Watch, Follow, Sabotage: Themes of Stasi Surveillance in the Queer East German Films Coming Out and Die andere Liebe

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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Watch, Follow, Sabotage: Themes of Stasi Surveillance in the Queer East German Films

*Coming Out* and *Die andere Liebe*

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

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Julia Goncalves

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ABSTRACT

The Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, Stasi, conducted constant and relentless surveillance on the citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), whom it perceived as political threats to the regime’s stability. After organizing and pushing for public visibility, gay East Germans quickly attracted the attention of the Stasi. Even though the East German state regarded homosexuality as a taboo topic, it became the subject of a 1988 documentary, Die andere Liebe, and a 1989 full-length feature film, Coming Out. These films focus on the hardships that gay East Germans faced in a society of compulsory heterosexuality. Existing scholarship on the two films critiques the homogenous, monogamous presentation of gay men, analyzes East Germany’s ambivalent relationship to its gay citizens, and describes the use of shame as a method of self-policing. Offering a new reading of these two films, this thesis unites both the cinematic presentation and real-life experiences of gay East Germans to argue that these films allude to the omnipresent Stasi surveillance apparatus through their cinematic techniques and narrative structures. While any direct criticism of the Stasi would have faced immediate censorship, the films use subtle tactics, such as camera positioning and tracking shots, to evoke a sense of surveillance. Using Michel Foucault’s theory of Panopticism, I examine prominent sequences and narrative elements from the films. This new reading demonstrates how the films utilize Brechtian alienation effects to draw attention to their presentation of the “normal.” This cinematic reflexivity encourages audiences to question not simply what the films show but how. The films construct the gay body as an object of surveillance; this thesis argues that the gay East German figure has become a subject of visual curiosity both on the streets and on the screens.
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INTRODUCTION

Tracked, monitored, medically sabotaged, and seduced by an operative for the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, the Stasi—this was the story of Eduard Stapel, a Protestant priest and activist in East Germany’s gay rights movement. Codenamed “After-Shave,”1 the Stasi operation that focused on Stapel yielded thousands of documents that demonstrate the drastic lengths to which state operatives went to interfere directly with gay activism in East Germany.2 While Stapel’s story showcases a more extreme version of surveillance and intervention, gay communities nevertheless endured vast and relentless scrutiny from the state.3 Seen as incongruent with a socialist identity, homosexuality became synonymous with deviance, laziness, and immorality. In 1958, Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), issued the “Ten Commandments for the New Socialist People,” which commanded “Du sollst sauber und anständig leben und Deine Familie achten”4 (You should live a clean and decent life with respect for your family). During times of political instability, officials often used the policing of homosexuality as a way to reignite beliefs in sexually productive, socialist society.

For most of the German Democratic Republic’s (GDR) forty-year existence, the government deemed gay activist groups a serious political threat to the regime’s legitimacy. The GDR, historian Jennifer Evans argues, “feared narcissistic, sick, inward-looking men who ignored both their productive and reproductive responsibilities and who might lead lives outside of the purview (and control) of the regime.”5 However, in the mid 1980s, the GDR began to

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1 Stapel, Warme Brüder, 18.
2 Armstrong, “Homosexuality Under Socialism,” 9,12.
3 Armstrong, 12-3.
4 Ulbricht, Zehn Gebote.
5 Evans, “Decriminalization, Seduction,” 555.
institute more liberal policies that the Stasi hoped would “…be an effective strategy to suppress gay and lesbian political organizing.” Moreover, greater gay visibility in the public sphere offered the Stasi increased surveillance opportunities.

The notion of accepting homosexuality eventually entered the cinematic mainstream when the short documentary Die andere Liebe (The Other Love) and the full-length feature film Coming Out premiered respectively in 1988 and 1989. These films explore how gay East Germans grapple with their sexuality in a society of compulsory heterosexuality that aggressively discriminated against, ostracized, and policed non-conforming populations. Existing scholarship on this topic documents the ambivalent relationship East German authorities shared with the country’s gay citizens. Scholar Kyle Frackman astutely contends that even though East Germany decriminalized homosexuality before its Western counterpart, homosexuality was generally unwelcome in the public sphere and often seen “through the lens of homophobic anxiety.” Both Frackman and Josie McLellan argue that these films show only a small sliver of the gay community: male, straight-presenting, monogamous, and non-effeminate.

Additional scholarship—not concerning the films—focuses on the extensive Stasi surveillance gay communities endured from the GDR’s conception till the fall of the Berlin Wall. Given access to the files the Stasi kept on him, Eduard Stapel created Warme Brüder gegen kalte Krieger in which he published original copies of the Stasi documents alongside his own commentary. Another example appears in Eike Stedefeldt’s striking interview with Wolfgang

6 Huneke, States of Liberation, 215.
7 Frackman, “Persistent Ambivalence,” 686.
8 McLellan, “From Private Photography,” 422.
10 Stapel, Warme Brüder.
Schmidt, a former employee of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit. Schmidt details his involvement in the surveillance of homosexual groups within the church and outrightly claims that the Stasi’s goals were simply political and not motivated by sexual persecution. These sources reveal only a sliver of the extensive Stasi surveillance apparatus that accumulated thousands of documents during its existence.

Building upon these cinematic and historical foundations, this research seeks to augment, as John Armstrong claims, “The field of gay GDR history [which is] in its infancy.” This thesis departs from existing readings of Coming Out and Die andere Liebe. This new reading bridges the gap between these scholarly literatures to show how these films directly connect to the lived experiences of gay East Germans—life under surveillance—and subtly subvert the surveillant state apparatus through formal elements. Subtlety was key as any attempts at explicit commentary on the police state and its repressive tactics faced censorship. For instance, as historian Samuel Huneke notes, during the production of Coming Out “bureaucrats insisted that a scene in which police officers raid a cruising area be cut.” McClellan adds that the film only began production after being “personally approved by Kurt Hager, the Politburo member responsible for culture” with a guarantee that Heiner Carow would direct the film. Nevertheless, Carow faced constant scrutiny throughout his career at the Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA) where an Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (unofficial collaborator for the Stasi) “‘Wassili’ berichtete besonders intensive über Heiner Carow” (Wassili reportedly very

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Historian David Dennis notes that Carow, a committed member of the SED, nevertheless “resented state interference in the creative process” and attempted to work within the system to “articulate his urgently felt personal and political concerns.” Despite the harsh internal surveillance, Carow called for a new form of cinema that dealt with real people and their emotions, thereby launching “a subtle attack on the officially prescribed socialist-realist approach to art that had dominated DEFA films since the early 1950s.”

To avoid forced censorship by DEFA, *Coming Out* and *Die andere Liebe* encode critiques of the Stasi in their formal elements—shot composition, shot length, and camera positioning, and particularly narrative structure—whereby certain film sequences conjure a sense of surveillance and allude to the omnipresent state security apparatus. While the medium of cinema is inherently surveillant, especially in expository documentaries, these particular scenes employ technical elements that call attention to form; this cinematic reflexivity urges viewers to engage with the work on a deeper level than simple visual presentation because it is “at base a communication…from the work and its makers to audiences.” These technical elements include tracking shots in which cameras follow gay characters throughout space and peculiar camera shots that suggest the camera’s desired invisibility from its captured subject. For both *Coming Out* and *Die andere Liebe*, I examine a few key scenes from each film that demonstrate how themes of surveillance manifest themselves within the film’s form and narrative elements.

Before analyzing the film sequences, I briefly overview homosexuality’s historical role within German society from the country’s inception in 1871 to the liberalizations made in East

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16 Dennis, “Heiner Carow’s Third Way,” 68.
17 Dennis, “Heiner Carow’s Third Way,” 66.
Germany in the late 1980s. This overview demonstrates that East Germans’ anxieties about homosexuality were simply the latest addition to a long series of homophobic attitudes in German history. After reviewing the historical context, I briefly summarize the content and prominent scholarship of Die andere Liebe and Coming Out. Thereafter, I recount important scenes and narrative structures from Coming Out and Die andere Liebe and explore how they allude to the omnipresent Stasi surveillance apparatus. Any translations within this text are mine unless otherwise noted. Throughout this research, I utilize the gender-neutral word “gay” as opposed to queer since according to John Armstrong the latter “carries a connotation of inclusivity” that was “not a concept that would have been used by East Germans.”

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALIZING HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE GDR

Historical Overview

To understand the context in which these films emerged, one must first understand the dynamic role homosexuality played within East German society. Germany had long criminalized homosexuality. After Germany’s unification in 1871, the Reichstag passed §175, which targeted and outlawed homosexual acts between men.⁰² Since prosecutors had to prove intercourse occurred, actual convictions under §175 remained fewer than 1,000 per year until 1935.⁰²¹ Nevertheless, gay subculture grew, as did pushback against the harsh legislation. In 1929, Reichstag committee members proposed a bill that would decriminalize homosexuality—excluding instances of prostitution and abuse—and increase the age of consent to twenty-one, seven years older than the consensual age for heterosexuality. However, the bill never became law.⁰²²

In 1935, all steps towards decriminalizing homosexuality ceased. Despite the history of homosociality and homosexuality within the right-wing Freikorps²³ and the Nazi movement, the Nazi regime passed legislation that intensified §175.²⁴ Furthermore, historian Dagmar Herzog notes that “Nazi leadership was tremendously anxious that it not be perceived as ‘queer,’ internationally or domestically.”²⁵ The vague language of §175 criminalized any fornication between men, which subsequently, made any type of suggestive interaction dangerous and

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⁰² Armstrong, 2.
⁰²¹ Huneke, States of Liberation, 24.
⁰²² Huneke, 28.
²³ See Klaus Theweleit, Male Fantasies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
²⁵ Herzog, Sexuality in Europe, 73.
punishable.\textsuperscript{26} After 1937, the number of prosecutions under this sharpened law increased considerably, totaling more than 100,000 prosecutions by the end of the Second World War. Nazi authorities sent half of these men to prisons or concentration camps where they endured horrific torture and experimentation.\textsuperscript{27}

After the fall of the Third Reich, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) kept the Nazis’ intensified law while the German Democratic Republic (GDR) reverted back to the earlier version of §175. However, the GDR retained a portion of the Nazi law, §175a, that, as Evans notes, forbade “male prostitution and intergenerational sex” because authorities believed that §175a sought to protect young men from “unnatural sexual experimentation at the hands of the preying homosexual.”\textsuperscript{28} With the death of Stalin and the East German workers’ uprising in 1953, East Germany cracked down on dissent and attempted to cloak itself in Communist beliefs about the sanctity of the family, thereby launching an attack on homosexuality.\textsuperscript{29} Evans convincingly argues that “GDR leaders in the 1950s marshaled homophobia to project a sense of normalcy during moments of intense sociopolitical modernization and change to rid themselves of dissenters within the leadership.”\textsuperscript{30}

Eventually, liberalization arrived in the GDR; in 1968, lawmakers officially decriminalized homosexuality.\textsuperscript{31} They rewrote §175 into §151 which effectively outlawed homosexual relations between adults and minors and raised the age of consent for homosexual sex.\textsuperscript{32} The gender-neutral language additionally targeted women, which, as Huneke highlights,
made §151 “the only statute in modern German history to criminalize any lesbian act” with “no obvious reason for why lesbians were suddenly also subject to a higher age of consent.” While this monumental victory for gay East Germans did not remove homosexuality’s societal stigma, it did remove the law’s power over sexual deviance. Evans maintains that lawmakers’ decision to decriminalize relegated homosexuality to “sociologists and criminologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists,” thus making homosexuality “less of a legal issue than a medical one.”

However, even with these restrictions and the pathologization of homosexuality, the decriminalization of homosexual acts between adults paved the way for gay activism in the 1970s in the GDR.

Gay activism behind the Iron Curtain did not exist inside a socialist vacuum. While the Berlin Wall restricted physical movement, ideas nevertheless permeated through the barrier. McClellan convincingly argues that West Germany’s “social, cultural and even political upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s left their mark on Eastern Europe too.” When West Germany decriminalized homosexuality on May 9, 1969, an avalanche of gay media and publications began, including Rosa von Praunheim’s film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt (It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives).* As Herzog notes, this film “was a movie by homosexuals for homosexuals” that nevertheless “[opposed] the prevailing subcultural strategies of conformist passing and furtive anonymous sex.” The filmmakers sought to disseminate the film and spark widespread

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33 Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 144.
34 Evans, “Decriminalization, Seduction,” 561.
35 McClellan, “Glad to be Gay,” 105.
36 Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 223.
37 Herzog, 223.
conversations about homosexuality. Rosa von Praunheim’s film thrust the topic of homosexuality onto the political stage and increased the visibility of the gay rights movement within West Germany.\textsuperscript{38}

Because East German gay activists maintained contact with West German gay activists and generally had access to Western television and literature, this film’s premiere did not go unnoticed by East Germans. With a smuggled West German magazine called \textit{him}, a young Michael Eggert discovered the film’s impact in the West and hoped, with his friend Peter Rausch, to begin a similar gay activist movement in the GDR.\textsuperscript{39} The film eventually appeared on the West German channel ARD, which was widely available to viewers in the GDR. Informed of the movie’s airing by Western activists, Eggert arranged for a group of friends to watch it. McClellan writes that “this evening came to be known as the official foundation of the HIB” (\textit{Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin}).\textsuperscript{40} The group sought to create a community for gay East Germans, improve their social and political situation, and, through education, increase their visibility in society—something that the East German government had long ignored.\textsuperscript{41}

Due to the group’s inherently political nature as an organization that sought fundamental change in the GDR, HIB attracted the Stasi’s attention as a potential threat to the state even though, as Armstrong notes, “gay East Germans generally considered a gay identity to be compatible with a socialist one.”\textsuperscript{42} Taking a proactive approach, the Stasi infiltrated these gay rights groups early in their inception and often blackmailed and bribed members to become

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{38} Herzog, 223.
\bibitem{39} McClellan, “Glad to be Gay,” 109.
\bibitem{40} McClellan, 105, 109.
\bibitem{41} McClellan, 113.
\bibitem{42} Armstrong, “Homosexuality Under Socialism,” 8.
\end{thebibliography}
Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (unofficial collaborators, IMs). Historian Günter Grau uncovered Stasi documents that overviewed the state’s plan of action to unravel the gay community’s political movement, in which Stasi operatives state concrete goals such as “Gewinnung von Schwulen und Lesben als inoffizielle Mitarbeiter, Nutzung vorhandener IM, um den innerkirchlichen Widerstand gegen die homosexuellen Gruppen zu stärken” (Recruiting gays and lesbians as IMs, using existing IMs in order to strengthen resistance within the church against homosexual groups). A famous example of this cooption and infiltration comes from a prominent trans figure in East Germany—Charlotte von Mahlsdorf—who also appears in Coming Out as a barmaid. In the museum she ran in East Berlin’s Mahlsdorf district, von Mahlsdorf often hosted meetings for the HIB, but even she, for a short while, informed on the group for the Stasi. In their essay “Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin,” Kay Nellißen and Kristine Schmidt highlight the ubiquitous surveillance by discussing a photographer who attended many HIB events, took photos, and sold them to interested members. Unbeknownst to others, the photographer forwarded these photographs directly to the Stasi.

In addition to infiltration, Stasi members frequently sabotaged the events and meetings of gay activists. Ursula Sillge—a prominent lesbian activist—organized a meeting for East German lesbians that would take place at von Mahlsdorf’s Gründerzeit museum. However, having prior knowledge of the meeting, the Stasi physically forbade the women from entering the museum. The women reorganized and met in smaller clusters at local restaurants and cafes, which meant

43 Armstrong, 12.
44 Thinius, “Erfahrungen schwuler Männer,” 24-25.
45 Frackman, Coming Out, 40
46 McClellan, “Glad to be Gay,” 113.
that “The gathering went ahead, but in a fractured, and therefore less potent form.” Armstrong asserts that the Stasi’s desire to eliminate gay activism rooted itself not entirely in homophobia, but instead their “primary motivation…was a desire to quash any political or social power they would have had as an organized group, rather than an aversion against gay men and lesbian women.”

Nevertheless, gay activism continued in East Germany into the 1980s and flourished underneath the umbrella the Protestant church. Organized religion’s adversarial relationship with Socialism made it a haven for ostracized and oppressed social groups. By no means did this protection from the church result in mass adoption of Protestant beliefs, and in the end, only about 10% of the East German gay activists actually identified as being Christian. While not all activists endorsed this close relationship with the church, they used this opportunity to further their agenda, which resembled HIB’s—“consciousness-raising, emotional support, and political action.” However, these gay activists endured intense and unrelenting Stasi surveillance because, as political scientist Jason Johnson contends, “Even in the 1980s, the infamous Ministry for State Security (MfS or Stasi) saw them as an existential threat to the country.” For instance, Eduard Stapel, a Protestant priest and activist, founded a homosexual working group in Magdeburg, Germany in 1983, and the Stasi files reveal the rampant paranoia officials harbored

49 Armstrong, 13.
50 Armstrong, 13.
52 Armstrong, 9-11.
53 Lemke and Borneman, Gay Voices, 65.
54 Johnson, “Homosexual People Do Not Stand Outside,” 42.
toward the gay community. According to the Stasi reports, Stapel was considered to have become “‘zu einer zentralen Figur der Schwulenbewegung’” (a central figure of the gay movement). Therefore, the Stasi decided that “‘Darüber hinaus müssen eine Reihe bekannter homosexueller Personen aufgrund ihrer politisch-negativen Einstellung...als potentielle Straftäter...angesehen werden’” (Additionally, a number of well-known homosexuals must be viewed as potential offenders due to their politically-negative attitude). Because these activists publicly organized, the Stasi saw them as potential criminals who could destroy the GDR with their non-conforming ideologies.

Surprisingly, this perception helped improve the social situation. Armstrong notes that the East German government conceded to the demands of these organizations based “on a desire to bring gay groups and activism further into the public sphere and therefore more securely under the control and surveillance of the Stasi.” This activism and an increasingly accommodating East German population rapidly transformed homosexuality’s role in East German society from illegal to, if not fully accepted, at least tolerated. Benefitting also from the reform in the Soviet Union and Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika, this liberalized environment created a context more amenable to the expository documentary film Die andere Liebe and the full-length feature film Coming Out.

Film Background and Criticism
That rapidly changing environment reflected itself in the GDR’s film as directors began to engage with topics outside of the conventual. Created by the Deutsches Hygiene Museum

56 Brühl, 124.
57 Stapel, Warme Brüder, 31.
(DHMD, German Hygiene Museum) in Dresden to educate the GDR’s citizens, *Die andere Liebe* follows gay East Germans through their regular lives as they discuss their relationships, sexual experiences, and personal hardships. Between interviews, the documentary shows clips from local gay bars, clubs, and cafes and suggests to audiences a sense of normalcy regarding gay communities—“Look, they’re just like us.” However, as Frackman notes, the film still others homosexuals because “*DaL* did not take the customary route through the machinery of DEFA” but instead “appeared under the auspices of the Deutsches Hygiene Museum in Dresden.” Historically, the DHMD has produced educational documentaries focusing on subjects like healthy eating, infertility, alcoholism, and sexually transmitted diseases. Even though the film seeks to educate audiences and produce an effect of gay normality, its origin at the Hygiene Museum assumes that homosexuality is something pathological, diagnosable, and treatable. While the film seeks to deconstruct prejudices about the gay community, the documentary solely features “outwardly inconspicuous homosexuals” and ignores *Tunten* (fairies; feminine-presenting males), thus painting an inaccurate representation of the community. *Die andere Liebe* constructs an image of the acceptable homosexual: “the melancholic (primarily male) homosexual” who “now seeks or has found a steady monogamous partnership, and aims to be considered ‘normal’ despite her or his discursive construction as anything but.” Frackman convincingly contends that the shame the homosexual subjects experience serves as a means to civilize gay East Germans. The shame makes them

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60 Frackman, 229.
61 Frackman, 229-30.
62 Frackman, 231.
63 Frackman, 227.
uncomfortable regarding external distaste for their behavior and thus serves as a form of self-policing.\textsuperscript{64}

Also engaging with the theme of shame, \textit{Coming Out} centers around Philipp Klarmann, a high school teacher whose repressed sexuality threatens to disrupt his entire life. At the film’s start, Philipp begins a relationship with a female colleague Tanja. All seems well until Philipp encounters a friend of Tanja’s who happens to be Philipp’s former (male) high school love interest. This unfortunate meeting sends him into a spiral, and he subsequently ends up drunk at Burgfrieden—a popular gay bar in East Berlin—during Fasching, when he meets Matthias. The two quickly fall for each other, but once Matthias discovers Philipp’s engagement to Tanja, both relationships come to a catastrophic end. Philipp’s life descends into chaos as he must face his homosexuality. The film’s pivotal scene occurs when a drunken Philipp speaks with an older gay man who survived the concentration camps due to help from other Communist prisoners. After this scene, McClellan argues that Philipp is ultimately able to come to terms with his identity once “his own sexuality is put in the conventional political context of antifascism, and shown to be compatible with a belief in socialism.”\textsuperscript{65} The film’s conclusion depicts a proud Philipp who ultimately says “Ja.” to himself and his sexuality.

As Kristine Schmidt describes it, \textit{Coming Out}, while focused on the sexuality of its lead, additionally explores the social ramifications of homosexuality in the GDR. She notes that “Gewalt gegen Ausländer und Schwule wird thematisiert” (Violence against foreigners and gay people is thematized) and how the film depicts “Die Schwierigkeit, als Homosexueller im

\textsuperscript{64} Frackman, 228.
\textsuperscript{65} McLellan, “From Private Photography,” 421.
Lehrerberuf tätig zu sein” (the difficulty of being a gay teacher). Philipp grapples with his own identity while facing the possibility of bodily harm, familial conflict, discrimination, and unemployment. The film’s taboo topic alongside its subtle critiques of GDR’s compulsory heterosexuality ensured a difficult path to production. Moreover, the former head of DEFA, Hans Dieter Mäde, declared that “unter seiner Studioleitung ein ‘solcher Film’ nicht gedreht würde” (Under his studio leadership, such a film would not be made). The film’s writer, Wolfgang Witt, and director, Heiner Carow, knew the uphill battle they faced and therefore avoided Mäde’s opinion by going straight to the cultural committee head Kurt Hager. Carow and Witt presented the script with expert opinions from a sociologist, psychiatrist, and legal expert who all approved and supported the film’s content.

Appearing in the East German newspaper Neue Zeit, film critic Helmut Ulrich’s review of Coming Out, entitled “Of People Who Are Different from Others,” commends how the film “breaks taboos and champions tolerance” Ulrich dismisses any notions that the film is controversial or focuses on “voyeuristic curiosity about the lives of people who are attracted to the same sex” and instead highlights how Coming Out engages with difficult topics like suicide and homosexual persecution under the Nazis. Throughout the review, Ulrich seeks to build empathy between the newspaper’s audience and the gay community with a socialist spin. He emphasizes that Coming Out “tells the story of people who are different from others and makes clear the case that these people should remain among us.”

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67 Schmidt, 265.
68 Schmidt, 265.
69 Wagner, DEFA, 230-1.
70 Wagner, 230.
71 Wagner, 231.
ability to shed light on a marginalized group, his language others the gay community and still posits them as outside of the realm of normality. In this instance, even though Ulrich attempts to sound tolerant and accepting, his statement sounds incredibly dehumanizing; it reads as though he has finally recognized homosexuals’ humanity and thereafter understands that they deserve to not live as an ostracized minority and could play a useful role in socialist society.

Monika Zimmermann, a critic for the West German Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, uses the film’s topic to criticize the GDR’s treatment of its gay citizens. Zimmermann critiques the GDR’s longstanding ignorance towards homosexuals and sharply maintains that the “800,000 gays that are believed to be living in the GDR cannot simply disappear into thin air just because their lifestyle is incompatible with social norms.”\(^{72}\) She recognizes that Coming Out would have had a greater effect on the GDR’s public if it premiered on a night other than November 9, 1989. However, Zimmermann appreciates the monumentality of a film about homosexuality appearing “in a relatively prudish country like the GDR”\(^{73}\) and stresses that “This new open-mindedness cannot be taken for granted.”\(^{74}\) She commends how the film tackles the secretive nature of gay life in the GDR by showing “the desolate gay cruising area in the Friedrichshain Park in East Berlin”\(^{75}\) and other locales hidden in the big city.

Unlike Ulrich’s review, Zimmermann’s discusses the film’s director—Heiner Carow—and the eight-year pushback he faced to produce Coming Out. On the night of the film’s premiere, Carow spoke and encouraged the making of “‘films…that raise questions and stir

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\(^{72}\) Wagner, 233.
\(^{73}\) Wagner, 232.
\(^{74}\) Wagner, 232.
\(^{75}\) Wagner, 233.
Emotions were definitely stirring in the GDR in November 1989 as Zimmermann notes that “the entire population of the is itself experiencing a coming-out of a political nature.”

Both *Coming Out* and *Die andere Liebe* depict a rapidly changing GDR—a GDR that allowed limited social progress as a means to control what it saw as internal and external threats to its existence.

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76 Wagner, 234.
77 Wagner, 232.
CHAPTER 2: SURVEILLANCE IN COMING OUT

While the two films do not explicitly show the Stasi surveillance apparatus, East Germans knew that the Stasi had embedded itself into every aspect of life in the GDR. Ubiquitous operatives could track, listen, watch, co-opt, and blackmail people whom they believed to be threats. This section explores the tactic and practice of surveillance and how it manifests itself in the films. The Stasi required a “rationale for surveillance,” which John Turner believes derives from “the perceived need for security, the desire for risk reduction, and the logic of predictability.”

Viewing homosexuals in East Germany as subversive, the Stasi followed members of the gay community and kept tabs on their actions. This same level of tracking appears within both Coming Out and Die andere Liebe as cameras capture long tracking shots of gay people moving throughout space. Due to these scenes’ prolonged length, their use of non-diegetic sound, and their camera positioning, they accentuate “the presence of the camera, not just to what the camera is photographing” thereby giving “the film its reflective form.” The reflexivity attracts audiences’ attention to a possible deeper level of communication between the film and viewers that alludes to the realities of gay communities: objects of surveillance both on the screen and on the streets.

As a feature film that nears two hours in length, Coming Out dedicates in total about ten minutes of screen time to simply showing gay characters as they move through space. These scenes typically depict Philipp and sometimes Matthias as they walk around Berlin, bike down the street, come and go to work, and run errands. Importantly, these scenes, which range in length from five seconds to a minute-and-a-half, add little to the film’s narrative. Rather, they

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78 Turner, “Collapsing the Interior,” 106.
follow gay characters purely for the sake of following them, thereby constructing gay figures as objects of surveillance. These scenes represent the cinema of attraction, a term coined by Tom Gunning to categorize an earlier form of cinema that prioritized “its ability to show” over the narrative.\textsuperscript{80} This cinema of spectacle lends itself well to reflexive cinema as it “displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator.”\textsuperscript{81} In these scenes, audiences view for the sake of viewing; the characters on the screen are objects of visual inquiry.

Since Carow could not have explicitly shown Stasi surveillants without harsh censorship or the potential loss of his career, he used these frequent, sometimes long shots to call attention not simply to what he is showing but how he is presenting it. By documenting the familiar in this manner, these particular scenes create a Brechtian \textit{Verfremdungseffekt} (alienation effect), which Bertolt Brecht defined as a means whereby “something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, [is made] into something peculiar, striking and unexpected.”\textsuperscript{82} When we question the familiar, we question its naturalness and seemingly permanent norms, thus leading to possible change within society. The politics of Brechtian alienation effects lend themselves well to these films as they subtly invite subversion by pushing audiences to reevaluate their relationship to “normal.”

In addition, Brechtian alienation reminds viewers of the medium of cinema by taking “a common, recurrent, universally-practised operation and tried to draw attention to it by illuminating its peculiarity.”\textsuperscript{83} Beyond the alienation effect, \textit{Coming Out} even directly references

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{80} Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction,” 64. \\
\textsuperscript{81} Gunning, 64. \\
\textsuperscript{82} Brecht and Willett, \textit{Brecht on Theatre}, 143. \\
\textsuperscript{83} Brecht and Willett, 145.
\end{flushright}
Bertolt Brecht twice. Firstly, Philipp directs his students to write essays about Brecht’s 1955 poem “Ich benötige keinen Grabstein” (I have no need of a gravestone). Later on, Philipp visits his overworked, distraught mother to show her a photo of his new girlfriend, Tanja. After his mother looks at the photo with surprise, she returns to her typewriter to continue working. Above her hangs a green, white, and black poster of Bertolt Brecht who grasps the sides of his glasses, adjusting them on his face. The themes of reflexivity and alienation appear throughout the film, notably at the beginning and end, when Philipp enters and exits the film, and additionally twice within the middle of the film when two longer sequences follow Philipp and Matthias throughout Berlin.

The first few scenes of Coming Out are incredibly jarring as they depict the failed suicide attempt of Matthias whose identity is, initially, unknown to viewers. After his stomach is pumped, Matthias admits to the doctor that he tried to commit suicide because he is gay. Once this scene ends, the title sequence begins with a wide shot of a loud and busy street in Berlin. The camera rests slightly above street level and eventually pans quickly to the right to show an apartment bloc, from which Philipp exits. Philipp exits the building, returns inside, and leaves again with his bike. Audiences view the main character from the street where a small statue and park benches dominate the majority of the shot. This peculiar vantage point draws attention to the camera’s positioning (fig. 1), which, to borrow Thomas Y. Levin’s phrasing, effectively crafts a “spectatorial position that is in large part identical to that of the surveillance operator.” Through this positioning, audiences occupy the subject position of the Stasi. Thus Philipp’s first

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84 Coming Out, 0:26:50-0:27:01.
85 Levin, “Rhetoric of the Temporal Index,” 590.
appearance in the film frames him as a subject of surveillance where filmmakers prioritize his body’s movements over his identity, personality, or even facial features.

One of the most striking scenes of prolonged following begins after Philipp confronts his former childhood lover Jakob at his home. Philipp fears that Jakob will reveal their past relationship to his current girlfriend Tanja. Recognizing the same shame and embarrassment of a younger Philipp, Jakob bitterly recounts their past and recalls how Philipp’s family attempted to gift him a bicycle as a replacement for Philipp. Overwhelmed with emotion, Philipp departs midstory, and the next shot finds him walking through a subway station in Berlin. For thirty seconds, the camera, nestled behind a steel fixture, follows Philipp’s slow walk through the station. From offscreen, a man hollers “Hey, Schwuli!” (in this case a derogatory term for gay man). At first, audiences believe the man yells at Philipp until the camera captures another man standing in the station who appears outwardly effeminate. A group of men begins to assault the conspicuously gay man as Philipp runs away in frantic fear. For the next minute and sixteen seconds, the camera shows Philipp as he flees and runs through the Alexanderplatz subway station.\textsuperscript{86}

As Philipp attempts to metaphorically outrun his homosexual identity, the camera follows alongside him and tracks his flight until he disappears up a staircase. In the next shot, the camera awaits Philipp at the opposite stairwell which he runs to, partially ascends, and then stops upon to catch his breath. Having successfully fled the perpetrators, Philipp slowly ascends the stairs coughing and then exits the subway station. For over thirty seconds, the camera extensively follows this slow departure. For most of this sequence, the camera captures Philipp from a side

\textsuperscript{86} *Coming Out*, 0:45:19-0:46:34.
view whereby only a profile of his body and face are visible. As Philipp climbs the stairs, the
camera prioritizes his body’s movement over his emotional response. This shot, once again,
cements his role as an object of surveillance. Philipp slowly exits the frame with his back to the
camera, suggesting the camera’s main concern lies in knowing Philipp’s location, not his
emotional state.

Like the first shot of Philipp exiting his apartment, this prolonged sequence alienates
viewers by presenting the mundane in such a way that calls unique attention to its peculiarity.
Simply showing Philipp’s flight from the homophobic aggressors would have accomplished the
sense of fleeing one’s identity, but continuing the sequence in this extended manner points to
another aspect of surveillance: its panoptic character. Philipp stops on the stairs and looks behind
and around him, hoping to establish a sense of security and anonymity, but the camera still stalks
him, shakily following him through the metal handrails and up the stairs. Even in his perceived
state of security, there still exists a watchful eye over him, thereby emphasizing the ubiquity of
the Stasi surveillance apparatus and how it encourages citizens to discipline themselves.

In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes the relationship between
Jeremy Bentham’s hyper-surveillant prison, the Panopticon, as a model for modern society’s
forms of policing. Within Bentham’s Panopticon, prisoners live under the assumption that
authorities are always watching thereby creating a situation in which “[the prisoner] is seen, but
he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication.”87 Foucault
argues that those power dynamics dominate in modern society; people now operate like the
Panopticon’s prisoners—under the assumption of complete and never-ending surveillance.

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87 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.
No longer are public executions necessary to demonstrate the consequences of not adhering to the law because modern citizens, out of fear of being watched, police themselves.

Like a prisoner in the Panopticon, Philipp faces society’s “permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible.”

He endures scrutiny from his job, family, and those around him. Internalizing this “state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power,” Philipp polices himself by adhering to heterosexual norms in public, fearing the social ramifications of being out. Philipp has internalized the rules of heteronormativity in the GDR to such a degree that he chooses not to help the gay man being attacked. This behavior starkly contrasts an earlier scene in the film, in which Philipp breaks up a fight between Neo-Nazis and a black man. Because Philipp fears even the mere association with a gay person, he disciplines himself and flees the situation. However, this extended shot of Philipp alone in the stairwell demonstrates that even in situations of perceived sanctuary, there were, nevertheless, “thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert.”

This particularly drawn-out sequence in which the camera solely follows Philipp alludes to the omnipresence of surveillance within the GDR and its panoptic nature.

Throughout the film, shorter takes capture Philipp’s body moving through space, but the longest sequence comes at the film’s conclusion. The scene was originally written as one in which “…die Hauptfigur Philipp vor der Klasse steht am Schluss und sich über drei Seiten erklärt, was ihm in den letzten Monaten wieder erfahren ist.” (at the end the main character)

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88 Foucault, 214.
89 Foucault, 201.
90 Foucault, 214.
91 Freihof, 02:45-02:52.
Philipp stands in front of the class and explains over three pages what he experienced in the last months. The actor playing Philipp—Matthias Freihof—rejected this monologue and told director Heiner Carow “Wenn du das drehst, dann brauchen wir den Film nicht drehen”92 (If you shoot that, then we don’t need to make the film). Eventually, Freihof convinced Carow to change the ending.93 Philipp stands in front of his class in silence, and when the principal implores “Kollege Klarmann?” Philipp answers this question and all other looming questions about his identity with a proud “Ja.”94 Like his last name, Philipp clarifies who he is and his sexuality. After this monumental moment, Philipp departs the school on his bicycle in a bright red sweater. He rides off into traffic, and for the next two minutes and twenty-six seconds, a crane shot—evoking notions of Panopticism—follows him as credits begin to roll over the screen.95

Even though Philipp accepts his identity, he cycles off into a society that regards nonconforming sexuality with frigidness. The camera tracks upward to capture a wide shot of Philipp’s departure, and his figure remains visible in the growing distance. Once again, viewers watch an extended scene in which the camera prioritizes Philipp’s movement. The conspicuous brightness of his sweater coincides with hisouted sexuality, making him a more discernable target for surveillance. What should be a liberating moment turns somber as the camera captures the busy street, demonstrating its omnipresent and omniscient power over not only Philipp but the entirety of East Germany. Ending the film with another instance of following underscores that while Philipp accepts identity as a homosexual, the East German government nevertheless sees his homosexuality as an ongoing threat to its authority. Therefore, even as he exits the

92 Freihof, 02:53-02:56.
93 Frackman, Coming Out, 80.
95 Coming Out, 1:50:11-1:52:37.
repressive school and cycles away into the open streets, he remains an object of surveillance, and as Armstrong notes, the Stasi remains “Frightened and suspicious…of anything that resembled rebellious independence from official state ideology.”

While the camera heavily stalks Philipp’s character, Matthias—Philipp’s lover—is no less immune to the camera’s panoptic gaze. The two have fallen in love, and after an intimate night together, Matthias regularly attempts to see his love interest, but to no avail. With flowers in tow, Matthias arrives at Philipp’s note-covered door with no response from the other side. Dejected, Matthias departs, and the camera cuts to what Frackman describes as “an establishing shot taken from some distance [that] shows a Christmas market at night with its festive lights situated amid the bustle of the city.” Similar in length to Philipp’s subway scene, the sequence follows Matthias throughout the Christmas market for one minute and thirty-four seconds. This scene alienates viewers not only through its peculiar camera angles and prolonged length but also through the use of non-diegetic sound. The camera focuses on following Matthias as he sorrowfully wanders through the busy Christmas market. Other patrons, large carnival machinery, and bumper cars obscure Matthias from the camera’s view as it pans across the grounds to keep him in focus. The distance between Matthias and the camera suggests the latter’s role as an unseen observer who hopes to remain hidden from Matthias (see fig. 2), thereby interpellating the audience as surveillers. In this instance, we become the Stasi, stalking Matthias throughout the Christmas market.

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97 Coming Out, 1:15:55.
98 Frackman, Coming Out, 64.
99 Coming Out, 1:16:32-1:18:06.
Much like the following examples, this sequence signals a distinctive moment in the film due to its extended length and lack of contribution to the narrative. Leaving Philipp’s apartment alone, Matthias is clearly upset; however, the film continues by contrasting this sadness with the bright, cheery atmosphere of the Berlin Christmas market. Further alienating viewers and drawing attention to its inherent peculiarity, the film overlays this sequence with a choral rendering of “J.S. Bach’s 1734 Weihnachtsoratorium.”

Matthias hands the bouquet over to a woman working the ring-toss booth as the choir ironically exclaims “‘Cheer, rejoice! Praise these days!’” As Matthias wanders through the happy crowds, the choir’s robust singing dominates the scene, thereby shifting the emphasis away from Matthias’ gloomy disposition. Eventually, the non-diegetic choir music becomes diegetic sound as the setting turns from Matthias’ sad stroll to the live performance at the concert hall. However, this instance of contrasting, non-diegetic sound that foreshadows the choral performance withholds an opportunity for audiences to connect with the character emotionally.

While the camera focuses on Matthias’ body, objects obscure the camera’s path as celebratory Christmas music overpowers his heartbreak. The non-diegetic sound, camera angles, and shot composition dehumanize Matthias. This sequence’s multi-layered alienation makes this scene less about what Matthias feels and more about tracking his body throughout space. The Christmas market’s chaos affords a certain level of anonymity that the camera refuses to grant Matthias; the camera stalks, watches, and follows his figure. The camera shows Matthias in this peculiar, contradictory environment simply because it can. In this instance, “the cinematic apparatus produces an ideological position through its system and mechanics of

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101 Frackman, Coming Out, 64.
In essence, the camera symbolizes the power of the Stasi surveillance apparatus that can strip a person of their anonymity and privacy. As a proudly out man with many connections in the gay community, Matthias poses a clear threat to the East German regime. This scene’s importance derives from its ability to reflexively hint at the political realities that gay East German faced as a group subjected to intense state scrutiny and surveillance.

While formal elements like the camera positioning and shot composition allude to the Stasi surveillance apparatus, other themes of surveillance appear in the narrative elements of Coming Out. As Foucault contends in Discipline and Punish, Bentham’s Panopticon surveils, punishes, and reforms prisoners. However, this style of surveillance can also serve “to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work” and thereby “can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons.” Two major panoptic institutions play major roles in Coming Out: the hospital and the school. At the film’s beginning, Matthias’ failed suicide attempt during New Year’s Eve celebrations results in a swift ambulance ride to a hospital to have his stomach pumped. The ambulance’s sirens and lights mix with the fireworks overhead as the camera follows the vehicle throughout Berlin’s streets. In a startling scene, this—at this point in the film—unidentified man endures a graphic and distressing medical procedure.

Within the hospital, there exists a clear hierarchy between patients and providers. The hospital as a panoptic institution wields power over its patients because of its ability to regulate

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102 Hayward, Cinema Studies, 349.
103 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 205.
104 Coming Out, 0:00:19-0:05:18.
the body. Furthermore, doctors and nurses are themselves privy to their patients’ biological information, which leads to a society that prioritizes “an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge.”

Foucault asserts that the invisible, all-seeing eyes of the authorities “[are] a guarantee of order,” which in the medical field guarantees that “there is no danger of contagion.” All biological information is know, thus ensuring the medical deviance cannot spread. In Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic*, he coins the phrase “the medical gaze,” which refers to a doctor’s view—or lack thereof—of the patient. Foucault argues that when a doctor treats a patient, his “gaze is directed initially not towards that concrete body, that visible whole.”

The doctor looks within the body for the source of disease and ignores the identity of the patient. This medical gaze dehumanizes the patient by disconnecting the body from the identity of its inhabitant and serves as a way to centralize power within medical institutions because medical opinions are seen as unbiased and objective.

Matthias confronts this panoptic institution and the doctor’s medical gaze immediately and harshly as the doctors and nurses command in harmony “Schlucken! Schlucken!” (Swallow! Swallow!) while pushing an orange tube down his throat. To use sociologist Peter Conrad’s phrasing, the doctor forces upon Matthias “Medical social control” by way of a “medical intervention that seeks to eliminate, modify, isolate or regulate behavior, socially defined as deviant.” After correcting his deviance, a doctor approaches a fragile, sobbing Matthias lying on a hospital bed. She asks “Warum haben Sie das gemacht?” (Why did you do

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106 Foucault, 200.
107 Foucault, 200–201.
109 *Coming Out*, 0:02:15–0:02:45.
110 Conrad, “Medical Social Control,” 2.
that?) to which he responds “Ich bin schwul. Ich bin homosexuell”\textsuperscript{111} (I’m gay. I’m homosexual). The doctor searches for a reason, a diagnosis for this social deviance because that medical knowledge allows her “to secure adherence to social norms; specifically, by using medical means to minimize, eliminate, or normalize deviant behavior.”\textsuperscript{112}

In this sequence, Matthias directly confronts a panoptic institution that while saving his life still subjects him to ideological domination. The medical institution seeks to classify, understand, and prevent his medical deviance. Through the accumulation of biological information, the hospital consolidates its power over Matthias. Commenting on this scene, Frackman astutely describes the peculiarity of Matthias’ situation by arguing that “This unpleasant hospital scene reminds us of the conflicted and contradictory supporting hand of socialism” and that even though Matthias was “Saved by state and institutional medicine” he “remains an anomaly within socialist society.”\textsuperscript{113}

While the hospital appears only once in \textit{Coming Out}, Philipp’s workplace—the school—serves as a reoccurring surveillant presence in his life. As Foucault argues, schools serve as establishments of discipline where students internalize a “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish.”\textsuperscript{114} The school subjects not only its students to surveillance and punishment but also its faculty who must adhere to the wishes of the school administration. The school’s principal quickly becomes suspicious of Philipp’s unorthodox teaching methods. Worried his youthful instruction could threaten the school’s hierarchy and the politics of the ruling SED, the principal bursts into Philipp’s class as he and his

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Coming Out}, 0:04:20-0:05:19.
\textsuperscript{112} Conrad, “Medical Social Control,” 1.
\textsuperscript{114} Foucault, \textit{Discipline und Punish}, 184.
students clap, snap, and dance along to music. Having already internalized the hierarchy of the school, the students abruptly cease their fun upon the principal’s arrival and return promptly to their chairs. Philipp and the principal stare at each other in a power struggle; Philipp eventually surrenders and begins opening his chalkboard to reveal Bertolt Brecht’s poem “Ich benötige keinen Grabstein” (I have no need of a gravestone). Philipp announces the corresponding “Aufsatzthema” (essay topic) and asks the students “Was bewegt mich beim Lesen dieses Gedichtes?” (What moves me when reading this poem?) and “Was bewege ich nach Lesen dieses Gedichtes?” (What difference do I make after reading this poem?).

Only after the return to formal, frontal instruction does the principal feel satisfied enough to depart the classroom and leave Philipp alone with his students. The presence of the authoritative principal induces Philipp into “a state of conscious and permanent visibility,” so that even after she departs, Philipp polices himself by continuing standard instruction and not reverting back to uproarious dancing. This instance demonstrates “the perfection of power” in a panoptic institution because “its actual exercise [is rendered] unnecessary.” The principal’s watchful eye continues throughout the film as Philipp navigates his tumultuous relationships with himself, Tanja, and Matthias. The principal reprehends Philipp for his late arrival to work and at the film’s conclusion observes his lesson with multiple members of the school’s administration. Other colleagues become aware of the school’s dislike towards Philipp, specifically Frau Möllemann, who attempts to console Philipp in the teacher’s lounge. As tense,

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115 *Coming Out*, 0:16:10-0:17:25.
116 *Coming Out*, 0:17:04-0:17:14.
117 Foucault, *Discipline und Punish*, 201.
118 Foucault, 201.
119 Foucault, 201.
staccato woodwinds and strings play, a slow zoom captures Philipp lost in thought with his hands atop his bag. Frau Möllemann attempts to comfort him by saying that teaching “ist kein leichter Beruf” and that “es sind nicht nur die Kinder, die das Leben schwer machen, auch die Kollegen”\(^\text{120}\) (is not an easy job. It’s not just the children that make life difficult, also colleagues).

Beyond its panoptic nature, the school and its administration can also be read as narrative allusions to the oppressive East German regime whereby Philipp’s unorthodox teaching metaphorically represents his sexuality. His unconventional teaching and sexuality threaten both the school and the regime’s legitimacy because they jeopardize the status quo. While the Stasi surveilled gay East Germans for their presumed risk to the political establishment, so too does the principal surveil Philipp to gauge his subversion of the school’s strict norms.

\(^{120}\) Coming Out, 0:30:28-0:32:32.
CHAPTER 3: SURVEILLANCE IN DIE ANDERE LIEBE

While Coming Out engages with the topic of homosexuality through a fictional narrative, Die andere Liebe confronts the reality of gay East Germans through a series of documentary interviews. While visual anthropologist Jay Ruby notes that “…reflexivity is to be found more frequently in fiction film than in the documentary,“121 Die andere Liebe nonetheless contains elements that engage with audiences on a meta-cinematic level. Scholar Bill Nichols discusses the fourth, newest type of documentary film style in which “These new self-reflexive documentaries mix observational passages with interviews, the voice-over of the filmmaker with the intertitles...”122 This reflexivity emerges in Die andere Liebe as filmmakers insert between the interviews observational scenes that show homosexuals—both female and male—as they walk around Berlin, take public transportation, and spend time at local bars and cafes. Furthermore, the film uses voiceovers of both the filmmaker and the interviewees while additionally capturing some scenes in which the director appears within the shot sometimes holding a visible microphone as he conducts interviews.

Ruby contends that “being reflexive means that the producer deliberately and intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his finding in a particular way.”123 The filmmakers directly reveal their assumptions at the film’s beginning in a voiceover that claims “Etwa einer dreiviertel Millionen Menschen unseres Landes, Frauen und Mädchen, Jungen und Männer, gleichermäßen

sind homosexuell,” but that “Sie bleiben dennoch für viele von uns Außenseite”124 (About three-quarters of a million people of our country, women and girls, boys and men, are homosexual. They still remain outsiders to many of us). Ironically, in a film that tries to give agency to homosexuals, the first words spoken in the voiceover come from the heterosexual directors. In thirty-five minutes, the filmmakers explore that outsider status and seek to elicit audience compassion and empathy through emotional, informative interviews. As a documentary with reflexive tones, Die andere Liebe makes “patently clear what has been implicit all along: documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto ‘reality’” because “the filmmaker was always a participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning.”125

As in Coming Out, scenes within Die andere Liebe use alienation effects and other reflexive strategies to draw attention to a greater theme within homosexual communities in the GDR: life under surveillance. Instances of following occur throughout the film but most prominently at the film’s beginning as the camera attempts to capture the normality of homosexuals. And indeed, we see homosexuals involved in banal, daily behaviors: they walk around town, ride the bus, and walk their dogs. However, audiences only see these individuals while non-diegetic jazz music plays over the shots. For one minute and eighteen seconds, the camera captures them moving throughout space without any context.126 Although these sequences do humanize and emphasize the normality of gay people, they nevertheless introduce homosexuals first as objects of visual inquiry. Viewers watch them without knowing why these

124 Die andere Liebe, 1:27-1:42.
126 Die andere Liebe, 0:19-1:26.
people are worth following. Ironically, this surveillant optic works against the film’s attempts to
normalize homosexuality and its acceptance because it simply draws more attention to their
otherness and invites viewers to peruse the image for possible clues of difference. Eventually, a
voiceover begins that introduces them as homosexuals, and the voyeuristic shots continue for
another whole minute.127

As film scholar Paul Rotha highlights, capturing non-actors in documentary films begs
the question that “If we are going to use natural people and characterise them as individuals in
our films, how are we going to persuade them to assume this or that expression, or feel this or
that emotion according to our requirements?”128 In the instance of Die andere Liebe, the camera
captures these “natural” people, but they know they are being filmed, thus creating a level of
artificiality to these scenes of intended normality. These people thereby become actors playing
versions of themselves, performing as East German homosexuals. The artificiality and
mundanity of these shots signal another instance of Brechtian alienation whereby viewers
question the familiar because it has been “stripped of its inconspicuousness.”129 One particularly
peculiar shot depicts a presumed homosexual woman who walks around in front of the World
Clock at Alexanderplatz in Berlin (see fig. 3).130

A slow zoom captures the woman as she paces back and forth, glancing around for some
unknown person or object. The camera situates itself behind a series of metal pillars and
banisters, secretly nestled beside a descending subway station staircase. The camera’s distance
from the woman implies a certain level of desired invisibility on the part of the viewer from the

127 Die andere Liebe, 1:27-2:35.
128 Rotha, Documentary Film, 148.
129 Brecht and Willett, Brecht on Theatre, 144.
130 Die andere Liebe, 1:33-1:47.
subject. However, ironically, the woman does know of her surveillant due to the film being a documentary. Increasing this scene’s peculiarity is the voiceover that recounts how fellow GDR citizens poorly regard and treat the homosexual community. Like the examples from *Coming Out*, this scene adds little significance to the film’s overall message, and its oddity and artificiality suggest that it was included in the documentary as a reference to other societal impacts on the East German homosexual community. The shot’s composition and camera positioning allude to the actual surveillance gay East Germans endured at the hands of the Stasi. Even as the lesbian woman stands alone, posing no visible danger, her homosexuality, nonetheless, threatens the stability of the socialist regime and requires surveillance even in the most mundane of circumstances.

Towards the end of the documentary, the camera captures a one-minute sequence of Dirk—who plays Matthias in *Coming Out*—as he walks to the public transit station at Schönhauserallee, ascends the escalator, and waits for and eventually boards the metro. What appears to be a normal person riding transportation becomes peculiar through the heavily overlayed non-diegetic jazz music, the scene’s sheer length, and the serious interviews that occur before and after. The film deals with intense, sometimes tragic themes in the gay community such as shame, rape, addiction, suicide, and parental judgment, and these interviews contrast heavily with the contrived scenes of gay people walking around to the fun tune of a jazzy saxophone. This following sequence radiates artificiality as it appears between interviews where Dirk and his partner discuss their former alcoholism. Beyond its alienating effects, this scene contains reflexive elements whereby viewers see those around Dirk gawk at the camera, unsure

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131 *Die andere Liebe*, 1:33-1:47.
of its presence in a subway station. With the intention of depicting homosexuals as normal 
people, the scene does, in fact, precisely the opposite as the camera draws attention to Dirk, 
causing spectators to inquisitively watch the camera and the strange man whom it captures. 
These stares remind audiences of Ruby’s assessment that “all films whether they are labeled 
fiction, documentary, or art—are created, structured articulations of the filmmaker and not 
authentic, truthful, objective records.”

As a documentary that discusses aspects of homosexuality, Die andere Liebe tries to give 
agency to gay individuals as they recount their own experiences in short interviews. However, 
the interpolated shots that follow homosexuals relay a pretense of normality, in which normality 
is predicated as heteronormative. Upon greater inspection, these scenes are anything but normal. 
Like the aforementioned examples from both this documentary and Coming Out, these sequences 
that depict the act of following draw attention to themselves as scenes of surveillance. They 
engage audiences on a reflexive level and ask viewers to question not simply what is being 
shown but how. Any explicit reference to the GDR’s real surveillance apparatus would face 
immediate censorship, but through the use of non-diegetic sound, surveillant camera angles, and 
extended scene length, these scenes allude to the realities of homosexual communities in East 
Germany. By prioritizing motion over emotion, Die andere Liebe, similarly to Coming Out, 
establishes the homosexual body as a subject of interest, a subject of surveillance. As the 
panoptic Stasi surveillance apparatus follows and tracks homosexuals, so too does the camera.

Ruby, “The Image Mirrored,” 44.
CONCLUSION

In *Warme Brüder gegen kalte Krieger*, Eduard Stapel comments on various published Stasi files that depict the extensive and relentless surveillance he and gay rights groups endured in East Germany. At the conclusion of the chapter about discrimination against gay rights groups, Stapel makes a poignant revelation. He reflects that “Ich habe lange Zeit geglaubt, wir könnten den Regierenden in der DDR diese Ängste durch Aufklärung nehmen,” but he realizes “...daß der Sicherheitsdienst vor allem Opfer seiner durch seine eigenen Vorurteile geschürten Angst vor Schwulen wurde”\(^\text{134}\) (For a long time I believed that we could diminish GDR officials’ fears through education...that the Stasi, fueled by its own prejudices, fell victim to its own fear of gay people). Like many other East Germans, he believed that he could work within the socialist society because, in his view, gay and socialist identities were not at odds.\(^\text{135}\) However, in a regime rampant with political paranoia, those benign intentions were met with immediate skepticism, anxiety, and malice.

Bringing gay East Germans into better view of heterosexual audiences and the state’s watchful eye, DEFA allowed the production of the expository documentary *Die andere Liebe* in 1988 and the full-length feature film *Coming Out* in 1989. The films began a long overdue dialogue within East Germany concerning the taboo topic of homosexuality. Beyond serving as a means to introduce heterosexual audiences to gay life, these films also catered to gay East Germans who saw their realities represented on screen. As Philipp Klarmann struggled to reconcile his sexuality with a hostile society, so too did real gay East Germans. These films depict legitimate challenges of being gay in the GDR—alcoholism, familial rejection, addiction,

\(^\text{134}\) Stapel, *Warme Brüder*, 80.
and shame. However, beyond those hardships, the films show another dimension of reality: life under surveillance. This subtle subversion of the East German state appears in both *Die andere Liebe* and *Coming Out* and manifests in various formal techniques and narrative elements that allude to the widespread state surveillance apparatus. The films make clear what gay East Germans knew all along: they are objects of surveillance both on the streets and now on the screens.
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Figure 1. Still from *Coming Out.* (0:05:45) Directed by Heiner Carow. Berlin, Germany: DEFA, 1989.
Figure 2. Still from *Coming Out*. (01:17:51) Directed by Heiner Carow. Berlin, Germany: DEFA, 1989.
Figure 3. Still from *Die andere Liebe*. (01:36) Directed by Helmut Kissling and Alex Otten. Dresden, Germany: DEFA, 1988.
VITA

Julia Goncalves was born in New Jersey but moved to Cleveland, Tennessee at a young age. She pursued a Bachelor of Arts in German Language and Literature and Russian Studies at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. She began her Master of Arts in German in 2020 and took a two year hiatus to pursue a Fulbright scholarship. After completing a Fulbright Teaching Assistantship in Saarbrücken, Germany, she returned to UTK to finish her degree. Her academic interests include German cinema, East German history, and Russian writers like Tolstoy and Nabokov.