5: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: Andreas Voigt's Leipzig Pentalogy, 1986–96

<fl>WHILE MANY OF THE LAST FEATURE FILMS produced at DEFA in the final years experienced a much-delayed show of interest by audiences, documentary films often garnered immediate attention, as they functioned as reflective mirrors for the political and social upheavals of 1989. But like the feature films made between 1989 and 1992, the lasting value of these documentary films is only emerging years after the events they depict. Looking at Andreas Voigt's series of five documentary films about Leipzig from 1986 to 1996 from the perspective of twenty-five years after the fall of the wall confirms a statement by cinematographer Thomas Plenert at the Leipzig documentary festival in 1989: "I think it is important that a film retain its relevance for many years."[i] This unique pentalogy of films captures the changing mood from before the mobilization of GDR citizens— through their protests—and the ensuing dramatic changes, including the disappearance of the GDR itself. They do so directly, as they focus on the protests of 1989 and topics such as monetary union, restructuring of the social, economic, and legal system of the former GDR, and the effect on peoples' workplace, among others. But more interestingly, the films reflect the changes in the country indirectly in their own changing foci, beginning with a film that was Voigt's diploma film for graduation from the film academy (HFF) Babelsberg and ending with a film jointly financed by a German public broadcasting station (MDR), state and federal film subsidies, and a private production company (A Jour Production). As different as the production conditions for the five films may have been, they shared dramatic releases in the East and West: the first film, *Alfred*, caused a stir in the Babelsberg film school during its official evaluation for

acceptance as a diploma film. The fourth film, *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung*, provoked several lawsuits and injunctions by its subjects as well as by Leipzig's District Attorney.

<txt>Unlike the newscasts from the period, which covered the big events and the actions by politicians, these films focus in depth on the effects of the macro-historical events on the lives of ordinary people from a broad spectrum of backgrounds. By accompanying five or six individuals over the course of ten years, viewers of these documentaries can appreciate the complexities of coping with the rapidly changing world in East Germany. More importantly, the stories exemplify the need for nuanced study of recent history to avoid oversimplified divisions into winners and losers, perpetrators and victims. One reviewer aptly argued that the films show many hundreds of pages of social-science research.[ii] Twenty-five years after the fall of the wall, when historians are questioning the usefulness of the "totalitarianism model" for understanding the history of the GDR, and turning to everyday history (*Alltagsgeschichte*) in search of "more adequate representation and fuller understanding of GDR history" as Mary Fulbrook has written,[iii] Voigt's films are especially valuable documents. Far from being outdated, they rather anticipated such calls for a more complex assessment of the past. Voigt does not claim to be either comprehensive or representative, but his camera's focus on citizens in Leipzig is helpful in understanding both the hopefulness and earnestness of the protesters in the fall of 1989 and the sobering realities of life after unification. The films further avoid replicating the all-too-familiar images of dancing crowds on the wall in Berlin by exploring life in working-class neighborhoods on the outskirts of Leipzig, such as Connewitz, and Grünau, where change was initially slow to arrive, but unemployment was particularly drastic after the end of the GDR. Conceptually, all the films except the

first do not simply document the public events on the streets but take their audiences into factories, military barracks, pubs, private homes, and a jail. They therefore assemble a far more complex portrait of the multifaceted consequences of the change in East Germany's political system. Voigt's films move from capturing the crowds in the streets to a more intimate focus on the lives of a handful of individuals, thus taking viewers from the streets to the living room, from the political events in the public space to their consequences in the private sphere.

<txt>Historian Konrad Jarausch has pointed to the value of such individual life experiences, especially when they seem to contradict our understanding of history: "Instead of inspiring frantic efforts to produce a single authoritative narrative, these divergences of memory challenge historians to take the life stories of ordinary people into account when constructing their account of the past."[iv]

<txt>Yet filmmaker Andreas Voigt is not interested in working as a historian—he is a documentarist with a camera, trained in the DEFA studio but like his films' subjects released into the free market place of unified Germany. As such, he is as much an interested participant in the events he is filming as the people in front of his camera. In fact, the third film of the series, *Letztes Jahr Titanic* (Last Year Titanic, 1991), ends with an interviewee turning the table and asking Voigt about his future. The director replies candidly that DEFA will close down and all employees will lose their jobs—just like the subjects of his film. This admission on camera freely states the participatory mode and his subjective involvement in the events he chronicles.

<txt>As a filmmaker he makes it clear that "film is an image, it is a very subjective image."[v] Voigt is thus not constructing a coherent historical view of the years

from 1986 to 1996 but is seeking people from a broad range of society who are willing to allow the camera access to their quickly changing lives. He is interested in collecting complicated life stories and not afraid to ask very personal questions. In all five films he remains outside the image, but his voice is heard throughout, engaging in dialogue with his subjects. He never introduces his interview partners, nor does he provide an explanatory voice-over. He thus makes no attempt to edit his own presence out of the picture but creates extra distance between interviewee and interviewer by placing the camera in the middle. The full frame of the image belongs to the interview subject, often in long steady takes without breaking the focus through point-of-view shots. The tension created between the very personal questions and the special distance between interviewer and interviewee yields surprising intimacy without overpowering the films' subjects with the director's presence. Through editing, choice of music, and location, however, Voigt openly interprets his subjects' stories, a strategy that he begins in the diploma film, *Alfred*, and continues to the last, *Große Weite Welt*, as I will show in the following analysis of the films.

<1>**DEFA Style?**

<fl>In the critical literature on DEFA films, scholars have considered the question of a DEFA documentary style and its fate after 1989.[vi] However, as most film historians point out, the question of what this DEFA documentary style was is far from easy to answer. Frequently, documentary styles are categorized by generational developments, from the founding years in the 1950s, to the early hints of perestroika in the mid-1980s. In the case of the youngest generation of documentary filmmakers, the influence of the middle

generation, represented by Winfried Junge, Volker Koepp, and Jürgen Böttcher is noted.[vii]

<txt>For Voigt these directors were personally influential because they all worked within the "Gruppe Document" within the documentary-film studio. Like the feature filmmakers, documentary filmmakers were assigned to work within certain artistic groups, each with its own character. "Gruppe Document," which Voigt joined in 1978 as dramaturge for a film on Poland, was considered the most aesthetically diverse and creative among the various documentary groups. Voigt was a doctoral student in economics at the time and hired for the project because of his Polish language skills, having previously studied a year in Krakow. Even before beginning his own external studies in documentary film directing at the film academy, Voigt had worked with directors Junge and Koepp on their films (for example, Junge's long-term documentaries on the village of Golzow and Koepp's *Haus und Hof*) and participated in the general artistic and intellectual climate of the group. Having previously experienced the much more open and exciting cultural life in Poland and joining a filmmaker's group that contained internationally renowned artists such as Jürgen Böttcher shaped Voigt's own artistic development.[viii] Like Junge and Koepp (in his *Wittstock* films), Voigt became an important chronicler of change by depicting ruptures in individual biographies and landscapes over decades. Like Böttcher and Koepp, he was interested in Germany's relationship with its Eastern neighbors and made films about and in formerly contested border regions after unification, including *Grenzland—eine Reise* (1992) and *Ostpreussenland* (1995).

<txt>Jürgen Böttcher had modeled a new approach to documentary film in the GDR from the early 1960s on. Instead of following the official directive to depict exemplary lives in the young socialist worker and farmer state, he was attracted to more complex characters, like the three workers in *Drei von Vielen* (1961), which shows three workers who pursue artistic interests as passionately as their day jobs. In *Stars* (1963) Böttcher is less interested in the particulars of the female workers' industrial accomplishments in a light bulb factory, focusing more on the social dynamics among the women. *Ofenbauer* (1972) on the surface celebrates the amazing feat of moving an eighteen-ton heavy chimney-like oven a few yards to facilitate a more efficient replacement process, but the images' immediacy as a result of the placement of the camera in the midst of the tense operation is more reminiscent of Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* than of a typical socialist realist factory film. Finally, in Böttcher's seminal *Rangierer* the director delivered a groundbreaking montage of masterfully edited sequences of workers redirecting trains in various directions in a wintery Dresden industrial train yard. The film is edited without any voice-over or intertitles, highlighting the diegetic industrial sounds of screeching brakes, metal wagons slamming into each other, and snow crunching under heavy boots. The density of the visual and aural montage conveys powerfully the dangerous and hard work the men perform: no commentary is required. The lack of interviews and voice-over however, was also Böttcher's response to the increasingly stifling censorship situation in the studio and his refusal to engage the apparatus on that level. In his next film, *Kurzer Besuch bei Hermann Glöckner* (Short Visit with Hermann Glöckner, 1985), Böttcher visits the "constructivist" ninety-year-old painter and films him painting sparse circles in long, uncommented takes. Once more, little verbal

commentary is necessary as the film portrays the cheerfully stubborn dedication of one individual artist to his own aesthetic vision, unmoved by the dictates of official socialist policies.

<txt>Documentarist Thomas Heise (b.1955) pursued a similar strategy in his film *Das Haus* (1984) about the Berolina building on Berlin's Alexanderplatz, which housed the offices of Berlin's municipal administration, including the offices for housing, welfare, labor, and youth. The film also avoids a voice-over or any other commentary except for the visual structuring device of a sequence of visitors riding a paternoster elevator between floors. As the film crew moves from one city office to the next and simply chronicles the interviews between citizens and their caseworkers, the film uses intertitles to repeat phrases the caseworkers utter such as "I can already erase that," "there is no private workroom for a student," "Your daughter is not listed in the plan. My plan is the law. First the plan and then all else"[ix] Reproduced as intertitles, the phrases highlight the bureaucratic processing of people, which the tiny moving paternoster cubicles visually reinforce.

<txt>Voigt's personal style developed through his exposure to the directors of Gruppe Document, with whom he shared many affinities, including the long-term chronicles of Junge and Koepp, the precise observation of Böttcher, and the attention to socially marginalized individuals such as radical youth like Heise. Like his colleagues from the youngest generation (for example, Tschörtner, Misselwitz, Heise) Voigt displays his interest in the very personal experiences and dreams of his individual subjects. In contrast, Jürgen Böttcher's engaging film *Martha* (1978) portrays its protagonist as the last surviving *Trümmerfrau* (rubble woman), that is, one of the

countless women who literally rebuilt Berlin after the Second World War. In 1978, Martha still works among the rubble, sorting debris from the stony rubble in a junkyard. Böttcher, who has spoken about the lasting impact of his early childhood impressions in destroyed Dresden, repeatedly asks about her experiences in 1945, inserting footage of the destroyed city. He appears more interested in her persona as "the last surviving *Trümmerfrau*" than her individuality. The intimacy that documentary filmmakers of the younger generation, including Voigt, establish with their subjects signals a heightened commitment to the subjective and contradictory individuality of the protagonist.

<txt>While film historians generally share the view that real creative autonomy was as impossible to achieve in DEFA's documentary-film division as it was in feature films, it is important to remember that documentary films were produced for television, the documentary-film studio subdivided into its various artistic groups, and the division of state-owned film documentation of the film archive (staatliche Filmdokumentation beim staatlichen Filmarchiv) where independently minded young artists like Thomas Heise found a more protected work niche out of the limelight. As documentary films were less on the radar screen of censoring authorities, unexpectedly creative works were also produced in the children's documentary-film division, for example, by directors such as Günter Jordan and Jochen Kraußer. Jordan's *Berlin Auguststrasse* (1979) and Kraußer's *Die Leuchtkraft der Ziege* (The Luminosity of the Goat, 1987) may not have received permission to be released in theaters, but both films nevertheless had an important impact through film-club and school screenings. *Die Leuchtkraft der Ziege* in particular is a disarmingly comical, surreal farce that pokes fun at many things in the GDR; it prominently features hapless filmmakers in a parody of the country's stifling

artistic production conditions (see chapter 6). Documentary films produced at the DEFA studio were made for cinematic release under the jurisdiction of the film division of the Ministry of Culture and their directors generally enjoyed more freedom than documentary filmmakers at the GDR television studios. The latter operated directly under the supervision of the central committee of the Socialist Unity Party and its division for "agitation and propaganda."

<txt>A creative niche for small-scale documentary-film experiments was DEFA's "Kinobox" series, which produced documentary shorts that changed monthly for pre-feature film presentation in cinemas in the 1970s and 1980s. Directors such as Helke Misselwitz and Andreas Voigt, that is, members of the last generation of documentary filmmakers who went on to successful post-Wende careers, found space for important early film experiments here. Andreas Voigt's early Kinobox contributions included a portrait of an artist whose painting of the worker Alfred Florstedt later led to his diploma film,*Alfred*. A highly entertaining gem was his five-minute short *Mann mit Krokodil*, which dryly captured the absurd tale of a pet crocodile's annual excursion via Trabant taxi to its vacation domicile at his owner's summer house in the country. As the surprised cabdriver skeptically eyes his unorthodox passenger, the voice-over states matter-of-factly "Once a year Jonas is being shackled."[x] The story does not claim any political importance or greater moral significance but is a treasure of a closely observed unusual occurrence in the midst of the hectic urban bustle of Berlin.

<txt>In addition to finding niches such as the Kinobox productions for creative opportunities, having older, influential directors as patrons could make the decisive difference: both Misselwitz and Voigt were protégés of director Heiner Carow, which

provided them with small openings to develop their own filmic language instead of assisting merely on projects by older established colleagues. Given the different locations where documentaries were produced under varying conditions, as well as considering the impact the ever-changing larger political climate in the country had on filmmakers, the search for a definitive DEFA documentary style appears naively simplistic and by extension complicates the question of whether "the" DEFA documentary style may or may not have survived into unified Germany.

<txt>In addition to the political and generational changes among directors, younger cinematographers also made their mark in the last decade of the GDR. Elke Schieber has pointed out that this younger generation of cinematographers knew that GDR audiences had much more faith in images than words and "developed out of a sense of responsibility a special sensitivity for situations that change through the act of filming and reveal something fundamental."[xi] Schieber cites cinematographers Christian Lehmann, Sebastian Richter, and Rainer Schulz as prime examples for such aesthetic change. All three cameramen have worked repeatedly with director Andreas Voigt.

<txt>Helen Hughes has suggested that the absence of commentary in Voigt's documentaries is a relict of the old DEFA tradition that attempted to insert critical ambivalence into a film by letting images that concurred with official propaganda but contradicted popular experience speak for themselves. With regard to Voigt's refusal to comment on the right-wing views of his subjects in *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung* she questions whether this style is still effective in the "plurality of public opinion" of post-unified Germany as it might be misconstrued as "indifference or indecision" about the depicted extremists' views.[xii] By contrast, one might suggest that if audiences in the GDR

could be trusted to identify critical commentary in DEFA documentaries that flew below the censors' radars, audiences in unified Germany might be considered visually sophisticated enough to understand the filmmaker's montage not as an uncritical endorsement of right- or left-wing extremists' views but as explorations of what motivates young Germans to use violence against foreigners and perceived foreigners. Audiences from the former East and West Germany might thus be able to differentiate between images that endorse and glorify extremist violence and images that probe the reasons for disenfranchised youth to engage in such acts. Thomas Heise, who himself was criticized for his depiction of right-wing radicals in *Stau* (1993), commented in a related context: "It is not the task of documentary film to teach lessons about which view of the world is the correct one. Everybody has to decide that for himself, or at least to strive to find out for himself. Perhaps it is the task of film to remind viewers occasionally of the existence of real reality."[xiii]

<1>**The Leipzig Pentalogy**

<fl>The series begins with the biography of a worker in Leipzig, Alfred Florstedt, whose life encompasses all the major events of German history of the twentieth century from the First World War to nearly the end of the GDR. During the filming of *Alfred* in 1985 it was inconceivable that the GDR would not exist a few years later. The film was thus not intended to be the first of five Leipzig films. The second film, *Leipzig im Herbst* (Leipzig in the Fall, 1989), came about when Voigt and a few other DEFA directors and cameramen from the documentary studio felt that as filmmakers they could no longer ignore the events of the fall of 1989. Leaving the annual meeting of documentary filmmakers in Neubrandenburg in October 1989, Voigt and his colleagues petitioned the

director of the DEFA documentary studio on October 15 for equipment and permission to film the weekly demonstrations in Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden. Voigt and his colleagues wrote: “In regard to the current sociopolitical developments in the GDR it is our duty as documentary filmmakers to accompany this process. On the one hand, we need to engage through film in this all-encompassing dialogue. On the other, we need to collect material, capture events that will have great importance as a document of these weeks and months later on. We must film now.”[xiv]

<txt>The studio responded guardedly, by permitting the use of camera and sound equipment but specifying that the shooting was intended for archival purposes only. The succinct permission note stated simply that Voigt was charged with filming for documentary purposes,[xv] and was signed by the assistant director Seidl, as director Rüsch was “usually ill” on critical days, as Voigt put it dryly.[xvi] This way, the crew would gather potentially important material but could claim that it was for “research” purposes in case the protests were to turn violent and a government crackdown occurred. Three teams, with Voigt opting for Leipzig as his focus, thus took their equipment to the streets to document the rapidly expanding protests in October and early November of 1989. Calling his film “a material” rather than a fully conceived documentary film, Voigt’s document nevertheless was the only one of the three teams’ material that became a film. Although *Leipzig im Herbst* was shot only from October 16 to November 6, 1989, it became the opening sensation of that year’s Leipzig Documentary Film Festival just ten days after the last day of shooting. Encouraged by the success of the film, which won a specially created prize of the international jury in recognition of its unprecedented accomplishments, Voigt continued the work and documented the last year of the GDR

and unification with West Germany in *Letztes Jahr Titanic* (1991). It is here that Voigt introduces us to five characters whose lives he follows over the next decade. It should be remembered that the end of the GDR as an independent state could not have been predicted at the beginning of the shoot for this film in December 1989. Returning to Leipzig in 1992, a time when violent attacks on immigrants, asylum seekers, and black Germans reached new heights, Voigt engages with three radical youth in the most controversial of his five films, *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung* (1994), trying to find out what motivated such violence. In his final film, *Große Weite Welt* (Big Wide World, 1997), the team returns to reconnect with the five characters from the third film (*Titanic*). Unfortunately, efforts to secure funding for another film that would locate the protagonists of the second film *Leipzig im Herbst* to assess the situation twenty years after the fall of the wall were unsuccessful. TV broadcasting stations funded instead a large number of made-for-TV dramas that featured spectacular escape stories, or Stasi spy tales, further cementing the dominant view of the oppressive GDR ("Unrechtsstaat DDR") and thus preparing TV audiences for the opulent celebration of German unification, sponsored by the car manufacturer Audi, at the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the wall, the "Festival of Freedom" on November 9, 2009. In 2013 Voigt returned once more with a script for revisiting the characters from the pentalogy for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the wall.

<1>***Alfred***

<fl>What unifies all five films is Voigt's interest in connecting the private experience of an individual with the public events of macro-history in a working-class neighborhood of Leipzig. After seeing a painted portrait of worker Alfred Florstedt in a friend's studio in

1985, Voigt was curious about the old man and interviewed him for two days on tape, hoping to use the audio material as a starting point for a film at some point. A week later, Alfred Florstedt died, and Voigt decided to attempt a film based on the audio and few photos he took of Alfred. Relatively conventional in format, the film chronicles Alfred's biography from birth to his retirement, touching on his fate during the First World War, the Weimar years, the Second World War, the cold war, and the various stages of GDR history. These important cornerstones of German national history and that of Alfred himself are intertwined by means of the theme of Alfred's continuous involvement with political life in various parties. Even though he was persecuted for his political beliefs under the Nazis as well as the Communists in the GDR in the 1950s, Alfred never tired of his political work, as an anarchist, a Communist, and a union leader. As he stated pointedly to the filmmaker: "Those who do not engage in politics are the ones who make politics happen."[xvii]

<txt>Such a portrait of "a German life" is a worthy and fascinating project in itself, as it illustrates an ordinary worker's extraordinary struggles for political participation during the twentieth century in Germany. The audience gains insight into the unexpected complexities of these struggles almost by accident. Alfred's cousin, for example, describes his political convictions during the Weimar years as those of an anarchist. She explains that their families, while living across the street from each other, had little interaction, because Alfred's family was socialist while her own was Communist. Socialists and Communists simply could not interact in those years, she says, even if they were related and found themselves on the same side of the political spectrum.

<txt>However, Alfred's repeated run-ins with the socialist party authorities in the GDRin the 1950s was not a topic that film-school authorities felt comfortable addressing even in the mid-1980s. The troubles around the release of *Alfred* are difficult to comprehend from hindsight and outside the experience of having lived in the GDR, as the taboo surrounding any criticism of 1950s socialist policy was absolute and remained so almost until the end of the country. This book contains numerous stories about filmmakers such as Ulrich Weiß and Herwig Kipping, who were shut down after voicing alternative views of the early building years of the East German State. As I have shown in chapter 2, Herwig Kipping's depiction of the party's Stalinist period in *Land hinter dem Regenbogen* was a rare cinematic exploration of the power struggles in the GDR in the 1950s and was only possible after the wall had already fallen. Voigt's use of newspaper stories and party disciplinary documents that illustrate Alfred's past troubles with the party irked the censors.

<txt>Even more problematic was another provocative sequence. When reporting about Alfred's wife, Claire, and her work in a factory, Voigt interviews female workers in a plant where Alfred once worked. In one of the most compelling scenes of the film, two female workers discuss their daily struggles to find a balance between work and family responsibilities. Rather than presenting a rosy picture of the emancipated GDR worker, fulfilled by work and family life, these women talk about the stresses of having too little time for their families, few dreams, and little happiness. As one of them says when asked about her dreams: "Of course one has dreams, until one reaches a certain age. But once you have a family and a job, you stop dreaming" (20:00).[xviii] The women date this point, when everyday reality replaces youthful ideals, at the age of thirty. The film,

made in 1985, anticipates some core themes regarding women in the GDR that Helke Misselwitz would explore three years later in *Winter Adé* and is far more radical and personal than the interviews with female factory workers in earlier films by Böttcher and Koepp, such as *Stars* and *Mädchen in Wittstock*.

<txt>Voigt's rare voice-over (his later four films avoid voice-over commentary) just before this sequence accompanies a tracking shot along train tracks through the industrial landscape and connects Alfred's story with the present time: "Thinking of the past. Wishing to change the world quickly. Hoping to still experience that. The revolutionary ideal and reality" (19:00).[xix] The women's resigned assessment of everyday reality (*Alltag*) contrasts with Alfred's spirited and lifelong fight against rigid structures on the one hand and on the other hand reflects on the state of affairs in the GDR of 1985. Voigt clearly saw the correlations between Alfred's passionate struggles and his own generation of filmmakers, who were frustrated by the inflexible production structures at DEFA. He stated in an interview with the paper *Sonntag* in October of 1989: "We did not, in fact could not, make films about the essential experiences and conflicts of our generation."[xx] The film's critical aesthetic might appear subtle today, but was obvious for sensitized GDR audiences at the time. Voigt relates his film's "historical" documentary focus to the current situation and problems in the GDR of the later 1980s by editing frequent train sequences into the interview material. While it could be argued that these are simply needed to animate the numerous shots of still photos (a necessity since Alfred had died prior to the shooting of the film), the moving camera fulfills two central tasks: it explores Alfred's former neighborhood in search of traces of his biography, and it compares views of the Leipzig of Alfred's youth with the modern-day equivalent. The

seemingly innocent images reveal astonishingly little contrast. Leipzig-Plagwitz looks like a forgotten landscape from the past century, not the model image of the modern GDR economy that the leadership propagandized to its citizens and the world. Furthermore, the "traveling camera" symbolizes the need for the youngest generation of filmmakers to be given support for their own films about their time, as Voigt stated in the interview. Train tracks evoke the themes of travel, exploration, movement, modernity, progress, and departures. They signify Alfred's idealistic hopes for a better future, contrast with the female workers' sense of being stuck, and illustrate the filmmaker's desire for opportunities to explore his generation's topics and aesthetics.

<txt>In addition to being a sensitive tribute to an extraordinary ordinary person, the film highlights three clusters of problems in the GDR that visually anticipate much of what is verbalized in the material of *Leipzig im Herbst*: tedium, lack of freedom for self-realization, and decaying infrastructures. The film thematizes the stress of family and work life and sets expectations for personal happiness against the dreary realities of shift work in the manufacturing industry. Voigt's film does not confirm the official socialist propaganda of the emancipated GDR women specifically and the workers' paradise in general. On the other hand, the women in the film do not state that they dislike the work and would prefer to stay at home. They seem comfortable in their collegial relationships and sympathize with each other's complaints, thus hinting at the existence of a mutual support system. While their complaint about the daily stress is serious, they do not speak about feelings of isolation or lack of self-confidence. The dominant stress is of a different kind than that of West German women's lives in the 1970s and 1980s who were much less likely to work outside the house: the women workers in *Alfred* appear self-confident

and independent, if stressed by the double burden. This is not to suggest that all workers depicted in the films appear as primarily stressed, overburdened laborers. In a scene in a foundry, the film shows young metal workers performing tedious mechanical tasks, appearing less stressed than bored by the routinized labor.

<txt>Supporting this impression of the workers' lives as both secure and wearisome is the visual language of the film. Voigt and his cameraman Sebastian Richter capture the atmosphere of the Leipzig working-class district of Plagwitz in picturesque images that convey a sense of backwardness, decay, and some underlying timelessness. The most important aesthetic structuring device is a repeated long tracking shot, filmed from a freight train that passes through a neighborhood of manufacturing plants, industrial sites, brick warehouses, and surprisingly, the occasional residential tenement building in between. The area has a raw beauty, but the film also suggests that time has not progressed. Most of these tracking shots are devoid of human figures, increasing the impression of a deserted landscape. Depending on the viewer's perspective, these train sequences may appear idyllic to some, for example in their focus on a horse-drawn cart on cobblestone streets. Others might be reminded of poetic sequences in Walter Ruttmann's early-morning impressions of a still-sleepy metropolis in *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*. Voigt's superiors at the film academy in Babelsberg in 1986, however, did not share such sensibilities and immediately understood the film's critical attitude. A filmic portrait of a worker who ended his life as a distinguished comrade in the Socialist Unity Party (SED) could hardly have won favors with the authorities by depicting the working-class neighborhood of Leipzig-Plagwitz as run down and sleepy, while its

workers appear either stressed by the double burden of work and family or bored by the tedium of their jobs.

<txt>Alfred's parting shot at the film's end comes in response to the director's question of where he found the strength to fight so many different political systems over the course of his life: "If you don't believe that life will take a turn for the better, you needn't even begin" (**39:10**).[xxi] Unwittingly, the film becomes an immediate precursor to the second installment of the pentalogy, *Leipzig im Herbst*, which features the citizens' outspoken protests against the restrictive conditions in the GDR, demanding freedom of speech and travel, and democratic participation in government. In a way the November protesters signal a return to the combative spirit of Alfred Florstedt, who fought both Nazis and Stalinists because of his own views on social justice.

<txt>Voigt's film conveys appreciation for both Alfred's indomitable spirit and his critical assessment of the workers' situation in Plagwitz of 1986 by means of careful editing and evocative photography. Looking at it from today's perspective, viewers might be surprised to learn that this seemingly non-confrontational film caused serious uproar in the film academy during its evaluation process as Voigt's diploma film. It faced stiff opposition against being broadcast on GDR television, or being screened at the Leipzig documentary festival. The unflattering depiction of Leipzig's heavy-metal industrial district, Alfred's difficulties with the socialist unity party, which lead to his expulsion in 1950, and his eventual rehabilitation in 1956, and finally the modern workers who have given up their dreams of a brighter future was considered a provocation against the officially sanctioned views of the GDR as a modern, democratic workers' state. Voigt stated that this film would have not been possible even ten years earlier, and even in 1986

depended strongly on the steadfast support of two influential DEFA figures: feature-film director Heiner Carow, who had taken a personal interest in the work of Voigt and of several other promising young directors, including Helke Misselwitz and Herwig Kipping, and newly appointed film-school (HFF) director Lothar Bisky, who led the school from 1986 to 1990 and brought about a major change in its final years with his open-minded encouragement for the youngest generation of directors. Even with such high-level patronage, *Alfred* was only released for semi-private screening in film clubs but not for television broadcast, as was common for diploma films. In 1990 *Alfred* was among the formerly censored diploma films that were broadcast on television. Andreas Voigt successfully challenged an attempt by the television broadcaster to change the production date from 1986 to 1990.[xxii]

<txt>The fact that changes were taking place at the film academy in the later 1980s is illustrated by an incident Andreas Voigt related in an interview with the author.[xxiii] In 1987 Kurt Hager, chief party ideologue and member of the *Politbüro*—the highest governing body in the GDR—visited the film academy to personally view a few recent films by its graduates in the school's cinema in the Stalinhaus. After viewing *Alfred*, he turned to Voigt with an approving nod and said: "Make more films like this, young man."[xxiv] Such approval from the highest authority enabled film-school director Bisky to further defend the film and finally release it for its screening at the Leipzig film festival, which in turn earned Voigt an invitation to the important West German Oberhausen film festival.

<txt>Voigt establishes a few trademark features of all of his works in this first film. He is never seen in the film, although his voice is heard asking questions from

behind the camera. Arguing that the tendency toward a false naturalism in documentary film is furthered by the director's appearance on camera, Voigt prefers to create more distance between the protagonist, the camera and the director by interacting with his interviewees from behind the camera.[xxv] Furthermore, Voigt never speaks for his protagonists. He allows them to express themselves, answering his questions, but never summarizes what they have said for the audience in a voice-over or intertitles. In fact, in his second, third, and fourth films, he does not introduce his protagonists at all. He simply asks them questions, to which they respond. Whatever impression or story emerges over the course of the films is theirs to tell. Voigt's commentary establishes itself through the editing on the one hand and several structuring visual motifs on the other hand.

<txt>The dominant visual motif of the train cutting through the industrial neighborhood reappears in the following films, most prominently in the opening and closing shots of the train pulling in and out of the main train station in Leipzig in the third and fifth films, while the second film features a short sequence of the freight train rattling through a Leipzig industrial area that is highly reminiscent of similar sequences in *Alfred*. The significance of these recurring sequences shifts from the first to the last film: in the first film, they establish a connection between Alfred's neighborhood in the 1920s and beyond, and the time of filming in the late 1980s, with an eye to assessing the circumstances of workers in Leipzig today. The images thus contrast the reality of the 1980s against the ideals Alfred had struggled for.

<txt>In *Leipzig im Herbst*, the train sequence functions as a contextualizing device for two interviews with workers in a manufacturing plant like the one that Voigt

had visited in 1986 and would revisit for his later Leipzig films. Within the narrative flow of the film, the train tracks support his interviewees' contention that thorough reforms and modernizations are urgently needed. The camera cuts from an interview with young and old workers in the factory, where the older worker states that forty years of his generation's hard work had amounted to nothing, while the younger workers complain about stagnating and regressive developments in the factory. The dominant, all-encompassing control of the party is identified as the main source of frustration. Voigt contrasts this sequence with a shot of a billboard outside the factory, proclaiming proudly: "With the people and for the people we realize the goals of the party. Onward to the 40th anniversary of the GDR."(Voigt, *Titanic*, 13:18)[xxvi] Next we see the train tracks between two factory buildings with boarded-up doors and broken windows, placidly illuminated by pale sunlight and photographed in stark black and white stock. More pointedly than in *Alfred* this short montage contains the director's commentary on the events in Leipzig of 1989: the discrepancy between the party proclamations of progress and prosperity and the frustration of the people, who experience stifling structures and bureaucratic meddling by the government, is elegantly and efficiently made evident without resorting to any explanatory commentary, echoing Elke Schieber's assertion that GDR audiences trusted images more than words. The fact that the political climate had drastically changed and large crowds of people protested publicly in November 1989 is reflected in the more directly critical montage of this film. The indirect contrasting of reality and official propaganda in *Alfred* has given way to a pointed irony in *Leipzig im Herbst*.

<txt>The filmmakers take a self-confident stand by announcing to each interviewee that they are representing the DEFA documentary-film studio, as opposed to the television studio or Stasi cameras. GDR audiences dislikedGDR television films, but they appreciated DEFA documentary films produced as features for cinematic release because of their more complex approach to depicting GDR realities.

<l>***Leipzig im Herbst***

<fl>Indeed, Voigt's introduction of himself as a DEFA documentary studio representative is greeted with cheers and applause in the opening scene of *Leipzig im Herbst*, further signaling that filmmakers and protesters are embarking on a new path of more outspoken public discourse. Voigt's initial request for equipment and permission to film on October 15, in order to engage directly in the dialogue on the street with his camera, is accepted by a public that demands freedom of the press and welcomes the DEFA documentary-film team eagerly. The film illustrates what such an open discourse may look like in its encounters with a broad range of protesting citizens, police officials, church leaders, and workers. Importantly from today's perspective, the protesters do not primarily claim their desire for travel or consumer goods as their motivation to speak out. Freedom of speech, participation in government, and free elections are their main concerns, articulated with great dignity and earnestness by individuals who state that they have never been political before and are demonstrating now for serious reforms, not the abolishment of socialism. How far such sentiments had spread at this point in the dramatic developments of 1989 is elegantly conveyed by a central scene showing garbage collectors cleaning up the discarded banners of a recent protest march. Before flinging

them into the truck, they pause to read several signs and comment approvingly that they would rather preserve these signs than discard them.

<<Figure 5.1>>

<txt>The film's climactic scenes build around contrasting interviews with young army soldiers, whose mandatory military service required them to be on the other side of the protests from their families and friends, and whose loyalties were torn between their sworn duty as soldiers and their personal beliefs. These frank conversations are edited against interviews with two army officers, who outline the events of October 9, 1989 in Leipzig, where only a last-minute order averted a violent clash between police and protesters that seemed almost inevitable. The interviews reveal how easily a bloody escalation of the conflict (either by order from above or by accident in response to an uncontrolled violent trigger from either side) could have taken place.

<txt>*Leipzig im Herbst* was shot between October 16 and November 6, 1989, but its featured interviews recall especially the tense events around October 7th and 9th in Leipzig. The film is not a teleological chronicle that culminates logically in the fall of the wall on November 9th, thus "releasing" GDR citizens into the West. Such descriptions of the events of 1989 are common in the twentieth-anniversary celebrations such as the official "freedom festival." Instead, like many *Wendeflicks*[xxvii] made by East German directors around the years 1989 to 1992, this film is interested in the GDR itself, its problems, its ideas for reforms, and the astonishing power of the citizens' takeover of the streets and the podium, even in the face of incalculable danger. In the next film, *Titanic*, the situation in the GDR is discussed by street protesters, but there they also talk about

the FRG and its role in the future of the GDR. In *Leipzig* the focus is solely on the East German state and the historic moment of hopeful optimism for what it might become.

<txt>*Leipzig im Herbst* is notable for the immediacy with which it conveys the events of 1989. There was little time to filter the events—the excitement of the film as a historical document where filmmakers and street protesters are equally involved participants is palpable. The previously relied-on method of subtle critique through visual metaphors has given way to the frank exchange of diverse views by engaged citizens.

<l>***Letztes Jahr Titanic***

<fl>In the third film, *Letztes Jahr Titanic* (1991), which chronicles the events from December 1989 to December 1990, the train motif reappears in the opening and closing sequences, as the film team arrives and departs by train in the Leipzig train station. The film changes from color to black and white, reminiscent of the first two films in the series, as it begins its exploration on the streets and in the factories of Leipzig. A later sequence picks up the familiar train motif as it shows a freight train moving between the tenement buildings. The location is identical to sequences in both *Alfred* and *Leipzig im Herbst* and is once more part of a subtle but effective montage: the director begins with a conversation with Sylvia, one of the film's central characters, about her plans to sell her bar in Leipzig and move to Bavaria to purchase a new pub there and start over. A close-up of her hopeful yet uncertain face is edited against the heavy train moving through the tight opening between two residential buildings. The image is unsettling, as freight trains normally do not cut through tight residential spaces. The next image is of a carnival street scene, picturing a person dressed as the Statue of Liberty, and a group of revelers

alternately singing drinking songs and chanting demands for the incarceration of the former GDR president, Erich Honecker.

<txt>As in the use of the train motif in the previous two films, Voigt uses the image here to evoke powerful and contradictory ideas: Sylvia's plans to depart for the West, as she does not believe in the possibility of a brighter future in Leipzig; the draw of the West, once more symbolized by the costume of Lady Liberty; and the image of Bavarian conservative politician Franz Josef Strauss on another reveler's poster, all interconnected by the incongruous shot of the freight train. If the train symbolized the wish for travel and change in the earlier two films, this dream has now become a real possibility. But the image of the heavy train cutting through a tight opening also conveys the director's view that this departure will not be easy. Voigt captures this historical moment of opportunity and ambivalence in the brief shot of the train slicing through the city without any voiceover commentary.[xxviii]

<txt>The topic of departing for a better life in the West also corresponds to an early interview with steelworker Wolfgang, who tells Voigt about his repeated attempts to escape for the West in the early days of the GDR, for which he twice served time in jail. After his release he married and had children, a story reminiscent of the two women in *Alfred*, who found that life's dreams and higher aspirations typically find their end in the everyday routine of marriage and work. Wolfgang, like Sylvia, wishes to depart for the West now that his children are grown and his work place is likely to be abolished. As it turns out, he reiterates this plan several times in the film, always further postponing the departure date. In the end he does not manage to go. Voigt explained in an interview in 1998 why Wolfgang chose not to participate in future films: "[The worker] always talks

about leaving and has still not left today. He did not want to participate in further filming because he would have had to face his past illusions, and that would have hurt."[xxix]

<txt>*Titanic*, the third of the five films, is the centerpiece of the pentalogy. It uniquely captures the unsettled atmosphere of the *Wende* year, 1989/90. If *Leipzig im Herbst* features the anger and hopefulness of GDR citizens, as well as the somewhat speechless helplessness of its officials, *Titanic* depicts a country deeply shaken by its sudden dissolution. The atmosphere at a Titanic-themed farewell party to the GDR is symptomatic of the pervasive sense of uncertainty of those days. Partygoers dance somewhat mechanically, without real joy or excitement in their celebration. When a performance artist intones through a megaphone: "Ladies and gentlemen, please proceed in a calm and orderly fashion to the life-boats," a group of young men slowly take off their tuxedos and stand quietly, vulnerable and exposed in their nakedness, on the proverbial sinking ship. The scene echoes precisely the dominant mood of anxiety also expressed in street celebrations. Here citizens attempt to conjure up the party spirit by intoning the German national anthem. Opting for the ordinarily shunned first stanza, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," a few revelers attempt to sound as self-confidently patriotic as the text of the anthem would suggest. Alas, neither text nor melody seems well practiced. Switching randomly between the first stanza of the (West) German anthem and the popular drinking song "So ein Tag, so wunderschön wie heute" the small group gives the overall impression of great forlorn uncertainty, forced excitement, and an utter lack of self-assurance.

<txt>Supporting the theme of departure, in line with the Titanic motif of the sinking ship, the film introduces several characters planning to leave for the West. The

desire to start over and realize one's own potential, not to mention the fear of losing one's job in the East, are the reasons for this migration, which has persisted for the last twenty years, as much of the former manufacturing industry in East Germany has been dismantled. Importantly, the relations between East Germans and foreign workers in the GDR, described in several interviews as "excellent," appear more fragile in light of the new economic situation. Tensions emerge quickly in a bar scene when a local East German feels that African musicians, who are his fellow workers in the manufacturing plant, receive an undue amount of attention by the documentary-film crew, while GDR citizens are ignored. Like the seamstresses depicted in a different interview, who articulate their fear for their jobs and the strong view that their Vietnamese coworkers should be the first to go when lay-offs begin, since "they can always return to their own country," the argument in the bar illustrates the great sense of uncertainty and tension regarding the future. The two interviews also connect to the theme of violence against foreigners, which is the main focus in the next film, *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung*. Pointedly, Voigt concludes this segment with a brief shot of an old apartment building imploding. As the city is already preparing for the building craze that is about to begin, the old and familiar structures are quickly being demolished, literally vanishing from view within seconds in this shot.

<<Figure 5.2>>

<txt>In *Titanic* Voigt's team encounters other signs of the rapid change that took place within a matter of weeks after the fall of the wall. Sandwiched between the scenes of street revelers droning the German national anthem, and the seamstresses discussing

their worries about their job security, Voigt finds a pair of enterprising West Germans who found opportunity in the East. The Bavarians produce porno films with "Leipzig housewives," and rave about the ideal market conditions, the "open-minded attitude" of the East German women, and the record profits that strong demand in this new market has already yielded for them. These two characters appear lewd and unsavory in the film,and the setting of the founding of Leipzig's "Sexliga," shown immediately following the interview with the Bavarians, is bizarre. Resembling a socialist-party convention in a conference room, rows of middle-aged, conservatively dressed men and women are sitting quietly watching the tawdry performance of two strippers. No further information about the goals, motivations, or plans for the "Sexliga" is provided, creating a baffling intermezzo between interviews about job losses and system change. But the film's editing again speaks for itself: the new freedoms affect all aspects of life in the former GDR, from the singing of a new anthem, to the workplace, and the bedroom. In a summative gesture that refers back to the filmmaker's own situation, *Titanic* features a montage of a closed cinema, adorned by an old poster on the crumbling facade proclaiming: "Film becomes an event only in the cinema" (59:19).[xxx] In a cross-cutting shot, we then see a brightly illuminated "Video World" store, hinting that the filmmaker's own work at DEFA, with its claim to making films that can have a cultural, and political impact on society, will now have to make room for the commercial home-entertainment industry.

<txt>In this context the character of Renate is introduced. She is the only person who actively reflects on the old system, her role in that society, and her struggles to adjust to the new system. Voigt structures her story into three segments that build the dramaturgical tension, give the audience a chance to slowly ponder her complicated

history, and allow the director once more to place her story within the context of the overall narrative of the film. The initial encounter occurs about two-thirds into the film, showing Renate on a train. The traveling motif again signifies her own journey—she is shown on the train as she ponders her past in the GDR and her future in the new system. Renate is the most complex character in the five films, and her story illustrates the complexities of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* beyond easy dichotomies.

<txt>Most striking is her candor, as well as the courage with which she describes her own belief in the socialist project, her faith in the system, her thorough study of classic texts of political science, economy, and philosophy that all led her to the conviction that the GDR was the better German state. Her analysis of her own idealism is sincere and counters the *tabula rasa* condemnations of socialism as totalitarianism that dominated the populist discourse regarding the GDR from 1989 until the twentieth anniversary celebration as a triumph of free market capitalism over socialism Renate's examination of her own former utopian idealism helps to explain why the GDR was a relatively stable system for forty years, as it was supported at least until the mid-1970s by a significant proportion of the country's intellectuals. Her testimony also reminds viewers that the underlying principles of the socialist experiment, while increasingly further removed from the actual reality of their implementation, once held a powerful and stabilizing appeal for many GDR citizens. These principles were certainly bitterly disappointed, but they still resonated in a number of interviews of the Leipzig films, including in conversations with radical youths, old factory workers, and young punks. The complete disregard of these ideals in the rush toward German unification (as Konrad Jarausch once famously termed it) explains some of the frustrations and disappointments

of the characters in the pentalogy. While the old utopian ideals had been perverted in the real existing socialism of the GDR, they still continued to inspire hope and motivated citizens to protest in the events leading up to 1989. The rapidly changing chants from "We are the people" to "We are one people" and the urge toward quick monetary union with the West left little room for a more measured contemplation of alternative models for reform and/ or unification. Andreas Voigt himself articulates this sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of thorough analysis of what led to the collapse of the old system and what alternatives to a fast-track unification with the West could be realized. In an interview with the paper *Tageszeitung* he states: "Therefore the events in the GDR were not a revolution. We did not manage to destroy the old structures"[xxxi]

<txt>Renate's explanation of her initial belief in the system, a belief that extended so far that she searched for flaws in her own attitude when she found imperfections in the socialist reality, is important if we are to understand her later role as an informer for the Stasi. It is only in the second segment of her interview that we learn that she was coerced into informant's duties through blackmail after being raped by a Stasi official. Neither she herself nor Voigt presents her as a mere victim of the Stasi; they paint a complex picture of an idealist intellectual who was both a victim and a perpetrator of the system. Renate struggles visibly with her own history as an informant. She is worried about the professional, social, and personal repercussions of this history on her life in unified Germany. But she also questions her actions of the past, asking: "From what point on should we all have been smarter than we were back then? My ideal society seemed to me a realizable goal in the GDR" (1:06:16).[xxxii] Such earnest and tortured attempts to come to terms with the past, on a macro- and micro-historical level, are rarely seen in filmic

treatments of the *Wende.* Instead, easily consumed caricatures like Stasi officer Wiesler in the Oscar-winning box-office hit *Lives of Others* (2006) have satisfied the popular imagination with stereotypical surveillance villains. Renate's tortured tale demonstrates instead how a large, oppressive apparatus that consists of individual agents with complex and contradictory motivations can function. Her final appearance in this film confirms the impression of her inner strength as well as the complicated inner turmoil many East Germans experienced: barely having had a chance to digest the past and anticipating an uncertain future, she is torn between fear and hope at the end of *Titanic*.

<txt>This situation has not significantly changed five years later, when the film team catches up with her for *Große Weite Welt* (1996). Renate is still digesting the Stasi past, musing about the decision of many former informants to deny their past in order to not be excluded from jobs in the new economy. Rejecting such a path for herself, she is struggling with the consequences of an openly admitted informant's past on her private and professional life. Voigt now films her in the glass elevator of a newly constructed high-rise in Leipzig, on the way to a job interview. She has done much to adapt to the capitalist market: obtained a drivers license, brushed up on her Russian, and learned English, but to no avail. Her optimism, expressed verbally and visually in the elevator ride upwards, is disappointed once more and she remains unemployed. Five years of continued struggles finally end with her suicide, a tragedy that occurs after the film is completed. Director Voigt has referred to her story as having "the dimensions of an ancient tragedy."[xxxiii]

<txt>Indeed, but perhaps with the difference that Renate's fate was not preordained by divine forces. Political, economic, and social pressures resulting from the

unification process have created many individual fates like Renate's, particularly for her generation of East Germans, that is, those who were in midlife when the wall fell. Much of the value of Voigt's Leipzig pentalogy lies in the care with which such stories are preserved and presented. The films neither condone nor condemn the individual for past and present conduct but instead provide the time and space for a reflective articulation of the difficulty of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

<1>***Große Weite Welt***

<fl>The fifth film, *Große Weite Welt*, is introduced once more by the shot of the train arriving at the Leipzig train station, again switching from color to black and white to signal the different time frames of the film: here Voigt inserts segments from his earlier films to reintroduce audiences to his characters from the past and contrast the earlier interviews with life in 1996. Sylvia's hopeful departure for the West and a new life in Bavaria has not really found fulfillment: she and her husband Dietmar have established a new life in a small town in the West, but her attempts to start a new business for herself have failed. She is home, unemployed, while her husband is working. Voigt's camera effectively captures the dramatic change in the energetic bartender of 1990 who danced with her regular guests at her lively farewell party in Leipzig, and is now photographed alone in her kitchen. She appears quieter, wistful, as she reads from a travel book about the Caribbean Islands. Her husband Dietmar meanwhile, a hobby diver, is filmed emerging in his diving gear from a lake, playing on the double meaning of the German "abtauchen" (in German, the word means to dive under but also to disappear). Both want to go further West, leaving Germany altogether. Their dream of a better life is still not fully realized, but seems much less attainable in late middle age. No voice-over

commentary is needed here, either, to articulate the complexities of their departure from East to West: Voigt's staging in the kitchen, at the lake, and with the travel book tells the story visually and pointedly.

<txt>In a telling shot, for example, we see Sylvia and Dietmar on the sidewalk of their small town in Bavaria, observing a carnival parade moving past them. It brings to mind the carnival parade of 1990 in *Titanic*, which despite all uncertainty was marked by upbeat hopes for the future, but this small town parade is characterized by its orderly procession. Silvia's and Dietmar's faces are impassive; they appear to be mere onlookers, not integrated into the social fabric of the community. The images of the couple on the margin of the festivities again contrast with Silvia's lively farewell dance in her Leipzig pub.

<txt>This last film of the pentalogy, like the third film, *Letztes Jahr Titanic*, begins with a train ride into the Leipzig main station, once more signaling its geographic location in the East but also, in its change from color film to black and white, the motif of time travel. Pointedly, however, the film does not end with the train ride away from Leipzig's train station, as does *Titanic*, but instead with a forlorn-looking single car occupied by one of the film's protagonists, Sven, and his girlfriend Diana in the empty parking lot of a strip mall on the outskirts of Leipzig.

<txt>Ten years after unification, the lives of the five Leipzig citizens have been transformed significantly: the former punk girl is now a conservatively dressed office worker in Stuttgart, who lives out her wilder side by dressing up in leather clothes and partying with her cross-dressing friend on the weekends. The former bartender is a lonely-seeming housewife in Bavaria, with dreams of life on a Caribbean island. The

former radical left wing skinhead (the so-called redskin) youth, “Papa,” is now a career soldier in the German army, about to marry his nineteen-year-old girlfriend Diana, and hoping for a small family. Former journalist Renate, who had earnestly struggled with her own past involvement in the Stasi, details her continued efforts to adjust to the new economy without finding an opportunity for herself and tragically commits suicide.

<txt>Much of this is summed up in the change from the opening shot, the by-now-familiar train ride into Leipzig, to the closing shot of the small car in the empty mall lot. The train has been replaced by the car. Interviews in the earlier films usually took place in manufacturing plants, since that was where the protagonists spent their days. Now many of those plants have closed and strip malls have altered the cityscape of many East German towns. While workers spoke of stresses at work or the difficulty of balancing work and family in the early Leipzig films, we now see images of individuals at home, in small gardens, kitchens, overstuffed chairs, or cars. The contrast of the footage from the earlier films, where the protagonists speak of their hopes and dreams for the future, and the sobering realities in 1996 is clearly expressed in their statements about the various forms of alienation under capitalism. Voigt and cameraman Sebastian Richter skillfully reinforce these statements with a strong visual language that is as unobtrusive as it is memorable. As Martin Mund summarized, “Voigt documents a pervasive fatigue and exhaustion, an increasing loneliness, an escape to the private sphere, an almost complete de-politicization of people’s ideals.”[xxxiv] Visual metaphors such as Dietmar in his diving suit, Papa and Diana in the car in the empty strip mall lot, or the garden shack at night from the outside, while the now retired or unemployed former seamstresses have moved inside, are potent images for the changes that have taken place between 1986 and

1996. As Hans-Jörg Rother opined: “The fifth and for now concluding film by the Berlin director about people in Leipzig is one of those important cinematic events of contemporary German culture that reveals a lot without wishing to make any claims.”[xxxv]

<txt>The tracking shots of trains that structured *Alfred* and functioned as important visual metaphors in the second and third film are gradually replaced with shots of cars, especially cars driving through drive-through restaurants. The landscape of Leipzig has changed from the picturesque but sleepy horse carts on cobblestones of 1985 to the new fast-food chains that pepper the modernized cityscape. The increasing withdrawal of the protagonists into the private sphere—into their kitchens, weekend cabins, and backyards—contrasts sharply with the outwardly directed political struggles of Alfred and the outspoken earnestness of the street protesters in 1989.

<txt>The last film, while sober in its assessment of the effects of German unification in Leipzig, is not judgmental in its editing. The protagonists are not depicted as having sold out their former ideals after 1989. Voigt is interested in the complex negotiations each of his protagonists has to undertake in both East and West in order to reach his or her personal goals. The stories of the radical redskin “Papa” and the journalist Renate best illustrate these struggles. Their lives demonstrate that the historical analysis of socialist and capitalist systems cannot proceed along simplistic, binary lines. While West German journalists demanded a straightforward indictment of former Stasi informantsafter the release of *Titanic*,[xxxvi] Voigt insists on a more nuanced approach. His films demonstrate that a real understanding of the repressive mechanism of mass surveillance in the GDR can only be gained by analyzing the apparatus as consisting of individuals.

<l>***Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung***

<fl>The fourth film in the series is perhaps the most incongruous and was at the same time the most controversial. Responding to the sharp spike in street violence by radical youth in East Germany in 1992, Voigt visited a youth club in Leipzig-Connewitz known for its concentration of radicals and suggested making a film with them. The resulting *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung* (1994) focuses on three young men, the two right-wing skinheads Dirk and Andre, and the left-wing skinhead nicknamed Papa. The segments that introduce the lives and worldviews of these skinheads are juxtaposed with sequences with West German investor Dr. Schneider, whose real-estate empire quickly expanded eastward after the fall of the wall. Voigt shows him opening a newly renovated, upscale shopping center in a historic Leipzig building, and jovially dispensing advice about the market economy to an East German cabdriver. After the film's release, Schneider sued and received a temporary injunction, and the scenes showing him had to be censored. Claiming to have been misled about the true nature of the film, he refused to be included in a film about violent skinheads. Fortunately for the film, these events coincided with the revelation that the billionaire investor was a fraud who suddenly disappeared. The film could thus be restored and shown in its original form.

<txt>The Schneider sequence was criticized by reviewers, who found the balance between the business dealings of the West German capitalist and the violence against non-white inhabitants perpetrated by skinheads in Leipzig depicted disproportionately. As one critic wrote, "The neo-Nazis appear as victims of a society that does not need them. The real perpetrators, Voigt insinuates, are characters like the West German businessman Mr. Schneider, who travels with his wife between Frankfurt and Leipzig,

and buys a house here and there—which Voigt observes with disgust."[xxxvii] The review, published in the left-leaning West German daily *Tageszeitung*, performs precisely the simplistic comparative weighing of one evil against another that the film avoids. *TAZ* reviewer Kuhlbrodt argues that while neo-Nazis are as unpleasant as "capitalist picture-book pigs" like Schneider, one would nevertheless prefer to meet the business man on the street rather than the violent skinheads. Such reductive readings miss the point of Voigt's montage.

<txt>The interviews and camera work are measured, restrained, and sober in the jail cell with neo-Nazi Dirk as well as in the posh office of Dr. Schneider. The film's editing does not pit Eastern street radicals against Western crooked venture capitalists. Rather, Voigt encounters both with an interest in exploring their respective worlds and worldviews. His attempt to understand the young radicals is highly revealing, showing how social problems ranging from unemployment to family violence and neglect affect marginalized youth. At the same time it is entirely unnecessary to comment on Dr. Schneider's jovial speeches on how East and West Germans are all facing the economic challenges of unification together, and that his concern for the preservation of historic architecture trumps any business interests he might have. The elegance of such footage consists of Schneider's own display of self-satisfied arrogance, requiring no verbal elaborations from the filmmaker.

<txt>In juxtaposing these sequences with the scenes with the left- and right- wing youth Voigt is making a clear commentary. Unlike Kuhlbrodt however, I read this technique as expository of two important phenomena that shaped East German cities such as Leipzig in the early years after unification: the emergence of increased violence

against foreigners and black Germans on the one hand, and the capitalist takeover of the East German economy by West German investors on the other. Voigt's intention here is not to pit one group against the other with an interest in establishing a hierarchy of evils. Rather, the montage delineates the tense post-unification economic reality of East Germans, who lack not only jobs and job training, but also capital for taking advantage of the economic opportunities in rebuilding the East. The dialectic between the portrayal of the skinheads and the investor does not show understanding for the violence of the youth while indicting the businessman. Instead, as in the story of Renate, the film refrains from pitting "the victim" against "the perpetrator." Dirk, Andre, and Papa are not excused for their violent attacks on foreigners and others. But instead of using them for moralistic condemnations and righteous outrage, Voigt is interested in finding out where the violence originates. The portraits that emerge tell us that they have experienced a great deal of violence in their own lives, and that they have noprospects for a meaningful career, no productive adult role models, and most seriously, no motivating goals for their personal futures. The interviews with the skinheads, whether left- or right-wing, are harrowing, because they depict young people unable to envision any productive future for themselves, or to provide even vaguely political reasons for their hatred of others. Asked why they attack asylum seekers, these youths state simply that it is "fun." Asked why he wrote a song about gassing foreigners, Andre shrugs and states simply that gas rhymes with fun (Gas/Spaß) Boredom, alienation, and a lack of social structures or family support are common factors for all three. Perhaps one of the most disturbing answers to Voigt's repeated question regarding the origin of the violence they perpetrate is delivered

by Matthias, who after his court trial for “disorderly conduct” and “agitation against the people” (Volksverhetzung) shrugs, and says that the violence has always been in him.

<txt>The film does not begin and end with the customary train ride in and out of the Leipzig train station but instead shows two skinheads practicing shooting with their handguns on a bare, wintery field. The image is grippingly desolate. The audience sees only the uniforms of the skinheads (bomber jackets, army boots, shaved heads), their backs turned to the camera, symbolically away from society. The frame shows the youths’ singular focus on their weapon; as the interviews reveal later on, a girlfriend and a gun are the only two objects worthy of love. The guns are important for their own protection—for the neo-Nazis, their sense of disrupting the social order and for the left-wing skinhead, securing “calm and orderliness (“Ruhe und Ordnung”) . But guns are not just of great value for the radical youth. As *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung* illustrates, violence is on the rise in general in post-unified Germany. Reviewers have pointed to the thematic parallels between Voigt’s film and Winfried Bonengel’s *Beruf Neonazi* (1993), as well as Thomas Heise’s *Stau* (1992), which now, with *Neustadt* (1994) and *Kinder, wie die Zeit vergeht*, which was completed in 2008, has become a trilogy itself. Bonengel’s film caused a scandal because of its complete lack of commentary on the racist, holocaust-denying statements made by protagonist Eward Althans. Unlike Bonengel and Heise in their slightly earlier films, Voigt does engage his interviewee Andre in conversation after he has performd his song “Ausländer rein” (Foreigners Enter), which appears at first glance like a reversal of the neo-Nazi slogan “Ausländer raus” (Foreigners Out)—that is, until the lyrics continue: “Ausländer rein, rein ins Gas” (Foreigners enter, enter into the gas). While critics of *Beruf Neonazi* and *Stau* rebuked their directors for refraining from

commentary, reviewers called Voigt's response to Andre "pedagogical" and critiqued the "empathetic social worker sound."[xxxviii] How politically sensitive either approach was, is demonstrated by the fact that both *Beruf Neonazi* and *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung* became objects of legal injunctions on the grounds of sedition (*Volksverhetzung)*.

<<Figure 5.3>>

<txt>Voigt is not just examining the views of right- and left- wing youth, however. The film also features interviews with a gun-shop owner, and of course the fraudulent Dr. Schneider. Furthermore, Voigt discusses Papa's work for a private security firm, as well as Dirk's views on the foreign legion and the German army. Out of all these segments, the impression of a society arises in which security (or better, the lack thereof) is of increasing concern for its citizens, all of whom express various forms of anxiety and frustration. Neo-Nazi Dirk rages against his impotence to fight the real political powers of the state, left-wing skinhead Papa wants to ensure that there will be no right-wing disruptions, while former worker Klaus feels victimized by the economic crisis of epidemic unemployment in the East that followed unification. Only the gun-shop owner feels "well protected" as she glances with satisfaction over her inventory of guns, knives, and other weapons. Once again, the film derives its power from the simplicity of the audiovisual presentation: seeing the small, late-middle-aged woman surrounded by the armory of modern protection and hearing the metallic sounds of weapons being tested by her juvenile customers is startling to audiences, as the scene is depicted as matter-of-factly as if it were a bakery or a hardware store. But with the same normalcy as the youth might have purchased a bottle of milk from the corner store a decade earlier, the tools for

executing the violence the film has explored are now being traded. This cold shift in social relations, visualized so unspectacularly, leaves viewers with the chilling realization that fundamental changes have indeed shaken this society. The strategy here and elsewhere in this controversial film is not journalistic, sociological, historical, or moral. Rather, Voigt has maintained his filmic style, his "handwriting" as Günther Jordan would put it, remarkably steadily from his early student days to his post-Wende works. As Jordan has argued, film style among DEFA documentary filmmakers was not just historical baggage determined by the conditions of studio and party hierarchies and censorship in the GDR but "tools that cannot be random in the march through the world, toward people, into the world of art."[xxxix] For Voigt, this means taking time, and giving space to his subjects, taking them seriously and treating them respectfully, even, and perhaps especially, when he disagrees with their viewpoints. The individual portraits of Leipzig residents that emerge from ten years of filmmaking are diverse and contradictory, sad and sometimes inspiring. Voigt finds images to convey their stories that speak volumes in brief snapshots: the return into the private sphere, the loneliness of the overstuffed living room, the sadness of a carnival group, the hopefulness of an elevator ride, the weight of a freight train, the backs of disaffected youth, and finally the frequent long shots of quiet groups of unemployed workers sitting idle and forlorn in front of closed manufacturing sites. The reception history, from the censorship debate around *Alfred* in 1986 to the legal injunctions against *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung* in 1994 demonstrate that while political conditions in Germany have been fundamentally altered, Voigt's quietly provocative style has remained remarkably consistent. In the GDR his strategy of blending the historical with the contemporary irked the censors, as it disturbed

the harmonious view of modern socialism they wished to project. In unified Germany, the director's refusal to verbally position himself vis-à-vis his extremist subjects struck reviewers as cowardly, while city officials complained about negative imagery harmful to their hopes for attracting trade and tourism and thus stood in the way of TV broadcastings once more.[xl] If Voigt's documentary style is thus indeed labeled "typical DEFA style," then Thomas Schmidt's oft-cited statement about the superfluous DEFA documentary film after the fall of the wall must be questioned: "The pressure to express oneself in such a way that censorship or the apparatus does not discover the politically dicey things, yet to still narrate reality, is a result of censorship. The moment it disappears, [documentary film] loses its function as ersatz medium for the journalistic work that is lacking in television or the print media."[xli] Voigt's films in their steady pre- and post-*Wende* aesthetic have earned the distinction of remaining provocative and artful documents of complex realities and experiences from the margins of society.

<1>**Notes**