

Confessions and the Stasi Files in Post-Communist Germany: The Modest Scales of Memory and Justice in *Traitor to the Fatherland*

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DESPITE THE LEGACIES OF TWO DICTATORSHIPS AND TWO WORLD WARS, OR POSSIBLY because of them, Germany's current approach to its criminal and authoritarian past is generally regarded as both 'unique' and 'exemplary' (Rosenberg 1). The Germans themselves, however, are far more critical of their track record in dealing with troubled historical legacies. For large sections of the population, the communist past is far from settled. Memory of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is twenty-five years on still divided between what Martin Sabrow at the Potsdam Centre for Contemporary History calls the 'memory of dictatorship', the 'memory of arrangement or accommodation' (*Arrangementgedächtnis*) and the 'memory of progress', the third least reputable memory strand still wedded to the now unfashionable notion that the GDR was a legitimate alternative to the West (Sabrow 18-20). Sites of memory, or what Pierre Nora has called 'lieux de mémoire', tend to fall into one of these three categories. Of these three, it is the middle form—memory of how citizens accommodated the regime in their everyday lives—that is currently thought to offer the most potential for exploring the East German past since it is best able to do justice to the multiplicity of ways in which the East German dictatorship was mapped onto individuals' lives. For instance, it allows us to prise open the sometimes rigid

relationship between subject and system, between lives and power, and to probe those unpredictable points of intersection when ordinary people became entangled in the workings of power and the state (Sabrow 19). Moreover, it permits us to explore the more modest, personal scales of memory, and justice, understood as both the personal recollections of individuals *and* the small but significant steps taken by each of these acts of memory.

In dealing with the legacy of its communist past, unified Germany has pursued transitional justice on a large, national scale through trials, purges and truth commissions. This work was enabled through the unprecedented move to open the archives of East Germany's infamous secret police, the Ministry for State Security or *Staatssicherheit* (the Stasi). The subsequent setting up of publicly-funded foundations such as the Foundation for Working Through the SED Dictatorship in 1998 has expanded the mission of memory into the area of memorialisation, commemoration and education and is additional testament to Germany's ongoing commitment to addressing the legacy of human rights abuses and violations from the GDR era. Key players more generally in the process of 'working through the communist past' have also been literature and film, both fictional and factual, as well as the media. Particularly literature and film lend themselves to a reckoning with the past on a small scale—often through their focus on biography and illuminating individuals' experiences of dictatorship. Throughout the nineties there was a far greater appetite for listening to the stories of the victims of the regime than the accounts of the perpetrators. Because so few officers of the Stasi were forthcoming with information about the operations of the secret police, it fell to the informants, those involved on a casual basis and often blackmailed or coerced into collaborating, to provide answers about the extent of the regime's network of secret surveillance and its effects on the population. Victims and the media demanded answers to these questions and expected confessions and contrition from informants, often under the harsh spotlight of televised encounters and public outings in newspapers. That perpetrators and collaborators resisted the far from neutral settings in which their confessions were supposed to be performed was disappointing but not altogether unexpected given the fact that many collaborators perceived unification in terms of a Western takeover or even worse still as a form of western colonisation.

Over twenty years later public attitudes to Stasi collaborators have slowly begun to change, and there has been a slight softening if not towards the Stasi's officers then at least towards their informants who were often pressured by the Stasi to sign up as collaborators. This is most in evidence in a number of recent documentaries, which have reopened the debates of the early nineties about betrayal and complicity and tackled the topic of the Stasi's informants in interesting new ways. The most

notable of recent contributions have been Annekatriin Hendel's two acclaimed documentaries about Stasi informers *Traitor to the Fatherland (Vaterlandsverräter)* (2012) and *Anderson* (2014). Hendel's work is all the more remarkable because at least one of these films, *Anderson*, deals with a well-publicised case of a literary informant who has hitherto been notoriously unwilling to give testimony and admit to any wrongdoing. In this essay I will investigate another less well-known case of a writer-informant detailed in the documentary *Traitor to the Fatherland*, which offers an example of a small-scale cultural intervention in the context of transitional justice in Germany.

Unsettled pasts are, of course, of concern to the interdisciplinary field of peace and transitional justice studies, which has developed models to describe the transformations of many post-conflict societies. Curiously, many of the most widely used terms in these fields—peace, justice, truth and reconciliation—came into wider currency only after East Germany had acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990. For over half a century, the German post-conflict context has been dominated by national traditions—the concepts of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and *-aufarbeitung*, 'mastery of the past' and 'working through the past' respectively, the latter being the term favoured by Theodor W. Adorno in his 1959 essay on National Socialism. German expressions such as these, however, present problems for comparative contexts, since they are, as Sabrow admits, largely untranslatable (23). Particularly, the German concept of 'mastering the past' reinforces the impression that traumatic pasts can be dealt with conclusively and fuels hopes that are, as Sabrow argues, 'no longer appropriate to our times' (23). Rather than replace both of these terms, I suggest augmenting the concept of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* with the more readily accessible, and more encompassing transnational vocabulary derived from transitional justice studies. In light of the seemingly intractable memory struggles in Germany mentioned above, it seems timely to argue the case for the usefulness of transnational 'grammars of transitional justice', to adapt a well-known phrase by legal theorist Elizabeth Hankins Wolgast, and to encourage a productive dialogue between memory studies and legal science. The vocabulary of transitional justice allows us, I would argue, to ask a slightly different set of questions.

Transitional justice aims to deliver retribution to the perpetrators, recognition to the victims, and a 'truthful and common public narrative of past wrongdoing' as Williams, Nagy and Elster argue in a recent book *Transitional Justice* (5). There is, as they argue, a 'complex politics of transitional moments [that] is mirrored in the complexity of normative standards by which we judge them' (5). In all accounts of transitional justice, restoring voice and dignity to the victims is a major normative

aim along with achieving a more just and democratic order (Arthur 357). Others such as Michael Humphrey include questions of social healing and social and economic justice within the purview of transitional justice according to the notion that 'revealing is healing' (Humphrey 111). Pablo de Greiff identifies a further goal in promoting reconciliation and bringing about attitudinal transformations that foster trust between citizens and in state institutions (48-49). Williams and Nagy remind us that each of these goals does not necessarily have to serve the other and that it may not be possible to achieve all these ends at the same time: truth may interfere with justice, or peace with justice (5). Inevitably there are 'inescapable trade-offs', (5) and securing peace and order may take priority over criminal justice, or justice may be traded off for truth.

As Jennifer Yoder has remarked, Germany has hitherto been seen as a case of truth *without* reconciliation (59). Reconciliation with perpetrators and collaborators has arguably been sacrificed in favour of an uncompromising search for truth. The German government's first truth commission, the 'Enquete Commission for the Working Through of the History and Consequences of the SED [Socialist Unity Party] Dictatorship in Germany', although it was conceived as a truth and reconciliation commission, quickly became a politicised bureaucratic and academic affair. It heard testimony from 327 experts and concerned citizens at 24 public hearings. But as Yoder has argued, it was never intended to become a vehicle for tackling reconciliation. Instead, it served 'as a fact-finding body free of emotionality' whose purpose was largely didactic and lacked 'public healing' (Yoder 77).

It is widely acknowledged that the German road to transition was paved by the foundational act of securing the archives of the *Staatssicherheit*, and the creation of a Federal Stasi Archive, and that this aspect of transitional justice in Germany has been exemplary, providing a model for lustration processes in the rest of Eastern Europe. This is the route best described in transitional justice studies by the concept of securing forensic justice. In reality, however, the salvaging of the Stasi's extensive archive has proved to have far greater impacts on justice. As Joachim Gauck, the first commissioner of the archive, and Germany's Federal President today, has argued, the declassification of the Stasi archives was not born out of a desire for revenge but motivated by the need to restore trust in public office holders and to ensure that the newly elected political executive powers effected a clean break with the dictatorial past (Gauck 279). Access to the Stasi files facilitated the flushing out of former collaborators among politicians, judges, teachers and academics, and, in combination with the lustration laws passed in 1992, prevented them from occupying positions in the public service. The bold act of declassifying secret files aimed to restore trust in the state and to serve the interests of truth-finding or

recovery on behalf of the victims by providing a tool for assessing injustices perpetrated against them and to assist with their compensation claims.

The secret police files have in turn provided a knowledge base for truth- and story-telling, both of which are crucial components of transitional justice, and can assist in restoring social equilibrium (Baines and Stewart 245). Here too the victims' rights were the main priority and they were firmly enshrined in the Stasi-Documents Legislation, along with the rights of historians, journalists and researchers to gain access to personal file material, provided they are considered to be 'persons of contemporary history'. According to the law victims are allowed unrestricted viewing rights but not perpetrators or collaborators, unless they also have a victim file. Informers' rights are curtailed, for instance, and while researchers can only make photocopies of victims' files with their permission they are allowed unlimited access to photocopies of perpetrators' files. With their emphasis on restoring dignity to the victims, the archives have thus far paid little attention to the rights of perpetrators and collaborators, and this has not changed substantially since the passing of the legislation.

While early debates about the GDR as a 'Stasiland' have pointed to the need to include other voices and topics—for instance memories that are perhaps more representative of the experience of average citizens—in terms of transitional justice, this poses a number of problems. The topic of the Stasi's comprehensive surveillance of society and the nature of its impact on everyday life, and that includes the enduring impact on victims' lives, is far from exhausted. Moreover, the process has to date afforded little opportunity for the voices of Stasi officers and informants to be heard and judged. Or, put another way, Germany has not been able to find a way to integrate former Stasi employees, officers and informants back into society without appearing to vindicate, or make peace with, the perpetrators. Germans have been accused, in the view of Ralph Giordano, of a 'second guilt' if they make their peace with Germany's second dictatorship as well as with the first, which was National Socialism (Giordano). And if we believe Hubertus Knabe, justice has not been served on the victims and the 'perpetrators' have not been called to account (Knabe). But as Katharina Gajdukowa has shown in the context of mediation sessions conducted by protestant church groups between victims and Stasi officers, both victim and perpetrators stand to benefit from a collective working through of their respective traumata. Victims have come away from such encounters re-empowered and better able to face their deep-seated fears of persecution. The process also allowed former Stasi officers, who found themselves 'in the role of scapegoat' of unified Germany, to feel as if their 'motivation for their violent actions' (319) and for collaborating has been acknowledged. In the mediation sessions this

was achieved through the narrative construction that collaborators too were, to some extent, victims in their own right, for instance they were victims of a 'history of misused ideals' (319).

Although the legislation covering access rights to the declassified Stasi files aimed at restoring trust in the state as well as civic trust, in practice, the perpetrators have for understandable reasons been marginal to official efforts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. However, experience in other contexts has shown that truth will not be served without, at some point, working with perpetrators, listening to their stories and learning from them. Neither will the goals of restoring civic trust among citizens be met in a country still divided in mentality between the capitalist west and the more socialist east. One way of rectifying this imbalance in the scales of justice, as we move beyond the immediate transition process, may be in power of story-telling. Since narrative—and biography, as I have suggested—is at the heart of the media of literature and film—it is through narrative that literature and film can make important small-scale contributions at the personal level to balancing the scales of justice. They can participate in processes of truth recovery, to be sure, but they can do so often at some remove from events. They can do so on many levels: at the level of factual truth, of narrative truth, understood as cathartic meaning making through stories, social or dialogic truth such as through debate, and lastly, of restorative truth (Chapman and Ball 10-11).

Early works of testimony by victims of the Stasi in the nineteen-nineties focussed almost exclusively on revealing the contents of their Stasi files. While dissidents such as Wolf Biermann, Reiner Kunze, Hans Joachim Schädlich and a host of others already knew that they had been under surveillance by the regime, they had not known the extent of the surveillance until they were allowed to see their secret police files. Having access to their files also allowed them to discover the truth about who had betrayed their trust among family, friends and colleagues. The files thus served as a type of forensic proof of state persecution and personal betrayal at a critical juncture in the transition to democracy. In making these secrets public by publishing excerpts from their files, and commenting on them, victims sought some public acknowledgment for their suffering.

Thus far however the files have found little use in relation to collaborators with the regime, apart from providing the public with hard evidence that individuals were collaborators. In a recent development, attention has shifted from regarding the files as proof that individuals informed for the Stasi to seeing them in more subtle and nuanced ways, for instance, as vital documents in wider processes of reconciliation and healing. In several recent German-language films we find instances of how the

Stasi files can aid reconciliation. The first film to acknowledge the centrality of the files in transitional justice was Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's international success *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006). It was also the first film to incorporate images from the Stasi Archives in a dramatic and highly emotional narrative coda at the film's end. In this final twist in the plot, the film's protagonist reads from his Stasi file and thus learns the truth about his wife's betrayal and the identity of the Stasi officer who saved him.

This trope of reading from the files has since been copied successfully in other feature films, as well as in documentary films. Particularly in the latter, secret police files play key roles, providing on-camera triggers for mental and emotional journeys of self-discovery and for reassessments of personal history. I want to suggest that at the heart of these journeys is a rather German 'scene of reading', a scene which could be considered as a type of foundational scene of truth and reconciliation. I contend that this scene is particularly German not because I want to argue the case for the national character of reconciliation cultures but because the major media of transition in Germany—the Stasi files—can be considered to have engendered a specific type of memory work, which we see reflected and repeated in literature, feature film as well as documentary. This is a rather different scene of truth-finding from the one, for instance, we have seen in Spain in recent years where the exhumation of mass Republican graves from the Franco era appears to have led to a 'forensic practice' or mode of memory and truth recovery (Colaert 103).

This German foundational scene, in which subjects are confronted with painful truths—factual or forensic truth but narrative and restorative truths as well—from their Stasi files, arguably has its own distinctive *mis-en-scène*. In its filmic form the scene serves to mediate truth recovery on behalf of victims and perpetrators as well as for the spectator, and it does so not through unearthing and exhuming bones, but through acts of reading and interpretation. These acts are in turn mediated through technologies of writing, as indeed are all acts of memory if we follow Derrida, and all efforts to retrieve the repressed contents of the unconscious (Derrida 85). We find that this scene rarely involves speech, dialogue, question and answer, and seldom includes public spectacle, performance or public exposure. It is for instance devoid of the very elements of public catharsis that have characterised the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and also bereft of any intent to humiliate the perpetrators or to discredit them. Instead, the scene is enacted for the most part as a rather private and solitary affair that performs the search for truth as an intensely introspective personal journey made possible, and bearable, through 'neutral' technologies of reading and writing. This scene, as I will argue, could be considered to constitute a symbolic 'lieu de mémoire' in collective memory of the communist

past in its own right that serves to focus memory recall of shameful acts in the past, to facilitate their re-enactment and to contribute towards psychic and social healing.

A recent example of this scene can be found in Annekatrin Hendel's critically acclaimed documentary from 2012, *Traitors to the Fatherland*. The film is a nuanced biographical portrait of the carpenter writer Paul Gratzik, who rose to fame in the mid-60s but fell from favour with the communist regime in the early nineteen-eighties. It was around this time that he took trusted friends into his confidence and confessed that he was a Stasi informant in a desperate attempt to free himself of the Stasi altogether. Gratzik was initially enlisted as an agent—his undercover name was 'Peter'—on the basis of his favourable ideological views in 1962 and remained registered until November 1984. For most of the 60s and 70s, however, Gratzik was a deeply conflicted and fairly unreliable source of intelligence for the secret police. He constantly had to be cajoled—sometimes with incentives and emotional blackmail and at other times with outright threats—into continuing his association with the Stasi. It was only on his second attempt to blow his cover in the presence of public figures like the dramatist Heiner Müller that the Stasi begrudgingly let him go.

Hendel's film illuminates Gratzik's life, past and present, and from multiple angles. It is a sensitive and affectionate portrait of Gratzik, the parvenu playwright and refugee from East Prussia who defied the odds and achieved national acclaim. It is also a portrait of Gratzik, the negligent father who sacrificed his children for his career, Gratzik, the young gigolo of actresses and opera singers, and Gratzik, the secret police informant, with a deadly secret for over twenty years. The film acknowledges that Gratzik was all of these things in the past but it also reveals much about who Gratzik is today, about the hermit Gratzik, who lives in a secluded dilapidated house in the German countryside, alone and dependent on social welfare and home-brewed alcohol. In this sense, the film documents the rise and fall of Gratzik from everyone's darling at the height of the Cold War to post-unification pariah and outsider in unified Germany. Gratzik might have been a collaborator with the communists but today he feels he is an outcast and anything but one of re-unification's winners. As Gratzik remarks at one point in the film, he has paid a high price for allowing himself to be instrumentalised by the regime and this price is plain for the viewer to see.

Hendel's documentary-making is for the main part interactive rather than observational and her aim is to reveal and to probe her subject gently rather than to confront, denounce or expose him. In exploiting the power of the camera to explore human subjectivity and fallibility, Hendel deploys her camera, in the words of

Michael Renov, as a 'kind of accelerator' (178), an 'incitation' (178) to Gratzik to tell the truth about his life, and, in particular, about his collaboration with the Stasi. The camera thus becomes, as Jean Rouch suggests, a 'kind of psychoanalytic stimulant' (quoted in Renov 127), creating conditions for the production of discourse that would otherwise not be possible. This power is clearly something that Hendel has to manage carefully, if her intrusive questioning is not to produce the opposite of what she intended.

In a brilliant opening sequence we see Gratzik's almost visceral response to Hendel's timid probing of the topic of Stasi collaboration. Gratzik, who is sitting opposite Hendel in a rowing boat, is defensive and angry. He threatens to jump overboard if Hendel does not desist from her questioning and announces that he had good reason to work for the Stasi, declaring: 'I have no conscience and no morality. At least not your morality'. Gratzik not only refuses to talk about his Stasi past, his views of communism have not changed in twenty-five years and he appears to have no regrets. As this sequence makes plain, Hendel is faced with a monumental task if she is to get Gratzik to tell his story on camera, even more so if she expects any admission of wrongdoing or expression of contrition. Her approach is to try and win him over gradually. Hendel introduces herself in a voice-over as an old friend and neighbour, which is a bonus, but like him she is an eye-witness of history as well—*eine Zeitzeugin*—and one with very different views on communism. We witness her in the film in various roles: as care-giver for the often ungrateful Gratzik, shopping for him and ferrying him to the hospital for tests and an eye operation. She even facilitates a reunion with his adult daughter and surprises him with a reconciliation with an illegitimate son he has never met. Hence, Hendel is far from the impartial observer of direct camera and her presence in the frame and just out of the frame ensures that the camera and the filmmaker both become participants in the truth and reconciliation process.

At the centre of the film is a scene of truth-telling, which revolves around a scene of reading. It occurs early in the film around the time Gratzik is reconciled with his daughter. He has reluctantly agreed to look at some examples from his Stasi file, which he has never seen before. The setting is a room in one of the few high-rise hotels in Dresden. The camera creeps up from behind Gratzik and Hendel who are sitting facing the large window looking out over Dresden's skyline, as Hendel hands him some Stasi files she has found in the archives. There is a close-up shot of the file and then a cutaway to Gratzik, now with his back to us, alone in the presence of the camera.

Gratzik is alone during the following performance of reading, although we suspect Hendel is not far away. Thus, the *mis-en-scène* allows for a complex interplay between privacy and voyeurism, secrecy and exposure, because, of course, the fact that he appears alone is a mere illusion of the filming process. At the start of the sequence and before he is left alone to contemplate the excerpt from his file, Gratzik claims that he cannot remember writing the report or the scene in question while still in the presence of Hendel. He is metaphorically still in the dark about his past, blinded to his own misguided actions and his betrayal of friends and colleagues. As he reads, now alone, the still-blind speaking subject, or in Lacanian terms, the subject of the enunciation, fails to recognise himself in the written 'I' on the page, in the subject of the statement. And yet, Gratzik no longer denies outright that he has written the report, which is a far cry from the opening sequence, and for the first time here he is prepared to suspend disbelief. His quivering voice as he reads underscores the undoing of the self. Painful though it is, he is forced to acknowledge the disparity between the linguistic shifter 'I' in his old reports and his speaking self in the present that makes him not quite the 'agent' of what he has written. To recognise the undercover agent he once was is thus to encounter the self as other.

Gratzik slowly starts to 'see' in the scene; he lingers at first on the surface of the Stasi text, mulls over its form and language, and expresses irritation that the report is badly written, as if reading from a more eloquent report would make things better: 'I wrote this report so badly or spoke it onto tape', he says. He passes judgment but only on its style calling it a 'bloody awful achievement as a report isn't it?' Style, as the text's surface or interface, is important as he clings to the hope that he might finally recognise himself in particular turns of phrase. But none of this produces any recognition until his reading finally succeeds in jogging his memory, and he recognises his signature at the end. Ironically, he recognises himself precisely in his undercover name, his Stasi pseudonym 'Peter'. The discourse of the Other, the unconscious, speaks to him from the past via his pseudonym, it interpellates him, and for a brief moment the scales of blindness fall from his eyes and he can see himself in the police informant he once was. He recognises his past self, as spoken to by the Stasi-propagated discourses of power and secrecy. Several times throughout the performance, his voice cracks, his hands shake and he wipes his nose. The scene of reading is one of deep affect and clearly unsettling as he is forced to admit he had betrayed the trust of one of his greatest idols in the postmodern playwright Heiner Müller. Despite Gratzik's distress, his shame remains contained by the privacy of the scene and the semi-intimacy of the hotel room. The setting safeguards his modesty and screens him from the loss of face that would surely result from public exposure. Tellingly, he now offers no more denials or excuses.

Through its poetics of surface and depth, fluid and solid states of being, the film alludes to the complex knotted set of entanglements of subjects like Gratzik in authoritarian systems of power. In the rowing scene at the film's start, Gratzik's denials of involvement with the Stasi are reinforced by his defensive corporal position. With his back to the front of the boat, facing Hendel, he rows forwards resolutely braced against the headwinds. The boat moves rapidly forward while he looks back, and the camera zooms in on his oars as they dip into the lake and unearth weeds which become entangled in them, only to slip from his oars' grasp and fall back below the water's surface. In the later scene of reading, which is also a scene of the unconscious, Gratzik faces uncomfortable truths about himself, is able to grasp hold of past entanglements with power and the state, and to fleeting break through his psychic defences against remembering.

In conclusion, as this film shows, the Stasi files represent a rich but still largely uncharted site of memory—memory on a small scale—which offers the possibility of bringing the diverse recollections of victims, perpetrators and collaborators into dialogue. If the files can be deployed as an aid to personal memory, even for those who collaborated with the secret police, and used to engender acts of confessions, expressions of contrition and regret, they can make a small but vital contribution to transitional justice. If they are able to foster recollection, recognition and a truthful rewriting of biographies among collaborators, the files may be one of Germany's most powerful mnemonic instruments. Where the files can prompt the recall of painful memories, often related to shameful acts of betrayal, and access the traces of a repressed writing, they can be used not to expose or shame collaborators but to give them a belated voice, allow them to tell their stories, and thus make a contribution to social healing. This occurs in the cultural medium of the documentary film rather than in legal courts of truth and reconciliation, thus showing that cultural materials are often able to achieve results in transitional justice that other more legal contexts cannot.

As Hendel's documentary makes plain, cultural forms of truth and reconciliation can continue to contribute to the processes of truth-finding commenced by the opening of the Stasi files twenty-five years ago. They can pick up where public debates left off after the immediate transition period and make some progress towards understanding the actions of collaborators and to reintegrating them back into society. They do so not by returning to the victims' narratives but interestingly to the unfinished business of the little understood scene of collaboration with power. As Gajdukowa's studies in the nineties showed, it is important for both victims and perpetrators to be able to agree on some shared understanding of the reasons

behind the moral transgressions of Stasi officers and informants. Some acknowledgement of the other's experience—such as misplaced idealism and faith in the lost ideals of international communism as in the case of Gratzik—is needed to permit the contours of a 'truthful and common public narrative of past wrongdoing' to emerge.

Hendel's film relativises Gratzik's stubborn refusal to confess to wrongdoing through her sympathetic exploration of the former Stasi informant's current living conditions. Gratzik might be unrepentant but he clearly has not derived any long-term social, political or economic benefit from his years of spying and collaborating; on the contrary, the post-unification public has hung him out to dry and forgotten about him. The film thus asks the spectator to weigh up the moral compromises of the past with the sorry state of Gratzik's life in the present. In addition to encouraging insight into the losses incurred by many Stasi informants after the collapse of the communist regime, retrospectively the film also manages to achieve what the public debates of the nineties on the whole failed to deliver: a painful, honest and contrite working through of wrongdoing on the part of the perpetrators and a compassionate witnessing of their stories.

When faced with the sheer evidentiary force of the Stasi files he once wrote in the unthreatening and dignified space granted him in the film, the former Stasi collaborator Paul Gratzik is able to enact a confession that he failed to make in the years prior. Gratzik's journey in the film takes him from blindness to sight, denial to confession and, ultimately, to partial reconciliation with his past. More confessions follow in the film after his cataract operation, and reconciliation is enacted with some family members. Gratzik achieves flashes of what Caroline Wake has called 'emotional copresence' (Wake 113) with his past—and begins the slow and painful work of acknowledging his complicity with dignity. We the spectators in turn become witnesses to his contrition, gain insights into Gratzik's psychological and ideological motivations and ultimately a more empathetic understanding of the messy lives lived under communism. At the end there is still much unfinished business, as Hendel suggests: Gratzik has another daughter that he has never seen, he has not apologised to those he betrayed, not confronted his former lovers or other eye-witnesses seen in the film, some of whom are disgusted by his past actions. He has not begun to build the bridges his secret police work has so effectively and enduringly destroyed. And perhaps the final message of the film is that it is unrealistic to expect that he ever will. As the closing sequence highlights, Gratzik still believes that the grand dream of communism has not failed, a view that puts him at odds with the majority of his German and international viewers, and with the filmmaker herself. However, at the end, the film seems more reconciled to

Gratzik's extreme political views, which do not seem so shocking as they did at the start. The scales of justice, which have shifted back and forth throughout the film, mobilising emotions both for and against the accused former Stasi spy, have stopped vacillating. They have come to rest tipped slightly more towards the perpetrators than they were at the start, and have thus paved the way for the gradual integration of Stasi collaborators back into the collective fold.

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