

**Memories of the GDR:  
Multiple Temporalities and Embodied Spectatorship in  
Filmic Narratives of East Germany**

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## Abstract

Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the re-unification of East and West Germany, much has been said and written about the history of the dictatorship, and there has been vigorous debate over the last three decades about how best to direct the country and its citizens forward. This thesis investigates cultural memories of East Germany through case studies of post-unification German films, analysing the extent to which they challenge or support dominant narratives. Of the films that I have chosen, three are fiction feature films: *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) directed by Wolfgang Becker, Christian Schwochow's *Novemberkind* (2008), and *Der Preis* (2011) directed by Elke Hauck. The final two films are documentaries, of different kinds. *Einzelkämpfer* (2013), directed by Sandra Kaudelka, looks at the GDR's competitive sports system. Marten Persiel's *This Ain't California* (2012), which takes a hybrid 'fictionalised documentary' form, engages with the subcultural history of skateboarding.

Each of these films, though differing in approach and form, incorporates remembrances of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The past and the present are found to be co-dependent in the productive memory work of these films, and their use of multiple temporalities central to this project. Applying methodologies from memory studies, together with an embodied, phenomenological film theory, this study interrogates the affective and sensorial qualities in the spectator's film experience. Accordingly, this study contends that the spectator's experience of the temporalities of memory in film is fundamentally embodied. This thesis examines these films beyond the lines of critiques of historicism that have permeated discussions of post-Wall German cinema, by shifting the focus away from a representational optics and

onto the experiential, sensorial modalities of cinema – ‘affect’ as it is conveyed beyond merely the visual and the aural. Each film in the research corpus uses affectivity and narrative to incorporate multiple perspectives across its multiple temporalities. I argue that these ostensibly very different works share similarities in the way they play self-consciously with time as they undertake complex memory work, and that they thus present accounts of the former GDR and re-unification which complicate and challenge dominant narratives about the East German past and present-day German unity. Theories of embodied spectatorship support the contention that these films offer sensorially affective and affecting sites of memory and that the spectator, as an embodied, material subject, is central to that memory work.

These films suggest that there is an ongoing desire, or need, to evaluate the place of the East German past within national constructions and narratives, both with their thematic presence among other German-language films, and their deliberate and reflexive attitudes towards time and temporality. This study finds that sub-national memories of East Germany continue to haunt both eastern and western imaginations. I suggest that films which tell nuanced stories of the German Democratic Republic, of eastern Germany, and of the temporal linkages between these, will be better able to speak to the profound, complex truths embedded in history and memory.

## Declaration

- i. The thesis comprises only original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated in the preface.
- ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;  
and
- iii. The thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

James Cleverley

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## Introduction

The year 2019 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the event which we remember as precipitating the collapse of the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the subsequent re-unification of East and West Germany. It did not, however, mark the complete disappearance of all that is, or was, 'East German'. The GDR has rather experienced something of an afterlife as the subject of popular debates, academic scholarship, television shows, social media accounts, blogs, YouTube channels and films. While the events of 1989/1990 were initially met with optimism across both sides of the dismantled Wall, a sense of uncertainty followed as numerous political and economic concerns soon became apparent. The elation evident in the famous images of people dancing on the Wall, broadcast to the world, gave way to pessimism for many – particularly regarding any hopes for the swift (re)production of a healthy, and stable national identity in the newly (re)unified Germany (Knight 86). The stark failure of then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl's predicted 'blühende Landschaften' to materialise, and the pejorative attitudes evident in the stereotypes of 'Besserwessi' and 'Jammerossi', which had great currency in charged debates of the 1990s, are illustrative of many causes and symptoms of an enduring East/West divide (Hodgin and Pearce 3).

The attention paid to the GDR past belongs within a broader context of an explosion of interest in 'memory'. In 1995, Andreas Huyssen wrote of a 'memory boom' of 'unprecedented proportions', describing a generally increased preoccupation with memory in academic study as well as in popular culture and debate (*Twilight Memories* 5). While the fascination with memory goes beyond Germany – Europe has been recently been described as a 'memoryland' – 'obsessed with the disappearance

of collective memory and its preservation' (Macdonald 1), in Germany today, identity and memory are tightly bound together. In particular, interest in the mediation of memory, i.e. the way that we retell and disseminate the former GDR's past continues to be key to these discussions. While the GDR 'may now be a closed chapter in strictly historical terms', as Marc Silberman observes, 'it is part of the postwar history of Germany, and the way we explain it to ourselves will have consequences for the way we judge and narrate Germany's relation to the present' ('Problematizing' 2). The importance of the present as context for the understanding of the past, and vice-versa, of the past for understanding the present, is fundamental to this study's approach to the concept of memory. Central to this project is the fact that, as Silke Arnold-de Simine observes, '[h]ow we remember, individually and collectively, has become almost as important an issue as what we remember, as the former is seen to determine the latter' ('Introduction' 7).

In what ways are individual and collective memories contained, regulated, shaped and mediated by cultural phenomena? The activity of memory work is instructed by a dynamic relationship with an array of signs and symbols, coded with meaning related to the past (Erll and Rigney 1). We place personal narratives of our own pasts into context with those of others, shaping and reshaping our memories in an interactive field that includes fictional narratives found in film, books and television (Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis* 185). Within this constellation of media, film has particular force in conveying memory narratives: 'Seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg ist der Film unaufhaltsam ... zu einem wirkmächtigen Medium der Vergangenheitsdarstellung und -deutung geworden, welches ... im Konzert der vielfältigen Medien populärer Erinnerungskultur klar die erste Geige spielt' (Erll and Wodianka 1). Approaching memory and film together requires a twofold

consideration, as Paul Grainge proposes, of determining frameworks for discussing ‘issues of memory *in* film and of film *as* memory’ (‘Introduction’ 12).

Since the opening of the Berlin Wall, film has been influential among the many spheres of memorialisation, evaluation and criticism of the GDR. Museums, academic institutions, journalism, online forums, fiction and non-fiction have all responded to the mission of remembering the GDR past. The role of film in this endeavour has not been limited to the ‘rediscovery’ of a number of historical films of the *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) produced in the GDR, but also includes post-unification cinema, which gradually began to deal with the legacies of division and re-unification. Much of the literature discussing post-*Wende* films starts with Eric Rentschler’s iconic complaint of a ‘cinema of consensus’ to describe mainstream, star-driven German filmmaking in the 1990s (‘Cinema of Consensus’ 262). Despite success at the box office, these films, characterised as ‘trite, formulaic comedies’, discouraged many critics through their modelling Hollywood’s conventions and the perceived ‘lowbrow’ content and aesthetic (Hodgin, *Screening the East* 1).

The popular (and financially successful) cinema of the 1990s therefore did not typically examine the problematics of re-unification, or deal with questions of national identity in meaningful ways. As Stephen Brockmann observes, ‘[t]hroughout much of the 1990s, the experience of East Germans going through a radical historical change found virtually no voice in the established German cinema’ (427).

Nevertheless, some films did take either the GDR past, or the *Wende*, as a topic, these include a number of ‘unification comedy’ films, such as *Go Trabi Go!* (Peter Timm, 1991). These comedies might be thought of as being at the vanguard of the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* – a neologism combining *Ost* (East) with *Nostalgie*

(nostalgia) to describe a wave of nostalgia for the former East expressed across a variety of cultural realms – that was to dominate much of the discussion of East German memory over the course of the 1990s and into the 2000s (Naughton 165–205; Allan, ‘*Ostalgie, Fantasy*’ 106).

Since the turn of the millennium, many German films have looked to both the Nazi and GDR pasts, often reaching large audiences and international acclaim. These films are emblematic of an emerging trend towards a cinematic mode that has been described as capturing a *Geschichtsgefühl*, a ‘feeling for history’; they are remarkable for the ways in which they evoke strong emotions towards historical events, and hook viewers into an experiential past (von Moltke 18). Oliver Hirschbiegl’s *Der Untergang* (2004), depicting Hitler’s final days, and the Oscar-winning *Stasi*-thriller *Das Leben der Anderen* (Florian von Donnersmarck, 2006) exemplify this mode for their respective historical periods. Lutz Koepnick terms these films, which construct a ‘nostalgic aura’ in their depictions of the past, ‘heritage films’;<sup>1</sup> they are united in presenting ‘the texture of the past as a source of visual attractions and aural pleasures’ (‘Reframing the Past’ 49–50).

While the ‘heritage films’ Koepnick describes are specifically about the Nazi past, this characterisation has been linked to GDR films such as *Das Leben der Anderen*, aligning its ‘Stasiland’ depiction of ‘Germany’s other dictatorship’ with internationally acclaimed films about National Socialism (like the Oscar-nominated *Der Untergang*) (Cooke, ‘*Das Leben*’ 613). The ‘totalitarian’ view of the GDR

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<sup>1</sup> Koepnick works with the same term used influentially by Andrew Higson to brand of a cluster of British films from the 1980s that traded on nostalgic representations of the past (For more detail on its British application, see Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*).

identified in *Das Leben der Anderen* prompted reviewers to contrast its more serious mode of story-telling with *Ostalgie*, seeing it, for instance, as an ‘effective antidote’ to the phenomenon (Bradshaw) – in this regard, Nick Hodgkin writes of a common interpretation of the film as a ‘necessary corrective’ to *Ostalgie* and its effects (‘Screening the Stasi’ 70). In terms of the debates that have surrounded this film’s relations with authenticity and *Ostalgie*, Paul Cooke questions whether these have failed to capture the film’s potential to challenge East German memory discourse, despite its ‘consensual’ mode of address (‘Watching the Stasi’ 129).

Recent scholarship has analysed the emergence of ‘heritage’ in German cinema from a variety of angles. Many contemporary German films, Cooke argues, ‘can be viewed as part of a transnational trend ... presenting the past as a spectacular museum to be consumed by the present-day spectator’ (*Contemporary* 93). However, as Daniela Berghahn points out, a distinguishing feature of German heritage cinema is that, unlike French or British examples that focus on glorious events, it ‘dwells on the most traumatic moment of its national history’ (‘Post-1990 Screen Memories’ 301). Cooke therefore suggests that ‘many of these films actually tend to challenge the conservative outlook their setting seems to indulge’ (*Contemporary* 93). Meanwhile, in an essay revisiting his ‘cinema of consensus’ thesis after a little over a decade, Rentschler identifies in these ‘so-called German historical films’ a continuation, or ‘sequel’, to the consensus-driven works of the 1990s – now with a focus on either ‘Hitler’s evil empire and the horrors of the Holocaust’ or ‘the Stasi state of fear and loathing’ (‘History of Heritage’ 242–43; 245). *Das Leben der Anderen* proves a paradigmatic example, having now attained the status of the GDR ‘master text’, just as *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) has come to represent Holocaust recollection (Rentschler, ‘History of Heritage’ 253).

It is also important to note that debates over the screening of Germany's 'heritage' are not restricted to the world of fiction. As Sara Jones observes, these questions of authenticity, prominent in discussions of films such as *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Good Bye, Lenin!*, have also been raised in relation to documentary films about the GDR ('Catching' 161–62). For instance, a number of documentaries have notably taken as their focus the oppressive nature of the SED regime, the *Stasi*, or the relationship between the *Stasi* and GDR citizens. Stefan Weinert's *Gesicht zur Wand* (2009) and two documentaries directed by Annekatrin Hendel, *Vaterlandsverräter* (2011) and *Anderson* (2014), are examples in this mould. Other documentaries demonstrate a more light-hearted approach; for instance, *Ein Traum in Erdbeerfolie* (Marco Wilms, 2009) reminisces humorously about the lives of a group of fashionistas who worked in East Berlin in the 1980s.

A central characteristic shared by many historical films is their emphasis on 'experience', producing 'historical theme parks', as Rentschler puts it ('History of Heritage' 242). Both Rentschler and Cooke agree that 'authenticity' proves a critical point for analysing the way these films seek consensus (Rentschler, 'History of Heritage' 250); Cooke argues that for *Das Leben der Anderen*, 'the focus on original artefacts allows the spectator once again to indulge their fascination for the past, rather than critically engage with it' (*Contemporary* 113). The nature of the spectator's engagement in the screened German past forms the focus of Axel Bangert's 2014 study, which traces the shift towards 'experience' in the way that filmmakers have incorporated 'history' into German productions after 1990, according to two strands of analysis. On the one hand, he illustrates how 'film has created a sense of intimacy with history' through offering close-up, personal views of the lives of those in the Third Reich – *Der Untergang* is cited as a paradigmatic

example of such depictions (Bangert 2). On the other hand, he identifies how experiential cinematic productions have ‘mobilized an unprecedented degree of immersion’ in their re-enacting of dramatic, historical events (2).

Mattias Frey and Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien have notably examined post-Wall German cinema under a similar framework of ‘immersion’; each analyses contemporary films dealing with Germany’s past with reference to Alison Landsberg’s concept of ‘prosthetic memory’, an affective mode of film-viewing in which spectators experience cinema as if it were a vivid memory. Frey first questions the easy prevalence with which the term ‘heritage’ has been adopted to describe a certain type of German film (6); he instead proposes that we should consider ‘film history’ over ‘heritage’ in the German context, since ‘recent German historical film deploys constellations of *film history* to recreate the past’ (7). For her part, O’Brien expands the affective approach advocated by Landsberg to include a discussion of ‘how history films help viewers to comprehend the dynamics of chance, agency, and passivity’ in historical understandings – in other words, viewers’ capacities for reasoning and judgement (16). Critically, both Frey and O’Brien contribute towards a growing body of scholarship considering German cinema not as a historical entity but as belonging to and having something to say about the present.

This thesis aims to both complement and build upon these works, which demonstrate the shift towards immersion and ‘experience’ in post-*Wende* films dealing with the German past, by probing how cinema about the GDR (past) also speaks to the post-unification present. Here I take up Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood’s call for looking ‘beyond the cinema of consensus’ (1), asking whether ‘the affective power’ of films which deal with Germany’s past and the ‘emotions they evoke in the

spectator' might 'become a means of troubling the political consensus of their diegesis' (11). In order to do this, I depart from the approaches mentioned above in both the theoretical framework adopted and the body of work studied.

Firstly, I employ a film-theoretical approach that centres on the *sensorial* qualities of affect, and the affective relationship between the film and the spectator as an embodied agent. 'Affect', as Gregg and Seigworth write in their oft-cited introduction, 'is found in those intensities that pass body to body [...], in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves' (1). That the frequency of the use of 'affective' as a term has grown in most cultural theory, in the place of 'emotion', lies in its emphasis on the 'relations practised between individuals, in contrast to emotion, which still bears the spectre of a psychological individualism' (Richard and Rudnykyj 57; see also Macdonald 242). The relational is hereby accented, underscoring a productive interactivity; affect can thus be thought of as energetic, or as 'the name we give to those forces [...] *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion' (Gregg and Seigworth 1). In the following chapters, I seek to examine these films beyond the lines of critiques of historicism that have permeated discussions of post-Wall cinema, by shifting the focus away from a representational optics and onto the experiential, sensorial modalities of cinema – 'affect' as it is conveyed beyond merely the visual and the aural.

Secondly, my research corpus includes films which explore both the GDR past and the post-unification present. Rather than focusing on what might be called 'GDR heritage films' such as *Das Leben der Anderen*, or contemporary films that offer



realist, social critiques of post-*Wende* eastern milieux, such as Andreas Dresen's *Halbe Treppe* (2002), I propose that their remembering of the GDR offers a productive site for examining the bi-directional influences of past and present. In other words, through case studies drawn from a corpus of 'memory films' which are neither strictly 'heritage cinema' nor solely concerned with representing the present, I suggest that immersive, emotional cinematic engagement with the GDR past and its legacies exceeds easy categorisation under familiar umbrella-terms such as 'consensus cinema' or 'heritage'. This approach challenges existing neat divisions of 'heritage' and 'present-day' filmmaking. The study's embodied framework for examining the film 'experience' seeks out particular ways in which the spectator may be sensorially immersed in filmic depictions both of the GDR past and the post-*Wende* present. Furthermore, the friction produced by these films, through their juxtaposing multiple timelines and temporalities, potentially troubles and unsettles established East German memory politics. In other words, the duality of past and present is examined in terms of its potential for affectively engaging the spectator in complex processes of cultural memory.

This study therefore examines recent films which deal thematically with the East German past, capitalising on the advances in the ever-growing field of memory studies in order to analyse the nexus of film and memory. In order to do so, I will draw on selected works, released between 2003-2013, which use multiple temporalities in their narratives and in the way they engage thematically with memories of East Germany. The (fictional) feature films are: Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), *Novemberkind* (2008) directed by Christian Schwochow, and *Der Preis* (2011) from Elke Hauck. The documentaries are Sandra Kaudelka's *Einzelkämpfer* (2013) and Marten Persiel's *This Ain't California* (2012). With the

exception of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, these films have so far been granted little or no scholarly attention. The films in the research corpus are diverse in that they do not belong to any particular school or genre; they include films by directors who were socialised in both East and West Germany, and straddle genres of memory with fictional and non-fictional narratives. What unites them, however, is their explicit relationship with memory as I have described – through their playing with cinematic time. This results in my choosing not to focus on East German ‘historic films’ – whether that term means DEFA films made during the period of division, or those that might be subsumed under the ‘heritage’ genre.

The films put multiple temporalities to work in a number of ways. This involves the presence of dual, or multiple timeframes, including the use of ‘flashbacks’ as a narrative device. But they have not been selected exclusively according to this attribute, for instance, the two documentaries in this study contain multiple temporalities in their use of generic conventions, such as talking-head interviews which simultaneously comment on post-*Wende* realities and remember the GDR past, either implicitly or explicitly. These films also have the capacity to evoke the past through archival footage and remembered testimony, framed by voice-over narratives in the present.

Throughout my analysis I interpret the multiple temporalities evoked in each film as demonstrations of what Annette Kuhn has termed ‘memory work’: ‘an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory ... a conscious and purposeful performance of memory’ (*Family Secrets* 157). The films offer examples of dynamic sites of memory within Germany’s national cinema, which embody cultural memory across multiple

temporalities – both within and beyond the films’ diegesis. Most of the films display a self-reflexive mode of memory work, which makes them particularly suitable for this purpose, in that they can be interpreted as a kind of microcosmic example of the mechanics of memory itself. I argue that these ostensibly very different works share similarities in the way they play self-consciously with time as they undertake complex ‘memory work’, and that they thus present accounts of the former GDR and the *Wende* which complicate and challenge dominant narratives about the East German past and present-day German unity. I draw on theories of embodied spectatorship to suggest that these films offer sensorially affective and affecting sites of memory and that the spectator, as an embodied, material subject, is central to that memory work.

In the post-unification context, cinema about the East German past, and by eastern German directors,<sup>2</sup> has increasingly been considered within the broader context of German-language filmmaking. For instance, this trend is notable in two works discussing the tail-end of DEFA’s history across the period of the *Wende*; Reinhild Steingröver’s *Last Features* and the volume *DEFA After East Germany* edited by Brigitta B. Wagner have helped bring a rather neglected chapter in East German filmmaking into scholarly discussion. Furthermore, Berghahn has pointed to a strong belief in a social function of filmmaking in a number of German directors born in the former East (such as Andreas Kleinert and Andreas Dresen, who developed their craft under DEFA), finding legacies of DEFA in their post-Wall films as well as continuities with the New German Cinema (‘East German Cinema’ 99). By connecting new directions found in eastern, post-*Wende* cinema with historical

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, ‘East German’ and ‘West German’ in capitalised form designate the two states as they existed prior to re-unification. I use the lower-case ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ to refer to the post-unification regions in Germany.

traditions of filmmaking from both West Germany and the GDR, Berghahn brings recent debates over productive strategies for framing and categorising research on German films into focus.

Regarding broader tendencies in German film studies, Sabine Hake writes of concerns over the ‘demarcating effects of the national’, warning of the dangers of both homogenisation and particularism through siloing effects of theoretical and institutional practices (‘Forum’ 634–51). Partly in response to Hake’s appeal, Marco Abel and Jaimey Fisher articulate the need to present German-language films within global contexts, reflecting a transnational turn observable in both film and memory studies. Their intervention presents cogent arguments for the deterritorialization of German cinema, writing specifically of the need to comprehend German films beyond intellectual frameworks overinvested in the national (Fisher and Abel 12–13). The films chosen for this study are preoccupied with eastern memories of the *Wende*, its consequences, and the GDR past. While these films and their memories certainly travel, there remains a need to examine these memories according to their ‘Germanness’.

Notwithstanding the risk of essentializing inherent in national cinema frameworks, and the circuitous nature of their ‘destabilising the very category which legitimates their shared project’ in the first place (Hake, ‘Forum’ 650), this thesis offers a departure from these issues via two central strategies. Firstly, by engaging with the (already) problematized notion of considering German film to be meaningfully ‘national’, this study addresses an ongoing need to complicate that construction ‘from within’. That is, the films in the study corpus challenge homogenous notions of German nationality by confronting ‘normalising’ tendencies with the persistent

instability of the presence of ‘sub-national’ memories. In other words, this thesis is kindled by the filmic memories of the former East, which continue to trouble the sense of unity between eastern and western parts of the country, and which therefore spark interest by rubbing sub-national memories against the national.

Secondly, by drawing on theories of embodied spectatorship, I suggest that personal and cultural memories of East Germany adhere in mediated filmic narratives, and are experienced as affective encounters between the film and the spectator. Here, I draw on a conceptualisation of cinema, which ‘stresses the interactive character’ of film spectatorship (Marks, *Touch* 13). This enquiry is based upon existential phenomenology, namely ‘a philosophical style that emphasizes a certain interpretation of human experience and that, in particular, concerns perception and bodily activity’ (Ihde 21). It is critical to note that foregrounding subjectivity and perception in the study of film does not imply a universalist paradigm, since the film experience described is only one, particular way of apprehending the film – the spectator’s film experience is not posited as being the same for *everybody*, but it is nonetheless a *particular* experience that *any* individual may share.<sup>3</sup> For existential phenomenology, ‘meaning’ emerges ‘in any given case’ as the ‘synthesis of the subjective and objective experience’ – here, the film experience (Lanigan 30). This theoretical account of the spectator’s experience lies between the general and the particular through conceiving of ‘the possibility of individual perception’ in subjective

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<sup>3</sup> On this point I follow Murray Smith in the understanding that ‘filmmaker’ and ‘spectator’ are not particular individuals, but ‘roles taken on by individuals’, and that ‘what a critic does ... in boldly declaring “the spectator responds in such and such a way” ... is not to assume an all-powerful text and a prostrate spectator, but a spectator who responds to the text with a knowledge of all the relevant conventions that the text draws upon for the particular effect in question’ (64).

experience, this ‘perception ... may be shared to greater or lesser degrees depending on the extent of similar perceptions by other persons’ (Lanigan 29). It transgresses borders on the one hand, but is always grounded in the locus of the body on the other. In speaking to spectatorial response, this study therefore acknowledges the cultural and historical differentiation in the film experience. Together, these approaches offer a useful mechanism for working through the problematized view of ‘national’ versus ‘transnational’ experiences of memory and film. This framework thus enables me to build on existing literature that responds to cinema’s capacity to ‘redistribute the sensible’, as Abel (via Jacques Rancière) would have it (*Counter-Cinema* 1) Here, the meaning of ‘sensible’ is meant to capture its dual-meaning in French: referring to both ‘sensation’ and ‘sense-making’ (Abel, ‘Filming’ n30).

Through marrying an embodied film theoretical approach with questions that continue to probe existing tensions in Germany’s (sub)national identities, this study seeks to account for the sheer differentiation found in sensorial responses to individual and collective memories. In this study’s methodology, the spectator is considered not as an abstract, ideal figure, but rather as an embodied, material subject, whose agency in the film experience is crucial to the film’s memory work. Here, I argue for the theoretical characterisation of the film-viewer as being involved in ‘perceiving, affective, [and] sensual’ relations with the ‘body’ of the film; the film experience is understood as an embodied, phenomenological encounter (Elsaesser and Hagener 130). In other words, by considering the film as a dynamic experience, which sees both the spectator and the film as corporeal, intentional agents, this study’s methodology both supports, and is in turn supported by, analysis of the cultural and historical contexts of each film’s memory work, narrative and critical reception.

Situated within and between memory studies, film studies and German studies, this thesis therefore asks how post-unification filmic memory-narratives shed light on the nature of cultural memory of East Germany. How are these narratives of the past evoked in the present, and how do they continue to affect the present? How do East German memories, corporeally mediated in the film experience, shape identities in the Berlin Republic? These questions can, for example, be tested by asking the question of whether the films either contest or affirm official or dominant historical narratives. Furthermore, the way in which the medium of film can be exploited towards political or cultural ends may also be productively examined according to this framework. This study therefore poses the related question: in what way are certain cultural and political ideas privileged in each film's memory work? Here, attention is paid to the very mechanics of 'memory', that is, the way memory functions through the multiple temporalities that are active in the spectator's corporeal experience of a film. Overall, this research offers not only to deepen understanding of the affective portrayal of East German cultural memory on screen, but importantly, it seeks to expand our knowledge of not only *what* we (and films) remember, but *how*.

Chapter one begins by surveying the literature of the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, briefly tracing the development of the notion of a 'collective' memory from the 'founding father' (Erl 7) of the discipline, Maurice Halbwachs, through to the more recent interventions from influential theorists such as Jan and Aleida Assmann, Ann Rigney, and Astrid Erl. It then summarises key developments in the memory of East Germany, providing important cultural and political context for the filmic memories analysed in this thesis. I outline the theoretical framework that governs the film analysis, developing an account of the embodied-phenomenological methodology employed. The multiple temporalities of the films in this thesis are

grasped according to these frameworks and will be informed by the argument that the film experience is multi-sensorial and corporeally affecting; this fundamental concept intersects with the film's attention to memory and the shaping of post-*Wende* identities.

Chapter two examines *Good Bye, Lenin!*, certainly the most well-known of the films in this study. A terrific box office success upon its release, the film takes place in the period leading up to the fall of the Wall and continues until re-unification. The protagonist Alex believes that he must convince his mother that the GDR has not collapsed, in order to preserve her from a shock which might kill her, after she misses the fall of the Wall while in a coma. While the plot jumps across various temporalities, much of the action takes place during the *Wende* itself, differentiating it from many post-unification films about the history and legacies of Germany's division. The experience of time itself – for East Germans during the *Wende* in particular – is a focus of the film, and one that has to date received little attention. The viewer encounters materially rich depiction, telling a tragi-comic tale of loss, which is as potent in its affective qualities as it is in its symbolic attributes.

In chapter three, the sensation of touch and the role of skin will form the focus of the interrogation of the memory work of *Novemberkind*. This film tells the story of a young woman who is prompted to leave her home town in post-unification eastern Germany after discovering the story of her mother's *Republikflucht* (escape from the GDR). In essence, the film depicts a road trip in search of the truth about the past and identity. The analysis focuses on the sense of 'touch', which relates not only to interactions between the 'bodies' of the on-screen characters, but also functions within further dimensions of the film experience. I will show how the 'shared-skin' of



the actor Anna Maria Mühe, who plays both a mother and her daughter across the film's two timelines, creates an affective experience of the mutual influence of past and present.

Chapter four examines the film *Der Preis*, in which an architect revisits the site of his memories in the GDR, winning a competition and returning from Frankfurt to the town of his childhood in Thüringen, to modernise the *Plattenbauten* (GDR housing estates) in which he grew up. The film's uncanny sense of time resonates with broader enquiries into the relationship between time and modernity, which have questioned whether 'time is out of joint' (For example, A. Assmann, *Ist die Zeit*; M. Fisher). Elke Hauck, loosely associated with a second generation of 'Berlin School' filmmakers, directs an atmospheric film that produces the feelings of both the late-1980s GDR and the post-unification present. *Der Preis* takes perhaps East Germany's most 'concrete' legacies, its *Plattenbauten* – those looming housing blocks – as the foundation of its non-linear narrative, telling a story of homecoming, and of re-encountering ghosts. The architecture of these terrains of memory, in conjuring the spectral ever-presence of the GDR, evokes Derrida's 'hauntology': I argue that the temporalities of 'not yet' and 'no longer' are found in the unfulfilled future promises of not only the socialist past, but also the post-unification present.

In chapter five the attention shifts to non-fiction with an analysis of the documentary *Einzelkämpfer* (I Will Not Lose, 2013). The director, Sandra Kaudelka presents the stories of four former GDR athletes, as well as her own memories as a young diver in the GDR's sports program. Kaudelka's film stitches together archival footage with the memories of each of athletes, which are recounted in filmed interviews conducted by the director. This chapter focuses on the rhythmic way that each athlete's subjective

interpretation of the GDR blends with the others', sometimes in complementing and other times contradicting ways. The rhythmic elements of the documentary open up the tension that lies in-between multiple meanings – emphasising a pluralistic understanding of East German remembrance.

Chapter six examines Marten Persiel's *This Ain't California* (2012). This film takes a hybrid 'docu-fictional' form, employing a fictionalised narrative to tell the subcultural history of skateboarding in East Germany in the 1980s. The ratio of 'truth' and 'fiction' remains nebulous throughout, calling for an interrogation of *This Ain't California*'s memory work, framed by issues of documentary authenticity and history/story-telling. Of particular interest is how the filmmakers (re)create the everyday by shooting 'amateur' skate clips with Super 8 cameras. By presenting these 'falsified' sequences as archival footage, according to generic documentary conventions, the film also probes how the spectator is affected by mediated (sub)cultural memories.

To conclude, the thesis develops an original account of the relationship between film and East German memory, through an analysis which marries methodologies from memory studies with an embodied film theory. The films in the research corpus bring memories of socialism into contact with the spectator in their post-unification context – this study attempts to grasp and comprehend their multiple temporalities, paying particular attention to the affective realms of experience evoked by their audiovisual narratives.

# 1: Literature Review and Methodology: Between Memory, Film, and German Studies

## **Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks of ‘Cultural Memory’**

In order to engage with the multiple temporalities of memory at work in this thesis’s film corpus, I will be referring to theoretical frameworks from contemporary memory studies, which have their origins in the beginning of the twentieth century. Maurice Halbwachs’s influential concept of ‘collective memory’, which he developed as part of his sociological studies, was initially published in 1925 in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (The Social Frameworks of Memory, partially translated by Lewis A. Coser in *On Collective Memory* in 1992). Through the notion of a ‘*mémoire collective*’, he collapses the binary structure of understanding memory, arguing that there can be no clear separation between the personal and the collective. Departing from his mentor Henri Bergson’s theory of memory, which emphasised subjectivity, Halbwachs argues that individuals never recollect events in isolation, rather, memories are always formed within social frames (Coser 23). ‘[I]t is in society’, Halbwachs claims, ‘that people normally acquire their memories ... that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories’ (*On Collective Memory* 38). His ideas received only a limited audience at the time, and it was not until the English translation of his work in the 1980s that they gained prominence, contributing to the so-called ‘memory boom’, and in particular through Pierre Nora’s conceptualisation of ‘sites of memory’ in his series of studies, *Les Lieux de mémoire*.

Halbwachs’s theory stresses the importance of the present in the way that the past is (collectively) remembered, according to present needs. Here, Halbwachs distinguishes sharply between ‘collective memory’ and ‘history’. History is construed as universal,

it represents a general understanding of the past that takes over at the moment when social memory 'is fading or breaking up' (*The Collective Memory* 78). For Halbwachs, memory derived from lived experience is full of richness and detail, in contradistinction to the more abstracted, neutral history, characterised by, for instance, knowing a list of dates (Russell 797). Or, as Olick and Robbins put it: 'History [for Halbwachs] is dead memory, a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an "organic" experiential relation' (110). History is therefore about the past. In contrast, Halbwachs's presentist understanding of memory (which is always active within social frames) highlights memory's experiential relationship with identity, as Coser observes, 'the present generation becomes conscious of itself in counterposing its present to its own constructed past' (24). This view stresses the present needs of the group to remember the past in specific ways.

Halbwachs's ideas have been influential. As part of a summary of the legacy of his work, Astrid Erll identifies two 'fundamental, and fundamentally different, concepts of collective memory', which have been drawn together (14). Firstly, collective memory is that which belongs to an individual, inextricably operating however within a sociocultural framework, the *cadre sociaux*. Secondly, collective memory exists as the shared creation of the past, through various means of interaction and communication, and through media and traditions. These are located within institutions and social communities, and often performed in social rituals.

Before considering how recent German films function with a framework of ‘collective memory’,<sup>4</sup> there are some further considerations to be addressed. There has been some scepticism about the validity of the term ‘collective memory’. Susan Sontag, for example, has criticised the use of the term, since memories cannot strictly exist independently from an organism; instead, they are tied to an individual, and die with each person (85–86). Moreover, the polarization of memory and history, which Nora also maintained in his *lieux de mémoire* (sites/realms of memory) has been questioned, particularly given the development of reflexive modes of historiography (Erll 24). Theories have therefore been refined in order to describe how memories are shared through rituals, memorials, media, and social interactions with others.

While Halbwachs’s term ‘collective memory’ has become the guiding concept for researchers into memory from the social sciences, those in the humanities tend to approach the field through the guiding concept of ‘cultural memory’ (Rigney 242). The term ‘cultural memory’, introduced originally by Jan and Aleida Assmann (Assmann and Czaplicka; J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*; A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*), has been further developed over recent years (Erll; Erll and Nünning). This terminology clarifies a distinction within different registers of collective or group memory, making it possible to deal with the relationships between memory and culture spanning multiple temporalities (Erll 28–29; Clarke and Wölfel 17–18). To this end, Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish ‘cultural memory’ from ‘communicative memory’. On the one hand, communicative memory is the passing on of experiences between generations through everyday interaction, and this is

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this sense of the term ‘collective’ (individual memory that is shaped by cultural frames) has been distinguished from ‘collected’ (memory shared within and belonging to a group) (Olick, ‘Collective Memory’).

typically through oral memory. On the other, cultural memory is tied to material or ceremonial representations, such as literature, monuments, films and other cultural artefacts, and these memories tend to be ritualised and written (J. Assmann, 'Kollektives Gedächtnis' 10–11). The greatest difference between these two modes is their duration: 'communicative memory' is socially transferred (orally or interpersonally) and can exist roughly the length of a generation (about 80 years), while 'cultural memory' is preserved on particular sites in an 'archival' manner, allowing for the reactivation of memories through a process of active recollection (Arnold-de Simine, 'Introduction' 13–15). It is important to note that these two modes of memory are not mutually exclusive of each other, but can operate in a supplementary fashion. For instance, Jones shows how traumatic memories posted online, being a hybrid form of communication between orality and textuality, 'catch' otherwise 'fleeting' memories, effectively blurring the Assmannian distinction ('Catching' 391).

Returning to Sontag's reservations regarding 'collective memory', it should be emphasised that there is no implication of a kind of mythical collective 'mind,' which is doing the remembering. The collective memory, Halbwachs argues, 'draws strength' from the group, but 'it is individuals as group members who remember' (*The Collective Memory* 48). In other words, 'social memory', which has neither an individual as 'substrate' nor an 'organ' like the brain, as Harald Welzer puts it, 'exclusively exists *between* subjects and not *within* them' ('Re-Narrations' 5). Moreover, the relationship between an individual's organic memory and collective memory is mutually dependent. 'One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group', according to Halbwachs, 'but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in

individual memories' (*On Collective Memory* 40). But where might a 'collective', 'cultural', or 'social' memory reside, if not in a mythical mind? As indicated above, what distinguishes 'cultural memory' are the locations and artefacts whereby 'the past' can be both stored and communicated between individuals (within social frames). Cultural memories are mediated by, for instance, literature, film, memorials, or museums, and can therefore be seen to travel through communal interaction.

Memory research offers the possibility of engaging with the relationship between individuals and groups, and across multiple temporalities: '[I]t is never the past itself that acts upon a present society, but representations of past events that are created, circulated and received within a specific cultural frame and political constellation' (Assmann and Shortt 3). Moreover, the dynamics of memory in the present are also frequently considered increasingly to be in motion: Bond et al. argue that memory is increasingly conceptualised as something that is 'on the move', it is 'more and more perceived as a process, a work that is continually in progress, rather than as a reified object' (1). Scholars therefore increasingly consider memory beyond national frames. In an age of globalisation, memory is not locked into a national context, and neither are films (Fisher and Abel 14). However, as Susannah Radstone reminds us, 'even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever instantiated locally, in a specific place and at a particular time' ('What Place Is This?' 117). This thesis, as indicated in the introduction, is interested in the locality of the sub-national memories of the East German past, mediated by the post-unification national context. The persistence of contestation between the sub-national and the national recalls the conditions of mobility described by Radstone, especially the 'significance of location, and, particularly, memories of 'home', for the meaning-making and affective dimensions of life in the present' ('What Place Is This?' 109). In light of this and cognisant of

memory's mobility and of the insecurity inherent in the concept of the 'nation', this thesis further localises the body as an active site of memory work. It posits the body of the spectator as the site at which the past and the present, and the individual and the collective affectively collide.

Part of memory's work-in-progress is found in the moving parts of the mechanics of memory itself. Any theory of 'cultural memory', Rigney argues, 'sees memory not as a set of things to be preserved intact but as a selective praxis, where the orientation towards the "space of experience" is fed by the current "horizon of expectations" [...] and vice versa' (243). In other words, the theory involves a dynamic process whereby present ideas about the future influence the way the past is understood, and ideas about the past influence the way we imagine the future. Here, Rigney refers to Reinhart Koselleck's *Futures Past*, published in 1985, where the image of the horizon is used to describe the multidirectional relations between past, present and future.<sup>5</sup> Put simply, the term 'horizons of expectation' describes futures brought into the present (e.g. framed as hopes, fears, utopia/dystopia), whereas 'spaces of experience' describes the past becoming incorporated into the present through remembrance. These directions are dynamically linked. Koselleck asserts that there is 'no expectation without experience; no experience without expectation' (270). According to Koselleck, modernity has brought with it a temporal anxiety, resulting from a regime that is dominated by the notion of progress, along with a widening gap between expectation and experience – i.e. a symptomatic temporal dislocation (de

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Rothberg's concept of 'multidirectional memory' is relevant here, which seeks to conceptualise what occurs in public spaces when multiple histories of violence encounter each other. He offers 'a model based on recognition of the productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance and developed in contrast to an understanding of memory as involved in a competition over scarce public resources' (309).



Luna 112). Koselleck also shares in his diagnosis a similar concern with Nora about the acceleration of temporal experience. Nora identifies an ‘increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good’, which has led to the contemporary situation, where ‘[w]e speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left’ (‘Between Memory and History’ 7).

Expectation and experience – imagined futures and remembered pasts – are held in a tension of mutual dependence. According to Koselleck, if experience and expectation are too distant from each other, both become ‘impoverished’, and it is only when they are drawn together – the space aligning with the horizon – that ‘experience is properly funded, and expectation properly limited’ (Pickering 287). Koselleck concludes that ‘history is only able to recognize what continually changes, and what is new, if it has access to the conventions within which lasting structures are concealed’ (288). A sense of failure in the expectations for the future can give way to what François Hartog calls ‘presentism’, i.e. ‘the sense that only the present exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now’ (xv). While differing in emphasis, Hartog’s sense of an endless ‘present’ shares an unsettled quality with the version of temporality that Huyssen puts forward when he argues that ‘the boundary between past and present used to be stronger and more stable than it appears today’ (*Present Pasts* 2). Paul Ricoeur, too, shares this belief – that problems arise when things are out of balance, temporally speaking. His motivation in his publication *History, Memory, Forgetting* is prompted by a preoccupation with the fact that he continues ‘to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere’ (xv).

In the present, individuals and groups actively select particular futures and pasts as a part of these temporal relations described above. Regarding the way that ‘present’ groups have access to the past, it is useful to note the differentiation between a society’s active ‘working memory’ and the passive, potential memory that lies latent in the archive (A. Assmann, ‘Canon’ 103; Rigney 243). As Assmann explains, the transfer from historical event to either inert memory in the archive or to a group’s working memory occurs according to selection criteria that are ‘neither clear nor are they uncontested’ (‘Canon’ 104). Alexander Etkind, writing on the function of monuments, illustrates how this system functions. He argues that monuments are ‘invisible’, if they are not currently part of intellectual or political discourse, whereas ‘public opinions, historical debates, and literary imagery’ eventually dissipate from society’s memory if not housed or embodied into material or institutional memory (such as into monuments or museums): ‘Monuments without inscriptions are mute, whereas texts without monuments are ephemeral’ (194).

The process of selecting particular memories according to society’s needs is always in a state of flux, and can proceed in multiple directions: ‘things that have been overlooked may later become relevant, while conversely, things that used to be important become forgotten’ (Rigney 243). This relationship, too, is bi-dependent, as Elena Esposito asserts: ‘Remembering and forgetting get stronger or weaker at the same time: [...] memory grows when the ability to remember and the ability to forget increase contemporarily’ (182). This is because there would be nothing to forget, according to Esposito, without a system capable of organising events, identities, and repetitions into recollection; at the same time, if we did not have the ability to forget all of the details that deviate from the ‘remembered identity’, our capacity to remember *at all* would soon be overburdened.

## Memories of the GDR

The *Wende* – the term that has come to signify the transitional period from division to re-unification – positions the study of East German memory. As O'Brien observes, the postwar, West German paradigm of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the 'coming to terms with' or 'mastering' the past, has been accorded a new meaning after re-unification: 'a radical shift has taken place in what constitutes the immediate past. 1989 has replaced 1945 as designating the primary caesura of recent German history' (2). The re-unification process has thereby effected a reshaping of the meanings configured upon 'the past' within Germany, as the dynamics of memory are in a continual state of being contested and negotiated. 'In reunified Germany', as Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove succinctly put it, 'the past is not so much another country where they do things differently, but a hotly contested territory' (2).

The memory politics of Germany and the role these have played in shaping discussions of national identity are overshadowed by national projects of coming to terms with the legacies of National Socialism. In the wake of the Second World War, the immediate past became a battleground on which ideological struggles over the foundational mythologies of both East and West Germany were fought. As Bill Niven observes, these myths functioned within an oppositional framework, 'according to a system of mutual self-exculpation and inculpation', through which both Germanys attempted to legitimise themselves: 'East Germany understood itself as an anti-fascist and West Germany as a neofascist state, while West Germany understood itself as democratic and East Germany as but the continuation of dictatorship, this time in

socialist guise' (1). Accordingly, memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War was divided.

While both Germanys often turned towards the National Socialist past in postwar cultural activity and as part of national identity discourse, the shape these discussions would take differed according to the ideological and political hegemonies on each side of the Wall. In the West, this discourse was typically referred to as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 'coming to terms with' or 'mastering the past', the objective being the 'self-centered and self-designed therapeutic treatment of the descendants of the perpetrators and bystanders of Nazism' (Kansteiner 84). The GDR's socialist ideology, based on a foundational antifascist narrative, demanded interrogation of the fascism of the Third Reich, but saw continuities of that past only in the West, where capitalism was the heir to fascist legacies (Silberman, 'Writing' 527–28).

Following re-unification, debates around the appropriate ways that Germans should face the legacy of the Holocaust were complicated by further argument over desires for Germany's 'normalisation' – the (controversial) project of recovering the nation from its past transgressions and producing a 'normal' state. After the collapse of the GDR's state socialism, the officially-led project of achieving 'normality' on a national scale was tied to the idea of unity. As re-unification saw the removal of one 'crucial impediment' to the search for a national sense of normalcy (i.e. the division of East and West), some expressed apprehension at the prospect of a *re*-united Germany – the ever-present Nazi past figuring in these anxieties (Olick, 'What Does It Mean' 549). For these and other reasons, including generational change and the consequent fading

of living memories of the Holocaust, the historical period that has become known as the *Wende* marks a new phase in the national process of identity (re)construction.

Germany's memory politics have their own history, marked by intense, complex debates. The fall of the Wall, whether viewed as a watershed moment, turning point, ending, or another repetition in history's cycles, is now thought of as a globally symbolic caesura – '[r]e-unification was another of Germany's new beginnings' (Gook 11). The material realities produced by the legacies of Germany's national past(s) continue to shape its present, not least in politics. For instance, debate over ending the *Solidaritätszuschlag*, the tax brought in to aid the rebuilding of the former East, has recently been rekindled (Pletter and Schieritz; Kaiser). The following question often framing these and similar issues is how can we determine ethical approaches to histories that contain both victimhood and perpetration? Such questions are pressing – a contemporary wave of intensified looking back to the past was remarked upon in a rather candid interview published in January 2019, between the writer Jana Hensel and Angela Merkel, in which the GDR-born Chancellor expressed her sense of this *Zeitgeist*:

Und jetzt, nach einer gewissen Zeit und mit Abstand, sind wir wieder in einer Phase, in der man zurückschaut. Oft denke ich, es ist ein wenig, wie es 1968 im Westen war, denn auch damals wurde bohrend nachgefragt: Wer seid ihr vor 1945 gewesen? Und wie seid ihr danach damit umgegangen? So befragen wir uns heute mit Blick auf den Zeitenwechsel von 1989 auch (qtd. in Hensel).

East German pasts, mediated in memory-narratives across all spheres of public life, have been markedly contested, and debates about how best to frame the dictatorship

persist. Martin Sabrow, seeing this landscape as a battleground, identifies three distinct, competing categories of post-unification memories of East Germany ('Die DDR Erinnern' 18–20). The first is the memory of the dictatorship, or what he calls *Diktaturgedächtnis*. This mode focuses often on narratives of the *Stasi*, on the dichotomy of victim/perpetrator, and is the most dominant in official discourse, public foundations such as *Die Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* and commemorations. Sabrow writes,

Das Diktaturgedächtnis ... räumt Verbrechen, Verrat und Versagen unter der SED-Herrschaft hohen Stellenwert ein und sieht in der Erinnerung an Leid, Opfer und Widerstand die wichtigste Aufgabe einer Vergangenheitsbesinnung, die im Dienst der Gegenwart Lehren aus der Geschichte ermöglichen und so vor historischer Wiederholung schützen soll ('Die DDR Erinnern' 18)

This form of memory emphasises the repressive nature of the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) regime, at times celebrating its ending as the peaceful revolutionary triumph of Western democratic principles, or occasionally as the 'realization of the *telos* of world history' (Fuchs et al. 8). The second perspective, *Arrangementgedächtnis*, the memory of settlement or accommodation, broadly comprises the notion that people's lives under the SED regime were not totally without agency or meaning, and that people found ways to accommodate the dictates of the regime and negotiate spheres or niches of agency for themselves. To contradict Adorno's aphorism, it is the idea that it was possible to live 'the right life in the wrong

one'<sup>6</sup> (See also Ahbe 240; Saunders and Pinfold 4). The third, *Fortschrittsgedächtnis*, continues to value the core ideology of the GDR, and generally defends its socialist principles as a 'genuine effort to break with fascist traditions' (Jarausch and Geyer 63). This perspective denies claims of the GDR's illegitimacy as an *Unrechtsstaat*, and, within this frame of discourse, attention is often drawn to events such as the Global Financial Crisis as evidence of the flaws of Western free-market capitalism. Sabrow's outline of the divisions in memory politics is reflected in attitudes beyond Germany's borders, as Konrad H. Jarausch argues: 'Though less vehement due to their physical distance, Anglo-American views on the other Germany nonetheless polarize along similar ideological lines' (4).

This organisation of GDR memory is not static, as Sabrow reminds us: 'In diesem tripolaren Kräftefeld zwischen Diktaturgedächtnis, Arrangementgedächtnis und Fortschrittsgedächtnis wird die DDR-Vergangenheit täglich neu verhandelt' ('Die DDR Erinnern' 20). While evaluating particular cases of GDR memory in light of this model, it is important to bear in mind, as David Clarke and Ute Wölfel suggest, that: 'What are often at stake in such debates are the alleged consequences of a particular kind of relationship to the GDR past and its projected effects on the future shape of German national identity, expressed in terms of values and attitudes' (11). Analyses of these circumstances that draw on the 'presentist' understanding of collective, or cultural memories therefore offer a way to deal with the temporal implications of these stakes. In other words, by illuminating the social and political configurations

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, Christoph Dieckmann's book tackling eastern German identity 'Das wahre Leben im falschen' (1998) takes this phrase as its title.

that mould cultural memory, we can hope to derive insights into the nation and its citizens' present and future paths.

Marc Silberman observes that we are currently in a moment of generational shift regarding memories and scholarship of the GDR, 'not only in the sense of a young adult generation with few of their own memories of divided Germany but also of a younger generation of scholars whose knowledge about the two Germanys has been mediated by their older mentors' ('Problematizing' 4). Silberman writes that, as 'East Germany' has shifted into an historical entity, GDR studies has developed its own history, one which has bifurcated into German and non-German scholarship, each 'with somewhat different objects of interest and critical approaches, mediated not only by distance but also by our respective scholarly cultures' (4). Scholars comparing the GDR experience of dictatorship with the Third Reich or with other Soviet bloc states will, Jarausch suggests, discover a 'puzzling alterity of real existing socialism', which is especially true for Western researchers, 'who can only recover traces of a lost world in broken down buildings, faded newspapers, and disturbing memories' (5). It is vital to ensure, as Jarausch goes on to argue, that distance (the same could be said for proximity) from the subject of study does not preclude a critical approach: 'Criticism is not just legitimate but necessary, since the system was undeniably dictatorial – but strictures ought to depart from a clear understanding rather than from prior prejudice' (5).

Following re-unification, the German state took an active role in shaping the official memory of the GDR. Significantly, the 1990s saw two *Enquete Kommissionen* – parliamentary commissions of enquiry motivated broadly by a perceived pressing need for the *Aufarbeitung*, or the 'working through' of the dictatorship, followed in



the mid-2000s by the so-called Sabrow Commission.<sup>7</sup> There is an observable shift over the course of the 1990s, from the first of the Bundestag commissions through to the Sabrow-headed inquiry, whereby the direct intervention from politicians and government institutions gives way to greater funding of third-party projects: ‘This move from official to state-mandated memory is exemplified’, Andrew H. Beattie argues, in the way that ‘the former debated and wrote GDR history itself; the latter discussed the roles of other institutions’ (33). In a similar fashion, the emphasis on totalitarian structures of power of the early 1990s began to be challenged by social history theories of such as *Eigen-Sinn* (Saunders and Pinfold 4).

Official memories of the GDR have not necessarily been homogenous. Ben Gook writes that, while the *Diktaturgedächtnis*, being the hegemonic form, certainly foregrounds its ‘inhumanity and criminality’ in order to ‘condemn the GDR’s existence’, official responses to that history have been ‘neither unchanging nor dogmatic’ (13). Instead, Gook argues that the official history ‘is a mixture and overlapping of direct representations of the past by state organs and representatives, as well as by subsidized and endorsed third parties’ (13). With an increase in heterogeneity within state-mandated memory, Beattie argues, conceptions of a univocal, top-down official memory fail to capture the roles played by alternative voices (24). The *Diktaturgedächtnis* nevertheless remains the modality of GDR remembrance most clearly promoted by the state. These observations underscore the need to investigate the memory cultures and politics beyond polarising constructions.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Beattie, ‘The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory since 1990’, Cooke’s *Representing East Germany since Unification: from Colonization to Nostalgia*, or Boyer’s *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture* for evaluations of these projects.

For instance, a common dichotomous split cited by Beattie casts the *Diktaturgedächtnis* as a top-down, western (broadly conservative or right-wing) view on the one hand, while on the other, identifies vocal critics of official memory (such as the democratic socialist party Die Linke) as representative of all eastern Germans, from below (23–24). Binary understandings such as these minimise voices of those eastern Germans who largely support, and contribute to official memories, while also failing to account for the production and sharing of counter-memories in the west.

The phenomenon of *Ostalgie* has come, in many ways, to signify *the* counter-memory to the perceived official *Diktaturgedächtnis*. *Ostalgie* – nostalgia for the East – has its origins in the early 1990s as the self-expression of an eastern identity, as a form of resistance against a variety of interrelated factors, including the western-led, growing hegemony of a devalued East German past, the insecurities of unemployment, and seeing representatives of the old regime retain power and influence (Berdahl, *Where the World Ended* 175–77; Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* 47; Clarke and Wölfel 14). Moreover, as Dietrich Mühlberg writes, it arose in response to the feeling of everyday exclusion on the part of many eastern Germans as a result of the inability of westerners to conceive that there could be ‘noch eine andere historische Erfahrung und ein anderes gültiges Verhältnis zur deutschen Vergangenheit’ (218). Accordingly, under an ‘ostalgic’ paradigm, emotions such as melancholia and nostalgia are translated into positive (re)significations of numerous everyday objects and consumer goods. By the late 1990s, the ‘cult of nostalgia’ was found in western parts of Germany in the form of ‘revival parties’ and GDR-shops (Seegers 30). The reach of *Ostalgie* has even been mapped as a worldwide phenomenon (Kunze and Vogel). On the whole, scholars have disagreed with the impression that *Ostalgie* derives from the simple expression of an eastern desire to return to the political regime of the GDR

(Cooke, *Representing* 104). Indeed, some commentators have argued that *Ostalgie* relates to a more universal sentiment, captured, for example, by the expression ‘früher war Alles besser’;<sup>8</sup> in other words, it is part of a human tendency to see the past through ‘rose-tinted glasses’. Others apply a more specific reading, such as Daphne Berdahl, who argues that it emerged as a complicated oppositional practice responding to social and political conditions following re-unification: an ‘*Ostalgie* for the present’ ([N]Ostalgie’ 206).

German citizens’ emotional attachments to the past and to the experience of the *Wende* have been analysed from a variety of perspectives. For instance, these range from psychological frameworks which interrogate ‘pleasantness bias in flashbulb memories’ of the fall of the Wall (Bohn and Berntsen), through to socio-cultural studies of East German *Alltag* (e.g. Berdahl, ‘[N]Ostalgie’; Blum; Betts, ‘Twilight of the Idols’). Central to many anxieties about the spreading of ‘ostalgic’ memories of the East are concerns about trivialising the consequences resulting directly from the dictatorial nature of the SED regime. These have particular weight in the national context which is overshadowed by the Nazi past; as Jonathan Bach astutely observes, the German word *verharmlosen*, ‘to trivialise’, has a literal translation ‘to make harmless’ – and ‘the last thing a responsible, democratic citizen wants is to be accused of declaring Germany’s history of dictatorship harmless’ (*What Remains* 5).

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<sup>8</sup> The writer and actor Thomas Brussig expresses this idea in the following quote from an interview: ‘Es liegt nicht an der DDR, sondern in der Natur des Erinnerns, dass die DDR plötzlich so viele gute Seiten hat. Und wenn Westler Ostler erleben, die sich gerne an die DDR-Zeiten erinnern, dürfen sie die nicht verdächtigen, dass die die DDR wiederhaben wollen’ (qtd. in Lambeck).

The flourishing of a marketable culture for symbolically charged, everyday goods from the GDR signals a recent shift towards the prioritising of *Alltag* over *Aufarbeitung* in post-*Wende* memory politics. The 2005-2006 Sabrow Commission found attention to *Alltag* lacking in official memory, and a resulting move towards incorporating memories of GDR *Alltag* suggests a meeting of *Diktaturgedächtnis* and *Arrangementgedächtnis*. By the end of the first decade of re-unification and in the wake of the two *Enquete Kommissionen*, Cooke contends that, while certain ‘negative’ aspects such as the *Stasi* remain in focus, there is an identifiable shift towards a ‘view of the past that looked back, at times nostalgically, on the everyday experience of life in the East’ (*Representing* viii–ix). The Sabrow Commission, which interrogated the official status of GDR memory, as Bach puts it, ‘found the treatment of everyday life profoundly missing in attempts to understand and explain the GDR, including what produced both loyalty and resistance’ (‘Collecting Communism’ 136). Sara Jones points to ‘allergic reactions’ from certain individuals and institutions (for example the then head of the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen prison memorial, Hubertus Knabe) to the controversial finding cited in the report that official memory, with its emphasis on repression and division, has precluded narratives of ‘resistance and conformity, ideology, and single-party rule, as well as the everyday’ (qtd. in ‘[Extra] Ordinary Life’ 120); she argues that these reactions are in many ways an ‘oversimplification’ – the Commission’s recommendation was not a ‘concession to *Ostalgie*’, rather, it was partially provoked by the very need to avoid a musealising tendency towards ‘uncritical collections’ of GDR material culture (‘[Extra] Ordinary Life’ 120).

Importantly, the history of the German-German division continues to be reflected in disparate attitudes in both eastern and western parts of the country across a variety of

social and political issues: To take one example, a recent survey that was published at the beginning of 2019 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* found that that eastern Germans have less trust in democracy and the German state than their western counterparts: 42 percent of respondents believed democracy was the best form of government compared with 77 percent of westerners, and only 30 percent in eastern Germany, compared with 48 percent, agreed with the statement that there is no better system than the market economy (Köcher). Moreover, international press has reported on the particular resurgence of far-right politics in eastern parts of the country, citing issues that stem from an unmastered *Wende*, from poorer living conditions to a crisis in eastern masculinity, as reasons for, for instance, heightened anti-immigration sentiments (Oltermann; Bennhold).

### **German Cinema and East Germany**

Film has often been significant in German-German memory debates, as it plays a central role in mediating cultural knowledge of the GDR past. In order to explore how concepts such as ‘identity’ and ‘East/ern Germany’ are remembered, reflected and constructed in the post-unification films which form the body of my research, it will be helpful to understand their place within a larger film-historical context. When it comes to its cinema, Germany has a long and complicated history. Earlier traditions can roughly be bracketed chronologically, such as into the Wilhelmine period, the ‘Golden Age’ of the Weimar Republic, and the controlling paradigm of the Third Reich. The postwar years of division saw a ‘split-screen’ for German film, with East and West film cultures developing in parallel (Meurer).

Representing an early example of a *Vergangenheitsbewältigungsfilm*, the first German film production after World War II was also the first 'East German' film: Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (1946). Filmed in Berlin's rubble (setting a blueprint for the genre 'rubble films'), the film was the initial production of the newly formed *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA), and licenced by the Soviets. Anke Pinkert writes that DEFA films from the early postwar period participated in processes of contestation and negotiation within the memory politics of the GDR, providing an 'alternative cinematic archive of Germany's complicated postwar transition' (7). DEFA became the centre of the East German film industry, the sole producer of feature films; under the 'totalitarian' aspects of the regime, filmmakers had to toe the line according to capricious periods of censorship – and the ensuing self-censorship. Meanwhile in the West, the national output ranged from unchallenging *Heimatfilme* of the 1950s, often seen as a retreat from the horrors of war and designed to comfort, to the movement of critically acclaimed 'art films' of the New German Cinema a few decades later.

Owing in part to the international and critical successes of New German Cinema films during the 1970s and 1980s, West Germany has been considered heir to the heyday of the acclaimed German filmmaking of the Weimar era (Rentschler, 'American Friends' 14); Before re-unification on the other hand, East German (DEFA) films were excluded from any version of the 'national' film canon (Brockmann 213). Since the Wall's collapse, many of these DEFA productions have seen a renaissance of interest, thanks largely to an agreement between DEFA and the University of Massachusetts, and the work of Barton Byg in particular in initially promoting the importance of these films for scholarship on East German politics, society, and culture. DEFA films thus found an international audience – by no means mainstream,

but significant nonetheless to the refiguring of the GDR's place within a reunified Germany's film history. While these archival images of East Germany gradually jostled for position in a national cinematic archive, a number of new films began to be produced about the recently collapsed GDR, from both western and eastern perspectives.

As outlined in the introduction, the limited cinematic portrayals of East Germany produced in the early 1990s tended towards comical or humorous representations. Leonie Naughton argues that, among the depictions of the former East in films of the 1990s, western productions tended towards romanticising the liminal East/east German post-*Wende* experience, citing the 'Trabi Comedies' as examples which cast easterners as beneficiaries of re-unification. This was in contrast to eastern productions, which focused instead on easterners' experiences of alienation and lack, for example in *Ostkreuz* (Michael Klier, 1991) and *Herzprung* (Helke Misselwitz, 1992) (172). Over the course of first post-*Wende* decade, the characteristics of the emerging genre of 'unification comedy' films shifted towards arguably more complicated, self-aware portrayals. For instance, *Sonnenallee* (Leander Haußmann, 1999) and *Helden wie wir* (Sebastian Peterson, 1999) present more 'sophisticated' approaches in comparison with the earlier offerings (Cooke, *Representing* 111–19). At the end of the 1990s, German cinema was among the first forums to bring the word *Ostalgie* to 'widespread public awareness' (Cooke, *Representing* 104).

The connoted (and perceived) *Ostalgie* in the aesthetic and narrative modes of films like *Sonnenallee*, and the associated attitude towards the East German past, nonetheless continued to attract negative receptions, from conservative commentators in particular. These critics' strict political opposition to the GDR state united them in

concluding that humorous depictions of the former East, by their nature, must be blind to the seriousness of the wrongs in an *Unrechtstaat*. On the other hand, discriminating audiences and critics alike often expressed satisfaction at these films' ability to represent a counter-memory 'from below', while maintaining some ambivalence. For instance, Anthony Enns argues that, by including East German voices and criticising effects of the *Wende*, films like *Kleinruppin Forever* (Carsten Fiebeler, 2004), which shows the GDR in a positive light, 'clearly employ nostalgia both as a form of mourning for what has been lost and as a means for effecting political change' (489).

The transition to the new millennium saw an 'explosion of cinematic memory work in Germany', as Owen Evans argues, 'inspired by the efforts of Gerhard Schröder's Red-Green coalition after 1998 to encourage a more "normal" engagement with the German past' ('Memory, Melodrama and History' 241). Many of these films engaged with the National Socialist past, and films such as *Der Untergang* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004), *Rosenstraße* (Margarethe von Trotta, 2003), and *Aimée & Jaguar* (Max Färberböck, 1999) have been cited as examples of this normative approach (Berghahn, 'Post-1990 Screen Memories'; Koepnick, 'Reframing the Past'; Davidson). Writing of this phenomenon, Marco Abel notes how German films appear to have found a means to achieve both mainstream success and international, critical acclaim. According to Abel, the desire for 'consensus' (identified by Rentschler in the films of the 1990s, which were incapable of 'garnering glory for Germany abroad'), has now discovered 'more successful forms of expression in a series of history films that work like a charm at the Academy Awards'. 'These films', Abel goes on to argue,

cater to an audience that can find in them both confirmation of its own preconceived notions about Germany ('the Nazis!'; 'the Stasi!') and the



comforting, even feel-good perception that this people has finally managed to shed its totalitarian past and join the community of ‘normal’ nations (‘A Sharpening’ 206).

This particular resurgence of German-produced films about German pasts is further notable for the adoption of more popular styles and aesthetics, in contrast with, for example, the art cinema approaches characteristic of the New German Cinema (Evans, ‘Memory, Melodrama and History’ 241). Depictions of the more recent East German past may also be included into this development (as Abel’s reference to both ‘the Nazis!’ and ‘the Stasi!’ indicates), as mainstream German audiences showed increasing interest in contemplating serious issues of contemporary and recent German experience (Brockmann 428–29). Florian von Donnersmark’s Academy Award winning *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006), with its core-theme of the *Stasi*, represents one of the most prominent examples of this more ‘serious-minded’ approach to the GDR past,<sup>9</sup> differentiating its portrayal starkly from the unification comedies of the previous decade (J. Fisher 288; Ziegengeist 138).

The critical question, according to Johannes von Moltke, when considering the number and popularity of films about the past, and in particular when seeking to explain the prominence of the *Geschichtsgefühl*, is how these films infuse their audiovisual histories with ‘an affective force that can significantly shape our understanding of historical events’ (23). According to von Moltke, this demands a framework which can take into account the way that affect is ‘cued’, ‘solicited’, and

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<sup>9</sup> To this effect, Lu Seegers writes: ‘Mit dem Oscar avancierte *Das Leben der Anderen* zu dem international anerkannten Erinnerungsfilm über die Staatssicherheit der DDR’ (22).

‘structured’ by films (19). Being able to account for cinema’s power in ‘experientially’ evoking the past is vital, since both filmmakers and audiences ‘seem to understand that a film is something very different from a history book’, as Mathias Feidler puts it (143). The box office successes of GDR memory films such as *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Good Bye, Lenin!* may be explained, as Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold suggest, not only as a spectatorial ‘voyeuristic desire’ to watch representations of the historical dictatorial regime, but also as a condition of Landsberg’s prosthetic memory, ‘where the ability of the mass media to facilitate emotional identification is perceived as a valuable means of allowing memories to be passed on transgenerationally and transculturally’ (6).

The concept of ‘prosthetic memory’ draws attention to film’s important role as conveyer and mediator of collective/cultural memories. In her book published in 2004, Landsberg formulated a key question in relation to film’s technological means of forging memory. She asks: ‘To what extent do modern technologies of mass culture, such as film, with their ability to transport individuals through time and space, function as technologies of memory?’ (1). Her work is important because she stresses the potential for filmic images to shape subjectivity ‘as memory’, thereby arguing against widespread concerns about film’s manipulative power as an instrument of mass media. Instead, Landsberg offers a model, whereby the spectator makes intercultural and dialogic connections through the incorporation of memories via film. A person is ‘sutured’ into a larger historical narrative through experiencing that history in film: ‘the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics’ (2). Landsberg argues that this experiential mode of viewing

can work towards ethical goals, that is, the production of ethical subjects through the incorporation of memories of others.

The thematic returns to the past in German-language films demonstrate how history, memory, and national projects of identity (i.e. debates over nostalgia or the process of ‘normalisation’) come together in film. It is evident that post-*Wende* memory films have often been highly conflicted, as the German nation, still in the well-documented process of coming to terms with its National Socialist past, faced after 1989 yet another social and political upheaval (Hake, *German National Cinema* 208). As David Martin-Jones observes, in periods of ‘historical transformation’, films often appear that play with the formal arrangement and structuring of narrative time. The examples of various European new waves during the 1960s and 1970s ‘can be interpreted not only as comments on the state of their respective national cinemas, but also on the changing postwar conditions each nation experienced’ (1). A good example of such a trend may be found in the joint commercial and critical success of *Lola rennt* (1998), directed by Tom Tykwer, which features an innovative temporal logic. Clarke argues that Tykwer’s film demonstrates an ‘erosion’ of the division between *Autorenfilm* (auteurist film) and commercial practices (4). Tykwer was part of the group of filmmakers who founded the independent company X-Filme Creative Pool, which also includes the producer Stefan Arndt and the directors Dani Levy and Wolfgang Becker. X-Filme achieved enormous success not only with *Lola rennt*, but also, a few years later, with Becker’s *Good Bye, Lenin!* in 2003. It is intriguing that Becker’s film, which complicates the 1990’s genre of ‘unification comedy’ through its more nuanced approach to East German memory (examined in chapter two), also shares an interest in the workings of cinematic time with Tykwer’s *Lola rennt*.

## **National Identity and Cinema**

At the core of this thesis are questions of identity, in particular the question of how the cinema of the Berlin Republic affects the cultural, political (and mythological) shaping of the newly '(re)imagined community' of a (re)unified Germany. To what extent do questions surrounding German-German relations play a part in the negotiation and construction of contemporary identities in the collective sense? How might these constructions be reflected in post-unification films, and do these films indeed contribute to social configurations of national, sub-national, and differentiated cultural identities? Narrative feature films and documentaries certainly can offer insights into everyday life, and societal constellations of collective memory and national identity, as historical references on the one hand; on the other, as aesthetic products, they offer access to realms which are both a reflection of, and a reaction to, certain moments in time.

In engaging with the memories that move between the individual and collective, this study is inevitably concerned with collective identities. Following Judith Butler's constructivist view, these are considered in this thesis as 'performative'. While Butler's writing on performativity focuses on the construction of gender identities, her conceptualisation of the systems that mobilise and control identity politics resonate across identity scholarship. Butler has expressed surprise that her theorisation of performativity as expressed in *Gender Trouble* through the example of a drag queen was often read simply as 'performance' (751); she then clarifies how, instead, performativity should be understood as system of communication and identification in which the subject is compelled to act and iterate according to pre-existent norms.

It could be seen as problematic to transform Butler's theorisation of gender identity construction and performativity into a model for understanding national identities, which function in a 'collective' manner, as this logic runs the risk of essentializing an individual process into a collective reading (Jarausch and Geyer 224). Nevertheless, a performative reading of national identity can prove fruitful in a number of ways, as it is largely through performative practices that national identities are made visible: in flags, national anthems, affirmation of national mythologies through the naming of streets and towns, and national memorialisations and commemorations (Butler and Spivak). This is particularly important for this study, as the functioning of memory within this system cannot be underestimated: it is significantly around the production and exchange of memories belonging to various groups that this inherently complex and unstable concept of 'the nation' coalesces (A. D. Smith 375). According to Liron Lavi, '[t]he insights arising from the performance theory suggest that national identity, just like gender identity, is the result of repeated acts, lacking an ontological origin' (699).

Performative notions of identity provide the starting point for this study's enquiry into embodied subjectivity and identity: on-screen embodiments of national identities, which can be considered on the one hand as 'sites of memory', can also be understood as functioning within a Butlerian system, in which constructed subjectivities are determined through repetition and through time. Accordingly, the role of identity and film is bound up with the relations between films and their context within a 'national cinema'. Joachim Meurer suggest that a productive usage of the term 'national cinema' is predicated on two suppositions: firstly that, it assumes a 'certain degree of structural coherence among the corpus of films', and secondly, that these films will correspond to a presumed 'coherence' in the structure of the nation-state in which

they were produced (15). Nevertheless, the role of film in shaping the national imaginary is ‘undeniable’, according to Sabine Hake, and film history, as an entity itself, plays a part in this process, since ‘film not only continues to provide powerful stories and images but also uses its own historicity to convey a sense of cultural tradition and historical continuity’ (*German National Cinema* 7).

In considering the inherent alterity within the concept of nationhood, Jarausch and Geyer suggest that rather than presuming the existence of a ‘national character’, a more productive approach is to consider the notion of a ‘German identity’, because ‘this flexible approach points to the constructed character, the contested nature, and the changing configurations of such a sense of self over time’ (224). The project of defining any static notion of a ‘national cinema’ is equally as fraught as any attempt to define a ‘national character’, as the subject matter is a complex web of interactions between the real and the imaginary, between mimetic practice and mythological construction. Furthermore, film culture is defined as much through exchange and through mechanisms of integration and hybridisation as it is through opposition or difference. Questions of identity and film require the scholar to draw together the various socio-political factors from the cultural *milieux* of their production and reception, as Andrew Higson explains:

In considering cinema in terms of cultural identity, it is necessary also to pay attention to the process by which cultural hegemony is achieved within each nation-state; to examine the internal relations of diversification and unification, and the power to institute one particular aspect of a pluralistic cultural formation as politically dominant and to standardise and naturalise it (‘The Concept of National Cinema’ 139).

In any analysis of a historiography of national culture, care must be given to avoid predicating arguments upon normative conceptualisations of nationalism; this becomes important when considering the interrelations between politics and cinema, as ideas are communicated and received by films, audiences, and critics respectively. ‘The “end of the era of nationalism”’, Benedict Anderson writes, ‘so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time’ (3). Given these stakes, the crucial role of the ‘nation’ in both memory and film continues to demand attention in the context of the ways that ‘the GDR’ finds its on-screen afterlife through affective encounters with eastern German identities.

Of further interest to this study is how the films contribute to the wider picture of cinematic portrayals of re-unification and GDR history, particularly in light of their varying positionalities. Here, the sub-national rears its head as an important locus of debate. For instance, well-known productions such as *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen* have western German directors; within the films I have chosen there is a range of positionalities from eastern to western perspectives. One of the aims of this study is to determine how particular political or cultural biases might inform, distort, or privilege certain modes of remembrance. In terms of the construction of particular versions of remembrance of the GDR, I will be examining what has been included, and what excluded, in the process of constructing a meditated image. I will be extrapolating from these remembered pasts the present-day questions of German national identity, and how contemporary sociocultural realms (i.e. ‘imagined communities’) are shaped by sites of memory such as these.

## Memory and Film

Astrid Erll characterises media and the mediation of memory as a kind of ‘switchboard’ between personal and collective dimensions of remembering, in short: ‘cultural memory is unthinkable without media’ (113). Mediation plays a fundamental role in the dynamics of forgetting and remembering, and it is crucial to the movement of memory within and across different groups and cultures. Film can capture images and audio and preserve these for future viewing. This represents one of the medium’s memory attributes, as Gerhard Lüdeker writes: ‘Das Gedächtnismedium Film hat zwar Vergangenheitsbezüge, weil es selbst Teil der Vergangenheit ist, insofern es archiviert und im kollektiven Bewusstsein lebendig gehalten wird und weil es als Speicher der Vergangenheit fungiert’ (82). However, film plays a significant part in the mediation of cultural memory, not only as storage, but as a communicator of sounds and images of the past. Accordingly, the medium has been characterised as ‘conservator of memory’ and ‘catalyst of discourse’ (Ziegengeist 124). Film’s capacity to portray the past, and thereby bring it into present contexts, is a further dimension of its memory function. As artefacts of cultural memory, films exemplify two of Aleida Assmann’s forms of memory, *Speichergedächtnis* and *Funktionsgedächtnis*. Assmann writes that the first category, ‘stored memories’, tends to emerge in a group’s collective memory in order to serve a ‘function’ when that group’s identity is undergoing significant change or contestation (*Erinnerungsräume* 139–40). The memory work of the films of this study demonstrates this processual functionality; straddling the *Wende*, their joint portrayal of the GDR past and post-unification present underscores the dynamics of the past’s activation in the present as a central part of identity discourse. For instance, many of the films, both fictional and nonfictional, juxtapose archival footage – illustrating the process by which *Speichergedächtnis* may be mobilised into *Funktionsgedächtnis*.



In a useful contribution to the debates about memory in film, Susannah Radstone argues that memory and film have been understood according to three paradigms. First, memory has been theorised as analogous to cinema, and second, in reverse, that cinema has been understood as analogous to memory. (Radstone sees ‘prosthetic memory’ as an exemplar of the notion of ‘cinema as memory’). In the more recently developed third idea, the interrelations between the nodes of cinema, film and memory are conceived of as both ‘more porous’ and ‘more deeply interpenetrating’ than theorised in the first two formulations (‘Cinema and Memory’ 326). That is to say, what Radstone calls theories of ‘cinema/memory’ describe a liminal construction, which seeks to account for the ‘mutuality and inseparability’ of cinema and memory by collapsing the boundaries between the two (‘Cinema and Memory’ 336). In practical terms, this means analysing the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ worlds of both film and spectator. The key question for Radstone here (and one which continues to shape future directions of study into cinema and memory), is: ‘What binds together images and sounds in personal memory with images and sounds in collective memory?’ (‘Cinema and Memory’ 336). As I will outline in the final part of this chapter, the principle method I will use in this thesis to examine the authenticating, emotive techniques of the films’ memory work, is to consider the affective and embodied quality of the filmic experience. Here, I consider the mediation of narratives across the multiple temporalities evoked in the films, and the corporeal nature of the relations between filmic images and the subjective experience of individual and cultural (i.e. collective) memories.

Cinema enjoys a prominent place in the field of cultural memory as Astrid Erll has pointed out. Arguably, we encounter some of the most powerful and ‘impressive

popular versions of the past' 'in the cinema of cultural memory', and what she calls 'memory films' (137). Annette Kuhn concurs with Erll in attributing a mnemonic force to cinema, contending that films are 'peculiarly capable of bringing together personal experiences and larger systems and processes of cultural memory' ('Memory Texts' 303). Erll, for her part, identifies two categories that sit under the general banner of 'memory films': these are 'memory-reflexive' and 'memory-productive' films. The first category describes films which thematically deal with, or portray the concept of memory itself. Examples she gives for these include *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Memento* (2000). 'Memory-productive' films on the other hand 'tell us little or nothing about the workings of memory, but they have led to the powerful global dissemination of images of the past' (137). *Schindler's List* (1993) is a prime example of this type of film – and for the debate that often surrounds such films regarding the authenticity of the cultural memory produced. Erll explains that for a film about memory to become a 'memory film' it must be viewed *as such*; in other words, 'films that are not watched may well provide the most intriguing images of the past or perspectives on the workings of memory, yet they will not have any effect in memory culture' (138). Often, the crucial component in that moment of transfer from 'film about the past/memory' to memory-productive film is the discourse that surrounds it, which further impresses that film onto the cultural imaginary.

All the films studied in the following chapters vary in their memory-productive and memory-reflexive qualities, but all can be considered *Erinnerungsfilme*. They all engage the GDR past and the post-unification present, and all produce (albeit to varying degrees) cultural memories. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to measure the 'impact' of memories according to, for example, studies of responses at film festivals, this thesis's methodology opens up directions towards understanding

how the films can impact cultural memory, through analysis of the affective power of their memory work. These cultural memories are communicated to the spectator via a ‘dialogic relationship[s]’, as Paul Grainge writes, between the temporal markers of ‘now’ and ‘then’, found in popular memory cinema (‘Introduction’ 1). This feature, which distinguishes memory from its kinship with history, enables the memory film’s activation of the past in the present. *Erinnerungsfilme*, as I will demonstrate, thus not only portray connections to the past, enclosed within the film-text (Lüdeker 83), they actively engage with fundamental questions of individual and collective remembering: opening up the juncture between past and present in a fluid and multilayered way.

In what ways can films embody collective or cultural memories within formal and aesthetic styles and features? How do films with dual time frames address the past and the present in cinematic terms? Perhaps the most instantly recognisable, or easily brought to mind, example of a filmic technique which portrays a narrative outside of the film’s main linear time-sequence is the ‘flashback’. This device, often made explicit through the use of particular colour palettes and filters, stylised in the manner of a home-movie, or presented as memory in a dreamlike way, introduces a sequence or story which belongs in a time anterior to the main timeline of the film’s plot.

Flashbacks engage spectators with socio-political and cultural elements through embedded and interwoven narratives within multiple temporal frames. They also blur the distinction between the personal and the collective. As Maureen Turim writes, flashbacks give us on the one hand ‘images of memory, the personal archives of the past’, and on the other, ‘images of history, the shared and recorded past’ (2).

Moreover, Turim contends that films often merge these two modalities, mediating

large-scale 'History' via the subjectivity of a 'single, fictional individual's remembered experience' (2).

In the case of the films that make up this study, cultural memory appears in a variety of guises. The fictional narrative feature films all make use of the flashback (among other devices), as a means to bring the GDR past into the post-unification present. This is of course, as Radstone argues, nothing surprising in itself, 'routinized deployment of these terms has rendered them unremarkable', which she suggests is in turn a symptom of the 'apparently automatic, involuntary, and mechanical relationship between cinema and memory' ('Cinema and Memory' 326). In the films studied, the effects of these devices are registered on the narrative level, the layering of entangled timelines demonstrating the interaction of both the past on the present, and the present on the past. At the same time, these effects are perceived as affects. The combination of narrative and sensorial experience furthers the sense of involvement in each film's memory work. Within documentary film, the concept of 'flashing back' might conventionally be understood to be different from that which is typical of fictional film. One such example of the ways which the documentaries investigated here portray dual or parallel narratives is the continuous juxtaposing of interviews filmed in the present time with archival footage of the GDR, and with personal photographic stills from the past. While the films project differing accounts of GDR memories, encompassing a variety of forms, they also display a number of striking similarities. Both fictional and non-fictional modes of filmmaking share commonalities in their usage of filmic devices such as interwoven, parallel or interacting temporalities to present and trouble our conceptualisations of memory.

It might seem surprising that this thesis compares documentaries with fictional films, and hence mixes factual and fictional genres, however this particular diversity across the case studies offers an opportunity to interrogate the apparent dichotomy between the two forms. This is especially true, given that the opposition between fictional and non-fictional filmic forms proves less than rigid, but is rather a flexible interchange, as documentary theorist Michael Renov explains:

[T]he key questions which arise in the study of nonfiction film and video – the ontological status of the image, the epistemological stakes of representation, the potentialities of historical discourse on film – are just as pressing for an understanding of fictional representation ... For, in a number of ways, fictional and nonfictional forms are enmeshed in one another – particularly regarding semiotics, narrativity, and questions of performance (2).

Just as people will often approach a fictional feature film with an expectation that it might illuminate certain aspects of their lived reality outside of the screen, similarly, for audiences, documentary films are not merely an objective representation of reality on the screen. Both fictional and documentary film mobilise viewers' expectations and experiences, and both interpellate them, albeit through different filmic codes and genres. The blurring of the boundaries between these two main forms of filmmaking can best be seen in Piersel's *This Ain't California*. Using documentary film with a fictionalised narrative, as well as using actors to portray (seemingly) historical persons, the film challenges many of our assumptions about both the production and reception of cinematic 'truths'. Finding itself at this particular crossroads of fiction and nonfiction, it problematises our understanding not only of what ought to

constitute ‘documentary’ style, but, through its destabilising form, it allows for a refreshing re-examination of the thematic content from an atypical vantage point.

I therefore propose that such a formally diverse corpus of films offers an apposite means both methodologically and theoretically to make sense of the cultural memories that are studied. In the introduction, I contend that ‘memory work’ will function as a guiding concept for the way that the films are interpreted in this thesis. ‘Memory work’, Kuhn argues, ‘undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, treating it not as ‘truth’ but as evidence of a particular sort’ (*Family Secrets* 157). The past, according to Kuhn, is encountered as ‘material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for its meanings and its possibilities’ (*Family Secrets* 157). Returning to this notion helps to understand the specific way that memory films, whether fictional or not, are capable of questioning the past. In the following, I question the extent to which each film is engaged in an active and conscious ‘staging’ of memory, and analyse its critical relationship to the work of memory. Here, I examine its enquiry into the past, and the past’s relationship with the present. The connecting strand of analysis that binds the film corpus together is found in the affective narratives, whether recognisably fictionalised or not, which are separated in time by re-unification. It is here that the synthesis of findings based on theoretical frameworks from cultural memory, film, and identity theories follows, with outcomes which can benefit the broader theoretical understandings we have in each of these fields.

Over and above a memory studies approach, I propose to develop a framework for studying the affective quality of the spectator’s experience of the memory work in these German films about the sub-national, East German past. I pay attention to the

mechanism whereby multiple temporalities demonstrate the impact of the past on the present and the present on the past. As mentioned above, the role that mediation plays in cinema is crucial. In this thesis, I will be using an approach which understands the act of ‘watching a film’ to be fundamentally an embodied one. Moreover, my analysis is structured by a critical awareness – a ‘sense’ – that my experience of film is mediated by my body.

This realisation can be explained by referencing a personal anecdote of the serendipity in some bad luck, which helped me encounter the film-theory best suited to the aims of my thesis. I will gloss over the ‘bad luck’ part of the story; suffice it to say I was in the burns ward of a hospital for a few weeks. I had surgery, grafting skin from my thigh onto my shoulder. This event set the conditions for the fortuitous part. At the time, I was analysing a German-language film by the Australian director Cate Shortland, *Lore* (2012). The film follows the journey of five young German siblings across a devastated German landscape in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Immediately, I felt it to be a powerfully sensual, affective and affecting work. In one scene, for instance, a bedraggled group of German citizens gaze at a poster put up for their guilt and shame by the American occupying forces.

Claustrophobia pervades the crowd, who stare at photographs depicting the emaciated figures of concentration camp victims. The atmosphere is silent, tense, a woman cannot stop scratching at her arm, then the protagonist, 15-year-old Lore, reaches out and touches one of the images in extreme close-up, and the still-fresh glue sticks to her fingers.

We say that our skin crawls when something horrifies us. The cultural theorist Steven Connor describes the skin as a ‘resonating membrane’ (246); wrapped in this

uncomfortable, tactile, and materially engrossing moment, I shivered. I felt my recently wounded skin tingle with a pointed, hot, sizzling, and lingering sensation. This embodied response came both *before and after* any cognitive awareness of either metaphor or symbolism. The embodied horror in my skin was just as much sophisticatedly *felt* in that organ's haptic responsiveness, as it was understood 'in my head'. Not only did my skin crawl as I watched *Lore*, but in the days afterwards whenever I would remember a particular moment in the film, I would feel an 'aftershock' of sorts trembling in my wounded skin, both physically and emotionally tying me back into the film's narrative and its affect. It was in this moment that I first corporeally understood that in the experience of watching a film, we experience the traffic of sensation, emotion and meaning, back and forth between the (images constituted upon the) film screen and our embodied selves. Tarja Laine locates this sensation as affect, experienced as a bilateral touching of bodies and skin: 'Spectatorship, then, is more than the act of seeing. Spectatorship is what comes into being in contact, in the activities of touching. The cinema screen is a shared skin, through which we reinvent the others and ourselves, an interface or a contact surface for every encounter' (104). This autobiographical experience, which travels along a path through my body, taught me the value of a somatically-aware approach to film, after which I consequently pursued a theoretical framework capable of grappling with the physical and the affective.

### **Embodying Film and the Spectator**

Since the 'invention' of cinema and the moving (audio)-image, theories to explain how the medium works and how it affects audiences have regularly been developed, changed and innovated. The influential distinction between formalist and realist



approaches to film has often been used as the basis for the classification of film theoretical approaches (Elsaesser and Hagener 3). Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dominant theories have included semiotics, with its focus on codes, signs and the way meaning is structured through referents and language, and psychoanalytically informed approaches which draw our attention to the spectator's gaze, psychic fantasies and identifications with either the apparatus or characters in the diegesis. What unites these disparate and often oppositional approaches is the fact that they have typically tended to *look* at film by privileging the visual. In what has been deemed an ocularcentric paradigm, the sense of sight carries connotations of distance and also of mastery. Debates over the reassessment of the privileging of vision in cultural theory from the late 1980s and early 1990s can be seen in such examples as the works of Jonathan Crary and Martin Jay. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Crary pivots towards a new art historical approach to visual culture. No longer assuming a disembodied eye, Crary traces a 'carnal density' in the history of emerging visual technologies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century towards an epistemology that grounds vision within bodily experience (150). Joining a growing discursive field over vision and the body, Jay's *Downcast Eyes* from 1993 has been influential in its critique of the increased scrutiny placed onto 'vision' and the philosophical roots of ocularcentrism.

Tom Gunning's scholarship on the 'cinema of attractions' marked a significant shift in the attentions of film theory from questions of meaning *within* the text, to questions exploring affect found not only in the structures beneath the text but also *between* the film and spectator. Through historical research into early cinema, Gunning concludes that the hegemonic thought pervasive in film theory has operated within the boundaries of narrative, failing to account for what he describes as 'the primal power of the attraction running beneath the armature of narrative regulation' (68). Cinema

before 1906, Gunning argues, shared a common basis around the primacy of the spectacle – like the fairground – which did not disappear but went underground with the dominance of the narrative film. The mode of address described here is energetic, moving towards the spectator, who is acknowledged as present, rather than focusing inwards towards the character-reliant situations on the screen (66). This ‘energetic field’, as Anne Rutherford has observed, ‘opens the way for a major paradigm shift toward a recognition of spectatorship as embodied’ (43).

An early pioneer of the sensations between spectator and the screen was Linda Williams with her research into what she terms ‘body genres’ – genres with ‘bodily excess’ and low cultural status such as horror or pornography. Williams proposes that excesses – not ‘gratuitous’, but ‘fundamental elements of the sensational effects’ of these films – organise the system of displaying bodies on the screen and registering in the bodies of spectators (3). She questions the assumption that the spectatorial response to excesses in sensation on screen, such as tears in melodrama, violence in horror, or orgasm in pornography, is one of a simplistic ‘involuntary mimicry’, opening up discussion for the relationship between the bodies in front of and on the screen (4). However, as Rutherford has pointed out, her analysis ‘relies for its discussion of embodiment on the presence of the human body on the screen’ (150). In contrast, the following theories of embodiment do not (necessarily) assume or require a human body on the screen.

Among the most significant theoretical innovations are the use of phenomenology by Vivian Sobchack and the notions of haptic engagement of Laura U. Marks. Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye*, first published in 1992, utilises the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to model an embodied theory of

perception of cinema which has all of our senses at its centre. At the time of Sobchack's writing, Lacanian psychoanalysis and neo-Marxism dominated (American) cinema studies (Wilson 6). In a polemical work that responds to this hegemony, she lays out her critique of ocularcentrism:

[C]ontemporary theory ... has focused on the essentially deceptive, illusionary, tautologically recursive, and coercive nature of the cinema, and on its psychopathological and/or ideological functions of distorting existential experience. Such theory elaborately accounts for cinematic representation but cannot account for the originary activity of cinematic signification (Sobchack, *Address* 17).

In *The Cinematic Body*, published in 1993, Steven Shaviro challenges what he perceives as the established order in film studies in a similar fashion: 'Film is a vivid medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame' (viii). Writing contemporaneously with Sobchack in response to the ubiquity of a theoretical focus on disembodied vision in film studies, Shaviro takes issue with the paradigmatic approach's 'fear of images': 'This theory', he argues, 'still tends to equate passion, fascination, and enjoyment with mystification; it opposes to these a knowledge that is disengaged from affect, and irreducible to images' (13). Shaviro, disturbed by film theory's psychoanalytic and poststructuralist founding texts' 'reflex movement of suspicion, disavowal, and phobic rejection', argues that 'it is high time we rid ourselves of the notion that we can somehow free ourselves from illusion (or from ideology) by recognizing and theorizing our own entrapment within it' (11). As others

have remarked,<sup>10</sup> his focus is a particular version of masochistic spectatorship (and he acknowledges his is a personal, partial account of film spectatorship) (Rutherford 50; Marks, *Skin* 151). Both building on, and departing from, the concepts proposed by Sobchack and Shaviro, Anne Rutherford offers a methodology for occupying the space in-between the film's materiality – 'the film as *film*' – and the energetic, affective encounters described above (52). Through an interrogation of both *mise-en-scène* and mimetic experience, Rutherford concludes that embodied experience is fundamentally affective, and hence, 'the ability to awaken embodied experience is pivotal to the arousal of affect in film' (59).

In her later (2000) work *Carnal Thoughts*, Sobchack puts forward the concept of the 'cinesthetic subject': a neologism joining 'cinema' with the experiences of 'synaesthesia', the activation of one sense modality via the stimulation of another, and 'coenaesthesia', an awareness of one's body aggregated from perceptual impressions (*Carnal Thoughts* 67). Sobchack's cinesthetic subject possesses a lived body, which is impressed upon, and expresses, sensorially. The body, with its synaesthetic potential, Sobchack argues, must be thought of as a 'carnal "third term" that grounds and mediates experience and language, subjective vision and objective image – both differentiating and unifying them in reversible (or chiasmatic) processes of perception and expression' (*Carnal Thoughts* 60). In other words, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's

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<sup>10</sup> Shaviro's work, Rutherford argues, is 'useful in clearing a path for a consideration of spectatorship that escapes the models of disembodied vision inherent in semiotic and psychoanalytic film theory, and challenging the psychoanalytic models of scopophilia based on mastery and sadism'. However, as Rutherford goes on to explain, 'its assumption of a corollary between mimetic spectatorship and his particular interpretation of masochism imposes unnecessary strictures on the understanding of visual fascination and mimesis itself' (50).

figure of the chiasm, Sobchack seeks to overcome a binary between body and image, suggesting that oppositional figures are reversibly and subjectively perceived and expressed in the relations between the cinesthetic subject and the film-image object. Sobchack's term is useful to differentiate from 'spectator', as it eschews the latter's visual etymology. In this thesis, where 'the (embodied) spectator' is generally spoken of, the idea of the cinesthetic subject is continually intertwined in that expression.

For Sobchack, embodied spectatorship is not metaphoric, in other words, the film does not function *like* a body, rather, the film functions *as* a body. The existential phenomenology that structures her thinking and her work is thus always 'philosophically grounded on the carnal, fleshy, objective foundations of subjective consciousness as it engages and is transformed by and in the world' (*Carnal Thoughts* 2). The transformative, affective relations between body, subjectivity, and knowledge require that attention be paid to the language used to describe how films are watched: of particular concern is the gap between the 'actual *experience*' of cinema and our theoretical language to describe it which can, unfortunately 'explain it away' (*Carnal Thoughts* 53). In an example of her analysis which shows how her philosophy is applied, she describes a pre-cognitive grounding of the film experience within her own flesh, working outwards, which occurred as she watched the very first shot of *The Piano* (1993). Sobchack reports that her fingers first responded to the (as yet) indeterminate image on screen, namely that of a blurry shot looking through the hands. It is worth quoting this passage at length, to capture the eloquence in her description:

As I watched *The Piano*'s opening moments – in that first shot, before I even knew there was an Ada and before I saw her from *my* side of *her* vision (that

is, before I watched *her* rather than her *vision*) – something seemingly extraordinary happened. Despite my ‘almost blindness,’ the unrecognizable blur,’ and the resistance of the image to my eyes, *my fingers knew what I was looking at* – and this *before* the objective reverse shot that followed to put those fingers in their proper place (that is, to put them where they could be seen objectively rather than subjectively ‘looked through’) ... From the first (although I didn’t consciously know it until the second shot) my fingers *comprehended* that image, *grasped* it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation (*Carnal Thoughts* 63).

Laura Marks, also writing against a representational paradigm, distinguishes two forms of viewing. Put simply, she contends that sensations in the cinematic experience can be conceived of in terms of *touch*, on the one hand, opposed to *sight* on the other. For Marks, ‘haptic visuality’, which emphasises the embodied nature of spectatorship and a tactile relation to the object, is distinct from an ‘optic visuality’ that has hitherto dominated film theory. The Greek etymology of the work ‘haptic’ (from *haptikós*) informs us of its meaning: the ability to ‘come into contact with’ (Bruno 6). Drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s ‘time-image’ model of cinema and analysing intercultural and experimental media, Marks argues that ‘intercultural cinema’, especially with its move away from narrative story-telling, ‘seeks to represent sensory experiences that encode cultural memory’ (*Skin* 229). Marks’s terminology further distinguishes ‘haptic perception’ as a separate mode of experiencing. ‘Haptic *perception*’, Marks writes, ‘is usually defined as the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies. In haptic *visuality*, the eyes themselves function like

organs of touch' (*Touch 2*).<sup>11</sup> The 'touch' of the eye (no longer disembodied) is not (always) penetrating, but runs along and across surfaces, feeling and being felt by film images. Sound, too, can be haptically perceived – however, the audiovisual experience of film is certainly not restricted to the two most obviously involved senses of sight and hearing.

For both Sobchack and Marks, cinematic experience is not divorced from concepts of identification, but they conceptualise how the viewer identifies with the images on screen differently from psychoanalytic models. Moreover, they forge new models for examining not only how the spectator identifies with the filmic experience, but what it is in film that the spectator is identifying with. They thereby break away from previous conventions which relied so heavily on a disembodied visual system for their explanations. In haptic visuality, the gaze of the spectator neither engages symbolically, nor attempts to master the content on the screen, but produces a material, reciprocal encounter of touch, marked by an intersubjective relationship between her body and the film's. Some theorists of this school of cinema studies locate this encounter in the physical response of the spectator, while others, such as Giuliana Bruno, locate film's affectivity in spatial terms. The haptic, according to Bruno, describes not only touch, but also 'kinesthesia', the bodily capacity to sense our position and movement in space (6). For instance, Bruno contends that we should transform the spectator from 'voyeur' to 'voyageur'. (In fact, her 'psychogeographic' methodology, having a feminist function, takes the spectator to be a 'voyageuse'). Bruno's concept of 'site-seeing' – with a deliberately errant spelling to match her

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<sup>11</sup> For a history of the term 'haptic cinema', tracing its origins to works including Alois Riegl's study of Egyptian spatiality, see Marks (*Skin* 171).

wandering, cartographic method – describes a spectator who ‘traverses a haptic, emotive terrain’ in her personal and subjective encounter with the film’s spaces (15–16).

Vision is not an isolated sense, and neither is hearing. Both are discrete, having their own distinctive structure, capacities and limits, yet neither works in isolation from any of our other senses. That is to say, the *audiovisual* in film makes *sense*, because of all of the cross-modal lived-experience we have of *all* of our senses informing us of our presence in the world. Cinema is at once a form of perception and a material perceived, a new way of encountering reality and a part of the reality thereby discovered for the first time. In the film experience, our bodies experience a kind of traffic of sensation, emotion and meaning – back and forth between the images on the film screen and our ‘subjective’ selves. These events work according to the dynamics of our lived body’s knowledges of reality, our very ability to perceive being, of course, itself culturally and socially informed – as Sobchack states, ‘[w]e do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium’ (‘Carnal Thoughts’ 63).

Applying these insights to the themes of this study, then, my question is: how are memory, time and place in films about the East German past experienced by the embodied spectator through film’s mediation and transmission? To answer this, I draw on these corporeal film theories to address the sensual, affective qualities of cultural memory. This project is necessarily intercultural, as the spectator’s ‘acculturated sensorium’ (according to her particular positionality) fundamentally shapes the process by which memories are mediated in the films studied. Here, the



phenomenological encounter is between the viewer's body and what Sobchack terms the 'film's body',<sup>12</sup> producing an 'expression of experience by experience' (*Address* 3). Rather than focusing on what is processed solely on a cognitive level, this is partly a question of wondering how the viewer 'feels' during a film, or more specifically, what she 'senses', i.e. in filmic spaces, hues, shapes, sounds and movements. If we know the viewer to be active in an exchange between two bodies – theirs and the film's – then, as Marks argues, 'the characterization of the film viewer as passive, vicarious, or projective must be replaced with a model of a viewer who participates in the production of the cinematic experience' (*Touch* 14).

These preliminary claims are evidence of a 'turn' in cultural studies more generally, and in film studies in particular, towards considering the way our entire sensorium works together, cross-modally, to inform our sense perceptions and the expressions of our realities. While the history of film theory (and cultural studies) has oscillated between phenomenological-realist and constructivist-formalist models (Elsaesser and Hagner 147), the embodied nature of cinematic experience has been 'on the radar' of film studies from the early works of Hugo Münsterberg, Sergei Eisenstein, and Jean Epstein to the more recent turn promoted by Sobchack, Marks, Shaviro and Jennifer M. Barker (Horton 95). At some point in the recent past, 'the observer of the modern

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<sup>12</sup> Sobchack's terminology seeks to describe two key dimensions of perception and expression. Firstly, the film's body is 'the *instrumental mediation* necessary to *cinematic communication* between filmmaker and spectator'. Secondly, it is considered 'as a *direct means* of having and expressing a world' (*Address* 168). Sobchack summarises her meaning of the term thus: 'I use the phrase the "film's body" very precisely [...] to designate the material existence of the film as functionally embodied (and thus differentiated in existence from the filmmaker and spectator). The "film's body" is not visible in the film except for its intentional agency and diacritical motion. It is not anthropomorphic, but it is also not reducible to the cinematic apparatus (in the same way that we are not reducible to our material physiognomy); it is discovered and located only reflexively as a quasi-subjective and embodied "eye" that has a discrete—if ordinarily prepersonal and anonymous—existence' (*Carnal Thoughts* 66).

has given way to the experienter of the postmodern' (Elliott 2). The phenomenological turn in cinema studies is founded on the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, who emphasises reciprocity in the constitution of subjectivity, and understands the object and the subject together, as providing each other with meaning through the act of perception – in looking or touching for example – and they must be studied together: 'Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system' (209). Essential to his system is affect, which, being 'both a noun and a transitive verb simultaneously makes both its subject and object' (Richard and Rudnycky 59). Or, as Barker puts it, '[w]e do not "lose ourselves" in the film, so much as we exist – emerge really – in the contact between our body and the film's body' (*The Tactile Eye* 19).

Notwithstanding these pathbreaking works, which all seek in different ways to re-embody the visual experience of film, it is important to consider some words of caution regarding this apparent paradigm shift. It has been observed that this 'turn' towards haptic or embodied approaches runs the risk of 'celebrating a big-tent, inclusive, feel-good theory of sensory empowerment' (Elsaesser and Hagener 143); Sobchack has herself acknowledged that the term 'experience' appears 'mushy', 'soft', and 'sloppy' – particularly when considered in contrast with the 'scientific methods and technically precise vocabularies' of structuralist and semiotic theories (*Address* xiv). But, as Laura Wilson argues, 'the effect, or affect' that film has on the spectator, *experientially*, importantly underscores the fact the films are 'processual' (6). Moreover, according to Wilson, by problematising the value that the visual metaphors in language place on sight, we can more effectively (affectively) engage with the other senses that are activated in experiences of cinema (6).

The benefits of adopting a somatically grounded concept of film experience are many. First, it builds on the affinities between the senses and film's audiovisual content, which can strengthen the ways in which we can understand how spectators engage with cultural memories. Second, it helps to provide a theoretical framework for describing sensations and feelings, which tend to evade the 'capture' of language – those fleeting experiences which struggle to find expression. It must, however, be stated that these approaches are in no way united in any attempt to radically disregard or ignore the obvious role of hearing and vision in the *audiovisual* of film. To reject the specific importance of those two senses in the filmic experience would clearly be an absurd case to put forward; the purpose of engaging with a haptic understanding is rather to work towards understanding the cross-modal interactions between all the senses. The purpose, too, is to counter the impact that a hierarchical valorising of vision in particular has had on the capacity for theory to grasp, in a nuanced way, all that goes on when film and spectator meet. As Marks puts it, '[t]he point is not to utterly replace symbolization, a form of representation that requires distance, with mimesis. Rather it is to maintain a robust flow between sensuous closeness and symbolic distance' (*Touch*, xiii). Furthermore, we must be cautious not to think of a turn towards the body as part of a historical progression towards a more enlightened, or 'in touch' position. Elsaesser and Hagener warn that, 'there is no progress in the emphatic sense, no linear advance toward an imaginary goal, even if the movement from outside and distanced observer (frame) to inside and immediate participant (brain) might invite such an interpretation (147).

As established in the Introduction, this thesis is concerned with affective encounters. I understand affect as an intensity that passes between the ‘film’s body’ and the spectator’s. As Sara Ahmed argues, affect is not merely a property of ‘subjects or objects, but [is] produced as effects of circulation’ (8). This study shares the approach advocated by Barker, where affective encounters are the ‘conduit’ between gestures and behaviours on the part of both film and spectator. To interrogate these encounters is to seek to comprehend the ‘emotional, intellectual, and thematic aspects of any given experience’ (*The Tactile Eye* 15). I use this methodology, not as a totalising, ‘Grand Theory’ of film; rather, I adopt a *particular* approach to the films, which centres both experience and the body. My advocating a phenomenological approach does not mean that I ignore plot events, narrative, or the fact that images *do have* symbolic meanings. Rather, this embodied-phenomenological approach to the filmic ‘experience’ communicates productively with analysis of the ‘memory work’ that is carried out by both the film and the spectator. Considering the phenomenon of memory philosophically, Mary Warnock contends: ‘Memory itself cannot be understood as long as we persist in thinking of the mental ghost in the physical machine, neither can the peculiar delight and insight that we can derive from recollection’ (viii). Embodied phenomenology offers a means to tie together the temporal and the spatial dimensions of film spectatorship, without precluding considerations of the individual and collective dimensions. Space and place – so important to memory concepts like the *Erinnerungsort* – are brought into a meaningful ‘being’ and ‘perceiving’ through in the interaction between the film’s body and the spectator’s.

## 2: Memories Re-Imagined in *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003)

### **Introduction**

Since its release in 2003, *Good Bye, Lenin!* has remained one of the most successful post-unification German films, having attracted strong box office attendances domestically and internationally. Alongside its remarkable (for a home-grown German production) mainstream popularity, the film received critical attention and, despite over a decade having passed since its release, it remains one of the most recognisable post-unification German films to deal with the GDR and the *Wende*.

Indeed, the film had an immediate cultural impact that surpassed the typical bounds of cinema: ‘So well received was Becker’s film and so significant was its perceived cultural status that 180 politicians duly heeded the invitation extended by the Minister for Culture, Christina Weis, to attend a screening of the film at the former prize GDR cinema on Karl Marx Allee in Berlin’ (Hodgin, ‘Berlin Is in Germany’ 96). The film is an oft-cited reference within discussions of the *Ostalgie* phenomenon, no doubt owing to its resonance among the public and its ascribed pedagogical usefulness as a means to engage with the issues surrounding re-unification, the loss of the GDR, and possible future paths for the nation and its citizens.

As discussed in chapter one, the ‘ostalgic’ wave of memorialisation and musealisation for aspects of life within the former GDR perceived to have been lost became a hot topic in the 1990s, and this was reflected in cinema. A number of feature-films, ranging from the slapstick of *Go Trabi Go* (Peter Timm, 1991) to the more affectively sophisticated *Sonnenallee* (Leander Haußmann, 1999), had spawned a discursive space within German national film culture where politically and emotionally charged conflicts over the past and the present formed: how to appropriately portray and

remember the GDR, and how to frame discussions of current issues relating to the economic and social consequences of re-unification. In other spheres, light-hearted television trivia quiz shows about GDR knowledge, and the emergence of a retro/kitsch market for ex-GDR and GDR-inspired objects in consumer culture, triggered further debate. Through these cultural effects, the ‘Stasi state’ is transformed into a world of peculiar commodities (Cooke, ‘*Ostalgie*’s Not What It Used to Be’ 148). Becker’s film entered into this arena of cultural, social, and political negotiations and, while it received criticism from some quarters for failing to deal adequately with the dictatorship’s history, it has also been regarded as providing a refreshingly nuanced perspective into the experiences of East Germans through re-unification. I argue that this nuance is expressed partly through its self-aware commentary on the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* and other forms of cultural memory.

There is a wealth of writing on *Good Bye, Lenin!* questioning the extent to which it contributes to, or provides a critique of *Ostalgie* – whether through visual identifications with GDR commodities and aesthetics, its tragi-comic form, or its sentimental portrayal of the protagonists.<sup>13</sup> Politically, the *Ostalgie* debates have often proved divisive. With the GDR’s disappearance, what has been deemed to be at stake is ‘what remains?’: the memories and legacies of that nation and its erstwhile citizens. On the one side, it is argued that *Ostalgie* represents nothing more than an exculpation of the GDR’s history as a dictatorship: a wilful amnesia towards its human rights abuses, its population surveillance and its lack of freedoms. On the other side, *Ostalgie* is lauded as an expression of memory ‘from below’ where, in contradiction

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<sup>13</sup> Some examples of scholarship that go into these dimensions include: Timothy Barney’s ‘When We Was Red’, Jennifer M. Kapczynski’s ‘Negotiating Nostalgia’, and Nick Hodgin’s ‘Aiming to Please?’.

to the dominating views of the GDR's history, the everyday experiences and agency of East Germans can be made visible. *Good Bye, Lenin!* self-reflexively engages with the debates that have followed re-unification, by managing, simultaneously, through its multi-layered and nuanced depiction of the GDR and the *Wende*, to critique both the dictatorship's most problematic characteristics and the impact the West's brand of political and economic organisation can have on individuals. Becker's film questions the past; more precisely, it asks *of us* to question *our own* relationship to the past, i.e. our personal and cultural memories.

Given that *Good Bye, Lenin!* has had such an impact on the ways in which the GDR and the *Wende* are collectively imagined and, considering the fact that its plot contends directly with the concept of memory (i.e. the (mal)functioning of the memory of a central character), we can categorise this film as both 'memory-productive' and 'memory-reflexive', in Astrid Erll's terms (137).<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that Becker's film entered into an already existing, contentious debate. Ben Gook remarks that if we are to understand that 'film *produces* more than it *represents*' (his emphasis), 'we can notice the film's success had an impact in shifting the ways the GDR was thought about in Germany and beyond, including spurring another round of *Ostalgie*' (174). I argue that cinematic affect, corporeally experienced, is a spark of that *production*. In this chapter, I find that *Good Bye, Lenin!*, rather than merely mirroring *Ostalgie*, affectively invites responses from the spectator, which then shape the film's 'memory-productive' qualities. The extent to which its self-reflexively mediated critique of *Ostalgie* succeeds in overcoming its own 'ostalgic mode of filmmaking' may remain perpetually in debate (Kapczynski 86); my contribution

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter one for a definition of these terms.

seeks to demonstrate that affect is central to the functioning of its symbolic and metaphoric memory work.

I therefore look to Becker's film as both a reflection on, and an experience of, memories of East Germany. The self-reflexive mode of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, in its understanding of the past, present and future, corresponds to Annette Kuhn's concept, 'memory work': recalling that it describes 'a conscious and purposeful staging of memory' (*Family Secrets* 157). Why was *Good Bye, Lenin!* so successful – and how did it become such an important film within the context of *Ostalgie* debates? One reason could be that this film is, in a way, as much about the future as it is about the past. Looking closely at the technologies of filmic memory employed by Becker and the film-production team, and their affective power in particular, there are a number of elements that suggest answers to the film's ongoing relevance, decades into the (unfinished) processes of cultural change following re-unification. The film's memory work is accomplished through an assemblage of its affective use of melodrama, a material, detailed liveliness in its mise-en-scène and the intertextuality of visual references. The spectator does not need to have personal involvement with the history of the GDR to be affected by the film. *Good Bye, Lenin!* calls for a response from the spectator on two fronts. On the one hand, *universal* questions of love, family and life are asked; on the other, the more *specific* story of both the dramatic and everyday consequences of the sudden disappearance of a country and its political and social systems are placed in the spotlight.

This chapter asks where the film's memories are found, looking to corporeal affect, as well as the film's formal, aesthetic, and narrative characteristics for answers. *Good Bye, Lenin!* codes its memory work in a variety of symbolic gestures, I interrogate



how the film's representations interact with its affective qualities. To do this, I develop my critique by questioning the way the film temporally positions the spectator, applying this thesis's central, embodied film-theoretical approach. This chapter investigates how both personal and cultural memories have embodied aspects that are activated in the process of watching a film such as *Good Bye, Lenin!*, in which the spectator is invited to 'experience' - i.e. contemplate, interpret, question, remember, and 'be in' – the past.

### **The Politics of *Ostalgie***

Nostalgia: *nostos* – return home; *algia* – longing

The central conceit of Becker's film is that teenager Alexander Kerner (Daniel Brühl) must create and maintain the illusion of a 'really-existing GDR' within 79m<sup>2</sup> of his family's high-rise apartment in East Berlin. The tragic catalyst behind this humorous exercise is that his mother, Christiane (Katrin Sass), has had a heart attack and doctors have warned that any further shocks might prove fatal. To her children, neighbours, and colleagues, Christiane appeared to be committed to the GDR's socialism, and her heart attack occurs when she sees Alex arrested at a protest march. To protect her from discovering that, during her coma, the entire country has collapsed, Alex must search for increasingly hard-to-come-by GDR consumables, or failing that, must fake them. As the changes of the *Wende* find their way into Christiane's illusory bubble, Alex has to become innovative. Together with his colleague Denis, he records self-made news presentations to explain, among other developments, the presence of Western products and people intruding into his GDR-on-a-lifeline. And so, as the two Germanys rapidly become one, in the reality transpiring outside the bedroom, Alex

must increasingly deviate in his fabrications from the 'real' history of the GDR and re-unification. This culminates in a representation of an inverted *Wende*, an almost whimsically inaccurate 'third way', in which the GDR opens its barriers to those from the West seeking refuge from a culture of materialism and hedonistic overconsumption. Here, Becker's film gives expression to a political dream, as Paul Cooke writes, 'allowing the spectator a moment to reflect on what might have been, and to consider the limitations of the materialism of contemporary Western capitalist democracies ('Watching the Stasi' 121).

In order to investigate whether Becker's film contributes to an uncritical nostalgia for the GDR, or whether it instead reinforces the dominant remembrance of the GDR as an illegitimate state (or perhaps whether it supplies a nuanced critique of both sides of this particular political fence), it is worth turning to Svetlana Boym and her theoretical work on nostalgia and its manifestations and affects. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym offers a typology of nostalgia, revealing how it is that we, as individuals and groups, fall under its influence. She distinguishes between two forms of nostalgia, which she terms the 'restorative', stressing the '*nostos*', wishing to reconstruct the 'lost home', and the 'reflective', which stresses the '*algia*', longing for 'longing' itself:

The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover, the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its "original image" and remain eternally young. Reflective nostalgia is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. *Reflection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis (49).

According to Boym, restorative nostalgia mystifies, in that it does not consider itself as nostalgia, but rather as ‘truth and tradition’; whereas reflective nostalgia is more fluid, weaving its way through multiple interconnecting layers of place and time, often preferring details to grand symbols. This typology allows Boym to distinguish between a ‘national memory that is based on a single version of national identity, on the one hand, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define individual memory, on the other hand’ (13–14). Within *Good Bye, Lenin!* there are elements of each of these nostalgias, represented not only in the characters and their portrayals of cultural and individual memories, but also working on us as spectators. On this point, O’Brien observes that the film grants ‘nearly equal attention to the rebuilding of home and to the acknowledgement of irretrievable loss’ (34). In doing so, Becker’s film draws attention to ‘the postmodern preoccupation with ruptures, discontinuities, and absences in order to question the master narrative that sees the period 1989-90 as the inevitable triumph of capitalism over Communism (34).

A key part of its balancing act, between representing, producing, and critiquing *Ostalgie*, is the film’s self-reflexivity; Becker self-consciously illuminates the very mechanisms through which his film portrays memory. In this light, Alex’s exhaustive searching for quotidian GDR products to make his creation of the recently dissolved country ‘real’, while functionally necessary to the plot, more broadly reflects the quest of the *Ostalgiker* to recover a lost world and the ways the film itself recreates the GDR for our own exercise in remembrance as we watch it.

It would doubtless be surprising to many to observe the way that material goods from the former GDR have been ascribed (popular-)cultural and consumerist value following re-unification, as the socialist state had rarely been conceived in terms of having a 'genuine' consumer culture (Betts, 'Twilight of the Idols' 734). These commodities, which originally existed as part of the socialist economy and everyday life have now been ascribed a new worth, denoted not only in cultural terms, but also monetarily, as people 'cash-in' on the *Ostalgie* craze, turning the phenomenon into a business (See Hodgkin and Pearce; Berdahl, '[N]Ostalgie'). Writing in the year 2000, and therefore commenting on the *Ostalgie* culture during the period of the conception of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, Martin Blum contends that the phenomenon is a response to loss of identity: 'the remembering of seeming innocuous things, as brand names, products and other trivia of everyday life helps to assert and maintain an identity that has been under attack for the last ten years' (249).

Alex's project to recreate the GDR for his mother's sake quickly becomes complicated, as the speed with which re-unification rushes into the formerly socialist landscapes of consumer materials and practices is astonishing. Eastern goods disappeared almost overnight in supermarkets, an event which is portrayed directly in the film: Alex is baffled as he attempts to find a jar of gherkins from the *Spreewald* for his mother in a surreally transformed shop – filled with the western capitalist promise of choice and endless purchasing power. The array is dazzling, yet precisely not what Alex is looking for. As John Borneman explains, many *Ossis* promptly abandoned Eastern consumables in favour of those which were defined as particularly Western:

In the days and weeks after the opening, East Germans gorged themselves on the symbolic goods of West German nationness ... They flocked to the shopping centers and stores in a consumptive orgy that kept West German businesses open long after the state-mandated (and sacred) closing hours, and they sought those items that most define the West German self: cars, indexing power and prosperity, pornography, symbolizing pleasure and free time, travel out of their country, jeans of the sort identifying one as *westlich* (321).

In the absurdity of Alex's obsessive searching, Becker playfully satirises the *Ostalgie* that, some years after the *Wende*, has created a market for the return of many of the Eastern products that had been so quickly replaced: a critique of a restorative nostalgia. Yet the gentle, humorous tone of this critique lacks malice or derision, as Alex's devotion to sourcing or faking old products is presented in equal parts as farcical and poignant, reflecting the film's overall position as a tragi-comic exercise in remembrance. This mood is illustrated well in a sequence in which Alex and his girlfriend Lara are exploring an abandoned apartment with a view to moving in. Alex's delightful exclamations of 'Mocca-fix Gold!' and 'Tempobohnen!' are comically juxtaposed with Lara's joy at finding (what to most people would be far more valuable) a working telephone line and connected utilities. Despite our laughter, we share in his over-the-top delight as he finds a trove of unopened GDR foodstuffs in the abandoned apartment because it represents his devotion to, and love for, his mother.

Of all the GDR goods, or imitations, that Alex searches for, the *Spreewaldgurken* prove the most elusive. When Christiane requests some of these almost immediately upon arriving back from the hospital, Alex is unable to source even an empty jar to

fake with newly imported gherkins from Holland, which are all that can be bought, following the overnight restocking of Eastern supermarkets with Western consumables. Tragi-comic in their juxtaposition are Christiane's frail desire and Alex's struggle to satisfy it. Yet, in a neat example of the potential absurdity within contested GDR memory, it is now possible to purchase *Spreewaldgurken* as souvenirs from the airports in Berlin, their status as a cult item presumably deriving from *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s influence. This is especially ironic, considering the film's playful critique of the penchant of the paradigmatic *Ostalger* for an obsession with a 'restorative' (in Boym's terms) reappropriation of GDR consumables – raising the question of whether the film's self-reflexive mode is capable of overriding its simultaneous, celebratory use of the tropes of *Ostalgie*.<sup>15</sup> The transfer from onscreen trope to marketable nostalgia object exemplifies the memory-productive power of this film: the *Nachleben* of the *Spreewaldgurken*, if it is permitted to borrow Aby Warburg's term, can be found in the film's memory work, in the affecting 'tragi-comic' pathos in Christiane's desire for the suddenly-absent *Gurken*. The feelings aroused in spectatorial responses have been actualised into the same commodification of East German memory that the film critiques.

Daphne Berdahl, seeking to reframe discussions of *Ostalgie* away from reactive politics and assert that the phenomenon reveals remembrance practices worthy of serious consideration, argues that ostalgie instances do not necessarily point to identifications with the former state, but rather with 'different forms of oppositional

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<sup>15</sup> Mattias Frey argues that *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s 'authentic self-reflexivity' does not necessarily produce a subversive effect: 'Even if *Good Bye, Lenin!* acknowledges history as a hodgepodge of manipulable discourses, it retreats from the implication of its own self-consciousness' (119).

solidarity and collective memory'. Some practitioners of *Ostalgie* may find products reminders of 'daily hardships' since re-unification. According to Berdahl, 'loss, belonging, solidarity, and a time that differentiates *Ostis*' are all tied into *Ostalgie*'s evocations of 'feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction – often within the same individuals' ('[N]Ostalgie' 203). Berdahl contends that multiple and contradictory emotional responses are possible in any single example of a person acting nostalgically for the former East. At this point, we note how individuals experiencing *Ostalgie* appear less concerned with 'facts' – a person's nostalgic identifications may be in response to those complicated factors suggested by Berdahl. Taking cultural memory seriously requires our paying attention to emotional responses following historical change (such as nostalgia). *Good Bye, Lenin!* values these qualities, which could be described as 'emotional truths': Alex does not necessarily need to find the product itself, but is able to convince his mother that he has, by filling old GDR jars with the new western produce. His love for his mother is true, despite this pretence, attesting to the importance of empathising with, and valuing, a sometimes contradictory and paradoxical layering of memory and history in people's lived experience.

The film's political stance regarding the former GDR is one that is not necessarily afforded much breathing space in the highly charged atmosphere of contested memory. Instead of encouraging divisive reactions, which would reify the polarisation of the memory debates, *Good Bye, Lenin!* searches for a middle ground (approximating Sabrow's *Arrangementgedächtnis*). Its point-of-view does not explicitly conform to either the broadly left-wing view, which points to failings of capitalism and a superiority of the political system in the GDR (*Fortschrittsgedächtnis*), or the (centre/right-wing) 'western-triumphalist' view

(*Diktaturgedächtnis*). Rather, it is a perspective hoping to avoid a dichotomous split altogether. *Good Bye, Lenin!* offers an experience of the GDR that is clearly intended to appeal emotionally to a universal audience, showing it to be a place where people lived, worked, loved, laughed, and grieved. In short, a country where people experienced achievements and failures, in both private and public lives. While memories of this country will certainly, on many planes, be culturally specific to that time-and-place, some will exhibit universally recognisable markers, for instance in the pleasure in food, the role of family, or the trials and joys of love.

*Good Bye, Lenin!* encapsulates many of the predominating discourses and contests of re-unification, however, the film avoids focusing too sharply on points of political difference and antagonism between *Wessis* and *Ossis*. Allusions are certainly made to contemporary political, social and economic issues: the older residents of the apartment block, for example, demonstrate a (stereo)typical resentment of the negative consequences of re-unification among some Easterners, such as the rise in unemployment. Alex and Ariane encounter a revolving door of doctors in the hospital on each visit – many professionals chose to leave for the West following re-unification. On the other side of the equation, the collective joy in the prospect of a new, German unity is conveyed through the coming-together of people to celebrate the national team's success in the World Cup of 1990. The film is dotted with temporal 'milestones' – memory-triggers that work for the audience, placing them in the world of the film by conjuring a familiar time-and-place. The World Cup is a way to remember when things happened; according to Becker,<sup>16</sup> these milestones serve as a 'landmark' of time, a geographical metaphor for the temporal plane. Placing the

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<sup>16</sup> Becker discusses his use of these milestones in the special 3-DVD release of the film.



spectator into the film via these landmarks, Becker argues, assists in keeping the attention of those watching, preventing them from dropping out of the film.

Believability, even for this film, delving deeply into a fantasy, remains important for the spectator's memory work.

The images of the German nation coming together to share and witness the World Cup shown in *Good Bye, Lenin!* seem prescient, upon later reflection, to the positive affect widely observed of the 2006 World Cup held in Germany, where public celebrations of 'Germany as nation' flourished. The documentary *Deutschland, ein Sommermärchen* (Sönke Wortmann, 2006) records a shift in the expression of national identity in the social life of Germany, with many people feeling 'normalised' enough to celebrate their Germanness more openly, in front of the whole world. This demonstrates a new patriotism, suggesting that perhaps the 'dark' national history now casts a smaller shadow than at any point since World War II (Schiller; Majer-O'Sickey).

A similar image is found in *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s post-*Wende* euphoria, with the East Germans' willingness towards unity symbolised by their waving of German flags – which have been made up-to-date through the simple means of cutting out the hammer and compass. Bornemann writes how the East Germans 'crossed out the first "D" and the "R" in the acronym "DDR", leaving only a "D,"' (321). These flags, with the sudden absence of the GDR, signify the intentional, speedy reimagining of the national German community, with East Germany perceivable through its surgical removal. However, in another light, this image foreshadows the sense shared by many East Germans later, that their country was altogether too easily and quickly wiped out, leaving only a hole in the place of a stable national identity. A swift transition to unity

was further complicated by the revealing of East/West difference. Historian Mary Fulbrook observes the shift from a generally shared belief in 1989-90 in an ‘intrinsic German identity’, captured in the slogan ‘Wir sind ein Volk!’, to a troubling awareness as both East and West Germans realised the extent to which they had grown apart over nearly half a century of radically different experiences’ (*The People’s State* vi). The ease by which the GDR could cut out from the flag, in order to symbolize a new unity, belies the future pain of that country’s sudden absence, which would come to be felt by many Easterners once the collective wave of joy of the *Wende* had crashed.

### **The Feeling of the Time**

As we have seen, nostalgia is woven into *Good Bye, Lenin!*’s temporality, contributing to both its emotional and entertaining content. The nostalgic mode, whether it is being critiqued or performed (or both) in Becker’s film, is tied to the film’s narrative development. ‘One basic function of narration is the building and conservation of memory’, as Andreas Böhn has observed, ‘narration links one moment in time to another, and it links the present to the past’ (245). Many of these stories, Böhn goes on to argue, function to explain and legitimise the contemporary social world that exists at the time such stories are formed. In other words, time and narration are linked to both memory and identity. When we are active in engaging with the manner in which we imagine our pasts, especially on a group level such as the ‘national’, we are interacting with cultural memory in the process of making sense of the past.

The narrative of *Good Bye, Lenin!* addresses us from a flexibly uncertain time in the post-unification present, a point that is anchored by Alex's disembodied, off-screen narration. He speaks to us from an unspecified time after all the events portrayed in the film have concluded. Anchored loosely to this point in time, the film jumps across multiple timeframes. The timespan for the film's plot runs from the summer of 1978 until October 1990 (and, implicitly, beyond), with the bulk of the action taking place across the period of the *Wende*. Thus, while the film deals with the *Wende* as an historical event, it differentiates itself from 'period' pieces such as von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) by not being predominantly set, statically, in one historical era, or chronological point. Rather, the audience experiences the entirety of the film by dynamically interacting between this shared 'present tense' from which Alex speaks and the shifting points in time visually depicted as memories and histories. When considered in this manner, the entirety of the film can be understood as being framed wholly as a kind of 'flashback' – we are looking out from an 'unspecified present' in post-unification Germany, a temporal experience which is mediated through Alex's voiceovers and the combined effects of the technical presentation of all of the time-jumps and memory-work within the diegesis and filmic montages.

From the opening sequence in *Good Bye, Lenin!* the audience is being primed for a film about memory. With the screen still in darkness, we are introduced to the film's musical theme composed by Yann Tiersen: a rolling, melancholic piano refrain, which calmly inspires a sentimental affect in the listener, as it sequentially moves between rhythmically steady major and minor harmonies. An image in sepia tones slowly fades into view, captioned: *Unsere Datsche, Sommer '78*. The spectator is made aware that this sequence is not contemporaneous with the 'present'.

Furthermore, the East German word *Datsche* locates the film geographically within the GDR. We suspect that this image is not from the central time-scheme of the film; the image initially appears in a small, boxy format, the footage shaky and typical of hand-held home-movie. In the background, we hear the sound of a rolling-film camera, the whirring of the frames of memory being filmed is heard haptically, and the footage has that slightly fast-forward motion typical of early film. The visual effect of lines materially streaking down the screen further immerse the spectator into this 'aesthetic' of memories of the past. The 'content' of these initial moving images is of a boy pushing a girl in a wheelbarrow through the garden of the *Datsche*; we hear the universally nostalgic sound of children at play. The two children move closer towards us. We hear a man's voice asking the laughing children to look into the camera; this first sequence ends with the shot fading to black as the boy waves at us (and the man holding the camera – with knowledge gained later we learn he is the children's father, Robert). This all happens as the boxy, rose-tinted image slowly enlarges to fill the screen. Two more of these home-movie sequences follow, depicting childhood innocence, both taking place at the *Datsche* during the same summer holiday. They fade in and out, and the character credits begin.

The use of a hand-held camera and 16mm film is a gesture, in its movement and kinaesthetics, towards a recognisable feeling of 'being-there'. The shakiness of the image recalls the experiences of 'watching memories' that many will have – looking back at home-movie footage of family holidays, childhood birthday parties, and so on. In this way, we are drawn into a recognisable memory-world, which intersects with the specific world of the DDR. In this instance, the universal imagery of a family holiday merges with its Eastern *Datsche* setting, and then blends into postcard-like images of iconic GDR landmarks in the title sequence. A little later, we see more

‘home-movie’ footage of Alex at a *Pionierlager*, a holiday camp for members of the GDR’s youth organisation. Many of the film’s viewers (particularly its international audience) will have no familiarity with such an experience. However, through the techniques described above, *any* viewer is invited to associate with the ‘feeling’ of memory, jolted by the shaky camera back to their own childhood memories. These tropes introduce ‘memory’ as a thematic centre of the film, and the spectator’s engagement with the home-movie’s hazy, filtered images, its haptic audio, and kinaesthetics, arouses sense-memories and corporeal responses to the formal characteristics of the footage.

The home-movie trope also connotes ‘family’ – a motif which runs through the film in various guises, functioning both as an analogy for unity, and also as a means of engendering empathy in the universal audience. The importance of family touches all people. Alongside the initial sequence, showing an innocuous, ‘universally’ recognisable memory image of children’s summer holidays, Becker interweaves cultural memory artefacts: postcards, representations of historical events, evocations of stereotypical attitudes and ideologies within the GDR. *Good Bye, Lenin!* is definitely ‘about’ the specifics of GDR identity and memory, yet equally, it expresses individual, broadly recognisable nostalgias and personal histories. In this way, it works to avoid problematically telling any ‘single-story’ of the history of the former country, the *Wende*, and post-unification conflicts.

Delving further into the ways that the filmmakers organise the narrative structure of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, it becomes clear that around the tale of a woman being shielded from the collapse of the GDR, there lies a labyrinthine collection of miniature narratives, personal memories, stories and lives which have varying degrees of

‘authenticity’ or ‘truth’. This assemblage reflects the web of mythologies, histories and memories that direct the present and the future; our subjectivities are continuously weaved into a visibility during the present, in ever altering patterns, shaped by our shifting cultural memories. Alex’s childhood narrative is presented as a chronological sequence of flashbacks, which tells the story of his father leaving for the West and abandoning the family (told in the aforementioned off-screen narration from Alex’s perspective). This version of events turns out to be not entirely ‘true’, but created by Christiane, as a protection against her fear that the children would be taken from her, were the state to discover her original intention to flee with her husband. Once Christiane awakes from her coma, ‘real’ history begins to diverge from Alex’s constructed version of the GDR. Whilst in ‘reality’ the two Germanys move inevitably (from our perspective as knowledgeable spectators) towards re-unification, Alex creates an increasingly idealised version of GDR history.

To this end, both the media and material goods feature as tropes, depicting the film’s interpretation of where (East German) cultural memory lives (i.e. as *Erinnerungsorte*). As Christiane desires to hear what is happening outside the four walls of her convalescence, Alex and his colleague Denis (who serendipitously desires to become a film-maker) initially use old footage from GDR news reports from *Aktuelle Kamera*, with Denis (from West Berlin) pointing out that Christiane will not notice the difference as the same old stories were always repeated. While this might appear a derogatory comment, typical of the dominant (western) attitudes to media control and intellectual freedoms of the GDR, it is not a statement intended to be deprecating, and Alex takes no offence. Again, Becker does not wish to deride people’s lives under the GDR, and Denis’s statement could similarly be interpreted as being pertinent to western news media.

Within the film; the malleability of truth within the media is self-reflexively explored, Denis and Alex must stretch their creative wings, faking news reports in the style of in the same archival style they have been showing, to explain the elements of reunification that increasingly intrude on Christiane's GDR-bubble. To make sense of the presence of Coca Cola advertising, Denis plays a reporter, claiming that the drink was invented in the GDR, and the West stole it. To explain the presence of numerous West Germans, they invent a story that the GDR has made an offer to take in refugees from across the Wall, wishing to flee the trappings and fetters of a consumerist, capitalist system.

Alex and Denis's final bulletin from this alternative reality is the most audacious. They retell, inversely, the fall of the Berlin Wall. This report announces that Alex's childhood hero, the cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn has replaced Erich Honecker as *Generalsekretär des ZK der SED*. To this end, Alex employs a taxi-driver *Doppelgänger* he encountered earlier who, ambiguously, may or may not be the real Jähn. 'Jähn' officially declares the borders open to all from the West who wish to seek a better life in the GDR. This is Alex's *coup de grâce*; he is finally making peace with his mother's story and the GDR. Yet, in the final irony of the film, it is now he who is being shielded by an illusion. His girlfriend Lara has told Christiane (now on her deathbed) the truth of the past few months. Christiane watches Alex's revised version of history with a smile; she allows him to believe that he has helped her by keeping the GDR alive. She is proud, but not as he imagines of the utopian GDR, but of him. Thus, the supposed authenticity of 'real history' is superseded by the importance of the family's memories.

Instead of fiercely advocating one version of GDR memory over another, *Good Bye, Lenin!* entertains the sense of multiple, simultaneous, and to a degree legitimated beliefs. The film raises open questions through this sequence; for instance, given that Alex has recently learned that Christiane had planned to join her husband in escaping to the West, and was thus presumably not the committed socialist he had known, why does he continue in his pretence? While the family watches Alex and Denis's broadcast (to end all broadcasts), seated around Christiane's hospital bed, there is an exchange of looks. Alex and Christiane sneak glances at each other, checking whether the other is satisfied in response to the film. The spectator watches the family, but also watches the bulletin, sharing in its affect both directly and mediated by the family's response. The sum of all this looking tells as a lot about this scene, and *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s overarching message – but it does not fully explain the affective quality imbedded in this news bulletin. Alex and Christiane are wrapped up into their own world constituted by the multiple temporalities and the multiple realities that have been revealed throughout the film: presents, pasts, and futures with varying relationship to 'actual history'. The ever-present tragi-comic sensibility is here too, Ariane can barely keep a straight face at the audacity of Alex's version of the fall of the Wall, while Christiane appears moved by her son's commitment to her. The footage feels like an echo from a lost GDR, the stirring music of the GDR's national anthem, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen*, plays in the background, while the Jähn-lookalike speaks of a just and utopic socialist GDR which never materialised, but, in this alternative vision, wins the hearts and minds of the West.

The ambiguity of this moment reiterates the film's political standpoint, somewhere in-between a recognition of the positives of re-unification and conveying a respect for the lost potential of what the GDR could have become. As Nick Hodgkin rightly



observes: 'That Alex's mother finally reveals her original plan was for them to leave the GDR with her husband may render her son's deception meaningless but it does not reduce the sincerity of his efforts or negate his idealised GDR' ('Aiming to Please' 106). The film's denouement is perhaps at its most poignant here in the way that it pulls together all the narrative strands from 'reality' and 'illusion' into one affecting moment.

Christiane dies soon after, giving this scene a dual-function of redemption and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In his narration over the very final sequence in the film, where we reencounter the same rose-tinted, amateur-styled shots of his mother on a trip to the Pioneer Park with her students, Alex explicitly states that his creative efforts to preserve the GDR have been fundamentally a memory of his mother, and are thus representative of his idea of his mother's vision of how the GDR could have been. Alex's personal interpretation of his mother's wishes is based on a 'lie', informed by her performed identity as a committed socialist, but his memory of her and of his upbringing is no less valid – this is conveyed through the affect as much as the vision.

Stuart Hall writes that cultural identity 'is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past' (225). The 'play' of the temporalities in the film can be thought, in-and-of-itself, as a demonstration of how cultural memory operates. Both individual and collectively-shared experiences shape identities in the present, which are then (re)visited through remembrance (on a personal level, yet always inextricably in social groups, as Halbwachs would argue). As Hall contends, the relationship between memory and identity is not only oriented towards the past, but is also about the future. Hall argues:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized, past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past ... identities are the names we give to all the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (225).

Cultural identities are construed by Hall as having a ‘future tense’ as processes of ‘becoming’, and having both ‘past’ and ‘present tenses’ because of the continual reshaping of the past in the present. Accordingly, in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, we observe processes of musealisation of the GDR, which reflect the wish to collect, catalogue, or store objects and memories (Böhn 254). This desire is rendered in the film through Alex’s efforts; these do not simply preserve the GDR, but reshape its cultural memory – demonstrating the ‘constant transformation’ described by Hall. The film does not portray Alex’s revising of GDR history as inherently dangerous or threatening, obscuring the true nature of life under a dictatorship (most of the film’s humour comes from the quirks that emerge from his illusion). Rather, we are invited through this amusing (yet poignant) reshaping of the past to consider our identities in the present: how they are formed around an array of personal and collective experiences. A ‘future tense’ emerges again, embedded in nostalgia, the emotion that contributes so much thematic thrust to the film. ‘Nostalgia’, as Boym argues, ‘can be retrospective but also prospective. ... Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future’ (xvi). We continually refer to our individual versions of cultural memories, inflecting and altering them with our

personal histories throughout future ‘presents’; reshaping once again our identities and contemporary self-conceptualisations. Moreover: ‘Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales’, Boym goes on to explain and, unlike the case of melancholia, which is restricted to the individual’s consciousness, ‘nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory’ (xvi).

*Good Bye, Lenin!* confronts us with reoccurrences of the past not only in its portrayal of *Ostalgie* and through insertions of culturally significant imagery, such as archival footage of the Wall being torn down, but also through the development and exposition of the family’s story. The private history, which we see unfold as flashbacks (within the total ‘flashback’ of the whole film) at the start, forms the foundation of the ‘tragedy’ side of the tragi-comic form. The trauma of their father’s leaving is at the core of the emotional punch that *Good Bye, Lenin!* hits the spectator with, in its tragi-comic ‘left-right’ boxing action of humour and pathos. Christiane’s hidden sorrow at not fleeing the GDR with her husband is revealed in the film’s most reflective and touching moments; one of these is the scene depicting the sudden reappearance of Alex and Ariane’s father in the narrative. Their father’s appearance is dramatically unsettling for the whole Kerner family, as it destabilises their interpersonal identities and the family structures they have worked to establish since his leaving. A notable interpretation here of this narrative function is that Christiane substitutes the state, in place of her husband, as the patriarchal figure (Gook 184–85; Hillman 227). Without discounting this interpretation, I would like to further consider the affective quality of the sequence depicting his return, and its contribution towards the film’s overall commentary on separation and proximity – a theme with powerful resonances given its setting of Berlin, the city working to overcome the Wall that once split it in two.

It is a chance encounter that brings the father back into the narrative. When he appears, at the Burger King drive-through counter where Ariane works, it is the first we have seen or heard of him since Alex's memory of his disappearance at the start of the film. With no foreshadowing, his reappearance is meant to be unexpected, not only for Alex and Ariane, but for us. His very presence shocks the spectator, shifting the weight away from the humorous efforts to prevent Christiane discovering the fall of the Wall, through this sobering reminder of a great sadness in the family's past – a sadness resulting directly from the regime's policies of control and the restriction of movement. Ariane watches, frozen, as her father approaches like a ghost out of the past, on the small boxy television showing the grey-scale CCTV footage of the drive-through. The visual meeting is almost wholly confined to her seeing him on this grainy, unclear image, and her only communication is entirely out of the Burger King training manual: 'Danke, dass Sie sich für Burger King entschieden haben'. The restrictiveness of this limited visual interaction is alienating, for the spectator and for Ariane. Ariane's workplace embodies capitalism, but the Wall has imposed for decades the separation of family and of East and West. This is not overcome in this moment of family reunion. Through this sequence's obscured vision and the corporate blunting of emotional release, we sense a paradoxical juxtaposition of closeness and distance, between past and present, father and child, and the two Germanys. The otherwise high-intensity colour in the film's palette contrasts with the black-and-white images on the television. For his children, Robert has been as far away as cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn, who we also encountered in grainy images which the younger Ariane and Alex watched, beamed from space onto their television, their father having already left for the West.

The perception of distance that characterises Ariane's experience at the drive-through emphasises separation and division of East and West, is further exaggerated in the sequence after Ariane has told Alex of her encounter. In a voiceover, Alex begins to describe the image he pictures in his mind: his father living in gross, Western luxury. We then are shown a vision of an imaginary figure, a huge man who eats cheeseburgers every day, lazing on a deckchair by his swimming pool, his large house in the background. This vivid, negative depiction is less 'realistic' than the fleeting glimpse we are offered at Burger King, and the affective quality differs accordingly. Here, the film's discussion of the broader social concerns of re-unification meets the depiction of its characters' intimate memories; the past is brought into a dynamic conjunction with the present, the personal biographies of the characters are presented in the shadow of the historical events that have affected them. Scenes appealing to a universal 'feeling of memory' and the particularly 'East German' pleasures, dreams, and failures demonstrate the film's emotional approach to story-telling and to the *Wende*, and they exemplify the range of its mood, from light-hearted to sincere.

### **Keeping Pace with Re-Unification**

While the film exhibits multiple temporalities, it also simulates multiple tempos – differing velocities of time. In the audio-commentary that accompanies a special 3-DVD release of the film, Becker acknowledges the unusual length of the introductory sequences; here the 'history' of the family is presented - in order to properly engage the audience with the characters' qualities and contextual development prior to the central crisis that drives the film. As part of these framing flashback sequences, we learn that Christiane suffered a mental breakdown as a consequence of the trauma of her husband fleeing from the GDR to the West. It was felt that this amount of time

was required in order to connect viewers emotionally with the family. According to Becker, a viewer might wonder ‘when does the film actually begin?’ However, the sensitive quality of the music, the footage of children (evoking sentiment from the spectator), and the drama of familial tension linked with Christiane’s mental illness following her husband’s *Republikflucht*, convey to the audience that we are well into the emotional content of the film. The unusual length of time taken to go through these opening ‘flashback’ sequences, compared with Hollywood tradition, testifies to the importance the director and writing team have given to the characters’ histories. In other words, their personal, culturally-inflected memories are crucial to the film’s character-development and the consequent investment, on the part of the spectator, in the film’s authenticity, as well as its believability. Here, the film’s pacing involves the spectator in the interplay between the affective, personal memories of the Kerner family and their cultural context, as the story unfolds within its GDR thematic backdrop, revealing the importance of ‘the past’ in its narrative.

However, *Good Bye, Lenin!* is reluctant to look only to the past in its consideration of identity in reunified Germany. For instance, one sequence, in which Alex and Lara visit a nightclub venue on a date, demonstrates an optimism in the film’s approach to *Wende*-moment, celebrating youth, hope, and the future. For this scene, the filmmakers were clearly inspired by the ‘Kunsthau Tacheles’ – a well-known art space in a building that was taken over by artists in 1990. Alex and Lara enter a graffiti-covered, buzzing venue with a bizarrely-costumed band playing, and become immediately swallowed up by a vibrant, quirky, bohemian mass of people being moved by the loud electronic music. This chaotic, hedonistic atmosphere is left behind as they continue upstairs and find a private space, sitting at the edge of the building, where they find a moment to contemplate themselves and their place in time

and space. This scene is definitively positive, in contrast to elements of the film that portray eastern disappointment, such as the stereotype of the *Jammerossi*, embodied anachronistically in the character of Herr Ganske, the elderly neighbour always complaining about unemployment and the general state of things. Here, Becker gives expression to the ambivalent emotions present at the time of the *Wende*. The film slows, reflecting on the youthful potential in Alex and Lara, and perhaps in the new Germany too. O'Brien writes how this positivity is conveyed through an assemblage of affective cinematic techniques:

In the void created by the death of the GDR and the not-yet birth of the unified FRG, anything seems possible. Along with the setting and camera work, the soundtrack reveals the emancipatory utopian dimension of the void. Alex and Lara are seen talking, but their voices are swallowed up by the lingering music, so that the audience is compelled to imagine their conversation, just as the characters are imagining their open future of endless possibilities (66).

This moment, as the camera pulls away from the pair, is particularly affective, combining pathos with a feeling of hovering or floating, produced by the film's movement and Alex and Lara's position, perched at the edge of a half-ruined building. The slowing in time works with the evocation of space, and this break in the film's often hectic progression achieves a momentary shift in its narrative pacing. Following Alex's series of dramatic and difficult life-experiences, from childhood to his mother's current precarious state, the spectator can now pause and take a breath, sharing Alex and Lara's smoke from their joint, and their perspective over the city. There are possibilities and optimism of new love opening up ahead: an attitude that is reflected in the creativity possible from the ruins of the building they are in, and

within the birthing of a re-unified Germany. The spectator shares this pause of optimistic reflection, and the trope of youth is not only symbolically put to work, but through corporeal means. The film's shifting pace inspires the spectator as if a refreshing breath of life was being blown into the country.

In contrast to this moment of pause, time-lapse sequences are interspersed throughout the film, instilling in the spectator a sense of the haste of the *Wende*. While Christiane is lying in a kind of stasis within the 79m<sup>2</sup> apartment, the world outside is indeed, unbeknownst to her, frenetically changing. We zoom around with Alex and Denis in their van as they work to supply the city with thousands of satellite dishes, the World Time Clock at Alexanderplatz spins at a furious pace, traffic whooshes past below the Kerner's apartment window. The archival footage, which, in his words, Becker has interspersed throughout to 'kurz und prägnant, die Sache erzählen', flashes us with jolts of memory, with montages of the famous imagery of the fall of the Wall, simulating the speed with which the 'bloodless revolution' surprised the world. The symbolic power of the Wall has been well noted. 'The dominance of this image persists', as Pugh argues, '[p]art of the wall's importance lies in the fact that it gave physical form to a political and ideological divide that was already conceived of in spatial terms (3). In this way, the Wall came to signify not only East/West division in Berlin, but also in a very material, 'concrete' way, the structure embodied Churchill's Iron Curtain.

Becker's use of these montages with their potent imagery causes them to function as *our* 'flashbacks' as spectators – drawn from a global cultural memory of the momentous events, gathering us into the narrative: We experience these past events, which are now interwoven into this film's (fictional) personalised sliver of historical



narrative – juxtaposing the personal with the national – and in doing so we are offered an experience of how cultural memories are simultaneously individual and collective in nature. The velocity of these sequences, where historical time appears to move more quickly than the film’s narrative, are contrasted with the far calmer pace of time within Christiane’s bedroom, where the GDR is being maintained, something that Alex’s narration highlights in the film:

Das Leben in unserem kleinen Land wurde immer schneller. Irgendwie waren wir alle wie kleine Atome in einem riesigen Teilchenbeschleuniger. Doch fern von der Hektik der neuen Zeit lag ein Ort der Stille, der Ruhe und der Beschaulichkeit, in dem ich mich endlich mal ausschlafen konnte.

The film comments on the disorienting and dislocating suddenness, which marked the abrupt end to the GDR, as Alex begins to take refuge in his own reconstructed, fanciful world of memory. In Paul Betts’s analysis of the *Wende*, he draws a connection between the near-instantaneous abandonment of so much that was the GDR (or at least those objects – commodities, images etc. – which would come to be remembered by some as ‘the GDR’), and the psychic conditions that produced cultural nostalgias for a lost future, as much as a lost past: ‘No doubt this East German nostalgia is directly linked to the fact that the GDR has literally vanished from the political map. It was this speedy absorption – what East German detractors often called ‘Kohl-onization’ – that made the GDR story so unique’ (‘Twilight of the Idols’ 734). The spectator’s perception of the speed with which the *Wende*’s ‘wind of change’ accelerates the events in *Good Bye, Lenin!* is affected by Christiane’s reality – an unwitting, dreamlike experience that constantly teeters on the margins of her awareness. Through the amnesia of her coma and sheltered by Alex’s illusions, her

distorted perception of the momentous events exaggerates the spectator's response to the changes that occurred between the Wall's collapse and the lead up to reunification. Returning to Betts's account of the historical process, he explains the vote for a speedy reunion sacrificed 'any possibility of national autonomy and/or socialist reform'. Regardless of whether this constitutes a 'missed opportunity for building a viable 'third way' democratic socialism', the 'so-called voluntary annexation forever severed East German history and memory' ('Twilight of the Idols' 734–35).

This summary underscores the political and cultural elements in the speed of reunification. The arrivals of Coca Cola, or Westerners moving into the *Plattenbauten* of the East are changes that Alex manages to warp into an alternative reality. These come at him (and us) at an increasingly unmanageable speed, constantly threatening to destabilise the tenuous false reality that he feels his mother needs; the stakes are high, to abandon his attempt would risk a fatal heart attack. Often, *Good Bye, Lenin!* (and the *Ostalgie* it critiques) turns to material objects in order to 'grasp' meaning from the everyday. O'Brien argues that the government went 'well beyond the practical necessity of dismantling the former [GDR] state's political and military apparatus as a precondition of German unity', a fact that furthered the sense of loss within Eastern memory (24). She details a striking list of material effects, from the quotidian to more revered items, that all disappeared within a short time: 'The GDR national anthem, flag, emblem, uniforms, and holidays were summarily abolished. Bank account numbers, license plates, and passports were suddenly invalid'. 'This process of forced amnesia', O'Brien concludes, 'occurred with such rapidity that it seemed to many that their own sense of self was being eliminated with the last remnants of their customary old world' (24). Interestingly, it is Christiane's amnesia of the *Wende* itself that prolongs the existence of a version of the GDR in her

bedroom, and prompts Alex's need to hold onto these material objects that are disappearing so quickly outside. Her amnesia, the consequence of her coma, foregrounds a surreal, fairy-tale-like narrative of re-unification: this aspect is explored in relation to its corporeal affects in particular over the next section.

### **Christiane's Experience: Embodying Memory**

Cooke does not interpret Christiane as a representation of 'ordinary' East Germans living a 'normal' life (such as might be found in films more typical of an uncritical *Ostalgie*). He argues that she shares more in common with East German intellectuals such as Christa Wolf; she is 'a reform socialist, who, although critical of the SED, has not lost faith in its original ideological project' (*Representing* 132). When Herr Klapprath, Christiane's erstwhile boss at the school in which she taught, explains to Alex that his mother's apparent dedication to the socialist cause was so strong as to alienate her from her colleagues, we might infer that she represents a typical ideologue: a party apparatchik with unwavering commitment to the socialist realist doctrine. However, as we later discover, she has a far more ambivalent relationship to the state and the regime's dogmatic approach to socialism. On the political implications of this, Hodgkin argues that 'Becker's depiction of this benign Socialist mollifies those on the left who have spent the years since 1989 attempting to wrest Socialism from its association with its notorious Eastern Bloc practitioners' ('Aiming to Please' 106). The extent to which the film's political intentions frame the spectator's response depends largely on the way that the spectator is affected by Christiane's predicament.

On the one level, Christiane's body functions as a site that codes a conflicting array of ideals, memories and values. But her body, together with the assembled film-world (i.e. the 'film's body') that it inhabits, has an affective power that resonates with valences according to both personal and national identifications in the spectator. As has been already indicated, Christiane's role can be read symbolically as an embodiment of the GDR state (there is also an intertextual element, if we consider the significance in the casting of Katrin Sass, a well-known East German actor). On one level, her role is clearly corporeal in this regard; her experience of amnesia, illness and eventual death can be ascribed as bodily metaphors for symptomatic memories of the GDR. Understanding the plot's organisation, with Christiane at the centre, around which the narrative (pushed forward by Alex's activity) revolves, supports this interpretation. While this reading finds meaning in the body-as-metaphor, over the course of the final section in this chapter, I develop an analysis that aims to show how the 'symbolic' and the 'affective' merge in Christiane's figure, arguing there is more to her presence than only this analogy. Recalling that the film's body produces an 'expression of experience by experience', evaluating Christiane's importance in the film's narrative requires we pay attention to the spectator's body, and her perception of Christiane's experience (Sobchack, *Address* 3).

One way that Becker's film seeks to avoid the trap of overly simplistic or reductive story-telling (typical of the early 'unification comedies')<sup>17</sup> is through the multiplicity of meanings that are embodied in Christiane's character. These meanings emerge according to the relations of presence and absence to both a 'real' and an 'imagined' GDR. Christiane is absent from the 'real' *Wende* through her coma and, after that,

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<sup>17</sup> (See Allan, 'Ostalgie, Fantasy' 123)

through Alex's curation of a GDR, increasingly diverging from the real GDR that had existed only a few months ago. The film's climactic revelation, that Christiane's ostensible support for the socialist system was just a cover for her abandoned attempt to flee with her husband, complicates our reading – the husband was not the adulterous defector we believed. Negative memories of the GDR can be found in Christiane's lived experience – to her lasting regret, the nature of the dictatorship tore her away from her husband. Alex's interpretation of his mother's GDR is a further alternative vision, a refuge from the excesses of capitalism and consumerism.

The fragility of this contested area of Germany's cultural memory is embodied in Christiane's frail, bed-ridden presence. The contradictions of the contested interpretations of what the GDR was, and what the *Wende* has produced, are placed before the spectator as a tapestry of meaning woven together around the figure of Christiane; we can come to see her as a symbol of the GDR itself as a nation, reading her place in the film-text as an allegorical personification of the state. In this way, the film becomes a funeral; Alex's memory of his lost mother becomes a collective memory of a lost nation (and perhaps the reverse is also true). Christiane becomes, for Alex, the personification of his memories of the GDR. More than this, she embodies for him a memory of the GDR that never really was, or had the chance to be. Her legacy as his mother, the person who cared for and raised him and has played the most important and influential role in his personal life, becomes intertwined with the legacy of the state, i.e. with the cultural and political circumstances in which he grew up. The film's ending can be read as a commemorative ritual for the passing of the 'GDR that was', and for mourning the loss of the humanitarian socialist project that never was. Alex's fantastical project resulted in his personifying the GDR into his

personal memory of his mother, a memory which is marked as a tragic loss, subjective, yet universally affective through the trope of loss and mourning.

Christiane does more than personify an ‘inevitable’ death of the utopian socialist ideal. Her bodily fragility, introduced with her breakdown, and amplified with her heart attack, engages the spectator with a tangible, physical connection to the fragility of a corporeal human existence; its poignancy lies in portraying a messier and more contradictory reality than simplistic, deterministic representations. We perform identities in cultural frames, experiencing the world across differing planes, not only drawing on primary and personal knowledges, but also interacting with shared cultural understandings and social mythologies to sense and make sense of our realities. These identifications are shared by the spectator, operating here at the dimension of the character’s body. In other words, the spectator’s corporeal response is mimetic: a physical, direct sympathy with Christiane’s predicament and frailty.

### **A ‘Demonstration’ of Violence and Traumatic Memory**

One of the scenes in *Good Bye, Lenin!* that is most obviously ‘physical’, is its portrayal of one of the protest marches that followed in the wake of the celebration of the nation’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In order to investigate how the spectator experiences the violence and trauma of this demonstration sequence, I interrogate the affective quality of the tragic component to Christiane’s experience, as an embodiment of a particular East German narrative. Taking her characterisation as an example of how the spectator engages with the film in a tactile, rather than purely optic, fashion, we can see how it is that *Good Bye, Lenin!* draws us into its depiction of memory in more complicated ways than its negotiation of politicised East German memory contests –

which are typically understood as being represented and identified with (or rejected) on a symbolic and ideological plane. First, let us recall that Laura U. Marks distinguishes between modes of spectatorship that centre on sight, against those which incorporate touch. An ‘optic’ visuality differs from the ‘haptic’: On the one hand, a ‘scopic regime’,<sup>18</sup> regulating the relations between image and spectator is ‘ideally’ one of mastery, whereby the viewer ‘isolates and comprehends the objects of vision’. On the other hand, a haptic visuality structures this relationship as being defined by ‘mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image’ (Marks, *Skin* 184–85).

The sense of touch builds one aspect of the somatic experience of cinema. Gestures, being intentional (but not necessarily intended), also play an important role in the body-language of performing our identities towards and for others. Jennifer M. Barker writes that films express themselves to the world ‘through muscular gestures, which take the form of specific cinematic devices or techniques’, these are a film’s ‘means of communication, the “words” and “phrases” of its body language’ (*The Tactile Eye* 78). In order to understand how the subtleties of these gestures operate within a film’s complex meaning, a tactile analysis must ‘take into account the specific and contextual significance of its unique body language and gestures’ (*The Tactile Eye* 79). Barker provides some examples of how ‘every part of a film’s muscular body can contribute to its expressive behavior and comportment’:

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<sup>18</sup> See Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, for a survey of terms including ‘scopic regime’ and ‘ocularcentrism’ and their usage in visual culture (2–4).

A film might plod along pensively with a slow tracking shot or long take; turn its back on something by cutting away from it; lean forward curiously with a forward-moving tracking shot; or proudly puff out its chest with the use of CinemaScope. A Steadicam shot sweeps along gracefully and confidently or lurks stealthily and with menace, whereas a scene shot by a wobbling hand-held camera might work muscularly and expressively, too (*The Tactile Eye* 79).

When discussing film techniques of movement and expression such as these, it is important to note that these gestures do not belong to or are not performed by the characters on screen; rather they are ‘enacted by and expressive of the films themselves’. Similarly, the ‘film’s body’ (if we recall Sobchack) does not equate to the human ‘bodies’ on the film – the type of identification described is neither camera- nor character-centred (*The Tactile Eye* 80). Returning to the protest sequence in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the violence at the march is authoritarian; we see the *Volkspolizei* laying into the protesters with batons. Christiane sees Alex among those marching, the shock triggers her initial heart attack and her coma. But this violence is felt beyond a visual response to the body-on-body violence depicted on the screen. The spectator responds, corporeally speaking, within an affective framework that works on a level beyond – or in parallel with – identification with those bodies. The spectatorial response certainly manifests as a reciprocal reaction to the violence on screen. However, in the phenomenology of the perceptual interplay between our bodies and the intentionality of the film’s body (which includes but is not limited to the camera, screen and the bodies on-screen), we intimately connect and ‘share’ in Christiane’s collapse not only through embodied identification, but through an immediacy of painful affect.



This functions on an aesthetic-affective dimension. In the chaotic scenes of the authorities striking out at the protesters, the spectator is denied clear, visual perspective of the events. The film lurches and shakes, and the spectator is at once part of the crowd yet strangely distanced, being pulled and jostled along with the images while unable to fully ‘grasp’ these images as clear events. Marks writes that the two-way experience of cinematic touch may not always be ‘like a caress’. She argues that there can be ‘a violence not toward the image but toward the viewer. ... Violence may occur in an abrupt shift from haptic to optical image’ (*Skin* 184). This ‘abrupt shift’ can be identified in the film’s portrayal of the protest, when the shaky and chaotic images of the violence are encountered through Christiane’s gaze. While the close-up images being perceived haptically are already violent in their content, there is a violence in the spectator’s shift from haptic to optic, from immersion to the clarity in the identification with Christiane’s gaze. Suddenly, the spectator sees Alex through Christiane’s eyes – in a shot-reverse-shot between his being arrested, and her shocked recognition of him.

One of the few times that Christiane displays any ‘violence’ herself is her outburst at the *Stasi* men at the beginning of the film. In a moment of unrestrained physical exertion in response to her circumstances, she smacks her hands on the table and screams at them, causing the young Alex to cover his ears and focus even harder on the images of his (and the GDR’s) hero, Sigmund Jähn in his rocket playing on the television. Naturally, following her heart attack and being in a frail condition, her performance and body-language are restrained for most of the film’s duration. Christiane’s lie to her children – that their father simply disappeared, supposedly abandoning the family for another woman in the West – takes its toll on her. Initially

the pain sent her into care, as she suffers a nervous breakdown and is unresponsive and unable to communicate; she explains to Alex, in a touching and vulnerable moment much later on, as he is caring for her following her heart attack, that it was the regular visits by her children which helped give her the strength to carry on. This breakdown can be seen as a foreshadowing of that heart attack at the demonstration. Accordingly, as we wince at the dual-violence in the jointly haptic and optic images of the brutality of the East German forces violently beating protesters into submission, ought we to interpret this as the culmination of the effect of her years of lying to her children and herself about how best to go on living in the GDR? A reading of Christiane's illness as purely symbolic of the result of the loss of GDR fails to capture this narrative and affective attribute of her embodied role in the film.

The moment that catalyses the crisis of the film, through Christiane's collapse, is also one of the most visceral – the literal sense of the word expressed in her heart attack. The film's production team put out a request for volunteers to participate in the demonstration scene, being unable to stretch the budget to afford 600 extras. A number of those who applied had been present during the original demonstration. Becker explains (in the aforementioned DVD commentary) how this played out perfectly for him as they filmed – for a director wishing to re-create a moment of history as affectively and closely as filmic representation allows. This re-enactment became a vividly real act of remembrance for many people, who walked once more in a performative reconstruction of the march. Many of these extras expressed an arousal of traumatic memories of past event in their lived experience, and reported feeling shaken following the filming, owing to the verisimilitude in the re-enactment. The 'prosthetic memories' of the violence of the GDR regime elicited in this sequence

have their own history in the film's production, which relates directly to living memories of the state.

The 'dys-appearing body', Drew Leder's philosophical concept, is a useful tool to assist us in understanding how our bodies come into play in the visual and audible representation of the GDR state's physical violence in this scene. Leder has described our experience of pain as a centripetal force, 'gathering space and time inward to the center' (76). Just before the violence begins at the march, Alex and Lara meet – Alex is choking on an apple, and Lara comes to his aid. The vital reality of our unconscious bodily processes initially draws our attention to Alex's choking, as he fails in his attempt to chant slogans of freedom and eat an apple at the same time. In a foreshadowing of the dramatic damage this event causes Christiane, the body – typically absent from our conscious thoughts – becomes 'visible'. Returning to Leder:

Pain exerts a power that reverberates throughout the phenomenological field, shifting our relations both to the world and to ourselves. There is a disruption of intentional linkages and a constriction of our spatiality and temporality to their embodied centre (79).

This theorisation on the phenomenological experience of pain merges with a haptic, 'felt' experience of film spectatorship. It is interesting that the event of filming awoke affecting memories on those participating. For them, Becker's recreation aroused responses to the visceral experience of witnessed pain (even in the performed mode of the film-set). Christiane collapses upon her witnessing this scene, and Alex's attempts to come to her aid eventually result in his being punched in the gut by the police, causing him to vomit. Abstracted notions which resemble a (Foucauldian) regime of

discipline, as defining the relationship between citizen and state, are narrowed into the focus of the 'here-and-now body' that pain produces: 'the body is no longer a nullpoint but an active presence whose call we must resist' (Leder 76).

These corporeal considerations show how *Good Bye, Lenin!* marries its light-hearted take on nostalgia and cultural memory with a narrative of force and control. These scenes are more typical of the *Diktaturgedächtnis* than *Ostalgie* – and any evaluation of the film in total must consider their place in its story. The presence of bodies in various degrees of pain, on a scale that reaches up to Christiane's life-threatening infirmity, draws both the viewer's intellectual and sensorial attention to the physical plane of the experience and memories of the GDR. Framed in this way, Christiane's episodes of collapse, frailty and institutionalisation affectively raise the spectre of the serious nature of oppressive aspects to GDR experience. To what extent are we to read her illnesses as being the result of pressures of decisions she has had to make to exist under the constraints of the GDR's system? In other words, how are we to read the film's memory of East Germany if her illness is the consequence of her inability to flee with her husband and having to perform the role of committed socialist, only to then see her son arrested among the violent scenes at the march?

### **Germany Reborn: 'Deutschland Lernt Laufen'**

In Hodgins' analysis, *Good Bye, Lenin!* raises points of social conflict and difference in the wake of the *Wende*. However, 'though it invokes the problems of adjustment faced by many in the east, it does so without actually engaging with those issues, seemingly unable or unwilling to flesh out the bones of its social critique' ('Berlin Is in Germany' 42). Hodgins is correct in arguing that many of the serious issues for

easterners resulting from social transformations (unemployment, industrial change, socio-cultural inequalities) are often dealt with only lightly, or through superficial, stereotypical caricatures – such as the ever-complaining Herr Ganske, or the former school director, Herr Klappath, now an alcoholic whose struggles provide comic as much as tragic effect. However, I wish to complicate this view of the film by ‘fleshing out’ the sequence that dramatizes the film’s title with an unnerving and disorienting ‘Good Bye’ to Lenin.

Christiane finally has her cravings for *Spreewaldgurken* sated, though of course Alex’s triumphant discovery of an empty jar provided the means to bring her only a façade, as the gherkins are in fact from Holland. Christiane’s enjoyment of them is made palpable to us nonetheless, through the foregrounded sounds of her chewing, and her grin of satisfaction. Her pleasure, however, is interrupted by her excitement at noticing Paula’s (Ariane’s baby’s) efforts at learning to walk. Watching the baby take her first steps inspires Christiane to get out of bed and see if she, too, can walk. We tense, as she approaches unsteadily towards Paula and the window. We are physically tense with empathy for Christiane’s frail condition, worried she will fall, but we are also nervous because we fear that Alex’s ‘game’ could be up. If Christiane makes it to the window in time to see what attracted Paula’s attention outside, she will see a blimp advertising cigarettes, emblazoned with the slogan ‘Test the West’. We exhale as the blimp passes out of sight just in time, but we are unable to fully relax, because Christiane, emboldened with her newfound strength, sneaks out of the apartment without waking Alex. The camera zooms in on Christiane’s slippers, as she tentatively takes her own ‘first steps’ out of a closeted, illusionary GDR. Christiane’s unsteady emergence into post-Wall Germany elicits a corporeal response in the viewer, which runs alongside the symbolic meaning in this moment: just as we falter and stumble in

a tactile response to seeing Ariane's baby learn to walk – so too are we invited into a muscular, corporeal response, experiencing the national sensation of a newly reborn Germany, as it finds its own footsteps.

In this sequence, Christiane is like a time-traveller to a parallel universe.

As she cautiously shuffles along, the camera draws our attention to images and objects that are quite foreign to the world that she remembers. In the lift, we immediately share Christiane's confusion at the graffiti: a swastika and a cartoon penis. At the entrance to the apartment block there are young people from Wuppertal, in the west, moving some very un-GDR-like furniture (most strikingly, a hideously hot pink lamp-shade); there are BMWs and Audis for sale, and billboards for IKEA and other western goods. The music swells, and we are held in suspense as, together with Christiane, we experience this uncanny world. She encounters a GDR landscape that is out-of-time with her 'reality' – stepping out of Alex's curated 79m<sup>2</sup> musealised GDR into the rapidly transitioning *Wende* moment. The crescendo of tension reaches its height as Christiane hears the sound of a helicopter, and looks up to see a statue of Lenin being carried overhead. This moment is drenched in symbolism, as Lenin's torso appears to be waving goodbye to her, passing surreally in slow-motion, as if in a dream. This caps off Christiane's disorientation. The spectator shares in Christiane's frailty via the assemblage of the filmic event. The dizzying, unsettling affect, first produced in the spectator's perception of Christiane's collapse and illness, reaches a peak. The destabilising, sweeping shot throws the spectator off-balance kinaesthetically – a physical experience which is foundational to the film's symbolic memory work – and this mediates the experience testified to by many easterners of the disorienting effects of the *Wende*.

Christiane's first step into post-Wall Germany retrospectively offers audiences an emotional 'farewell' to socialism, while it simultaneously plays with the idea of Germany's rebirth. This motif is further reinforced through Ariane's news of her pregnancy, together with Rainer making a 'gesamtdeutsches Baby'. The ultrasound of the baby connects our visual understanding of this metaphor with the physical – just as the nurse moves the ultrasound transducer across Ariane's stretched stomach, translating the signals into a moving image of her child, making it real for her eyes to 'touch', so do we touch this corporeal metaphor, and become physically drawn into the optimism that youth and unity can bring, as proffered by the film.

Alongside the motif of rebirth, this 'learning to walk sequence' contains perhaps a further reference to debates from the period of the *Wende* over GDR citizens having achieved self-determination and freedom – becoming 'mündig'. For instance, in the first sentence of *Der vormundschaftliche Staat* (1990), Rolf Henrich measures the GDR's socialism against the *Aufklärung* and finds it wanting: 'die Hoffnungen aus den Gründerjahren des Staatssozialismus [sind] verflogen, dass geänderte Eigentumsverhältnisse an den Produktionsmitteln und ein aufrechter Gang des Menschen automatisch zusammengehen' (9). The principles governing these debates, together with the notion of 'Aufrechter Gang' which had currency among oppositional circles in the GDR (Amberger 561), trace back to Immanuel Kant's essay 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung', where he describes the transition from 'Unmündigkeit' to 'Mündigkeit' through metaphors of walking alone and unhindered (Thiergen 31).<sup>19</sup> Considered in this context, both Paula's and

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, Kant writes: "[Es gibt] nur wenige denen es gelungen ist, durch eigene Bearbeitung ihres Geistes sich aus der Unmündigkeit herauszuwickeln und dennoch einen sicheren Gang zu tun" (6).

Christiane's learning to walk (again) suggest the need for the spectator to think critically and independently when drawing conclusions about the narrative of the *Wende* and its consequences for easterners and westerners.

It is through our connection to Christiane's physicality, and the disorientation, that we are invited to experience a particular memory of the *Wende*: we step out with trepidation together with her, and experience the suddenness of the changes that have already occurred within the relatively short space of time marking her 'amnesia' of reunification. Consequently, Becker offers us a means by which we can sensuously understand the dramatic and powerful changes of that time. We are flashed back into a personalised experience of something that we already know, culturally and historically, to be of importance. Indeed, in the 'Making of' film as part of the bonus features of the DVD special release, Maria Simon, the actor who plays Ariane, describes how during filming one scene she herself experienced such a bizarre, time-warped moment. While shooting the scene at the bank, where Alex and Ariane fail to exchange their mother's savings after the cut-off date, she describes how she was struck by her own memories of this event. Then, on a break, she looked at a television and saw the first reports of the terrorist attack of 9/11, and saw those images which are now seared into global cultural memory. She describes her experience:

Da war ich total in Erinnerung gefangen [...] Und dann wusste ich überhaupt nicht mehr wo ich bin. Und das war unglaublich absurd, in dieser realen Situation des Geldumtauschs und dann noch dieses Surreale, was man da im Fernsehen gesehen hat, und man kam auf die Karl-Marx-Allee was nicht mehr die Karl-Marx-Allee ist. Es waren so viele Ebenen die so auf uns gewirkt haben... also gewirkt kann man gar nicht sagen, es ist richtig reingeprescht.



Simon, in describing this moment on set, puts into words the affective memory work of the film itself: the experience of having all of multiple planes of temporal reality colliding, not only affects, but it ‘tears’ into her.

## Conclusion

In the hospital, Christiane is first woken from her coma, like Sleeping Beauty, with a kiss; but hers is not the promise of a handsome prince, and a happily-ever-after. It is Alex and the nurse Lara’s first kiss that coincides with Christiane’s return to consciousness, reinforcing the film’s sense that optimism in re-unification lies in youth and the future, rather than the difficulties, regrets, nostalgias and melancholies that constitute a large part of the post-*Wende* present. As Alex and Lara’s lips touch, the film’s recurring message of togetherness – eliciting a *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* – as an overarching value worth investing in, is similarly reinforced. Therefore, while I have argued in this chapter that the film’s political approach to East German memory tends towards a heterogeneous rather than one-dimensional strategy, it must also be said that there is a current running throughout the film that resonates with Will Brandt’s commentary on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1989:<sup>20</sup> ‘Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammen gehört’ (qtd. in Ash 13).

Christiane’s coma results in her missing the events of the *Wende*, and her ‘amnesia’ provides a gap which Alex temporarily fills with a story which resembles the eventually unfulfilled search for a ‘third way’ of re-unification. The film utilises this

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<sup>20</sup> In *Wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört?* Timothy Garton Ash exploration the apocryphal nature of this oft-cited quotation.

mechanism to explore the importance of national history in personal and collective lives: delving into how we are ‘filled up’ by our orientation to the collective events that happen to us. It shows us how the relative truths or authenticities – the single storied-ness – of such experiences matter less than the importance we attach. Instead of a didactic positioning of reified ‘objective’ historical truths, *Good Bye, Lenin!* supports the many subjective memories and identities in existence. The multiple layering of temporalities (ir)realities, official, and counter-memories in the film encourages the spectator to contemplate the contestation and diffusion which marks the legacies of the GDR in post-unification Germany.

*Good Bye, Lenin!* is certainly about mourning and moving on, with such a view drawn along the lines of contemporary political ideologies of normalisation as the means forward for a united Germany. Yet it is simultaneously about the ways in which the GDR is (perplexingly to those who could not have imagined what anyone would wish to remember from a life under a dictatorship) not that easily let go. The trauma of separation, which sent Christiane into a nervous breakdown, and caused her children pain (because of their father’s absence, and then again, their discovery of the full truth as Christiane reveals she has deceived them) is indicative and representative of the damage that the GDR’s oppressive regime has caused both collectively to its people, and the manifestation thereof on individual lives.

I have argued that the spectator experiences the *Wende* through Christiane’s embodiment of it – but this is achieved through more than character identification; an assemblage of cinematic techniques affects the spectator. The film’s play with the speed and feeling of time and the dizzying camera work, affective soundtrack, and physical instability elicited in the helicopter sequence exemplify this approach. While

the film is always preoccupied with clever references and its world of codes and symbols (reflecting *ostalgic* obsessions), key events in the film's narrative are highly charged with corporeality that produce moments where these symbols and the sensorium clash.

Becker uses the motif of 'family' throughout his film, underscoring an importance of togetherness in order to heal division. In this way, the repetition of this trope can be understood as metaphorically representing such a view, however the focus on family also provides a more apolitical aspect. The universality of family-values inspires empathy in all viewers, and in-so-doing aims to win the care and attention of an audience (whether western or eastern German, or international). At the same time, the cosmos is also repeatedly invoked to remind us of the possibilities of a larger perspective on what is most important in life. Alex's spiritual guide and hero, Sigmund Jähn, embodies a doubling of emotion in response to the remembered utopias of the GDR – both humorous and poignant.

By refusing to dictate any particular form of GDR remembrance, *Good Bye, Lenin!* wilfully invites the spectator to determine her own response. This is underscored, in part, through the film's self-conscious exposure of the unreliability of media to convey any one truth. However, rather than debunking the validity of a search for 'authenticity' entirely, the film encourages us to define our own paths, as we navigate between past, present and future – (perhaps on personal journeys towards 'Mündigkeit'). The bilateral nature of the interplay between the personal and the collective necessitates a far more ambivalent understanding of memory and identity than the extremes of the *Ostalgie* debates have allowed; thus, a reductionist, polarising perspective ought to be rejected in favour of an approach to history, and

memory, which foregrounds plural identities and narratives. The strength of Becker's film lies in its subtleties: by respecting personal, individually distinct experiences, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of the social and cultural *milieux* that surround all experience, *Good Bye, Lenin!* offers a way of looking backwards which can inspire a more optimistic view of the future. That is where the GDR is to be found, in living, breathing (embodied, cultural) heterogeneous memories.

The farewell at the film's end allows Alex to say goodbye to his dearly-loved mother. As her ashes are distributed across the sky, the GDR is also farewelled. This time-and-place is inextricably (and positively) linked with her, despite Alex's ambivalence regarding the state itself. Alex was never the socialist ideologue that he perceived his mother to be, neither was he a rebellious political dissident. The process of closure, that his project of revisionism ends up providing him, reveals the emotional legacy, for the most everyday of people, of the sudden disappearance of a country. Under such circumstances, even phenomena, such as the most 'tasteless' examples of *Ostalgie*, can be understood as spiritual and psychic responses to the disturbance caused by the abrupt dismantling of the scaffolding upon which people's lives had been built.

### 3: Uncovering the Truth in *Novemberkind* (2008)

#### **Introduction**

Christian Schwochow's film revolves around lies from the past, and lies being told in the present – not unlike *Good Bye, Lenin!*. A mother's death is at the heart of this film too. *Novemberkind*'s far more deliberate pacing, together with its sober representation of traumatic memories and grief, elicits a darker, more reflective mood in the spectator. The protagonist Inga Kaden, played by Anna Maria Mühe, is a young librarian living in the eastern part of Germany. Raised by her grandparents, Inga discovers that her mother Anneliese (Anne), played by the same actor, did not drown in the Baltic Sea, as she had been told. This is only revealed following the sudden arrival of a stranger, a western German professor of creative writing, Robert von der Mühlen. He has come in search of the lost daughter of a woman from one of his classes in Konstanz, who recounted a tale of *Republikflucht* and regret. The film's narrative is framed as a puzzle, the pieces of which are fragmented memories of Anne. Inga seeks these out on a quest to find the truth of her origins, accompanied by Robert (who is hiding his voyeuristic motives).

There are two differing timeslines central to the narrative of this film, which run more or less parallel; we follow Inga in the present (the year 2007) and, alongside her, we slowly uncover the truth of her mother's story, which begins in 1980 in the small town of Malchow, then part of the GDR. The mysteries of Anne's story are unravelled through testimonies from the various characters who had been involved in her life, gradually recounted to Inga in the present. These narrative elements of the past are enlivened by interspersed flashbacks, which are triggered by Inga's re-appearance in

the lives of those who were connected to her mother. Central among these are two encounters: Inga finds Juri, the Russian deserter with whom Anne fell in love, and whose urgent need to flee the GDR prompted their *Republikflucht* together. She discovers Juri was not her father (whose identity she has never known). Eventually she does find her father, Alexander, a doctor living in Konstanz. It is he who finally tells her the tragic fate of her mother's suicide.

The flashbacks are often transitory, offering only glimpses into Anne Kaden's life. Schwochow shot these in coarse, sepia-tinged ORWO-colour filmstock, a visual technique which heightens the difference between the aesthetics of 'then' versus 'now', accentuating the 'historicity' of these remembrances. Both of these characteristics withhold a visual clarity of a kind that has been associated with optical distance, instead inviting a haptic mode of comprehension, in narrative and visual terms. Laura Marks posits that an image that is undefined, blurry, or otherwise indistinct, invites a haptic visual perception in the spectator – that is, the eye functions as a tactile organ of touch (*Touch* 105). At the same time, by subverting the mastery linked with the spectator's optical, cognitive gaze, through refusing the totality of an image for the purpose of identification, a haptic experience of film arouses instead what Marks terms the 'memory of the senses' in *The Skin of the Film*.

*Novemberkind* arouses this mode of cinematic perception partly through a dialectics of restriction and expansion through textual and formal qualities. Narratively, the audience is provided with mere hints of the context and meaning behind each fragment of Anne's past. Visually, the subjectivity of the handheld camera producing grainy, shaky close-ups, limits the spectator's gaze. These techniques, however, work to expand the emotional and sensorial affect: a flurry of skittish, blurred shots of Anne

in a brief flashback, stumbling, panicked and in clear psychological and emotional distress through a crowded scene somewhere, arouses muscular, spatial empathy in us for her mental anguish. We recognise the camera's gestures in their physicality, and respond emotionally to corresponding affects – anxiety, distress, disorientation – a cinematic identification of a different kind than that of psychoanalytical film theory. Useful here is Murray Smith's notion of 'affective mimicry', where the spectator does not 'need to understand the specific evaluations of a person or character in order to grasp the basic affect-type being experienced by that figure, because it is discernible through the feedback chain of expression, physiology, and subjectivity' (101–02). At this point in the film's progress we are unclear as to exactly where or when this sequence belongs, chronologically speaking; the shot is cued by a reference to Anne's lack of choice in leaving her baby behind, we only know it is somehow tied to the consequences of that decision. Our gaze brushes up against this agitating scene for only a few seconds – an opaque window into the past, which is poignant in its kinaesthetic, haptic characteristics. This flashback is repeated in a slightly extended form towards the end of the film, at which point we learn of Anne's deterioration, eventual institutionalisation and suicide, and we understand cognitively (as opposed to affectively) the full implication of the panic that this sequence depicts.

In this chapter I explore the cross-modal interaction of the senses, which connects the film's body to the spectator, in the figurative and literal iterations in *Novemberkind*. In her detailed ethnographic study of the memory and change in eastern Germany following the Wende, Daphne Berdahl describes certain idiosyncrasies of the GDR from the perspective of a border crossing in 1990 from west to east into Kella, the town which was the subject of her study. This experience was 'most quickly and richly apparent to the senses':

The brown coal emissions from every chimney in the village, mixed with the oily blue exhaust of Trabants, the poorly built, slow, boxy automobiles owned by most East Germans, produced a very distinctive odor. The brownish haze that hovered ... confirmed visually what the olfactory senses had already perceived ... this 'GDR air' was largely responsible for the dirty, graying stucco that covered many of the buildings in the community (*Where the World Ended* 33–34).

Berdahl concludes with a note, that by 1992, much of this sensorial experience of the town had altered, with one woman exclaiming: 'I don't even recognize my Heimat!' (*Where the World Ended* 43). And so, as the 'GDR air' dissipated, with the *Trabi* becoming downgraded to a family's second car, these specificities that marked a person's 'being-in-the-GDR' became sensorial-memories. *Novemberkind* creatively resurrects not just a visual representation of the GDR but, through encouraging a haptic engagement, forges a new performance of cultural memory of a lost past, across the entirety of our sensoria.

The portrayal in *Novemberkind* of Robert's arrival into Malchow offers a similar experience to Berdahl's story. The film's audiovisual experience suggests that, despite the GDR's sudden vanishing after re-unification, the former-East still retains its own particularities in distinction from the West. Shot unsteadily, the film shares Robert's point-of-view from his taxi ride, looking out subjectively with a westerner's gaze at the distinguishing features of the post-unification east. We see the run-down *Plattenbauten*, a street-sign reading '*Neue Heimat*' speaking wryly of the undelivered promises of the *Wende*, of the gap between idealised 'homeland' and reality. The



economic and social differences between east and west in the New Germany are not at the core of the narrative; however, sequences such as this, which shows Robert as an outsider in the east, and later scenes highlighting Inga's upbringing as differing from a western consumer lifestyle, subtly assert cultural difference by underscoring the old divisions. The speed of re-unification and its implied change, as a historical 'event', is contrasted with the things that have lingered. These might be habitual practices, such as Inga's proclivity to bathe in freezing November waters, or hints at more latent traumas and memories particular to local communities.

Reflecting on the flow between personal experience and broader frameworks, Jan and Aleida Assmann's development of Halbwachs's concept provides a point from which we can engage with sensorial, cultural memories. Jan Assmann summarises a key shift in focus that accounts for medial transmissions of memory, beyond the social:

Halbwachs acknowledged social frames only, but it seems obvious that human memory is also embedded in cultural frames, such as the landscape or townscape in which people grew up, the texts they learned, the feasts they celebrated, the churches or synagogues they frequented, the music they listened to, and especially the stories they were told and by and in which they live ('Communicative and Cultural Memory' 17–18).

It is clear that in each of these examples, a person's perceptual sensorium is inseparably at the core of how an individual *lives* through such an experience. Each of these cultural frames is a remembered behaviour or action, which naturally draw on a person's acculturated memories. These memories are embodied culturally, i.e. the tastes and smells of feasts, the solemnity of silence in a church service, the warmth

imparted by a fireplace around which a family tells stories, or listens to the radio, or watches television, and so on. Here we could agree with Nicoletta Diasio, that the 'concept of embodiment, breaking a simplistic and essentialist view of individual and collective identity, then contributes to a more dynamic, performative and intersubjective understanding of memory' (400).

Schwochow's film is about looking backwards, in order to move forwards. The thrust of the film's tension is that memories of Anne are elusive, silenced and forgotten. As I have indicated, the audiovisual representation of her 'memory' is achieved through that filmic trope of flashback sequences; their fragmented appearance throughout dramatizes the process for Inga as she gradually pieces together her mother's biography. Anne thus embodies the unknown; the audience craves a solution for the mystery of Anne's hidden memory. Inga's grandparents, together with other friends within the small-town community of Malchow (including Inga's closest friend), 'buried' Anne in a fake grave, with a fabricated story of her drowning, and it is only with Robert's arrival that Anne is resurrected in some form. Inga is compelled to travel on a journey of self-discovery, of a (re)discovery of the past, of memory recovery. Her mother, who, for Inga, is dead at the commencement of the film, is temporarily alive once more, and Inga goes in search of her and of a lost past. The closer she gets to her mother, the nearer she approaches her permanent absence: a new grave in a different city, a second trauma. What had been a closed part of her personal history, a neat grave in Malchow commemorating a mother she never knew, becomes a messy and complex trip through her mother's guilt, pain and ultimate mental torment. The tragedy of her mother's suicide is amplified for Inga; had she been told the truth, she might have visited her, since the Wall fell two years before Anne's death.

Schwochow refuses to simplify the complex relationships and issues that mark the legacies of the GDR by relying on binary representations of right and wrong. The characters are not cast as clichéd *Ossi* or *Wessi* stereotypes, nor does he diametrically oppose ideologies through heroes or villains. Instead, the film invites reflection on the difficulties in untwisting personal culpability and responsibility from the extraneous political and social forces that define the individual choices we make as social beings. Rather than retelling a by-now commonly understood tale fitting the victim/perpetrator schematic, the film is better seen as a meta-analysis of the moral ambiguities and conflicts that belong to stories of the GDR past; it is an enquiry into how such memories and histories ought to be engaged with from within post-reunification discourses, media and personal reckonings with traumatic memories. This chapter asks: what kinds of memories (relating to the GDR) does the film show, and how are these corporeally experienced in spectatorship? What do thematic inclusions/exclusions point to, in terms of the present-day assessment of the past, the working through of the history of division as a reunited country, and in the negotiation of contemporary identities? *Novemberkind* is distinctly a film about the GDR, and about memory. However, as Schwochow demonstrates, the questions – whose GDR?; whose memories? – are not simplistically answered.

The tensions and narrative stakes that drive *Novemberkind*'s plot are drawn from two distinguishable, yet always interrelated, social spheres: troubled interpersonal relationships, and the effects of the external pressures (such as the forces of the GDR's dictatorship) on personal biographies. While it could be argued that the film's narrative of family trauma, which focuses on personal guilt, regret and loss could be set in any particular national context and still carry the bulk of its own particular

qualities unchanged, its specific GDR cultural resonances distinguish *Novemberkind* as part of the landscape of GDR memory-works and media. The film demonstrates how, when contemplating the causes and consequences of GDR histories and memories, a reductionist approach which conceives only of one of these planes, without considering the impacts of the other, offers a substantially less sophisticated understanding of the totality of events. Through its non-linear narrative, the film explores how aspects of German-German relations historically, culturally and socially impacted on people's lives during the divided years, as well as how the legacies of trauma and difference are affecting post-unification Germany still.

*Novemberkind* demonstrates how the GDR's legacy, much of which is still to be reckoned with, revolves around memories – in this case personal memories that had been buried and hidden. The coming-to-light of past decisions, and the debates that surround personal and social culpabilities of behaviour under the dictatorship, have both been among the recurring themes in GDR-related discourse following re-unification. Owen Evans has detailed an aspect of the film's context – the casting of Anna Maria Mühe – that inherently resonates with the film's thematic content. He connects the 'star discourse' surrounding the actor with the central preoccupation of the film: the pain that can accompany the uncovering of secrets and lies. The extensive *Stasi* files have at times dramatically revealed prominent individuals to have had compromised pasts, particularly when scrutinised in light of the contemporary dominant appraisal of the East German state as being illegitimate in its surveillance and controlling mechanisms. Evans summarises the publically fought battle between Anna Maria Mühe's parents, the actors Jenny Gröllmann and Ulrich Mühe, who accused each other of deceit, misrepresentation and betrayal, after Gröllmann's *Stasi* film allegedly exposed her an *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*. Both Anna Maria Mühe's

parents tragically died without any amicable resolution to the story, a year apart from each other (and during the filming of *Novemberkind*). She has downplayed the connection herself in interviews, but such a background undoubtedly adds another degree of meaning and depth to the actor's role (Beier and Beyer). In their tale, the similarities in the tragic consequences of lies are undeniable when considering the main impetus of Schwochow's film, as Evans claims:

[I]t is impossible to watch [Anna Maria Mühe's] performance without being struck by her physical resemblance to her parents, and thus reminded of their sad story. In view of *Novemberkind*'s thematic thrust, it is inevitable that one will reflect upon the impact of family secrets and contested memories within her own life ('Memories' 216).

Access to the *Stasi* files following re-unification dramatically revealed to the nation (and the world) a degree of citizen cooperation with, and participation in, the state's surveillance program that most observers found shocking. The consequences following the exercise of power that (this particular arm of the dictatorship) wielded reverberate on the national level, as well as in more localised groups, such as the family. Its ubiquity has become part of the mythic legacy of the GDR. The pain of, for example, finding that you never received a promotion due, in part, to a relative's informing on you, could clearly tear a family apart. Schwochow in fact wrote *Novemberkind* with Mühe in mind, for the parts of both mother and daughter; Evans suggests that '... the fledgling director was not unaware of the impact his casting would have'. The film therefore 'articulates a particularly poignant German-German story and marks a significant contribution to contemporary memory debates in the reunified country a generation on from the fall of the Wall' ('Memories' 216).

The personal story surrounding Anna Maria Mühe must be understood as, on the one hand, a private trauma of one family, yet on the other, it is a story encompassing broader cultural resonances and impacts. *Novemberkind*'s narrative similarly engages with intersections between personal experience and memory, and socio-cultural elements which cannot be neatly disentangled. Mühe's regret that journalists never report on her parents without reference to the Stasi-story, which sadly taints their memory, calls to mind a cautionary element within *Novemberkind*'s narrative – the presence of the emotionally vampiric Robert, whose obsession with Anne and Inga's story ultimately causes his downfall.

### **A 'Shared-Skin'**

Watching a film's cultural memory of trauma (in this case located in the GDR), the spectator will, in Sobchack's terms, 'cinesthetically' share that traumatic experience. What are the implications of this regarding the shaping of identities, and the passing on of memory? 'Viewers' responses to films', Jennifer Barker writes, 'are necessarily physical, full-bodied responses, because our vision is always fully embodied, intimately connected to our fingertips, our funny bones, and our feet, for example' (*The Tactile Eye* 74). In the following, I examine the ways by which the spectatorial body becomes entwined with the emotional, the cultural and the memorial in particular – as expressed through the sensorially activating techniques that are peculiar to the experience of the filmic medium. In *Novemberkind*, that means delving into how the tragedy, grief, losses and attachments which occur in the shaping of identities are expressed through the somatic functions of the film's body – aroused in the spectator's embodied perceptions and memories. Schwochow's film places the

past against the present through its non-linear narrative structuring: a demonstration of how futures can be influenced by the past, and how the present can either obscure or reveal ever-changing configurations of the past.

In *Novemberkind*, Inga's progression depends upon her incorporating Anne's traumatic memories. While the GDR no longer exists as a country, the legacies of the German-German division continue to remodel the ways in which citizens, both eastern and western, conceive of a reunified nation. Lasting memories of the GDR act as a channel of information and lived-experiences from before and after the *Wende*. In such a way, Anne might be conceived of as a GDR *Erinnerungsort*, upon which Inga's present identity might feasibly be authentically grounded. *Novemberkind* suggests how particular events from the past can resurface, and shape our present pathways. I seek to show how the parallel temporalities, which belong to Anne and Inga respectively, interact bi-directionally; the temporal split is rendered visually through the flashback sequences, yet this divide is shown to be a porous point of contact. If Anne and Inga's relationship can be conceived as a metaphor for the bi-directional influences of past and present, then I propose that the spectator's role in responding to the different temporalities and bodies, makes a kind of prism; emotional affect sensorially diffuses across multiple layers of time and place.

We can think about this affective 'prism' in a different way, by considering the concept of 'skin'. 'Historically', Tarja Laine writes, 'skin was defined as the boundary of the self, but it is also the organ that locates the subjects physically and topographically with their senses and bodies in history, as it is the place where individual and collective history meet' ('Cinema as Second Skin' 98). Laine positions our bodies and our sensual perceptions as a surface of contact, where we enmesh with

each other, our cultural environment, and with our pasts, presents and futures. Anna Maria Mühe's dual role, in being cast as both mother and daughter, embodies the film's action: transporting us across the temporalities of Germany's division and reunification. Each time we are taken back into the past we are anchored by Mühe's body. Anne and Inga's 'shared-skin' connects the temporalities of past and present through a corporeal medium: Mühe is both Anne as the ephemeral past, and Inga as the contemporaneous, troubled present.

Inga is positioned as being dislocated from her 'self'-identity; she does not know of her mother's history. Until Robert's arrival in Malchow, Inga had believed the story of her mother's tragic drowning in the Baltic Sea, at a time when Inga was too young to have any memories of her mother to 'call her own'. Inga is initially a locus of Anne's absence; this becomes established as the contextual departure point for the film's transformational journey, a process of discovery undertaken by Inga (and shared with the audience). Inga's search for Anne rubs the buried traumas in her mother's past right up against the present, often resulting in the opening of painful lesions of memory for those who have been involved.

The Anne/Inga duality can be thought of as a metaphor for the appearance of the past in the present, and (in a certain manner of speaking) vice versa; by extending the investigation, we can determine how this metaphor is affectively engendered in the spectator's experience, watching *Novemberkind*. Skin and its affiliated sense perception, 'touch' offer the way into this understanding. Or, perhaps, 'onto' proves the more apt word; where, following (those such as Laura Marks's) work on haptic visuality, engagement *upon* the surface of things can be just as revealing as the more typically valued analytical method of penetrating to hidden depths in search of truths



behind or beneath appearance. *Novemberkind* often plays with notions of surface and depth, as will be further discussed later in this chapter. Anne and Inga's shared-skin demonstrates how meaning and memory are carnally implicated, and implicating, of the spectator. If we recall that memories, both 'cultural' and 'personal', are always embodied, we can see how Anne/Inga's corporeal doubling forms a central part of the film's meditations on lived, socio-cultural experiences of traumatic memory, thereby shaping the ways in which performative, embodied thinking around identity can be conducted.

Returning to Owen Evans's analysis serves to demonstrate the embodied nature of the temporal jumps in the film. While he does not specifically focus on notions of corporeality, by looking at the language he chooses, we can see that Evans reveals a physicality in his delineation of the structures of memory. His choice of words to describe Inga's upbringing points to the ways in which she developed as an embodied subject; the false memories Inga grew up with were 'grafted onto her', and 'implanted' ('Memories' 218–19). This 'forgetting' in Inga speaks also of how our lived experience becomes filled up with memories through a kind of stratification, choosing to (whether actively or passively) remember certain things necessitates forgetting others: a dialectics of presence and absence. Until Robert's arrival, Inga's memory of her mother is marked by absence. Through the physical connection to Anne, this becomes corporeally re-performed, and re-written.

These notions, which speak to the character of Inga and her journey through her past and present, resonate with the national traumas and processes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which are still at the forefront of the identity contestations of the new Germany's cultural landscape. In *Novemberkind*, narratives

from history and memory are sewn in to Inga's present like stitches into her body. The dimensions of a somatic expression and perception of memory, at the nexus of the cultural and personal, come to be expressed in the filmic experience. Tragic wounds of her abandonment by her mother, her family's story of forced and enforced separation, of painfully held secrets and missed opportunities, are (re)opened. Anna Maria Mühe's double-role acts as a needle, guiding the stitches of narrative truth, which then form part of the opening and closing of past and present traumas – life experiences that become identity-informing. Furthermore, Anne and Inga are phonetically similar names, reinforcing the sense of the interchangeability of the two characters. Here, the metaphorical merges again with the material. Sara Ahmed describes the effect of a painful touch upon the surface as powerfully formative:

It is through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and worlds materialise and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, surface, and fixity is produced. To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what 'makes' those borders also unmakes them. In other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others. This paradox is clear if we think of the skin surface itself, as that which appears to contain us, but as where others *impress* upon us (25).

Schwochow uses bodies as a means to interrogate how 'impressions' are made on our identities by the collisions we experience, taking Inga's painful reconnection with her dead mother as a 'paradoxical' example – Inga both touches and is touched by a void. We share, through the film's body, these points of contact: on numerous planes of thought, experience and time. Bodies (and most particularly Inga's and Anne's doubled body in the form of Anna Maria Mühe), become the site of communication

between disparate, but distinctively social and personal, concepts such as memories, identities, hope, grief and love. Schwochow utilises Inga's attributes, including her youth, and the subsequent crises that she faces, as a counterpoint to the fixity of the events that lie in her past. After all: 'Jede Generation entwickelt ihren eigenen Zugang zur Vergangenheit und lässt sich ihre Perspektive nicht durch die vorangehende Generation vorgeben' (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 27). The film's movement between past and present temporalities is most often visually cued in the film by a reappearance of the past for a particular character, triggering a flashback that is coded (somewhat vaguely, ambiguously) as a personal recollection of that character. This visual cue is mostly Inga's physical similarity to Anne – and is therefore an embodied affect.

Nedzmina Mehmedovic has observed that it is through Inga's body that Anne is able to speak, and is made visible, despite her tragic death (25). Her interpretation draws upon psychological trauma theories of Bessel van der Kolk and Thomas Fuchs, which locate traumas within the body: 'Das Trauma, das Anne durchlebt hat und das sie vergessen wollte, konnte ihr Körper nicht vergessen, was sie zum Selbstmord führt. Durch das Körperdouble von Anne und Inga, evoziert Ingas Körper Annes traumatic memory' (37). Mehmedovic maps Inga's process of elaborating and expanding Anna's fragmentary memories (represented as the audiovisual flashbacks) onto mental phenomena, such as 'tunnel memory', where traumatic events are more easily recalled than peripheral information (Safer et al.). In this way, the 'Körpergedächtnis' is utilised to explain the increasingly insistent and vivid flashback sequences as a process of Inga encountering Anne's traumatic memories (38). The flashbacks are a visual metaphor, according to Mehmedovic, *for* embodied trauma. This metaphor extends beyond the individual characters: 'Die Rückblenden sind ein Zugang zur

kollektiven Erinnerung der DDR' (20). This focus is on the representation of sense memories in *Novemberkind* in order to build a symbolic explanation for Inga's relationship to her mother, and to the GDR.

My notion of the shared-skin does conflict with Mehmedovic's reading, but it does depart from her representational method in order to theoretically account for the affects which manifests in the viewer as a result of the film's corporeality. My understanding is that *Novemberkind*'s physicality extends beyond symbolism. Steven Connor writes of a cinematic experience which turns our skin into a kind of 'resonating membrane': we shiver, prick or bristle, our bodies being aroused by visual and auditory activations of our synaesthetic sensorial memories (247). To illustrate how the spectator's carnal perceptions are activated in affective response, I take as an example the film's opening sequences, which introduce us to Inga, conditioning us through corporeal affect to empathise with her. While I foreground Inga's 'body' here, as an example of corporeal affect, it is important to remember that the spectator also responds to the 'film's body', which, recalling Sobchack, is neither restricted to the characters' bodies on the screen nor the cinematic apparatus.

We encounter Inga and her best friend Steffi at the edge of a lake in Malchow; a caption informs us of both the location, and the year – 2007. The two young women strip off their thick, fur coats and run, screaming in anticipation of the cold, into the water. While the moment is joyous, it foreshadows a much darker flashback sequence to come, in which Inga's body-counterpart, Anne, contrastingly screams in torment and despair as she attempts wildly to wade out into a different body of water. Inga is naked, Anne fully clothed; Inga is pleased, unaware she is about to discover her best friend is leaving their eastern town for a job in the west; Anne is at her wits' end,

having been unable to reconcile the absence of her baby daughter. The tension in the similarities and contrasts between the characters played by Anne Maria Mühe underlines the fluid, ever-shifting boundaries of identity and memory.

Schwochow establishes the close relationship between Inga and her best friend Steffi by emphasising the kinaesthetics of the intimacy they share in bodily contact. The camera's shaky, close and personal movement creates a sense of the film itself as a living body; the scene becomes animated, bringing the spectator into the sauna, through the activation of reciprocal, responsive body-memories of the heat of steam and the gentle touch of warm water across naked skin. We share the intimacy between the two women, establishing a corporeal connection with the film's body, as with Inga's and Steffi's bodies. Schwochow demonstrates the nature of the intimacy between Inga and her best friend in this corporeal way to engage the spectator's body, eliciting a reciprocal warmth towards their relationship. Thus, the spectator more easily shares Inga's experience of betrayal, when she discovers Steffi has known for some time that her mother did not drown in the Baltic Sea.

Inga and Anne are aligned by the sympathetic portrayal of their tender and caring qualities, which is achieved for both characters through sensual, intimate relationships with those who are close to them. We see Inga cutting her Opa's toenails and we are shown how Anne's response, having been shocked by the appearance in her basement of Juri, the deserting Russian soldier, is to tenderly care for his wounds, bandaging his head. Juri cannot speak German, but the camera lingers as he touches her forearm, and communicates equally the entirety of his gratitude for not giving him away, and for looking after him. The contrasting of Inga and her grandparents is also expressed through their bodies: Opa is wheelchair bound, and has recently had a fall, an event

which Inga's Oma reports to her pointedly, before asking if she would consider moving back in with them to help. Her ageing grandparents have no doubt sacrificed much in raising her, setting up tensions between the generations, a theme which is revisited.

Inga, a young woman, can be read as symbolic of New Germany as a whole. Here, the generational conflict may be read as analogous with Germany today facing its historical wrongs (GDR as dictatorship, the Nazis); Inga would be a living 'site of memory', the embodiment of the potential for Germany to spring forward optimistically – highlighting her youthful potential to resist the repetitious tendencies of history. There is merit to such a reading, but *Novemberkind* uses bodies to do more than just act in this metaphorical, symbolic way. Barker contends that we can 'understand' cinema through tactile experience: 'Through the skin, we gain a clearer picture of ourselves in relation to others and to history, and we come to recognize that relationship as one of mutual permeability' (*The Tactile Eye* 62). Anna Maria Mühe embodies the mimetic relationship between past and present; between identity and memory. Within the film, this operates more profoundly than simply as a metaphor: That is – Anne and Inga's shared-skin, their visual similarity as perceived by other characters, the film's journey of memorial, physical, topographical, emotional and psychological (re)connection between mother and daughter – is more than 'represented' in the casting of the one actor to play both parts. Memory and identity are felt through the film's affective tactility – a mutual 'touch' shared by spectator and the film's body, just as Inga and Anne are wrapped in a membranous connection spanning the GDR and post-*Wende* present.

## **Between Forgetting and Remembering**

Forgetting is an important part of being able to move on, to leave certain things behind, and to forge new and unfettered versions of one's self, directed towards the future. Astrid Erll reminds us of Friedrich Nietzsche's emphasis on this point in *On the Use and Abuse of History*. She observes that '[r]emembering and forgetting are two sides – or different processes – of the same coin, that is, memory. Forgetting is the very condition for remembering (8). Through Inga, a discourse which focuses on forgetting as repression, which implies a certain pathology in the burial of past trauma, can be challenged by her personal memory work and search for identity into a transformation into a more positive framework that balances appropriate and authentic commemoration with a forward-looking confidence. Forgetting and remembering both play their role in this process.

While Inga's 'problem' is a lack of memory, Anne's is one of too much. The trauma of her missing child is unbearable, and, as Anne writes in a poem she wrote in Robert's writing class, 'no one can teach her to forget'. If we interpret Inga's loss of an authentic memory of her mother as a 'repression', then the film becomes a process of *Aufarbeitung* of the repressed past. Anne was unable to 'forget' the child she left behind, the resulting torment being too much for her to bear. She makes one final act of self-determination and, despite her carers in the hospital having credited her with not enough strength for this final act, she tragically takes her own life. Her poem, the scrap of paper she left behind in Robert's class, which leaves such an impression that it eventually, tortuously finds its way to her daughter back home, reads in full:

Keiner lehrt mich zu vergessen

wär' da ein Gruß von da heim

würd' ich hoff'n

ein bisschen

Inga instrumentalises this memory trace of Anne for herself, as a means of getting under Anne's skin and feeling what she felt. When Juri refuses to disclose anything to Inga about his and Anne's past, she snaps, storming about in the drab, meagre train-carriage where resides, off a siding in a goods-train depot; she strews his few possessions around, then scrawls Anne's poem in permanent marker onto a wall of his boxy home. Inga uses Anne's memories to give herself a self-reliance and independence, which she lacked at the start of the film. This new-found sense of purpose appears to offer her a life full of the promise that Anne's escape from the GDR, in the end, tragically never provided her.

Memory, as we recall, exists materially in an individual but is always connected to external social and cultural symbols. The experiences that form autobiographical memories are socially and culturally implicated in interactions between an embodied human subjectivity, and the spheres of somatic perception in which that body operates. Aleida Assmann sees the sites of cultural memory as part of a system that stratifies the preservation of certain things, at the cost of suppressing others, a constellation of mnemotechniques of remembering and forgetting:

Institutions and groups do not possess a memory like individuals; there is, of course, no equivalent to the neurological system or the anthropological disposition. Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church, or a firm do not 'have' a memory; they 'make' one for themselves



with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments. Together with such a memory, these groups and institutions ‘construct’ an identity (A. Assmann, ‘Memory, Individual and Collective’ 216)

People, places, cultures and nations: all of these leave traces of memory behind, as the changes through time shift into newly diverse contemporaneities. Following reunification, officially-led processes sought to uncover, confront, and ‘overcome’ the burdened East German past; Daphne Berdahl describes how this ‘rush to avoid the kind of collective forgetting that characterized post-Nazi Germany [...] has paradoxically been accompanied by a kind of “organized forgetting”, an erasure of certain memory symbols and the creation and contestation of new ones’ (*Where the World Ended* 220). (For more detail on how this has functioned, see also: Connerton 14). The Berlin Wall has incorporated a mingling of remembrance and forgetting. This can be observed in the decisions, part of projects of ‘official memory’, which have preserved some of what remains of the Wall and seen other parts removed. In *Novemberkind*, the dialectical relationships of remembering and forgetting and of presence and absence are incorporated in the Kaden family’s ritual of visiting Anne’s false grave in Malchow to lay flowers. Anne’s *Republikflucht* was, for Inga’s Oma and Opa, as great a loss as if she had in fact died, and the grave functioned as a ceremonial place of mourning as if her body were indeed buried there. For Inga, the grave was a locus of connection to a mother she would never know; at the same time, for her grandparents, the site marked their repression and ‘burial’ of the truth. The family and community utilised such ‘mnemotechniques’ to assist their collective ‘forgetting’ of her mother’s story. The false grave stands, in this sense, as a memorial to an amnesia.

The revelation that the community of Malchow has hidden Anne's 'authentic' memory from Inga her whole life, adds a further layer of complexity to the story, owing to the particularly tight-knit weaving of memory in the 'village' group setting. Connerton observes a difference between larger urban environments and villages, with respect to outward performances of identity and memory:

If we are to play a believable role before an audience of relative strangers we must produce or at least imply a history of ourselves: an informal account which indicates something of our origins and which justifies or perhaps excuses our present status and actions in relation to that audience. But this presentation of the self in everyday life is unnecessary when, as is the case in the life of a village, the gaps in shared memory are much fewer and slighter (17).

These presentations are legitimising acts, which determine how we make ourselves temporally, corporeally and sensibly legible to others. The Malchow community choir features as an exemplar of the institutions where people gather and maintain continuity in groups across time. Choirs are a powerfully active, iterative, ritualistic, sensorial and communal means of expressing and sharing humanity. Members of this choir include Kerstin and Steffi, her mother's and her own best friend respectively. They are part of the closed community who shut away the truth from Inga, causing her to feel like an outsider to that community. The community shares a voice, based on the harmony of layering and weaving each member's contribution, forming an amplified, musical unity. Inga's community has abruptly been revealed to her as having been complicit in a conspiracy of silence; the harmony of the diegetic music is

juxtaposed with the sudden discord in her relationships with Kerstin and Steffi. Inga is left with the certainty that she has grown up with an entirely false memory of her mother; we are left with the lingering sound of the choir's recital of a Christmas carol in the background.

The choir, as rhetorically invoked by Inga's interrogation, exemplifies both communicative and cultural memory. Jan Assmann explicates how cultural memory, in order to be active in society, must be mediated from a disembodied state: its representational shape necessarily becoming re-embodied into societal groups and structures. The 'institution' of cultural memory, Assmann argues 'is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the appearance of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent. They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another'. For cultural memory to function *as memory*, 'its symbolic forms must not only be preserved but also circulated and re-embodied in a society' ('Communicative and Cultural Memory' 17).

Interrupting the choir rehearsal, Inga draws Kerstin away, and asks her, as her mother's best friend, if she threw flowers into the grave at the funeral. She then asks, accusingly, if the choir sang at the funeral. The community passes on both silence and a false memory of Inga's mother's story from generation to generation in the figures of Kerstin and Steffi. The institution of the choir moreover demonstrates Assmann's description of the re-embodiment of cultural memory: it is a social 'site' of the memory and forgetting that has shaped her self-knowledge up to this point. The symbolism in the motif of the choir by Schwowchow is buttressed by its embodied performative role, showing how community practices may provide a continuum of

memory, even across such huge transitional phases in a region's history as the collapse of the GDR, and re-unification. We see, too, how not only memory but forgetting can be re-embodied Inga's friends and community in the choir an enveloping silence and forgetting that was necessary to hide the truth of her mother's story from her that enveloped her.

Opening up the flux of remembering and forgetting serves to replicate Anne's trauma relating to her *Republikflucht* and its consequences onto Inga, as the 'truth' of the past rises to the surface. The memory of Anne is recovered from hidden depths through Inga's investigative journey, signalling the closure of that transformational arc of the narrative. Inga's 'amnesia' of her mother marks the starting point of that curve, and it is through a consideration of the film in such terms that a metaphorical reading of a broader allusion to a national dialectics of forgetting and remembering, as part of the project of nation building and identity construction, can be intuited; under such a reading the lesson is that remembered and forgotten traumas must be dealt with in order to move forward. Inga is a new Germany who makes the journey through painful memories in order to better understand herself.

The impetus that drives Inga to determine what actually happened to her mother points to an inevitability in the resurfacing of past trauma. The surface, and 'resurfacing' is a recurring idea in *Novemberkind*, with repeated usage of the motif of bodies of water; further to this the processes of truths coming to light has been a dominant part of judging the GDR following re-unification, and one which touches Anna Maria Mühe's personal biography publically, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Indeed, water is everywhere in *Novemberkind*, featuring in various elemental guise in lakes, the sauna, rain, baths. It plays with ideas that are central to the identity- and

memory work of the film; water travels and it envelops, both osmosis and submerging mimic the film's journeys between exterior to interior or surface and depth. The spectator is affected by all of this water in ways that exceed metaphor – sensorial memory of water (which is culturally profound, life-giving water having such spiritual and cultural meaning) is always active in the spectator's bodily reception of the film.

The affective charge of Anne/Inga bodily relationship similarly works in tandem with the symbolic meaning, where a national trauma is represented through the division in both characters. However, *Novemberkind*'s discourse of victimhood and trauma pertains in part to questions of post-Wall national identity, but also to issues localised at the family and similarly intimate, community levels. Each of them shares a 'second skin' to borrow Laine's term, with the other, which is felt as affect by the spectator: 'Skin as a concept is not merely a metaphor for vision that functions like touch, but a *structure* that allows one to re-negotiate both the ocular and the anti-ocular paradigms' ('Cinema as Second Skin' 99). Their connection also entwines the spectator into a contemplative and an emotional response to the traumas of both Inga and Anne, the multiplicity of these layers remembering and forgetting linking each character across time and place. The criss-crossing of space and time is enacted meaningfully, enhanced even, in the spectator's capacity for perceptual experience with all senses in conjunction. Our world is made 'meaningful' to us via all our senses, through cross-modal activity. Laine reminds us that vision may be most 'privileged' of the senses in the cinema, but it is not isolated, but works cooperatively ('Cinema as Second Skin' 94). *Novemberkind* activates skin through an assemblage of effects including Anne Maria Mühe's body and its trans-temporal 'shared-skin' performance, the colour gradient (with its implied temporal disjuncture) and the kinaesthetic effects of movement. The spectator's affective engagement via the skin is

not to be understood as only 'additional' to the audiovisual realms of theoretical cinematic experience, but rather as integral to the film experience. Always and every time we watch a film, emotional and physical affect is transferred around the body, as the entirety of our cross-modal sense perception and body-memory becomes engaged.

### **Of Flesh and Blood**

Inga's search for Anne has the side-effect of bringing her into contact with Alexander, her father. When she discovers that Juri is not her father, her journey takes her to Alexander, Anne's friend who helped both Anne and Juri escape from the GDR. And so, Inga is nearing the end of her search when she arrives at the doctors' clinic where Alexander, who is her father, works in Konstanz. Interestingly, her father has never been the focus of her search, and, in this moment, he remains much more a key to finding her mother, than any destination in his own right. (Perhaps because Inga had never known her father's identity, inserting him into her life now has a different significance to the correction required to reconfigure Anne's actual story for herself). Inga requests an appointment with the doctor at reception and, as she takes a seat in the waiting room, there is a cut to Robert, sitting on the floor of a foyer, smoking a cigarette, looking unkempt and unsettled. He raises his dictaphone and records, ominously:

Sie kommt in die Stadt, aber sie nimmt sie nicht wahr. Es könnte irgendein Ort sein, irgendwo. Es interessiert sie nicht. Sie sucht Anne, und in Anne, sucht sie sich selbst. Aber Anne ging damals weg, und kam nie wieder irgendwo an. Sie wird sie nicht finden. Sie hätte glücklich hundert werden können. Dafür ist es zu spät.

Robert's narration merges into a voice-over, as the vision cuts back to Inga tentatively entering Alexander's large, well-lit, expensive looking examination room. Inga's determined gait, her usual comfortable presence and body language are now reduced to a wearied hesitance; her eyes dart anxiously across the room as she waits to see how this interaction unfolds. Since Robert's arrival she has tried to take control of each situation, resolutely seeking out shards of truth from her grandparents, her friends, and Juri. Now she appears at her most vulnerable; despite everything, it seems that Alexander holds the power in this encounter.

Once he notices her, there is an obvious, instant recognition. The moment lengthens, with a tension held taut by years of unspoken history. In this pause, pregnant with the possibility of reconnection, the camera flits through sequence of shot-reverse-shots in extreme close-up, which has the effect of exaggerating each character's choice in that moment. Then Alexander, instead of acknowledging his absence in Inga's life, or her presence before him now, turns away and dials his intern, requesting that she sits-in during the examination. Alexander chooses to act as if this were a regular physical examination of a new patient, and treats Inga's purported complaint of back-pain, refusing to acknowledge her and his recognition of who she is. This active forgetting resonates with the falsity that Inga now feels characterises her life in Malchow.

Until this point in *Novemberkind*, the sense of touch has tended to arouse a gentle, intimate affect, as in the portrayal of Steffi and Inga's closeness, or in the momentary sequences showing Juri and Anne's falling in love. Schwochow's direction in this confronting sequence works to trouble such connotations, through a more uneasy portrayal, one that uses contact on skin to tease out the subtext of guilt, regret,

accusation, loss, shame and fear. Alexander's question, 'Wo genau sind die Schmerzen lokalisiert?' has more meaning in its general poignancy than in this ritualistic play of doctor and patient. The camera perspective throughout the sequence alternates between highly subjective close-ups and point-of-view shots of each person, often heavily obscured by other objects in the room. There is a cut to a shot of Inga with her shirt pulled up at the back, Alexander stands behind, slowly moving his hands down and asking if Inga 'feels anything'. She responds each time with a shake of her head; however, the spectator sees what he cannot – the tears welling in her eyes.

Alexander and Inga's specific personal history, marked by distance and absence, is highlighted through an awkward performance of proximity – a torturous proximity, which serves to throw light on all of the barriers that have separated, and are still separating them. This is the first time that Alexander has touched his daughter and of course, the first time Inga has touched her father. The very reciprocity of touch is dramatically toyed with in this sequence. Through the very means of portraying bodily contact, skin becomes the site of emotion, and the film-screen, which does not 'touch' us in the same way as another person or object can, touches us through a mediated process of emotional affect (Laine, 'Cinema as Second Skin' 101). Giuliana Bruno's concept of 'e-motion' is apt here in the attention paid to the body, motility, and affect. Bruno writes how 'being touched' involves the reverse: 'being touched in return'. 'This reciprocal condition can be extended to a representational object as well' she argues, 'it invests the very process of film reception, for we are moved by the moving image' (254).



Further, and with particular relevance to the full-bodied ‘touching’ I find in this film – in Inga and Anne’s shared-skin and in the spectator-film’s body relations, Bruno reminds us that, ‘as a receptive function of skin, touch is not solely a prerogative of the hand. It covers the entire body, including the eye itself, and the feet, which establish our contact with the ground’ (254). When Alexander moves his hands down Inga’s back it elicits a visceral affect both in her, and in us. Alexander and Inga (and Anne) are each other’s ‘flesh and blood’, an apt phrase to describe the sensations from haptic surface to visceral depth this scene inspires. All the while, Robert’s words linger in our ears, and we suspect a certain futility in this whole performance; it seems that Inga will not find her mother Anne at the end of her quest.

Anne is nevertheless oddly present in this scene. Her absence in Inga’s life is recalled in Alexander’s deafening silence. Moreover, with the film’s suggestion of Anne’s death in Robert’s narration, the spectral-like quality of Anne’s involvement in the film is intensified. Inga has so far only found Anne through traces of her memory, in her writing, letters, and through second-hand testimony – the possibility that she will succeed in finding her now living appears (to the spectator) to be foreclosed. Inga’s journey towards Anne becomes asymptotic in nature, as the focus of the film shifts from Inga’s quest to ‘find Anne’, to the processes of her own conceptualisation and performance of her identity. Her mother has been temporarily resurrected in Inga’s imagination, however, in the end this proves illusory, as Anne’s memories, presented audiovisually in each flashback, are transformed into a melancholic, ghostlike reality. These ephemera are given a new authenticity through Inga’s instrumentalisation of them, as part of her moving on from the trauma within them.

The flashback sequences of Anne's biography cannot be clearly delineated in any sense as 'belonging' to a particular person, while they are often presented as being an extension of a particular character's memory of their own connection to that part of Anne's story, they cannot be said to exclusively be a memory of each of these characters. What were once memories of Anne become increasingly blurred, as Inga actively inherits them, thereby correcting the falsehood in her childhood. If it can be said that anyone can 'have' or 'own' memories, Inga's journey is one of memory acquisition; she seeks out those characters who hold fragments of Anne, and puts together a memory of her mother which becomes, increasingly, hers to hold. They are always also Anne's, and by the end of the film we are shown that they are now Inga's – the very final shot of the film reinforces this, as we see her setting off on her own in possession of all of her mother's notes and recorded memories.

### **Embodying the Voyeur's Gaze**

Robert's role as a voyeur is dramatically foreshadowed through his unusual behaviour in the sequence of his and Inga's first encounter. Upon recognising her face, he appears frozen, and the image of his own stunned face enlarges as the subjective camera moves closer, a technique which enhances the sense of time passing, his eyes wide open, mouth slightly agape, as he is completely struck by the resemblance of Inga to her mother (and the realisation he has found what he came searching for). This shot-reverse-shot sequence of the two characters is interrupted by a sudden cut to a quick flashback, showing Anne's discovery of Juri hiding in her cellar. We return to the present, and Inga naturally has no idea of the reason for his staring. Robert snaps out of his entranced state, explaining away his peculiar actions as something he does occasionally. In this sequence, Schwochow intersects elements of these characters'

lives that have dramatic effects in altering the course of their lives. Inga's physical connection to Anne is effectively played alongside Robert's voyeuristic influence, which upsets Inga's world as much as Juri's arrival impacted Anne's.

The person who perhaps best describes Robert's transgressions is himself, in a moment of clarity and self-reflection. He does this in a sequence where he reveals for the first time the full extent of his lies to the spectator, through his narration into the dictaphone, confessing his exploitation of Inga: 'Ich nehm' ihr die Biographie, Ich nehm' ihr die Identität. Und was biet' ich ja an? Lügen'. He comes to this point while Inga has made it to the clinic where her father, Alexander, works. These lines are overlaid off-screen as the image cuts back to Inga, sitting anxiously and vulnerable in the waiting room. Thus, the subject of his manipulation, exploitation, and at the same time his growing care, is foregrounded for the spectator, just as he reveals how irredeemably far he has gone in his dishonesty. That he is aware of the precise wrongness in his actions might not atone for them, but it allows for a certain level of sympathy on the audience's part.

To look at the representation of GDR memory in *Novemberkind* with Sabrow's three-way distinctions in mind, one might initially interpret the film as erring towards the categorisation of a *Diktaturgedächtnis*: it utilises such tropes as *Republikflucht* and fear of the state's authorities. The film's central concern is not to normalise the everyday of the GDR, nor does it obviously seek to diminish the prevailing cultural sense of the dictatorship as an oppressive force. Furthermore, at the narrative's core lies the trauma of a family's suffering, which to a large extent occurs as a consequence of the GDR's border policies. Such motifs are common to many films about East Germany that are in accordance with a western-triumphalist master-

narrative of division and re-unification. While the film certainly draws from a deep well of emotion of the dictatorship's traumatic effects, there are elements within Schwochow's film which textually and visually serve to problematize a simplistic understanding of East German memory and agency. For instance, the discomforting presence of Robert von der Mühlen, his unsettling dishonesty towards Inga, and his exploitative all-consuming desire to write someone else's biography in order to achieve status as a writer, calls into question who should have the right to publically remember, and what power relations control the dissemination of GDR memory in broader terms.

Although the film's narrative drive relies on a repressive GDR state – the events for Anne are triggered by the arrival of Juri in her life and the consequential need to escape – the inclusion of the manipulative, controlling, and selfish Robert serves to question the role of the west following re-unification. Since re-unification, western German discourse has been challenged for alternatingly seeks out tales of GDR misery in a kind of voyeuristic delight, while at the same time claiming political and cultural superiority. *Novemberkind* demonstrates a more subtle account within this context, with differentiation in the development and depth of the East German characters and the granting of agency and an optimism to Inga by the end of the film. Equally, the avoidance of simplistic binary representations (Robert is parasitic, but even he can be pitied; Inga's grandparents lied to her, but they had reason to believe this was the right thing to do by her), marks the film as speaking to a more sophisticated contemporary appraisal of post-unification German-German relations and memories.

## Who Remembers?

Robert's presence complicates the very ways in which we devour such GDR memories as that of the (fictional) Anneliese Kaden. Whether or not a particular spectator shares ties with East Germany in their personal biography will naturally shift the response to this aspect of the film. The director's positionality in this regard has also been considered of relevance, Schwochow's own 'pan-German' lived experience is notable: he was raised in East Berlin before moving with his parents to Hanover in 1989, after which he moved back to Berlin as an adult. Together with his mother, a former GDR radio journalist, he wrote the screenplay for *Novemberkind* (Evans, 'Memories' 217). Mariana Ivanova has also remarked on the autobiographical elements, which she argues contribute to its project of 'uncoupling individual stories from universalising discourses' (281). Schwochow has acknowledged as much in a statement for the film's promotion:

Ich wollte einen Film machen, mit dem ich mich selber auf eine Suche begeben kann. Mit dem ich mir und anderen Fragen stellen kann, die auch wehtun oder wütend machen. Will ich mit einer Lüge leben, wenn doch alles ganz gut funktioniert oder stattdessen die Wahrheit einfordern, auch wenn damit Schmerz und Enttäuschung verbunden sind? Es ist die Frage nach dem richtigen Leben im Falschen (qtd. in Ivanova 279).

Robert's connection to Anne, whose story genuinely affected him personally as she recounted it in his class, does not justify his exploitation of her memories, and of Inga, for his own career gains. Being a westerner, his manipulation of Inga is doubly confronting; she has grown up in the provincial, eastern town of Malchow, which contrasts sharply with his stylish flat in Konstanz. He appears completely obsessed by

his need to write this story – to the point where it comes across as a debilitating weakness; he expresses in a few ways his inner turmoil at not being able to come clean to Inga, as they become closer. To his publisher, he attempts to justify his decision not to initially tell Inga of the whole, true reason for his visiting Malchow to find her. ‘Eigentlich, möchte ich sie beschützen. Und gleichzeitig habe ich das kranke Bedürfnis über sie zu schreiben. Es ist wie... ich kann nicht anders’. *Novemberkind* is not just about Inga’s identity; this is made clear at the outset of Robert’s quest. His partner, who has left him by the end, says: ‘Du bist kein Schriftsteller’. Robert replies: ‘Was bin ich deiner Meinung nach?’ This film is also about Robert’s identity, and thus not exclusively about an East German identity; the story and its consequences affect both easterners and westerners.

While they are together in Stuttgart, Inga explicitly asks Robert why he wished to go with her on the search for Anne. The atmosphere in the hotel room suggests each person is slowly lowering their emotional and interpersonal defences. Robert’s uncertain relationship status with his partner has just been openly discussed. To the audience, it is clear that Robert feels that he cannot explain the actual reason for his accompanying Inga (i.e. the novel). Firstly, it will affect his ability to observe her reactions if she knew his full intentions. Secondly, he has already become emotionally attached to her, and is afraid to face her anger, when she discovers he has lied from the outset. Following Inga’s question, he lights a cigarette, a common reflex coping mechanism, but immediately he pauses and opens the window to toss it, unsmoked. Having rejected his initial, bodily impulse to avoid Inga’s question, and thus addressing his own culpability, we are invited to listen to what he now says to Inga with greater credulity. His actions speak of sincerity, despite his compromised position.

He describes how his father was a highly successful priest and an intimidating presence in his life, but could not offer Robert the attention and recognition he was after. He explains that, sometime after his father had died, Robert's family discovered he had been a powerful figure in the Nazi military during the Second World War. Robert's brother had been a militant '68er, and was consumed by a need to uncover everything and expose his father's crimes, until his own sudden passing in a car accident. Robert says that (for a brief moment) at his brother's funeral, he thought: 'jetzt ist endlich Ruhe'. Robert turns to Inga and concludes that perhaps this story is the reason he has chosen to follow her on her journey. We are left to ponder how, and why, these personal stories touching individual families might intersect with Germany's national histories. It is worth noting that the GDR's founding mythology of antifascism was necessarily a burial of many uncomfortable truths, on a collective scale: 'to construct a barrier between the new beginning and the old tyranny is to recollect the old tyranny' (Connerton 10).

There appears to be a circular nature to past recriminations. Robert's monologue directed towards Inga is in part a performance covering his anxiety and shame at not being able, even in this very moment which demands it of him, to tell her the whole truth. As in many films that engage in some way with Germany's collective past, the history of National Socialism is not far below the surface. Robert's story could be understood as a moment of lucidity, in which he suddenly understands himself to be playing the same role as his brother, painfully agitating old wounds – in his case it is for the purpose of his novel, in his brother's, as part of ideological distancing from the sins of both their father (as a poor father), and the preceding generation.

Inga's eastern identity has mostly been formed post-unification; she is much more part of the new Germany, than the former GDR. Nevertheless, there are moments in which she demonstrates a sense of her 'easterness', contrasted particularly with Robert's western identity, such as when she ironically asks if Robert wishes to survey the 'blühende Landschaften', when he asks her to join her on an outing at the start of the film. Later, as she nears the end of her quest, Inga rhetorically hypothesises about Anne and Alexander's life together, without her, and without any contact with her, in the West. The city of Konstanz and western stereotypes become a foil against which she can express her frustrations, and her anger at being abandoned, through a resistance in the form of asserting difference in identity. This takes the form of some humorous 'riffing' on typical social structures in the West, a demonstration of culturally informed stereotypes. 'Sie hat sich eingerichtet im schönen Westen. Herr Doktor schafft das Geld 'ran und Frau Doktor kümmert sich um die Kinder'. Wryly, Inga concludes: 'Da hab' ich echt was versäumt'. Inga asserts her own cultural identity as an easterner by valuing its particularities in the face of her parents' apparent rejection of her in favour of a lifestyle just as she describes.

### **Who Watches?**

*Novemberkind* interrogates the very act of engaging with GDR memories through its symbolism, metaphor and narrative. Identifying these encoded meanings, I have also sought to place the spectator's body further into this audiovisual experience, for instance, through my modelling of the 'shared skin', as well as in the spectator's carnal responses towards Inga and Robert's on-screen physicality. In the following, I examine the way that Robert's conflicted character incorporates differing modes of perception, from voyeuristic to intimate mediations of memory. In other words, my



aim is to examine how corporeal affect is integrated within the filmic techniques, used as part of Schwochow's intellectual probing of ethical questions surrounding GDR memory discourses.

As Robert and Inga embark on their journey together, we see shots of a number of industrial and roadside observation towers which, in the context of this story in particular, irresistibly call to mind border watchtowers of the GDR. It is as if the film has a twist on a typical GDR-trope where the *Stasi*-figure, prying into Inge's life, is in fact a westerner. There is a foreboding sense, aroused through the motif of these watchtowers (recalling Foucault's panopticon), along with specific camera techniques including a series of distant shots of Inge and Robert travelling, from the point-of-view of an unobserved watcher and common to 'thriller'-genres. These evoke a general feeling of unease, a 'sense of being watched'. Film theorists have utilised Foucault's theorisation of the panopticon as a means to investigate the 'scopic' realms of power at work in cinema (Elsaesser and Hagener 105). In these, the spectator's identification with either the camera or with the characters is connected with a voyeurism that we find made explicit in the sequences from *Novemberkind* described above; a modality of viewing that creates the feeling of being watched, through an increased awareness of all the 'watching' that is going on in an optical regime of film-viewing.

As has been indicated already in this chapter, there is a history to theories of cinema which link the 'gaze' with qualities of 'mastery'. But what does (an embodied) film phenomenology make of the scopic power relations detailed in these examples?

Jennifer Barker writes that 'we and the film are structured as the exterior relief of the other's inward feeling [...] Our reciprocal gestures – caresses, shivers, slaps, and

pricks – are the results of shared attitudes’ (*The Tactile Eye* 67). In *Novemberkind*, the spectator is implicated in the act of observation; through shots of the pair travelling, perceived as if through an unnamed observer’s eyes, the handheld camera’s movement kinaesthetically invites a physical connection between spectator and film’s body. The spectator does not possess a disembodied gaze, her corporeal response to the entirety of the film’s body, the mechanisms and motility of the camera, along with the layered and interconnected sensory responses to the character’s bodies and their relations on-screen, work together to place the (embodied) spectator firmly *within* the structures of cinematic gaze. ‘The way any embodied subject touches the world is an expression of its projects and attitudes toward objects and others in the world (desire or repulsion, for example)’, Barker goes on to argue, ‘films both inspire us to join in their attitudes towards the world and respond to our own’ (*The Tactile Eye* 67). The spectator is not separate to, but implicated as part of the film’s regime of viewing – in tandem with other sensory experiences.

We can therefore understand Robert’s voyeurism, which takes both narrative and visual forms, to be physically implicating and affecting. In the hotel in Stuttgart, the motif of water returns as a tool to show us just how deeply his situation is affecting him – his psychological trouble is physically portrayed. Robert sits at the edge of the bath as he runs it for Inga, clearly grappling with internal conflict. We cut to an extreme close up of Robert’s face, the handheld camera is continually shifting slightly, then the vision skips, once, twice, as if time is passing differently at this moment, jumping forward. Then he strips off his clothes and submerges himself repeatedly, our perspective cutting joltingly from one close-up angle to another. If we have any doubt as to the cause of the outburst, it is dispelled as he finally emerges, panting, with a look of exhausted horror, and says to himself: ‘Du Arschloch’. If

anything, in Robert's suffocating distress, we see clearly that he is out of his depth, not in control; through kinaesthetic means, this sequence figures Schwochow's intent, the ethical enquiry into the issues prompted by turning back towards painful histories and memories – along the spectrum from the private to the national.

Watching *Novemberkind* on multiple occasions, with the knowledge of the entirety of Robert's deceit, makes his duplicity all the more frustrating to see, in the way that, through narrative expectations, self-destructive behaviours seem bound to end in failure. An awareness of the fact that he is withholding the truth of Anne's death from Inga, out of a mixture of cowardice and selfishness, with the aim of ultimately furthering his career aspirations as a writer, makes Robert's intimacy with Inga all the more objectionable. This sense is augmented through the contrasting of Robert's intentions with Inga's sincerity in her search for identity and her past. Schwochow hints at the magnitude of Robert's lies from the beginning, as he grapples with what he is about to do in the restaurant toilets in Malchow. Again, claustrophobia marks the shot, cutting rapidly from one close up angle to another, as he pulls his body up in chin-ups, to get his blood flowing; it is a physical performance which serves to 'psyche him up', he utilises his body in order to wrest control of his mind, and his conscience. Cutting swiftly between multiple angles, the line-of-sight often obscured by the toilet cubicles, it feels as if there is almost not enough room for 'all of us' to be in there, including Robert.

While Robert is undoubtedly a dubious character, there is also an element of ambivalence in his portrayal, which can be mapped from the visual and distant, to the physical and intimate. His exploitation of Inga is secretive and observational – voyeuristic. On the other side, there are moments, like the bath scene above, where

the audience is invited to share in his dilemma more empathetically, or at least sympathetically – pity is aroused through accentuating his physical vulnerability. He also demonstrates that, behind his self-serving deceit, he has developed genuinely-felt emotions for Inga; he is certainly not a one-dimensionally bad, parasitic monster.

Robert's (intradiegetic) gazing upon both Inga and her mother's traumatic memories is a fetishistic and voyeuristic 'gaze'; it recalls what has become a conventional feminist film-theoretical understanding of the operations of distance and mastery inherent in this version of cinematic 'looking'. This type of viewing is troubled by moments showing Robert's physical proximity, desire for, and intimacy with Inga. This conflict, embodied in Robert's character, reflects Marks's observations on the viewer in cinema: 'Voyeurism relies on maintaining the distance between viewer and viewed. Eroticism closes that distance and implicates the viewer in the viewed' (*Skin* 184). Marks's 'haptic visuality' – as opposed to its optic counterpart, entails a critique of mastery, and it often through a pleasurable relationship that operates erotically between the viewer and the film. This erotic quality does not rely on the content of the images being 'erotic'; Marks argues that haptic images are erotic in the inter-subjective relationship between the spectator and the image that they produce (*Skin* 183).

Robert's wish to control Inga's story is a reflection on the ideal nature of the optical relationship between viewer and film, in which 'the viewer isolates and comprehends the objects of vision' (Marks, *Skin* 184). Robert's self-described 'kranke Bedürfnis' to write Inga into his novel, necessitating a voyeuristic distance, is contrastingly juxtaposed with his physical desire for her, as a person who (currently) trusts him, and is sharing the pain of this journey with him. Both Robert's and Inga's identities are

being shaped by their shared journey; in this respect, we can see how the closeness and the distance in their relationship shape the arc of their identity seeking. Touch and desire are intimate, and an awareness of self and other belong to the power of touch, as Laine affirms (recalling Sartre), ‘... touch reveals the other’s skin as skin to myself and to the other; touch is a mutual fascination, an exchange of similitude in the reciprocal act of shaping’ (‘Cinema as Second Skin’ 99). Robert’s conflicted status between observer and friend reflects two modes of viewing distinguished by Linda Williams: he seems to be in-between the pleasures derived from an aesthetic distance (traditionally understood as part of the conceptualisation of the gendered gaze) and a ‘sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion’ in horror, pornography and melodrama (5). Indeed, in one scene, Inga and Robert come close to an erotic encounter; Robert ‘almost’ kisses her. But the eroticism of the haptic image goes beyond physical relations between the bodies of the characters within the film. Robert’s voyeurism, too is contrasted by more than his closeness to Inga – the film’s ‘haptic images’ use closeness and texture to bring the viewer into a relationship that lacks focus and totality, but contains heightened affect, define his conflicted approach to Inga/Anne’s memory. Moreover, we also haptically ‘know’ Inga through our encounters with the dual figure of Anne – these flashbacks, shot in the ORWO colour gradient, establish a warmer contrast with the hues that surround Robert’s appearances. Here we can identify a critique of viewing in *Novemberkind* that aligns with Marks’s critique of ‘optic visuality’, perhaps sharing ‘an awareness about the destructive and literally imperialist potential of vision’ (*Skin* 193).

Robert’s dictaphone emblematises the objective, controlling apparatus that stands between him and Inga’s often distressing search. It acts as a shield, like the war-photographer’s lens, between the reality and consequences of this story on the people

involved (including himself). Managing the separation between his affection for Inga, and his need to write Anne's and her stories, increasingly escapes his control. This barrier is shattered, momentarily, in one instant of panic, when the true stakes of the Robert's game with Inga's personal life are revealed. Secretly observing Inga in the gloomy, goods-train depot where Juri now lives, Robert records her emotional state with a poetic turn of phrase into his dictaphone. As he stands distantly, describing her distress, disorientation and confusion, he is snapped out of his focus on linguistic precision. A train approaches, and he fears for his life, stashing the recorder into his pocket and running towards her, yelling her name. The train passes by, and they embrace; the spectator's privileged knowledge of Robert's dishonesty transmutes the lingering shock of the train into an ongoing discomfort. Had Inga's distress placed her in front of that train, Robert, as a catalyst for this pain, and through his manipulation and vampiric desire to own and use her story, would have to own a considerable moral responsibility for that.

Robert's apartment is creepily reminiscent of a stalker's, or serial killer's, from a psychological thriller. The posters adorning the walls with key-words – 'Lüge, Identität, Schuld' – that thematise Inga's life, appear brutally cold and distant when confronted with her presence. The very idea is highly unsavoury: that the person who set Inga's recent traumatic experiences in motion, and who has accompanied her throughout her journey, could abstract them in such a manner. Robert's reduction of both Anne and Inga's memories starkly contrasts with Anne's painfully lived experience of personal grief, which we have shared through increasingly affecting flashbacks. In this relationship, where do we as spectators sit, ethically speaking? Inga seizes his dictaphone, and hears Robert's narration: 'Sie sucht Anne, und in Anne sucht sie sich selbst'. We hear the crux of *Novemberkind* through Inga's ears. The

manipulation of her mother's and her own grief is conveyed harshly through the tinny, coarse speakers on the playback device. 'Warum geilst du dich an fremden Geschichten auf?' Inga's accusation, thrown at Robert like a weapon, echoes Anna Maria Mühe's own criticism of certain people who exacerbated the hardship of her parents' conflict by becoming over-involved and taking sides; in such cases Mühe wondered 'Habt Ihr kein eigenes Leben?' (Beier and Beyer).

Why do we relish the misery of others' stories? – Inga's accusation could be read in a broader sense, aimed at 'society' in general - we seem to have an unquenchable thirst for the tragic and traumatic in cultural memory. Inga's question could also be turned and directed at the audience. Of course, within the film's world, Robert's obsession with Anne and Inga's personal biographies take a different form to the entertainment the film provides us. He observes and intervenes in her life as part of his desperate 'need' to write his novel. For us as spectators, Inga's accusation is differentiated in that we have been watching a fictional story unfold. Nevertheless, when one considers the glut of stories which have endlessly mined the GDR for tales of tragedy and oppression, her question remains pertinent. For instance, we do not have to look far to see the consequences of such public interest, when we consider the real-life context, only just outside the world of the film-text, of the 'scandalous' post-unification GDR recriminations which dominated the last years of Anna Maria Mühe's parents' lives.

By the film's conclusion it is clear that neither Inga's nor Anne's story will be published by Robert. His desire for Inga complicates his relationship to her, and our potentially voyeuristic relationship to hers, and her mother's stories. However, his position at the end of the film (no Inga, no partner, no novel) can be read as a stark message that deceit, and exploitation of others' memories, is not to be valued. Thus,

while we might share some sympathy with his plight - that he has found himself unable to extract himself from his lies – the ultimate revelation that he has known all along that her search for her mother will ultimately prove fruitless is unforgivable (for both Inga and the spectator). Inga has a ‘right’ to hers and her mother’s story and, while heartache and loss have been central to the affects aroused for the people concerned, if there is to be (a moral) ‘good’ to come of it all, it is through Inga’s ability to take her newly reformed identity out into the world, and to live happily. Where she is to go, and where she is, matters far less to Inga at this point; her journey into the past has returned her altered to Malchow, and possibilities, rather than limitations, are what beckon now.

### **Trapped in the Headlights of the Past**

Through her neologism ‘site-seeing’, Bruno maps the cinematic experience onto a spatial, emotional topography, aiming to shift focus in film-studies from *sight* to *site*. In the transition from the optic to the haptic, this theoretical approach opens up aspects of film-spectatorship from being preoccupied with visual ‘mastery’, to being conceived of in terms of movement, place, and exploration, among other ideas:

Locked within a Lacanian gaze, whose spatial impact remained unexplored, the film spectator was turned into a *voyeur*. By contrast, when we speak of site-seeing we imply that, because of the film’s spatio-corporeal mobilization, the spectator is rather a *voyageur*, a passenger who traverses a haptic, emotive terrain (15–16).



The framing of the film as a mystery makes a virtue of the search for the truth. Inga's *Novemberkind* is certainly not alone in this respect. European film broadly speaking is 'fascinated by time', Wendy Everett argues. Practices in European cinema are 'shaped by a desire to return to the past' (a central motivation driving *Novemberkind*), and by 'an almost obsessive need to explore and interrogate memory and the process of remembering'. This need, according to Everett, is prompted by an 'apparent' conviction that in the exploration of memory and how memories function, we may find the 'key to present identity' (107).

If we accept that *Novemberkind* fits the mould described by Everett, what techniques are employed to return to the past, and to investigate memory? Taking Bruno's methodology of understanding cinema in terms of its kinaesthetic origins (recalling the archaic word for cinema: kinema), we can see Inga's search for identity takes a psycho-geographical form. The spectator is invited to share her 'site-seeing' journey, visiting traces of Anne that have been left with the people she touched. Anne's letters, her poem, her melancholy, and Inga herself – these are all 'sites of memory' that form a composite of Anne's existence. Inga (and the spectator) become Bruno's 'voyageuse', as she travels through a mnemonic terrain, and she (re)collects fragmentary landmarks of her mother.

Bruno's transformation of the spectator from an observer to a traveller, whose journey through emotional affects is mobilised in part through the geospatial and temporal relations of the film-environment, neatly encapsulates Inga/Anne's movement across temporal and physical planes. A multiplicity of movements is encouraged in *Novemberkind*. A highly personal and intimate representation of characters' subjectivities is ushered through a frequency of close-ups, unsteady, handheld shots,

and in the repetition of a melancholic, minimalistic, yet sentimental soundtrack. Corporeally, the past and the present are interlocked through Mühe's duality, and in the meantime (the present) Inga's road-trip unlocks her self-understanding through encountering and harnessing emotional memories of her mother, fleshing out her identity anew.

The spectator visits these *Erinnerungsorte* along with Inga, each an example of Bruno's *voyageuse*, travelling along a path which navigates 'site-seeing' landscapes of affect. Breaking from a traditional film-theoretical approach, Bruno's wordplay aims to describe a strategy of opening up understandings of the haptic experience of film spectatorship:

The premise of site-seeing contests another aspect of the theory of the gaze as well: its favouring of a perspectival, optical geometry as a model for film. Confined to an optical position, this theory has tended to conceive of film space as a direct heir of Renaissance perspective and, understanding this in a narrow and reductive way, has reduced spectatorship to the fixed, unified geometry of a transcendental, disembodied gaze (16).

In terms of the film's depiction of hindsight, the moral and ethical evaluating of past decisions and dealing with past wrongs, how do central identifications operating in the film experience function in Bruno's framework of site-seeing? This question crystallises as a culturally relevant locus of debate, surrounding the film's own context, in light post-Wall revelations of the scale of Stasi-compliance, informing, surveillance, and self-surveillance. Important among the sensorially-active identifications in the film are our empathy for and shared perspective with Inga (as

main protagonist and with her ‘shared skin’ with Anne). We are rarely (if at all) asked, as spectators, to interrogate her decisions under a moral framework; rather, she is more or less a victim of her circumstances, and we share her outrage at the web of lies weaved around her since before she can remember. Her need to find her mother is not only understandable, but shared in us. We, like her, are teased by the drip-feed of memories and flashbacks to Anne’s story. We share in Inga’s desire to rewrite her past into a more truthful account, one that includes her mother’s reality. The force of the narrative that drives us towards ‘solving’ the mystery of her mother’s whereabouts, which works on the mutually affected Inga and embodied spectator, seems to place a premium on the notion of truth.

As a ‘memory film’, *Novemberkind* prompts us to think about the way we judge our past actions and decisions, and those of others; these aspects are vital to the moral thrust of the characters’ stories. There is an invitation to interrogate the past (and present) decisions each character has made, which bears out particular attitudes which we, informed by the structures of society, might have regarding the influence of history on personal decision making. Paul Connerton has commented that: ‘To pass judgment on the practices of the old regime is the constitutive act of the new order’ (7). Inga is able to find a new strength partly through her ethical contestations with the other characters. Looking at processes by which trauma can be transferred across generations is not new to studies of German culture and society (Olick, ‘What Does It Mean’ 547–49). The phenomenon has often been discussed in the national context, for example in such forms as the influential work of intergenerational consequences of mass-repression from Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in *Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern*, or, more recently, in Marianne Hirsch’s work on ‘post-memory’ and the

intergenerational pain from the Holocaust. Connerton attests to this generational aspect of contested memory:

Across generations, different sets of memories, frequently in the shape of implicit background narratives, will encounter each other; so that, although physically present to one another in a particular setting, the different generations may remain mentally and emotionally insulated, the memories of one generation locked irretrievably, as it were, in the brains and bodies of that generation (3).

*Novemberkind* deals with generational changes and contestations within GDR remembrance; it addresses some of the conflicts that have arisen owing to differing perspectives relating to those whose being-in-the-world has been informed predominantly from opposing sides of the Berlin Wall's existence – temporally speaking. A post-unification generation of young eastern Germans have grown up with memories of the dictatorship around them; whether accentuated, or indeed silenced or suppressed, this culture of memory undoubtedly has shaped identities according to its specific tendencies. There is a sense of endlessness to the cycle of the nation's psychic processes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which have dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and show little sign of letting up; for some Germans, this might feel like an obligation to perpetual re-traumatisation. The repetition of claustrophobic sensations, and the motif of water (as surface and depth, as obscuring, asphyxiating, as well as purifying) both serve as symbolic and corporeal filmic techniques that work to translate an affecting experience of the restriction, that the endless national quest of determining perpetrator from victim applies onto the nation.

Travel is vital to Inga's journey to uncover truth, and to discover her identity anew. Her search takes her across Germany, from the regional Malchow through to Stuttgart and Konstanz. Her journey does not, however, end at her mother's grave in Konstanz. At the film's conclusion, while she has finally uncovered the full story of her origins, she now embarks on a new expedition; a particular destination is explicitly less important than her search for Anne, Inga now having found a strengthened resolve at the conclusion of her challenging and the painful, if productive, searching for her self-identity. The amount of time spent actually travelling in *Novemberkind* reveals the importance movement to Inga's internal journey. In self-conscious, modernist filmmaking, the 'essentially dynamic nature of filmic time,' Everett reminds us, accounts for the 'frequent representation of memory and the search for identity as journeys: the moving camera both reflects and constructs narrative impetus, and comments on and explores temporal mobility' (111). The connection between memory, identity, and filmic time recurs as a motif, for instance as the central function of the road-movie. The skin of the film, shared by Inga and her mother, and by the spectator and the film, drives the dynamics of these relations.

The experience of *Novemberkind*'s narrative temporality is coupled to its spatiality – and also to movement. This can be mapped approximately to a formulaic arc based on the generic road-film: there is a crisis which precipitates a need to travel, and during that journey there is a process of identity-discovery reaching resolution by the end, producing a changed protagonist. Mariana Ivanova writes of the symbolic function of travel in *Novemberkind*: 'Die Reise als eine Metapher für die Suche nach der eigenen Herkunft spielt eine zentrale Rolle für die Konstitution von Ingas neue Biographie, die sich durch die Existenz einer bisher unbekanntem Mutter verändert hat' (278).

While I concur with Ivanova in that the 'road-movie' trope is certainly activated in

Inga's journey of self-discovery, I would supplement this understanding with the kinaesthetic implications of the film's movement and travel, which affect the spectator's experience of Inga's journey at the same time.

By the film's conclusion we leave Inga not at a terminus of her identity-search, but at a liminal stage, as she embarks on a second journey. The plot's ending posits that a solution to Inga's 'problem', as was posed in the beginning, could be found through a new engagement with her past. By looking for her mother, in a project of memory-discovery, she has a better idea of who she is – her corporeal relationship with Anne figuring this '(re)membering'. She emerges with a new sense of self-identity in the post-unification present to embark with confidence and optimism into the world-at-large. It is through access to the past, and to memory, that she has become less shackled by other pasts – i.e. she feels able to, with a degree of sadness and regret at the loss of an innocence in the relationship to her grandparents, form some distance from the older generation, and from her home-town, with its limiting outlook, and take more control of her path. Anne's actual grave, with the inscription – a new site, tragically for Inga she has been unable to find her living mother to replace the false story she grew up with, however she has a 'living' memory of her now inside of herself. One she acquired through her journey of discovery.

### **'Du setzt dich da wie ein Verhör!'**

Inga's Opa snaps at her with this exclamation, as she interrogates her grandparents for their decision to hide the story of her mother's *Republikflucht* from her. Anne's escape had immediate consequences for those left behind in Malchow; aside from taking up the responsibility of raising her child, Anne's grandfather lost his position

as the headmaster of the school. Inga is not terribly sympathetic to these protestations, however, as she fires back, ‘was unterschreiben?’, accusing her grandfather of possibly coming to a moral compromise (with the Stasi) in order to regain his position at the school. Inga speaks for a new generation of Germans, following the 1968-era protests, who might come across unpleasant realities in their elders’ pasts. Nevertheless, the circumstances of a dictatorship make it difficult to apply appropriate moral judgement. It is hard to distinguish where personal responsibility ends and practical reality begins. Are we to judge Inga’s grandparents less harshly than she does in this moment? The film’s sympathetic portrayal of Oma and Opa’s vulnerability suggests: perhaps.

‘Self-understanding’, according to Mark Freeman, ‘occurs, in significant part, through narrative reflection, which is itself a product of hindsight. [...] Hindsight plays an integral role in shaping and deepening moral life’ (4). Analysts of all description – such as writers, thinkers, politicians, journalists and judges – encountered profound difficulties in the exercises of hindsight that marked an explosion of re-evaluating the GDR following re-unification. The newly reconfigured parliament sought to officially work through a multitude of issues through the two *Enquete-Kommissionen*. Many of the looked-for pathways leading to reparations, disciplinary actions, public condemnations or exculpations were mined with contradictions and paradoxes. The particular nature of experiences of repression in the GDR contribute to this effect. At the same time as the ‘apparatus of coercion and covert capacity for repression was growing exponentially’, O’Brien argues, ‘the GDR functioned not primarily through the overt exercise of coercion [...] but rather through some form of internalisation of, or willingness to play by, the unwritten “rules of the game”’ (232). In *Judging the Past in Unified Germany*, James McAdams provides a detailed examination of

judicial procedures of criminal, moral and ethical responsibilities, in the context of the post-Wall efforts to find justice for perceived wrongdoings under the dictatorship. He notes how care was given to understanding and evaluating cultural and social circumstances, in such examples as cases of prosecution of GDR officials, before any culpability could be determined. In one highly visible trial of three officials for a border shooting, the judge (as part of a guilty verdict), remarked that the defendants had been ‘prisoners of German postwar history and prisoners of their own political convictions’ (qtd. in McAdams 40).

*Novemberkind* is both a part of, and a reflection on such discourses, of this ongoing process. The film calls us to ponder how to weigh up right and wrong, to measure the good and the bad in the choices made by the characters. We understand this is not a simple process, for the film shows us, too, how the pressures from the oppressive arms of the dictatorship complicate any evaluation, attempted in hindsight, of the behaviour of those who lived in the GDR. Former citizens of the GDR were effectively incarcerated, locked out from the world behind the jointly material and symbolic Berlin Wall: the ‘*Schussbefehl*’ representing the ultimate price for those who attempted to defy their circumstances. In one of the travelling sequences, which enlist the spectator in the journey of the somewhat unlikely companions in Inga’s equally unusual transport, her vintage motorcycle with Robert in the sidecar. At one point the camera holds as it focuses on a sign, which points to Erfurt in one direction, and Frankfurt am Main in the other – an image that is symbolic of a freedom of movement only available after the *Wende*. There is a melancholy in this representation of a united Germany within the context of the film’s narrative; a tragic irony in that the opening of the borders did not bring Inga and her mother together. Inga’s remark to Alexander, that she would have visited her mother in the hospital,



suggests that she, at least, feels blame for this lies perhaps with those individuals whose silence kept her from her mother, regardless of the GDR's controlling mechanisms.

Each of the characters' decisions in the past and in the present, is a snapshot of the film's being inflected with responsibilities and moral choices. Explanations such as Kerstin's: that Inga simply 'could not understand how it was back then' are understandably typical, for those trying to justify their actions under the compromised circumstances of the dictatorship. Anne's own 'choice' was between risking the life of Juri, the hunted deserter, or her baby daughter. In flashback, we understand that she is frozen in grief at the decision she has run out of time to make. The stakes were high, the state could punish children left behind by parents who managed to successfully cross the border in flight through forced adoption (Warnecke 232).

Importantly, the film does not seek to oversimplify the differences between right and wrong, with respect to decisions made by people and families under the dictatorship. Rather, it shows us that in many cases personal agency in decision-making must be understood as being marked by complicated systems of compromise. That Inga appears, at the end, to be moving towards forgiveness, of her mother, her grandparents and her closest friend, suggests that, while the new Germany ought not to shy away from the truth, nor from traumatic memories, an approach which allows for understanding and mercy rather than punishment is a healthier option for the country as it moves forward. However, there is equally no definitive 'happy-ending'; Inga's influence upon reappearing in Juri and Alexander's lives does not necessarily point to any absolute reason for us to believe that it will 'initiate a healing process commensurate with her own', as Evans has observed ('Memories' 222). Furthermore,

that doubt extends to her judgment of her grandparents. At the end of the film, Inga returns to Malchow, but does not speak with her grandparents – instead, she writes a letter leaving it in their letterbox, before she departs on her new journey, armed with her newly-found sense of self. Evans suggests that, for her grandparents, who remain ‘oblivious to the fate of their daughter, having severed ties with her and returned Alexander’s letter unopened ... the truth will [arguably] be the hardest to bear’ (‘Memories’ 223).

Despite this melancholy, Inga’s physical journey, her social conflict with those around her who have lied, and her psychological transformative experience of identity formation, all work together to interrupt what appears to be an endlessly repeating cycle of trauma. Inga’s journey opens up potential new directions, and *Novemberkind* thus posits a circuit-breaker for Germany’s collective traumatic history: if Inga embodies positive post-unification futurity, this futurity can be found in a balance of appropriate measures of inward-looking, backward-looking, and forward momentum.

## **Conclusion**

Inga’s optimistic future at the film’s conclusion has been achieved through her access to a new authenticity. The spectator ventures through the topography of Germany, and the psyches of both Inga and Anne; Anna Maria Mühe’s body thus membraneously connects the past with the present. Traces of the past inspire characters to make particular decisions in the present. Inga’s only means of ‘touching’ her mother is through an archaeological search for her in others’ testimony. Her mother is a person who is at once powerfully tied to her (as is made clear consistently through their

similarity in appearance and comportment) yet also in many ways a stranger, once Inga discovers most of what she knew about her was founded in lies.

The connection between Inga and her mother is defined by both distance and proximity. Inga sets off to find her mother, who, up until this point, had only existed as memories, photographs, in stories told by her grandparents, or as a grave by which to lay flowers. Anne appears before us in a series of flashbacks, ‘wearing’ Inga’s body – yet ultimately, she remains as buried as she was at the beginning, just as distantly trapped in the past; under the ground as she had been for Inga at the start. Except, not quite – Inga is transformed through her experience, which we have shared, and the film ends showing her embarking on a new journey full of resolve and promise.

Through each of these (re)discoveries, Inga comes close to her mother anew, a touching of the past which alters her present. Inga’s actions also have an effect on the past – by probing for the truth of her mother’s story, Inga upsets the concealment and, with fresh light on the past, so come possibilities of interactions leading to personal growth.

As a counterpoint to the ensnaring claustrophobia of Germany’s history and cultural memory, Inga’s forward momentum, her release from stasis into an active search for herself, signals a possibility for reunified Germany to break out and find its way in the youthful confidence of a fresh start. By the end of the film, Inga comes to realise that despite the reawakening of multiple traumas in herself, her family and friends, the journey she has undertaken has left her with an essentially unchanged reality of the death of her mother. However, there is a definite shift that has taken place as a consequence of what she now knows about her mother, and what she has learned of herself. This is coded cinematically and narratively by the resolution of the crisis of

her indecision, held back by a limited outlook and the weight of responsibility to her grandparents. No longer does Inga feel trapped within Malchow; she is able to make a move out of the small town, at least for a while, to continue the journey set in motion by Robert – this time, however, she will be writing her own story.

## 4: *Der Preis* (2011): In the Shadows of the *Plattenbau*

### **Introduction**

At the centre of Elke Hauck's 2011 film, *Der Preis* (The Prize), stands the *Plattenbau* – the prefabricated slab apartment blocks that have come to be the distinctive 'look' of East German architecture. Large, looming and homogeneous, these estates remain one of that former nation's most 'concrete' legacies. *Der Preis*'s non-linear narrative is set in their shadows; they house its story of homecoming, and of re-encountering ghosts across multiple temporalities, from the late 1980s GDR to the post-unification present. In this chapter, I examine the valuable insights *Der Preis* offers into time and space – as experienced in post-unification Germany and in late-modern capitalism more generally. The film has many spectral qualities. But, as I will argue, there is more at play here than the straightforward notion of the past haunting the present.

*Der Preis* follows its protagonist, an architect called Alexander 'Alex' Beck (Florian Panzer), across two timelines. In the present, his prize-winning designs to renovate a block of *Plattenbauten* send him grudgingly from his western German life back to the provincial, eastern German town of his childhood – to redevelop the very apartments where he and his classmates grew up. However, with construction stalled, and being further trapped in the town with his broken-down car in the garage, he encounters people and places he has not seen since he left years ago. In the second narrative strand, we are taken back to the late 1980s of the GDR, via Alex's memories; here the subjective flashback is used to frame this memory film.

The redevelopment seems to function as the central force pushing the film's plot forwards, but in the meantime (while construction lags) we delve into Alex's memories of his youth, which have been unavoidably (for him) stirred up since his arrival. Told in flashback, we follow the younger Alex (Sven Gielnik) and two former close companions, the siblings Michael 'Micha' (Vincent Krüger) and Nicole (Vanessa Krüger), as they experience the trials and joys of youth in the GDR. Back then, the young Alex imagined his life unfolding with optimism: Micha is training to be accepted into the *Kinder- und Jugendsportschule* (KJS), and Alex hopes his and Nicole's feelings for each other will continue to develop, and that the three of them might forge a future that conforms, and is comfortable, within the possibilities offered by the world that lay in front of an East German youth of the 1980s.

*Der Preis* fits well within the category of 'memory films', if we recall Astrid Erll's typology: Hauck's film exhibits a conscious approach to the workings of cultural memory, through its interrogation of the legacies of the GDR in post-unification Germany, and it deals with personal memory in a formal sense through its non-linear narrative and use of flashbacks. For these reasons, it further suits Erll's subcategory of 'memory-reflexive' cinema. Such films 'address concepts of memory, and problematize and imaginatively realize acts of individual and collective remembering' (137). As such, I also interpret the film's temporal explorations as 'memory work', given it demonstrates both an 'inquiring attitude towards' and 'purposeful staging of' the past (Kuhn, 'Memory Texts' 303).

Time, itself, is an experience in *Der Preis*, carnally tethered to the spectator via the film's affective spatiality. The film uses the *Plattenbau* as a cornerstone of its narrative; these buildings are the spatial environment which house past, present and

future. The GDR past, the post-unification present, and the haunted landscapes of lost ideals, failed utopias and undelivered promises are all found in their shadows. The environment produced by the *Plattenbau* builds the film's terrains of memory. These buildings are like stationary time-machines, seemingly always there. Meanwhile, the film beams us from the present to the past and back again, conjuring the spectral ever-presence of the GDR.

The past timeline is situated in East Germany, remembered from the post-unification present. These two timelines are tied together by *place* – and through the narrative trope of the home-comer. This homecoming role is embodied by the film's central protagonist, Alex. The locus of a provincial town in the former East is the fulcrum upon which the film's musings on change, stasis, time, nostalgia and regret are balanced. The GDR (encountered through the familiar cinematic technique of the flashback) is (re)created on the screen by filming in abandoned, or otherwise available Soviet-era architecture. The present-day sequences are set in the same location, the *Plattenbauten* standing still in the face of the buffeting from the 'winds of change' that have swirled through Germany's history of division and re-unification. The sights and sounds of cinema are manipulated by the filmmakers to achieve a mediation of a memory of East Germany that carries a melancholic emotional and affective valence; the spectator experiences not only the past, but how it feels to remember that past, today. Furthermore, it brings the emotional immediacy of the past to the forefront, through the 'trick' of the flashback, short-circuiting temporality. Thus, the film bypasses 'naturally' occurring emotional, temporal and spatial distance from the past.

This chapter is broken into three parts. To begin, I outline the film's twin notions of 'temporality' and 'spatiality' and explain its aesthetic context and 'Berlin School'

connections, in order to question the extent to which this film might belong as part of a particular period of national filmmaking. Secondly, I demonstrate *Der Preis*'s resonances with DEFA productions, finding echoes of GDR filmmaking in its remembered past. Finally, I develop the inquiry into temporality and emotion, located in space, through an analysis of the film's atmosphere and affects, referring to the notion of 'hauntology'. Here, I pay special attention to *Der Preis*'s use of sound, finding in its haptic qualities, a spatial evocation of the film's melancholic, temporal memory work.

### **The Time-and-Space of the 'Berlin School'**

We encounter the film's atmospherics of lateness and spectrality from the outset. The film begins without any image; the first sounds are of a GDR punk song playing over a blank, black screen. Hauck uses non-diegetic music only sparingly in *Der Preis*, and this example precedes the first visual shot – that of the architect, Alex waiting in his car at a crossroads for a train to pass, as he journeys from his new home in Frankfurt am Main to his birthplace in the former East. We therefore begin the film at a borderland of both time and place. Seated in his car, Alex's demeanour makes clear, even before he later declares, 'ich schieb' das Ding dem Bauleiter in den Arsch und hau' wieder ab', that this visit is not one he would make by choice.

The adult Alex's reluctance to return home is signalled from this opening sequence, as he sits in his car, staring, after the train has passed and the boom gates have risen. This scene establishes the subdued, melancholic tone that pervades the film, expressed through a grey colour palette typical of post-Wende eastern depictions, sparse dialogue, a sense of dissatisfaction among the locals, and Alex's body language



as he deals with personal demons; these elements combine to suggest an inevitable tragedy set in the GDR past. Indeed, we eventually discover that, following a sequence of events that involves Alex's own actions, his best friend, Micha, commits suicide – unable or unwilling to contend with the joint pressures of his authoritarian father and society.

Scholars have remarked on a wave of literature that expresses a sense of 'lateness' and 'spectrality' when dealing with the legacies of the GDR (Leeder, 'After the Massacre of Illusions' 103–04; see also Smale). Similar atmospherics have arisen in recent filmmaking. In particular, 'Berlin School' films have notably been suffused with eerie, temporally uncertain and ghostly depictions – Christian Petzold's *Gespenster Trilogy* is one example. Hauck has been associated with a second generation of 'Berlin School' filmmakers (Wagner, 'Introduction' 5; Abel, 'Film Establishment Attacks' 605); older directors often cited as part of this loose grouping include Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler and Angela Schanelec. Reading *Der Preis* within the context the Berlin School helps to understand the film's place as part of a wider collection of cultural works that are figuring out questions of late-modern life through similar aesthetic means. It is important, however, to bear in mind that 'the Berlin School has always been a critics' designation, not an artists' declaration' (Roy 11), when viewing separate productions as part of a whole.

We can identify certain 'Berlin School' aesthetics and atmosphere in *Der Preis*'s slow realism, in its 'foregrounding' of the background *mise-en-scène*, the objectivity of the remarkably still, observant camera's long gaze with a tendency to stare, and in the amplification of the sounds of everyday life. Marco Abel has observed that 'many, though not all, Berlin School films are dominated by long takes, long shots, clinically

precise framing, a certain deliberateness of pacing, sparse usage of extra-diegetic music' (*Counter-Cinema* 15). *Der Preis* is a film that is in many ways *about* time – specifically, the feeling of time within the context of Germany's division and reunification. The 'action' in *Der Preis* proceeds slowly, with unhurried, episodic shots that are suffused with a sparse, poetic use of dialogue, and with a plot that relies less on 'action-reaction' to drive it forward. Instead, the film meanders in a way which cinematically approximates the feeling, if not the actual temporality, of the slower pace of 'reality' out in the world beyond the film.

In words resonating with the corporeal, sensorial and temporal domains of this study, Abel argues that Berlin School films tend to 'share a desire to infuse German cinema with a new sense of reality – or better yet, a *sensation* of the reality of the present, which ... is not the same as, and is indeed crucially different than, a mere *Bebilderung* (depiction) or *Abbildung* (representation) of the present' (*Counter-Cinema* 14–15). The 'sensations' of the multiple Germanys (East, West and post-unification) in *Der Preis* are of particular interest. While Hauck's explorations of time and space are indeed concerned with contemporary German national identity, the atmospherics of *Der Preis* resonate with global concerns of epochal decline and a sense of end times.

Time and space are twin dimensions with which *Der Preis* plays, preoccupations that characterise Berlin School films. In terms of *time*, Berlin School filmmakers' collective political approach is 'profoundly affected by a sense of *belatedness*, of having missed or arrived too late for a time when politics in its more traditional, left-radical sense still seemed possible' (Abel, *Counter-Cinema* 10). The temporal sense of lateness is pertinent to *Der Preis*, it recalls 'Nachträglichkeit' – 'a retroactive effect directed towards the past' and an 'aftereffect or affect projected into a future' (Gook

38). This particular sense (and sensation) belonging to the current historical moment, of present and future suffused with repetitive intrusions of the past, is interrogated further in the second part of this study. In terms of *space*, Berlin School films often invite the spectator to play the role of ‘*flâneur*’ together with the characters, ‘phlegmatically’, in typically unrecognisable spaces, or interstitial environments such as borderlands and transitory locales (Abel, *Counter-Cinema* 16). The *Plattenbauten* of Hauck’s *Der Preis*, so distinctive of the former East, might be symbolically recognisable, but their uniformity creates a generalised and non-specific affective quality, and they furthermore act as interstices between borderlands – East/West, division/re-unification.

Place is clearly a consideration of deep interest for Hauck’s film, which has an architect as its central protagonist, and which examines the East German *Plattenbau* as a key *Erinnerungsort* (following Pierre Nora’s concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, a place where a group’s memory crystallises). The film expresses cultural memories of the GDR in the subjective mode of its fictional personal narrative; we inhabit the space of the *Plattenbau* of the late 1980s through Alex’s point-of-view via ‘his’ flashbacks, and we reencounter these spaces through his home-coming role. The film’s focus is thus also demonstrably concerned with memory (thought of as different from history), as the film directs its attention to the GDR past via Alex’s subjective flashbacks. Maureen Turim has written that the ‘Hollywood film finds it almost impossible to tell the story of an historical occurrence or to describe a period of history without focusing on how a small group of individuals is affected by that time in history’ (103). The ‘Berlin School’ *Der Preis* utilises Alex and his individual memory in a similar narrative fashion; the issue at hand is how the past is approached from the spatial coordinates of a post-unification landscape.

Furthermore, the repeated jumping back into – and then returning from – the past through flashbacks highlights a paradoxical stagnation of life within the liminality of the post-Wall present. This is a contradiction of memory and history: an entire country, along with its political ideology, economic structures and social organisation ‘virtually’ disappeared, in what is remembered as one of the most dramatic singular, momentary turning-points in recent world-history, yet, in both material reality and in the memories of people, much of the GDR remains. The standstill of the renovations to the *Plattenbauten* reflects the frustrations and ambivalence faced by those living in these spaces. There is, moreover, a double resonance in the evocation of this contemporary feeling with the temporality of the ‘80s GDR in the flashback, an era typically understood as stagnated – a theme explored in the DEFA film *Die Architekten* (Peter Kahane, 1990), discussed later in this chapter.

### **The Temporal Work of the Photographic ‘Thumbnail Image’**

*Der Preis* shifts between its focus on the built environment to locating memory in other memory sites; in particular, photography emerges as a key trope. Complexities of contact and distance, and the spaces in-between stillness and movement are brought to our critical attention in the physical act of handling photographs within the film’s diegesis. Across all these spheres, both cultural and personal traces are present in film’s emotional content of belatedness, loss and regret. Photographs have been shown to be a socially and culturally significant memory object: in ‘Family Frames’, Marianne Hirsch uncovers the power of images to affect people across time and generations, deploying her influential notion of ‘postmemory’. Family in particular, for Hirsch, ‘is structured by desire and disappointment, love and loss. Photographs, as

the only material traces of an irrecoverable past, derive their power and their important cultural role from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of family life' (5). Annette Kuhn concurs, suggesting that 'perhaps the archetypal memory-object is the souvenir ... [a]s repositories of memories, reminders of persons, places or events in the past, family photographs and family albums may certainly be regarded as souvenirs' ('Memory Texts' 303).

The philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has argued that it is vital to our understandings of our identities, origins and future development to consider the contingency that each 'temporal modality', i.e. past, present and future, brings to be on the others:

Each of the three temporal modalities [...] entail presumptions regarding the others that are often ill- or unconsidered: how we understand the past, and our links to it through reminiscence, melancholy or nostalgia, prefigures and contains corresponding concepts about the present and the future; the substantiality or privilege we pragmatically grant to the present has implications for the retrievability of the past and the predictability of the future (18).

These issues are particularly pertinent for photography – especially when considering the specifics of temporality for a photograph as it appears within the 'time' of cinema, a concern raised by the photographs in *Der Preis*. Both time and memory have long been a central preoccupation of both the practice, and the study of photography. Since its invention, the phenomenon has fascinated people with its power to represent the past in the present. However, as Sarah Greenough observes, 'while most photographs seem to depict a singular moment in time, each image contains multiple layers,

including the instant of exposure, the moment of viewing, and the lapse in between’ (3). As we shall see, this multifaceted relationship to time is poignant for the way photographs are used in *Der Preis*. The film’s non-linear narrative timeline becomes folded into the layers of time of photographs that appear within the film’s own, peculiar, cinematic time.

Not only the photograph-object, but the analogue practice of photography itself recurs as a motif in *Der Preis*. The young Alex was a keen amateur photographer; we see him developing photographs of the siblings Micha and Nicole in the makeshift dark room in the bathroom of the apartment and other images adorn the walls of his childhood bedroom. Later, we see he has held on to these as a souvenir of a past that he otherwise has tried to forget. Here, we can observe the connection between photography, loss and mourning (and melancholia): Alex’s photographic images offer glimpses into the processes of personal memory within the cultural sphere. In this regard, Roland Barthes has written influentially of the emotional affects in his personal experience with photographs, focusing particularly on the sensations following the recognition of loss.

In *Camera Lucida*, the intimate, final work before his death, Barthes searches into the art of photography for the reasons why certain images affect him profoundly, while others leave him (relatively) unmoved. This exploration is more a record of his personal coming to terms with grief than a thorough theoretical or semiotic account of photography – a departure from that to which his readers and students were accustomed. His influential concept of what he terms the *punctum* of an image, which for him is the consequence of an intimation of death, remains poignant. This affect, which is described by Barthes as a physical wound that pierces – a ‘sting, speck, cut,

little hole ... a photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (26–27) – categorises one locus of the photographic experience that is in contrast with the *studium*, which might be a subject of interest, but not something which so profoundly moves or grasps the viewer's emotional, subjective attention.

The black-and-white portraits that Barthes prefers in his study (he is not interested in colour photography) are aesthetically similar to those developed by Alex in *Der Preis*, and the link between photography and death, so central to Barthes's thinking, is starkly evoked in the film's usage of the trope. Faced with the grief of losing his mother, Barthes describes his searching through old photographs of her with 'no hope of finding her' (63). However, he comes across an image of her as a young girl that stings him with a melancholic recognition of the person he loves, a *punctum* whose poignancy, he realises, lies in what he senses: the apprehension of his own death. The photographic images of *Der Preis* interrupt the colour and temporality of the narrative in a manner that recalls Barthes's *punctum*, intimating the death that haunts Alex's memories.

The viewer experiences Alex's photographs as objects held by the characters within the cinema's frame (the viewer mostly shares Alex's perspective). Jennifer Barker has identified this form as a trope in cinema which she terms a 'thumbnail image', describing the moment when a photograph is shown onscreen held by someone whose thumbs remain visible around the photo-object, all within the film's frame. For Barker, these images promote contemplation of the relations between self and other, and of viewer and viewed:

At this threshold between cinema and photography and between vision and touch, there arises a momentary delay and a moment of direct contact that allow us to puzzle over the nature of cinema as a co-existence of movement and stillness ('Be-Hold' 194).

The 'thumbnail image' first appears in *Der Preis* during a momentary flashback, which lasts just a few seconds before cutting back to the present. This narrative event acts as our initial introduction to both the younger Alex, and to his friendship with Micha. The 'most thought-provoking' of such thumbnail images, according to Barker, are those which, through the film's body's shared presence of human hands and photography, point to 'contradictions that remain unresolved in the images' framing and temporality' ('Be-Hold' 195). Alex's feelings of guilt and loss have haunted him, and despite his successful career in the West, he shows a reluctance to come back to his hometown up until it becomes a coincidence of his professional work. This internal conflict is externalised into the temporal play of the thumbnail image. His inability to reveal his part in Micha's death to Nicole (Micha's sister, also the object of Alex's adolescent love) has doubtless contributed to his choice to separate himself from his past.

Having arrived back 'home' after all these years, Alex takes out a notebook – which we discover is Micha's old diary, given to Alex by Nicole after Micha's death. Alex un-creases two of his large photographic prints kept inside, those of Nicole and Micha from about twenty years ago. His mouth relaxes into a form that might be a recognisable as a slight smile, but might also withhold a wince of painful nostalgia as he stands, silently, in the centre of the hotel room, his hands caressing these tokens of memory. Barker reminds us of the kinaesthetic properties of film, into which the still



image is inserted: ‘The film’s grasp is ‘alive’ as well: it moves at 24 frames per second. Thus, the film activates this still photograph by lifting it into the temporality of human and cinematic movement’ (‘Be-Hold’ 196). These still physical images have been transported, under the gaze of the spectator, from Alexander’s memory in flashback into a shared present tense, activated by the film’s moving qualities. They wear this temporality in their material form, the fold down the centre speaks quietly of the years that have passed since these photographs were carefully produced in a makeshift bathroom laboratory – that was in an apartment around the corner from the hotel-room, and which have been kept for years since.

Here, memory is not merely a contemplation of a locked-away, static time ‘back then’, but also of alternative visions, of potentialities. When looking back, we wonder what might have been different. Discrepancies between the spirit of the genesis of the photos and Micha’s tragic reality, not yet clear for the spectator, foreshadowed in Alexander’s wistful gaze at his past. Melancholy diffuses through the quiet room in this momentary pause via the thumbnail images. A sense of being in an ‘in-between’ is ontologically connected with the fleeting act of the taking of a photograph, which is temporally in contrast with the duration of the image in its preserved, developed form. The thumbnail images ‘transform the photographic instant by rendering the click of the shutter as an extended cinematic moment,’ and the character who holds the image within the film’s time visibly and haptically emphasises this temporal modality (Barker, ‘Be-Hold’ 204–05).

As Alex’s story of adolescence within the milieu of a small GDR town is gradually revealed, we come to understand *cognitively* the significance of the tension that we *feel* when encountering the still-photographs of Micha in the shots towards the start of

the film. There is both movement and stillness in the photograph of Micha; he has been captured midstride while competing in a race. However, the click of the shutter arrests his action, prefiguring the cutting short not only of his career in sport, but also his own life. Barker reminds us that Jean-Luc Nancy's description of the encounter between photographer and subject is a kind of reciprocal 'grasping', in the specific instant of the pressing of the shutter. Barker argues that this describes a 'being with', which is experienced by both parties: a visual and tangible ontological relation between viewer and viewed possessing a 'distinctive alterity aimed at, desired, held at a distance' (Nancy qtd. in Barker, 'Be-Hold' 204). This distance is, according to Barker, a '*necessary*' factor of the experience, for it 'constitutes the very beings who enter into the encounter' ('Be-Hold' 204).

This particular feeling of subjectivity informs a critical understanding of the multiple perspectives and temporalities that are bound up in the sequences of the young Alex, who grasps the photographs he has produced in his laboratory, and of his touch as an adult upon the images of his childhood companions. The visual record in these objects is but a sliver of a representation of the moment-in-time in which the photograph was taken. Within the film's diegetic framing, the spectator, privileged with a flashback showing Alex's memories of developing these images in his darkroom, is excluded from the same experiential access to the living world of their referents. The photographic encounter is distanced from the spectator, similarly, the distance between Alexander and his previous life in the East is thus paradoxically underscored alongside the affective proximity in his (and our) haptic perceptions of the thumbnail image.

*Der Preis*, in thematising the darkroom – the transformation of photosensitive paper into an image via its exposure to light – draws attention to the seam between the object, observer and the surface relations that bring these subjectivities into being. Alongside her ontological study of the ‘be-holding’ of the thumbnail image and its relations with self and other, stillness and movement, and distance and proximity, Barker touches on a further notion of tactile engagement proposed by Anne Cranny-Francis, since ‘thumbnail images exhibit precisely the kind of polysemic touch that [Cranny-Francis] describes’ (Barker, ‘Be-Hold’ 206). When Alex holds his photographs before the camera, his touch carries meanings across the layers of time and place embedded in the thumbnail image. Cranny-Francis argues that the sense of touch can draw attention to the seams between a technological interface (in this instance the photograph within the filmic apparatus, and in the grasp of the character’s hands) and user(s): ‘the bodily positioning prompted by a seamful interface is also *seme*-ful in that it draws the attention of users to the interface and hence to the ways in which it makes meanings’ (23). The overlapping presence of Alex’s hands with the temporal and spatial boundaries embedded in his photographs joins with the material, black-and-white contrast of the images, thereby rendering time, in its multiple directional (non-linear) quality, as a tangible, affective force before the viewer’s haptic eye.

The thumbnail image’s frozen, melancholic affect interrupts the film’s movement, while the thumbs that hold the image simultaneously draw our attention to the stillness of the character, and the contemplative emotional content of the cinematic moment. This ‘seamfulness’ brings about its ‘seme-ful’ purpose, which is to provoke the spirit of its temporality; a haunted *Zeitgeist* that accumulates melancholies, regrets, and nostalgias from the GDR, its collapse, and from the resulting post-

unification landscape. Alex's dreams from his youth in the *Plattenbau* haunt the same spaces that he has come back to revitalise by his designs, which now seek to 'Mediterraneanise' the living spaces by opening up the rooms to light and to gardens – referencing a very different Europe as imagined paradise from the one in which he grew up. Alex can hold the image of his friend, but he can only grasp at Micha's lost potential, as an athlete and a friend. Micha's death pervades his thumbnail photograph. Barthes sees a ghost when he spies himself in an image: 'the Photograph ... represents that very subtle moment when ... I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (or parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre' (14). Barthes's morbid experience in perceiving his own image, in which he appears to flit in-between the remote place of death and back again, mimics the in-betweenness of the thumbnail image in film – where stillness, motion, light and shade interact in a 'polysemic' and 'polyseamic' fashion.

Bruno writes that the editing process of cinema gives life to death, frozen into still images. In the case of a particular film, Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), Bruno identifies this in one of the characters. This woman, who is a film editor, reanimates people in her laboratory through her work: the arrested faces and bodies of a city's citizens are set into motion through the cutting and splicing of the tactile manufacturing of movies. 'Editing – an analytic procedure – embodies, with its assembling force, the power to fashion an "e-motion"'. In this woman's laboratory, the mobility of the city ceases, and so does the course of life of the city dwellers' (25). Alex's darkroom functions like this laboratory; it is a place where he arrests the movement and life of the people he has 'captured' on camera. However, as Bruno goes on to explain, 'the force of editing, the arrest, also contains the power to release

the movement. The moving image overcomes the death of “still” photography. And just as it happens in the work of mourning, life moves on’ (25). Alex’s photographs are held in tension between the movement of cinematic time and the still images of the melancholic, more distant past. Alex’s flashbacks reanimate the past (as we, too, travel back in time to experience the events from his memories), however, Micha’s photo, in its thumbnail form, forever captures the boy who did not grow older, and its stillness within the movement of the film speaks to finality of death.

The dialectical relationship between stillness and movement in the images of film, and in particular in the thumbnail image, is mirrored in the contrast between Bruno’s positive reading of the life-giving power of cinema through the editor’s release of movement and Kristi McKim’s observation that ‘[c]inema’s endowing a subject with time and movement neither resurrects the deceased nor wholly satiates the mourner’s loss’ (75). *Der Preis*’s thumbnail images, which have stilled the movement of those depicted in the act of snapping the photograph, are brought into an altered temporality when being ‘be-held’ by both spectator and Alex within the diegetic spatiotemporal frame of the film. This releases an ‘e-motion’, in Bruno’s sense, but a feeling more melancholic than mournful, which calls into play the ghostly foreshadowing of Micha’s death, and its affective force in Alex’s memory for his part in it.

Hauck’s use of photographs introduces the image of death, of loss. Alex’s melancholic performance of an uprooted, lost man arouses emotions on a fundamental and human plane, which speak more broadly to a universal lived experience beyond its particular plot, themes of grief and romance emerging from the film’s GDR context. The incursion of a still image into the rolling frames of cinematic life brings Barthes’s ‘punctum’ of mournful recognition into the viewer’s embodied gaze. As the

thumbnail images of *Der Preis* bring a mournful stillness to filmic time, the viewer experiences the multidirectional passages of time as loss – the loss of alternative futures, the loss of a past versions of the self, the loss of the virtual horizons of imagination, stifled by the repressive force of the GDR’s dictatorship, or by the failures of re-unification. Through the complexity of touch’s relation to both distance and closeness, Alex’s spatiotemporal dislocation from the environs and people of the *Plattenbauten* of his youth calls our attention to the space in-between the continuities and ruptures that make up our socially produced geographical surrounds. Pulling together these strands of embodied experience, which all share personal as well as cultural influence, films such as *Der Preis* grasp at the seams between reality and representation to reveal the ways in which our sensory perceptions interweave with our somatic memories in everyday life.

### **Ulrich Müther’s *Rettungsstation*: An Escape from Monotony**

Beyond Alex’s photographic portraits of his friends, a photograph of a different kind becomes a motif within *Der Preis*’s explorations of time and place. The young Alex, demonstrating an early interest in architecture, was fascinated by the GDR architect Ulrich Müther’s *Rettungsstation*. Resting on a solitary pillar, Müther’s lifeguard hut rises futuristically over of its coastal surroundings. Today, its curved structure and glass exterior no longer serves its function of an observational platform for lifeguards. This out-of-the-ordinary building from 1968, which looms over the sand like a UFO on the *Ostsee*, is now a relic from a futurism that is not often remembered in GDR architecture. Thematically, its filmic image pulls the personal and the national together; its cultural importance as an unusual, distinctive example of East German architecture joins with its meaning for Alex within the film’s narrative, where it

houses both his dreams and failures. From Alex's nascent interest in architecture at school, through to the present success in becoming a practising (indeed prize-winning) architect, the building now signifies in its importance to him both change and continuity.

A still-image of this futuristic building by the sea, cut out from a magazine, is valued by Alex along with his own photographs of his friends, and is stuck on his bedroom wall. Together, these images preserve the time, and companionship, of his youth in the glossy profiles of his closest friends. In Alex's dark room, the tangible production of the image is foregrounded. Frozen images arrest time, and hold the friendship of youth together in an instant: a souvenir of emotional connectivity which comes to contrast starkly with Alex's stagnant social and emotional abilities as an adult. The *Rettungsstation* remains a motif of Alex's dreams and desires; of his search for identity and individual self within the socialist paradigm. In his remembered GDR, the monotony of the *Plattenbauten* is highlighted in contrast with extraordinariness of the motif of Ulrich Müther's lifeguard-hut. The building's architectural futurism seems forlorn when perceived in the context of Alex's melancholic and nostalgic reflections on his youthful enthusiasm for what such spaces promised the GDR, in specific contrast with everyday life within and surrounded by *Plattenbauten*.

The landmark of the *Rettungsstation* maps the emotional trajectory of Alex's life. From a hopeful and optimistic youth who is embedded within the structural ideology of the GDR, to an outwardly successful, yet melancholic and somewhat unsatisfied adult, the extraordinary architectural object, particularly distinctive in comparison with the homogeneity of *Plattenbau* architecture, plays a role as an *Erinnerungsort* for Alex. However, this building is not a place he has visited during the time of the

GDR, it is rather a place that embodies the dreams and ideas of his youth. Returning home as an adult, Alex asks Nicole if she will accompany him on a day trip to finally visit this site. She agrees, and Alex and Nicole's belated journey to visit this old GDR outpost, which stands resolutely alien and futuristically against its natural sea-side backdrop, speaks of a number of melancholic absences: Micha's absence in death, Nicole's and Alex's friendship in adulthood, and the GDR's absent presence in memory.

As Elke Hauck remembers in the audio commentary on the extras of the DVD, a trip to the *Ostsee* was a common activity for young East Germans. This was an achievable independent trip – a rite-of-passage for many. Since movement across borders was restricted for citizens of the GDR, the sea becomes a locus of both openness and restriction: its expansiveness embodies the idea of distance itself, while at the same time hems in its people, who can only swim out so far. Nicole and Alex's *Ausflug* is a haunted, melancholic trip, a delayed visit to a youthful dream that never came to pass for the three friends; Micha's death rupturing their plans. Micha's absence from Alex and Nicole's eventual visit, moreover, highlights the misalignment of dreams and reality – the time that has passed is spoken to, through the contrast between Alex's hopeful, teenage plans with his best friends, and the story of their lives as actually transpired.

In order to understand how it is that spaces affect people both materially and emotionally – in particular the spaces that are formed by and within the built environment – sensorial, cultural and social aspects are all important. Given the complexities of such an arrangement, the architect and scholar Juhani Pallasmaa, in his work *The Eyes of the Skin* (a work that resonates with the turn towards embodying



film-theory), wonders why we consider architectural culture and theory almost entirely under a regime of knowledge tied to one sense – sight. Pallasmaa argues that we must, instead, consider the mutually affective, physical relations between the built environment and the person: ‘The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me’ (144).

Sound, importantly, gives film a spatial dimension: ‘We can hear around corners and through walls, in complete darkness and blinding brightness, even when we cannot see anything’ (Elsaesser and Hagener 148). The waves, the sea air, the cries of gulls – these produce an enveloping sound which makes the most of a three-dimensional quality of sound design: panning from the left ear to the right to model a projection, within the spectator’s head, of the place that Alex and Nicole visit. The spectator’s attention beams outwards, while hearing and responding to these sounds. Lutz Koepnick describes the poetics of sound’s function in film:

Sound inscribes the off in what each frame defines as the visible. In doing so, it does not simply remind us of what we do not see or allow us to speculate about what might be to come, but also encourages us to explore what is truly architectural about the cinematic experience—its ability, by engaging multiple sensory systems at once, to situate viewers in three-dimensional environments (*The Long Take* 184).

At the *Rettungsstation*, what we hear is translated into a spatial experience back towards the film’s visual projection: the spectator shares a journey from Alex’s two-dimensional photographs of the *Rettungsstation* to the ‘real thing’. The enveloping sense of being *in* the space of the film, that is, the feel of the fresh Baltic breeze, the

swirl of birds, the whipping of sand against the legs, is enlivened through the heightened realism of the seaside soundscape. Hauck executes a moment of translation, and of transportation, by experientially taking us from the photographic reproduction of Mütter's architecture into the building's situated, material reality.

The relationship between 'two-dimensional' and 'three-dimensional' experiences of image and sound in *Der Preis* is marked by the dynamics between Alex's photographic images of his friends and the *Rettungsstation*, and the very spatiality of the film's architecture. The power of architecture – as a discipline which can produce lived-in, affecting and affective spaces that shape individuals' and societies' relations with each other and the world – is linked: 'cities of filmmakers, built up of momentary fragments, envelop us with the full vigour of real cities. The streets in great paintings continue around corners and past the edges of the picture frame into the invisible with all the intricacies of life' (Pallasmaa 74). In a similar way, the architecture in the set and setting of films extends into Marks's 'memory of the senses, we create affective, internal worlds inside our minds in response to cinema. Art and experience are linked as Pallasmaa goes on to argue, with the aid of Sartre: '[The painter] makes [houses], that is, he creates an imaginary house on the canvas and not a sign of a house. And the house which thus appears preserves all the ambiguity of real houses' (Sartre qtd. in Pallasmaa 74).

The affects that accompany the experience of transforming the photograph into a real place, all within the film's onscreen diegetic space, are not unlike the transformations that occur in the cinematic experience itself. That is, the phenomenological sense in the spectator of being within a living space produces the effect (or affect) of what Bruno describes as 'the mapping of tangible sites' (Bruno 65). In *Der Preis*, sound

plays a special role in the conjuring of a ‘lived-world’, encouraging the spectator to believe in, to commit to the absorbing realness of the filmic spaces via sound’s three-dimensional material quality.

The spatial quality of Alex and Nicole’s seaside trip breaks out of the constraints of the filmic rhythms in *Der Preis*: the frustrated inactivity of the building site, Alex’s inability to progress his social relations with the people of his past, the suffocating feeling of his being trapped (Alex has crashed his car and it is stuck at the garage) in the haunted shadows of the *Plattenbau*. In contrast, their visit alleviates momentarily the restrictive feelings caused by the stalling of the renovations and Alex’s sense of being trapped in his past. The rest of the film takes place entirely in and around the unspecified provincial town in the East: either in the built environs of apartment blocks and concrete streets with small pubs, or in the small green spaces that lie in between such towns. The seaside is altogether full of a different sense of space than any other setting in *Der Preis*. This is not a relaxed paradise, but the dreary, grey skies suit the wistful, quiet and restrained comportment of both Alex and Nicole.

‘Alltäglichkeit. Wege gepflastert, Häuser aus Beton’. Micha begins his diary entry for the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1988 with an illustration of his struggle against a sense of a lack of options, of being trapped within systems that regulate him. This sequence offers an impression of Micha’s subjectivity, at a greater distance from Alex’s interpretative force. The flashback begins with a cut from a shot of Alex in the hotel, once again returning to Micha’s diary to contemplate its contents, to a montage of Micha on a run, training. The monotonous rhythms of the restrictiveness of life in the GDR are both expressed and shaped by the uniformity of the visual regime of the housing blocks. The fact that we hear Micha’s ‘disembodied’ voice reading aloud this diary

entry shifts the perspective of this flashback sequence away from Alex, who is the usual bearer of memories witnessed. The mediated quality of Micha's trace in his off-screen voice emphasises his spectrality in this scene – his written words permeate Alex's present, and then shift between the temporalities of past, present and his lost or foreclosed future. They escape the framing of the film-screen as the narrative jumps to the GDR in flashback.

In the same sequence, we can sense Micha's alienation from GDR society through his body language, when he comes across a group of athletes training, dressed in their official tracksuits. Micha trains alone, apart from his dog who accompanies him on a lead. He stops running, moving off the path and standing still, until this group passes him, as if he would rather no-one know of his wish to be accepted into the *Sportschule*, perhaps for fear of failure grounded in his father's disapproval of this dream. While the viewer observes his ambivalence in the momentary contact with the GDR's institutional sports system, Micha's diary entry continues: 'Ich rede und ich weiß, dass es auch ohne geht, denn ich brauch' ja nicht wissen. Hier ist doch alles geregelt. Wozu Fragen stellen?' His rhythmic footfalls punctuate his thoughts, and his steps (left, right, left, right) evoke the rhythms reflected in the architecture of planned blocks of housing as described by architectural theorist Steen Eiler Rasmussen:

The simplest method ... is the absolute regular repetition of the same elements, for example solid, void, solid, void, just as you count one, two, one two. It is a rhythm everyone can grasp. ... It represents a regularity and precision found nowhere in Nature but only in the order man seeks to create (128–29).

In the examples from Rome and New York that Rasmussen cites, the specific difference between streets of uniformity and those composed of individual houses offers an ‘exhilarating rather than tiresome’ experience. Rasmussen’s enthusiasm for repetition in those places contrasts with Micha’s exhaustion and his feelings of entrapment in the face of the uniformity in *Plattenbau* architecture. Micha connects the monotony of the concreted, regulated spaces he inhabits with the cultural and social restrictions of GDR society, which makes asking questions pointless, silencing him. What is the point of wondering, if the answers are all predetermined?

The photo-images of Mütter’s atypical building, an inspiration that Alex treasured as an adolescent, are conjured into a three-dimensional spatiality during his visit, bringing the souvenir he has kept in his head and his heart into a greater material presence. Alex is looking for closure, perhaps seeking some sort of redemption through Nicole’s forgiveness (or the ability to forgive himself), by finally revealing the whole truth of his betrayal of his best friend. The importance of this scene is underscored by the director herself. In the accompanying commentary to the release, she explains that to shoot on location in Binz auf Rügen required extra determination and cost from the point of production, which was some distance from the central point of filming in Thüringen. It was, however, worth the effort (in her view) as the place stands out as something out of the ordinary, as a marker of difference from standardised, understood GDR realities.

### **Echoes of DEFA**

The *Plattenbauten* in *Der Preis* not only embody the film’s spatiotemporal attention to change and continuity across the period of the *Wende*, and of the subsequent post-

unification era, but they also have specific resonances with the GDR's cinematic legacies. For instance, the plot of Hauck's film, which centres, in the present, on a standstill of production at a building site, invites comparisons with an DEFA film from earlier: *Spur der Steine* (Frank Beyer, 1966) starring Manfred Krug, one of the so-called 'rabbit films' that suffered censorship under a crackdown from the infamous 11<sup>th</sup> Plenary session of the Central Committee, which resulted in the entire year's output of DEFA being banned. Krug's character, Hannes Balla contrasts dramatically with that of Alex, however. Balla is a hyper-masculine rowdy cowboy-figure, solely capable of the strength of leadership and skills required to wrest the construction-project from its blockages. His practicability and honesty are shown to outweigh his rebelliousness and anti-authoritarian streaks, and the bureaucratic party-apparatchiks are shown to be the cause of inefficiencies and delays in the realisation of the socialist project.

In *Der Preis*, we can note the similarity of *Spur der Steine*'s depiction of the obstructive party officials in the character of the head of the owner's collective in charge of apartment blocks, who is unwilling to sign off on Alexander's firm's plans for the renovation. Alex's suspicions of this man, whom he refers to as a 'Stasi-Fettsack', prove correct, and it is his firm's investigation of his corruption, following Alex's suggestion, that ultimately breaks the standstill at the end of the film. In this narrative element, we can perhaps see Hauck tracing *Spur der Steine*'s trope from its reformist critique of socialism under the GDR into her own representation of political and social power dynamics and stratifications following re-unification.

In another DEFA film, *Unser Kurzes Leben* (Lothar Warneke, 1981) (an adaptation based on parts of Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand*), the construction site

reappears as both material reality and metaphor for the building of the socialist state. In this narrative, the architect Franziska is a rebellious figure, who criticises the plans for the *Neubau* construction in the small town where she works, arguing strongly for a less monolithic plan of her own, which would avoid the construction of high-rise blocks in the town centre. Such criticism of the state's housing program, which had by the 1970s become one of General Secretary Honecker's defining policies, was 'bound to be regarded as a direct attack on the working class and the Party leadership' (Rinke 190). Despite the purportedly relaxed climate, it took nearly ten years for the film to be cleared for release. Franziska's hopes were in vain; in the film's conclusion (with echoes in *Der Preis*), she ultimately concedes defeat, despite the fact that her designs for the redevelopment had won a prize.

Following the infamous dramatic banning of the Plenary films in 1966, the Party wanted the nation's film production to be concerned with dramatising the political locus of socialist production as the workplace, through the dissemination of *Gegenwart* films (Feinstein 198). The Party's attitudes to the arts ebbed and flowed through periods of greater and lesser degrees of freedom or censorship in expression. Honecker, whose speech at the Eleventh Plenary session only a few years ago had resulted in the drastic ban, famously declared in 1971 that there would be no more taboo subjects in either art or literature (Allan, 'DEFA: An Historical Overview' 15). This signified a break away from the conventions of *Gegenwart* films that had dominated since the disaster of 1966. For those films to 'successfully' fulfil their formal and ideological obligations for the state, they ought to depict 'epic stories about achieving socialism' (Feinstein 198). That *Gegenwartsfilme* became superseded by *Alltagsfilme* during the 1970s points to a shift in the desires among the populace

for narrative depictions which explored the complex relations in the GDR between public and private spaces.

As Pugh records, partly as a result of this change, the ‘Documentary Style’ recognisable in Klein and Kohlhaase’s Berlin Films and Böttcher’s *Jahrgang ‘45* (1966) was revitalised, and then further developed as part of the rise in popularity of the *Alltag* formal depictions. The documentary aesthetic of showing the everyday, influenced in its origins partly by Italian neo-realist films, shares characteristics with many films that have been placed under the Berlin School umbrella for formalistic and stylistic reasons. Through modes of representation which emphasized realism, such as open narratives, lengthy takes and an increased attention to the private realms of living, both the documentary realism which made its mark on many popular DEFA films and numerous Berlin School films show they share a willingness to depict and critique ‘normalities’ of people’s lived experiences.

Gabriele Mueller has observed how Günter Gaus’s term ‘Nischengesellschaft’, originally used in 1983, has been frequently evoked (and much debated) since the Wende, in order to describe a turn towards private spaces from the 1970s in the GDR. She, along with others such as historian Paul Betts, notes that such a trend was not restricted to East Germany, but can be seen in other Eastern European countries, as well as in the West (Mueller 199; Betts, ‘Building Socialism’ 120). According to Mueller, ‘in the GDR the “withdrawal into the private sphere” became both a prevailing theme and an artistic strategy in the 1970s and 80s’. She argues that consequently visual images from this time offer ‘interpretations of the role of the private sphere that are much more complex than Gaus’ description, and far from apolitical’ (199).



With Erich Honecker's disposal of Walter Ulbricht in 1971, the hints of a valorising of *Alltag* that had been developing in the late 1960s officially were prioritised. This shift marked a loosening for filmmakers, who had been stifled largely through self-censorship following the explicit message sent by the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenary's ban, which had marked the appraisal of contemporary GDR as incommensurate with the official socialist realist doctrine. As Honecker's economic policy focussed on providing both consumer needs and housing in material terms, the provision of a *Heimatgefühl* grew in cultural importance alongside. Feinstein notes that as a part of this shift in cultural policy artists were 'no longer asked to help create the new society; instead, they were merely to entertain and stimulate its inhabitants' (202). Within this context, *Heimat-GDR* must be understood, as Pugh argues, as an ambivalent site, being 'defined both as an official, party-sanctioned 'homeland' that was publicly displayed and as a separate, more private realm of identity and belonging' (Pugh 189). The predominance of depictions of *Alltag* in many films throughout the 1970s thus marks a shift in the nation's self-conceptualisation. What united the diverse range of films that fell under this banner was the fact that they depicted the GDR as an actual, existing place (Feinstein 204). It should not be a stretch for us to imagine how Hauck must have drawn inspiration from this form of filmic articulation, in which everyday concerns are the focus of the drama, serving as an expression within the backdrop of broader socio-political contingencies.

Heiner Carow and Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (1973), a box office hit at the time for the DEFA studios, has come to be seen as an exemplar of the *Alltag* film-aesthetic (Feinstein 196). Consistent with the shift during the 1970s towards the 'private' in the GDR, Carow's film seeks to articulate some of the

pressures, as well as the rewards, from within the dwellings where the realities of citizens' lives transpire. Pugh observes that in this film, 'personal values and identity are communicated spatially, and the characters' domestic spaces define their personality and values' (191). In *Paul und Paula* (as Pugh elaborates), Paula's choice of a somewhat ramshackle, older apartment building to live in, with her cheerful decorations and colourful flowers inside, reflects her warmth and emotional openness. In contrast, Paul's prefabricated dwelling, with the associated benefits of state-provided comforts such as central heating, is more sterile and, ironically, appears 'colder' than Paula's, though she has to haul her coal from the street. Paula's implicit rejection of the state's touted benefits of living in a *Neubau* in favour of a place in the Mietskaserne district suggests she values a certain autonomy – which perhaps must be sacrificed in exchange for the comforts offered in the new high-rises that frame the socialist utopian horizons. Their 'home spaces' mediate the 'tension between the ideal and reality', as Pugh has it. This is not only because they underscore the failure of the SED's promises with respect to the poorer quality of the actual homes, but the film also highlights that gap 'between the dream of a comfortable, private existence versus the fact of SED repression' (194). Moreover, in *Paul und Paula* the buildings now referred to as *Plattenbauten* were still shown to be under construction, suggesting the unfulfilled promises of the Party, and the yet-to-be finished project of socialism more generally (Pugh 193).

In *Der Preis*, a post-Wall audience is transported to a construction site, set up around buildings like those in *Paul und Paula*; Alex's struggle to finish his prize-winning renovations mirrors the imperfect, and incomplete processes of re-unification.

Hauck's film can be thought of as an extension of the concerns of *Alltag* GDR films, shot instead from post-*Wende* context, from the temporal advantage over the socialist

ideals and realities of the former East, yet at the same time embedded within the private and collective situation in the present. The aesthetics of Documentary Realism and *Alltag* as influences for Hauck's own cinematic memory of the GDR, merge sensibly and sensorially with the Berlin School's preoccupation with, as Abel puts it, 'the here and now of unified Germany' (Abel, *Counter-Cinema* 31). Indeed, Knut Elstermann reports that Hauck specifically drew on DEFA films as inspiration for her directing *Der Preis*:

As [Hauck] has told me herself, she consciously drew on *Die Architekten* by Peter Kahane for her story. In fact her film could almost be a sequel. The main character could very well be one of Kahane's architects: he is successful, but is once again forced to live with compromises and his dependence on social constellations [...] current productions are entering into a dialogue with the old DEFA films. They are allowing us to see once again just how important many of these old DEFA films were as seismographs of social change – in terms of their successes and failures, of what they say and do not say (57).

Given this continuity of cinematic influence across the temporal divide of the Wende, it seems worthwhile to interrogate the intertextual connections between film-historical memory, as an internal network within German national film knowledge holders, and as influence and by-product of a film such as *Der Preis*. How do these cultural memories contained in national film archives contribute to the production of images of the past, as well as images interpreting and reflecting the present (post-Wende)? Kahane's film provides an example of this filmic GDR memory, referenced and reflected in the interior and exterior spaces of *Der Preis*.

In *Die Architekten*, a group of hopeful designers plan out an alternative to the urban monotony which the *Neubau* projects had produced throughout the GDR (their hope proves ultimately to be in vain). ‘Cookie-cutter buildings made of the same concrete facades stood facing vast empty, treeless squares’, as O’Brien describes it. She finds that these ‘cheerless surroundings contributed to an overwhelming sense of alienation in the population’ (114). Amid this desolate picture, the architects of the film optimistically envision a wholly new built environment, which would revitalise the East, stem the flow migration to the West, and promote a more comfortable, liveable sense of place. In Kahane’s film, the visionary protagonists eventually come up against the (metaphorical) brick-wall of GDR bureaucracy, a plot that is reminiscent of the problems faced by the socialist workers in *Spur der Steine*. In *Der Preis*, Alexander runs into the bulk of the ‘Stasi-Fettsack’, a relic (Alex surmises) of the old regime who owns the organisation in charge of the buildings his firm has won the right to renovate, and who is holding the process back due to the company’s concerns that the renovations will prove more costly than desirable.

If we follow O’Brien’s conclusion— that *Die Architekten* demonstrates that it was a passive, resigned mindset among GDR citizens that led to the nation’s downfall, rather than the more superficially visible objects and instruments of the state’s control, such as the *Stasi* or the enforced border control – then Hauck’s turning to this particular film for inspiration makes sense: Hauck’s film, too, draws our attention to the everyday plane of lived GDR-experience, as well as to the present-day milieu of the former East, in order to search for explanations of why things were – and are. The most vital and critical point of *Die Architekten* for Reinhild Steingröver is ‘the defiant struggles for the last generation which nevertheless was doomed from the start’. This is emblematised in a sequence early in the film, their ‘position on the edge of the

abyss', as Steingröver reads it, symbolised in an image of the architects standing at the edge of a large crater, framed against the 'sea' of *Plattenbauten* (208).

Kahane lamented that history (in the form of the external political and social changes) was passing by far more quickly in the 'real world' than in the fiction feature they were shooting. The film team attempted for a while to alter the script to keep up with the events that were occurring around them. For example, Kahane even shot footage of the demonstration at Alexanderplatz on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 1989, but in the end, it was decided not to include any of the alterations to the original version of the story and the script. 'Although he had planned to make a *Gegenwartsfilm*, that is, a film about current social issues', Steingröver explains, 'he concluded upon the film's release in 1990 that it had unwittingly become a historical film (209). Kahane's film, then, was 'too late' even as it was being shot (*Der Preis*'s sense of belatedness is examined in detail in the final section of this chapter). Although those involved in the production could not know at the time, the historic moment comes to haunt the film in its contemporary reception. Where Kahane observes that real-time events were happening more quickly than the filmic time of *Die Architekten* could catch up with, the temporal modality in *Der Preis*'s narrative slowness speaks to the sense of halted progress in the *neue Bundesländer*.

According to Steingröver, Kahane's film shows the futures faced by a heterogeneous sample of (relatively) young individuals in the GDR, searching in vain for some form of change in the lived conditions of that society. She writes that *Die Architekten* 'outlines the available alternatives: compromise, full participation and promotion, exit visa, or withdrawal into the private sphere' (215). *Der Preis* appears to steer Kahane's critique into the eastern post-*Wende* experience. Hauck's characters perform a variety

of attitudes towards individual financial success with the GDR society, and the search for a general sense of happiness. The level of compromise necessitated by the realities of life under socialism does not necessarily feel like it has lessened for many of *Der Preis*'s characters, in a society that, too, has its dual share of change and stagnation.

### **Public and Private: 'Niches of Memory'?**

It is unsurprising that Hauck looked to DEFA films as a way to touch on the dynamics of public and private spaces of memory in the GDR – these films were the cinematic reflection of the GDR that she grew up with, and they are also lasting images of how that nation's filmmakers saw their country (within the limits of the regime's censorship protocols). *Der Preis*'s GDR timeline is set in 1988, close to the time period of *Die Architekten*. *Paul und Paula* responds to an earlier era, its milieu being 20 years before that which is remembered in *Der Preis*, from the time not long after Honecker's takeover. While the construction of *Plattenbauten* as the centrepiece of the state's housing program continued at a pace up until re-unification, it became clear to most people in East Germany that Honecker's promises in 1971 would fail to be properly realised. The national economy struggled, people's living conditions suffered as a result, and the nation's socialist realist discourse of progression clashed ever more greatly with reality's stagnations. The possibilities of architectural experimentation or deviation from this core script were more or less curtailed during the 1970s, as Pugh explains:

[I]t became even more difficult to countenance the blatant contradictions between the regime's version of reality and East Germans' own experience of it. Furthermore, although the period from the late 1960s to the early 1970s had

been a fruitful time for both architectural discourse and filmmaking, yet another cultural crackdown by the SED in the late 1970s crushed any true reform (198).

Within this context, as Mary Fulbrook has demonstrated, East Germans tended towards behaving with a performance of outward conformity in the 1970s in a mode she describes as ‘Anpassung und Meckern’, or accommodation and complaint (*Anatomy of a Dictatorship* 142). Citizens were happy to display outward support for the regime, such as by attending mass celebrations to socialism’s successes, provided that they felt they could win certain freedoms within private spaces. After a time, we can note how these modalities of equivocation and accommodation in public spheres have resulted in a homogeneity of outward nation identity performativity, which, in remembrance, has contributed to the tendency towards stereotypical depictions of GDR realities. For instance, legacies in cultural memory of the importance of the private domain within the GDR are illustrated during a sequence in *Der Preis*, in which Alex is presenting his designs to the current residents of the apartment’s blocks. While Alex enthuses upon a revitalised transformation of the buildings, such as the provision of more green, open spaces, residents express concerns at the meeting that their privacy (largely defined in terms of who can see in to their apartments) will be diminished.

As with much in the GDR, the *Neubauten* were neither wholly public nor private spaces. Built as dwellings for East Germans to retire to following their daily contribution towards positively constructing the socialist State, they were owned and controlled by the State. Honecker’s emphasis on the importance of both *Alltag* and the politics of his housing construction program (the State’s success being explicitly

linked to its ability to house its citizens) caused GDR citizens to associate (in terms of varying conformity or denial) *Heimat* and that ideal's construction of private spaces with Party ideology and nationhood. The state's attempts to encroach further into the private sphere of its citizens provoked contestation in the spatial understandings of everyday life in the GDR. The realms of official and unofficial culture had to be negotiated; people looked increasingly to their private spaces as somewhere to retire from public displays of dedication towards the state. Honecker sought, at the same time, to delve further into these spaces through aligning everyday praxis with the ideals of *Heimat*-GDR. This, however, caused officials to relax attitudes towards time spent at home, which prior to the 1970s was deemed suspicious (Pugh 187).

Meanwhile, Honecker continued to elongate the reach and stimulate the strength of the *Stasi*, with its own sinister capacities for gaining access to the most private spaces of people's lives.

Thus, people's identities became bound up into a structure comprising opposing behaviours of obedience and acquiescence against assertions of the boundaries of private space. Fulbrook has described these relations as forming the 'honeycomb state', where official, unofficial, public, private and acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and arenas intermingle, rather than remain completely separate.

Participation was located instead, 'in the multiplicity of little honeycomb cells of the many overlapping and intersecting elements in the GDR networks' (*The People's State* 247). For instance, Pugh draws out an axis within such a structure, where housing policy worked to draw spheres together, since 'as private spaces that were designed, built, distributed, and controlled by the state, *Neubau* dwellings were both public and private' (188).



The spaces in and surrounding the *Plattenbauten* across the eastern parts of Germany are thoroughly coupled to people's senses of who they are; their memories of the particular smells, sights and sounds in their immediate environment merging with broader spaces and skylines. Identities crystallise at points of connection in an environmental network that, too, resembles a honeycomb – with the political, social and material contingencies of housing being fundamental to the way these develop. 'The authenticity of architectural experience is grounded in the tectonic language of building and the comprehensibility of the act of construction to the senses', Pallasmaa writes (69). He goes on to argue that the spaces that we inhabit are profoundly embedded with our memories and our bodies:

We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence, and the experiential world becomes organised and articulated around the centre of the body. ... We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the self from its spatial and situational existence (69).

Affective sites connect with the continuities and ruptures of ideological and socio-cultural relations as they have been continuously reshaped across time. The proposed reconstruction of these buildings and their shadowed surrounds in *Der Preis* is a figuration of the psychic and corporeal experience of life for the people affected by this history. They must not only deal with the past, but also face the particular challenges of the post-Wende present.

In *Der Preis*, cultural memories of the GDR are stirred up by the reconstruction of that time and place of Alex's youth, as portrayed through 'his' flashbacks (most of the

scenes in the past are ‘read’ as being from his point-of-view). A ‘fly-on-the-wall’ sense of observation accompanies this backwards-looking modality, which makes for an affective mixture of Alex’s subjectivity with a more remote objectivity, when evaluating the events of the past. Further to this, these memories are shown to be relevant to his post-unification return to his home, not only because of the weight of his personal sense of loss, and guilt, but also in the difference he encounters in outlook and lifestyle for those who remained. This is starkly felt in a series of uncomfortable encounters with his old classmate, Udo, who is living in his parents’ old apartment in one of the buildings planned to be renovated. We see Udo right at the end of the film packing all his belongings into a van, his prediction that he voices earlier to Alex having materialised: the renovations, together with his not having paid any rent for months, have resulted in his eviction. His last words are a half-hearted repeat of his request that Alex let him know if he hears of any work going as part of the renovations.

Memory’s subjectivity is intermingled with objects in the film that provide a sense of historical authenticity, i.e. the appearance of spatiotemporal markers of the GDR such as FDJ uniforms, Trabants or, perhaps most importantly the *Plattenbauten* themselves as set and setting. It is therefore unsurprising that Hauck’s autobiographical memory (personal and accultured) is interwoven into the narrative of the film, a factor she explains in the DVD commentary. Hauck explains how her experience, returning to her old hometown in the former East to shoot her debut film *Karger* (2007), prompted a desire to explore the figure of the home-comer in Alex:

Was mich besonders gereizt hat, war die Hauptfigur, in der ich mich selbst ein wenig wiederfinde. Denn so wie ich in meine Heimatstadt gegangen bin, um

dort einen Film zu drehen... und dabei noch einmal zu sehen, woher ich komme, geht Alex, der Architekt, mit einem Umbauprojekt an den Ort seiner Herkunft (qtd. in 'Der Preis').

Her account of meeting former school friends after years apart, the uncanny familiarity of buildings and spaces that have changed yet remain familiar, speaks to both the temporal experience of space, and the spatial aspect of time – both of these modalities are mapped in *Der Preis*.

Hauck also describes how, during the shooting of *Der Preis*, spaces which were sought out to suit the historical (flashback) scenes ended up reminding her powerfully of her own memories. The autobiographical in the home-comer is not necessarily (or only) to be found in the narrative, or the plot, but in the way in which Hauck recollects how the episodic moments, motifs, appearances of buildings and other such traces of the GDR evoke her own memories of these specifics of her homeland.

Private memories interlock with those that are culturally shared, and which can be collectively understood as belonging under a particular temporal, geographical and social umbrella. Cinematic, audiovisual reconstructions of the past are able to conjure eras different to the contemporary through temporal jumps of memory work, which activate the spectator's personal, sensorial memories. In an interview accompanying the film's DVD press release online, Hauck connects the private motivations of memory, awoken following her experiences filming *Karger*, to the project of filming *Der Preis*, and her desire to capture a collective, generational desire to seek understanding in one's past:

Mir ging es um diese, meine Generation, die nach der Wende erst einmal nicht zurück geschaut hat, weil das Neue viel spannender war und jetzt, zwanzig Jahre später, spürt, dass es an der Zeit ist, sich zu seinen Wurzeln zu bekennen, um einfach fester auf den eigenen Füßen zu stehen (qtd. in ‘Der Preis’).

Hauck attests to the mnemonic force of ‘place’ when she describes how the abandoned buildings in which they shot much of *Der Preis* ‘in the present’ remind her poignantly of her memories of ‘back then’. The traces left in the apartments of those who used to live there, in the GDR, create a sense that there is still so much that feels unchanged, despite the years that have passed, and the deterioration of time that is worn in the wear and tear of the buildings. These observations do not mean that for Hauck, the GDR is entirely ‘present’ in those spaces, a point she makes when remembering her own homecoming when shooting *Karger* in the town in which she grew up. Here, she claims, she was left with the absolute feeling that this place is no longer her *Heimat*. Her words here echo with Alex’s, when he dismisses Lange’s description of him as a ‘Heimkehrer’, responding, with a wry chuckle, ‘[Es] kommt mir wie ein fremdes Land vor. Ich könnte genauso gut in Mozambique arbeiten, oder in Ulan Bator’. Yet immediately after Alex claims this emotional distance from his former home, his thoughts turn once more to Nicole and Micha – clearly there *are* memories embedded in this landscape that persist, in the shadows of the *Plattenbauten* where he and Lange sit, contemplatively smoking cigarettes. Between Hauck’s commentary and the characters created in her film, contradictory emotional responses emerge; the director’s personal account and her fictional depiction of Alex’s ambivalent relationship with the GDR and its post-unification legacies share

an uncanny (*unheimlich*) sense of ‘home’, which complicates identities and connections to place.

The attention paid to recording the acoustics of Alex’s past, and his present, contributes to the stylistic realism of the film. In the DVD commentary, Hauck remarks on one serendipitous moment in the film’s shooting. The scene in question is the moment of the young Alex’s ‘betrayal’ of his friend. Invited to a meeting of the board of party representatives among the teachers at the school, Alex is asked, as *Vorsitzender der FDJ*, to comment on Micha’s suitability for the *Sportschule*. Alex, in anger at Micha’s treatment of him, refuses to support Micha. In this sequence, Hauck describes how she was struck, when listening to the recording, that the voices (of two women in particular) sound just like those from an old DEFA film. Her remark coalesces with the film’s palimpsestic quality: it awakens ghosts from the GDR by disturbing the sounds of abandoned *Plattenbauten* in the processes of production, voices from DEFA films echo in its intertextual references to East Germany’s film history. In the filmmaking process, this consequence can literally resonate with her own memories (and anyone’s who has seen these DEFA films) – evoking the past as ‘echoes’ through the audio track.

### **The *Plattenbau* as Hauntological House**

Memories of the GDR, like all memories, are embedded in spatial contexts. These spaces stretch from the post-socialist circumstances of the present to historical sites, which house the traces of shared and of private memories. Architecture – the theory and practice which produces built environments, the physical, material world we inhabit – forms and shapes our memories within shared, social and cultural frames.

Cinema and architecture have been closely linked, both as visual regimes of experience and in studies of the non-optical affects they engender; people respond to the enveloping nature of film and architecture in similar ways. Bruno has written persuasively on the connections between these disciplines. She concurs with the filmmaker René Clair's statement that, 'the art that is closest to cinema is architecture' (qtd. in Bruno 27), inasmuch as 'both enterprises are practices of space'. Bruno continues:

Moving along with the history of space, cinema defines itself as an architectural practice. It is an art form of the street, an agent in the building of city views. The landscape of the city ends up interacting closely with filmic representations, and to this extent, the streetscape is as much a filmic 'construction' as it is an architectural one (27).

The GDR's *Plattenbauten*, and the environment which they produced, are 'sites' with meaning that is drawn in part from the political economy and ideology behind their construction, and which emerges through people's activities within them – via the affects aroused within these social realms. The buildings were intended to embody the future capacities of the GDR, as Adelheid von Saldern recalls: 'Die Großsiedlungen in Plattenbauweise verkörperten für ihre Protagonisten in Staat und Partei die Zukunftsfähigkeit der DDR' (301). Plans to build vast estates of *Plattenbau* housing, such as the Marzahn district in Berlin, were certainly future-oriented. This new urban space 'reflected the modernist concepts popularized by Le Corbusier, the CIAM, and like-minded planners and architects [...] it was truly a socialist, and modern, space' (Rubin, *Amnesiopolis 2*).

Mass prefabricated apartment blocks were not unique to the Eastern bloc. While the technology came from the West and many were built in post-war France, West Germany and the UK, they ‘were and remain among the most visible, immediate, and phenomenological links to the communist past’ because they were built to such a large extent (Rubin, ‘Beyond Domination’ 35). Moreover, as Fulbrook explains, ‘[w]hat was distinctive about the GDR, in contrast to most contemporary Western societies, was the sheer extent to which the state took responsibility for housing’ (*The People’s State* 51). Following Honecker’s takeover of Party leadership in 1971, a policy focus – The Housing Construction Program (*Wohnungsbauprogramm*) – explicitly sought to improve living standards, partly as a means to cast aspersions on the failures of Ulbricht’s previous administration (Pugh 288). Consequently, this meant that when the state eventually proved unable to provide housing to satisfy everyone, largely owing to economic reasons, East Germans’ dissatisfaction was directed towards the Honecker-led SED regime. In contrast, in the West, housing issues might be the fault of any number of agents such as landlords, banks or the housing market itself. In cultural memory within the former East, the political dimension of the *Plattenbau* lingers. Their utopic purpose is obscured: once exciting visions of a socialist future, which could provide all citizens with the fundamental domestic essentials, are tainted by the same ideological ties with what has ‘proven’ to be the failed, socialist state.

In post-unification eastern Germany, these spaces no longer carry the weight of possible, utopic futures. Instead, the *Plattenbauten* house memories of futures that are no longer possible. As von Saldern argues, ‘nach der Wende mutierte der Plattenbau dann endgültig zum Negativsymbol par excellence’ (308). Standing as monuments to 20<sup>th</sup> century socialism, whether used, abandoned, or in liminal states of renovation or

demolition – they literally and figuratively overshadow post-socialist realities in the present. More than this, the hegemonic Western (capitalist) triumphalist attitudes that shape how they are viewed from the present foreclose how futures were once imagined from the past.

From the temporal perspective of today the historical events that led to 1989 and its aftermath in Germany appear to be predetermined, leaving little flexibility for contestation. ‘Common sense’, as Ben Gook argues, ‘dictates that this is how things stand today’. However, as he goes on to observe, ‘if we move in reverse from [now] to 1989, we can notice the belated hardening into “fate” of what was earlier an open moment – a moment at which contingency was visible’ (23). And so, proceeding backwards through the years towards 1989, we can see how the range of potential futures grows at each point. Given prevalent negative appraisals of the *Plattenbau*, it could be difficult to conceive of the existence of a nostalgia for GDR housing. However, as Peter Thompson has pointed out, ‘the nostalgia inherent in the term *Ostalgie* is actually a longing for a future that went missing in the past rather than for a past that never had a Socialist or Communist future’ (252). Gook’s temporally ‘backwards’ approach to history allows us to imagine how the revolutionary meaning of the *Wende* has narrowed over time. This upsets teleological obfuscations that accompany the dominant cultural memory of the GDR, which can only imagine the inevitability of the failure of the socialist state.

*Der Preis*’s specific temporality evokes a feeling that relates to both melancholia and nostalgia – ‘hauntology’ – a ‘punct’ coined by Jacques Derrida. Playing on the almost identical pronunciation in the original French, Derrida’s term seeks to subvert traditional notions of ‘ontology’ by replacing the importance of ‘being’ and



‘presence’ with the figure of the ghost, who occupies spaces in-between. According to Martin Hägglund, ‘what is important about the spectre is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*’ (82). Recent interest in the notion has been influenced by UK theorist Mark Fisher, who writes widely about negative affects of late-capitalism in popular culture. He iterates the expression of feelings of longing for a future that never arrived, a sensation that profoundly afflicts post-modernity and late-capitalism. I argue that the directional temporalities of ‘*no longer*’ and ‘*not yet*’ are found in the unfulfilled future promises of not only the socialist past but also the post-unification present, both of which are embodied in the structure of the *Plattenbau*.

The twin modalities of ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet’ thus designate distinct absences in time, both of which are ‘present’ (present as absences, like ghosts) in *Der Preis*.

These are affective experiences in both narrative timelines, which are leveraged by the turning point now remembered as the ‘end of communism’, symbolised by the fall of the Wall, and the ‘end times’ evoked in, for example, Francis Fukuyama’s famous (or infamous) phrase, the ‘end of history’. In this (post)historical moment, social or cultural dreams of *anything else* have become ghostly visions: alternative futures that are forever trapped in the past, only to emerge into the present as absence, whiffs of nostalgia, melancholic songs, and the returns of retro fashions and material culture.

While Fukuyama’s conceptualisation of post-modernism has been refuted, Fisher (writing under his k-punk moniker) argues that the feeling of that time which he evokes nevertheless somehow rings true:

Postmodern temporality is captured by Fukuyama's claim – everywhere officially disavowed, even by Fukuyama itself, even as, surreptitiously, it is universally accepted, operating as a kind of presupposition of the contemporary cultural unconscious – that we have reached the 'end of History'. This is not only the conclusion of the process, but also the final cause to which everything has always been tending. End, then, in a double, appropriately Hegelian, sense: the terminus and the teleological goal (k-punk).

Fisher's cultural theory recently focused (up until his tragic death in 2017) on the particular 'spirit', of late-modernism – his critical theory that focuses on electronic music in the early 2000s refers to hauntology in order to describe a sound that was once futuristic, but has become a spectral reference to futures (or future imaginings) that reside in the past. 'What has vanished', Fisher writes, 'is a tendency, a virtual trajectory' (22). The disappearance of future-oriented movement afflicts the characters of *Der Preis* in complex, often ambivalent ways. For instance, the *Rettungsstation* is a place suffused with hauntological affect – the building houses ghosts of its socialist architectural ideal: to alleviate the boredom in monotonous blocks of the concrete, a purpose that the young Alex describes to the pleasure of his teacher during his class presentation on the building. That very boredom is the same that Micha details in the glimpse we have of his psyche prior to his suicide, from his diary entries. Alex and Nicole's daytrip is an encounter with the spirits of their younger selves, encapsulated in Müther's futuristic pod. The temporality of that building is one of a yearning for a brighter, more interesting future that is now trapped in Alex's backwards looking gaze.

*Der Preis*'s general atmospherics are suffused with belatedness, spectrality and temporal disjuncture – a 'time out of joint'.<sup>21</sup> The film's sense of stagnation, of looking 'over the shoulder', is projected into Alex's flashback memories of the former GDR. It is also woven into the narrative of the present through the lack of action on the building site. Fisher describes this post-modern sense, or sensation, as a 'feeling of belatedness, of living after the gold rush' (8). His phrase resonates with *Der Preis*'s 'Berlin School' pace and atmospherics, and with the sense of near impossibility of anything actually *happening*. A pointed moment in the film, which carries a subtext of commenting on this aspect of its own temporality, is when Alex, upon arriving at the building site, asks the foreman, 'Bin ich zu spät?' – to which the laconic reply, 'Hier? ... Nee' seems to suggest a more general belatedness, than a specific answer to his question. Narratively speaking, belatedness is also at the heart of Alex's inability to shift the 'Stasi-Fettsack' who is the chief obstacle blocking the renovation project; this hindrance, as if conspiring with Alex's broken-down car, prevents him from a quick get-away back to Frankfurt-am-Main, away from this place of unfulfilled dreams and traumatic memories.

The expression that Fisher borrows from Franco 'Bifo' Berardi to describe the post-modern waning of the expectations of a temporality beyond the present and the past is the 'slow cancellation of the future' (qtd. in M. Fisher 13). Alex's designs seek to modernise the relics of GDR urban planning by transforming, for the better, what he remembers as the 'absolute Reduktion' in the GDR's *Plattenbauten*: 'Essen, schlafen, Dach über dem Kopf'. Alex, for one, expresses no *Ostalgie* in his retrospective

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<sup>21</sup> This sensation is echoed in recent work that focuses on time. For instance, Aleida Assmann's *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?* explores the idea that the current epoch is in a crisis of temporal disjuncture.

evaluation of the *Plattenbau*, which, he remembers, provided only the barest minimum in terms of everyday comfortability: ‘Es bricht den Geist, so eine Typologie’. From the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and increasingly as we progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the sensational forward-moving trajectories that were the modern promise of the 1950s and 1960s are becoming ‘no longer’ expected.

Fisher’s phrase resonates with the melancholic atmospherics in *Der Preis*, as Hauck traces the passage of time back and forth. We swing between the post-unification malaise, expressed by Alexander’s inability to get the building project moving, and Micha’s sense of no future, which is the root of the rift that separated the two friends back in their youthful GDR. Hauck’s film is dominated by lateness, and by failures in movement and progression: The building manager is failing in his work, where nothing can be started, and in his marriage, kicked out of his apartment to sleep in his car and at the building site. The film assembles elements – Alex, the school and its authoritative figures, Micha’s father, and the societal expectations of the GDR – all of these failed Micha, in different ways, by withdrawing their conditional support for him. After his suicide, it was *too late* to change what had happened. Alex, furthermore, is too late to return to his home and build healthy social interactions with the people of his past. The economic promises of re-unification fail to provide Alex’s former classmate with work (just as Alex, the ‘expat’ of a sort, fails to help in this regard, despite his former friend’s requests).

Karen Leeder has remarked on a recent obsession with spectral representations. Examples include doppelgänger, zombies, vampires and the undead. Leeder wonders whether the perpetual returns – revenants – that have followed the end of the GDR point to a ‘constant conjuring of history, which owes much to the need to reckon with

the fascist past and is compounded by the second truncated past of the GDR', while arguing that 'it also speaks to a wider apprehension of end times' ('Figuring Lateness' 19).<sup>22</sup> Slavoj Žižek has gone so far as to assert: 'if there is a phenomenon that fully deserves to be called the "fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture," it is this fantasy of the return of the living dead' (22).

Ghostly sensations of 'not yet' and 'no longer' emerge in the following illustrative example of a spectral sequence in *Der Preis*. After running up against further blockages to the renovations, Alex encounters three youths hanging about in the area around the *Plattenbau* in question. He asks if they are at all interested in the development plans, to which only one boy replies, with a disinterested and far from definitive: 'mäßig... ein bisschen'. These three figures are like a ghostly mirror to the three young friends of the 1980s GDR, Alex, Nicole and Micha, who hung around in the same place, which looked much the same back then, as it does now. The girl in this present-day group even has a streak of fluoro dye in her hair, as Nicole used to wear. They appear in the film as if to remind us of that universal truism, that 'as much as things change, they remain the same'. In the context of preoccupations with a late-modernity defined by hyper-acceleration (related to an inherent logic of speed, which Paul Virilio terms 'dromology'), these figures reflect a mode of resistance against this increasing pace; they embody the belatedness that inheres in the temporal clash

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<sup>22</sup> Relatedly, in his study of post-Soviet Russia, Alexander Etkind writes of the emergence of a memory form he terms 'ghostware'. This phenomenon works alongside two categories of memory he sees as analogous to a computer's hardware and software: hard memory (official monuments), and soft memory (primarily texts, narratives etc). Ghostware, describes a third, interrelated category: 'Ghosts feature interesting differences from texts and monuments', he suggests, 'texts are symbolic, while ghosts are iconic in the semiotic sense of these terms (as signs, ghosts possess a visual resemblance to the signified); in contrast to monuments, texts and ghosts are ephemeral; and in contrast to texts and monuments, ghosts are uncanny' (195).

between past events, past futures, and a lack of future in the present. This is a past that does not clearly separate from the present, evoking hauntedness and *Umheimlichkeit*. This scene demonstrates, through its uncanny affect, how contemporary cultural experience remains afflicted by ever-returning spectres of the events, dreams and disillusionments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This brief example demonstrates the film's use of spectral figures. Understated, quick: this scene's impact is ambient and atmospheric, rather than obvious or forceful, consistent with the film's general feeling. These revenants who appear in the shadows the *Plattenbau* demonstrate a lack of interest in the project that is also an uncanny doubling of the film's depiction of youthful disengagement in the GDR. The doubling of the static temporality of the stagnant building project with the equally frozen 1980's GDR reflects cultural memory of the GDR, which persists in the post-unification present for citizens of the former East. In *Der Preis*, this feeling sucks the spectator into the 'not yet' renovated apartments and 'no longer' dreamings of utopia.

Hauck recounts (in the DVD's commentary) a moment during filming, when two 'punks' suddenly jumped out of the window of one of the abandoned *Plattenbau* apartments in the background of shoot; Hauck chose to keep them in the final cut. It is apt that these figures, real life 'ghosts' of the *Ostpunks* from the 1980s, interrupt the diegetic world of the film from the 'real' world outside. There is a reciprocity in this that suits the ways in which Hauck describes the influence of East Germany's cinema, its DEFA films, on her shooting this particular movie. It also seems appropriate that the *Plattenbau* spits out these characters from beyond the film's construction, the buildings appear to have a life of their own, an ecosystem of memories and affect.

In this context, the inhabitants, and their memories, bound up within the concrete walls of their housing, might be thought of as the subjects of the renovation's exorcism. Derrida argues that capitalist societies 'can always heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back' (123). We bear witness to this spirit via the reluctance among the inhabitants of the *Plattenbauten* in *Der Preis* to move in order to make way for the revitalising rebuild that would turn their outdated blocks into a re-energised, spacious and well-lit upgrade.

Bearing in mind that Fisher's reenergising of Derrida's hauntology has significantly accompanied his studies into music and sound, it seems appropriate to turn our perceptive attention to the aural dimension of *Der Preis*. In his study of 'haptic geographies' Paul Rodaway reminds us that our understanding of the way we 'see' our reality is dominated with reference to the visual; in this regard, he identifies two levels in our language. Firstly, he observes that, in speech, we have a tendency to use metaphors which draw on meanings with visual significance, and secondly, he finds an optical regime in the structuring of language itself. He argues that we 'primarily think in terms of synthetic wholes – the view, image, scene – or attend to a particular angle – or point of view, perspective, outlook – and identify discrete objects set in the context of other objects as a relatively stable image' (82).

In contrast: 'An auditory world unfolds like a tune, a visual world is presented already complete like a painting' (Rodaway 82). This characteristic of sound is drawn upon in *Der Preis*, being a key element in its realist constructions. Indeed, sound is often the cinematic tool that most 'realistically' envelops the audience into this film's world.

Sound appears to wrap around us in a way that light's directionality does not. As Pallasmaa, when considering the built environment, observes: 'Sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates; vision is directional, whereas sound is omni-directional' (53). Our body is able to 'feel' auditory information further to that which our ears pick up, through the tremors that reverberate from heavy bass sounds in the ground, to the synaesthetic associations we make – such as the feel of a breeze on the hairs of our body which bleeds perceptively into the sound of the wind in the trees.

Sound and film are tied together in the medium's particular form of spatiality. 'The city remade in a film studio is a geography in its own right', Bruno explains, 'soundscapes define cities: they construct urban spaces and make them into specific places and sites of memory. As inhabitant-spectators of the haptic architectural journey, we are deeply affected by the sounds of the city' (306). Steen Eiler Rasmussen describes precisely how architecture can not only be 'heard' – but how this can be experienced through film: he elaborates how, during the famous, final chase scene in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) through Vienna's sewer tunnels, 'the characteristic sounds which tunnels produce are clearly heard in the splashing of the water and the echoes of the men hunting the third man. ... Your ear receives the impact of both the length and the cylindrical form of the tunnel' (225).

One particular moment in *Der Preis* bears both this architectural quality of sound and its hauntological quality. In a flashback scene, Alex's class visits a factory as part of their education into what constitutes a good, socialist worker. This sequence, Hauck explains in the film's commentary, was filmed in an abandoned building in Gera, Thüringen. She describes how through an aural trick of editing, the impression of an active factory was achieved, in this empty, abandoned space, through the use of



backgrounded sounds of operating machinery. We see the class wandering down the corridors of what is in the external reality to the film a relic of industry. The building becomes 'undead', a revenant of GDR memory, through a sonic trick; the breath of 'life' is blown back into this abandoned piece of architecture, once a functioning, symbolic and literal centre of the socialist working backbone of the GDR, and the space resonates with the juxtaposition of unrealised futures in its post-unification malaise. We see none of the workers that the foreman describes to the children; within the past temporality of the GDR flashback, these role models, who are meant to programmatically inspire these children into becoming (the socialist worker), are absent – ghostly. To return to Rasmussen's phrasing, the 'ear receives the impact' of, in this instance, the presence of memories that haunt the absences of the abandoned building.

Hauck has furthermore pointed to her very deliberate choice to use music in the film as another form of 'sound', rather than as an emotionally affecting and manipulative (non-diegetic) 'soundtrack' (a stylistic choice shared among many 'Berlin School' films), as well as being typical of many of DEFA's documentary realist films. Hauck writes:

Eine Ebene des Filmes spielt ja 1988/89 in der DDR und da ist die Musik ein wichtiges Mittel, um ein Zeitgefühl wachzurufen, aber auch um die Personen, die die Musik hören, zu charakterisieren. Deshalb ist die Musik immer an konkrete Quellen gebunden wie Autoradio oder Kassettenrecorder. Nur an manchen Stellen schwingt sie sich kurz zur Filmmusik auf. Ich fand es wichtig, dass dieser Film nicht bewertend, anklagend, aber auch nicht sentimental-nostalgisch wird. Deswegen erschien es mir gut, nicht auf Musik

zu setzen, die den Zuschauer emotional an die Hand nimmt und die Emotionalität von Szenen nicht durch die Klangfarbe einer Musik vorzubestimmen (Hauck qtd. in 'Der Preis').

Thus, the formal and aesthetic qualities of the 'flashback' GDR sequences, in recalling the stylistic conventions of *Alltag* films from the DEFA studios, place the spectator who possesses such cultural knowledge into a kind of time capsule, which shuttles back-and-forth between representational modes of critiquing both socialist and post-socialist realities. The soundtrack's inclusion of songs from the GDR into the diegetic world of the flashback sequences is one way in which this effect is achieved. For example, we are with the young Alex as he listens to the radio playing GDR-pop tune, 'Am Fenster' by the band City. The lyrics and the haunting violin from this song play nostalgically with memories attached to the GDR past. These sounds are grounded in the material use of the buildings as the set of the film, the sounds reverberate around the room of a *Plattenbau* just as a former citizen of the GDR might remember. Hauck explains further the reasoning behind avoiding an 'acousmatic' (the term for a sound with no visible origin) usage of music:

Ich habe statt dessen versucht, ein wenig zurück zu treten und die Atmosphäre eher durch Geräusche lebendig und erlebbar werden zu lassen. Musik funktioniert dann an vielen Stellen selbst wie ein Geräusch, wie ein Detail unter anderen. Handelnde Personen und Environment verschmelzen dramaturgisch. Wortlose Passagen erzählen ebenso viel wie Dialoge (Hauck qtd. in 'Der Preis').

The ghostly quality of the audio in *Der Preis* is therefore a significant feature of the film's (re)construction of experiences of East Germany, past and present. The film's 'soundscape' is a vital part of the evocation of the spaces between the GDR past and post-unification present. Rodaway argues that this 'deceptively attractive' concept requires further clarification. In attempting to define 'auditory geographies', Rodaway initially pulls apart a definition (R.M. Schafer's) of the environment in which a subject hears – pointing out implicit visual connotations in the term soundscape, which draws from its optical partner 'landscape', and therefore similarly evokes 'traditions such as painting and architecture, and ideas of linear perspective and the composed view or scene' (86). This interpretation resonates with Pallasmaa's observations concerning the privileging of vision in our intellectual contemplation of space more generally. He argues that the 'invention of perspectival representation made the eye the centre point of the perceptual world as well as of the concept of the self' – this shift not only 'describes but also conditions perception' (18).

There is therefore a tension in Schafer's usage of this term 'soundscape', since auditory experience is, according to Rodaway, more dynamic and participatory than is mapped by conception of soundscapes as either a space, or static object. He suggests instead that term might be understood in a way which is generally neglected, as an auditory experience.

Here it is less an object for contemplation and more a process of engagement with the environment. The soundscape moves with the sentients as they move through the environment and it continually changes with our behavioural interactions. In this sense, one cannot 'map' a neighbourhood soundscape ... Soundscapes surround and unfold in complex symphonies or cacophonies of

sound. Using the term ‘soundscape’, we must remember these qualities and not allow visual connotations to usurp our understanding (86–87).

By reassessing the nature of perceptual fields in this manner, we can work to elide a way of thinking which ‘conditions perception’, or ‘usurps understanding’. If the spectator enters into a mimetic relationship with the film’s body, then the auditory worlds, as delineated by Rodaway’s sensuous matrix, are encountered by her lived-body in a manner resembling the ‘reality’ that the film portrays. We can recall how Laura Marks’s ‘memory of the senses’ contends that cinema excites our body-memory capacities for perceiving sensory information cross-modally; in a similar way, we can think of the audio-track of a film working on our entire perceptual field in a more profound interaction than the binary of the right and left stereo-split input into our ears (*Skin*).

The action (and the inaction) of *Der Preis* largely takes place in and around the town’s *Plattenbauten*, in both timelines. One exception to this is Alex and Nicole’s visit to the *Rettungsstation*. Important also is a particular section of woodland by the train tracks, where Micha used to run, and where the three young friends would often meet. We return here a number of times throughout the film. There is a kind of natural magic in the forest environment, that is emphasised in contrast with the grittier realism of the built environment, both in Alex’s flashbacks and when he returns to this spot as an adult right at the end of the film. *Der Preis*’s narrative ends here, as Micha’s life did all those years ago. This narrative’s ending is far more affectively mediated than the moment which precedes it, in which we see that construction has finally begun on the *Plattenbau* redevelopment – it is this site of Micha’s tragic suicide in 1988 that is meant to linger with the audience.

At this poignant site of traumatic memory – finally revealed in Alex’s last flashback with the ringing of awful screams of steel as the train that hits Micha fails to brake in time – there are now only the calls of birds and the distant hum of traffic. We leave Alex, as an adult, staring down the line, his only movement the rubbing of his fingers against each other in an expression of discomfort. The credits roll, and for a while the sounds of the forest linger, and we hear the amplified crunch of leaves underfoot, the sound of a car’s ignition, and we imagine, engaging all our senses to conjure the image of Alex’s driving off away from this place, where he is haunted by too much memory, regret, and futures forever lost. As he departs, the once officially forbidden punk-rock of the band L’Attentat, which opens the film, returns to bookend Alex’s journey. The refrain – ‘Abfahrt, Abfahrt, das ist zu hart’ – while originally a composition expressing frustration and rebellion against the prison of forced optimism in the GDR, echoes with Alex’s personal battles with the ghosts of both future and past in his role as a home-comer.

The punk music in *Der Preis* recalls the spirit of hauntology observable in works that have looked back at the East German punk scene. The title of a series of exhibitions, and a subsequent DVD documentary, *Ostpunk: Too Much Future*, adapts the Western catchcry taken from the Sex Pistols song to suit the distinct atmosphere of the East’s punk scene.

Too much future, to them, meant no future at all ... In the flashy and flamboyant activities of the punk scene they found a home which the GDR no longer supplied them with. They escaped the country while still living in it, thus becoming free within limits (*Too Much Future*).

Where the feeling of ‘No Future’ bound the punk subculture together in the West, for Eastern punks, the issue was that of a future overloaded with the programmatic expectations of the regime; a future that Micha (who progresses in the film to increasingly stylising himself as a punk, wearing leather and chains) rejected in his suicide. The hauntological presence-and-absence of futures can be found in similar works, for example in the title of Tim Mohr’s book, taken from a favourite *Ostpunk* graffiti slogan: ‘*Stirb nicht im Warteraum der Zukunft*’. The last verse of L’Attentat’s song, played out over the film’s credits, also encapsulates the sentiment of being trapped in the decaying failures of modernity:

Ich wohne dort wo die Panzer stehen.

Dort wo man sagt, das Leben ist schön.

Dort wo bald kein Vogel mehr singt,

Wo das Wasser nach Abfall stinkt.

Ich wohne in einem Friedensstaat

Abfahrt, Abfahrt, das ist zu hart.

The extent to which Alex has been able to work through his sense of guilt and sadness at the joint losses of his best friend, and his first love, is uncertain even at the film’s end. He appears to have gained little satisfaction from the resolving of the crisis in construction, which he came to solve in his professional capacity. While he may have found some peace in opening up to Nicole, there is a sense that the youthful exuberance of the young Alex in the FDJ is trapped in his memories, along with Micha, and the GDR.

## Conclusion

Failures of the socialist state are embodied in the *Plattenbau* monoliths, which rise up like giant tombstones across eastern landscapes. *Der Preis*'s memories are not only of the socialist past, but of the teleology of socialism's utopic vision, popularly (and globally) discredited after the collapses in the revolutionary wave of 1989. Further to this, the promises tied to the capitalist, neoliberal rejuvenation following reunification have failed to materialise for many in the former East. As poet Simon Armitage wrote, 'the future was a beautiful place, once' (12).

Set in post-unification Germany, *Der Preis* is poised to comment about the end of socialism and late-capitalism, and the West's 'end of history' moment that seems to have found a kind of perpetual stasis since the fall of the Berlin Wall. In such a light, the film's *Plattenbauten* loom over a landscape that remains disquieted. The standstill of Alex's renovations of his childhood dwelling reflects the frustrations and ambivalence faced by those living the shadows of these spaces, back then, and now. *Der Preis*'s ghosts lurk in the evocation of the GDR's lost futures, which continue to haunt easterners in the Berlin Republic, as well as post-unification's unrealised 'Blühende Landschaften'. Uttered in 1990 by then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl, this phrase offered a picturesque economic promise for the recently former East. Now, it haunts the drab greys of the many neglected, deteriorating, or empty and abandoned *Plattenbauten*.

## 5: Striving for Socialism: The Bodies of *Einzelkämpfer* (2013)

### **Introduction**

Sandra Kaudelka's documentary pieces together the stories of four East German athletes alongside her own memories. *Einzelkämpfer* takes us back-and-forth in time, from the GDR past(s) to the athletes' present(s), as we encounter them in the context of their post-unification circumstances. The film's movement 'backwards' foregrounds the historicity of the GDR and the astonishing suddenness of its 'non-existence'; the drama of that historical moment partially explains why the heritage topic of East German histories and memories continues to capture public interest and attention. The documentary's movement 'forwards' in time highlights the lingering consequences of the complexities of life between the dictatorship and post-*Wende* present, illustrated and embodied through the athletes' and the director's lived experiences in diverse post-unification circumstances.

Kaudelka, who herself was selected as a young girl to train to become a diver at the GDR's *Sportschule*, takes the spectator into the GDR world, bringing it temporarily 'back to life'. The sphere of competitive sport, valued so highly by the regime for its global image, becomes re-energised by the memories of the athletes and Kaudelka herself, and by archival footage and historical references interwoven throughout. This produces an experiential GDR that recalls Arnold-de Simone's term, 'Themepark GDR', describing a trend towards aestheticisation of East German memory in media and museums (*Themepark GDR?*). One of *Einzelkämpfer*'s pleasures derives from its access to the (historical) world of GDR sport, recreated with detailed memories and footage. The film tells the East's stories of division and re-unification by documenting and projecting the memories of its protagonists. These always connect with the



overarching narrative of the director's personal experience. In this way, the film performs both individual and collective memory work.

In the personal tales of four athletes, Kaudelka seeks out the overarching 'story' of elite GDR sport and its legacies. The interweaving of individual stories into a collective whole demonstrates, in itself, a process of the construction of cultural memory. However, the athletes' memories are not subsumed into a master narrative. Assumptions about life in the GDR have left gaps in cultural memory by seeking to tell a single story of GDR sport. The director explains, in the DVD's 'Making-of' interview, a key motivation for the film was to immerse the viewer into the complexity of the story, contrasting, for instance, with the typical narratives which often fixate on the topic of doping. Kaudelka's main concern is not the scandalous outrage of an illegitimate regime's illegal doping program. Rather, it is what could be described as 'der außergewöhnliche Alltag' of competitive athletes. To connect exceptionalism with the everyday might seem contradictory, but this linkage describes a tension between the film's joint effects of positioning its subjects as both 'normal' (humanised, arousing empathy) and 'extraordinary' (having lived lives worthy of our attention).<sup>23</sup> One focus of this chapter is to examine the formal and aesthetic means by which *Einzelkämpfer* seeks to express these contradictions and complexities.

The director's subjectivity and personal motivations in documenting this story are vital to its narrative mode. Eschewing pretensions of objectivity-as-authenticity, Kaudelka searches instead for a 'truth' in people themselves, partly as a means of

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<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Jones has observed that the term *Alltag*, in the GDR context, often inflects an atypical focus on the 'extraordinary' – specifically the extraordinary state control experienced by 'ordinary', 'everyday' people ('[Extra] Ordinary Life' 121).

interacting with the ‘truth’ of her own past. I examine how Kaudelka pieces together the individual stories of the athletes, and her own story, using documentary techniques to claim authenticity. *Einzelkämpfer* manipulates filmic photography, audio recording, editing and other documentary techniques. This becomes an assemblage of embodied witness testimonies, culturally and politically inflected narratives, and sociohistorical documents and artefacts. These techniques are shaped by Sandra Kaudelka’s directorial process, she selects stories that she has valued, telling of life in the GDR as it was experienced by these competitive athletes. The layered remembrances in *Einzelkämpfer* produce an affective, subjective film: an assemblage of diverse accounts of, and approaches to, GDR history and memory. The spectator is affected by archival footage from the GDR, by the athletes’ words, and by their presence in the filmed interviews taking place in post-unification Germany. Here, Sandra Kaudelka’s documentary succeeds in finding room for contradiction and uncertainty.

The pluralities and ambiguities within the concept of ‘memory’, particularly when considered against the perceived ‘factual’ nature of ‘history’, invite a theoretical approach to testimony and witnessing that finds space for ‘truth’ in ‘fiction’ as well as ‘fiction’ in ‘truth’. The way we perceive the borders of fiction and non-fiction, following Bill Nichols, is ‘like the division of historiography from fiction’: bound by ‘the degree to which the story fundamentally corresponds to actual situations, events, and people versus the degree to which it is primarily a product of the filmmaker’s invention’ (*Introduction* 12). Here, our multisensorial relationship as viewers with both image and audio is underscored. Through an apprehension of the audiovisual technologies that mediate the athletes’ stories, this analysis seeks to reveal the ways in which the documentary form (re)frames conflicting aspects in East German cultural memory, by questioning the film’s relationship with authenticity, and with the

framing of its protagonists as witnesses to the GDR past. By examining the intersections of personal and cultural memory with sociohistorical realities, I look for the ‘lure of authenticity’, to borrow Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s phrase, in *Einzelkämpfer*’s embodied memory-narratives, identifying aesthetic and formal tactics of representation and affect in the rhythms of its witnessing (53). I interrogate the film’s embodiment of conflicting and corroborating witness testimony, finding tensions between the narratives, which produce both ‘competing’ and ‘complementary authenticities’ (Jones, ‘Memory on Film’ 205–07).

The core of my analysis concentrates on the film’s rhythms – in various senses and modalities – informed by Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of ‘rhythmanalysis’. This chapter is broken into three sections. Firstly, I explore the ways in which a rhythm analytical approach can break down the measured, sequential way the documentary affects the spectator in its persuasive story-telling. I then examine the rhythms of East German athletes’ lives, expressed in their memories of routine, and observe a poignant rhythmic ‘irruption’ in the film’s story-telling. To flesh out the structural effects of GDR sport, I turn to Foucault’s concepts of ‘biopower’ and ‘biopolitics’, and draw specifically on his suggestion that biopolitical mechanisms can be deployed in order to regulate and manage populations (i.e. ‘incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organise’) (*The History of Sexuality* 136). I question how a regime of (bio)power may be enacted over bodies in the athletes’ recollections.

### **‘Rhythmanalysis’ of Complementary and Competing Authenticities**

This section focuses on the affective rhythms of *Einzelkämpfer*’s narrative. To this end, I draw on Lefebvre’s method of ‘rhythmanalysis’: a stimulating, if at times

underdeveloped outline for studying life-worlds according to their rhythms. First published in 1992 after his death, Lefebvre's work<sup>24</sup> observes the ubiquity of rhythms in everyday life: 'Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is **rhythm**' (15). For each disciplined field of human pursuit, the role of rhythms that will be foremost in a person's mind will, however, vary wildly. A sleep psychologist would think of the circadian rhythm. A nurse is preoccupied with the routines of the round of the ward, the distribution of medication at the required intervals, and the regular monitoring of vital signs. For a musician, rhythms are the divisional beats governed by tempo that make a piece of music coherent. Addressing the general concept of rhythm, many people may reference music, given the very direct importance of beat and measure.

As Lefebvre points out, rhythms may often be reduced to mechanical definitions, as opposed to organic. This is because (in his view) we tend to confuse rhythms with movement, or a series of movements, like a machine (5–6): one dominant notion is that rhythms have strict, measured repetitions. For instance, the industrial rhythms of Fordism, or the sound of a steam train, evoke this particular concept of rhythm. However, from the general to the specialised, the abstract to the concrete, Lefebvre sees both organic and inorganic rhythms as central to the organisation of the everyday, incorporating not only *repetition* but also, importantly, *difference*: 'there is no identical absolute repetition, indefinitely. Whence the relation between repetition and difference' (6). The introduction of difference into measured repetition

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<sup>24</sup> In the introduction, Lefebvre states that in his book, he 'proposes nothing less than to found a science, a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms' (3).

synthesises realities, rhythmically. The fusion of alterity and repetition relates specifically to *Einzelkämpfer*'s relationship with authenticity.

Lefebvre asserts that rhythms are fundamental and pervasive in life, whether or not they are consciously observed (15–16). Following this claim, it makes sense that the phenomenon of cinema would be rhythmically constructed. *Einzelkämpfer*'s relations to memory, time and place determine its suitability for an analysis of its rhythmic flow and feel. Incorporated rhythms are crucial to *Einzelkämpfer*'s narrative mode; the persuasive techniques attached to its personal, political and sociocultural commentary are demonstrated by identifying these rhythms. Furthermore, they can be tied to the documentary's generic form – understood in relation to issues of truth and authenticity. The processes of editing are certainly rhythmic, as well as their effects, as these involve the temporal sequencing of shots, scenes, sounds and images. This organising procedure (coordinated under the directorial authority of Kaudelka) significantly informs the 'meaning' that lies within *Einzelkämpfer*'s collected memories. This shapes its political attitude (if considered as a whole) towards cultural memories of the GDR and its competitive athletes.

Film has historically been described in terms of its inherent rhythms. In his book on the 'Photoplay' published in 1916, Hugo Münsterberg finds that for cinema, just as for music, 'the melody and rhythms belong together' (138). Ingmar Bergman concurs – for him, 'there is no art form that has as much in common with film as music'. Bergman goes so far as to argue that film has more in common with music than with written narrative forms, justifying this position in terms which evoke film's corporeality: 'Both [film and music] affect our emotions directly, not by way of the intellect. And film is mainly rhythm; it is inhalation and exhalation in continuous

sequence' (*Why I Make Movies*). Others have also remarked on film's respiratory quality. For instance, Vivian Sobchack describes the flow of images in the film's 'breathing body' as a 'natural' rhythm similar to our breathing, likening the 'intermittent passage of images into and out of the film's material body (through camera and projector)' to 'human respiration or circulation'. Here, mechanical and organic intertwine, as breathing and circulation represent 'the primary bases upon which human animation and being are grounded' (*Address* 207).

Sobchack's frame of reference shifts from literal bodies (i.e. those of characters) to cinema's broader corporeality, opening up a theoretical account of the film's rhythms, which are perceivable beyond the screen's framing. Thus we can see, for instance, how a shocking moment in a film that makes us 'gasp' (an interruption to the normal rhythms of breathing) can be the result of an assemblage of cinematic affects that arise from circumstances before, during, and after the shooting, distribution, and viewing of a film. Moreover, we can find rhythms in the materiality of cinema, whether experienced in the whirring of film-stock through a projector, or the spinning of an optical DVD (with its capability for pausing and skipping). In each of these examples, rhythms are embedded within any potential film-viewing, from the formal characteristics of the structuring of time within the film's diegesis to the spectator's phenomenological contact with the film's body. Rhythms are also central to procedures of editing, which take pro-filmic events and render them sequentially in the truncated, curated form that is distributed for viewing. Social, physical, and emotional rhythms, both 'natural' and 'artificial' (a distinction important in the development of Lefebvre's methodology), are assembled together into a complex pattern of images and sound in the making of a film.

Understanding how filmic rhythms work calls for a method of analysis which can separate the various elements of the film experience by isolating differing motions and emotions, before synthesising conclusions. In his book, Lefebvre describes a hypothetical 'rhythmanalyst'; he imagines this role as a possible future occupation, and outlines what attitudes to the world such a person would perform. He suggests:

The rhythmanalyst calls on all his senses. He draws on his breathing, the circulation of his blood, the beatings of his heart and the delivery of his speech as landmarks. Without privileging any one of these sensations, raised by him in the perception of rhythms, to the detriment of any other. He thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality (21).

What would this type of analyst make of film? I suggest that Lefebvre's prototypical rhythmanalyst, if charged with such a task, must respond to the physical nature of cinema. The analysis would consider the rhythms of the film's body together with those of the embodied spectator, finding the moments when these synchronise and when they jar. Lefebvre's method thus suits this chapter's interest in the bodies of *Einzelkämpfer*, and their temporal relations in the film experience. Here, it is important to consider, as Aleksandra Vojcic reminds us, that Lefebvre's concept of rhythmanalysis is 'one of using rhythm as a tool or a method, rather than an object of analysis' (78).

Rhythm is central to narrative function, regulating the spectator's involvement. For instance, a documentary typically opens with objectives and questions. It presents evidence to corroborate its findings. Finally, it concludes. The rhythms of this sequencing of events dictate (in part) the temporal nature of the affects that a film can

elicit – this is the narrative structuring of spectatorial experience. In her corporeal study of the fictional cinema of Darren Aronofsky, Tarja Laine affirms a similar mode of filmic experience, finding rhythms in ‘dialogue and narration’, ‘accompanying music and sound effects’, the ‘movement both within the frame and in framing mobility (the movement of camera)’ and in ‘image composition’ (*Bodies in Pain* 50). Rhythm is not only important to fictional cinema; Spence and Navarro argue that the order in which a documentary organises its testimonies encodes the information into a hierarchy. Various pieces of evidence ‘talk’ to each other, situated within the design of the entire documentary: ‘Oftentimes, it is this specific arrangement that determines what kind of evidence should be considered relevant and worthy of attention’ (Spence and Navarro 44). Moreover, certain documentaries work to trouble normative histories through radically challenging the status of ‘facts’ and ‘evidence’. Such films, according to Spence and Navarro, presume history to be made up of ‘irreconcilable perspectives, none of which is complete or completely “true”’ (45). The effects of this approach trouble the assumed authentic status of the documentary genre’s ‘evidential’ mode. The following section examines how *Einzelkämpfer* uses rhythms in order to organise the athletes’ testimonies, juxtaposing both complementary and contradictory viewpoints.

### **Kaudelka’s Authorial Rhythms: Meeting the Athletes**

Rhythms permeate all layers of a spectator’s experience of *Einzelkämpfer*. Vital elements in the film are sutured onto the screen and are perceived rhythmically. These include: the protagonists’ individual memories, Kaudelka’s interpretation and incorporation of these and her own experiences, and other archival footage. The flow of information embedded in the witness testimonies is sequenced so that it can either



support or contradict the evidence that precedes or follows. This process is built into rhythmical patterns of narrative, style, and form. By looking at the rhythm of the film's introductory sequences and shots, we can reveal the logic behind the arrangement of the themes and topics that make up Kaudelka's documentary.

Starting with Kaudelka's childhood memories of diving, the film establishes her subjective, authorial role, and her narration locates her memories of the GDR spatio-temporally: 'das war auch zu einer anderen Zeit, in einem anderen Land'. The 'time and place' of East Germany is then depicted in a montage of socialistic images that instantly conjure a familiar picture of the GDR and its sport, such as athletes competing, politicians and parades. We then snap directly to the present, and are introduced to each of Kaudelka's (i.e. her film's) subjects. These sequences, a kind of 'getting to know' the athletes, are not only a narrative means of introducing them, but represent, to a degree, Kaudelka's (as interviewer, and fellow former East German, as well as a former athlete) actual 'getting to know' these people. While the audience cannot know the extent of the correspondence between Kaudelka and the other athletes prior to shooting, there is a clear sense in these opening shots of a 'virtual performance' of meeting someone for the first time.

We are thus included in this social experience; we become witnesses to the performativity of 'becoming acquainted'. Here, we can observe Kaudelka's directorial subjectivity merging with our own. Through her distinct presence in the film, we can see things the way she does. This encourages our identification, or better our 'allegiance' as Smith terms it, with the interviewer, and with the authorial perspective on the political and social commentary of the film (84). Pertinent here is Smith's observation that sharing a perceptual alignment such as the 'point of view' is not

essential to identification. Rather, in this instance, the spectator shares an experiential engagement with Kaudelka through the assemblage of her roles as editor, character and interviewer, which then invites an ‘allegiance’ with her moral outlook. We are inducted into a rhythm of social interaction that typically begins with personal introductions. Moreover, we are thereby encouraged to form an empathetic relationship, or ‘allegiance’ with the film’s ‘characters’. The spectator interacts with the athletes, who are embodied witnesses to their cultural and personal memories, thereby sharing in the rhythms of the athletes’ lives in post-unification Germany, and their memories of the GDR.

Firstly, we meet Udo Beyer, the former shot-putter, at his place of work – his own travel bureau. In his case, the ‘extraordinary’ in him is established through his achievements: he points out to Kaudelka (and to us) a shot-put, currently being used as a paperweight, that won him three world records. He explains that four out of six siblings in his family became Olympic athletes. Beyer describes how his exceptional build attracted the attention of a number of divisions of the GDR’s sports scouts. The interviewer’s arrival at Beyer’s travel agency (and by extension, our arrival as spectators), interrupts him at work, in order to document his memories. Beyer’s remembering is framed by the setting of his interviews, at his business. He appears content and busy in the midst of the everyday rhythms of his work.

Ines Geipel, a former runner, who is now perhaps best known as a prominent advocate for the rights of athletes who are victims of the GDR’s doping program, is introduced to us in her public capacity. We meet her at an awards ceremony as chairperson of the ‘Doping-Opfer-Hilfeverein’. In the speech introducing her award, the master of ceremonies refers to the damages the GDR’s sports system has caused its former

athletes. He speaks of Geipel's career having been officially cut short 'wegen politischer Unzuverlässigkeiten' – a phrase, he says, that has over time been transformed from an insult to an honour. There is an 'intimate' feeling in this scene. In a conversation that we seem to 'overhear' from behind her shoulder, Geipel is asked by one of the officials surrounding her whether she has any family attending the presentation of her award ('Das Verdienstkreuz am Bande des Verdienstordnen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland'), and she replies definitively that she does not. Her tone of voice suggests a long story lies behind that fact.

Brita Baldus, a former diver, is introduced with reference to her connection to the director – both attended the same *Sportschule*. As a child, Kaudelka wrote an essay about Baldus, who was the GDR's champion at the time. Here, the personal aspect to this film's memory project is reasserted. Kaudelka's own childhood is evoked, intersecting through the documentary's narrative of both Baldus's past and her present. Baldus emphasises the hard work that ended up affording her the luck and success she achieved through competitive sport. Rhythms of memory and cyclical connections between time and place are conjured in Baldus and Kaudelka's connection. The introductory montage for Baldus concludes with a sequence of long-takes, depicting Baldus at work with an accentuated 'realism', accompanied by the garish, tinny reverberations of a radio playing up-beat music for a group of older citizens' aqua-aerobics exercises, led by Baldus. We leave with a lingering, final shot, after the pool has emptied. Again, the camera is steady, holding the image of Baldus as she struggles to return the 'pool noodles' to their container, having to squeeze each one into its box – the unglamorous nature of the work contrasts with the higher stakes of the young Baldus, competing in the elite world of sport, revealed in archival footage only a few sequences before.

Marita Koch is one of East Germany's most renowned sporting figures globally, her record for the 400-metre sprint remains unbroken. Her prominence in German sporting history (and memory) is underscored immediately; we find her at an athletics competition in the stands of the stadium, being approached by a fan for her autograph. She is told: 'Sie waren mein Vorbild gewesen'. As with the example described above with Ines Geipel, it is a privileged view that is granted to the camera, with spontaneous conversations captured and relayed to *Einzelkämpfer*'s audience. In our introduction to Koch, we are shown how 'our' (or at least, one fan's) memory of her is tied to the ongoing rhythms of the post-*Wende* competitive sporting world, and to her place in cultural memory as a public figure. Here we also have an instance of the film's use of juxtaposition as a technique, contrasting Koch's and Baldus's circumstances by their rhythmic sequencing. This particular technique is examined in greater detail below.

Kaudelka makes plain, through her narration, that these athletes were also her idols. The way these opening scenes are formatted reveals a distinct motivation for the film: to show what has become of these former national heroes, who were also of personal significance to the director as a child (Soldierer). Each of the athletes is described positively by Kaudelka, through the tone of her voice-over, and through her presentation of each person's achievements. These also work to justify their being worthy of documentary interest. In this way, we are invited to relate empathetically to these witnesses. Her friendly tone suggests that Kaudelka does not set out to antagonise her subjects. Each of the athletes appears to have Kaudelka's sympathy and, given the strength of the embodied identification of the spectator with the

interviewer's role, this encourages a reciprocal sympathetic reception from the spectator.

These introductions demonstrate *Einzelkämpfer*'s reliance on one of its key 'documentary' features, the 'talking head'. Nichols has demonstrated how, in documentary film, interviewees are engaged in what he terms a 'virtual performance' – the 'everyday presentation of the self'. This mode of discourse involves the presentation of 'the logic of actual performance without signs of conscious awareness that this presentation is an act' (*Representing Reality* 122). The protagonists of *Einzelkämpfer* in their role as witnesses are engaged in a performance. Their authenticity accumulates because there is no (apparent) display of a conscious awareness that this performance is an act before a camera. Their personal memories are shared with us, and we receive their testimony in a similar mode of viewing to how we relate to actors in a fiction film. However, the non-fictional form denotes a truthfulness that typically separates the virtual witness from fictional performances. By outlining both similarities and differences between our perception/reception of memories embodied in a fictionalised character on screen, played by an 'actor', and those recounted as authentic, 'first-hand' memories from a documentary witness, we can observe a distinct quality in the mode of documentary film-viewing. (This question also takes on an urgency in the following chapter, where the imagined line between 'virtual performance' and a 'conscious performance' is blurred by the hybrid form of *This Ain't California*).

Roger Hallas notes that, in documentary filmmaking, the medium allows for testimony to be reproduced; this frees the witness from what has been termed their 'solitary burden' of having to be present in order for their testimony to retain its

function (Felman qtd. 37). However, as Hallas goes on to argue, the fact that cinema mediates ‘through a temporal deferment and spatial displacement’ means that films which place importance on the act of bearing witness ‘necessarily rely on techniques which enhance the impression of a witness’s presence before the viewer’ (38). For Hallas, the talking head format is the ‘principal technique’ that conveys this impression. In *Einzelkämpfer*, the core subjects – the athletes Beyer, Baldus, Geipel, and Koch – recount their memories facing the camera, with the hidden interviewer occupying the space behind. Kaudelka is therefore ever-present in this position, despite having her actual questions, her voice, almost always edited out in the final cut. The disembodied interviewer plays a specific role, which Hallas terms the ‘future viewer’s proxy’: The off-screen interviewer’s presence becomes disavowed, and the viewer, as proxy ‘takes up the position of this cipher, and thus, experiences the witness’s address as directed to him/her, an address that apparently takes place in the present’ (38).

This impression of presence, marked by the witnesses in the mediated act of giving testimony, can bring to a story (or a history), the authenticity of *having been there*. Drawing upon what Hallas calls ‘the corporeal inscription of the witness in the film’s sound and image’, first-person memories can be particularly affecting because of the ‘truth’ carried by the witness, as a living embodiment of real experience (38). The affective quality of the intimate responses conveyed in such accounts can offer an emotional legitimacy to a narrative, which the referral to drier, ‘factual’ documents may fail to evoke. The humour expressed in a chuckle or wry smile at an absurd event from one’s past, or the sadness felt in the tightening up of one’s voice or in wiping away a tear, can be a profoundly convincing way of retelling a story. ‘Personal history interviews can be valuable’, Spence and Navarro contend, ‘not only because they tell

us about events that do not usually get into written records but also because they tell us of the meanings that those events have to the people who recount them' (43). The athletes' personal interviews provide us with an opportunity to evaluate how those taking part in GDR sports *felt* about what they were going through and, bearing in mind the temporal dimension of recounting memories, we can assess how those feelings might have changed over time. Spence and Navarro go on to argue that these first-hand accounts, through the affect aroused in their very subjectivity, can offer the spectator avenues for 'exploring how individuals connect with larger-scale historical processes (44). Through the series of introductions detailed above, we begin the film by engaging with each athlete's particular world-view and experience; the audience dialogically relates to each individual and at the same time builds linkages between them, connecting that information with broader knowledge about East Germany and its sport.

Kaudelka's personal story is rhythmically interwoven alongside these virtual introductions to the subjects, fashioning an intersubjective whole. Her memories are cyclically interlinked with the GDR's historical narrative of division and the *Wende*, closely relating her presence in the film to its East German thematic content.

*Einzelkämpfer* utilises genre-typical conventions of the documentary in a rhythmic fashion. Some of the most common documentary tropes include:

[t]he use of a voice-of-God commentary, interviews, location sound recording, cutaways from a given scene to provide images that illustrate or complicate stated points, and a reliance on social actors, or people, who present themselves in their everyday roles and activities (Nichols, *Introduction* 21).

That we can find each of these techniques in Kaudelka's film encourages an easy recognition of its documentary form. This coheres its narrative into a familiar shape and coordinates responses in line with the expectations associated with the distinct focus of non-fiction: portraying the 'real'. After the film's first sequences, in which Kaudelka introduces the topic and content of the film that is to follow, her disembodied voice-over concludes with the following statement, explaining her personal motivations behind the film's conception: 'Ich war damals noch zu jung, um meinen Auftrag auch nur annähern zu erfüllen, denn auf einmal gab es die DDR nicht mehr. Dennoch, oder gerade deswegen, lässt meine Vergangenheit mich bis heute nicht los'. Thus her 'voice-of-God' commentary is noticeably, and deliberately, involved in the story of GDR sport from the film's outset. Kaudelka does not pretend to be an objective, distanced observer in her stated role. While there is an inherent verticality in the relationship between her voice (i.e the voice-of-God) and the other athletes' testimonies, according to documentary conventions and preconditioned audience assumptions, the film's polyvocality ensures that hers is not simply the film's only guiding voice. Nevertheless, the rhythms of her personal biography, which correspond with the historic rhythms of the *Wende*, mediate her documentary's overarching story.

While we never 'visually' see Kaudelka as 'interviewer', we sense her physical presence, primarily through two means. Firstly, we occasionally hear her voice from her position behind the camera, sometimes in shared laughter with one of the athletes following a humorous account, at other times with a follow up question that has been edited into the final cut (most of her questions have been edited out). Secondly, we encounter the director through her own memories as a child in the *Sportschule*. Here, we tend to see her as a child in old photographs or home-videos, in diving



competitions and training. These artefacts align with the footage of the athletes that make up the 'official' subjects of the documentary. In the press kit for the film, Kaudelka's personal story is, quite logically, not presented as vitally as the better-known athletes. Yet her story shapes the entire documentary; this film emanates from her own desire to deal with the GDR past. The athletes' voices are embodied more obviously than the voice of Kaudelka, i.e. we encounter their bodies not only in archival footage, but also in their present-day interviews, whereas the dual-voice of the narrator/director remains out of the camera's framing. Meanwhile, we only 'see' Kaudelka in the temporally distant archival videos and photographs. In the present, she is always off-screen.

The way in which Kaudelka has placed herself in her film has implications for how authenticity is carried, and the way that the spectator responds to the film's overarching meaning. Partly, this depends on the extent to which hers is a 'governing voice'. Nichols writes of the 'voice of the documentary' to describe the construction of a political perspective that relates all of the assembled content and sources in the documentary into a coherent whole. We can ask of *Einzelkämpfer* the extent to which this 'voice' is Kaudelka's – 'voice' being used to designate not (only) the literal (i.e. a voiceover), but the organisation of the material into a whole, as in an 'intangible, moiré-like pattern' (Nichols, 'Voice of Documentary' 18). Nichols's metaphor illustrates the enmeshing of the different sources and elements that produce a documentary. The film is an assemblage, sometimes a containing, other times a controlling, authority, playing one source either against or for another (Spence and Navarro 66). In *Einzelkämpfer*, Kaudelka's directorial decisions of shooting and editing merge with her virtualised performance – in her role as witness to her own memories of participating in East German sports. Throughout the film, the viewer is

engaged in a continual process of hearing and responding to Kaudelka's particular understanding of the athlete's memories, and infers the director's judgment on the fairness of their present circumstances, how life has treated them. The overlapping 'moiré-like pattern' of documentary experience is complicated with the presence of the subjective director's voice as both a figure in the film and as commentator.

Kaudelka's memories are an important locus along the film's narrative arc. As stated above, Kaudelka's desire for 'closure' regarding her East German childhood catalysed the project. She returns to her own story as the film's narrative arrives at its apparent 'turning point' – which is fittingly the *Wende*. Before the film reaches the *Friedliche Revolution* of November 1989, Kaudelka testifies to her personal moment of protest, in which she and her teammates at the sports academy went on strike. They protested against the endless, painful and thankless routines of training and performance (another repetition, *ad infinitum*). In the spring of 1989, only a few months before the national events took place, the children refused to participate in any training, wishing to be allowed to quit. Over a backdrop of home-movie footage showing the young divers at training, Kaudelka describes the manipulatory efforts of the trainers and sports officials, who alternately coaxed and blackmailed the children to return to their training routine. After a few weeks, their resistance eventually broke, and training resumed. Only a few months later the exterior world turned upside down, as protests in Leipzig (footage of which we see) set in motion the events that led to the *Wende*. For Kaudelka, this was the point that marked the most dramatic change in her life. Destined to dutifully perform the role of an elite diving competitor, since being singled out for the *Sportschule*, Kaudelka was liberated from the demands of a life that she had no desire to participate in.

Thus, a moment that is seen globally as a major turning point of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is translated, through the memories of the director, into the perspective of an individual. The weight of history becomes measurable in one person's life-changing experience. Historical epoch-making is translated into a human, personal 'meaning'. There is a rhythmic circularity in the insertion of the director's own experience at this juncture; the motivations for the documentary belong to her, and the film's story returns to her experience at this crucial, historical moment. As the film's historical narrative arrives at its common turning point, the *Wende*, Kaudelka's own memories are interlaced within the larger tapestry of Germany's 20<sup>th</sup> century; her personal tale crystallises the story of the 9<sup>th</sup> of November into something tangible. Her narration, which overlays the very familiar archival images of the Wall's destruction, speaks of her personal, unexpected liberation. Freed from her brutal, hated routine at the sports school, reunification meant that her life could progress in an entirely different direction. The significance of the all-too-familiar narrative of mass euphoria, emblematised in the ecstatic scenes of the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, can lose its impact through endless, symbolic evocations. However, the audience shares Kaudelka's perspective, and from her position we understand not only the broader historical significance of this moment, but also the fact that it changed her life. The string connecting the individual and the collective narratives is drawn tight; Kaudelka's release from the regime's disciplinary power over her (body) draws out an empathetic, corporeal understanding that the spectator can touch, no matter the degree of her own knowledge of this event.

The presence of the filmmaker within the film's narrative, in its subjectivity, is not to everyone's taste. One film critic complains that, for him, Kaudelka's personal story created an effect of incompleteness, and the motivations behind the film's conception made too obvious to the point of condescension:

Dass dieser persönliche Zugang im Film vorkommt, wirkt ein wenig, als klebe die Bedienungsanleitung für die Motivation noch am fertigen Bild. Und ist wohl nur zu erklären durch die Vorstellung, dass Zuschauer Filme besser verkraften, in denen die Autorin ihren Stoff selbst erlebt hat (Dell).

Ham-fisted in this critic's eyes, both Kaudelka's visible presence and her voice, seen and heard in the videos and photos of her childhood in the *Sportschule* and in her off-screen narration respectively, are deemed unnecessary. Her presence detracts from the (worthier, according to Matthias Dell) protagonists' stories. Being framed as exceptional witnesses, the athletes' authenticity emerges, for Dell, from their public prominence. He also criticises the inclusion of Baldus in the cast, given her relative lack of profile in sporting success (she was 'only' European champion, and has a bronze medal from the Olympics). Most interesting, in this critic's response, is the inference that this subjective form of documentary making, an untidy version in his eyes, can only be justified by what he perceives as an appeal to the legitimacy (and primacy) of lived experience. Regardless of whether this subjective mode of documentary filmmaking convinces the spectator, or the critic, it is clear that Kaudelka not only stages, but also participates in the witness text. The presence of her own story at the *Sportschule* invites us to be aware that the documentary-maker is implicated within the film's political and cultural positions; this can be recognised as a process of (Kaudelka's) working through the past. Both the encompassing, historic rhythms of the *Wende* and the intimate rhythms of Kaudelka's 'Sportalltag' (which she despised) are crucial in their regulating function within the overarching narrative.

## Harmony and Discord: Rhythmic Juxtaposition of Witnesses and

### Evidence

In the following, *Einzelkämpfer*'s rhythmic juxtaposing of witnesses, testimony and evidence will be examined. It is through rhythm that the spectator experiences the film – and is drawn towards certain conclusions as a result. This is central to how Kaudelka's film works, favouring a depiction of complexities in GDR memory. The rhythmic tool in *Einzelkämpfer*, appearing in its memory work most often, is the juxtaposition of testimony and evidence. While the sequencing of footage is largely a result of the editing process, it is important to consider how decisions in research, scripting (the interview questions), and shooting (such as the positioning of the interviewees, the construction of the pro-filmic setting), all play a role in generating the final audiovisual product that affects the spectator in particular or desired ways. In other words, what might appear 'natural' in a documentary is always present as a consequence of decisions made by the filmmakers. For instance, the athletes are never present in the film without either the contextualising influence of each other, or Kaudelka's privileged directorial and personal involvement in shaping the final, entire product.

A significant proportion of *Einzelkämpfer*'s overall screen time is given to the (re)playing of archival footage. This is most often edited (rhythmically) into montages that illustrate the testimony of the athletes given in the interviews filmed for the documentary, or accompanying Kaudelka's 'voice-of-God' narration. For instance, we see home-movies of Kaudelka at training on the diving board in the *Sportschule*, the broadcast of Marita Koch's record breaking 400m sprint from 1985 played in its entirety, and television news reports of former GDR functionaries Manfred Ewald and

Manfred Hoepfner leaving court with convictions for their roles in the GDR's doping program. These videos are not only an interesting audiovisual stimulus to engage the spectator, but they ground the film's stories of the past in a pro-filmic reality of the GDR past. The fact that archival footage has not been shot specifically for the purposes of the film does not mean that it is free from the creative and the affective contexts of *Einzelkämpfer*'s mediated transmission of memory. The process and results of research, together with decisions in the editing stage of filmmaking, are creative parts of the building of this documentary's narrative. These choices affect how the film's meaning may be interpreted and the way memories on screen are translated into a shared memory-experience with the spectator. Once inserted, the memories become part of the film's whole assemblage. Furthermore, choices of inclusion also necessarily mean exclusion: 'After all', as Spence and Navarro have observed, 'just as framing always involves excluding, remembering also always involves forgetfulness' (45).

The eyewitness is now almost ubiquitous in historical representation; Sabrow points out that this form of storying the past, having originally occupied the status of counter-narrative, has now achieved hegemony ('Der Zeitzeuge' 22). As Aleida Assmann has observed, such narrative styles often include 'dramatic turning points' and 'heroic or attractive figures of sympathy' as techniques of enlivening the remembrance narrative (qtd. in Jones, *Media of Testimony* 162). The first effect has already been noted in Kaudelka's personalised experience of re-unification, and the second we can recall in the documentary's broadly compassionate framing of the athletes. These effects work together with a 'mediated immediacy', evoking the historical events by arousing a sense of having been there in the spectator (Pirker and Rüdiger 18). This participatory feeling forms a kind of shared witnessing, which is

particularly marked in filmic portrayals of traumatic events: an example of ‘prosthetic memory’. Alison Landsberg’s concept demonstrates that the feeling-mechanism of empathy can become a site of authenticity in remembrance, since empathy can allow people to ‘inhabit’ memories belonging to other people. An ‘alterity of identification’ still remains recognised in this process; these memories are understood not as one’s own, but as belonging to others (24). The spectator is thus actively engaged in the film’s memory work. Sara Jones expands on how the spectator is invited into the remembering community, through an empathetic response:

We might then understand this in terms of community – the reader, visitor or viewer is invited through processes of identification and the creation of complementary authenticities to feel themselves part of the mediated remembering community constructed in the witnessing text (*Media of Testimony* 189).

Having accepted the invitation into a remembering community, influenced by the film’s affectivity, the spectator may then typically be primed to respond in favour of the witness testimony presented. That is, we can see how the film elicits affects specifically through its documentary effects: its legitimising and authenticating techniques, which are activated through the experiential relationship between the embodied spectator and film’s body. A contested environment often demands the testimony of witnesses. The film’s rhythmic framing of the subjects – as witnesses – may be understood with the aid of Jones’s twin theoretical concepts ‘mediated remembering communities’ and ‘complementary authenticities’. These explain how testimony can be supported or contradicted through formal decisions in the filmmaking process. Jones argues that the ‘construction of authenticity’ relates to

power: ‘specifically the power to determine meaning’ (‘Memory on Film’ 195). When witness testimonies concur, an affective, mediated ‘remembering community’ is created, signalling the production of ‘complementary authenticities’. However, when their memories are contradictory a different mode of gaining authenticity emerges, which could be termed ‘authenticity through alterity’. In such instances, an overall sense of credibility is produced by featuring differing perspectives on the niche experiences of being a competitive athlete in the GDR. Finding meaning in the context of the contested nature of witness testimony calls for a particular analytical approach, which can determine how differing testimonial accounts are either bound together in support, or set up as oppositional discourses of resistance.

In editing, the decisions made to arrange certain interviews in temporal juncture before or after others, and the length of pause in between each, place a protagonist’s testimony always in tension with the others’. There is a linearity to the rhythm; one moment follows the other until the end of the film. A dialogue is awoken when two differing interpretations are placed next to each other in the sequence of the film’s story telling. We can observe both difference and repetition, central elements in Lefebvre’s rhythmic theory. Such a moment is starkly rendered in the remembrances of Udo Beyer and Brita Baldus of their respective gold medal ceremonies, each recalling their gold medal presentations in contrasting fashion. The way the film sequentially transitions from one to the other is an example of contradicting testimony made apparent through its discordance.

Firstly, Beyer reminisces on his unexpected success at the Montreal Olympics. As television coverage of his winning throw and the medal ceremony plays, he describes how he and his classmates were taught in school that this goal, victory at the



Olympics, was meant to be significant for many people. Beyer remembers how winning his gold medal felt like an affirmation of a collective goal: 'Wir haben diesen Sport gemacht für 17 Millionen anderen Menschen, nicht nur für Herrn Honecker ... Für mich war mein Umfeld mit mir Olympia Sieger'. Brita Baldus, in contrast, remembers the moment of standing on the podium, having the national anthem played and the flag raised, as being only for her. In the sequence that follows, immediately after Beyer has described his memories of feeling connected with the whole of the East German nation, we continue to hear the national anthem in the background, as further footage is played, of Beyer arriving home to the reception of jubilant fans. Then the music fades, and we cut to an interview with Baldus, who begins to describe her version of winning a gold medal at the European Championships: 'Nur für dich allein wird die Hymne gespielt.' This juxtaposition directly underscores the contrast between these two athletes remembering their similar experiences, within very different frames. The intensity of the memory is clear, as Baldus remembers reaching heights of emotion that come with such a victory, remarking that it is impossible to describe the feeling. Her sentiment is underscored in the broadcast footage of her ceremony, showing her tearful reaction to hearing the anthem played for her. The stirring, anthemic music arouses in the spectator the sense of occasion, of (inter)national significance, as this moment evidently did for Baldus at the time. However, where Beyer finds collective significance in his role as statesperson, Baldus draws her empowerment from her individual achievement.

In the case of both Beyer and Baldus, their remembering is supplemented with illustrative and evocative footage. We receive these artefacts from the past as documentary evidence. In this case, the footage supports the national significance (in Beyer's case) and the emotional, personal meaning (for Baldus). Therefore, we are

not necessarily being encouraged to valorise one perspective over the other. Rather, this juxtaposition is a demonstration of polyvocality inherent in lived experience – an example of authenticity through alterity. Furthermore, the *Nationalhymne der DDR – Aufstanden aus Ruinen* plays for both Udo Beyer and for Britta Baldus, an instrumental part of the nationalistic performativity that is central to international sports competition. This music creates, in *Einzelkämpfer*'s replaying of the footage, a poignant example of the overlapping of affect, through its rousing sentiment, with grand, ideological and national signifiers. Emotional music combines with the celebration of an individual's exceptional contribution in the name of a nation-state, acknowledged as a collective triumph in the medal tally at each competition. The music is universally stirring, yet the complexities of national identity are evident in the very different emotional responses – both social and individual – each athlete remembers.

Archival footage is interspersed throughout the documentary. There is typically no direct citation, no time-and-date stamp, and so we can never be sure whether the footage is from the time and place they are talking about, or solely illustrative of the point being discussed. There is still an effect of authenticity accompanying the appearance of this footage, and which lends weight to athletes' embodied testimonies. The film's re-contextualising of these 'evidential' historical traces inspire responses similar to those noted for photographs. Nichols observes that the perceived 'indexical quality' of the photographic image is 'ideally suited' to the evidential claims of documentaries: 'A perfect tautology appears to come into being between fact, object, or event, on the one hand, and evidence and interpretation, on the other, so that reference to a piece of evidence marries signified and referent in a single stroke' (*Speaking Truths* 100). The supposed referentiality between the photographic image

of an object has been critiqued for its illusory sense of an ability to document that object's reality *without mediation*. Nevertheless, the photograph retains its affective characteristic of offering a powerfully strong, evidential bind to how things were, when that image was taken.

In *Einzelkämpfer*, we encounter photographic documents, illustrating and evidencing the matter in discussion, grounding testimony in a visual record of its authenticity. The photographic image has been historically considered as 'proof', the signifier 'appearing' so close to its referent, in its indexical quality, as to engender a sense of scientific measurement and accuracy as a phenomenon (Spence and Navarro 39). Photographs of Kaudelka as a child are introduced early in the film to complement her narrated autobiography. She remembers being chosen by the talent scouts to begin a career path in the youth sports academy. These photographs are a visual sliver of the reality of her past, emerging from that time into her project of 'memory work'. Their presence in the film augments the authentic quality of Kaudelka's account. Alongside this effect, the extraordinary aspects of Kaudelka's story, such as the very young age she was selected, and her great dislike of the sports school itself, are supported by the evidential nature of these photographs. In another instance, we are presented with a photograph of the young Kaudelka with Baldus in the same classroom of their KJS in Leipzig (Baldus was a few years older than Kaudelka). The apparent lack of mediation between photograph and its referent draws the spectator closer to the reality that the film wishes to 'document' – another example of the film's placing the director within the documentary and evidencing her involvement. This coming together demonstrates *Einzelkämpfer*'s authoritative posture, appearing to offer links to the 'real' – to what has 'actually' happened.

The layering of narrative threads in a timed and measured manner (perceived by the spectator as audiovisual stimulation, which arouses the entire sensorium through a memory of the senses) recalls another musical concept – harmony. This concept again connects film with music via its rhythmic qualities. Distinct moods and ideas are grouped together through the rhythms of *Einzelkämpfer*, from the formal arrangement of each scene (editing) to the linear and cyclical assemblages of emotion – organised according to a dialectic of harmony and discord. Jones’s concept of authenticating memories emerges here, observable in the way that memories which speak together, form a unifying coherence in harmony. As in the differences between Beyer’s and Baldus’s remembered experiences on the podium, *Einzelkämpfer* conducts an orchestration of testimony, visibility, and embodied memory; sometimes harmonious, other times dissonant, the film pulls together different strands of experience – like the contrapuntal lines of melody strung together in a fugue. Jones’s notions of both complementary and competing authenticities are shown to be jointly at work in *Einzelkämpfer* – contributing to the complexity of its political, social, and cultural memories – and expressed in the rhythms of the ‘witness authenticities’ and its archival footage and images as evidence.

Building on the notion of harmony and discord, I now question whether *Einzelkämpfer* proposes a particular rhythm of life under dictatorship. We might ask: does everyone ‘sing the same tune’ under the regime, as expected and enforced by the party? In questioning the rhythms of the relationship between the individual and the idealised collective in the GDR, we may consider *Einzelkämpfer*’s footage of mass participation, dancing and parades at the ‘Leipziger Sportsfest’; these are choreographed, bodily demonstrations of this ideology. ‘Like many things taken over from the Soviets’, as Dennis and Grix explain, these ‘mass sporting spectacles in the

GDR were adapted and run in a stereotypical German-like manner, that is, they were planned meticulously and executed perfectly' (73). The 'participatory' nature of the GDR's dictatorship is underscored and embodied in these instances of mass involvement (Fulbrook, *The People's State* 12).

Kaudelka's film aims to reproduce this complexity in its overall *sense* of the GDR-history of sport, and the post-unification present it conveys. For example, the privilege of travelling the world is particular to the GDR-athlete's experience in comparison the East German populace. However, even this privilege is complicated, as Beyer's wife, in archival footage, talks of the hardships of having the father to their young child so often absent. For her part, Koch remembers when the authorities discovered her romantic relationship with her training coach, and henceforth forbade him to travel with her to competitions, as was protocol for couples, for fear they would not return.

Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, with its concentration on the 'everyday', emphasises the reciprocal influence of the individual pieces that compose the whole. The identification of particular rhythmic interactions within society can thus be imagined, through a kind of deconstruction, as a way of interpreting how and why things *are*. He writes:

The *substance* is the crowd (or molecules, corpuscles), it is a body. The crowd is a body, the body is a crowd (of cells, of liquids, of organs). Societies are composed of crowds, of groups, of bodies, of classes, and constitute peoples. They understand the **rhythms** of which living beings, social bodies, local groups are made up (42).

In the context of *Einzelkämpfer*'s GDR remembrance, this mode of thinking, rhythmically conceiving of the relations between the individual and the collective, can be applied in order to make sense of the self-understandings that the individual athletes express: their conceptions of the place they had in GDR society, with privileges and hardships unique to their participation in the nation's elite sports program. The role of the individual in East Germany's sports institution was to serve the whole: 'Im Ergebnis konnte das Individuum von der Institution "fast vollständig aufgesogen werden"' (Delow qtd. in Reinhart, 'Körperkultur' 467): Delow describes how the individual internalises the power-relations of the GDR, and then externalises these into productive citizenship – the professional East German athlete's duty was to gain medals, proving the country's superiority. These 'Diplomaten im Trainingsanzug' performed that role to perfection, when winning. Ines Geipel expresses this tension, between individual agency and collective responsibility. Her quote ends up giving the film its title: 'Es ist nicht so gewesen, dass man gesagt hat: "OK das ist das System und dieses System ist so und so aufgebaut". Sondern... jeder, in diesem DDR Sport, war wie ein Einzelkämpfer unterwegs'.

### **A Rhythmic Irruption: 'Die Teilung des Landes in meinem Bauch'**

The non-fictional protagonists in *Einzelkämpfer* have been construed as 'witnesses' throughout this chapter. Each appears in the film, bearing testimony which is informed by acculturated knowledges of East German experiences. But is there more than one type of witness? I argue, here, that one account stands out among the others. To an extent, this troubles the conclusions drawn above – my argument that the documentary uses rhythms to legitimise multiple perspectives and attitudes towards

the GDR past. Here, Geipel's story is accorded a special place by constructing her as a 'moral witness'.

The currency of the survivor's testimony is accruing; Jay Winter sees Margalit's paradigmatic 'moral witness' as one of the key figures of the 'memory boom'. These people, Winter argues, are 'story-tellers of a special kind' (467). Aleida Assmann writes that the moral witness is embodied, composed of 'die Personalunion von Opfer und Zeuge: er und sie haben das Verbrechen, das sie bezeugen, am eigenen Leib erfahren' (*Der lange Schatten* 90). Indeed, the discursive topic of 'pain' in *Einzelkämpfer* joins the individuals into the group – the remembering community – authenticating their accounts through a complementary series of juxtapositions. This interpretation of the moral witness reveals a connection between physical presence and the authenticity. Under this paradigm, distance from the subject is conceived of as unreliable: 'Der Körper des Gefolterten und Traumatisierten ist der bleibende Schauplatz der verbrecherischen Gewalt und damit zugleich das "Gedächtnis" dieser Zeugen' (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 90–91). When the athletes mention their painful experiences (memories of pain), the spectator is drawn closer by the affective 'standing-in' quality of painful testimony.

Bridging the space between testimony and the spectator is an issue of mediation of the past, which John Durham Peters terms the 'veracity gap' – the discrepancy between the witness's knowledge and the receiver's lack (Peters 26–27). Jones, drawing on Peters, affirms that pain may pull observers into witness testimony more closely: 'This "veracity gap" cannot be bridged by a "transfusion of consciousness", which is impossible, but only by an exchange of words that must stand for experience'. She argues therefore that 'trust in testimony is often constructed through the means of the

body, particularly the body in pain' (*Media of Testimony* 28). The immediacy of pain communicates at a different pace, in a unique modality. As Elaine Scarry has argued, writing of the political, philosophical, and material statuses of pain: 'physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language' (5).

Pain, for Scarry, defines reality. When a person is in pain, nothing else exists beyond that sense. Pain, being not of or for anything, is direct, objectless. One has a love for something, or a fear of something; pain on the other hand simply *is*. Discourse of pain, therefore (almost) offers the possibility for skipping the 'precarious' journey (Peters 26) from experience (the seen) into words (the said); that is, testimony of pain reaches out to bridge the chasm between 'being there' (experience) and the discourse about an event for those who were not present. This is pain's discrete nature:

Though the capacity to experience physical pain is as primal a fact about the human being as is the capacity to hear, to touch, to desire, to fear, to hunger, it differs from these events, and from every other bodily and psychic event, by not having an object in the external world (Scarry 161).

If pain has no object (unlike these other capacities shared in our human experience), then this feature ought to relate the athletes' painful testimonies to each other's in just the same way. Their memories of pain, even when mediated in *Einzelkämpfer's* interviews and archival footage, will therefore be placed in tension with other embodied, sensorial affects elicited by their interlaced 'virtual performances' throughout the film. The expressive 'reality' of pain cuts through the virtuality of the



performance, calling up the 'real' quality of pain to create affective cinema which drives to the heart of the spectator's embodied responses.

The body in pain is a recurring theme in each athlete's remembrances, and one that arguably binds their testimonies most strongly. The repeated testimony of their shared experience of the physical and emotional pain and stress of hard training and punishing performance, binds them with a complementary authenticity, stronger than any agreement as to what it means to have (had) an identity as an East German. As such, their 'remembering community' may be defined as 'former competitive athletes', more readily than 'former GDR citizens', were we to make hermeneutically such an artificial split. Regardless of the knowledge of the doping program, the film does not doubt the legitimacy of the hard, gruelling work that went into the athletes' results.

Ines Geipel describes how an athlete had to be 'immer an der Schmerzgrenze'; we are taken to extremes of bodily capacity in Kaudelka's film. The 'complementary authenticities' at work here create a remembering community of these witnesses, who are united in their (extraordinary) bodily experience of the GDR (Jones, *Media of Testimony* 187). Alongside this comes the question of community defined by their national identity, performing in uniforms under the banner of the GDR. The question could be asked: What do their achievements signify today, since that country no longer exists? These competitors were representing each of the GDR's citizens on the world stage, in duty to the socialist state. This historical assemblage of embodied, national duty is measured against their present situations. In this way, the body in pain always speaks as a part of the witness; testimony is always bound up within a witness's material lived experience.

The athletes' bodies are present within the film's mediation as witnesses to their personal GDR pasts, always acculturated and socially framed. Their pain is a remembered experience testifying 'outside' of language. While the spectator receives their testimony via the athlete's discourse, the 'memory of the senses', recalling Marks, enables the spectator's sensorial and corporeal understanding of their pain. According to Scarry, language cannot capture pain. But, there can be an approximation of a shared experience of pain through the multi-sensorial, reciprocal exchange between spectator and the athlete's bodies on the screen, incorporated in the film's body. Empathetic understanding is encouraged by the film's techniques in mediating the athletes' memories of training and performance. We not only hear their words, bearing testimony to the hardships of discipline, but are transported across time through archival footage. When a younger Baldus groans, battling to push for another weights session repetition, we travel shift across time, hearing and seeing memories come to life. Here the documentary experience draws on embodied comprehension on the part of the spectator, defying a Cartesian mind-body duality. This is integral to the film's claim to authenticity in carrying its subjects' stories.

Building on this understanding of how 'pain' works in *Einzelkämpfer*, cutting through to the spectator to convey the athletes' testimonies, let us consider Geipel's testimony. It stands out from the other memories, challenging the film's polyrhythmic balance and positioning her as a moral witness. The film has shown Geipel's advocacy and research into doping of athletes, and discussed the reasons behind her eventual *Republikflucht*, shortly before the Wall came down. But there is a further part of her story that casts a shadow over much of the film's 'lighter' moments. We hear from Geipel, in what comes across as a brutal, personal event, that the state's authorities

operated on her for a supposed appendectomy, with the hidden motivation of damaging her insides, so that she would never be able to run as an athlete again. This final revelation comes close to the end of the film, but the full horror of the state's interference in Geipel's life is foreshadowed a little earlier. In a sequence of interviews and footage, Geipel describes the reasoning behind her thwarted plan to leave the GDR in 1984, and her successful attempt in 1989. There is an inkling emerging from her demeanour –longer, thoughtful pauses between statements, and the altered quality of her voice, catching on certain words. These shifts in her 'virtual performance' bear out the biographical evidence that her relationship to the GDR authorities has been the most fraught of all the documentary's athletes. This inference is strengthened by the sequences in question, filmed at her home. She goes to her bookshelf, bringing out a folder, which we discover contains files from the *Stasi*'s surveillance of her.

As we have seen, documentaries can claim authenticity through the incorporation of 'evidence'. A documentary may establish its authority by binding its narrative to objects of authenticity, as Nichols observes: 'Documents are factual; documentaries are evidential' (*Speaking Truths with Film* 91). Nichols's statement reveals a moment of transfer that occurs between a 'fact' and a documentary's 'factual' status. Evidence becomes a part of the genre's apparent 'truthfulness'; factual information becomes embedded within the documentary's narrative, fashioning and re-contextualising objects as evidence in support of a film's particular claims or perspective.

*Einzelkämpfer* offers its audience 'facts' in various guises. Here, Geipel refers to her file. The *Stasi* files occupy a singular status among 'factual' documents, having come to be thought of as containing the 'truth about oppression and surveillance' (Lewis 379). Including Geipel's file into the film's diegesis, *Einzelkämpfer* claims the

authenticity connoted by 'the file's' recent history. These documents have developed a story of their own since re-unification, being cited in numerous revelations of wrong-doings of the state, and of unofficial collaborators. Geipel, having sat back in front of the camera, reads from her personal file, a document that tells of the 'powerful testimonies to the extreme paranoia of the ruling elites in the GDR' (Lewis 383).

We become privy to the state's observations about her relationship with a Mexican athlete, and her plans for the Los Angeles Olympics, to escape the GDR and join him. As Geipel describes the interference of the state in her romance with Ernesto Canto (a world champion race-walker), the words catch in her throat. Her emotion, triggered by remembering this traumatic part of her life, seeps out with an embodied, affecting aural quality. Geipel discusses the events that led to her being dismissed from the training institution, and disallowed from competing again. She remembers having only ten minutes to gather her things and leave. Being suddenly and forcibly removed from this highly regulated world was a traumatising experience. In addition, as Geipel explains, there was an immediate removal from the doping program that she unwittingly and unwillingly took part in, essentially causing a 'Kalter Entzug'.

Being kicked out of the sport is not the worst of Geipel's tale, however. Attention is given to the other athletes for fifteen minutes, then the documentary returns to her home. Her voice comes from off-screen, and we listen to her thoughts about having children. She questions why society often considers a woman's perspective as less legitimate if she lacks the lived experience of having children. She alludes that 'aufgrund einer bestimmten Geschichte', she has been excluded from the choice of whether or not to have children. At this point, the audience is not told the reason

behind this. In a subtle intensification of a foreshadowing technique, Geipel's story continues to sneak up on the audience, as she begins to tell it.

We return to Geipel's *Stasi* file, and pick up the narrative through the medium of this 'biography' that is withheld in these intrusive observations born of the state's systemic paranoia, insecurity and distrust. 'As biography', Lewis observes, 'the files can be read as a form of hostile, unauthorised biography whose banality in no way detracts from their harmful and aggressive intentions' (383). There is a shift from banality in Geipel's file, where earlier she laughs wryly at the absurdity of her 'biographer's' tone, to hostility, with the chilling words read out by Geipel: 'Das ist die Chance, sie für längere Zeit auf Eis zu legen'. These words refer to the plan to use the opportunity of an appendix operation to surgically damage her stomach and her insides, thoroughly putting an end to her sports career, causing lasting damage which included Geipel's being unable to conceive.

The institution of GDR sport had until this moment (openly) disciplined her through physical methods of training and routine (and not so openly, through doping), and had equally disciplined her through its contingent support and the privileges of being an athlete. Now the system intersected in a dramatic fashion with its hidden operations – the state's instrument of surveillance and control, and the previous structures of the sports system which had supported her dissolved. In this scene, the intrusion of the state is so corporeally direct that the ambivalence present throughout the film is stripped away. Geipel's telling of the story slows, and it is like the whirring of a disc at the end of a piece of rope which has been wound in one direction, and which decelerates until reaching a full stop, to then begin to spin in the opposite direction again with the remaining kinetic energy. At the end, evoking a bitter irony of the

individual consequences that the Cold War's national posturing has had on her body, Geipel concludes: 'Ich habe die Teilung des Landes in meinem Bauch getragen'.

With Geipel's story, we are reminded of the darker events that lurk in the dictatorship's history; inscribed into her own body is a memory of the state's potential to impose its power onto its citizens, via an incursion into an individual's body. The horrible consequences for Geipel – years of pain and discomfort without knowing the cause, and the incapacity to have children if she had wanted – tell a physical tale. The state's incursion into her body in order to 'lay her on ice' is affectively attended to by the sudden incursion of the horror of her story into the otherwise more tranquil rhythms of the film. An echo of the violating interruption to Geipel's life is thus embedded within the film's temporality. One determinable consequence of this shock is that, among the other memories, Geipel's story stands out. Her body is witness to the moral failings of the dictatorship to look after all citizens – even an athlete with the relative privileges that Geipel had enjoyed could be hurt. In this instance, the regime's oppressive attempts to lock in its citizens, and the paranoia inherent in the systems that enforced this, result in a cold and brutal decision to prevent one of its national champions from ever competing again.

The revelations that Geipel makes are shocking in the physical and biological nature of the violation. Geipel's narrative irruption into the film's rhythms can be seen as 'arrhythmic', referring back to Lefebvre's terminology. He writes that:

Rhythms unite with one another in the state of health, in normal (which is to say normed!) everydayness; when they are discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state (of which arrhythmia is generally, at the same time,

symptom, cause and effect). The discordance of rhythms brings previously eurhythmic organisations towards fatal disorder (16).

The discord that Lefebvre describes resonates painfully with the biological dissonance that is incurred within Geipel's body by the dictatorial regime. While, according to Lefebvre, arrhythmia leads towards 'fatal disorder', *Einzelkämpfer* shows Geipel to have found the strength to resist such an end. Geipel's example shows how the discord of trauma can be worked through into a 'polyrhythmia'. She acknowledges that she has come to terms with the impossibility of having her own children, partly through being happy to have regular interactions with young people as part of her teaching work. We note here the co-existence of multiple rhythms – in the way that life goes on for Geipel – without the clash or disagreement that defines arrhythmia. This promise of emancipation from the dramatic, traumatic experience ties Geipel's story back into the film's generally polyrhythmic structure, though ultimately this example of real suffering at the hands of the dictatorship does not break the harmony of all the other athletes' testimony.

Geipel's tale is affecting, and the emotional impact it has had on her life lingers in the spectatorial response. Her story is presented in such a way that promotes her status as a moral witness, justified through reference to the memory documents *par excellence* – her *Stasi* file. The total effect from these elements is that her story is arguably elevated into a different space from the otherwise equivocal rhythms and ordering of the film. While stories of the regime's most destructive, antisocial histories have been widely dispersed across the public record since the country's collapse, Geipel's revelation, in the context of this film's polyrhythmic mode, remains a shock. Its dramatic punch elicits a physical response; the affect aroused through her embodied

testimony is ‘literally’ visceral.

This memory confirms many of the tropes of the *Diktaturgedächtnis*. Its themes of *Stasi* surveillance and interference (physical, horrific), and of Geipel’s *Republikflucht* fit well with the remembrance of the GDR as an oppressive state. Her powerful, physically-affecting story arrives like a kick in the guts, following much of the film’s less dramatic and at times light-spirited mood, precluding a charge against Kaudelka of producing an unrealistic, nostalgic memory of the GDR. The calculated decision on the part of the *Stasi* to physically render their former Gold medallist unable to compete in sport might even have the power to shock those who are familiar with the history of the state’s darkest mechanisms of state control, for example in its interrogation methods and prisons.

Ines Geipel’s revelation of the awful things done by the GDR state to her body synthesises this chapter’s study of the various affects produced through the film’s rhythmic testimony and the corporeal relations of an individual’s place in social and cultural frames. The revelations of the state’s wilful damage to Geipel’s body are shocking, marking a significant break from the film’s regular undulation between the athletes’ memories of pain and of success. The rhythmic patterns in the film’s broad narrative arc, shaped by the experience of the film up to this moment, become warped by the severity of this particular event. The aforementioned narrative pivot, as the rhythms of ‘history’ and Kaudelka’s story arrive at the *Wende*, encounters a further shift with Geipel’s story. The sequencing of this sobering content towards the end of the film pricks the lingering sense of euphoria that is connected with the after-images of Germans celebrating on top of the Wall, shown just before. In a way, this is reminiscent of the dissipation of euphoria historically, as darker events from the



GDR's recent past, along with the difficulties to repair the damages caused, slowly came to overshadow the initial joy of the prospect of re-unification.

### **Sport and Biopolitics: The Rhythms of Training/Dressage**

The following section refines the analysis of the documentary's corporeal rhythms through a closer look at the role of sport in the GDR, tying the memories in *Einzelkämpfer* to the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics. I consider how the systems of competitive sport organised the athletes according to their physical performance in light of the frameworks of 'biopower' – as conceived by Foucault, and developed by others since. Here, sport historian Kai Reinhart's construct of the 'Sport-dispositiv' is instructive in detailing how power was dispersed through sport in the GDR. Weaving together Lefebvre's rhythmic conceptualisation with Foucault's description of the spreading of power through society, I argue that the repetitive concept of 'dressage' captures the disciplining routines of the *Sportschule*, and of GDR-*Alltag* more generally.

Foucault's formulation of biopolitics describes a governing process, ordering and administering the lives of those subject to it. He argues that, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the power of sovereignty over people's bodies shifted in the way it manifested. Between the demise of the monarchical regimes of the Middle Ages (in the West), and the rise of 'modernity' and democratic governance, there was a change. Under monarchical rule, the state determined who among the people it would 'let live', and conversely, those it would 'make die'. Foucault proposes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these principles were altered, so that power became exercised in organising subjects according to the right of the state to 'make live' or 'let die' (*Society Must Be Defended* 241). This

signals a shift from what Foucault terms ‘deductive power’ to ‘biopower’. Kai Reinhart argues that the role of sport in East German society can be understood as an instrument of (bio)power. According to Reinhart, ‘[w]ährend aber die Mauer ein äußerlich sichtbares Zeichen der Herrschaft war, sollte der Sport – seiner Idealstruktur nach – dazu beigetragen, die innere Herrschaft über die Menschen zu errichten’ (‘Körperkultur’ 477). Indeed, the state’s power was effectively diffused throughout society to such an extent that Reinhart concludes, ‘[i]n kaum einem anderen Land der Erde trat die Kerker-Funktion des Staates derartig offen zu Tage wie in der DDR nach dem Bau der Berliner Mauer’ (‘Körperkultur’ 476–77). To apply Foucault’s carceral view of modernity to the GDR is an attractive idea – the Berlin Wall would be seen as a monumental, concrete instance. However, where the Wall’s role in exercising political power appears direct and obvious, the structural role of sport and its political usages, in securing control and discipline among the populace, may not be so immediately clear.

Sport’s ‘national’ function has quite a long history in Germany. The interest of the fascist National Socialist party in sport as a social and political tool is reasonably well known. Many people recognise that Hitler’s Olympic games held in Munich 1936, the ‘Nazi Olympics’ (Krüger and Murray), set the standard for the modern Olympics. The propagandist documentary ‘Olympia’ from Leni Riefenstahl illustrates the ideological use of bodies for the promotion of national (and racialised) aims. Given that the GDR’s dictatorship emerged out of the wreckage of the Nazi regime, it is worth tracing whether these ideas continued to be expressed, or if they were rejected, as East Germans developed their political and social attitudes to sport and physical exercise.

A national, centralised attitude in Germany to the physical activities of the populace stretches back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Barbara Keys reminds us of Germany's long history of physical education, 'in the form of *Turnen* (German gymnastics), an intensely nationalistic system of formalized gymnastics created by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in 1811 as a means of instilling patriotism, increasing military readiness, and curbing ills such as masturbation' (401). These ideas reached (in different ways) into the top-competitive fields, and formed political ideas, to encourage the ideal participation in physical activity among ordinary citizens for the betterment of the nation and its health. In response to the losses of World War I, sport became a topic with political significance in the Weimar Republic and national approaches were developed particularly. Theodor Lewald, a civil servant who became president of the Olympic organising committee for the 1936 Summer Olympics, placed great national importance on physical improvement among the German populace during the period of recovery. Michael Hau argues that Lewald saw optimising 'the body' as integral to Germany's biological reconstruction. Together with a chorus of officials and professionals, Lewald 'promoted performance conditioning through sport as part of a comprehensive program to rebuild and refine human resource'; thus, *Leibesübungen* were successfully mobilized 'into an important element of qualitative population policy that intended to restore the productive capacities of the German population' (Hau 50). The ongoing efforts to further these biopolitics are underscored by Keys, who finds that continuities 'existed between Weimar and Nazi sport and physical education'; 'Weimar-era scientists and physical educators' Keys explains, 'created programmes intended to boost fitness, increase work productivity and "transform the human psyche", making Germans more disciplined and performance-oriented' (402). Across these various historical contexts,

the value placed in *Leibesübungen* derives from the belief that exercise would improve the physical (and psychological) conditioning of German citizens.

*Einzelkämpfer* testifies to the reappearance of this central idea in the East German context. Indeed, there appears to be a cyclical quality to the recurrence of intentions to instrumentalise sport for the nation's benefit over the last two centuries in Germany. The political and social worlds of GDR sport offer ways to understand the functioning of a multi-dimensional ever-evolving, regulating system, in terms of biopolitics. The GDR exerted itself, through discourse and technologies of power, onto bodies – this is very apparent in the stark example of Geipel's biography – but *Einzelkämpfer* also presents other, less dramatic examples. For instance, the rhythmic effects of editing, joining contradictions with confirmations, show an approach to GDR memory and biopolitics that is diffuse at its core. Taking its audience on a journey through the muscular, exhausting, physical experience of sports training, the film moves from the anatomical to the societal, sliding between individual and collective perspectives. Kaudelka, for instance, emphasises throughout the film her deep resentment at having to dive. She describes her fears: 'Jeder Sprung von zehn Meter war für mich ein echter Höllentrip. Doch irgendwie hat das niemand interessiert'. In one of her interviews with Baldus, a fellow diver, who had trained at the same pool, Kaudelka asks if she never felt afraid. Baldus replies: 'Ja natürlich. Angst hat man immer. Wenn man 'was Neues machen muss, was man noch nie vorher gemacht hat, klar hast du Angst. Ich hatte noch mehr Angst, den Sprung zu verweigern... Ich habe mich nicht getraut'.

In these examples, we gain insight into personal experiences behind the international notoriety of East German sport. Its globalised collective memory becomes re-

embodied by the documentary eye-witnesses. *Einzelkämpfer* offers, via its protagonists' testimonies, a variety of examples of the state's deploying the bodies of its citizens as instruments of political and social control. Knowledge of such a politics of the body has implications for what Keys refers to as the 'roles of consent and coercion' regarding the issue of 'somatization' in the empowerment of dictatorships (396). Athletes in the GDR were representatives of an entity that was far larger than their individual values desires. This is not unique to the socialist, East German experience, for athletes generally compete in the name of 'imagined communities' in international sport, whether representing a communist, democratic or otherwise politically-defined nation. Nevertheless, the importance placed on success in the worldwide sporting arenas in the GDR was extraordinary, and will be examined here in more detail.

### **Dressage – Rhythmic Training of the Body and Youth in the GDR**

When asked to explain East Germany's remarkable success in elite sport, doping might be the first thing that springs to mind. However, the systematic approach to scouting and developing talent in preparation for peak performance on the world stage is equally part of this history. Reinhart argues that the most vital targets of the socialist program of development and physical training's targets were children and young adults ('Körperkultur' 469). Anne Martin writes of the significant role played by the *Kinder- und Jugendsportschulen* (KJS) towards the 'Staatsziel Medaillen': the national imperative of demonstrating global importance through taking its citizens to the very peak of physical prowess (49). The first of the KJS were established in the East as early as 1952; these differed from the schools of later years in that they did not 'benefit from the "weeding out" process that delivered athletes who had already three

or more years training behind them, were good ‘socialist’ citizens and had reached specific levels of achievement’ (Dennis and Grix 61–62). In the beginning, the students taken on by the KJS did not undergo the extensive (but arguably often ineffective) measurements and testing in order to qualify.

Despite the lower quality of living standards, compared with West Germany, the SED regime poured money and resources into systematically developing its national sport by building training centres, educating trainers and developing sports science and medical research (Martin 49). 1964 heralded the beginnings of the *Kinder- und Jugendspartakiaden*. These local, annual competitions were intended to motivate young people to regularly and systematically participate in sport, and also to allow for the performances to be measured by talent scouts. The eventual goal was always to impact the world stage; youths were targeted in the national strategy to win medals in international competitions. Certainly, many athletes with Olympic medals triumphed at the *Spartakiade* earlier in their sporting careers.

The state-directed motivations behind this systematic and strategic identification and development of the nation’s youth are a prime example of the political shaping and disciplining of bodies that a particular environment (in this circumstance the workings of a dictatorship) can have collectively and individually:

Eingeschränkt auf eine relative kleine Gruppe der Bevölkerung eignete sich zunächst weniger für die Regulierung der Bevölkerung als für die Disziplinierung der einzelnen Talente. Darüber hinaus sollte er aber in die gesamte Bevölkerung ausstrahlen und dadurch auch regulierende Effekte erzielen (Reinhart, *Wir wollten* 91).

In their physical nature, the policies of the GDR, geared to identifying and moulding sporting talent in the elite academy system of the *Sportschule* and also in the promotion of mass sporting participation among the general population, can be seen as an embodiment of the national concern – the education of obedient and productive socialist citizens.

The competitive impulse inherent in the goal of dominating the medal tallies (a demonstration of the ‘Leistungsprinzip’, described by Beyer in *Einzelkämpfer*), above their Cold War enemies, only sharpens the intensity of East German elite sport. This drive can partly explain the disregard for the young athletes’ welfare, as evidenced in *Einzelkämpfer* in Kaudelka’s testimony, her subjects’ memories, and in reports that have followed in the processes of investigating the sports system since re-unification: ‘In a system where children were given the label ‘test person’ (*Versuchsperson*), DTSB [*Deutscher Turn- und Sportbund*], officials did not appear to have too many concerns about the health or welfare of the budding athletes’ (Dennis and Grix 57). Reinhart also finds that the system, in the form of its policy makers, trainers and functionaries, would often have negative, careless impacts on its youth. He notes that an argument based on a biopolitics of scientific, technological progress would be used to convince parents of the benefits of their child’s participation in the KJS – their children were meant to benefit owing to assertions of the medical advantages that would become available to them. In reality, however, these children were part of a machine which saw them as vehicles of the nation’s image, whatever the cost:

Tatsächlich aber dienten viele Mediziner und (Sport-)Wissenschaftler nicht der Gesundheit ihrer Schützlinge, sondern führten Experimente durch, die

einer der Hauptverantwortlichen, Verbandsarzt der DDR-Gewichthebe Hans-Henning Lathan, rückblickend als ‘Großversuche’ ... bezeichnete (Reinhart, *Wir wollten* 78).

Evidence of the disregard for the wellbeing of the youth in the care of the state’s institutions under the sports program is supported by reports that many trainers in the KJS would dope the young athletes in their care from as young as 9 years old with so-called ‘Unterstützende Maßnahmen’ obtained on the black market (Franke and Berendonk 1270). These disclosures give background to Kaudelka’s memories of her personal, sustained unwillingness to be a part of this system, as the film conveys the suffocation she felt during that time. The athlete Carola Beraktschjan is reported in *Wired* magazine,<sup>25</sup> describing the underhand methods of those in charge, and her opinion of the state’s decision to treat its top athletes in this way:

It’s terrifying what they did to us ... I took up to 30 pills a day. They always told us they were vitamins. There was no question you would not take them. You had to play by the rules. We were vehicles chosen to prove that socialism was better than capitalism. What happened to our bodies was entirely secondary to that political mission led by Ewald (qtd. in Kettman).

The question of doping and the particular way the topic is handled in *Einzelkämpfer*, I discuss in greater detail below. At this point, I would like to consider how the individual bodies of athletes were instrumentalised through medical experimentation

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<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, the publication of this story demonstrates the global interest in the court proceedings against Ewald and Hoepfner.



by the regime, irresistibly recalling the ‘Panopticon’ model. The large-scale systematic doping can be understood as part of the regime’s panoptic, regulatory control. According to Foucault: ‘the Panopticon was also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects’ (*Discipline and Punish* 203)<sup>26</sup>. The disciplinary institutions such as the KJS support this link, Reinhart argues these too approximate the panopticon: ‘Durch die vollständige Kontrolle der Sportler – in der Schule, beim Training, in der organisierten Freizeit und im Internat’ (‘Körperkultur’ 467). Moreover, the strict rhythms within the repetitive training regimes demanded of East Germans by elite sports institutions can be understood as part of the same framework, which Reinhart terms a ‘Sportdispositiv’ (*Wir wollten* 87).

In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre argues for the importance of analysing human practices enacted through repetition, identifying this as a fundamental rhythm in the production of ourselves: ‘Dressage can go a long way: as far as breathing, movements, sex. It bases itself on **repetition**. One breaks-in another human being by making them repeat a certain act, a certain gesture or movement’ (39, his emphasis). A crucial element that builds the athletes’ remembering community is the routine of training. Routine is a distinctively rhythmic notion. This is the *Leistungsprinzip*, whereby the extraordinary training expectations that all the athletes remember as being the core of

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<sup>26</sup> Regarding the rhythmic nature of Foucault’s concept, it is notable that in the Sheridan translation of this passage, the English ‘to train’ or ‘training’ is not as ‘strong’ as the French ‘*dresser*’ and ‘*dressement*’ (this has been translated to the German ‘Dressur’) (Elden). Dressage is typically understood to apply to the breaking in of animals; in Foucault’s writing, the broader concept of mechanised training (*dressage*) is connected with the procedural, structural effects of institutions, which shape and define the people within them, for the purposes of those who wield power.

the KJS are made routine through repetition. Brita Baldus testifies that life in the *Sportschule* was the very definition of routine: ‘Schule, Training, Schule Training, die ganze Woche lang, bis Samstag nachmittags und dann Wochenende... wir haben halt Sport getrieben’. In this way, these academies sought to shape elite examples of the ideal socialist citizen. Physically and psychologically trained to fulfil the stated political intention, the ‘Bildung einer “sozialistischen Persönlichkeit”’ (Martin 46).

The tying together of repetition and an embodied process of discipline connects to the biopolitics of the GDR’s sports program via both Lefebvre and Foucault. Lefebvre sees dressage as a rhythmic ingredient in the (re)production of bodies, in terms that resonate with his influential work on the production of space. He writes, ‘[t]he sciences of dressage take account of many aspects and elements: duration, harshness, punishments and rewards. Thus rhythms compose themselves’ (40). Lefebvre suggests that the rhythms of dressage by their nature ‘compose themselves’, i.e. regular patterns, which are constituted by punishment, reward, exertion and exhaustion, establish their own continuity. What he calls the ‘automatism of repetitions’ reflects the ideology inherent in the labour of the athletes in elite sports academies, as they become ‘trained’ (Foucault’s ‘*dresser*’) through the daily fatigues of the training regime (40).

In *Einzelkämpfer*, the athletes’ memories (oral testimonies) are supported by the repeated insertion of archival footage showing them at training, and of other GDR athletes using advanced technological methods and equipment in the constant pursuit of outperforming the rest of the world. In one particularly striking example, an athlete is seated, shirtless, in a chair, with rectangular pads strapped to the upper and lower parts of his arms and legs. Each has a metal plate, with wires attached. His body

convulses and shakes, as an electrical charge is pumped to him. The contortions of his face under the strain are accompanied by the loud buzzing of the electric charge. The footage cuts from the extreme close-up of his face to his thighs – the charge is sent through again and his quadriceps muscles leap into extreme definition, causing further grunting in concentrated physical effort. Shortly after this, we see another athlete running alongside a car at an athletics track, his nose plugged, a breathing tube in his mouth, presumably in an experimental training method of maximising oxygen intake. These scenes blur the boundaries between machine and human in a way that recalls Lefebvre's interest in rhythmic tension between 'natural' and 'artificial' phenomena. The cyclical return to footage of training (in the form of dressage) is pronounced throughout the documentary; these vignettes of physical memory are dotted between the athletes' testimonies. Temporal shifts (i.e. from the present-day interview to the GDR past) are kinaesthetically and corporeally exaggerated through the contrast between the sweaty, exhausted, straining athletes working towards the heights of physical ability, and their comfortable and relaxed seated interviews before the camera.

We are led back to Foucault by the proliferation of scientific artefacts in the GDR's self-representation (through the state-controlled production of this documentary footage showing the 'behind the scenes' work of the nation's athletes), which is replayed in *Einzelkämpfer*. The footage described above, apparently taken from a GDR-produced documentary, is followed by an *Aktuelle Kamera* report on the country's success at the 1988 Seoul Olympic games, where the small country placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the medal tally – behind the USSR but above the United States. The placing of this report at this moment answers the implied question, posed by this juxtaposition:

why are these people going to such lengths, enduring the clearly terrific pain and exhaustion evidenced in previous sequences from the audiovisual archive?

*Einzelkämpfer* utilises cinema's particular rhythmic, spatial and temporal attributes to also portray more positive qualities of the athlete's experience. Perhaps, the film seems to suggest, rhythmic dressage may produce a physicality worthy of awe. First, let us recall that Lefebvre sees 'the phases of dressage' as a 'linear series of imperatives and gestures repeats itself cyclically' (39). We can find a spatial expression of linear rhythms becoming cyclical in one of the film's prominent memories. Underscored by slow-motion and an emotional soundtrack, this is the story of Marita Koch's sprint, distinguished in GDR sports' history. She and her trainer (later to become her husband) innovatively extended the idea of the linear sprint around the circumference of the race track: a new way of conceiving of a person's bodily capabilities, a new duration of the rhythms of breath, of muscular and of cardiovascular exertion. *Einzelkämpfer* plays an archival-tape of Koch at training, ethereal music floats behind the images of the young athlete as she strives to fly around the track. The footage has been slowed, increasing the dramatic portrayal of her body as she pushes to the limits. Remarking on the affective and subjective experience of slow-motion footage, Walter Benjamin writes of the perceptual changes that occur through its manipulatory effects:

With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar

qualities of movement, but reveals in them entirely unknown ones ... a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye (236).

Benjamin finds these images are able to open up unconscious realms of perceiving that offer new movements, new ways of knowing. Kaudelka's cinematic intervention into the archival footage of Koch's training mediates that memory's temporality, accentuating a sheer beauty in the body's capability. The slowness, impressed upon the frames of Koch's movement, gives the same effect that Benjamin observed, quoting Rudolf Anheim's 'singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motions' (qtd. in 236). Duration is lengthened, and the rhythms of the film adjust accordingly, providing space between the measures of each athlete's testimony and memory for a moment to appreciate the beauty of the physical achievement.

In summary, the film's biopolitics can be understood as its corporeal-political approach to life in the GDR as an athlete. Stemming from the biopolitics within the state's 'real existierender Sozialismus', the filmic experience in which the viewer participates is dimensionally another layer, separated from 'the GDR' by time, and place. Communication between these dimensions is achieved through the filmic presentations of memory through oral witnesses, audiovisual archival artefacts, and the sum of the documentary's techniques and rhythms of affect and discourse. Bearing in mind these biopolitical effects, we can observe how institutions of sport in the GDR functioned within the state's systems of control, and how *Einzelkämpfer* produces corporeal affect according to a phenomenological filmic biopolitics (in the spectator's experience).

### ***Einzelkämpfer's (Reluctant) Look at Doping***

If Kaudelka's film were to approach the topic of East Germany's sports system according to familiar victim/perpetrator narratives (in a manner conforming to the *Diktaturgedächtnis*), we would expect to find a few well-recognised themes. First among these would surely be a dramatic account of the scandalous doping program. Given the worldwide infamy of the regime's program of systematically drugging its athletes, without their knowledge or consent, this issue has all of the scandal, the drama, and the elements of a monstrously culpable socialist state's exercise of power over its citizens that might be expected to create audience interest. The scandal is seductive in its fulfilment of many of the common conceptions that proliferate in media representations of GDR memory.

The first major scientific studies that pioneering the investigation into the extent of the state's doping program were led by the former athlete Brigitte Berendonk and her husband, the biologist Werner Franke. In 1991, Berendonk published a book, *Doping Dokumente: Von der Forschung zum Betrug* that revealed much of the state's 'Staatsplanthema 14.25' – its systematic doping program. Since then, the issue has often resurfaced in public debates, each instance strengthening the common association in popular memory between East German sports and the practices of forced doping. In 1997, Berendonk and Franke published English translations of extracts from the research undertaken by GDR scientists into anabolic steroids (1262–79). High-profile trials in court have figured prominently, the first of which began in 1998. In the year 2000, Manfred Ewald and Manfred Höppner's convictions marked a key moment in this chronology. Such drama is no doubt of interest to the potential audience of a documentary concerned with East German sport – not least given the pernicious continuity of doping in worldwide sports today. Comparisons with the

majority of Russia's athletes being banned from competing at Beijing's Summer Olympic Games following the revelations of that country's government's systematic doping program are hard to ignore.

Kaudelka's film does not, however, take doping as its central hook. This is despite, or perhaps because of, the international memory of East German sport's being thoroughly coupled to the topic. Following re-unification, its inextricable association with the cheating tactics of doping forever will mar its successes, just as Lance Armstrong's dominance over the Tour de France has been soured by the sensational revelations of his own doping. Kaudelka's shifting of our attention from the headline-grabbing stories of forced doping towards a collection of more nuanced and multi-layered narratives of sacrifice, signals a refreshing approach to this history.

What then, does Kaudelka's film focus on instead? Why does she take this approach? The director herself is perhaps best placed to answer these questions. She announces in her part-role as 'voice of God' narrator at the film's start that she wanted to make this film since her personal past, as that unwilling participant in the GDR's sport program, refused to let her go. In the place of a dramatic account of the insidious doping practices of the GDR regime, *Einzelkämpfer* offers insight into the costs of a physically and mentally punishing training regime, the pressures of performance expectations at the highest level, and also the rewards that come with achieving success in such a field.

That is not to say that she has removed the topic of doping from the film entirely, for, as has been observed earlier in this chapter, the subject does not escape discussion. But it is significant that this documentary about GDR athletes eschews an expected

and dramatic focus on doping. Kaudelka's ability to demarcate a place through her film's collection of GDR remembrances, allowing for contradiction between individual memories, may be the film's most distinguishing trait, in comparison with typical portrayals. The director steers the film's overarching mood into a difficult space, its overall 'picture' of the GDR expressing a reality that lies somewhere between the state's oppressive functions and counter-memories of everyday normalcy.

The global reputation of East German sport, once-renowned for punching far above its weight, has shifted dramatically over time, following the public revelations of the systematic program of doping. Those athletes, the 'Diplomaten im blauen Trainingsanzug', representing their nation before the world, came to be seen as the victims of the procedural, secretive methods of the same sports institution that had put them on the world stage. Following the opening of the GDR's borders, and according to a perceived 'natural' progression in the historical narrative, there came a flood of 'truth', teleologically, after the collapse of the dictatorship. This sense was intensified with the public release of the *Stasi* files. With the resumption of 'free' discourse, an 'openness' surely would come to define the re-unified nation's approach to its recent past. And yet, 'truth' appears to be as slippery an element from a post-unification perspective, as it is remembered to have been under the panoptic, secretive regime of the dictatorship. We can observe this 'slipperiness' in further examples of contradiction, found in each protagonist's memory of the controversial topic of doping. Here, it is what we do not see, that is the most revealing. Despite the presence of evidential courtroom trials and convictions, official studies, research and reports, the athletes of *Einzelkämpfer* are not unified in their responses to Kaudelka's questions of their knowledge and participation (whether forced or willing) in the state's doping program.



As has been discussed earlier, the spectator typically identifies with the position of the off-screen (behind the camera) interviewer in the talking head mode of documentary testimony. There are moments in *Einzelkämpfer* where the director's involvement as interviewer is revealed more obviously, when we occasionally hear her laugh or ask a quick follow up question. With this revealed, it is evident that Kaudelka and the spectator listen to, and learn from, the protagonists' various testimonies together. In one such moment, there is an unusually extended interaction between interviewer and interviewee, which occurs as we come to the part of the film, dealing most explicitly with doping. Here, Kaudelka's off-screen voice is heard as she has a discussion with Geipel. Each of the athlete's approaches differ regarding their own coming to terms with doping, and the extent to which they believe they personally were doped. Kaudelka now seeks to recall whether she herself would have been doped during her time as a young diver.

In her conversation that develops with Geipel, an expert in the topic through her advocacy, having written about and worked extensively around the issue since reunification, Kaudelka creates a feeling of frankness and honesty. Their spontaneous dialogical interaction strips away some of the more apparently performative aspects of the 'virtual performance' inherent in the documentary format. We hear Kaudelka trying to recall the name of the vitamin drink that she and her fellow divers were given; the taste is clear to her but the name escapes her. Geipel knowingly suggests that this was *Dynvital*, and she informs Kaudelka (who remains only an off-screen voice) that she has read many reports of anabolic steroids being administered in these drinks. 'Wir haben das täglich getrunken', Geipel says drily.

Looking at the issue of doping through the framing of the following question draws attention to the biopolitical nature of the issue. To what end did the state so deliberately and systematically organise this program of chemical enhancement in some of its most celebrated citizens' bodies? In *Einzelkämpfer* we see that the answer to this question aligns with the regime's wishes to produce and represent a population that demonstrates the unarguable advantages of the socialist system. In order to achieve this, these athletic, lithe, strong and determined physical exemplars ought to win at any cost. That is, biopolitics is about the incorporation of the state's disciplinary power onto the body producing organised and docile populations. To understand the histories and consequences of the GDR's doping program biopolitically is to register its intended effects on East German citizens under the sovereignty of the SED regime. The issue can then be understood as touching on more than the individual victims, but as something structuring East and eastern German identity both during and after the dictatorship.

Despite the fact that *Einzelkämpfer* restricted its discussion of doping to these few examples, the media coverage following the film's screenings at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Berlinale confirms the pervasiveness of the weight of doping scandals in public discourse. In particular, Beyer's statements regarding his experience of doping were taken from the film and turned into headlines (Reinsch). In the film, Beyer claims: 'Über alles, was mit mir gemacht wurde, wusste ich Bescheid. Dinge, die ich gemacht habe, habe ich selbst entschieden. Das Recht habe ich mir herausgenommen'. The response in the press, to this quotation in particular, is an indication of how sensationalisation of certain memories can elide the nuance that lies within. In reality, the extent to which Beyer's comments could be considered scandalous or 'news' is questionable, as Kaudelka explains in an interview, where she states that she had approached her

discussion of this topic with Beyer with knowledge from her research into the archives of *Deutscher Rundfunk*. She explains that she discovered during her research for the film that Beyer had openly discussed the doping program as far back as in 1990:

Weil ich lange Zeit im Deutschen Rundfunkarchiv verbracht habe. Und da habe ich ein Interview mit Udo Beyer aus dem Jahr 1990 gefunden. In dem hat er ausführlich über Doping in der DDR geredet. So kam ich überhaupt erst auf die Idee, ihn dazu zu befragen (Kaudelka qtd. in 'Ein globales Problem')

A return to a rhythm analytical approach can help us make sense of Beyer's two-fold assertion and the spectatorial reaction to his way of remembering. Beyer claims that he always knew when, and with what substances, his body was affected during his time as an athlete, and he asserts that he deserves his achievements regardless of this doping history. To consider the contradictions between his statement, and others', requires careful negotiation of the relationships between the spectator, the documentary and 'truth'. Beyer's refutation of being doped against his knowledge might be thought of as unlikely to be true, given other evidence within the film (such as from the 'doping expert', Geipel), and knowledge available beyond the film's narrative – the rhythms of juxtaposition and contradiction in Kaudelka's presentation would bear this conclusion out.

In a different light, his statement might be perceived as another *kind* of 'truth', if considered in terms of the rhythms of individual agency and the biopolitical dressage of the GDR's sports system. What 'truth' might be revealed in Beyer's claim of absolute, personal knowledge of the doping? The biopolitics of the (self)enforced

rituals of physical endurance, exhaustion, repetition and occasional moments of triumph, might explain the reasoning behind Beyer's necessary belief that he was in control of his training and his body, in the way he remembers his past. These biopolitics are illustrated and emphasised in Kaudelka's film as key to the GDR athletic experience, through her subjects' unifying, harmonic testimony of the pains of training. For a state which secretively set the parameters of the rhythmic discipline, in the form of the 'dressage' of athletic training, and illegal doping, to the point where those rhythms self-replicated and carried on producing the disciplined body, alienated from self-determination, then one might wish to claim in hindsight that one had conducted those rhythms oneself. For Baldus, perhaps the way to come to terms with the past is to say with surety that, since doping made little sense in the context of diving, she believes herself not to have been doped (Geipel's statements in the film suggest this is unlikely). For Beyer, a man who gives the impression of liking to be in control of his life and his choices, the best route may be for him to claim ownership over all that was done with and to his body in the past, while, at the same time, maintaining that he deserved his gold medal for being the best in the world.

### **Conclusion – An Open Narrative?**

The content of *Einzelkämpfer* is dominated by 'memory'. The thematic parameters of its enquiry specifically draw attention to 'remembering the GDR': a process, which naturally differs for each spectator, depending on their own lived experience (or lack thereof) of that time-and-place. But what prompts the continued production of so many depictions, re-enactments, museums and documentaries about all aspects of the GDR, nearly three decades since that country's collapse? The reunified nation's joint preoccupation with its two dictatorships in the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows little sign of

abating. This, perhaps in part, is due to the persistence of contestation and disagreement between official narratives and cultural memory ‘from below’, as well as politicised remembrances where institutions have stakes that rest on one interpretation of the past’s dominance over others. The very (pre)existence of a master narrative – a hegemonic cultural memory – (i.e. that of the *Diktaturgedächtnis* in the case of the GDR) creates the conditions from which counter memories will likely develop.

*Einzelkämpfer*’s focus is a realistic portrayal of life-memories of former GDR citizens who participated in the relatively ‘extraordinary’ sphere of competitive sport – what I argue might be framed as ‘außergewöhnlicher Alltag’. Writing of this specific historical and socio-cultural context, Jutta Braun observes that ‘GDR sports is being remembered in very different ways by very distinct social groups and agencies (182). Braun includes within the distinct remembering communities the officials of regional sports institutions working in eastern Germany today, who in the past had worked for the DTSB and for whom there is often a ‘clear positive picture of the past’ (183). On the other side of the equation are those who belong to state-sponsored institutions such as the *Birthler-Behörde*, or the *Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*, where the focus is on the repressive side of the history, stressing the topics of forced doping and the entanglement of the *Stasi* with GDR sport institutions. As of 2007, when she published these findings, Braun surmised that, despite the uncertainty as to which of all these interpretations would end up being the loudest, one thing would be sure: ‘While members of one party will grasp the opportunity to enter the podiums and remind the audience of the inhuman aspects of a dictatorial and centralized sports system; the others will think of the age of success back in the “Sportwunderland GDR”’ (183).

The contrast between ‘Sportwunderland’ GDR and post-unification Germany, for a former GDR athlete, is signalled in a curious scene with Brita Baldus towards the end of the documentary. In the present, we join Baldus, who is at the hospital to donate blood. The biopolitical enquiry within the film is aestheticised here, into corporeal representation of anatomo-politics: a biopolitics aimed directly at the body. Anatomo-politics centers ‘on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces ... its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls’ (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 141). Baldus rests on a hospital patient’s chair-bed, in her hand is a small, squeezable plastic heart. There is a cut to an extreme close-up of this and, for a few seconds, we watch as she squeezes this heart every few moments, to increase the pressure to her arm. This shot externalises the most ‘vital’ of human, organic rhythms, the beating of one’s heart. Baldus’s statement reaches over the top of this visual footage in a voice-over: ‘Wenn man von Arbeit nicht leben kann, ist das natürlich nicht wirklich lustig’. Baldus directly links the vitality of one’s life to the living standards a society can provide. The film’s thematic return to the body’s viscera resonates with, for instance, Geipel’s story. At the conclusion of her documentary, Kaudelka thereby evokes the persistence of the body and its social rhythms in the new political and economic climate of post-unification Germany.

But where is Kaudelka found at the film’s conclusion? Having been prominent throughout, as I have shown, through her rhythmic insertions in the film’s polyrhythms – its polyvocal memory – she leaves open the question that began the film: why is it that these memories refuse to let her go? It could be argued that Kaudelka’s film intends to rescue a lost (but not quite forgotten) nation’s former

sporting heroes from the infamy of doping scandal. She has said of the athletes: ‘Die haben damals Wahnsinniges geleistet. Das wollte ich in Erinnerung rufen’ (‘Ein globales Problem’). It might also be supposed that through her need to make the film, Kaudelka seeks to take the lives and memories of these individuals out of the German-German oppositional master narratives, by lending and supporting (through its rhythmic and subjective approach) weight to their plurality, and authority to their versions of the GDR past.

I have looked at moments of juxtaposition which share the effect of giving an impression that there is no singular notion of ‘truth’. Kaudelka seeks to achieve this by differentiating the film’s stories, affirming the documentary’s ‘open narrative’ mode, rather than producing a didactic or dogmatic lesson for the spectator.

According to the director, in an interview for Deutsche Welle, ‘[th]e coverage in the media about GDR sport doping angered me. I wanted to make a more nuanced film about the topic, as I experienced it at the time – for better or worse’ (Kaudelka, qtd. in *Soldierer*). In concluding that the film’s narrative is left open, I find that Kaudelka succeeds in this particular intention. In other words, she appears to approach her interviewees with no clear answers to the questions in mind. As a consequence, their evidence feels authentic, not by presenting a unified front, but in its very alterity.

## 6: Crossing Boundaries of Truth and Fiction: *This Ain't California* (2012)

*'Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth'* – Picasso<sup>27</sup>

### **Introduction**

Documentary films are ostensibly about the representation of reality. To distinguish nonfiction cinema from other forms, one should be able to point to its opposite – fiction film. This comfortable distinction has been challenged over the years, particularly as critics have increasingly had to come to terms with the instability and ambiguities of the postmodern era. One such challenge is expressed in the following provocation against traditional conceptions: 'Documentary films are often presented as depicting "truth", but are in fact just as much ideological constructs as fiction cinema' (Sætre 118). Indeed, the stakes involved in the assertion of truth versus fiction feel exceptionally high in our contemporary moment; current anxieties around factual representation within media are reflected in, and fuelled by, phenomena such as the Trumpian cry of 'fake news'. This chapter examines questions of authenticity in documentary filmmaking, seeking theoretical pathways out of the labyrinth of debate that lies between the binaries of truth/fiction, subjectivity/objectivity, and reality/illusion. These themes are raised with an analysis of the award-winning 'docufiction', *This Ain't California* (2012).

Directed by Marten Persiel, this 'hybrid' film synthesises technologies of fiction and documentary filmmaking to depict its story of skateboarders in the 1980s in the

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<sup>27</sup> This quote comes from a statement made by Picasso to Marius de Zayas. Picasso approved de Zayas's manuscript before being translated into English to be published by *The Arts* in New York, 1923, under the title "Picasso Speaks" (Barr 270–71).



former GDR. Acclaimed by many critics, Persiel's film also drew controversy for its undeclared use of actors, and for mixing 'historical' images with footage presented as archival, but which was in fact shot by the filmmakers, who used Super 8 cameras in order to achieve an 'authentic'-looking, 'home-movie' aesthetic. This chapter asks the question: How does *This Ain't California*'s formally inventive, non-traditional approach affect its telling of history and memory? I seek to map a path between truth and fiction, feeling the way using the coordinates of affect and emotion.

I argue that *This Ain't California* inspires a critical provocation towards the ontological status of 'truth' in nonfictional audiovisual works, both in its formal characteristics and in its reception. This uncertainty prepares the ground for questioning the film's thematic content: alongside the theoretical considerations, the assemblage of Persiel's aesthetic, formal and narrative choices challenges dominant frameworks of East German cultural memory, which typically recall negative elements, i.e. in the mode of *Diktaturgedächtnis*, by telling a vibrant tale of youth and rebelliousness. Persiel's film produces its memory work within the borderlands between truth and fiction, challenging common sense assumptions in the process. This enquiry aims to show that it is in the viewer's attitude towards the screen, as much as in any feature of the film, that the value of 'truthfulness' gives meaning to the memories of *This Ain't California*.

### ***This Ain't California* as GDR Memory**

Too 'documentary' to be comfortably called 'fiction', and vice versa, Persiel's genre-exceeding film details the history of skateboarding in East Germany. The film begins in present day, post-unification Germany. A gathering of former skaters has come to

pay their respects following the death of their friend, Denis 'Panik' Paraceck. Sitting around a campfire in a locality, now abandoned, where they used to hang out, the skaters perform a dual function as narrators and witnesses to the (sub)cultural memory that constitutes the film's subject. Their reminiscing works as a device whereby the history of the origins and development of skating in the GDR can be told. Our journey to the past is coordinated through the oral testimony of these 'witnesses'; memories of the GDR are recreated in vibrant colour, contrasting with the drab greys that are more typically associated with the former East. These memories are complemented with frequent cuts to illustrative 'archival' footage. Denis's life is reconstructed through the combination of these techniques and, for certain scenes, with the further aid of rotoscopic animation. The film's detailing of Denis's growth into 'Panik', his alter-ego, accompanies the story of the development, in the former East, of the skater scene. We learn how the East German skaters were constantly frustrated with their lack of access to quality materials for their boards. We travel with Panik and his mates on an exceptional trip to the 'Euroskate '88' competition in Prague, away from the restrictive borders of the GDR. We note how the young skaters return home reflecting on their place in a global society, having spent those days interacting with the West German team, and the rest of the world.

The film's toying with conventions of documentary authenticity begins from the very opening shot, with a tribute appearing over a black screen in white text:

Dieser Film ist Denis 'Panik' Paraceck gewidmet

1970 – 2011

The appearance of what could be thought of as ‘documentary actuality’ thus registers from the first moment; the dual figure of Denis/Panik is established as a ‘real person’. Kai Hillebrand is not credited as being the actor who plays Denis/Panik either here, or at the end of the film. *This Ain’t California* received criticism for its ‘hoax’ of filming footage and (re)presenting this as ‘archival’, using undeclared actors, and constructing a narrative ambiguously based on a ‘historical truth’ of the story of skateboarding in the GDR. The deliberate posture of sincerity that the film opens with, through this ‘dedication’, asks the question of the spectator – to what extent does it matter that the dual character of Denis/Panik is a fiction?

*This Ain’t California* utilises the GDR’s infamous sports program in drawing up the backstory behind Denis/Panik. Denis was being groomed to join the elite sports school, having had his talent identified by scouts at a ‘Spartakiade’, his father being both his trainer and a former Olympian. The pathway towards elite competition within the sports academy of the GDR prescribes Denis’s fate, stirring up his rebelliousness (we can note similarities with the character of Micha from *Der Preis* in chapter four). Right from the start of the film, *This Ain’t California* raises the topic of the (sub)culture of skateboarding in conjunction with the broader context of the cultural memory of GDR sport. This is established in a montage sequence, which mixes new Super 8 camera footage with various images and clips taken from the archives. The background music’s driving tom-tom drumbeat raises the sensation of adrenalin; typical images (supposedly) representative of the GDR (i.e. mass choreographies at parades and sporting competitions) are interspersed with the ‘amateur movie’ shots of Panik and his friends having fun and causing mischief on their skateboards – or on what they in the former East (according to the film) had, in a straight-forward way, termed a ‘Brett mit Rollen dran’.

Cold War images of armed forces marching, and tanks and rockets on parade, are followed by footage of a person on a hospital bed receiving a ‘shot’ (the allusion to doping is clear), and young children being drilled hard by their sports trainers (presumably taken at the nation’s elite sports academies). In one clip, a young girl, ‘Simone’, is yelled at by her trainer to keep pushing; as she skis across the finish line, she collapses. In another, a small boy, who looks no older than 12, lifts massive weights which expose extraordinarily defined muscles for his age. These extracted slices of footage continue to weave in and out of moving images of Denis/Panik, filmed from the low-angles and with the fish-eye lens’s rounded look, strongly associated with skate-videos. As Panik hurtles through the air, his board flying and his body crashing to the ground, we wonder, ‘why were all these people doing what they did?’

This is the film’s broad question, tied as it is to the GDR context specifically. This guiding framework of examining ‘why?’ is expressed in a slightly different way by Dirk Reiher, researcher for the film, who explains that the film-team was always preoccupied with the question: ‘Wie bringt man eigentlich die Zeit bei?’. This marks a distinct attitude towards the type of GDR memory, about which the film is predominantly concerned – the everyday. However, the documentary observes an ‘everyday’ that belongs to a demographic typically ignored in GDR remembrance narratives, commemorations, museums and other official or public manifestations of the country and its people since its disappearance.

Faced with these preliminary vignettes, we are invited to compare the young athlete, ‘Simone’, striving to exhaustion within the official system of the GDR, and the

skaters, who we see crashing their bodies to the ground with gleeful abandon, living at the margins of the national conception of appropriate use of one's body. That country, which now exists in memories that can be woven into (collective) mental images to form montages like this, is thereby conjured as a site of contestation. The remembered-GDR becomes a topos where a universal question of how people, within the liminal context of youth, coming of age, can struggle to find their place – how do they spend their time? It is as if the film has grasped the surprising 'truth' of the existence of a skating subculture in the GDR, and then imaginatively worked backwards, and against preconceptions about the historical context, to question how that could have come to be. The opening shots, tying the infamous sporting history with a previously unknown skating narrative, demonstrate this disjuncture between expectation and reality. The film then moves in an excited fashion, exploring how these subcultural experiences of belonging can form bonds that transcend material barriers, such as those emblematised in the former border between East and West.

Reviewers typically discussed the ethical questions raised by the film's inclusion of invented, or (re)created visual and narrative 'evidence'. In *Sight and Sound*, Sam Davies writes: 'The problem with *This Ain't California* is that imagining it is essentially what director Marten Persiel has done. A notional documentary, his film quite shamelessly conceals the fact that it is mostly acted, its home-movie "sources" shot in the present day' (90). On the other hand, some reviewers expressed delight at the film's expressive, imaginative, and experimental approach to a 'documentary' portrayal of GDR history and memory. A positive critic reports that he 'fell' for Piersel's movie; 'fell', he clarifies in the sense that he enjoyed the film, and was 'taken in by its subterfuge' (Mathieson). Another reviewer uses the same vocabulary to describe his own experience:

I have to admit right away that I ‘fell for’ the whole thing. That’s what happens when you avoid reading about a movie before you see it, I guess. All I knew was that it won a special award at Berlin last year and that it was a documentary about German skate culture. And I fell for it, too, meaning I fell in love with it. I found it to be electrifying, which can’t be ignored now that I know a lot of it is ‘fake’ (Campbell).

Both critics ‘fall’ for the film: they are duped into taking the Super 8 footage at face value, and at the same time they fall in love with the portrayal. All of this falling is evocative of the numerous ‘stacks’ we see from the skateboarders in the film itself, their bodies thrown towards the ground in a pleasurable disregard for the ‘normal’ way to proceed around a city’s public spaces. The pleasure these critics report, in being tripped up by this film’s documentary artifice, is neatly linked in a mimetic way with the film’s depiction of the liberation of the skateboarding experience.

The apparent veracity of the film’s framing, with the character Denis/Panik at its center, who is mourned by the vigil of his (apparently ‘real’) friends from former days, draws the viewer into its (almost) unbelievable tale. Some people will relish the playful spirit of the film; by omitting to declare the parts of the film that are invented, however (or even *that* parts have been invented), Persiel opens the possibility for others to feel deceived. Upon discovering that certain elements of the film are less ‘real’ than others, the viewer might translate their sense of having been tricked into a more general suspicion of the film’s intent and its broader politics of remembrance. Mathieson, one of the reviewers who ‘fell’ for the film, hints at this prospect, declaring that:

The real danger isn't lack of authenticity, but rather that it might lessen the historic understanding of the state security service, the Stasi, who in scenes shown here – again, probably invented – come across more as dogged bureaucrats monitoring the 'unorganised rollersports scene' rather than the brutal fist of a totalitarian regime (*SBS Movies*).

Germany's division into East and West created a stark duality that is yet to be sutured. The *Mauer im Kopf* (Wall in the mind) persists:<sup>28</sup> a concrete metaphor for the temporal and spatial dislocations and ruptures that collectively continue to shape German-German relations. The positionality of the director is therefore also pertinent to these ethical concerns of contextualisation within the legacies of Germany's history. Persiel, being a 'Wessi', i.e. someone from western Germany, threatens to upset certain 'Ossis', who might feel that a liberty has been taken with *their* history in the film's fabrication of narrative elements and evidence.

At the same time, *This Ain't California* tells a story that could belong, at its core, in many contexts. The East German-ness of the film, while always important, is pulled into tension with the love of skateboarding as a pursuit in itself. The film depicts the youths performing skate tricks in many long sequences, which are sensorially and affectively pleasurable without the need for a specific emotional backing of a poignant GDR contextualization. In those moments, the film is about skating, more than it is about the GDR. In an article published by the ('edgy') Vice magazine, which

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<sup>28</sup> This phrase, now in popular usage, comes originally from 'Der Mauerspringer' a tale by Peter Schneider published in 1982: 'Die Mauer im Kopf einzureißen wird länger dauern, als irgendein Abrißunternehmen für die sichtbare braucht'.

presents *This Ain't California* to a British audience, the film is introduced with the following preamble:

For whatever reason – be it Nestlé recruiting Bob Burnquist to sell Aeros or MTV adopting Ryan Sheckler to sell advertising – the public perception of skateboarding seems to have changed over the last decade. Skaters on TV aren't obnoxious, glue-huffing wasters anymore; they're admirable young men building community skateparks on Google adverts. But the sport – or the culture that goes hand-in-hand with the sport, at least – did used to be seen as more of a threat to all things wholesome (Clifton).

*This Ain't California* rejuvenates the rebelliousness of skateboarding (and the skate-movie) through its East German locality. The filmmakers reach into the sexy, cool aesthetic of skating in order to conjure a story of youthful exuberance that aims to resonate with a broad audience, who may be tired of the negative aspects within their current political and economic climates. The film satisfies the escapist potential that skateboarding films offer, through the kinaesthetic thrills of free expression and movement. Persiel and his team thus develop a movie with emotional application to numerous spaces and temporalities, which has been demonstrated in its popular appeal and in the vigorous discussions that followed its tours across film festivals internationally.

### **Playing (with) the Documentary Witness**

Hayden White writes of the way that modernist art, through its disavowal of the 'historical event' as a fundamental temporal unit of 'history', has destabilised the link



between realism in representation and the actuality of events from our collective past(s). This ‘dissolution’, he observes, ‘undermines the very concept of factuality and threatens therewith the distinction between realistic and merely imaginary discourse’; it furthermore ‘undermines a founding presupposition of Western realism: the opposition between fact and fiction’ (18). White goes on to explain how, having abandoned the foundational premise that there is an undisputed reality to be represented, modernism undermined the principle of fact, upon which conventional realism used to be based. The consequence being that the taboo of mixing fiction and fact is abolished. ‘In postmodernist docu-drama or historical metafiction’, genres which share many qualities with *This Ain’t California*, we increasingly observe,

the placing in abeyance of the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Everything is presented as if it were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary—realistically imaginary or imaginarily real, with the result that the referential function of the images of events is etiolated (White 19).

In many respects, Persiel’s film could be considered a product of postmodernism, in the way it flouts the expectations of ‘purist’ documentary traditions. However, *This Ain’t California* equally defies categorisation as a ‘fiction’ film. In both its form and content, the film registers its attention to historical detail according to conventions of documentary (such as using witness interviews and archival footage), distinguishing its appearance from typical fiction cinema. Importantly, this arouses a particular response in the viewer, who recognises the documentary features of the film. However, the film’s use of actors, playing the roles of the documentary ‘witnesses’, initially complicates the structure of cinematic identifications. This ambiguity invites a closer examination of how the spectator relates to the performative ‘witness’ in the

film experience, according to the expectations of style, narrative and content that are brought to the screen for both fictional and nonfictional cinematic objects.

The presence of paid actors in documentaries is not unknown; actors are often employed in 'recreations' in what has become a conventional, recognisable trope in non-fiction film. The (undeclared) use of actors in the role of eye-witnesses, as found in *This Ain't California*, could, on the one hand, be interpreted as simply a continuation of this relatively uncontroversial form of mediating its history and cultural memory. On the other hand, the special, authenticating power embodied by the figure of the 'witness' could be seen to be radically threatened by Persiel's move. The legitimating strength of the witness is importantly embodied, and is shared between the film's body and the spectator, as Sara Jones argues: 'The emotive impact of witness testimony – and the potential for a mimetic response on the part of the viewer – is augmented by the illusion of immediacy, that is, the experience of embodiment created by the apparent transparency of the medium' (*Media of Testimony* 185)

Bill Nichols describes how the people interviewed in documentaries engage in what he terms a 'virtual performance', that is, the presentation of 'the logic of actual performance without signs of conscious awareness that this presentation is an act' (*Representing Reality* 122). In *This Ain't California*, the former skaters who meet up, ostensibly to commemorate Denis/Panik following his death, flip this arrangement once again by engaging in an 'actual' performance, so to speak. As conscious actors, they are *performing* the 'virtual performance' of 'real' witnesses. Persiel's film presents us with a collection of witnesses, some of whom are engaged in a virtual performance of themselves, being 'real' eye-witnesses, while others are paid actors;

the audience is unaware of who is performing what role. Incorporated into the ‘witness’, the operations of authenticity are toyed with, through the actors’ embodying an oral history of GDR skateboarding. They recall this subcultural history via a conduit of the film’s script; they maintain the appearance of ‘having authenticity’ that is typically conferred upon eye witnesses who have that special quality of ‘having actually been there’.

The recent history of documentary filmmaking demonstrates significant formal innovation, along with a proliferation of new distribution models, from official online-streaming platforms to countless amateur productions found on websites such as YouTube. Given the diversity of all these forms of mediation, the functioning of authenticity, authority, narrative and entertainment in documentary filmic culture takes on ever more complexity and importance. The idea that this is a ‘new era’ defined by the proliferation of images is commonly expressed. Contemporary media are described as being both ephemeral (Grainge, *Ephemeral Media*) and personal (van Dijck). Indeed, the translation of sociohistorical experience into an audiovisual narrative has never existed in such a varied and globally accessible collection of forms, aesthetics, and in so many different realms (auditoriums, cinemas, bedrooms, computers, headphones and so on) of spectatorship. What might once have appeared to be the common-sense distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, become increasingly blurred, as new technologies constantly change the ways we produce and consume visual media. It would be a misapprehension, however, to think that the disruption of this distinction is purely the result of new, digital media. This dual-power in cinema can be traced all the way back to the pioneers of film, August and Louis Lumière, and Georges Méliès. Where the Lumière brothers were preoccupied

with the reproduction of reality, Méliès was excited by the magical illusions possible with the medium (Cowie 2).

The diversity of approaches to ‘reality’ in audiovisual mediations, which has existed throughout the history of film, brings to our attention a significant part of the filmic equation – if an analysis of the cinematic object cannot clearly distinguish between real and fake images, then perhaps the spectator’s attitude plays a determining role in what qualifies a documentary’s ‘non-fictional’ content. Does authenticity emerge not (only) from any fixed quality in the image itself, but relate instead to the viewer’s dynamic attitude towards the sounds and images received? When we watch a film with content that appears before us, not as fiction, but as fact, we decode the audiovisual information differently (compared with fiction film). Jones argues that ‘documentary is what the viewer perceives to be documentary’, and that consequently, authenticity is what is perceived by the viewer (*Media of Testimony* 163).

Today, nonfictional filmmaking is influenced by the abundance of cameras – almost everybody has near immediate access to a device on their phone within a pocket, which can not only record but also search for and playback videos from across the globe. The skaters in *This Ain’t California*, who, in the 1980s, take their Super 8 camera with them wherever they go, in order to film their exploits, embody the nostalgic sense of an earlier ‘origin’ story of home-movie making that contrasts with the plethora of images and screens today. The flaws of both over- and under-exposure, in the stylised ‘amateur-looking’ filmmaking of the skating videos, were achieved, according to an interview with the filmmakers on the DVD release, through the deliberate practice of unlearning professional techniques and habits. This contrasts

with the digital definition familiar to contemporary viewers, who more usually will encounter amateur clips filmed digitally with cameras on telephones. There is thus a nostalgic pleasure in the grainy, soft quality of *This Ain't California's* Super 8 footage that achieves its emotional aims regardless of its existential status as an authentic image of the past.

### **‘Documentary Consciousness’ and ‘The Charge of the Real’**

Filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha asserts that ‘there is no such thing as documentary – whether the term designates a category of material, or a set of techniques’ – this is despite the clear existence of a ‘documentary tradition’ (90). Yet this tradition has managed to maintain some sort of coherent meaning, despite the diversity within nonfictional filmic forms and styles. That is to say, most people, if asked, would have a clear idea of what a documentary is, despite the ontological uncertainty raised by Minh-ha. In this section I will flesh out the idea that has been germinating above, that the spectator’s own attitude towards the status of the cinematic object is instrumental in determining how its images and sounds are interpreted in relation to the ‘real’. In other words, we can gain insights into *This Ain't California's* claims to authenticity by investigating how the spectator affectively responds to the ‘false witnesses’ of *This Ain't California*.

To do this, I will refer to Vivian Sobchack’s interpretation of the previously little-known work by Jean-Pierre Meunier. ‘Undeservedly neglected’, according to Sobchack, his short volume *Les Structures de l’expérience filmique: L’Identification filmique* offers a schema for understanding different modalities of cinematic identification on the part of the spectator; its phenomenological basis accounts for the

inherent flexibility and multiplicity in the film experience. Sobchack determines that a Lacanian system of theorising cinematic identification is insufficient for the purposes of questioning the processes of documentary identification. The application of this foundational theory proves ‘highly problematic’ in the instance of its use as a model for nonfiction because it sees the spectator’s relationship with any cinematic images as fundamentally phantasmic, and therefore offers no way of distinguishing between the ways in which we can relate differently to images that we perceive as ‘real’, and those we think of as ‘fiction’ (Sobchack, ‘Toward’ 241). Lacanian models thereby theoretically elide the spectator’s phenomenological sense of structural differences in what might constitute the ‘real’, cinematically.

Where the Lacanian system assumes an essential ‘misrecognition’ of image for its referent at the core of its explanation of cinematic identification, Sobchack calls upon Meunier’s phenomenological account, to move beyond this ‘single and totalizing structure’. Meunier suggests instead a model which ‘differentiates among a variety of subjective spectatorial modes that coconstitute the cinematic object’ (Sobchack, ‘Toward’ 241). This theory, according to Sobchack, has the capacity to ‘disclose’, rather than ‘discount’ documentary cinema’s ‘charge of the real’ (‘Toward’ 242). Meunier, in his formulation, suggests that spectatorial modes gather around three distinct points along a scale that runs from the *‘film-souvenir’* (the French term for ‘home-movie’, through ‘documentary film, and ending with fiction film at the other end. The Belgian psychologist’s three-part distinction assists in clarifying the nature of the connections between film-viewer and film-screen. He asserts that the spectator most importantly brings an attitude with them to the images on-screen which affects how those are interpreted and received in turn. Meunier’s theory describes the varying conscious and unconscious states of recognition in the experience of watching film.

His phenomenological classification of the status of the filmic images rests on the shifting and fluid way we respond to images that are known to us differently – the variable being the extent to which the spectator has prior, specific knowledge of the objects being screened.

Sobchack's repeated assertion, which bookends her essay, that 'documentary is less a *thing* than an *experience*', is vital, causing us to figure the spectator's subject position prominently in our considerations of documentary film, authenticity, representation, and memory (241). The spectator's active role in receiving, knowing, and responding to a variety of mnemonic features in documentary films is fundamental to the logical coherence of the genre. In the case of the reception of the memories of the GDR in *This Ain't California*, we can consider how these features will be re-membered (i.e. embodied) differently by each person who watches, according to the differentiation of individual experiences and knowledges. Through sensorial and cognitive means, a viewer's memories will actively mediate the corporeal film experience, while shared perspectives and acculturated knowledges will gather people together according to numerous groupings, from the national and sub-national through to the local and the subcultural. For example, if a spectator has lived in the GDR, or if a viewer was part of a skating subculture, then their relation to the film's stories will be different from someone's who was born after 1989, with no (personal, 'living') memory of the GDR, or no lived experience of skating, respectively.

The relative quality of authenticity in a documentary therefore can only be examined with theoretical consideration of the spectator's active, physical involvement with the cinematic objects, its images and sounds, and the way these are felt and received across the totality of the body's sensorium. Sobchack's phenomenological approach

brings our attention to multiple ways a film can be received, from nonfictional home-movies (the *film-souvenir*), through to fictional features. To reiterate, it is ‘the viewer’s consciousness that finally determines what kind of cinematic object it is’ (‘Toward’ 251), and by thinking this way, we can see that ‘documentary’ comprises as much the things that are brought by the spectator *to* the film, as what the film (re)presents.

Despite (or perhaps in response to), the persistence of contemporary ‘postmodern’ uncertainties, documentaries have continued to rely on the power of authenticity for their impact and strength in story-telling. If we accept that a documentary/fiction binary is blurred – that all ‘documentary’ films deal with more than pure evidence, ‘objectivity’ or ‘fact’, and also that they can arouse emotions within the viewer in a manner that is similar to that of fiction films – then the ‘hybrid’ nature of Persiel’s film can be evaluated not as a trespass into narrative filmmaking, or a betrayal of documentary’s foundational principles, but as an experimental pushing of boundaries. The spectator plays an active, dynamic role in this regard, as Jones observes:

If we interrogate the concept of authenticity further, we see that it is not a quality that a person, object or narrative possesses a priori, rather, s/he or it must be ascribed authenticity by the listener, reader, visitor or viewer.

Authenticity is thus a social process that happens in the interaction between production and reception of the object or text (*Media of Testimony* 188).

This approach is in agreement with Meunier’s proposed system, in that it finds cinematic identification to be active in the relationship between the spectator and the object. In this way, Jones develops the idea that all memory is mediated to an extent.



In the context of testimony, the filmic processes of mediation are inherent in the mechanisms through which authenticity is ascribed and claimed. In a more abstract sense, we can think of how the spectator enters into a relationship with the film's body, in detail and as a whole. Crucially, Meunier and Sobchack have shown that the structural form of cinematic identification (i.e. from nonfictional to fictional forms) does not hang on the style or type of film being watched (Sobchack, 'Toward' 248). This scale of film experiences, based on modes of attentiveness on the part of the spectator, relates to the personal and cultural memories brought into contact with the film being projected on screen. This scale's worth lies in its usefulness as a tool that reveals the structural relationships between spectator, 'reality' (i.e. the life-worlds past and present outside of the film's diegesis), and documentary. Furthermore, we can use this scale to see that 'evidential' images and audio engage the spectator's 'non-fictional' attention, through their being coded aesthetically and formally as non-fictional information.

The affective quality of documentary cinema must be considered alongside its narrative and formal effects. Jones observes that 'documentary testimony may not have the same power as fiction to involve the viewer physically in a story; generally the narrative of the past is recounted rather than shown' (198). This reading concurs with Meunier's proposal that fiction cinema draws the spectator in more thoroughly, for she has less recourse to thinking laterally, away from the screen, towards her own personal memories. The spectator's film experience is influenced by cultural and personal factors, positioned between history and biography. The implications of Meunier's scale for understanding the relationship between the spectator and a film's audiovisual content, can be further expanded when examined according to the embodied film-theoretical approach that structures and frames the analyses in this

thesis: Sobchack's phenomenological thought on the film's body and the 'cinesthetic subject', and Marks's writings on haptic visuality/perception. Part of Marks's contribution to film studies has been to explain how the senses and the 'memory of the senses' inspire our experience of watching cinema. We can overlay our understanding of cinematic identification – from the *film-souvenir*, through documentary, to fiction film – onto the subjective sensorial-memory mode of cinema viewing which Marks describes. In these approaches, the spectator's personal history informs their viewing. This in turn will help when considering the existential status that is ascribed to the footage in *This Ain't California*, which sits uncomfortably (but entertainingly) in an in-between spatio-temporal 'reality'.

In Persiel's documentary, the spectator is vitally involved in this creative, fluid act of intentional perception – through an interrelationship with its haptic images, as will be examined in the next section. Jane Gaines asks, 'if it can no longer be said that the documentary has "reality" on its side, what can be said of it?' (6). I suggest that *This Ain't California*'s haptic qualities encourage the viewer's 'documentary' attention in a way that invokes the materiality of the 'real' – the real history of skateboarding in East Germany to be precise – such that its authenticity can be construed in ways that seek to exceed the bounds of identification, symbolism and the presumption of the 'real'.

### **Haptic Visuality and Experiential Authenticity**

In order to grasp the multi-sensorial qualities in *This Ain't California*, we must first recall that Sobchack's 'film's body' describes the 'instrumental mediation' needed for cinema to communicate between spectator and film. Her term captures more than the

characters' bodies on the screen, it is also the screen itself, and includes the apparatus and the camera's movements and gestures. The film's body must be accorded its own intentionality; it is dynamic and interactive, arousing physical responses in the spectator through its capacity for corporeally 'having and expressing a world' (*Address* 168). As stated earlier, the film starts by centring the spectator as a documentary viewer, this must be conceived of as a corporeal relationship with the film's body. The viewer's attention towards the documentary, which interactively produces its 'documentary' nature, must therefore also be considered in terms of its material and corporeal qualities.

The sense of indexicality associated with documentary filmmaking has been considered part of its claim to authenticity – a denial of its mediation (Jones, *Media of Testimony* 163). Nichols reminds us that 'recording instruments (cameras and sound recorders) register the imprint of things (sights and sounds) with great fidelity'; the strict correspondence between image and object 'gives these imprints value as documents in the same way fingerprints have value as documents' (*Introduction* 34). The debates over the legitimacy of the 'documentary's' claim to a uniquely indexical relationship with the 'real' world beyond the camera, often come to an impasse: what is more authentic, fact or feeling? If, following Laura Marks, 'film is grasped not solely by an intellectual act but by complex perception of the body as a whole' (*Skin* 145), then we should consider the affect of *This Ain't California* as holistic and physical. The assemblage of its constitutive parts, the nostalgic framing of its Super 8 footage, and the blending of archival footage with images that 'appear' to be so, engages the viewer's emotional knowledges of the GDR; Persiel's version shapes cultural memories through its stylistic effects. The crunchy sound of rubber wheels on

concrete accompanies its grainy, glowing images – these qualities in particular inspire a haptic way of looking, and the reciprocal relationship between viewer and object.

Persiel uses montage to weave footage from the past into the recently-shot images which appear to be from the past, the stylistic effects of amateur camerawork blur into energetic, highly saturated, and over-exposed sequences. With rapid cuts, a sense of those thousands of hours of film that have been edited out of the documentary, that we are currently watching, is created. We are presented with only small vignettes that accompany the remembrances of the now middle-aged skaters. We encounter Super 8 images layered together, depicting Panik and his crew running amok, using a car as a ramp for jumps and tricks, and irritating passers-by. This layering effect builds upon the snippets of the past, through sound, movement, and colour, to create an impressionistic whole. This impression is also deeply physical. Jennifer M. Barker elaborates on the material ways in which the viewer can be ‘touched’ by the film’s body: ‘Cinema entails a whole range of possibilities of touch against our skin: films can pierce, pummel, push, palpate, and strike us; they also slide, puff, flutter, flay, and cascade along our skin’ (*The Tactile Eye* 36). In terms that are evocative of a haptic sense of touch, one of the skaters remembers that the ground must have constituted ‘50 Prozent Beton, der Rest aus eigener Haut’; he thereby enmeshes a cultural memory of place with the vivid, corporeal experience of grazing one’s body into it. Our bodies, too, are thrown to the ground in a youthful, spirited shared remembrance of skating in the GDR.

Aerial shots of the East Berlin accompany these reminiscences, and the Soviet architecture is remembered in glowing terms, as a wondrous place for rolling on wheels. ‘Einen Beweis dafür bietet ein Blick auf das Stadtzentrum’ interjects a new

voice; its particular recorded quality and timbre indicating an older era of film production. These words emerge from the narration to whichever documentary footage these shots of the old city centre were taken from and blur with the witness testimony of the former skaters and, regardless of their ‘objective’ status as ‘real’ or ‘pretend’, their evocations bring to life the physical reality of the feeling of rolling on a skateboard through East Berlin. The architecture of Alexanderplatz is remembered positively by the ‘skaters’ in a subsequent voice-over. Monotonous Eastern Bloc concrete is thereby transformed into living site of individual expression through its kinaesthetic potential. In this manner, typically pejorative evocations of the East as concrete wastelands are reversed, or resisted. The concrete itself is poetically reimagined, or re-remembered (and re-membered), as something beautiful, an affecting material that remains powerful in the film’s recollection: ‘und wie sich dieser Sandstein angefühlt hat, der war so weich, und warm, und ewig glatt wie so eine ewige Wüste’.

The youths’ liberal act of both misusing their time (people should be working towards a goal in the GDR) and the public spaces of Berlin is thus constructed as a moment of pleasure and insubordination. The historian Kai Reinhart remarks that the East German skateboarders closely linked their valorising of autonomy with the ‘production of their own “truth”’ (*Wir wollten* 260). This resonates with the activity’s American (and global) history of being a marginal pursuit, with an aesthetic that appeals to outsiders and rebels. The subcultural themes are in this (material) way aligned, furthermore, with a central idea of this docufiction: that within the social worlds of the GDR there existed the potential for self-expression, fun and play – despite how the dictatorship is typically recalled or understood in post-unification contexts.

## California Dreaming

In the following paragraphs, I examine the influence of ‘America’ as a cultural force within Germany and in *This Ain’t California*’s creative endeavour to bring to life the ‘feeling’ of ‘the States’ that is integral to the skateboarding scene’s cultural resonances. My analysis builds upon the theoretical foundations described above – i.e. that it is the spectator’s attitude, the way she ‘intends the screen’, that structures the identifications from ‘real’ to ‘fictional’ sounds and images. I examine the role of the spectator’s body and memories of the senses in determining how that physically operates in *This Ain’t California*. I argue that we must consider that a cultural image (such as the memories of the GDR in *This Ain’t California*) will be sensed, felt, and understood in multiple ways, according to unique individual experience. Referring to the reflections of a personal encounter with American culture, this comparison aims to productively show the ways by which *This Ain’t California* explores the feeling of intercultural experience in a general, as well as an individual, sense.

America’s cultural relationship with Germany has been a topic of much discussion. Its influence, often perceived as a threatening, engulfing force upon the country’s domestic culture, has produced strong emotional responses to a range of cultural products from Jeans and Coca-Cola, to Hollywood, individualism and Fordism.

Lüdtke et al. explain the historical beginnings of these processes:

Bewundernde, mehr aber noch skeptische, wenn nicht scharf-ablehnende Äußerungen zur “Amerikanisierung” der eigenen Welt setzten in Deutschland nach der Jahrhundertwende ein. In den 1920er Jahren verdichteten sie sich zu

einem viel verwendeten Topos. So unterschiedlich die Akzente gesetzt wurden, so präsent waren Hoffnungen – verbreitete jedoch Ängste und Sorgen (7).

This tension backgrounds the situation in East Germany where official attitudes, under Cold War relations towards the United States, were naturally more antagonistic than in the West. Nevertheless, there are continuities between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes in Germany, before division, and the specific responses to America that developed throughout the Cold War opposition.

In an essay which discusses shifts in attitudes towards the ‘issue’ of Americanisation in Germany, Winfried Fluck begins with a personal memory of his own: his first encounter with American culture in bombed out Berlin, 1949. He remembers looking at American comics with a friend, before they could read in either German or English; the pleasures they received were largely drawn from the pictures. Fluck particularly recalls ‘the strong presence of an intense blue in Superman’s dress as well as in the sky through which he moved, a blue that gained an almost magical quality in our dreary, colorless surroundings’ (221). The affective power of the colour in the exotic magazines intersected with something his father once told him of a country called California, ‘where the sky was always blue’. Through this ‘arbitrary but creative linkage’, the young Fluck experienced a powerful and memorable response to the sensory information encoded in both the aesthetic of the ‘blue’ in the magazine, and the aura of a foreign land – creating a vision of ‘California blue’. In Fluck’s story, we can see how cultural knowledges can emerge in individual and unique encounters. Significantly, he sees his ‘wilful transformation of “Superman blue” into “California blue”’ as evidence of the fact that recipients of culture may re-use and transform its

effects in ways that can be confounding, unpredictable, and which go beyond the overt meaning that is more readily apparent in a cultural object (222).

For the young Fluck, 'California' was not simply found in the blue ink on a comic. Rather, it was created by him, via the sensations elicited in his perceptive response to both that colour, and to the idea in his head, of a mythical place where the sky was always blue, a notion he had culturally learned after a remark made once by his father. We can observe the same transformation, an affective feeling, in *This Ain't California*. The story (at this stage representing the origins of skating as it developed in the former East) is taken up by Nico, who remembers having the first 'Westbrett' brought over for the three friends, Nico, Dirk, and Denis. Its quality was far superior to the homemade boards they had so far been using. Its translucent wheels were succulently beautiful; this became the favourite colour-type in the East. The skaters remember, in tones evoking childlike wonder, the joy of this board and the pleasures of summers spent together. Meanwhile Super 8 close-ups roll, showing the bright red wheels and the three boys messing around, doing tricks: 'Das war der Knalle! Oh Mann, diese Rollen. Durchsichtig war die Lieblingsfarbe im Osten. Und wie die geschnuppert haben, wie das Paradies, das man am liebsten mit ihm hab's verputzt'.

In this sequence, the spectator is invited to share in the cultural experience common to East German memory, of receiving 'exotic' goods that were hard to come by. The transcendence of see-through wheels into an almost delectable sense of the brighter West echoes the post-war experience of America described by Fluck: 'the transformation of a piece of cheap, cheesy popular culture into an almost magical object' (221). In *This Ain't California*, we are told similarly that: 'Skateboarden ...



roch' nach der großen Welt... das war so das einfachste Amerikanischer was man sich zusammenbauen konnte'.

The expansive sensorial possibilities that can be found in relatively banal objects within one's life – and one's memory – fit neatly within a schema of the cinematic affect that the filmmakers have taken hold of and wielded, in their efforts to produce this vibrant film that seeks to overflow into the spectator's reality. Here we can note how the film's relative 'authenticity', or possibly its lack thereof, when conceived of as a nearness to an actuality 'out there' in the 'real' GDR past, does not have to be argued according to a logic of absolutes. Instead, there is a truthfulness to the account of how the children created (Western) magic in translucent wheels. Their creative investment in the objects will be understood by the spectator, who is engaged in a similar relationship with the haptic Super 8 images of those wheels. This is affectively conveyed by the mimetic relationship between the experiential knowledges of the viewer and the film's own understandings of its memories. The spectator plays a crucial part in activating this transfer between the film's body and the experience produced. 'The elementary fact about aesthetic objects is that, in order to acquire meaning, they have to be actualized by means of a transfer'; Fluck explains how this functions in the example of reading a literary text, '[s]ince we have never met literary characters such as Huck Finn or Madame Bovary and do in fact know that they never existed, we have to bring them to life by investing our own associations, feelings, and even bodily sensations' (228).

We are fashioned by such experiences; they inform our world. This idea does not only speak to such sensorial responses as recalled by the 'eyewitnesses' (actors) to the translucent wheels that were so popular among the Eastern skaters, it also helps

explain how the audience responds to *This Ain't California*. Evocative and sweet images such as those of the children playing with their prized boards from the West are brought to life by the spectator's investment in them – if the Super 8 footage has a nostalgic quality, this is not only denoted by an aesthetic or style, but equally it emerges through the mechanism of the viewer's acculturated, built-in associations with the idea of 'childhood'; personal memories of similar experiences fashion these cinematic moments into rosy, shared cultural understandings. This function moreover acts as a cultural and social translation: To understand something of the transcendent power of a skateboard's see-through wheels, the spectator does not need to share lived-experience of either growing up in Germany or being a skater. This response is both 'emotional' and 'cognitive', and follows the schema of allegiance proposed by Smith, whereby 'the spectator adopts an attitude of sympathy' owing to 'emotional colouration of thematic material' (188). The spectator can intend the screen by associating similar memories from a personal store, enmeshing individual emotional knowledges with the cultural memories particular to the film.

Speaking in an interview available on the DVD release, Persiel and Vietz assert that an important aspect for them in shooting the film was to make sure that it was 'nicht zu DDR-ich', a word they coined to describe the conventional depiction of East Germany that has developed over the years since re-unification. One scene demonstrates the results of this approach well; a skating sequence was shot in a concrete drain, with extended slow-motion images in a soft, glowing, yellow light. 'The American dream', East German youth (sub)culture, and the dreaming of *This Ain't California*'s loose and free-flowing sounds and images combine. The boys are skating shirtless, the image evoking a warmth that seems to bring 'California' out of what might otherwise be 'DDR-ich' scenery. As a result, this sequence produces a

momentary vision – an experience – of that ‘other’ place, an American dream that is also an East German dream, a universal yet particular moment, cinematically seeking to transcend the typical. This is not (merely) *Ostalgie*, but a nostalgia for an intercultural idea, for the desire to experience something different. The eye-witness ‘DJ Laser’ expresses this emotion when interviewed in the film, where he recollects: ‘Wir wollten in die Unendlichkeit gucken [...] andere Mentalitäten, andere Geräusche, ‘was Anderes zu schmecken. Ganz banale Sachen im Prinzip’.

The East German children and their emotional investment in the translucent wheels of a ‘Rollbrett’ from the West reflect a cultural dynamic of desire for consumables that formed a part of the GDR economy.<sup>29</sup> According to Fluck, the thinking about cultural imperialism has shifted over the years, and the idea that American values are simply imposed and then absorbed unchanged into other, submissive cultures has been replaced by more complex theories. These seek to describe the ways that American culture can be reappropriated and managed according to different needs and desires in each context, such as the ‘toolbox’ mode of cultural transfer (222). Fluck argues that his own ‘childhood focus on the magic of color provides an example for such selective, often highly idiosyncratic forms of reappropriation’ (222).

Skateboarding’s history in East Germany demonstrates this toolbox mode of cultural use and exchange. The surprising existence (to many with no prior knowledge) of the very ‘American’ pastime of skateboarding over the ‘other side’ of the Wall forms a central attraction in the film’s thematic framing. *This Ain’t California* describes how

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<sup>29</sup> See Jonathan Bach, *What Remains?*, for an example of this in the form of the ‘Intershop’ – a chain where goods could be purchased with foreign currency (not East German Marks).

the ‘American’ pastime developed special meaning in the East German context. Furthermore, we see how the activity’s potential was differently idealised depending on how the individuals were connected with the pursuit. For example, we hear from the ‘witnesses’, both in narration and in their roles as former skaters. They reminisce about the sense of community they shared with each other, existing alongside the individual freedom and expression they felt when skating. This contrasts with the state’s attempts to organise the sport in a similar way to their other official sport programs.

At various points in the film, we see the attitudes to skating of both the GDR government and the state’s officials. We see an excerpt from a broadcast of ‘Der Schwarze Kanal’, in which the propagandist Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler warns of the dangers of skateboarding. Originating in the United States, skateboarding has already infiltrated West Germany. We learn that the DTSB (Deutsche Turn- und Sportbund) saw a chance to develop skateboarding into a sport for the country’s athletes could excel at, aiming to echo national achievement in other sporting disciplines. In 1986, the GDR even produced its own skateboard, the ‘Germina Speeder’. However, the incompatibility between the skaters’ practical and personal desires, the way they wished to use their boards, and the understandings of state officials was clear: ‘Die haben auch nicht damit gerechnet, dass man damit Tricks machen kann. Das war einfach nur ein Ding, wo man sich draufstellt und irgendwo lang rollt’ (Böhme, qtd. in Reinhart, *Wir wollten* 226). On the reverse side of the board, such rules as ‘Befahren öffentlicher Verkehrsflächen verboten’ illustrate how the sometimes destructive, usually mischievous behaviour of the skaters in *This Ain’t California* quickly developed into acts of resistance against a regime lacking empathy or understanding.

This aspect of the history is written into *This Ain't California*'s narrative through the device of Denis's characterisation. The story is told through one of the film's rotoscopic animation sequences. Denis briefly attends an official camp set up by the state for skaters to train and improve their skills. Denis's friends, sitting around the campfire, suppose that this might have somehow resulted from his desire to reconcile with his father. They had been estranged since Denis refused to fulfil the expectation that he would become a GDR swimming champion via the *Sportschule*. We are told by the skater, Sladek, that the premise of the camps was for trainers to run exercises in the manner of 'Turnvater Jahn'; he gestures at his head to indicate how ridiculous this approach was. The story explains that Denis's firebrand personality could never be satisfied in the strict, disciplined and poorly conceived official approach to the sport. This, together with the quashing of that spirit of individual freedom, which is so crucial to skating's power (as it is remembered in the film), meant that it would not work for Denis. 'Mit diesen Typen... konnte man einfach nicht klar kommen', as Nico recalls.

Returning to an animated sequence, we encounter a landscape view of a local sports hall that has been set on fire, with smoke billowing from the windows. We hear in the narration that Denis (or is it Panik now?) eventually lost his cool and 'set the place on fire', screaming, swearing and causing general panic. There is ambiguity; was this fire is literal or metaphorical? That is not the important part of this moment in the story. What is vital, is that in another dysfunctional interaction between Denis and the state (and his father, by extension), 'Panik' was born. He returns to Berlin with this part of his personality amplified, along with his anti-authoritarian belief system. Animated scenes such as this fill out the story visually, often in moments of the story, where

there could not credibly be ‘archival footage’. These sequences weave together threads of the ‘myth’ of Denis/Panik. The black-and-white, shimmering drawings are more obviously ‘illustrative’ than either the Super 8 footage or the witness recollection scenes around the fire. They are stark images with sharp contrast and bold lines, but the characters’ bodies glimmer at their edges, creating an unreal effect.

In a dreamy animation that introduces us to the young Denis at the film’s beginning, Nico narrates a ‘typical Denis story’, where Denis escapes from his apartment, having been grounded by his father, by jumping out of the window into a tree, before meeting and playing with Nico and Dirk for the first time. Nico acknowledges the ambiguity in the truthfulness of this Denis narrative, which, when considered against the film’s own methodology, can be read as a nod to self-awareness. He tells us: ‘Er selber hat immer darauf bestanden, dass es genauso passiert ist. Wie in einem Traum’. Ambient music hovers unobtrusively behind this animated introduction to the film’s characters, furthering the resemblance to a dream.

The story of skateboarding is indelibly painted with American cultural resonance and evocation; wherever skating subcultures manifested in the world, a link with America, and the origins of the sport, is connoted in some way. In *This Ain’t California*, it is addressed in the film’s title, which plays with the distance and proximity of California, as a place and as an idea, from the East German experience. This quality is aroused in the film’s *film-souvenir* sequences, which are bound together more by the creation of a feeling than a causal narrative structure – the rolling of wheels on concrete, youthful exuberance, laughter, partying, and general mischief-making. As with the film’s animations, the skating montages share the characteristics of a dream. The filmmakers’ biographies are pertinent to the shifting emphasis between America

and East Germany that underlie the subculture the film portrays. This is expressed both humorously and in a more serious tone. One example of the farcical is shown in that excerpt, where von Schnitzler warns of the dangerous activity that has already inflicted West Germany. More seriously, the restrictions of the Wall, prohibiting the skaters from access to proper equipment are presented in tones that emphasise the deep frustrations they felt. The motivations and relationship of the film's creators with the remembrance of the GDR they produce, and of the global, cultural 'meaning' of skateboarding, vary according to each of their personal interests and upbringings. In an interview that appears on the DVD release, Dirk Reiher, born in the former East, and researcher for the project, describes how, in an autobiographical way, the film spoke of a GDR past that was his own: 'Ich musste den Film machen, weil das meiner Geschichte erzählt, weil es die Geschichte meiner Kindheit ist. Meiner Jugend. Weil ich aus einer Zeit komme, oder aus einem Land komme, was es nicht mehr gibt'.

His formulation echoes the personal reason director Sandra Kaudelka gives for her decision to make *Einzelkämpfer* that we saw in the previous chapter. Persiel, who was socialised in West Germany on the other hand, occupies a different positionality regarding the former East; his interest begins with skateboarding, a scene he has been involved with for a large part of his life. In one press interview, he and the producer Ronald Vietz recall that the early conception of their movie started with the idea of filming a story about an East German who invents the notion of skateboarding without any contact with the West:

Von diesem Ansatz, etwas Komödienhaftes oder was Luftiges zu machen, ging es dann sehr schnell in die Richtung einer richtigen deutschen Geschichte, die es sich vielleicht sogar lohnt, ernsthaft zu erzählen. Natürlich

ist von dem Luftigen und Lustigen viel übriggeblieben. Der Film ist an den Stellen ernst, an denen er nicht über Skateboarden erzählt (qtd. in Rebhandl).

The translation of the original idea into a documentary form followed the filmmakers' realisation, their discovery, that there was a serious East German history of skateboarding to be told. The balance between light-hearted exuberance and sombre context runs throughout the film eventually produced. The death of Denis in Afghanistan as a soldier bookends the noise, laughter and absurdity in the skateboarding story it encompasses. The chaotic filming of youthful rebellion is testified by the filmmakers as a powerful and vital part of the film. The fun that was had during the shoot, we are led to understand, should translate into the affect that those sequences in particular seek to elicit upon their viewing.

## **Conclusion**

*'... a fiction (un)like any other'* (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 125).

Incorporating a variety of audio, visual, and narrative techniques, Persiel directs *This Ain't California's* (post)modernist representation of a 'historical event' (in White's terms), which in this case is the surprising existence of a skateboarding subculture in GDR. The methods by which he tells the story of that history take inspiration from 'fictional' and 'nonfictional' traditions. If we can think of authenticity as neither singular, nor static, then we open a space for considering the impact of the audiovisual memories of the GDR on more sophisticated levels than only their perceived 'veracity'. Where that veracity has, in the past, typically been considered in terms of its proximity to historical accuracy, a more productive attitude might consider



whether there may be alternative ‘modalities’ of veracity that can emerge from affect, the gap between representation and reality. The multiplicity of viewer responses that are embedded in the creative act of watching, hearing, and being (haptically) ‘touched’ by a cinematic object must be taken into account.

Perhaps the stakes in the debates surrounding *This Ain't California*'s authenticity are not immeasurably high, if we consider that the film does not set out to deny the ‘fact’ of the SED regime’s oppressive characteristics through its formal tactics blurring fiction and non-fiction. Certainly, the film’s nostalgia is much more ‘reflexive’ than ‘restorative’, recalling Svetlana Boym’s terms, i.e. it seeks to extract a hidden narrative of East German individualism and liberal expression from the master-text of oppression, surveillance, and banality, rather than vainly return the entirety of the GDR into the present.

Nevertheless, the essential question that pervades discussions of *This Ain't California* has been whether this film can (or should) retain its ‘documentary’ status – with a large percentage of its content being in some way ‘fictionalised’ or otherwise imaginatively produced. We can recall how Sobchack’s assertion that ‘documentary is less a *thing* than an *experience*’, causes us to figure the spectator’s subject position prominently in our considerations of documentary film, authenticity, representation, and memory (‘Toward’ 241). The spectator’s active role in receiving, knowing, and responding to a variety of features in documentary films is fundamental to the genre’s (and to *This Ain't California*'s) ‘memory work’. This model of cinematic identification does not completely ignore the distinction between fiction and nonfiction in a grand, post-modernist gesture, but it is fluid rather than rigid. Documentary cinema’s ‘charge of the real’, to reuse Sobchack’s phrase, is moreover

affirmed under this framing. Sobchack concludes that we already know from experience, that ‘not all images are taken up as imaginary or phantasmatic and that the spectator is an active agent in constituting what counts as memory, fiction, or document’ (243). When the spectator regards the ‘faux’ *film-souvenir* footage of Denis/Panik and his friends, situated as it is within the film’s hazy, coloured version of the GDR past, her own cultural experience encounters the intimate, moving memories on the screen, and she determines the extent to which that relationship (between spectator and the film’s body) is predicated on the proximity of the images on screen to a presupposed ‘reality’ back in 1980s East Germany.

*This Ain’t California* grasps the attractive, fun, and rebellious idea of skaters in the GDR, and develops this into an aesthetic and moving experience via the generic conventions of the skateboarding film. By examining the spectator’s intentional ‘documentary consciousness’, it is possible to conceive of plural ways that ‘documentary film’ can be produced. Since authenticity and documentary are dynamic markers that rest in tension with the spectator’s own understandings and memories, whether or not the cinematic object can be said to be authentic relies on how and where meaning is found in a film. Persiel’s film, full of movement, light, and colour, recreates a subcultural memory of the GDR using techniques that draw on (and ‘fake’) aesthetics of documentary authenticity, but also on cinema’s power to sensorially engage with the ‘real’. The pleasures of the film lie in its ability to bring a forgotten world of skating in the former East to life. Its hazy, grainy images haptically bring the spectator into contact with the concrete; the roar of wheels and the crash of boards and bodies onto the ground excite and revive a nostalgia for a past that many viewers, before watching the film would not have thought ever existed. I find that the filmmakers themselves believe that *This Ain’t California*’s authenticating power lies

in its physical, rather than cerebral, force. As the producer, Ronald Vietz, explains in an interview: ‘Der Film war nie für den Kopf gedacht, sondern für den Bauch’ (qtd. in Rebhandl). Remembering is always a creative, embodied act – drawing on, and influenced by, the present and the future in its process of bringing back the past. *This Ain’t California* takes its audience on such a ride.

## Conclusion

We know now that memories are not fixed or frozen, like Proust's jars of preserves in a larder, but are transformed, disassembled, reassembled, and recategorized with every act of recollection.

- Oliver Sacks<sup>30</sup>

This project has sought to examine how cultural memories of East Germany are mediated in a selection of post-unification German films. Each film has been examined as a case study for its dual-purpose: firstly, the work it performs in remembering the GDR, and secondly, its commentary on the post-*Wende* milieu in which its memories are found. This study demonstrates how these two functions are related, confirming both the importance of the present in determining how the past is remembered, and the importance of the past in shaping the present.

Through this process, I found these films to be rich with complexity, in both the emotions they produce and the stories of the GDR they remember, piecing together complicated narratives of the East German past's ongoing influence. By consistently grounding my analysis in the spectator's *experience* of their East German past(s) and post-unification present(s), I have aimed to produce a unifying approach to quite disparate case studies. The films, which cover fictional and non-fictional genres of memory, offer diversity in their narrative and formal structures. Moreover, the corpus has proved to be heterogeneous in terms of aesthetics and mood, ranging from the tragi-comic *Good Bye, Lenin!*, through the exuberant *This Ain't California*, to the

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<sup>30</sup> From *Hallucinations* (154).

melodramatic *Novemberkind*. By paying attention to the films' reflexivity concerning the interrelations between past and present, this study found memories of East Germany activated in a variety of modalities – in different forms, moods, spaces and patterns. Consequently, it has revealed not only patterns and connections, but also contradiction and disjuncture, which are all critical to how we piece together the memory landscape of the GDR.

This ambiguity and conflict is precisely what makes these films such a rich and productive site of interpretive possibilities, as demonstrated by this study. Konrad H. Jarausch, writing towards the end of the first post-*Wende* decade, observes that scholars searching through the GDR's extensive archives were finding 'more confusion, contradiction, and conflict than they had ever imagined' (11). He suggests that '[t]he GDR continues to be interesting, not simply because it proves the superiority of democratic capitalism, but because it represents a failed alternative, simultaneously attractive and flawed (11–12). Interest in the GDR has persisted into the second and third decades after re-unification. We can consider the fact that films continue to be financed, produced and watched about this topic, as evidence of this interest; memories of the former East continue to jostle for position within wider discussions of Germany's history and memory. Two of the films in this study's corpus are from the 2000s, and three from the 2010s, across the span of these releases, they suggest that there is an ongoing desire, or need, to evaluate the place of the East German past within national constructions and narratives, both with their thematic presence among other German-language films, and their deliberate and reflexive attitude towards time and temporality.

This project found that sub-national memories of East Germany continue to haunt both eastern and western imaginations. The relationships between Germany's national history, its self-conceptualisation and its cinema have been interactive and reciprocal, each influencing the other. Sabine Hake describes the nexus where these points connect as a 'site of crises, ruptures, and antagonisms, but also of unexpected influences, affinities, and continuities' (*German National Cinema* 1). While it is beyond the scope of this study to measure the impact of East German memories on spectators via, for instance, empirical survey data, the methodological approach I have taken, with its recourse to the phenomenological as well as to cultural and historical theory and research, has allowed for interpretations of the way that sub-national memories collectively continue to influence Germany's post-*Wende* present. Moreover, I have found connections between the films studied and filmic traditions both within and beyond German national cinema. Accordingly, *Der Preis* must be placed not only in the context of the global influences of the Berlin School, but also with respect to the references it makes to DEFA films, operating sub-nationally – its connections with Peter Kahane's *Die Architekten* demonstrate this most clearly. This is not only because of its thematic similarities (though those are significant), but also in its affective conjuring of the stagnant temporality that connects the dying days of the GDR with the eastern failures of the post-*Wende* present. *This Ain't California*, on the other hand, might look like 'a documentary about East Germany', but its exuberant, colourful portrayal of a skater scene places it as much in dialogue with the American skater-film *Dogtown and Z-Boys* (Stacey Peralta, 2001) as it does with, for instance, *Einzelkämpfer*.

This thesis's methodological approach, informed by frameworks from cultural memory studies, phenomenological film studies and German cultural studies, sought

original ways to approach issues raised by the films themselves – their questions about East Germany and its place in cultural memory. As this project conjectured, the spectator's experience of the temporalities of memory in film is fundamentally embodied. Accordingly, I have maintained that our perception of each film's memory work is shaped by the 'memory of the senses' (Marks, *Skin* 195) and is always informed by our personal, bodily histories and through our 'acculturated sensorium' (Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 63). Each of the films studied offers us sensorially affective and affecting sites of memory. These range, for example, from Inga and Anne's 'shared-skin' in *Novemberkind*, through to *Der Preis*'s haunting use of the *Plattenbau*, and on to *Einzelkämpfer*'s recollections of routine and discipline. Here, I have sought to develop ideas stemming from an awareness of the centrality of the senses in the way we perceive and interpret cultural information and meaning. As Martin Jay contends, we have increasingly come to appreciate that 'sense' 'refers not only to the natural corporeal endowments that provide access to the world, but also to the meanings we attribute to the results' (307).

In chapter one, I argued that, by choosing films which deal with the past in light of present concerns – the way the past is instrumentalised for the present – I anticipated being able to look closely at how these films frame their versions of East German memories within the contemporaneous 'battleground of memories'. I have therefore kept the three-part distinctions proposed by Martin Sabrow active across each of the analysis chapters. As a framing device, these functioned as coordinates for positioning different versions of East German cultural memories within a *Spannungsfeld* from dominant to marginal – guiding my interpretation of the politics of the films' memories. Furthermore, acknowledging that the dominant way that the GDR is remembered typically evokes common factors of the *Diktaturgedächtnis* – the *Stasi*,

imprisonment, lack of free-will, restriction of movement – sets the conditions under which each of these films is produced and received. No single film belongs strictly in one category, instead, I have shown that we can identify elements of multiple modes of memory in the film. However, I have argued that the films are united in attempting to complicate, rather than simplify, memory narratives of East Germany.

While there are moments in a film that draw more heavily on the cultural power of the *Diktaturgedächtnis* to make a point – we can think here of the framing device of *Republikflucht* in both *Novemberkind* and *Good Bye, Lenin!* – there are invariably other elements within the same film that demonstrate the *Arrangementgedächtnis*. *Good Bye, Lenin!* asserts the legitimacy of everyday memories, while *Novemberkind* is critical of the voyeuristic *Wessi*, Robert, who seeks to exploit Anne and Inga’s tragic East German story for his own gain. On the other hand, the *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* is found only occasionally – the character of Herr Ganske in *Good Bye, Lenin!* performs a stereotype of this perspective. However, this form of memory is not found to be conveyed (or supported) in any of the films through particularly powerful, or affective means. Instead, the films use affectivity and narrative to incorporate multiple perspectives across their multiple temporalities – this quality unites all of them, to greater or lesser extents, and suggests each film may be categorised most comfortably within the *Arrangementgedächtnis* modality.

In chapter two, I engage initially with how cultural memories of East Germany are affectively conveyed, looking at *Good Bye, Lenin!*’s self-reflexive mode of addressing memory and its affective use of embodied filmic technologies. In *Good Bye, Lenin!*’s self-aware cultural memory, the GDR becomes more than a historic, closed-off ‘fact’. Instead, we encounter living, breathing instances of cultural memory and expressions



of cultural identity. This is congruent with an understanding (by now conventional wisdom) of identities as being performative and constructed. In other words, identities are neither static, nor stable, but rather ought to be understood as processes, which are constantly subject to change under various influences experienced in the present, but which are also constructed relative to numerous temporalities. Identities are ‘expressed’, or ‘enunciated’ – in the ways in which we ourselves perform outwardly (and indeed inwardly). I argue that, along with maintaining the idea that identity is a ‘becoming’, we must also remember it is enacted both performatively and *with the body*: This is particularly stark when Christiane is considered beyond her symbolism as a metaphor, and as a bodily, affective force in *Good Bye, Lenin!*.

In chapter three, I have stressed the importance of the affective relationship between the spectator and the film’s body between each of the nodes of enquiry. For instance, finding the concept of ‘shared-skin’ at work in *Novemberkind* emphasises contact, and permeability – two key functions of cinema, which are unambiguously crucial when studying the relationship between the spectator’s corporeal involvement within the film experience. The shared-skin captures Anne and Inga’s duality, which spans past and present, and simultaneously traces the spectator’s haptic responses to the film. Hence, not only do I find the shared-skin to be revealing of how memory functions, both individually and collectively, it also describes the spectator’s reciprocal relationship with the film, conceived haptically.

In chapter four, I contended that the multiple temporalities of memory produced by *Der Preis* demonstrate the ability of the past to haunt the present in ways that exceed the straight-forward reappearance of disturbing or traumatic pasts. The feeling of stasis and stagnation that is evoked powerfully through the film’s technique of the

long-take, for instance, supports the film's positioning of the *Plattenbau* as a site of memory, which houses not only events occurring in the GDR past, but also the lost dreamings of future possibilities that have been eroded away by time and by the joint failings of socialism and post-*Wende* capitalist hope. The temporalities of 'not yet' and 'no longer' thus define realities across the film's dual timelines and produce affects which speak to the spectral qualities of memory.

In chapter five, I draw on Lefebvre's method of rhythmanalysis in order to investigate how its individual parts (diverse memories) work together to form a 'whole'. To form a general 'impression' of the GDR through watching *Einzelkämpfer* is to extrapolate from the memories of a few former citizens, whose experiences were for the most part exceptional, rather than exemplary of the everyday. Nevertheless, this desire to summarise, to form patterns from the visual and audio documentation, is essential to the generic experience of documentary film-spectatorship. Under these circumstances, the 'version' of the GDR that one forms, tends to become more nuanced through the paradox and contradiction in testimony, as opposed to a singular and clear sense of history following orthodoxy or hegemonic master narratives. Kaudelka's approach to her subjects acts as a model (hers) for how the spectator ought to relate to former East German citizens. In a system which produced a complex web of privileges and disadvantages, for those who conformed and resisted in a participatory dictatorship (Fulbrook, *The People's State*), we should be wary of claiming moral certainty in hindsight. I have argued that this film presents an assemblage of individual memories, through which both contradiction and corroboration develop a believable community of witnesses – there is authenticity in their assertions of unique realities. Where their stories collide and merge, in light of these differences, the sense of a collective experience is felt all the more strongly.

In chapter six, I argue that the mixed responses to *This Ain't California* indicate that simple distinctions, such as those between fact and fiction, or memory and history, cannot easily be made, either about this film, or more generally. Aleida Assmann observes that 'history and memory ... are no longer considered to be rivals and more and more are accepted as complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past' ('History, Memory' 263); the dissolution of this particular binary over recent years assists with efforts to make sense of the difference between the ways that stories are told in fiction features and documentaries. Memory – when conceived of as opposed to history – involves a different set of values with regards to the types of authenticity that are legitimated (whether culturally, legally, or politically), and how exactly those authenticities are construed and perceived. Put simply, history has been more typically associated with 'objectivity' and 'knowing'; memory is 'subjective' and 'felt'. The film toys with the boundaries between formal, film-technical objectivity and imaginative creativity, subjecting it to rigorous debate among film critics and cinema-goers. Its status as a historical document of skateboarding in the GDR is placed in tension with the desire to directly produce the feeling of memory itself. Its nostalgic mode sets up the film's status as a 'memory film' – and I argue that the film is more concerned with memory than history. Moreover, Persiel's formal and aesthetic decisions to mix the generic form of witnesses and evidence (connoting documentary's 'indexical' claim to authenticity) together with its creative endeavours (belonging to the realms of fiction), recall how we understand the operations of both individual and cultural memory.

This study's insights into the respective positions of the films within the contested memory of East Germany have been underpinned by analysis of the ways in which

they seek to claim authenticity. This focus has been facilitated by bridging genres of memory. Documentary theorists have tended to critique conventions and practices according to a framework which questions the degree to which a film more or less ‘faithfully’ represents its subject. The very notion of authenticity can be put under the microscope as part of such enquiries, and the question emerges: can any representation achieve the level of truthfulness that the documentary mode’s reputation for (or the inherent presumption of) objectivity promises? A film’s ability to communicate its subject matter both effectively and ethically must be considered in answering this question. In this vein, Minh-ha – who is both a filmmaker and theorist – reminds us that for truth and meaning: ‘the two are likely to be equated with one another. Yet, what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than *a* meaning’ (92).

I have argued that the documentaries in this study are concerned with tensions between the individual and the collective. I found that *Einzelkämpfer* stitches together each of the individual, subjective interpretations of the GDR that emerge in the athletes’ testimony, and in doing so, it opens up the tension, narratively speaking, that lies in-between multiple meanings. Accordingly, I contended that the interweaving of multiple meanings and narratives invokes Lefebvre’s ‘polyrhythmia’. In chapter six, the discussion of ‘documentary authenticity’ that was initiated in the previous chapter is further developed. This line of questioning is enabled by *This Ain’t California*’s genre-defying formal characteristics, which blur the boundaries of truth and fiction. The vicissitudes of contested memory determine which particular narratives will receive popular attention. Efforts to address this fact form the kernel of both *This Ain’t California*’s and *Einzelkämpfer*’s approaches to their depictions of physical exertion in the GDR, which are synthesised into each film’s total impression, telling an embodied story of the GDR *as a whole* – placing individual bodies within a larger

collective body. It is a misconception to assume that singularised or generalised accounts of the past convey the broadest truths for the most people. The question of individual and collective experience under both the dictatorship, and following the *Wende*, also relates to issues of truth – and truth has a particular valence in the context of documentary film.

Over the course of this thesis's study of the three fictional narrative features, *Lenin*, *Novemberkind*, and *Der Preis*, I have noted where each filmmaker's efforts to represent heterogeneity in East German cultural memories may be seen as a positive development in representing the complexities of memory of the GDR. As Paul Cooke observes, 'inner unity' may not require individuals to possess identical biographies, but rather it may be found in a 'shared understanding of how to approach present-day society' (*Representing* 202). In other words, 'inner unity' as Anna Saunders contends, 'does not mean homogeneity', and we can therefore find that a 'growing recognition of biographical differences and experiences can only aid the unification project' (13). There is still room for greater sophistication in our understanding of the breadth of East German experiences. Where critical appraisals of the GDR's memory landscape may be exhausted by one-sided narratives, I suggest that films which tell nuanced stories of the GDR, of eastern Germany and of the temporal linkages between these, will be better able to speak to the profound, complex truths embedded in history and memory. That is to say, the social, cultural and political realities of both the GDR past and the *Wende* are messy and complicated, it follows that narratives about those places and events must reflect that complexity, or they will fail to approximate the whole story. In a contested memory landscape, dominant portrayals tend to skew towards simplistic master narratives that erode and silence those stories that are to be found at the margins. If we can, corporeally, apprehend film as being both a *function*

*of memory* and having memory *function within it*, then perhaps, based on the films analysed in this thesis, questioning and complicating memories will increasingly be found in film experiences, attesting to the same complexity in cultural memory.

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