

Das Leben der Anderen

(The Lives of Others)

Germany 2005/06.

Director: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck.
137 mins. German with English subtitles .



1. What is the film about?

This highly acclaimed, multi-award winning debut feature (2006 "Oscar" for Best Non-English Language Film) deals with the devastating impact of surveillance by the Stasi, the East German secret police, on the lives of artists and writers in 1980s GDR. An actress and her playwright partner, intellectual stars in the former East Germany, are spied on by secret police under orders from the Ministry of Culture. As the story unfolds, not only do the lives of those under surveillance change tremendously, but also the life of the spying Stasi agent, and the collision of their lives leads to a dramatic climax. "A suspenseful thriller with a complex and powerful moral drive ..." (The Guardian)

2. Characters in the film

Georg Dreyman - a successful playwright

Christa-Maria Sieland - actress and Dreyman's girlfriend

Albert Jerska - a theatre director, who is banned from his profession for being critical of the system

Paul Hauser - a dissident and confidant of Dreyman

Gerd Wiesler - Captain in the Stasi who is in charge of the surveillance operation

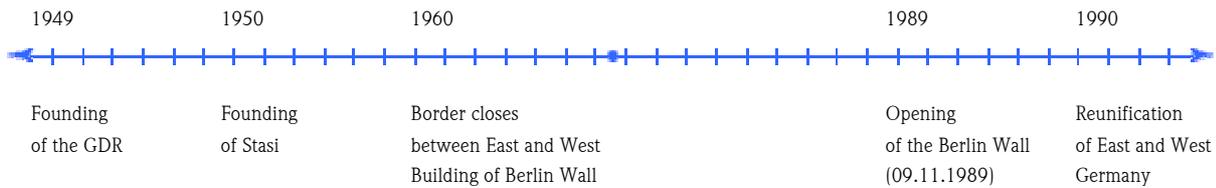
Anton Grubitz - a Lieutenant Colonel who is a careerist in the system

Bruno Hempf - Minister and member of the SED's Central Committee; he orders the surveillance of Dreyman

3. Background information

The GDR

After World War II Germany was divided into two parts the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the West and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East. The German Democratic Republic existed from 1949 to 1990. The GDR's aim was to build a socialist society and it was closely allied to the former Soviet Union. East Berlin was its capital. After initial openings of sections of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, elections were held on 18 March 1990, and the governing party, the SED, lost its majority in the Volkskammer (the East German parliament) . As a result the German Democratic Republic officially ceased to exist and unification took place in 1990.



The STASI

The “Stasi” (Staatssicherheit) was both the domestic and foreign state security body, the secret police, and the official intelligence organisation of the GDR. It was founded by the Communist Party SED on 8 February 1950 in order to protect and enforce the interests of the party. The main duty of the Stasi was to eliminate any political beliefs which opposed Communist ideology, to arrange political operations (**‘Operativer Vorgang’ (OV)**) against opposing powers and to detect politically unacceptable behaviour amongst the citizens of East Germany. In order to get as much information as possible and to expose people who had thoughts and opinions that were critical of the regime, the Stasi spied on people and many households were bugged. The Stasi also used heavy-handed methods such as intimidation and blackmailing in order to demonstrate its power and to make it clear that an adversarial attitude against the GDR would result in serious consequences (arrest, fines, expulsion from country, etc.).

Unofficial Staff within the STASI

Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter (IM)) (non-official staff) - colloquial called “Spitzel“ (grass) – were people recruited from professional, private and recreational areas of social life, if the required information was not obtainable officially. The majority of IMs worked more or less voluntarily with the Stasi – either because of political beliefs or because they benefited professionally or privately from it. However a lot of people were also pressured to spy on family and friends (see **“Stasi”** above). While 91.000 people worked officially for the Stasi about 170.000 people were worked as IMs.

Art and Culture – Freedom and Censorship

Art, Theatre and Literature were highly important in the GDR and the scene was very active and dynamic. They were also taken very serious by the government, which supported and also funded the arts. Theatre and cabaret had an especially important status for the people in the GDR. Plays could be used as an alternative forum for debating contentious issues within the GDR which other media could not. Therefore the Arts and Culture were a main focus of the Stasi.

Some Links for further exploring background issues of this film:

[http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/OLS9BA,0,0,Das Leben der Anderen.html](http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/OLS9BA,0,0,Das%20Leben%20der%20Anderen.html)

<http://www.filmeducation.org/livesofothers/guide.html>

<http://www.deutsche-geschichten.tv>