond, “Empathy and Identification in Von Donnersmarck’s The Lives of
Complete isolation and no set release date. No human contact the whole time, not even with the guards."\textsuperscript{340} Weisler decides not to report him. He protects Dreyman.

Christa decides to end her relationship with Hempf but is arrested for having possession of drugs and is threatened with the loss of her job as an actress. Thus, she joins the army of citizen informers.\textsuperscript{341} After that, Weisler removes the special typewriter before the Stasi team arrives. When the Stasi team opens the secret hiding place, Christa runs and a car hits her.\textsuperscript{342} After that, she says, “I was too weak, I can never put right what I have done.”\textsuperscript{343}

Due to his suspected involvement in helping Dreyman, Weisler is consigned to steaming mail open in a Stasi cellar.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, Dreyman is deeply affected by the death of Christa. He attends the play, “The Faces of Love” which is restaged to represent the spirit of a reunified Germany. Also, he learns unintentionally of the full surveillance upon him by Hempf.\textsuperscript{344}

In 1991, people could access the Stasi files, and Dreyman searches his files and finds clear proof of Christa’s treachery. He also finds that Weisler protected him during his full surveillance.\textsuperscript{345} Then, he tracks down Weisler, and he finds that he is a postal worker. He does not approach him directly; but he observes him, as before he was observed by Weisler. Two years later, Wiesler sees a poster with a photograph of Dreyman advertising his novel, Sonata for Good Man. When he opens the book, he discovers the book is dedicated to him (HGW XX/7).\textsuperscript{346} The clerk asks, “Shall I gift wrapped it?, he replies, “No, it is for me.”\textsuperscript{347}

The film \textit{Das Leben der Anderen} reflects the era of the GDR accurately. The beginning of the film starts with this sentence, “1984, East Berlin. Glasnot is nowhere in sight. The population of the GDR is kept under strict control by the Stasi, the East German Secret Police.”\textsuperscript{348} Then, the first scene begins with an interrogation in the temporary detention centre. The general view of the film about the GDR era can be understood with this scene.

\textsuperscript{340} \textit{Das Leben der Anderen}, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid., 824.
\textsuperscript{343} \textit{Das Leben der Anderen}, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{347} \textit{Das Leben der Anderen}, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006.
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid.
The film offers the spectator an Orwellian image of pre-unification life under East Germany’s totalitarian regime. The director of the film states the year 1984 was also an important year for the Cold War because everything was dominated by Russia. According to Dale, *Das Leben der Anderen* reflects life of GDR in a more realistic way unlike *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye Lenin!*. First and foremost, the film is a critic of Ostalgie. According to the director, Ostalgie is somewhat understandable, but it is definitely dangerous. Because people generally are nostalgic for their past. If a system finished, you feel nostalgic. It is dangerous as some Germans do not think that the GDR was a dictatorship. Also, the ostalgic comedies are shown as humanistic in the German television and cinema.

Some historians have used similar approaches to discuss the topics of the Third Reich and the SED regime in the GDR. The view of the GDR as a totalitarian state and perpetrator-victim discourse in the GDR are not precise and are unclear. For example, the victims in the GDR are not definite. In *Das Leben der Anderen*, victimhood was characterized, redefined, and emphasized. The question of victimhood was related to East German identity both pre- and post-*Wende* and was also problematic issue in the process of unification. The main question is that did East Germans just suffer from the SED-regime and the Stasi or were they also victims of a process of economic and political change by the Federal Republic? Because the GDR does not exist anymore, is it meaningful to think of an East German identity? Are they be loyal to the GDR past, or are they be neutral?, do they reject, or be nostalgic about their past?

The dictatorship of the system is emphasized in the film. For instance, in another scene, Weisler and his team enter the house of Dreyman to set up the surveillance apparatus. When they leave the house, a neighbor sees Weisler and his team and Weisler realizes this. He warns her, “One word of this to anyone and Masha (her daughter) loses her spot at university.”

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351 Seán Allen, “The love lives of others. The discourse of love and the reconstruction of East German identity in post-unification cinema,” (paper presented at the Workshop II Evoking the GDR Alltag, University of Bangor, July 6-7, 2009), 3.
352 Ibid., 814.
The film is both a melodrama and a heritage film. Heritage cinema is interested in ‘authenticity’ and the GDR of the 1980s in the movie is described in every detail. This authenticity is similar to Bogdanski’s use of colour palette (grey and brown tones), thus the spectator can feel through the use of colour the era of GDR of the 1980s. For example, it uses the hue of images which are similar to the images of old television footage.\(^{354}\) The director indicates that he used Brechtian Grey, green and brown to express something. He did not use real blues and reds.\(^ {355}\)

Colour is used to contrast the lives and lifestyle of characters. For example, when Weisler listens to a conversation between Dreyman and Jerska, he takes note of a book of poetry by Bertolt Brecht which Weisler borrows the poetry when he enters Dreyman’s apartment. Weisler reads the poems back at his own cold and grey flat. Hoffgen comments that, “Weisler’s life is characterised by sparsely furnished rooms with harsh lights and empty walls- whether it is his place of work or his flat.”\(^ {356}\) The appearance of Weisler is shown without colour and individuality. His clothing is grey and his face looks ashen. In contrast to this, Dreyman’s flat and his clothes reflect warmth and individuality. His apartment consists of a range of warm colours with comfortable sofas and individualised lighting. The spectator can observe the difference and contrast the two flats and two lives.

On the other hand, in the era of the GDR, people did not access Western newspapers. In the scene when Weisler and his team enter the house of Dreyman, Weisler finds forbidden Western newspapers such as Der Spiegel and Frankfurter Allgemeine. East German intellectuals somehow got access these newspapers.\(^ {357}\) In relation, similar to Sonnenallee, the director stresses the popular use of Western television in the Eastern side of Germany. Actually, it is forbidden to use the Western television but everybody watches it.

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck mentions that the title of the film is *Das Leben der Anderen* because Weisler had no personal life; he just focused on the lives of others. His life surrounded around the communist ideology but was never about him. Hence, this dedication was very crucial for him.

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\(^{356}\) Maggie Hoffgen, *Studying German Cinema* (Bedfordshire, Auteur, 2009), 211.

It is important to understand that *Das Leben der Anderen* is not a documentary. The main character of the film is the main issue, therefore the plausibility of the events are not the primary issue. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck has pointed that his aim was not to replicate history, but show the range of possibilities that has led to certain historical circumstances.

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck has a good background. He was born in Cologne in 1973. He grew up in cosmopolitan places such as New York, Berlin, Frankfurt, Brussels and Berlin. He studied Russian in St.Petersburg, and Political Science, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at Oxford University. After his education, he went on to study directing at the Academy of Television and Film in Munich. After his education, he went on to study directing at the Academy of Television and Film in Munich.\(^{358}\) *Das Leben der Anderen* is the director’s first feature film. He spent four years for searching and writing the movie and received support and advice from Prof. Hans Wilke as a historical consultant.\(^{359}\) The success of *Das Leben der Anderen* helped him to become more popular therefore he now lives in Los Angeles.

The director and his production team were very careful to select locations. These are similar as possible to original places. Because Berlin has changed substantially since the 1980s, filmmakers have to recreate Berlin. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck aims to make *Das Leben der Anderen* as real as possible in other ways. For example, the original spying equipment of the Stasi was used in the film. The spectator also observes a huge card-filing system which the former Stasi headquarters used to record millions of names written by hand.\(^{360}\)

In conclusion, the film emphasizes the GDR trauma through the eyes of Gerd Weisler. The film’s central message is that people are capable of change and that one’s politics can also be changed.\(^{361}\) Also, *Das Leben der Anderen* gains local and international success due to the aesthetic of the décor, clothing, the acting, and the prosperous cinematography.\(^{362}\)

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359 Ibid., 206.
360 Ibid., 207.
361 Ibid., 559.
5. CONCLUSION

The fall of the Berlin wall has affected German cinema to a large extent. After the unification, the German film industry underwent a major transformation. The GDR production studios (DEFA) were sold to French corporation Compagnie General des Eaux (later Vivendi Universal), which invested about 500 million EUR to bring its technical infrastructure and production services up to international standards. After having been sold to FBB-Filmbetriebe Berlin Brandenburg GmbH in 2004, and after a prolonged period of uncertainty about its future, the studio, now part of a “media city,” finally became profitable again in 2007 when the German Film Fund came into effect. Ironically, this was not least due to major US productions lured to Germany by the incentive of the fund, while the US American industry had been fought both on economical and cultural terms for much of Babelsberg’s long history.

Consequently, only a minority of films were helmed by directors that had made a career at the DEFA after the Wall fell. In the first years of unification, many GDR cinemas were closed or dominated by Western programmes. At the same time, and despite the dominance of American films on the German market, German films began again to attract attention. Especially Good Bye Lenin! and Das Leben der Anderen gained wide success both locally and internationally. Sonnenallee, in turn, found a large audience in Germany, while Die Unberührbare remained confined to the arthouse circuit. Overall, Germany’s new school(s) of film-makers gained popularity beyond the TV-flavoured German cinema of the 1990s, similar to the ways New German Cinema once had positioned itself against ‘Papas Kino’ in the 1970s. ‘Papas Kino’ came to be a catchphrase coined in the wake of the Oberhausen Manifesto. This manifesto supported art cinema and an actuality-based style of modernist film-making.

At the first instance, some commentators perceived the term and sentiment of “Ostalgie” to be dangerous. Yet Sonnenallee and other commercial feature films turned this suspect historical emotion into a positive image for GDR life. Being set in the 1970s, the narrative

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365 Ibid., 283.


paints a humorous picture of life under the totalitarian regime. The GDR’s Marxist-Leninist philosophy is ridiculed in the film, as Haussmann is trying to trivialize the oppressive realities of the SED regime. Consider, for instance, the border guard’s ridiculous explanation of the GDR’s failure in technological development. Such manifestations of Ostalgie can be interpreted as an apology for the GDR, or, at the contrary, as an attempt to cope precisely with the Ostalgiewelle (wave of Ostalgie). As I have shown throughout this thesis, Ostalgie has not always served to create popular representations of the GDR, just think how the former GDR is identified with the totalitarian Stasi state in Das Leben der Anderen. In more recent German cinema, two tendencies have become influential: one concerns a nostalgic work of displacement, the other postmodern narratives of dislocation set in the post-Wall present. The films selected here reflect on the life in West and East Germany through expressions of nostalgia.

Yet Ostalgie and Westalgie also have turned into political terms. As sites of memory, these terms create negative perceptions of the East. Therefore, some commentators contend that Ostalgie is the undesirable and problematic expression of an attachment to the past. As I have demonstrated, however, there is a strong connection between the consumer culture and Ostalgie. Differently from the citizens of many Eastern bloc countries, East Germans were conscious of social, economic and cultural developments in West Germany. For example, East Germans could watch Western television programs and advertising. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that their attitudes or cultural values developed in a dialogue with the values presented, negotiated, or contested by such programs. After the unification, Germany’s nostalgia industry has grown magnificently, not least by marketing and

merchandising former GDR products. For example, on October 3, 1997, a new national holiday, Tag der Deutschen Einheit, was introduced to honor the re-unification seven years earlier, and this national holiday continues to create opportunities for a new, nostalgic nation branding that includes the sales of East German beer or people dressing up in the former East German militia’s uniforms.

Heterostereotypes existed among East and West Germans. Many East Germans nourished negative Western stereotypes. In Sonnenallee, these stereotypes are emphasized. For example, in the beginning of the film, a policeman catches Micha and his friends listening to a banned American song. Asked why the song has been banned, one of Micha’s friends, Wunchel, answers that they do not know since the lyrics were in English, as a way of avoiding punishment. As the example shows, Good Bye Lenin! or Sonnenallee present an ironic engagement with society’s present-day celebration of East German material culture, that may include, as is the case of Becker’s film, glimpses of a more ideologically-based version of Ostalgie, where the filmmaker attempts to recuperate certain elements of the GDR’s socialist project.

Good Bye Lenin! is not only engaged with the events of 1989. Many German films of the period went beyond narrations of the collapse of the GDR or the experience of unification. In addition, as social or cultural reflections of history that do history, even the films thematizing German unification differ of course from each other. Some portray the German unification as leading to problems whereas others see East Germans on the way to a free-market society. For still others, the era of the GDR is nothing but the thought of totalitarianism. For instance, Sonnenallee softens the image of GDR and uses Ostalgie as a response to the fears among East Germans. Furthermore, the film tries to challenge the rose-tinted views of the East. Consequently, the film “forces the East German spectator to reflect upon, and ultimately

378 Ibid., 166.
382 Ibid.,156.
reject, any manifestations of Ostalgie which would ostensibly call for a return to the GDR.”³⁸³

Good Bye Lenin!, in turn, handles the trauma of the GDR. One reason for this trauma was the assimilation of lifestyles enforced by the West.³⁸⁴ Furthermore, the film interprets the GDR as a positive manner. Das Leben der Anderen, finally, emphasizes the dark and negative side of the GDR.³⁸⁵

Through many of Germany’s post-wall sites of memory, the GDR was to be experienced as economically underdeveloped when compared to Western Germany. Also, East Germans expected to have a political and economic quality along with the German unification but this did not work out.³⁸⁶ Over the years, they experienced many historical changes. Streets were renamed, regions politically re-structured, and Easterners were increasingly expected to adapt West German cultural, political, and social norms. At the same time, East Germans increasingly identified, in retrospect, what appeared to be their own, unique German identity.³⁸⁷ According to this view, life before reunification was better than in reunified Germany. Many East Germans claimed that the GDR would have protected them from the negative effects of capitalist system.³⁸⁸ Die Unberührbare, for instance, is based on such a personal account, with the main character, Hanna Flanders, being inspired by its director’s mother, the West German Marxist author Gisela Elsner.³⁸⁹ In the film, Flanders harshly criticizes the West’s bourgeois values and she supports the East, even after the Wall collapses.³⁹⁰ Roehler’s film “problematizes Hanna’s ideological position insofar she is a character whose idealism is difficult to understand.”³⁹¹ Furthermore, Flanders symbolized a

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 132-133.
³⁸⁸ Ibid., 133.
³⁸⁹ Brad Prager,”Passing Time Since the Wende: Recent German Film on Unification,”German Politics and Society, issue 94 vol. 28, no.1 (2010): 100.
³⁹⁰ Ibid., 100.
³⁹¹ Brad Prager,”Passing Time Since the Wende: Recent German Film on Unification,”German Politics and Society, issue 94 vol. 28, no.1 (2010): 100.
wider sense of crisis in West Germany; having psychological problems, she does not feel any loyalty to this new society.\textsuperscript{392} Not all Germans were content about the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some East German intellectuals like writer Christina Wolf or film director Frank Beyer publicly claimed that the GDR’s social and political values were sold out by West Germany. In the East, people faced difficulties to adapt to the new life. After the first years of unification, many East Germans felt the loss of the disappearance of the GDR. As it came to be related to Ostalgie,\textsuperscript{393} nostalgic feelings were marked by the experience of a lost cultural identity, and developed in opposition to the values represented by West Germany. With DEFA being sold to the West, the depiction of the history of the GDR and the effects of Wende on East Germans came to be dominated by West German filmmakers, while the themes of their films were partly, and paradoxically, dominated by an East German nostalgia for life in the GDR.\textsuperscript{394} For instance, the repression of the GDR is expressed in Sonnenallee, where Micha notes in his diary, “You are not able to move; only to dream. They ban lots of things here, they like banning things.”\textsuperscript{395} However, the brutality of Stasi is not shown in the film. Ostalgie remains a problematic phenomenon, as it keeps gaining its attractiveness through a mélange of cultural products emanating both from East and West, including feature films, television shows, or GDR consumer products.\textsuperscript{396} According to Hayden White, aestheticizing historical events with irony tends to predominate in narratives of such events.\textsuperscript{397} In the first years after the unification, mainstream German cinema represented the assimilation of former East Germans into capitalist society. German filmmakers made escapist comedies and dark social pessimistic films during those years. In the 1980s, the new German comedy became successful in the German film industry, and its comedic formula was

\textsuperscript{397}Hayden White, Historical Employmen and the problem of truth in Probing the Limits of Representation, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1992), 40.
taken up to articulate issues of German identity in *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye Lenin*.

Over the past two decades, individualized, subjectively told stories about struggling the system have remained popular. In many cases, despite of the political and ideological differences between East and West, films tell a common history. In films about the GDR, East Germans generally want to escape or become victims. Often, East Germans are portrayed as losers. The traumatic political realities are only seldomly expressed in film. Consumption remains the most important element for understanding the concept of *Ostalgie*. For instance, two levels of consumption are presented in both *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye Lenin!* First, the significance of Western consumer goods for East Germans is emphasized in both films. Second, the relation between East German consumer culture and GDR material goods is stressed.

The central theme of *Die Unberührbare* is the process of German unification and the integration of East and West. This theme was a common subject for filmmakers in the 1990s. German national identity and unity have been widely questioned in German literature and cinema of this period. On the other hand, the unification process here is depicted according to a West German point of view. Oscar Roehler emphasizes that the fall of the wall has led to a growing sense of a distinctive West German identity. On the other hand, ideologically, Hanna’s Marxism is not real Marxism; in one key scene of that film, she buys a Christian Dior coat, outing herself as the worst type of champagne socialist. However, when Hanna visits Eastern Germany, her point of view completely changes. For example, the sense of community is much stronger as compared to the West. People behave warmly to her and accept her in their community. But this state does not hold long.

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403 Ibid., 35.
*Good Bye Lenin!*, in turn, expresses satisfaction with the material culture of the GDR. This film is neatly identified with *Ostalgie* in German popular culture, connecting it to related shows on television such as *Die DDR-Show, Die-Ostalgie-Show, Ein Kessel DDR, Die Ultimative Ost-Show*, shows that were popular amongst East Germans. Yet despite its association with communist kitsch, this phenomenon also represents a form of mourning for what has been lost in the past and an implicit desire for political change in the present. *Good Bye Lenin!* tells its viewers that the German unification was at least partly undesirable. After unification, the separate identities of East and West Germany have been lost. As Susan C. Anderson observes, “Much of the film centers on maintaining the illusion of GDR unity in the face of unification’s force to destroy that illusion. The focus of the illusion is a childlike faith in the achievability of the ideals of East German society, as the beginning scenes of Alex’s childhood show, especially the shots of the German and Russian cosmonauts as a team breaking records in space.” Germany’s division is symbolized by the family. Alex feels disappointment about his father. He flees to the West, while Alex, his mother and his sister Ariane stay in the East. Christiane does not try to reunite her family, she intends to create a family with socialist ideals. But Alex’s participation in demonstrations challenges his mother’s ideals. At the same time, *Good Bye Lenin!* demonstrates that the growing new consumer habits threaten identity. The most interesting political metaphor here relates to Alex’s sister Ariane’s taking a new job at Burger King in West Berlin – similar to Coca-Cola, Burger King is a clichéd image for the Americanized West. As the film’s plot unfolds, the Western economic system spreads over to the East, with the East finally becoming indistinguishable from the West.

The particular forms of nostalgia that *Ostalgie* and *Westalgie* invoke come with contradictions, they complicate any easy sense of historical alignment or political attitude. While positing East and West against each other in terms of social or cultural values that inform its narrative, *Good Bye Lenin!* also suggests striking similarities between East and West Germany. Here, the Burger King uniforms of Ariane and her boyfriend evoke images of

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408 Ibid., 218.
409 Ibid., 218-219.
410 Ibid., 220.
children in Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ) uniforms used in the GDR, while the red banner of Coca-Cola dissolves into the red banners of Lenin. Social tensions between East and West Germans were indeed popularized in contemporary media as a Ossi/Wessi divide. As a West German survey indicated, six percent of East Germans and 14 percent of West Germans considered the relations between two different groups as positive, while 68 percent of East Germans complained about frictions between Ossis and Wessis. The East German experience in cinema is part of a discursive production, embedded in a set of ideas about East Germany held by the West.

_Sonnenallee, Good Bye Lenin!_ and the other films analysed in this thesis remain important films for understanding nostalgic constructions of the past and post-Wall identity. In some ways, the fall of the Berlin Wall even led to a new beginning for filmmaking in Germany. _Good Bye Lenin!_ and other films that evoke historical emotions of nostalgia make us, who did not have first-hand experiences of this historical period, understand now distant issues of German identity politics. As sites of memory, nostalgic films create an intimate sense of a loss once experienced.

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413 Ben Gook, “Really-Existing Nostalgia? Remembering East Germany in Film,” (Research Paper, University of Melbourne, 2008), 124.
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*Sonnenallee* (Leander Haussmann, 1999)
*Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1979)
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