

# Parallels, Contrasts, and Reversals in von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others*

By Lingxiao "Linda" Gao

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Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's film *The Lives of Others*, winner of the 2006 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, reconstructs the historical period from 1984 to 1991 in East Berlin, a place dominated by the Stasi's surveillance and censorship. The story portrays the psychological and political transformation of a Stasi officer, Wiesler, who undertakes the surveillance of Georg Dreyman, GDR's prominent playwright, and Christa-Maria Sieland (CMS), Dreyman's actress lover. As Wiesler listens intently to their daily conversations in order to ferret out treacherous actions, Wiesler becomes increasingly engrossed in Dreyman and CMS's lives and absorbed in their world of love, passion, and art. Transformed, Wiesler begins omitting evidence and eventually sacrifices his career to shield the two artists from imprisonment. The film incorporates a rich variety of parallels, contrasts, and reversals, which together bring out the film's themes of art, religion, and history. The first section of this paper discusses the transformative power of art. The following section addresses the film's religious dimension, especially the Christian themes of self-sacrifice, confession, and atonement. The last section considers the film's humanistic approach to history. The themes of art, religion, and history are interwoven; together, they testify to imperishable human dignity.

Art transforms Wiesler from a disciplined, dispassionate Stasi interrogator to an empathic human being. Wiesler first appears in a dark, gloomy room, interrogating a fatigued man in a machine-like voice. The next scene reveals that the interrogation is an audio tape Wiesler uses to teach new Stasi recruits. Wiesler, a skillful interrogator, has mastered a set of mathematical,

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scientific, and psychological techniques. By conducting a 40-hour non-stop interrogation, Wiesler deduces the suspect's guilt by interpreting his calmness, tears, and repetitive statements. In addition, Wiesler asks the accused to keep his palms under his thighs, so that the seat preserves an odor sample for the tracker dogs. When a student questions his method by saying "it's inhuman," Wiesler silently marks an "X" beside the student's name on the attendance sheet – he even monitors his students like suspects. Wiesler's strict approach to time also reflects his cold discipline. He orders his colleagues to bug Dreyman's house in twenty minutes and marks the time passed precisely with his watch. He is visibly annoyed when his colleague, Udo, arrives four minutes late for the surveillance shift. Wiesler leaves his talkative colleague with a perfunctory "see you tomorrow at 11:00 a.m." and exits immediately without acknowledging Udo's hand in the air. Wiesler's cold discipline continues in his surveillance of Dreyman and CMS. Expressionless, he taps out the report on the two artists' action: "presumably have intercourse." Wiesler's appearance – his stony face and steely eyes – also reinforces an image of coldness, rigidity, and a lack of human emotions.

The joyous, passionate life Dreyman and CMS share contrasts with Wiesler's bleak, monotonous world. The film's exploration of artwork aesthetics – its use of music, color, light, and cinematography – intensifies this contrast, which is essential to Wiesler's transformation. Dreyman and CMS's apartment is suffused with a warm golden light, walls decorated by various paintings, and rooms full of books and pieces of art. The parties they host are filled with spirited artists and lively music, creating an atmosphere that mirrors the richness and vivacity of their lives. When Wiesler goes home from Dreyman's party, a long shot reveals the emptiness of his hotel-like apartment: a clothes stand that only hangs his grey jacket, empty desks and tables, nothing decorative or cheerful. Wiesler adds some red sauce to a bowl of unidentifiable white

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food for dinner, while a monotonous, chilly music plays until the hollow sound of television takes it over. Wiesler's apartment is symbolic of his dull, lifeless world, a lifelessness reinforced by the unchanging nylon gray of his clothes. Wiesler's life is reflective of East Berlin, where the streets are engulfed by unsaturated greys and greens. The Soviet War Memorial in Pankow, where Dreyman meets with his friends Paul and Wallner, is desolate and cold. Its Mother Statue, captured by a downwardly angled camera, reflects the tainted whiteness of the sky over its shoulders. The coldness at both individual and collective levels amounts to a frosted isolation. The television news channel Wiesler watches reports on the efficient land use for chicken, a satirical allusion to this social alienation. When Wiesler wonders how a prostitute he calls enters the building, she replies that "a bunch of you guys live here;" that she is familiar with those "guys" hints at the emptiness of the Stasi workers. The lives of the artists, however, bring light and warmth to the grey, frozen world. For example, in the scene after the shot of Wiesler's apartment, Dreyman plays soccer with children, creating an uplifting atmosphere that contests the overall bleakness of the street.

Witnessing the passion, art, and eroticism in Dreyman and CMS's relationship, Wiesler comes face to face with the ugliness and nullity of his own existence. When Dreyman hugs CMS on their bed, Wiesler, sitting on a chair, leans leftward at the same angle with two arms somewhat hugging himself, a gesture that reveals his loneliness. After going home, Wiesler washes his face, looks into the mirror, and sees his plain face reflected by it – at this symbolic moment, he recognizes this loneliness. After experiencing a transient pleasure with the prostitute, Wiesler begs her to "stay awhile," only to be rejected: "I can't. My next customer is at half-past. I work on a schedule." Wiesler, looking at his watch awkwardly, is ironically hurt by this strict approach to time, a principle of his own. Besides an emerging need for love and interpersonal

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connection, Wiesler also begins to doubt his faith in the regime. Minister Hempf's base desires for CMS appear incompatible with the high principles with which Wiesler identifies.

Disappointed by his superior Grubitz's greed for promotion, Wiesler questions him: "is that why we joined? You remember the oath we took?" Wiesler then receives a dissatisfying answer that they should work for the benefits of the Party's members. A person who allies himself with the ideals, Wiesler feels out of place in a system riddled with selfish pursuits and opportunism.

Wiesler finds his new faith in Dreyman's world of art, where Wiesler experiences a spiritual transformation. After the prostitute leaves, a haunting emptiness urges Wiesler to go to Dreyman's apartment. Wiesler gazes at Dreyman's books and birthday presents, devoutly touches the two artists' bed, and steals Dreyman's copy of Brecht's poems. Wiesler later returns to his sofa, the same place where he has intercourse with the prostitute, and begins reading the Brecht. The scene is accompanied by Dreyman's voice reading the poems, which symbolizes that Dreyman introduces Wiesler into the world of art. A warm light, in harmony with the orange sofa and the book's yellow cover, lightens Wiesler's face – a light from this new world brings warmth to Wiesler's colorless life. When Dreyman plays the "Sonata for a Good Man", the turning camera slowly reveals Wiesler's facial expression: a tear rolls down Wiesler's right cheek. Leaving a shining trace, the tear indicates Wiesler's possession of guilt, but also uncovers a good conscience hidden beneath it. The "catharsis" Wiesler experiences, triggered by the therapeutic function of art, awakens his goodness and sympathy. Just as Dreyman says to CMS, "Can anyone who has heard this music, I mean truly heard it, really be a bad person?", the music reveals the inherent nobleness and dignity of Wiesler's soul. Catalyzed by art, Wiesler becomes an empathic human being, "a good man."

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Rich parallels between Wiesler and Dreyman signify Wiesler's conversion; meanwhile, they serve as beautiful reversals of Wiesler's old self. When a friend of Dreyman announces Jerska's suicide, Dreyman holds a white telephone in his left hand while Wiesler grasps a black telephone in his right hand; they hear the news at the same time, and both are wordless. The typewriter before Wiesler mirrors Dreyman's piano; the unfinished report on the typewriter parallels the sheet music. In a later scene where Wiesler enters an elevator, a boy holding a ball enters, an allusion to the previous scene where Dreyman plays soccer with boys. Wiesler pauses halfway through his professional question "What's the name of your dad", turning it into a hilarious "What's the name of your ball?" This amusing conversion suggests Wiesler's inner transition. The next day, Wiesler is engrossed in Dreyman and CMS's quarrel until Udo interrupts him: "Well, boss, am I on time?... I don't want you to do overtime because of me." Wiesler, too concerned for the relationship, lingers at the monitor desk, unwilling to leave. The reversal of his cold disciplinary attitude apparently baffles Udo, who becomes uncomfortable and wants to send Wiesler away. Udo says, "you'll have my detailed report tomorrow," a parallel to Wiesler's "see you tomorrow at 11:00 a.m.." The reversal of roles between Wiesler and Udo further demonstrates Wiesler's fundamental change. Entering a bar near Dreyman's apartment, Wiesler changes his order from soda water to Vodka – the drink that a male artist at Dreyman's party ordered – a representation of the passion, heroism, and liberation for which Wiesler now longs.

Wiesler also parallels Dreyman at a deeper level. To protect Dreyman and CMS, Wiesler fabricates reports and makes up the content of a play to cover up the lie, by doing which he becomes a playwright. Wiesler also becomes a director: he intervenes in Dreyman and CMS's relationship crisis, requests Udo's position shift, and ensures the smuggling of Dreyman's article

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to West Germany. Wiesler's identity of a director alludes to the blacklisted artist, Jerska, whose spirit motivates the silent resisters. The title of Dreyman's article "the One Who Made it to the Other Side" refers to Dreyman, who conveys the message to Western Germany; it refers to Jerska, who leaves this world and enters an afterlife; it also refers to Wiesler, who leaves his old life and enters the world of nobleness, passion, and art. As Wiesler begins to protect the couple, the relationship between Wiesler and Dreyman evolves toward symmetry. For example, after Wiesler takes Dreyman's typewriter to erase Dreyman's "sinful" evidence, Wiesler waits at a corner where Dreyman previously discovers CMS's betrayal, a place that symbolizes foresight, sacrifice, and suffering unbeknownst to others.

The film goes a step further by breaking and restoring this symmetry. When Dreyman is reading his file, the great confusion he experiences indicates that Wiesler achieves something higher. The movie elevates Dreyman's merits but does not shy away from his weaknesses. At first, Dreyman, "a friend of Margot Honecker, winner of the National Award," plays tactfully with the system and avoids confronting bitter truths. When Paul probes Dreyman "but you know he (Dreyman's director)'s with the Stasi!", Dreyman denies it: "No, I don't know that." Paul, infuriated, shouts out the truth: "you're such an idealist that you're almost a bigwig. It was informers and conformists like that who ruined Albert." In fact, Jerska reveals his suicidal tendencies early on when he mentions a happy afterlife to Dreyman: "I won't complain much longer. In my next life, I'll simply be an author." Dreyman, however, responds by optimistically recalling Minister Hempf's promise to consider Jerska's reinstatement. The phrase Dreyman uses, "concrete hope," turns out to be harshly ironic. Dreyman wakes up from his blind optimism to the dark reality following Jerska's suicide. However, he remains naïve in believing: "there's no State Security at my place!" The critical portrayal of Dreyman makes him a full three-

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dimensional character, irreducible to abstract ideals. Dreyman's resistance would not have been possible without Wiesler being a secret "guardian angel."

Wiesler demonstrates remarkable courage by subversively helping the artists. Courage, as implied by Plato's *Laches*, is the ability to overcome the fearful to reach a higher normative plane, with the knowledge of fear and hope. Blinded by his naïve optimism, Dreyman is ignorant of fear under the totalitarian regime. Wiesler, however, courageously sacrifices his future, knowing full well the consequences of disloyalty. He silently pursues what is right because of its intrinsic value, without intentionally revealing his good deeds to others – another meaning that the film's title "the Lives of Others" conveys. Wiesler's act is also an act of gratitude: he saves those who have previously saved him from a bleak world. However, Dreyman unintentionally enlightens Wiesler, whereas Wiesler is conscious of everything – Wiesler's sacrifice establishes a symmetry but also transcends it. After realizing the truth, Dreyman watches Wiesler from afar but does not approach him, the same way in which Wiesler silently protects Dreyman. Dreyman eventually restores the symmetry by writing a book: "Dedicated to HGW XX/7, in gratitude." Dreyman brings Wiesler's story to light through his work of art, a compensation for Wiesler's silent martyrdom. The symmetry of gratitude signifies not only the transformation of Wiesler, but also that of Dreyman. The contrasts, reversals, and symmetries between Wiesler and Dreyman together testify to the altruistic capacity of human nature. The dynamic structures in the film reveal the transformative and therapeutic power of art.

The movie's religious dimension adopts the Christian theme of self-sacrifice, along with a complex portrayal of confession that both negates its oral form and elevates its essence of atonement. Art transforms Wiesler from a sinner to a benevolent Christ-figure, who then sacrifices himself to save others. Wiesler's complex development makes him both a saved person

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and a savior. Wiesler watches CMS's performance and observes Dreyman upstairs from the balcony; later on, Wiesler monitors their lives from the attic. This gesture of monitoring from a higher position might remind the audience of the famous Orwellian slogan "Big Brother is watching you," a reference to which the events' year, 1984, alludes. However, as Wiesler begins to intervene in their affairs to help them, his goodwill transforms Big Brother's cold stares into God's benevolent eyes. Wiesler's following development fulfills a Christian arc: he sacrifices his future to save the artists and is dispatched to a basement opening letters, a representation of suffering and lowliness. Wiesler experiences two resurrections, at physical and spiritual levels respectively. When Wiesler hears the radio announcement of the Berlin Wall's fall, he leads people in the basement to walk out into the streets. Wiesler leaving the dark basement and walking again in the sunlight symbolizes his physical resurrection. Dreyman's writing leads to a resurrection of Wiesler's spirit: the book immortalizes Wiesler's story and condenses his life into a piece of art. After Wiesler discovers the book dedicated to him, the movie ends with a long freeze-frame shot of Wiesler glorified by an upwardly angled camera. The warm light of the bookstore lightens his face, echoing the scene where Wiesler reads the Brecht book. A faint smile lights up his features – throughout the movie, Wiesler cries once and smiles once, slight but indicative of significant inner transformations. Wiesler's eyes are looking slightly upward, as if he is seeing a divine light.

The ending incorporates another symmetry between Wiesler and Dreyman: while Dreyman's writing resurrects Wiesler's spirit, Wiesler's story revives Dreyman's art. Minister Hempf reveals to us that Dreyman "[has] not written since the wall fell," a predicament foreshadowed by an earlier scene. Grubitz describes the Stasi's treatment of type four subversive artists: "No human contact... Good treatment, no harassment, no abuse, no scandals... nothing



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they could write about later. Most type fours we've processed in this way never write anything again!" The fall of the Berlin Wall elevates the GDR's political oppression, while a flourishing consumerist culture replaces East Berlin's isolated, lifeless society. Ironically, the banishment of darkness and evil deprives Dreyman of the ability to create art. This reversal echoes the ideas that suffering leads to greatness and that progress arises from contradictions and collisions. Minister Hempf speaks a certain degree of truth: "What is there to write about in this new Germany? Nothing to believe in, nothing to rebel against..." The movie not only attacks the oppressive totalitarian regimes but also warns against a static society devoid of self-reflection and rebellious spirit. The movie provides a solution to this dilemma by initiating a genuine reflection on history: Dreyman's book reminds his society of the hidden sacrifice of an individual; the movie itself, by deciphering the past to the contemporary audience, also fulfills a historical reckoning. The film draws inspiration from the spirit of the many "Dreymans" and "Wieslers" in history; meanwhile, it salutes their intertemporal greatness. In the same way, Wiesler revitalizes Dreyman's art, which in turn immortalizes Wiesler's story: they bring mutual salvation to each other.

The movie shows a complex portrayal of confession: the movie both negates its form and incorporates a deeper embrace of its core. Wiesler realizes the error of his past belief but makes no confession throughout the movie; Wiesler has no monologue, an absence that alludes to his identity as "an audience." The movie's setting makes Wiesler essentially unable to confess. One important motif of the movie is that interrogation is a perversion of confession in which the interrogator coerces confessions from the suspect against his will. A master of interrogation, Wiesler appears defensive about his private thoughts. In an interrogation scene, Wiesler deciphers the suspect's emotions to evaluate not the suspect's sin, but his social deviance;

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correspondingly, Wiesler's expressionless face resembles a mask that conceals his own emotions. Moreover, situated in an oppressive system, Wiesler is bound to be silent. A subtle detail indicates the pressure that defies the freedom of expression. In the Stasi's dining hall, a young man tells an ill-timed joke about the GDR's leader Honecker, which Grubitz overhears. Grubitz first announces the end of the man's career, then laughs heartily himself, revealing that he has been joking. Only at the end – where a scene shows this young man sitting behind Wiesler opening letters in the basement – does the audience realize that the man's earlier transgression was not overlooked. The astonishing double reversals, as Grubitz goes back and forth, give the audience a taste of the unpredictable Orwellian regime. The setting also includes a perversion of language. For example, the word "blacklist" is ironically blacklisted: "black-listing? We don't do that here! You should choose your words more carefully." By perverting language and retaliating against self-expression, the regime defies truthful confession.

Wiesler confronts this strain by engaging in a silent confession – he works out his salvation through active atonement. Wiesler is a hero defined by action. Throughout the movie, Wiesler reveals his inner world by his deeds – omitting evidence in the report, stealing the Brecht book, hiding the typewriter – not by his words. This external atonement exemplifies a deeper embodiment of the Christian spirit: one washing away his sin by seeking recompense and saving others. A Christ-figure, Wiesler atones selflessly for the sins of CMS and Dreyman. He saves CMS by intervening in her affair with Minister Hempf and saves Dreyman by bearing the marks of his "sin," the typewriter.

However, unlike Christ, Wiesler also atones for his own sins. Hidden parallels between Dreyman and the suspect whom Wiesler interrogates at the opening scene suggest a cycle of atonement. When asked about what he did on September 28, the suspect tells Wiesler that he was

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at Treptow Park Memorial where he met his old friend Max Kirchner; they then went to Kirchner's place and listened to music until late. The Treptow Park Memorial is one of the three Soviet memorials built in Berlin after WWII; another one is Pankow Memorial, where Dreyman meets with his artist friends. Listening to music at a friend's place parallels the scene where Dreyman goes to Paul's apartment; Paul plays loud music to cover their conversation. In both cases, people use music to cover up certain "subversive" actions. The name "Max Kirchner" is an allusion to the German artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, whose works portray ugliness and who was traumatized by war, a clear connection to the world of art. The subtle parallels between this suspect, a victim of Wiesler, and Dreyman, whom Wiesler saves, reinforce the idea of atonement. Wiesler recompenses for his sinful past by saving Dreyman, a representation of all Stasi victims. Having committed many faults in the past, Wiesler makes things right for the first time.

CMS's death, a scene that alludes to the Pietà, incorporates multi-layered confessions. When Grubitz finds Dreyman's secret compartment, CMS meets Dreyman's gaze; through their silent eye contact, Dreyman realizes CMS's betrayal, and CMS could not bear her guilt. CMS, whose name alludes to suffering and sacrifice, atones by killing herself. She sees the car approaching, a vision that parallels that of her role on stage: Marta (the role she plays) sees the death of a woman's son, "crushed by the mighty wheel." It is not by chance that CMS's informant name is also "Marta," an allusion to her being a martyr. Overly obsessed with her identity as an actress, she betrays that of an artist. As Dreyman demonstrates, being an artist involves not only producing artworks, which CMS anxiously desires, but also pursuing and defending ideals without succumbing to reality. By performing a self-sacrifice, a break away from life and reality, CMS unintentionally restores the value of art. She confesses to Wiesler: "I

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was too weak, I can never put right what I've done wrong." Although CMS is at the position of Jesus Christ, the confession proves Wiesler to be the real Christ-figure; and again, Wiesler is her audience. "There is nothing to put right! You understand? Nothing. I moved the..." Wiesler could have made a confession if he had not been interrupted by CMS's death. Dreyman, now believing that he has wronged his lover, succeeds to the Mary position and laments: "forgive me, forgive me..." Dreyman's confession, however, symbolizes CMS's second confession, an unsaid confession that asks for her lover's forgiveness. The four succeeding confessions, either stated or intended, bring the film to its tragic climax. They enrich the categories of self-sacrifice and atonement by providing rich possibilities. The story is no longer a single narration of Wiesler's Christian arc but a plural world where people sacrifice and atone for each other, a world of solidarity and mutual salvation.

The red fingerprint beside Wiesler's agent code on the last page of Dreyman's file signifies a hidden confession. Whereas one's code name represents one's collective identity, a fingerprint implies something private and individual. After an unsuccessful search of Dreyman's house, Grubitz says to Wiesler: "Your career is over. Even if you were too smart to leave any traces." Wiesler, however, does leave a trace. He accidentally leaves a red fingerprint on his report, a trace that uncovers Wiesler's secret identity both as a savior and as a sinner. As a result, Wiesler unintentionally makes a confession of his deeds to Dreyman. The red fingerprint also contains a parallel to Dreyman: when Dreyman hides the typewriter under the floor for the first time, he unskillfully touches the ribbon and leaves red stains on his unfinished article "the One Who Made it to the Other Side." Symbolically, they shed their blood when fighting for a higher ideal. In this movie, the color red appears on three occasions: the typewriter's ribbon, CMS's blood after her suicide, and the author name on the cover of Dreyman's book. Their

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interconnections give Wiesler's red fingerprint a broader meaning: it signifies not only Wiesler's sacrifice, but also the suicides about which Dreyman writes, the suffering of all Stasi victims, and the spirit of rebellion.

The movie explores the idea of silent rebellion in depth. The scene where Wiesler hears the announcement of the Wall's fall parallels his surveillance of Wiesler: listening to Dreyman motivates Wiesler to become a silent resistor, and listening to the broadcast fulfills a silent resistance in a broader sense. After Wiesler hears the Wall's fall, the quietness in the basement appears in stark contrast to the broadcaster's exciting tone: "The excitement is enormous. People are streaming out in thousands!" Wiesler calmly and silently leaves the basement; the other three Stasi workers, following him, also walk away from their desks in silence. The next scene creates a parallel: on stage, four women solemnly come out of four white walls. The prevailing silence, as opposed to the excitement in the national broadcast, shows the film's realistic reconstruction of history that avoids kitsch: the sacrifice is so horrible that no easy rejoicing is allowed.

To further embrace a complex image of history, the film incorporates subtle moments of nostalgia without overriding its clear criticism of the GDR regime. For example, Dreyman, after several years, still refuses to wear a tie. The only two occasions where he wears a tie are on his birthday (at CMS's request) and at Jerska's funeral. CMS once mocks him: "Or can't you tie a tie, you old working-class poet?" Not wearing a tie reveals Dreyman's lingering faith in socialist ideals, even though he rebels against the GDR's dystopia built under the guise of utopia. Dreyman also feels out of place in the new theater, where the performance's abstract style lacks vitality and creates a sense of detachment. Both Dreyman and Wiesler dwell in the awkward interval between past and present: one never wears a tie, the other always wear the same old

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jacket. Having sacrificed so much along the way, they stubbornly refuse absorption into a singular, consistent narrative that rejoices in peace without reckoning the price paid for it.

The film's interweaving of historical frame and individual story provides a humanistic approach to history that recognizes the value of individual experience. The film positions itself in a historical framework: it starts with plain historical data on the number of the GDR's secret police and informants and integrates the fall of Berlin Wall into the epilogue. However, an individual story inserted into this frame conveys the film's main themes: the power of art, active atonement, and humanity's capacity for altruism and dignity. By connecting this individual story to a historical process, the film suggests that the inherent nobility of human nature has led to the collapse of the GDR's regime and the progress of history. Moreover, it beckons that the small person's efforts are as honorable as those of the influential one's, an idea that dissents from Hegel's category "world-historical individual." The movie includes a reference to Gorbachev in a newspaper article titled "Mikhail Gorbachev Elected As Leader of the Soviet Union's Communist Party." Gorbachev is a world-historical individual, who, according to Hegel, brings Spirit into consciousness by shaping the trend of world history. The movie, however, also sheds light on the struggles of small people, such as Wiesler and Dreyman. The movie's double narration, the macro- and micro- levels of history, appear not contradictory but complementary: Gorbachev's policies directly led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it would not have been possible without the countless unseen and silent dissenters who acted like Dreyman and Wiesler.

By elevating a story of small individuals from a large historical background, the film proposes an alternative approach to history besides the Hegelian mode: when enjoying the fruits of progress, we should reckon with the struggles at the micro-level and recognize the value of individual experience. This resonates with the movie's core value of humanism, which stresses

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imperishable human dignity. The faith in human dignity is also endorsed by the themes of art and religion: art reveals humanity's inherent nobleness and sensibility for a higher existence, and the religious-spiritual realm elevates self-sacrifice and atonement – categories that lead to salvation and greatness. The movie eventually embraces Hegel by echoing his view on art and religion: both are embodiments of the higher spirit, which moves history toward freedom.

Showing a glimmer of hope without granting spurious redemptions, the movie ends in a beckoning gesture of reconciliation. Dreyman and Wiesler never speak to each other face to face, and the ending contains no consoling reunion – these symbolize a bitter truth that even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, alienation and uncertainty still hover over the nation. However, Wiesler's storyline, which depicts the movement from the basest secret police officer to the noblest "good man," pictures a trajectory into reconciliation. The hope, as opposed to the fear that shivers throughout the film, lies in the conviction that Wiesler does not sacrifice in vain. The name of the bookstore where Wiesler experiences his spiritual resurrection is "Karl Marx Buchhandlung," an acknowledgement and remembrance of the nation's past struggles. It is not by chance that Wiesler buys Dreyman's book at this bookstore: it represents Wiesler's reconciliation with his past, which symbolizes an idealistic national reconciliation. The movie shows a redemptive image of the future without concealing the cruelty of history. By reflecting on *what happened* and *what is*, it shows the audience *what should happen* in the future.

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