

The Lives of Others

(Das Leben der Anderen)



Directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Starring:

Martina Gedeck, Ulrich Mühe, Sebastian Koch and Ulrich Tukur.

2006 Academy Award Winner for Best Foreign Language Film
2006 Los Angeles Film Critic Award for Best Foreign Language Film
2006 European Film Award for Best Film, Best Actor – Ulrich Mühe and Best Screenwriter
Winner of 7 Lola Awards (the German equivalent of the Academy Awards) 2006 for
Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor and
Best Production Design and Best Cinematography
Official Selection 2006 Telluride Film Festival
Official Selection 2006 Toronto International Film Festival

Running time: 137 minutes

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The Lives of Others (Das Leben der Anderen)

Cast

Christa-Maria Sieland
Captain Gerd Wiesler
Georg Dreyman
Lieutenant Colonel Anton Grubitz
Minister Bruno Hempf
Paul Hauser
Albert Jerska
Karl Wallner

MARTINA GEDECK
ULRICH MÜHE
SEBASTIAN KOCH
ULRICH TUKUR
THOMAS THIEME
HANS-UWE BAUER
VOLKMAR KLEINERT
MATTHIAS BRENNER

Crew

Director/Screenwriter

FLORIAN HENCKEL VON
DONNERSMARCK

Producers

QUIRIN BERG

Cinematography

MAX WIEDEMANN

Set Design

HAGEN BOGDANSKI

Costumes

SILKE BUHR

Make-up

GABRIELE BINDER

Casting

ANNETT SCHULZE

Editing

SABINE SCHUMANN

Music

SIMONE BÄR

PATRICIA ROMMEL

GABRIEL YARED

STÉPHANE MOUCHA

Director's Statement

German movies produced after the reunification generally, and strangely, depict the GDR (the German Democratic Republic or former East Germany) as funny or moving. Both my parents come from the East, so as a child, I was often in East Germany to visit friends and relatives. A cousin of my father's had been named chief of protocol of Erich Honecker, the East German head of state and boss of the ruling S.E.D party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany). Other people we knew had very normal jobs, yet one could see the fear in all of them, right up to the end of the regime. Fear of the Stasi (The State Security), fear of the 100,000 highly trained employees whose sights were trained on one thing: "The Lives Of Others": the lives of those who thought differently, who were too free spirited and above all, the artists and people working in the arts. Every aspect of life was recorded. There was no private sphere and nothing was sacred, not even one's closest family members. I met Stasi victims who had been jailed and harassed in Hohenschonhausen (where the central detention center of the Stasi was located). I asked "unofficial agents" about their activities and I talked to documentary filmmakers who had worked on these topics.

In the film, each character asks questions that we confront every day: how do we deal with power and ideology? Do we follow our principles or our feelings? More than anything else, **THE LIVES OF OTHERS** is a human drama about the ability of human beings to do the right thing, no matter how far they have gone down the wrong path.

--- Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Synopsis

At once a political thriller and human drama, *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* begins in East Berlin in 1984, five years before Glasnost and the fall of the Berlin Wall and ultimately takes us to 1991, in what is now the reunited Germany. *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* traces the gradual disillusionment of Captain Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Muhe, best known for his lead roles in Michael Haneke's *FUNNY GAMES* and as Dr. Mengele in Costa-Gavras' *AMEN*), a highly skilled officer who works for the Stasi, East Germany's all-powerful secret police. His mission is to spy on a celebrated writer and actress couple, Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck).

Five years before its downfall, the former East-German government (known as the GDR, German Democratic Republic) ensures its claim to power with a ruthless system of control and surveillance via the Stasi, a vast network of informers that at one time numbered 200,000 out of a population of 17 million. Their goal is to know everything about "the lives of others."

Devoted Stasi officer and expert interrogator Wiesler is given the job of collecting evidence against the famous playwright Georg Dreyman. The job begins after Lieutenant Colonel Anton Grubitz (Ulrich Tukur), a former classmate of Wiesler's who now heads the Culture Department at the State Security, invites Wiesler to accompany him to the premiere of the new play by Dreyman, also attended by Minister Bruno Hempf (Thomas Thieme). Minister Hempf tells Grubitz that he has doubts about the successful playwright's loyalty to the SED, the ruling Socialist Unity Party, and implies that he would approve of a full-scale surveillance operation. Grubitz, eager to boost his own political future, entrusts the monitoring, or "Operative Procedure," to Wiesler, who promises to oversee the case personally. Wiesler is also convinced that Dreyman cannot possibly be as loyal to the Party as has always been assumed.

However, Hempf's distrust of Dreyman is not politically motivated. Hempf cannot take his eyes off the attractive lead actress Christa-Maria Sieland, Dreyman's girlfriend.

While Dreyman is away from their home, his apartment is systematically bugged. A neighbor who notices the operation is forced to keep silent by a personal threat. Wiesler sets up his surveillance headquarters in the attic of Dreyman's apartment building, thus beginning Wiesler's cold and calculating observation of the lives of the playwright and his girlfriend.

At first Wiesler's observations show that, unlike most of his artistic peers, Dreyman does *not* display any outwardly disdain for the GDR. Dreyman's position slowly changes however, as he discovers that Christa-Maria has been pressured into a sexual relationship with Minister Hempf. When his close friend, theater director Albert Jerska (Volkmar Kleinert) is driven to suicide after seven years of unofficial "blacklisting" by the government, Dreyman can no longer remain silent about the GDR. Now determined to alert the outside world about the conditions of life under the GDR, he begins a plot to place an article with the famous West German publication *Der Spiegel*, exposing the GDR's policy of covering up the high suicide rates under the regime.

Wiesler, who has been monitoring all of Dreyman's activities, finally has the proof he needs to destroy his subject and to serve the GDR by foiling Dreyman's plot. But Wiesler's unemotional façade is showing signs of erosion. While he observes the day-to-day life of Dreyman and Christa-Maria, he begins to be drawn into their world, which puts his own position as an impartial agent of the GDR into question. His immersion in "the lives of

others,” in love, literature and freethinking, also makes Wiesler acutely aware of the shortfalls of his own existence.

When the anti-GDR article is published, the regime is thoroughly embarrassed and Grubitz is ordered to discover the identity of the article’s author. Dreyman is one of the prime suspects, but Grubitz cannot believe that the trustworthy Wiesler would have failed to discover the plot. At the same time, Hempf’s discovery of Christa-Maria’s drug addiction forces her to expose her lover as the author of the *Der Spiegel* article, but a search of Dreyman’s apartment does not yield any incriminating evidence. Convinced that Weisler knows more than he is revealing, Grubitz summons him to interrogate Christa-Maria in order to find the one item linking Dreyman to the *Der Spiegel* article. Wiesler, who has known all along about the source of the article and purposely failed to disclose the information to his superiors, must now decide where his allegiances lie. If he does not extract the information from Christa-Maria, his life and his career as an elite Stasi officer will undoubtedly be over. If he succeeds, Dreyman’s fate will be sealed.

In 1991, two years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Dreyman is in for a rude awakening when he runs into ex-minister Hempf and learns that he had been the subject of a Stasi surveillance. Immediately afterward, he finds the cables and microphones secretly installed years earlier behind the wallpaper in his apartment. In disbelief, he sets out to research and discovers the different reality of his past, which not only has a profound impact on his life but also surprises him with shocking revelations.

Background Information on the Stasi and East Germany

East Germany's secret police force, the Stasi, held power from 1950 to 1990. Established with Soviet help by German communists in the years directly following World War II, the Stasi was responsible for both political surveillance and espionage. The Stasi's intent was to monitor "politically incorrect behavior among all citizens of East Germany. At its peak the Stasi monitored roughly one third of the East German population, employing over 90,000 officers and hundreds of thousands of informants.

The rule of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED - Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) was based on a worldview informed by Marxist-Leninism and molded by class warfare. The Socialist Unity Party had expectations from "its people," which it laid down in the form of programs, plans, directives and clear restrictions, which resulted, for example, in political criminal law. The conceptual eradication of human individuality allowed the Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS) to categorize the "others," whom it interrogated and spied on, in order to transform them into objects of its hatred. The abbreviation "Stasi" was the SED dictatorship's secret method of repression.

In 1991, after the Berlin Wall fell, the Stasi was disbanded and the newly reunified government passed the Stasi Records Law, which allowed former East German citizens and foreign nationals to view their Stasi records. To date, approximately 1.5 million individuals had done so.

Starting in 1950, the Stasi intended to serve as a "loyal and effective partner" of the government, and was extremely efficient in penetrating the lives of citizens not only in East Germany, but also in West Germany and abroad. Approximately one in fifty citizens served the Stasi in some capacity, one of the highest penetrations of a society by any intelligence gathering organization.

To be arrested was seen as proof that one was an enemy or part of a hostile, negative "element." The Stasi understood its party program as an active and threatening involvement in the "lives of others," in order to change them radically when they no longer corresponded to the party's expectations.

The central detention center of the Stasi was in Berlin Hohenschönhausen and young interrogators were trained at the Stasi College. The term "Operative Procedure" was used by the Stasi to designate the highest level of monitoring of suspected individuals. (In *THE LIVES OF OTHERS*, the playwright Georg Dreyman is the subject of an "Operative Procedure.")

One typical "offense against the system," punishable by two years of imprisonment, was "illegal border crossing". Even planning and trying to "flee the republic" was punishable. The fortification of the inner-German borders and the Berlin Wall gave rise to escape agents from the West and whoever contributed to taking someone "abroad" was threatened with a sentence of up to eight years.

After the dissolution of the Stasi it was revealed that often times friends, colleagues, husbands, wives and other family members were routinely filing reports on one another, demonstrating the Stasi's grip over the populace.

During the regime's final days, the Stasi attempted to destroy their documents and files, even resorting to manually tearing apart pages when the task proved too great for machines. The new German government confiscated the approximately 33 million pages of trashed Stasi files and began the arduous process of putting them back together for public view, thanks to a declassification act passed in 1992.

After the Stasi's disbanding, declassified information revealed the breadth of Stasi activities in foreign countries. It was revealed that the Stasi secretly aided left-wing terrorist groups, such as the Red Army Faction; however their presence also accounted for the successful rescue of hundreds of foreign nationals, mostly leftist activists and politicians, in Chile after the Pinochet Coup in 1973.

Additional information on the Stasi and East Germany:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stasi>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/stasi>

<http://www.myspystory.com/>

<http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall

Thirteen Questions With Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Writer and Director of *The Lives Of Others*

1) Why did you want to make a film about the GDR? How and when did you have the idea?

It wasn't my intention to make a film "about the GDR". I was in my first year in film school, in late 1997. I was listening to a Beethoven piano sonata, and suddenly I remembered what Lenin had said about the "Appassionata" to his friend Maxim Gorky. He said that it was his favorite piece of music, but that in the interest of finishing his revolution, he did not want to listen to it any more, because it made him want to "tell people sweet stupid things and stroke their heads" in times when it was "necessary to smash in those heads, smash them in without mercy". I find that to be a terrifying quote. It shows so clearly how any ideologue has to shut out his feelings altogether in order to pursue his goals. Suddenly, in that moment, I understood that this was the true essence of ideology: the total dominance of principle over feeling. It became clear to me that one of the biggest challenge in life is finding the right balance between principle and ideology when confronted with a moral choice. Lenin had chosen one extreme: all principle, but in a way, his statement was also a beautiful testament to the humanizing power of Art.

So, I thought: What if Lenin could have somehow been *forced* to listen to the Appassionata, just as he was getting ready to smash in somebody's head? What if I could build a dramatic situation where Lenin felt that he *had* to listen to the Appassionata, because he was actually trying to listen to something else? As I was thinking about that, an image popped into my head. Tom Tykwer always said in interviews that the image of a red-haired girl running through Berlin just suddenly popped into his head, and I always thought that was simply a story he told the press. But suddenly that same thing happened to me, too: I "saw" a picture (actually even something like a medium close-up) of a man in a depressing room, with earphones on his head, expecting to hear words that go against his beloved ideology, but actually hearing a music so beautiful and so powerful that it makes him re-think (or rather: *re-feel*) that ideology.

I knew I was on to something and I let the information flow for a few minutes (my composer, Gabriel Yared, always says that artists are merely receivers, not creators), then sat down and wrote the story for "The Lives of Others" in less than three hours. It took me three *years*, however (one and a half years of research and one and a half of writing) before I had a draft that I felt was good enough to shoot.

2) Why did you choose 1984 as the year the film is set in ? Orwell?

If that were the case, , that would have been more of a subconscious motive. There were two other important reasons: Firstly, I knew the East Berlin of 1984 pretty well, if only as a child. And I wanted to use my personal experience. Secondly, 1984 was actually a year that, for the entire Eastern bloc marked a return to something closely resembling Stalinism. In February 1984 Yuri Andropov, the General Secretary of the CPSU, of whom many hoped that he would be a real reformer, died sixteen months after assuming office. Konstantin Chernenko rose to power. Chernenko was a disciple of Brezhnev, and in direct Stalinist tradition. Not so unfortunately for mankind, Chernenko's days were numbered, too. He died in March of 1985, after only twelve months in office, making way for Gorbachev, who really turned things around. The main storyline of my film ends the day Gorbachev's election is announced.

3) What are your personal memories of Eastern Germany?

In 1984 I was 11 years old and was living in (West) Berlin, a democratic island in the middle of the East. If we wanted to drive anywhere else in Western Germany or in Europe, we had to drive through the communist GDR. But we also often went there specifically to visit people. Since both my parents were from the East (my father from Silesia, which is now Poland; my mother born in Magdeburg, Eastern Germany) we had friends and relatives on the other side. My father's uncle was even chief of protocol for Erich Honecker's office. However, my parents, especially my mother, were on special Stasi lists. Since part of my mother's family had actually stayed in the East, while her part of the family had left before the Wall was built, I assume they were considered traitors to the communist cause. And since it was the Stasi that controlled the borders, she was subjected to particularly humiliating checks whenever we went over. At one time, she was held for hours, and strip-searched, which really amazed and shocked my brother and me. That people would have the right to undress my mother! She seemed so powerful to us. But now it was almost as if the Stasis were the adults, and my mother was the child! The experience taught me an important lesson about the very nature of totalitarianism.

Once we had managed to get to the other side, the fear continued: When we visited our friends in the East, I could see fear in their faces: fear of being seen with us, fear of what it could do to their lives and careers if this was reported to the Stasi. I remember those strange glances—they were looking to see who would be reporting them. It was an important experience for me as a child to see that kind of fear in adults. I never again had the feeling that adults were completely in control of everything. And it instilled in me a profound dislike of strong government.

4) What is fact, what is fiction?

The film is historically true in the way that a film like "Doctor Zhivago" is true about the Russian Revolution, or that "The Deer Hunter" is true about the Vietnam war. It is a truthful account, but not a true story. There was no Captain Wiesler in 1984, and there was no Georg Dreyman who wrote an article about suicide in "Der Spiegel".

However, there were plenty of stories that were similar. For example: An anonymous official from the East-German communist party published the so-called "Spiegel Manifesto" in 1978, in which he decried the deep level of corruption in the GDR government, and courageously called the GDR Stalinism and Nazism "twins". It drove the Stasi crazy that they couldn't find out who the insider was (in the end, they did find him, though). That, in combination with the fact that it became known after unification that the communist government had suppressed its suicide statistics, inspired me to come up with Dreyman's Spiegel article. Any technical aspects of Stasi work—from surveillance to the machines that can steam-open 600 letters per hour, right down to the odor samples—are of course authentic.

My research was extensive. I read the biographies of many great GDR writers and artists, talked to quite a few of them, and elements of their lives found their way into the characters and plot. I researched the GDR culture scene, politics and the Stasi for one and a half years before writing the first line of dialogue. I talked to Stasi officers and to their victims. Interviewed a former Politbüro member one day, and a group of former resistance fighters the next. The research was one big emotional and intellectual rollercoaster ride. All of these stories somehow influenced my film. I spent almost too much time with the realities. But in the end, I had reached a point where I knew that I would be able to create a fictional story that was somehow truer than a true story. I do believe that fiction can actually be richer in content

than fact. But perhaps that is a very German thought. The German word for fiction and poetry is "Dichtung", which actually means something like "Density".

5) Why do you think that writers and artists were so particularly interesting to the Stasi? Can you give me some examples of how writers were persecuted in the GDR?

The Stasi's declared goal was "to know everything". And they wanted to know it before it happened. Now, artists are unpredictable. The day an artist starts becoming predictable, he ceases to be an artist. But the Stasi never understood that. They thought that if 5 people monitoring a writer couldn't predict what he was going to do next, then perhaps 10 could, and so they just kept increasing the manforce.

There are so many horrifying stories that inspired me that I don't even know where to start. And there are many more I have found out about since then. For instance, only a few months ago, the great East German lyricist Günter Ullmann sent me his latest book of poetry with a dedication of thanks for "The Lives of Others". It included a text about how he kept being interrogated by the Stasi so brutally that he became completely paranoid. He could not understand where the Stasi had gotten its information about his most personal thoughts. When he had isolated himself even from his wife, and the interrogations still continued, he concluded that his dentist must have implanted bugs into his teeth. He went to another dentist and had all his teeth extracted, only to find out after unification, upon consulting his Stasi files, that his closest friend, Manfred Böhme, while encouraging him in his writing, had been informing the Stasi about his every move.

The East German writers Ines Geipel and Joachim Walther founded a documentation center called the "Archive for Persecuted Literature of the GDR". It documents how the poet Uwe Keller was sentenced to six years and eight months of prison in 1981, how Frank Romeiß got three years and six months for 12 poems the Stasi didn't like. How the writer Ralph Arneke was sentenced to one year and ten months simply because the Stasi found out that he had tried to publish a manuscript in the West. How Alexander Richter got 6 years in 1982 because his texts were considered "anti-state agitation". The list goes on and on and gets more depressing with every page.

6) Were there actual Stasi officers who worked against the system or who showed any kind of humanity?

The Stasi was an organization of almost 300,000 people; meaning there was most of everything, including –of course– officers that were disloyal to the system. In fact, they were a huge source of worry to Stasi chief Erich Mielke. Just to give you one example: While I was researching, I received a call from the Birthler Office (the administration of the Stasi files), telling me that in their archives they had found a recording that would interest me. It was a tape from 1981 with a sound recording of a short trial against Stasi officer, Captain (!) Werner Teske. He had been caught by his superior as he was looking at files that were none of his business. Not really a big crime. But his superior still brought him to trial, saying that the only way he could hope to save his position would be by talking completely honestly about what he had been reading and why. For some reason, Teske took his boss by his word and really did admit to everything that was on his mind – everything he had been reading in the files, all his doubts about the state, about the system, about his job. He even said he had thought about escaping to the West. It was devastating to listen to this honest, open, idealistic man talk himself to his own death. Because after that short trial, Teske was sentenced to death, and

executed the way disloyal Stasi officers were always executed: he was "shot into the back of the head at short range." All this only a few miles from where I was living at the time, completely unbeknownst to anyone. I'm sure part of Captain Teske entered Wiesler's character.

There were also funnier stories. In an article about my film published in 2006, "Der Spiegel" recounts of one of the Stasi officers who monitored Wolf Biermann (the greatest East German poet). The officer was so impressed with Biermann's poems (which he was forced to listen to via his headphones every day) that he actually started writing poems himself, and founded a Stasi Poetry Group. Regularly, these Stasi employees met to read each other their ambitious new poems –awful stuff, I can tell you, but touching nonetheless. Angry Stasi victims often referred to the Stasi employees who persecuted them as "Stasi pigs" ("Stasi-Schweine"). With his usual humanistic sense of humor, Biermann refers to this strange admirer as "mein Stasi-Schweinchen", "my Stasi piglet".

At the same time, it is important to stress, of course, that the majority of Stasi people did stay party-loyal. I hope and trust that the film makes that clear. Most of them, unlike Wiesler, did continue following their orders to the very end, and –this I know because I talked to them– still believe that what they were doing was right. It takes a lot of moral courage to allow yourself to acknowledge that the path you've been following most of your life is not the right one, and to begin your life's journey all over again. Not many people have that kind of courage. All the more do I admire Wiesler.

7) What makes the Stasi officer change?

Now there's a question I heard very often while trying to secure the financing for this film: "Where is the turning point? What is the one thing that triggers his change?". People read about the necessity for turning points in books about screenwriting, and somehow trust these books more than their own life experience. In my experience, when people change, there is never just one cause. Unless there is direct divine intervention there are always one hundred little things that together push a man into the same direction.

In the case of Captain Wiesler, the change actually begins very shortly after we enter the story. Already, going to the theater draws him out of his normal life. Then, the blows just keep coming. On the Stasi side, he sees that his friend from college days, Grubitz, who was always a little less intelligent and always a little less party-loyal, is actually having a far better career than he is. Wiesler realizes that people even somehow mistrust him because he is so politically correct (originally a Stalinist term, I've been told) and because he's so loyal. Also, he finds out that what he considered a sacred mission –finding dirt on a potential enemy of the state– was initiated simply to satisfy a Central Committee member's sex urges. This discovery constitutes his first direct encounter with the arbitrary use of absolute power. Then, when he begins with the Operation 'Lazlo' (did anyone notice the Casablanca wink?), he starts to get to know these people quite well, not just in an interrogation situation, but in every aspect of their lives. After a while, he starts asking himself: 'Are these people really the enemy? Is this what I've been fighting against all my life?' He experiences them as normal people, with their moments of greatness, but also their moments of weakness. And he also experiences people for whom art is something natural –a central, beautiful but also a very normal part of their lives. And this is the third level: Brecht, Beethoven (or rather: Gabriel Yared) –simply Art. He has never experienced anything like this before, at least not with the right kind of preparation.

And all these things together make him change. But he doesn't change into a white knight who draws his sword and starts fighting to save the maiden. At first, he is quite unwilling. He lets one thing go (Hauser's supposed flight to West-Berlin), then another, and almost grudgingly starts falsifying the reports. But the moment still comes where he goes to his boss and wants to betray Dreyman after all. He thinks the better of it, and continues protecting Dreyman. Only at the very end does he commit one actual, physical act of heroism. It takes him quite a long time. And it never feels heroic. I think that is one essential truth about heroism: it only feels good in retrospect.

8) *But do you really think the kind of extreme change you show in your film is plausible?*

Allow me to ask back: Would you think it possible that the same man who shed bitter tears at the death of 'little father Stalin' in 1953 would have become the greatest Anti-Stalinist in the history of mankind 30 years later? Well, that's the story of Mikhail Gorbachev. People do change. I have seen it happen.

9) *How did the German press react to your movie ?*

I was treated incredibly well by the press. All serious publications, FAZ, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Welt, Zeit, Spiegel, Focus –they all wrote reviews that could not have been more positive. There were actually three waves of reviews: First, the press asked the leading authors, freedom fighters and intellectuals of the former GDR to write about the film:–they all wrote impressive texts about the film, and their public endorsement and generous praise really helped me. Joachim Gauck wrote two pages about my film in "Der Stern" that were headlined: "Ja, so war es!" ("Yes, this is the way it was!"). GDR critic Wolf Biermann called it "insane and true and beautiful" and then said something really original. He said what had always driven him crazy was that these Stasi people knew everything about him (whether he had doubts about a poem, whom he slept with, and how long he brushed his teeth), but he did not even have a face to put to them. My film, he felt, had finally given them faces in his mind.

With the authenticity question thus out of the way, the film critics could write about "The Lives of Others" as a film, and those were the articles I enjoyed most. Because, at the end of the day, although I spent much time researching this topic, my true passion is films, dramaturgy, actors, psychology, not the Stasi or communism. I am not a preacher, nor a historian or politician but a filmmaker, a storyteller. I enjoy thinking and talking most about how to help actors live their art to the fullest, I spend my free time philosophizing about colors, shapes and beauty. Of course, the Stasi is an interesting topic, but the Story was there first. And that's what the film is really about.

Having said that, I was very glad about the third wave of articles that followed: Articles on the papers' Politics pages that talked about how "The Lives of Others" had caused a shift in how the Germans see the GDR, and had caused people to re-think the new German phenomenon of "Ostalgie" ("Ostalgia", a word made up of Nostalgia and the German word for East, which is "Ost". It is used to describe people's warm, nostalgic feelings for the good old GDR.)

10) *What do you think of "Ostalgie"?*

I think it is somewhat understandable, but definitely dangerous. Understandable because it is very easy to feel nostalgic for one's one past, and become confused: you think you're nostalgic

for a country and a system that has vanished, when actually what you're feeling nostalgic about is your own lost youth. But to show you the danger, too: The German writer and theater director Freya Klier did a survey among German adolescents, asking them if they thought the GDR had been a dictatorship. The overwhelming majority was surprised even by the question, and the answer was: "of course not". The Ostalgie Shows in German television and the nostalgic comedies in our cinema had been too effective in re-writing history, and portraying the GDR as a place of humor and humanity. I would hope that after my film, which was used by history and politics teachers in many schools, the results of that survey would be different. For not only was the GDR a dictatorship, it was a dictatorship that even called itself "dictatorship": "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" was the official Marxist term for the phase between "Capitalism" and "Communism" that the GDR never passed.

I think once the facts become known: The psychological torture of dissidents, the merciless killing of people who tried to cross the border, and the fact that the so-called "economic stability" was paid for in large part by the selling of political prisoners to the West –it becomes hard to stay ostalgie.

11) How was the public reaction in Eastern Germany?

The public reaction in the East was truly amazing. Ulrich Mühe, Sebastian Koch and I toured through the former GDR for two weeks when the film was released. And we were deeply touched by people's reactions (Sebastian always says that the goose bumps on his back have still not gone away). Viewers there were thankful that we had gone to such lengths to portray the GDR as it had really been, and were grateful that we had had taken the people and problems of the GDR seriously for a change. The Q&A sessions after the screenings went on for hours. And often we didn't even talk much, and rather just listened to people tell us their own terrible stories, often for the first time, and often in tears.

In a way, it was less emotionally exhausting to present the film in the West, because here people considered it to be more of a political thriller. They were not plagued by terrible memories or by guilt as were our viewers in the East. But the film was just as successful in the West as it was in the East, which is a very rare thing for any film in Germany, no matter what the topic.

12) Is it true that Ulrich Mühe, the actor who plays the Stasi captain, was under surveillance through the Stasi?

Most people working in the Arts and the Media were under surveillance, and so was Ulrich, who was a big star of East German theatre. He found out from his files that 4 members of his theater group from the Deutsches Theater in Berlin were actually spying on him. The administration of the archives was able to give him the real names (behind the code names) of only two of them. It was their assessment of his politically rebellious behavior that made the Stasi place Ulrich Mühe on a list of artists to be interned in an isolated camp. He also found out that his wife of 6 years, herself a famous actress of the East, was registered as an informer with the Stasi throughout all the years of their marriage unbeknownst to him

When people ask him how he prepared for the role, Ulrich Mühe answers: "I remembered".

13) Did other members of the cast or crew have brushes with the Stasi? How did it affect their work?

Oh, more than just brushes! With 300,000 people working in the system, you would have to be more surprised if someone working in arts or the media was never harrassed by the Stasi than if he was. Most of the East German members of my team had Stasi experience. I also offered several Stasi victims little parts as extras. They had great fun playing their former torturers, and it was quite useful to have them there to correct any little inaccuracies in Stasi behavior. The Stasi thug who opens Dreyman's apartment door with a crowbar, for instance, was a punk in the GDR whose life was destroyed by the Stasi when he fell in love with the "class enemy", a girl from the West who visited the East for her grandmother's funeral. The girl later immortalized their ill-fated love in the beautiful film "Wie Feuer und Flamme".

But just to give you an example of how their personal histories would affect people's work: The property master, Klaus Spielhagen, had been a property master in East Berlin, too. Around the time our film was set, he officially filed a petition to be allowed to leave the GDR. As a result, they black-listed him, and finally put him into Stasi prison for almost two years. He knew all these interrogation techniques first-hand, and found an amazing way of using his experience for the film: When I described to him what objects I needed –bugs, surveillance equipment, a room full of machines that steam-open letters etc. etc.– he took it upon himself not to re-create these objects (as prop masters usually do), but to find the actual original ones! He found collectors of Stasi electronics and convinced them to lend us their priceless possessions for the film. He even managed to have the Stasi Museum in Leipzig give us one of the original machines that steam-opened letters (600 per hour) for the final GDR scene. Even the jar that is used for the odor samples is an original (disgusting, but true!). Of course this was not necessary, but Klaus kept saying: "I don't want those SOBs to be able to fault us on anything!". I honestly think it helped the very intense atmosphere on the set that we knew we were using the actual tools of martyrdom. And for Klaus it was very empowering to be the one wielding them, this time.

I always believed that film is a kind of therapy. In this case it was a therapy even for us filmmakers.

Cast Biographies

Martina Gedeck (Christa-Maria Sieland)

Award-winning Martina Gedeck is one of Germany's most renowned actresses. Born in Munich, she studied at Berlin's Free University where she majored in drama and went on to develop a stage career all over Germany. In the early 1990s, Gedeck became a regular fixture in the films of the younger German generation such as "Maybe, Maybe Not", "Talk of the Town", "Life Is All You Get" and "Rossini", with the latter two earning her Lola Awards, (Germany's equivalent of the Academy Awards) for Best Supporting Actress. Gedeck made her international breakthrough with the hit film "Mostly Martha," for which she earned a German Film Award for Best Actress in 2002. Four years later she was nominated again for the German Film Award as Best Actress in a Supporting Role for the Berlin International Film Festival competition film "The Elementary Particles". Since THE LIVES OF OTHERS, Gedeck has worked on several European films including French director Francis Girod's "A Perfect Friend" and her next projects include Academy Award winner Marleen Gorris' new film, "Within the Whirlwind" in which she will play Eugenia Ginzburg, a Russian writer sent to a gulag in 1937. In addition to her acting duties, Gedeck has served on the 2004 Berlin International Film Festival jury.

Ulrich Mühe (Gerd Wiesler)

One of Germany's most acclaimed actors, Ulrich Mühe was born in Grimma in the former East in 1953. He trained as a construction worker before studying acting in Leipzig in 1975. He went on to join the ensemble of the Deutsches Theater, where he established his reputation as a prominent stage actor. Mühe appeared in a number of GDR films and TV productions before making his film debut as the lead in Bernhard Wicki's "Spider's Web" in 1989.

After the German reunification Mühe played leading roles in "Benny's Video", "Funny Games" and "The Castle" directed by acclaimed director Michael Haneke. Costa-Gavras cast him as the infamous concentration camp Doctor Mengele in "Amen", in a performance that drew him much praise. His role as Captain Gerd Wiesler in THE LIVES OF OTHERS earned Mühe a Lola Award, (Germany's equivalent of the Academy Award) for Best Actor.

Sebastian Koch (Georg Dreyman)

Born in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1962, Koch studied at the renowned Otto Falckenberg School in Munich and took his first steps as an actor in theater before making his film and TV debut. He has gone on to win several awards for his television roles and in 2002 and became the only actor to win two German Emmy Awards for different roles in the same year. In 2004, Koch portrayed the Nazi architect Albert Speer in Heinrich Breloer's three-part docudrama "Speer and Hitler: The Devil's Architect", which aired on the BBC. His recent film credits include "The Tunnel" directed by Roland Suso Richter, based on a true story of a group of East Berliners escaping to the west in 1961 and art house hit "Amen" directed by Costa-Gavras with his LIVES OF OTHERS co-star Ulrich Muhe. His upcoming projects include Paul Verhoeven's WWII thriller "Blackbook".

Ulrich Tukur (Lieutenant Anton Grubitz)

Ulrich Tukur was born in Viernheim in 1957 and worked as an accordion player and singer before taking up acting. In 1982 he made his film debut in Michael Verhoeven's "The White

Rose". Besides "The White Rose," Tukur is known for his roles in such acclaimed historical films as "Stammheim" (in which he played the terrorist Andreas Baader of the Baader-Meinhof gang,) "The Comedian Harmonists," "Bonhoeffer – Agent of Grace," Istvan Szabo's "Taking Sides" opposite Harvey Keitel and "Amen" directed by Costa-Gavras in 2002. He also appeared in Steven Soderbergh's "Solaris" opposite George Clooney and Natascha McElhone. Tukur's upcoming projects include Academy Award winner Marleen Gorris' new film, "Within the Whirlwind" with his LIVES OF OTHERS co-star Martina Gedeck. In addition, Tukur will be seen as Robert Schumann in "Clara," the new film by acclaimed director Helma Sanders-Brahms, about the lives of 19th-century composers Clara and Robert Schumann opposite Isabelle Huppert. Tukur won a Lola Award, (Germany's equivalent of the Academy Award) for Best Actor for his role as Lieutenant Anton Grubitz in THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

Crew Biographies

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (Director, Screenplay)

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (born 2 May 1973 in Cologne) grew up in New York and West Berlin. He studied Russian language and literature in Leningrad (which was renamed St. Petersburg during his stay), and went on to read Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Oxford University. In 1996, he took part in an essay competition and won a directing internship with Richard Attenborough on the set of "In Love and War". He then enrolled in a writing and directing course at Munich Film Academy, where he made several award-winning shorts. For his feature film debut *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*) he won the European Film Award 2006 for Best Film and Best Screenplay. The film has also been nominated for the Golden Globe and the Academy Award 2007 in the category Best Foreign Language Film.

Hagen Bogdanski (Cinematography)

Award-winning Hagen Bogdanski studied art and photography in Berlin where he was born in 1965. After completing his studies, he worked as an assistant cameraman and quickly became a prominent director of photography in the German film and television industry. Bogdanski has won the Kodak Advancement Prize twice and, for his work on *THE LIVES OF OTHERS*, was the recipient of the Lola Award (Germany's equivalent of the Academy Awards) for Best Cinematography.

Gabriel Yared (Music)

Acclaimed composer and Academy Award winner Yared was born in Beirut in 1949. After making his film debut in Jean-Luc Godard's "Every Man For Himself," Yared went on to write over eighty scores, becoming one of the film industry's most sought after composers. He has collaborated with Anthony Minghella on "The English Patient," "The Talented Mr. Ripley" and "Cold Mountain" and written the scores for Robert Altman's "Vincent and Theo," Jean-Paul Rappeneau's "Bon Voyage" and Jean-Jacques Beineix' "Betty Blue." A multiple award-winner, Yared won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for Best Score for "The English Patient," the British Academy Award (BAFTA) for "Cold Mountain" as well as the César (France's equivalent of the Academy Award) for Jean-Jacques Annaud's "L'Amant." He was nominated twice for an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for "Cold Mountain" and "The Talented Mr. Ripley." Most recently Yared has worked with Anthony Minghella again on the director's latest film, "Breaking and Entering."