

FILE-BASED AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AFTER 1989

by

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## **Abstract**

This study analyzes four file-based autobiographies written after the fall of the Berlin Wall in response to the opening of the Stasi files. The acronym Stasi comes from the German term “Staatssicherheit” and means the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). By constructing their narratives using files written by former secret police officers instead of their own memories, these writers challenge the aesthetics of mainstream autobiographies and subvert the expectations of over-determined autobiographical reading: instead of offering a personal story beginning in early childhood and ending later in life, they engage in a revision of their lives based on a personal Stasi file written by a hostile third party. These four case studies show how people under surveillance may need to draw on such hostile documents, even if they are inaccurate, because the Stasi files enable these writers to support their claims of authenticity and thus fulfill the autobiographical pact. In this way, these autobiographers acquire and give a new function to such documents than the one the Stasi originally intended. The autobiographers show that using their files not only results in unexpected memory processes but is also a political and literary process that supports their personal agenda and targets particular audiences like their families, friends, or the public press. This use of personal files gives these writers the authority to discuss their reaction to the opening of the Stasi files as well as the records themselves.

The dissertation not only groups the resulting narratives as an autobiographical sub-genre but also studies the legacy of a unique historical moment: while the opening of the Stasi files and the passing of the *Stasi Files Act* revolutionized the access, usage, and function of the Stasi archives, these autobiographers also contradict the original purposes

for which the files were kept. I study the various ways in which these autobiographers allow their police files mediate their memories and life stories. I analyze how these former data subjects contest the initial purpose of these files and of the autobiographical genre by strategically appropriating their Stasi records. I study the role of their Stasi files in their narratives and how and why these were re-functionalized in order to validate the authors' claims of authenticity.

## **Preface**

An earlier version of Chapter 4 appeared in *Colloquy*:

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# 1 Introduction: Historical and Theoretical Overview

“What we call ‘my life’ is the mental autobiography with which and by which we all live. What really happened is quite another matter,” Ash points out (20). In the case of file-based autobiographies, “my life” involves the re-appropriation of Stasi<sup>1</sup> files and their insertion in a literary context. The production of file-based autobiographies was made possible by the Wende, a turning point in German history following the fall of the Berlin Wall, but it is a sub-genre that owes its existence more specifically to the protests in Berlin and Leipzig and the occupation of the Stasi headquarters in Berlin’s Lichtenberg district. In fact, the protests that led to the opening of the Stasi files in 1992 provided the conditions necessary for file-based autobiographies. It was the citizens’ collective courage and insistence to preserve these records that triggered the discussions, which in turn resulted in the *Stasi Files Act* (Mitter 74). This pressure caused the files to be made avail-

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<sup>1</sup> The Stasi, established on 8 February 1950, served as an instrument of power of the Politbüro of the SED party (Socialist Unity Party). It was not a state within a state (Childs 176), but rather subordinate to the ruling Party. “Die absolute Unterordnung der Staatssicherheit unter die Partei und deren Führung geht aus unzähligen offiziellen MfS [Ministerium für Staatssicherheit] Dokumenten und Äußerungen von Erich Mielke hervor” (Gauck *unheimliche* 72). It was comparable to the State Security Service of the Soviet Union, the Cheka, and involved physical torture, show trials, long imprisonment, arbitrary arrests and abductions. Its main function was to suppress those who opposed Socialism. There was an estimated number of 600 000 unofficial collaborators (called IMs or *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*) in the overall GDR history (Dennis 90). Out of a population of 16 million people in the former GDR, at least one out of 120 inhabitants was an IM (Dennis 94). Other estimates argue that as many as one out of every 100 adults worked for the Stasi (*Firma*). The Stasi was one of the world’s largest spy agency: “Relative to population, it is the largest secret service in the history of mankind” (*Firma*). It was “East Germany’s largest government agency” (*Firma*) and was responsible for surveillance within the country as well as for foreign espionage, border controls, and counter-intelligence (*Firma*).

able to the former data subjects<sup>2</sup> as early as three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall instead of requiring the usual thirty years' retention period for other state archival material (Mitter 74). In the case of some former data subjects the memory processes were triggered by the encounter of these authors with their files, which they subsequently acquired and re-functionalized as writing tools.

My research is not about well-known writers in the usual sense but about an exceptional situation in history, when former data subjects from different social and political backgrounds were given the opportunity to access their secret files. Although the files were initially opened to allow these data subjects to evaluate the extent to which the Stasi infringed their lives, these individuals also used these files to narrate their own life stories under observation; they also reflected on the experience of reading the Stasi documents that recorded that life. Most former data subjects would not necessarily have become autobiographers, or at least not at this stage in their lives, had they not read their Stasi records. For this study I selected Timothy Garton Ash, Vera Lengsfeld, Katarina Witt, and Anke Jauch. Apart from Ash, who is a towering figure in contemporary historiography, these individuals have been transformed into authors both because of their experiences

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<sup>2</sup> According to the *Federal Data Protection Act* (dating from late 1972): "the legislature clearly rejects any tendency to perceive and treat the individual as a mere object of information" (Vismann *Files* 149). Therefore, scholars refer to these individuals as *data subjects* instead of *objects of observation*. According to Section 6.3 of the *Stasi Files Act* data subjects are "persons about whom the State Security Service collected personal data by deliberate, including secret, information-gathering or spying." Both beneficiaries and victims of the Stasi can be considered data subjects, regardless of whether they are Germans or foreigners, as long as they are the subjects of Stasi files. The access to these files is granted to any data subject who applies to see their own records. Scholars may be granted permission to read them either because they are studying persons of public interest or because they have received that right from the data subjects themselves.

under observation and their encounter with their files.<sup>3</sup> Jauch, Witt, and Lengsfeld knew that they were under observation at the time while Ash could only speculate that this was the case.

The four data subjects studied here used their files in constructing not only their narratives but also their critical commentaries on the power of the file and the Stasi apparatus. As long as the life narratives are written by individuals defined as data subjects in their Stasi records, it does not affect my selection criteria whether the autobiographers present themselves as victims, observers or beneficiaries of the Stasi. The autobiographers chosen for this study have experienced the surveillance system personally; their life narrative cannot be told by a third party, although one autobiographer may have benefited from the unacknowledged help of a ghostwriter.<sup>4</sup> These four data subjects meet the file-based autobiography criteria since they define their writing as non-fictional and autobiographical. Their narratives present conscious acts of the appropriation of their files and the construction of their personal life stories by the strategic insertion of these records into their narratives.

Based on these selection criteria, I leave out the Stasi files-related narratives that do not focus on the files, such as Hermann Kant's *Abspannn: Erinnerung an meine*

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<sup>3</sup> These autobiographers represent only a fraction of the population who accessed their Stasi record in the first place. In contrast, many individuals in the former GDR and other surveillance societies like Romania have decided to ignore their secret files. Some did not want to read them and preferred coming to terms with their past without the mediation of such documents; they look to their futures and personal growth rather than reflecting on the past.

<sup>4</sup> I asked Katarina Witt if a ghostwriter wrote her autobiography but both she and her representative refused to answer my question. I speculate that a ghostwriter penned her file-based autobiography because of the journalistic style in which it is written. Further, in her blog, the ghostwriter Barbara Feinman gives indirect hints that she wrote Witt's book.

*Gegenwart*, Wolfgang Hilbig's "*Ich*": *Ein Roman*, and Sascha Anderson's *Sascha Anderson*. Other autobiographical publications related to Stasi records do not meet the criteria for this research project because they comprise only photocopies of parts of the Stasi files with no substantial commentary, such as Erich Loest's *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann: oder, mein Leben mit der Wanze*, or Reiner Kunze's *Deckname Lyrik*. Furthermore, I exclude narratives labeled as life-based fiction or novels, such as Jürgen Fuchs' *Magdalena: MfS, Memphisblues, Stasi, die Firma, VEB Horch und Gauck – ein Roman*.

The selection criteria narrow my choice of literary works to four representative file-based life narratives. One is written from the perspective of a non-German scholar, two are written by German public figures, and one is written by an East German citizen: Timothy Garton Ash's *The File*, Vera (Wollenberger) Lengsfeld's *Virus der Heuchler: Innenansicht aus Stasi-Akten*,<sup>5</sup> Katarina Witt's *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür*, and Anke Jauch's *Die Stasi packt zu*. Their life narratives possess a common denominator, namely the authors' consistent engagement with their files to construct their autobiographies. Nevertheless, they differ from each other in their perspectives and reasons for writing as well as for publishing their personal narratives.

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<sup>5</sup> Wollenberger is her married name while her birth name is Lengsfeld. She took the name of her husband who turned out to be a member of the Stasi who informed on her. Throughout her marriage, she was known as Vera Wollenberger. Although following her divorce she wanted to take back her maiden name, Lengsfeld, her file-based autobiography is published under her married name, Wollenberger, since to refute allegations of Stasi collaboration, she wanted to publish her file-based autobiography before she was able to return to her maiden name. As a result, I quote passages from her file-based autobiography with her autobiographer's name, Wollenberger. However, I refer to her as Lengsfeld in other passages because it is the name that she uses now. The public knows her under that name, and she wants both scholars and the mass media to refer to her as Lengsfeld.

This thesis provides insights into what it means for former data subjects to read their files and to narrate their file-based life stories while changing the popular conception that autobiography usually starts with childhood and continues into adulthood. My study takes into consideration how these autobiographers acquire and use their personal files to construct authentic authoritative narrative stances vis-à-vis their audiences. I focus on how these texts can be distinguished as part of a sub-genre and what their study adds to the understanding of autobiography as a genre, and to the scholars' perception of state archives. To what extent can file-based autobiographies be analyzed by using the concepts developed by theories of autobiography in the second half of the twentieth century? This study thus focuses on the differences and tensions that these four pieces of writing offer as they contribute to the autobiographical sub-genre generated by the Wende.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. This first chapter provides a historical and theoretical overview of file-based autobiographies. It clarifies my selection criteria and methodology. Further, it explains what it means to consider these narratives as an autobiographical sub-genre.

The second chapter opens with the final scene of the film *Das Leben der Anderen* as a point of departure for the writing of file-based autobiographies. Additionally, the chapter provides the etymological meaning of the term autobiography and considers those trends in autobiographical theory from the second half of the twentieth century onwards that are relevant to the file-based autobiographical sub-genre. Rather than providing a thorough review of the autobiographical genre, this chapter develops distinguishing criteria for autobiographies as a genre that are shared with file-based autobiographies. A

section of this chapter discusses the ethics pertaining to life writing and how the act of writing autobiographically enables data subjects to reverse the roles of observer and observed.

The third chapter reviews definitions of files and archives. It discusses how the MfS viewed the role and functions of its own files before its dissolution in 1989 and how the German parliament regarded the Stasi files afterwards. This chapter analyzes the current legal status of the files and explains their new functions as literary and political tools in the construction of file-based autobiographies. It then explores how truth and value are associated with these files and why former data subjects tend to take their files as their own memories. I conclude that the data subjects' engagement with their own records and the files' role in mediating both their memories and their narrative structures are the primary distinctions between file-based and other types of autobiographies that are not based on files.

Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven analyze the four file-based autobiographies selected for this study. I start with Ash, who worked as a British journalist while pursuing studies in Berlin in the 1980s for his doctoral dissertation in modern history. Since he established contacts with Poland's Solidarity group for his academic research, he fell into the category of suspected spies and was placed under Stasi surveillance. Ash's *The File: A Personal History* (1997) offers the perspective of a non-German former data subject who does not consider himself a victim of that state security service because it did not affect his life; rather, he reflects as an outsider on the effects of records on memory and questions why some citizens collaborated with the Stasi. Ash concludes with the opinion that collaborators lacked paternal figures in their lives (Ash 225). The main difference



between Ash and the three other autobiographers is that rather than focusing on blaming the Stasi for intruding into their lives, Ash seeks to understand the IMs who spied on him. In addition to his hypothesis on what motivated the IMs to work for the Stasi, there is another unique component of Ash's narrative: he is the only one of the four data subjects in this study who mentions one of my other data subjects.

Chapters Five and Six explore the accounts by Lengsfeld and Witt, both public figures who were pressed to issue public statements after being accused by the press and friends of complicity with the Stasi. Both authors conceive of their narratives as a way to reply to the Stasi and the mass media while also addressing friends and relatives. To highlight how their roles in the GDR differed and, therefore how their narratives differ, I juxtapose Lengsfeld's and Witt's works in these chapters. Chapter Five examines the case of the former peace activist Vera Lengsfeld, who discovered from reading her file that her husband had spied on her. Lengsfeld's *Virus der Heuchler: Innenansicht aus Stasi-Akten* (1992) presents reflections on the First Section of Part One of the *Stasi Files Act*: that the viewing of their records would enable former data subjects to determine the extent to which the Stasi influenced their fate. It is one of the first file-based autobiographies to be published as non-fiction after the opening of the Stasi records. For Lengsfeld, the viewing of her file marks the realization that her husband had betrayed her, working actively to collect incriminating information on her activities in peace activist circles. As a politically active person, Lengsfeld feels compelled not only to account for her husband's involvement with the Stasi, but also to counter accusations of collaboration laid against her: otherwise, she would have been forced to abandon her political mandate (Lengsfeld *nun* 354). Thus, her main intention behind her book is to reveal the extent to

which the Stasi transformed her into an object of observation, affecting her private as well as her professional life. She embraces the file-based autobiography sub-genre as an opportunity to address former friends who wrongly suspected her of collaborating with the Stasi. Lengsfeld strategically inserted passages from her Stasi record in an attempt to justify her actions, provide evidential material of the destructive intrusion of the Stasi in her life and critical reflections on the harmful power of the file.

Chapter Six focuses on the file-based autobiography of Katarina Witt, whose *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür* (1994) presents the views of a former data subject who not only benefited from the Stasi but who may have collaborated with them. Despite the absence of any existing formal written consent to meet regularly with the Stasi and trade information on other athletes, Witt received financial support, rewards and travel privileges to pursue her ice skating career in exchange of her support of the Stasi. After the media published incriminating fragments from her file, Witt wrote her file-based autobiography in an attempt to restore her public image by justifying her behavior. Her refusal to consent in writing to be an IM as well as her alleged lack of choice when it came to representing and supporting socialism in the former GDR are her central concerns. She justifies her support of the system and complains about the media having published excerpts from her file without her permission. Despite her stated intentions, however, Witt does not provide an image of herself different from the one already available through the media. As a public figure her image is continually mediated by the public press. Instead of distancing herself from the mass media, she uses the file and extracts of various tabloid articles on her in order to define her identity and build her argument. This writing strategy is surprising since she announces at the beginning that she intends to present the real

Katarina Witt (7). In order to fulfill this goal, she would need to distance herself from the media and present her own version of the past. Yet, she limits her public image to the information already written or published on her. Witt's self-justification and her failure to denounce the Stasi are therefore central concerns to her autobiography. Since her account offers her an opportunity to respond to the press, I critically evaluate the contradictions, and silence in her book.

Chapter Seven analyzes Anke Jauch's *Die Stasi packt zu* (2007), the file-based autobiography of an ordinary East German citizen who merged her personal story and the file discourse in order to enter the public sphere, provide a form of testimony, and gain sympathy with, if not compensation, for her cause. Hers is the most personal and political text of the four; it is the only one in which the autobiographer explicitly asks for the reader's sympathy and requests compensation for the mistreatment she suffered while under observation. Unlike the three other autobiographers, Jauch was not previously a public figure: she started to write about her experience under observation only after being released from Hoheneck prison, where she was incarcerated for a year after failing to escape to West Germany through Bulgaria, and after accessing her Stasi file. Jauch's narrative voice, like Lengsfeld's, suggests that she feels herself to have been a victim of the Stasi at that time. As a form of working through her past, her life narrative not only captures her experience in words but also denounces her harsh treatment in prison. Since Jauch considers herself innocent, her autobiography emphasizes how she survived injustice and the consequent psychological and physical scarring (Jauch "Personal"). Like Lengsfeld, she does not ask to be seen merely as a victim of the Stasi; however, she emphasizes how unjustly the Stasi treated her and suggests that to come to terms with her

past requires her to make public her experience of arrest and imprisonment in the GDR. Jauch's account is thus a personal testimony that adds to the German literature of the Wende.

Chapter Eight questions how this form of autobiography has expanded the understanding of GDR literature generally while examining how the opening of the Stasi records affected the lives of those who had been under observation. It examines why despite superficial similarities to other state archives the Stasi files must be seen as different from others. Further, it explores how these file-based autobiographies balance between the need to share a personal testimony and the necessity to raise public issues with regard to the opening of the files in transitional justice. I discuss the ethics involved when autobiographers appropriate material written by a hostile former state security service and use it to write their autobiographies, and support their claims of authenticity.

The first part of each central chapter on the autobiographers analyzes the narrative characteristics of the text in question. The goal is to identify and describe the principal features (voices, discourses, perspectives, motives, and implicit audience) of file-based autobiographies in order to build a catalogue of the sub-genre's identifying characteristics, while comparing and contrasting each work's unique features to those of the three other accounts. In my analysis I consider the identity of each author and the construction of the autobiographical discourse with the help of the file, that person's declared intentions, the circumstances in which that file-based autobiography was produced, any differences between its announced and delivered messages.

The second part of each chapter focuses on how remembering processes are engendered and mediated by these files. The goal is to examine how these processes are

conceptualized by the data subjects, how they write about them, what value they give them, and why they rely on them. Furthermore, by analyzing how former data subjects use their personal files as a medium through which they can introduce themselves and authenticate their narrative voices, these segments investigate how these files are re-functionalized as literary and political tools. Although each of these file-based autobiographies stand out from those data subjects who have remained silent, to some degree the resulting stories represent what happened to thousands of other data subjects.

Despite their differences, all four autobiographers engage with their files in order to construct their arguments, and to provide individual perspectives on the extent to which their memories have been initiated, replaced, or contradicted by the contents of the file. The different degrees to which these four writers express emotion and censor themselves in response to their encounters with their files correspond to their individual political perspectives, treatment by the Stasi, and quality of life under Stasi observation. All four autobiographers engage with their personal records and indicate explicitly or implicitly that these records influenced to some extent the construction of their life narratives. Through their construction process, these four texts illustrate how former data subjects can turn to their advantage the fact that Stasi files are considered by the public as authentic material. As they incorporate file fragments into their narratives, these writers fulfill their personal agendas: justifying themselves, looking for truth, examining the influence of their files on their memories, and advancing their critiques of the Stasi. Their work reveals that autobiography is no longer only the analysis of turning points in life or the development of one's personality, but may instead function as the appropriation of others' reports that permits truths to be made public about life under observation.

All four writers criticize the Stasi and its modes of operation. Without necessarily trying to present themselves as victims only, Lengsfeld, Jauch, and Witt also strive to emphasize that they did not collaborate with the Stasi or derive any benefit from their contact with state authorities. They criticize the Stasi's organization and its objectification of its subjects of observation: Lengsfeld describes how her husband used the most intimate relations to gather incriminating information on her (Wollenberger 154); Jauch details her inhumane treatment in prison (Jauch *Stasi* 112); and Witt emphasizes how exploited she feels by the state's lack of appreciation after the fall of the Berlin Wall of her efforts to represent the GDR (Witt *Jahre* 203).

At the same time, by locating their files at the heart of their autobiographies, these authors all contribute to an autobiographical sub-genre. They deviate from major autobiographical trends in the sense that they feature their Stasi records in their narratives, telling their stories through this external storage medium instead of relying primarily on their own memories, and focusing on their encounter with their files or their time under observation as recorded in such documents. The authors' use of their files offers the general public the only insights into these Stasi documents and the writers' experiences on which the files are based.

Although the writing of these autobiographies was triggered by different motivations, all four file-based autobiographers rely on access to and incorporation of Stasi files as literary and political tools in the production of their narratives. Analysis of these texts reveals how official files can function in this autobiographical context while also contributing to the literature of the Wende generally. I therefore attempt both to situate these literary works in their socio-historical moment and to underline their similarities and differ-

ences. Since the meaning of working through the past differs from one individual to the next, I pay particular attention to the goals these writers seek to achieve through their writing.<sup>6</sup>

Considering these file-based autobiographies as a sub-category of the literary genre of autobiography raises the question of what genres and sub-genres are, and what the literary, historical, and readers' perspectives might be on such works. A genre corresponds to a "style or category of painting, novel, film, etc., characterized by a particular form or purpose" ("Genre"). A literary genre can be defined as a text written in a specific social context and situation and it is characterized by a distinct style from other literary genres. As a result, readers generate expectations with regards to the work's format, content, and truth value as determined by the literary genre in question. Additionally,

the work of genre is to mediate between social situations and the texts that respond strategically to the exigencies of those situations [... W]hen texts are well conceptualized and well constructed, they *perform* the genre [...]. The work of genre analysts is to track these textual regularities and irregularities and explain them in terms of the relevant and pertinent social circumstances and the rhetorical demands they engender. (Swales 14)

We may talk about a sub-genre when authors take a similar but distinct textual approach to comparable but different social or historical circumstances (Medway 141). An autobiographical sub-genre for instance, displays the general tendencies and criteria of autobi-

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<sup>6</sup> The mediation of the lives of former data subjects by an external storage medium is a major difference between file-based autobiographies and the narratives of other victims' literature such as the voices of Holocaust survivors like Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Hannah Senesh's *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary*, Janusz Korczak's *Ghetto Diary*, Emmanuel Ringelblum's *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, Ina Friedman's *The Other Victims: First-Person Stories of Non-Jews Persecuted by the Nazis*, and Terry Walton Treseder's *Hear O Israel: A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto*, among others.

ography, but also includes at least one major difference or deviation from the main genre it descends from. The engagement of the former data subjects with their file and its insertion in their narrative thus allows file-based autobiographies to be grouped as an autobiographical sub-genre. File-based autobiographies are distinguished by the very specific reactions of the former data subjects to their encounters with their files. Some of them (like Lengsfeld and Witt) were forced by the media to make public statements regarding their suspected collaboration with the Stasi prior to 1989, while others (like Ash and Jauch) felt personally compelled to write about their experiences under observation and to reflect critically on their files and the Stasi. While genre does not always imply clear boundaries, it engenders specific expectations from readers, and labeling a literary work according to its genre guides readers' expectations. In the case of life narratives, expectations of the autobiographical pact are fundamental. In autobiographies, this pact means a form of agreement between the autobiographers and readers when the writers commit to tell the truth by the best of their abilities.

When file-based autobiographies emerged in Germany after the opening of the Stasi files, those written by public figures and ordinary citizens became central to political and social debates. The file-based autobiographies I selected for this study provide the core material for my literary analysis. Their analysis broadens our concept of the autobiographical genre and of the Stasi files. Within the post-1989 literature, these texts offer unique autobiographical responses to the Stasi legacy since German and foreign former data subjects are the only ones to have benefitted from the *Stasi Files Act* to acquire this medium and turn it into their own life story. My research focuses on the literary response



to the transitional justice in Germany<sup>7</sup> by studying an emerging autobiographical sub-genre that results from the appropriation of once-secret files.

The data subjects' file-based autobiographies are only part of their working through of their past, if they can ever work through it at all. The issue of how to measure the success of a "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" is unclear, as Tobias Freimüller suggests in *Online-Redaktion*:

[I]s it a question of taking legal action to ensure that the guilty are punished? Is it a need to provide financial or symbolic "compensation" for the crimes? Is it a matter of society asking critical questions of itself and facing up to its responsibility? Should the success of "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*" be measured by changes in political and societal conditions, i.e. by the [construction] of a stable and democratic community? Or is it primarily a question of reconciliation between perpetrators and victims, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were supposed to promote following the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa? (Freimüller)

Of the four selected data subjects, Ash alone does not *need* to engage in this process of working through the past, because neither his career nor his psychological well-being has been affected by his viewing of his Stasi file. However, his autobiography offers critical reflections about what it could mean for German people generally as well as his informers in particular to work through the GDR past. Additionally, he considers how his behavior might change now that he lives according to the principle that he may be spied at any moment.

The opening of the Stasi files compelled political figures (Lengsfeld) or known personalities such as elite athletes (Witt) to define their relationships with the previous

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<sup>7</sup> The period of transitional justice in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall covers principally the 1990s.

political regime. While for some the act of working through the past or reflecting on it arises from either curiosity, as in the case of Ash, or from an inner need to write about the experience of being under observation, as was true for Jauch, I argue that for all these autobiographers the coming to terms with the past requires that they define a political agenda, a critique, or a personal stance in relation to the defunct GDR.

My research is anchored in Genette's method of narrative discourse analysis,<sup>8</sup> which offers the tools for a structural analysis of how these autobiographers construct their life stories and argumentation, present themselves, and frame their critical message. I chose this method rather than others in order to build a catalogue of what characterizes file-based autobiographies. I consider the claims that the narrating "I" makes at the beginning of each story and assess how fully these goals are fulfilled or if contradictions, silences, or ambiguities remain. I particularly focus on the implicit audience addressed and the response the autobiographers seem to be soliciting. Additionally, I question the reliability of the autobiographical subjects and study how they use their file-based-autobiographies to respond to their own experiences with their Stasi files. My analysis thus considers the identity of the narrator outside and inside the autobiography, the perspective of the data subject, and the possible personal motives influencing the writers.

Data subjects who suffered under the Stasi are keen to convince their readership of their truthfulness in order to gain acceptance of their accounts concerning the GDR or the wrongs committed against them. Therefore, I evaluate how these autobiographers use the Stasi's own tool — its files — to criticize the Stasi, to develop textual authenticity and to justify publishing their stories. I study how the writers use the file in constructing

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<sup>8</sup> In my study I use Genette's discourse analysis to focus on the narrative voices, perspectives, and overall structures of the autobiographers' arguments.

their arguments, how it helps to form their narrative identities, and how fully it documents their critical observations.

Due to the lack of existing scholarship on file-based autobiographies as a sub-genre of autobiography,<sup>9</sup> my analysis draws largely on the autobiography theories of established scholars writing in the later half of the twentieth century as well as on scholarly articles about the issues related to the opening of the Stasi files. Additionally, in February 2010 I traveled to Berlin where I visited the Stasi archives and interviewed autobiographers mentioned in my research, Vera Lengsfeld, and Susanna Schädlich, as well as one theoretician, the late Cornelia Vismann. Then, I traveled to Frankfurt to interview the autobiographer Anke Jauch. Although I tried to analyze these literary texts as objectively as possible, my trip to Berlin combined with these encounters impacted my perception of these subjects in the light of their socio historical background. I felt sympathy for the case of Lengsfeld, Schädlich, and Jauch, even though I met them only once. In addition to the interview with Jauch, our e-mail correspondence helped me understand her story from a very personal perspective and to feel part of the pain she experienced under observation. Through this e-mail exchange I perceived the misery she had to overcome as she wrote her book.

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<sup>9</sup> Many dissertations on autobiography have been completed recently, but none investigates the topics of the Stasi, MfS, Staatssicherheit, State security service, and GDR individually or in combination with the archives of the MfS, as my study does. As for a recent thesis on archives and autobiography, “Archiving self: Effacement, erasure, disappearance” by Litia Townes Perta (University of California, Berkely) in 2007 examines contemporary American artists’ conceptions of the subject through archives, silence, and disclosure. My study differs from it since it analyses the legacy of a former state security service in the construction of personal life stories.

After these meetings I understood that the access to their files symbolized a form of re-appropriation of life fragments, as was theorized by the scholar Alison Lewis. Viewing their files allowed these people to recover stolen photos, letters, etc., in turn not only facilitating their writing of their life stories, but providing them with the opportunity to *rewrite* and particularly to respond to the Stasi accounts of their lives (Lewis 377). Author Jürgen Fuchs mentions the photograph of his daughter that was removed from his prison cell but which he found again when he accessed his Stasi records, an example of a Stasi file containing stolen fragments of a life. However, the acts of reading these Stasi files and re-appropriating their contents do not necessarily open doors to reconciliation or a coming to terms with the past. Susanne Schädlich, whose uncle betrayed her and her family when he worked as an IM, said that it was impossible for her to forgive him or anyone who tried to convince her to forget about the implications of his collaboration with the Stasi (Schädlich “Personal”). Similarly, Anke Jauch argued that a lack of psychological and financial support limited her ability to work through her past (Jauch “Personal”).

The thesis thus provided various models of response to the Stasi files and this variety showed differences between those who have been significantly impacted by the Stasi and those who were not. With the exception of Ash’s account, the other texts are inaccessible to readers with no knowledge of German. In addition to expanding the understanding of this sub-genre and of files as memory-technology, my research makes this knowledge available to a non-German North American audience unaware of the consequences of the *Stasi Files Act* on the autobiographical genre.

## 2 The Autobiographical Genre

File-based autobiographies first appeared after the Stasi files were opened to the data subjects. The early stages of this phenomenon recall the final scene of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar-winning film *Das Leben der Anderen*, which examines the perspectives of former data subjects affected to different degrees by their files and the Stasi's presence in their lives. At the end of the film Dreyman, one of the principal targets of observation, is sitting at a desk in the reading room of the Gauck<sup>10</sup> Behörde, the German commission that keeps the Stasi files. As he reads a part of his personal file his gaze becomes more intense: he seems to be recalling the events he is reading about. Although his face stiffens with emotion, he appears to remain focused on finding answers, leafing through the pages of his file and remembering his past. This semi-fictional episode evokes the experience that engenders file-based autobiographies as defined by Vismann: the data subjects' initial encounters with their files (referred to in this study as the *urszene* of file-based autobiographies, as it were). While this 'Urszene' marks the birth of this literary sub-genre, its name first appeared as "Biographie nach Aktenlage" (Vismann *Akten* 313) in Cornelia Vismann's *Akten: Medientechnik und Recht* in 2000 and was translated into English as "file-based autobiography" (Vismann *Files* 156).

The data subjects reading their files for the first time are, like Dreyman, able to access and use this material, their unauthorized biographies, in order to give a degree of authenticity to their stories, justify their publication, and define themselves in part by using evidential material from their files. Dreyman's non-fiction literary product is a "file-

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<sup>10</sup> Joachim Gauck was the first administrator of the Stasi files from 1990 to 2000 and the institution was named after him. Since 15 March 2011 it is administered by the journalist Roland Jahn.

based autobiography” because it is assumed that it has been structured and motivated by the Stasi record.

This first chapter begins with a discussion of the term “autobiography,” since it is the broader category to which file-based autobiographies belong. Furthermore, I aim to provide additional parameters for the term “file-based autobiographies” initially formulated by Cornelia Vismann. In this chapter I identify and analyze the predominant autobiographical characteristics relevant to the understanding of file-based autobiographies since its focus is the development of file-based autobiographies, not a history of the autobiographical genre itself. This study’s investigation of the genre is restricted to limited parameters of autobiographies from the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries since its focus is the development of file-based autobiographies, not a history of the autobiographical genre itself. In fact, the earliest forms of autobiography belong to different genres, such as letters and diaries, and tend to cover themes of religious conversions, confessions, or stories of self-development unrelated to the structure and contents of file-based autobiographies.<sup>11</sup> Another reason for restricting my focus to this recent period only is that scholarly studies on autobiography as a genre began only in the twentieth century. Since file-based autobiographies have not previously been studied as a literary

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<sup>11</sup> Earlier autobiographical works exemplifying these different genres and subjects include the “[*Confessions*] (Augustinus 397/398, Rousseau 1782, 1789), *Biographie* (Johann Philipp Hagen 1794, Friedrich Wilhelm v. Hoven 1840), *Denknisse* (Friedrich Ludwig Jahn 1835), *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Goethe 1811-1831), *Erinnerungen* (Willibald Alexis 1900, Wilhelm v. Kügelgen 1870), *Erlebtes* (Wilhelm Dorow 1843/44), *Leben* (Franz Xaver Bronner 1795-1797), *Lebensbeschreibung* (Adam Bernd 1738), *Selbstbiographie* (Franz Grillparzer 1853), zunächst auch in diesem Sinne noch *Memoiren* (Karl Heinrich v. Lang 1842)” (“Autobiographie”).

sub-genre, this research proposes an initial framework designed to situate file-based autobiographies in the broader context of twentieth-century autobiographies.

According to its Greek roots, the word “autobiography” means the life (βίο) written (γραφία) by oneself (αὐτο). Autobiographical writing therefore consists of the conscious literary construction of the autobiographers own life with an emphasis on major developments in their personality, turning points in life, and influences on their personal growth. Narrated in the first person, autobiographies result from a selection of remembered events which are usually represented through prose, but also sometimes through visual genres such as collages or photographs. Autobiographies tend to describe a process of personal development, from early childhood to adulthood or old age, and the autobiographer is expected to fulfill an autobiographical pact of truth.

In the 1950s, English (Roy Pascal), American (Wayne Shumaker) and French (Georges Gusdorf, Philippe Lejeune) autobiography theorists (“Autobiographie”) began to produce structural and stylistic analyses that differentiated autobiographies from novels, diaries and personal letters. In his essay “Conditions et limites de l’autobiographie” (1956), Georges Gusdorf defines the autobiographical act as a practice requiring the writer to reflect on the personal past and he likens that process to observing one’s life from an aerial perspective or to an archaeologist searching for city maps, road directions, ruins, or fortifications (Gusdorf “Conditions and limits” 38). Autobiographers reflect on their personal lives in order to identify decisive factors of influence to their “parcours de vie” (Baudouin) that are obvious only in hindsight (Gusdorf “Conditions and limits” 38), as discussed with Jean-Michel Beaudoin. This reflective process in turn gives writers the opportunity to see meaningful causal connections between several of their life events. In

the 1950s, then, the autobiographer's focus, was to establish and comment on such connections (Gusdorf "Conditions and Limits" 45).

In contrast, in the 1960s, critical models focus – to a larger extent than before – on the socio-historical aspects of autobiographical writing: that is, rather than exploring only the personal events that have shaped their lives, these autobiographers also discuss the milieu in which they have lived, taking meaning from their social roles and their historical context. In *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960), Roy Pascal emphasizes that autobiographical knowledge allows individuals to "review [. . .] a life from a particular moment" (Pascal 3), relating themselves to their milieu in an attempt to understand how their lives have been marked by the socio-historical structures and cultural events of their time. Pascal underlines the importance of hindsight to autobiographers as they "alter earlier judgments and detect significances which escaped them at the time" (Pascal 4). This interplay between the present and the past rather than the portrayal of the past as a separable entity is what in Pascal's view gives autobiography its value: "its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past" (11). Seeking meaning in the past from the perspective of the present, autobiographers revise their personal histories.

Pascal's theory of autobiography considers how in the narrating process memory modifies the past. Yet "memory is a [fallible] faculty, and [. . .] it inevitably changes past experiences with a meaning they acquire only in retrospect [... which allows for] the danger of deluding oneself about oneself, and of substituting an ideal self for the real" (Pascal 163). Autobiography becomes art rather than factual documentation, a deliberate interpretation of life. Whether the life narrative strikes its audience as primarily artful or



evidential, it inevitably results from the writer's interpretations and personal understanding of the past expressed in writing. Interpretation and artistic re-arrangement of the past are central issues in file-based autobiographies: Former data subjects have purposefully selected particular episodes from their Stasi files in order to frame their arguments and influence their readers' perceptions of their work.

Despite apparent selections of facts and self-editing, the concept of authenticity is central to the autobiographical genre because it directly affects readers' expectations that autobiographies are truthful. Since the 1970s, the notion of veracity in autobiography has been defined as the authors' intention to reveal their autobiographical truths according to the best of their abilities. Some discrepancies with reality are inevitable since the language used to write an autobiography or any type of writing requires selection and manipulation of truths. Thus, according to Philippe Lejeune in his *L'autobiographie en France* (1971), autobiography is defined as the “[r]écit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité” (Lejeune *Pacte* 14), even if the autobiographical production implies slight discrepancies with reality. The autobiography is an agreement between the author and the readers, an “autobiographical pact” in which the authors promise to narrate their life as accurately as possible to the best of their abilities (Lejeune *Autobiography* ix). In response, readers expect to read about events recounted in a factual rather than fictionalized way. If events presented as autobiographical are later proven to have been presented inaccurately, the autobiographer in question can therefore be accused of breaking this autobiographical pact of truth.

In contrast, authors of fiction have no responsibility to present verifiable statements in their narratives. While the autobiographical novel and the autobiography can both be written from the first-person narrative point of view, the autobiographical pact distinguishes the autobiography from the other literary forms. Additionally, the existence of the author being the same as the protagonist makes the difference between autobiographies and autobiographical novels:

Comment distinguer l'autobiographie du roman autobiographique? Il faut bien l'avouer, si l'on reste sur le plan de l'analyse interne du texte, il n'y a aucune *différence*. Tous les procédés que l'autobiographie emploie pour nous convaincre de l'authenticité de son récit, le roman peut les imiter, et les a souvent imités. Ceci était juste tant qu'on se bornait au texte moins la page du titre; dès qu'on englobe celle-ci dans le texte, avec le nom de l'auteur, on dispose d'un critère textuel général, l'identité du *nom* (auteur-narrateur-personnage). Le pacte autobiographique, c'est l'affirmation dans le texte de cette identité renvoyant en dernier ressort au nom de l'auteur sur la couverture. (Lejeune *Pacte* 26)

From readers' perspective, an autobiography offers an unexpected opportunity to see behind the scenes and learn about the life of the autobiographer from that person's point of view. However, like Pascal, Lejeune admits that lapses of memory should be tolerated in life narratives despite the pact of truth, since they represent a construct of reality that does not recapture life as it happened. In the late 1970s the problem of veracity in autobiography resurfaces as a central question in Paul de Man's essay "Autobiography as Defacement" (1979). De Man argues that the medium of autobiography requires art insofar as the constraints of the writing process limit the truthfulness of the written text. That is, in writing a life narrative an autobiographer must select episodes, a language, a point of view, order, relationships between events, and meanings within that life.

The action of writing in these ways determines the content of that life since it is not possible to transcribe life exactly as it has unfolded. De Man explores the relationship between life and autobiography thus:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine that life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? (de Man 920)

Unlike Pascal, who sees memory as responsible for distortions of reality, de Man argues that such distortions occur in the process of language attempting to imitate reality: “To the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or prosopopeia) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative” (de Man 930). In this sense, de Man claims that autobiographers do not so much describe their lives as write them:

“Autobiographie heißt demzufolge nicht be-schriebenes, sondern ge-schriebenes Leben” (Wagner-Egelhaaf 16). The lives autobiographers narrate are thus shaped according to their personal responses to selected events, the emphasis they give these events, and their perceptions of causal relationships between them.

Referring to the first purpose of the *Stasi Files Act*, the ability to see where their “fates” seem to have been determined by their files, one can argue that the files of former data subjects indeed to some extent changed the course of their lives: Not only have these records the capacity to affect memories of life episodes, but they also contain guidelines for “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” (roughly, procedures of destruction and disintegration) that influenced the lives of the data subjects. These disintegration tactics outline measures to

take by the Stasi in order to cause the data subjects personal and job-related misfortune that those affected would never be able to precisely explain; the “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” thus destroyed lives (*Firma*). Since their subsequent viewing of their files guided these individuals as they constructed their narratives, those Stasi files can be seen as contributing to a written life rather than a described one, and the data subjects as reconstructing rather than recording their autobiographies. File-based autobiographies are testimonial narratives<sup>12</sup> in the sense that they provide a testimony about life under surveillance and the engagement of former data subjects with their files from the perspective of those who were observed by the Stasi.

Since file-based autobiographies are testimonial narratives, former data subjects writing their autobiographies seek to document their life stories with evidence from their files. In this sense that their files construct their narratives of their life stories just as they previously directed their lives. In a literary context, these files function as memory triggers as well as evidence for their stories. The core of file-based autobiographies is the actual subject who writes the narration according to the Stasi file that, in turn, refers to this subject. In this sense, the roles of biographical object and subject are reversed: although the Stasi files portrayed people being observed as objects of surveillance, the act of writing their file-based autobiographies allows those same individuals to see themselves as writing subjects, and thereby gain authority over their lives. Transforming into a writing subject means to acquire authority over the written text because the author in question can decide what to narrate, from what perspective, with which emphases and for what purposes instead of suffering from the biased reports that a third person would

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<sup>12</sup> Testimonial literature in general provides a testimony about a historical event.

write on the account of that same subject of observation. The writing of a file-based autobiography provides these former data subjects with a chance to reverse the positions of the observer and the observed, the position of the subject versus the (vulnerable) object.

The scholar Susanna Egan, in discussing autobiographers of colonized regions, raises a point of great relevance to file-based autobiographies when she argues that autobiographies are a means of “resistance of the [... objectified people] to the controls others have exercised over their stories; they talk back, not to implode the margins upon the center but to decentralize the telling of their lives” (Egan *Mirror* 11). Former data subjects offering their versions of their past in this sense “talk back” so as to correct the portraits the files have painted. They decentralize the telling of their Stasi biographies in order to take control over the narration of their lives. Although it may seem paradoxical that some of them use their files to support their narratives, these files — with their biases and errors — actually document past injustices or manipulations. The autobiographers’ appropriation and re-functionalization of their files against the Stasi and their informers reveal the Stasi’s corruption or abuse of trust. Although the Stasi was never trusted by the general German population, no one really knew who was involved with the MfS. The abuse of trust by husbands or close friends is described in more detail in file-based autobiographies. In other cases, the extent of that trust abuse is more clearly defined than what the general public might have imagined due to the film *Das Leben der Anderen*. In a North American context, Stasi’s abuses of trust might have been less negatively perceived than in a German environment. In this sense, not all international readers are aware of the extent to which data subjects may have been reduced to objects of observation. The film

might have that effect in Canada and in the United States after it received an Oscar and came known in those countries. It affected positively how the public perceives the Stasi because it portrays an informer who interferes in the lives of those he observes and protects them.

The status of objects of observation might be inverted during the writing process of file-based autobiographies. When autobiographers write their personal life stories, “[t]he narrator[s] gains control and authority, and the reader a sense of order and understanding” (Egan *Patterns* 21). When the autobiography is file-based, the act of writing represents opportunities to set the record straight and to take control over one’s personal story (in the case of Ash, Lengsfeld, Witt and Jauch), reputation (for Lengsfeld and Witt), public image (Witt) or future (as Lengsfeld did by filing for divorce). File-autobiographies also allow their writers to make a political statement (as Ash, Lengsfeld, Witt, and Jauch all make) or a public appeal to justice (as in Jauch’s case), to analyze a previous political regime (as Ash, Lengsfeld, and Jauch so), to start a new chapter in their lives (as Lengsfeld and Jauch in particular describe), or to attempt to come to terms with their pasts (as Lengsfeld, Witt, and Jauch do).

Except for Ash, the data subjects in this study exemplify that the act of producing a file-based autobiography is a necessary step in working through the past to try to heal its wounds. The healing potential of life writing is a major concern for autobiographers like Jauch, who invested a considerable sum in order to publish her file-based narrative. This therapeutic aspect of autobiographical writing is emphasized by Marilyn R. Chandler in her book *A Healing Art: Regeneration through Autobiography* (1990). Despite the healing potential of writing a file-based autobiography, the reading of a Stasi record may

instead provoke trauma. Vera Lengsfeld, for instance, learned from her file that her husband had been spying on her since they first met. Although Lengsfeld had previously been a proponent of opening the Stasi files to the public, she admits that her relationship with her husband was completely shattered as a result of her reading of her file. Clearly, the file-reading can constitute a life-changing event. As Lengsfeld emphasizes, “[t]housands were psychologically destroyed” (Boyes, quoting Lengsfeld). For some autobiographers, the writing process is a written form of talking cure, whereby the autobiographer makes sense of life episodes by restructuring, re-evaluating, and re-telling them (Chandler 5). For former data subjects, this autobiographical writing exercise allows them to put events in perspective, to understand their pasts from a different angle, and to reconsider their previous decisions in light of their present knowledge. As they read the Stasi reports on their lives, they must then assimilate this newfound knowledge into their existing ideas of their pasts and evaluate how the Stasi has affected their lives. All of the selected autobiographers chose to incorporate their files in the construction of their autobiographies and their argumentation.

When passages selected by the data subjects for inclusion in their autobiographies could harm third parties, however, the question of privacy arises. In his “Introduction: Mapping the Ethics of Life Writing,” Paul John Eakin asks: “[W]hat is the good of life writing, and how, exactly, can it do harm?” (Eakin 1). His question prompts readers of file-based autobiographies to ask in turn how much autobiographers should write about others. In fact, autobiographers might be criticized for telling too much about their experiences resulting in the infringement of privacy of other informers and shame or imposing their own interpretations on the events recorded in their files that contradict the Stasi’s

version. The autobiographical act entails responsibility for the writer and for others who are either mentioned in the narrative or who are related to the autobiographer. Because their life stories inevitably involve those who betrayed them, the privacy of other individuals is also compromised.

Lengsfeld denounces her husband as a traitor while Ash, Witt, and Jauch avoid identifying their informers by their real names. Although sufficient details are provided to permit most acquaintances and friends to unmask these individuals, the remaining element of uncertainty safeguards their identities. In all four cases examined in this study, privacy issues arise because the reputation of informers remains potentially at risk.

Although she raises ethical questions with regards to autobiographical writing in general without specifically referring to Stasi files, this concern to reveal the identity of third parties is addressed in Nancy K. Miller's essay "The Ethics of Betrayal: Diary of a Memoirist." Miller reflects on the moral responsibility of the autobiographer to those mentioned in the autobiography: Can one harm a third party by writing an autobiography? What is the nature of that harm? To what extent can another person interpret an autobiography as a form of betrayal? These issues are of considerable importance to file-based autobiographies because former data subjects disclose a historical reality; they testify to injustices as well as to infringements of human rights and choices. As a result, after being denounced former collaborators may experience difficulties finding work or re-integrating themselves socially.

However, not only third parties like the IMs can be vulnerable to former data subjects turned autobiographers. Life writing itself also raises the question of the vulnerability of the autobiographers: "When we expose the narratives of our lives to others through



the forms of life writing, do we not all become vulnerable subjects?” (Miller 159). This issue raises two related questions: Were the ex-data subjects placed in a vulnerable position by the Stasi? And could their file-based autobiographies help them regain the control over what is written about their lives? In fact, their autobiographies may help them gain the sympathy of the public and justify their past actions or perceptions. This possibility of the autobiographical genre permits them to attempt to transform their vulnerability into control over their life stories and to respond to the reading of their personal files. Nonetheless, their narratives might give rise to the public accusing these writers of deceiving them, as happened in Witt’s case. File-based autobiographies tend to encourage readers to focus on the writer’s file, which is an ambiguous document because it contains both evidence and inaccuracies. Although most data subjects are vulnerable to what informers would write about them prior to the Wende, the act of writing their file-based life stories allows these autobiographers to determine what is written about them. After reading their personal records and starting to working with them, these writers become the subjects operating with the file, not just the subjects of the files. Thus, the fact that these data subjects gain access to their files and base their life stories on them gives them a position of authority that they did not enjoy when the informers objectified these individuals in their reports.

The genealogy of the subject from records returns to its point of origin: after census technologies have for centuries provided information that turned humans into an object of knowledge, this very same knowledge is returned to them as their personal data, of which they may dispose as they wish. In the eyes of the law, the census object becomes the sovereign of its data. (Vismann *Files* 150)

This reversal of object / subject positions is evident in the autobiographies of individuals who have suffered at the hands of the Stasi. Those who considered themselves – even if only in part – victims of the Stasi are more likely to insert extracts of Stasi records into their autobiographies in order to fulfill their personal agendas, transforming the files into evidence supporting the authors’ claims of innocence or abuse at the hands of the Stasi. Hence, the file can help autobiographers who wish to use their autobiographies as testimonies. As data subjects open and read their files, they often perceive to what degree the Stasi. They thus confirm John Sturrock’s concept that autobiographers must see themselves as being at the center of machinations: “It is not necessary to be paranoid in order to write one’s autobiography, but it surely helps [...] to be able to believe that one has been the victim either of ill-informed attention in the past or else of an unmerited neglect” (Sturrock 27). Such is the case for many autobiographers who base their life stories on their files: they position themselves as individuals who realize that their lives and memories have been mediated by their files. Their autobiographies allow them to articulate the effects of the files on their memories and lives. Thus, while recent mainstream studies in autobiography theory focus on the identity of the narrator, file-based autobiographical studies concentrate on how the file mediates both memories and narratives.

## **2.1 Characteristics of File-Based Autobiographies**

The categorization of any literary product engenders expectations (as, for example, a certain reading mode) from its public: “[G]enre definition does not tell us the style or construction of a text as much as how we should expect to ‘take’ that style or mode of construction” (Bruss 4) and understand its function. A novel is not read with the same antici-

pation of truth as an autobiography, for instance. Both autobiographies and their sub-genre, file-based autobiographies, raise the same expectation of truthfulness. However, the engagement of former data subjects with their files in file-based autobiographical writing is distinct in several respects.

File-based life writing emerged in 1992 as a response to former data subjects' encounters with their Stasi records. For the first time in history, a large number of individuals were given relatively prompt access (within three years of their files being closed, in some cases) to the files of a defunct secret police agency. Former data subjects can inspect documents which they were never intended to read and write their file-based autobiographies. The fact that they were able to read their files gave these people a unique opportunity to reflect on how that reading experience affected their memories and their lives.

The four autobiographers selected for this study restrict their life stories to their time under surveillance or following the reading of their files. Although they are the objects of their files, scholars and other officials cannot call these individuals "objects of observation" but rather "data subjects." The latter appellation dates from 1972 and relates to Germany's *Federal Data Protection Act*,<sup>13</sup> legislation that prohibits viewing and treat-

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<sup>13</sup> The "Foreword" of the *Federal Data Protection Act* (*Bundesdatenschutzgesetz* or *Gesetz zum Schutz vor Mißbrauch personenbezogener Daten bei der Datenverarbeitung*) states that this Act started in 1970 in Hesse, Germany. The large amount of personal documentation available in information societies combined with the risk of these data will be used by anyone without any authorization gave rise to this legislation. It seeks to prevent misuse of personal data by third parties, as explained by this Act: "The amended Data Protection Act of 1990 is also intended to protect the individual from having his personal rights infringed upon. The individual must consent to having his personal data collected or stored, or there must be a statutory arrangement. In general the state is not allowed to collect or store personal data without an individual consent; the main exemptions are in the fields of police investigations, intelligence services or

ing persons as objects of information (Simitris 731). Nevertheless, these writers are both the data and the subject of their Stasi records: On the one hand, the Stasi identifies these individuals as a form of data and represents these subjects by the information in the Stasi files. On the other hand, these authors are also the subjects of that data during their production of their file-based autobiographies in the sense that they themselves select the passages and anecdotes from these records that they want to use in order to narrate their personal stories. In this way, file-based autobiographies, unlike other forms of autobiography (by Rousseau, Kant, and de Bruyn, for example), are not told exclusively from their authors' perspectives. Rather, the authors' accounts are mediated by the alien perspective of the files, which acts as both a starting point and a writing tool for these life stories. By appropriating their files, former data subjects are able both to identify themselves convincingly as victims or survivors and to critique the existence and contents of their files as well as the Stasi's intrusion in their lives.

Supporting her view by reference to the first section of the *Stasi Files Act*,<sup>14</sup> Vismann posits that the Stasi files assume the same function of self-enlightenment as diaries or personal notes because they enable former data subjects to evaluate how their Stasi records have affected their personal fates: "This remarkably nonjuridical goal – expressed with the equally nonjuridical term fate ("Schicksal") – is based on the assumption that the Stasi files are capable of storing individual life stories" (Vismann *Files* 154). This hy-

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defence. The data themselves are subject to data protection if they are not exclusively used in the private personal sphere."

<sup>14</sup>"Section I (I) of the Stasi Files Act states that its purpose is 'to facilitate individual access to personal data that the State Security Service has stored regarding him, so that he can clarify what influence the state security service has had on his personal fate' (Vismann *Files* 154).

pothesis presupposes that former data subjects initially assumed that their files contained not just factual details of events already happened, but rather the very facts that the Stasi outlined to infringe in the lives of its subjects. Thus, the files of the MfS contain the implacable destiny in the shape of the occult institution that governed their lives. According to Section 1 (1) of the *Stasi Files Act*, former data subjects assume that the files will provide them with insights into the extent to which the Stasi manipulated and interfered in their fates. Vismann supports her hypothesis with the idea that these Stasi files indeed provide details about “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” and other circumstances that affected the lives of the data subjects.

However, even if their Stasi records provides helpful clarification about the Stasi’s stratagems against data subjects, the files sometimes include distortions and biased misinterpretations of their lives. The contents of these records reflect the fact that they were produced by hostile collaborators seeking information on citizens who were considered to pose possibly a threat to the GDR; they therefore are inherently subject to bias, especially since the Stasi searched for evidence of negative behavior against the GDR. “In spite of the many differences between the IMs<sup>15</sup>, their main task was to provide in-

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<sup>15</sup> The *informelle Mitarbeiter* (IMs) were the Stasi’s informal collaborators. As opposed to formal collaborators, the informal ones did not receive regular payments for their work. They were divided into different categories: “Die Hauptgruppe bildeten die ‘Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter Sicherheit’ (IMS). Sie sollten der Stasi flächendeckend Aufschluß darüber geben, wer wann was aus welchem Grunde machte. Sie hatten Personeneinschätzungen vorzunehmen, schriftlich oder mündlich Bericht zu erstatten und Verstöße gegen Ordnung, Disziplin oder Sicherheit im Arbeits- und Lebensbereich der Menschen aufzuhellen” (Gauck *unheimliche* 64). Other categories of informal collaborators included the IME (*die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter für besonderen Einsatz*), the IMB (*die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter Bearbeitung*), the FIM (*die Führungs-Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter*) and the IMK (*die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter zur Sicherung der Konspiration*) (Gauck *unheimliche* 64-65).

formation on people's attitudes towards the socialist system, especially those suspected of having contact with 'negative-hostile' forces, and to operate in all areas of public life" (Dennis 94). However, the Stasi lacked the ability to competently analyze the enormous amount of data it collected:

The sheer mass of material not only threatened to overwhelm the ministry's operatives – inundation being the price to pay for very long ears – but also compounded the problems inherent in cognitive analysis and operationalisation. This is not primarily an issue concerning the accuracy of data – the MfS, it is generally recognized, was diligent in checking for accuracy – but the obstacles to analysis and the attendant flaws and errors. (Dennis 244-45)

Additionally, errors in the files may have arisen from misunderstandings between the informers and their superiors, from misinterpretations, or from the fact that the Stasi both produced and consumed this information, a situation which permitted for conflicts of interest. The ZAIG<sup>16</sup> was principally responsible for assessing the data and delivering it to Honecker and the Politbüro: thus, the producer and receiver of this data was the MfS, who sought to avoid information contradicting its preconceptions. The Stasi neither wanted to admit failure nor show the successes of its enemies, and IMs therefore purposefully silenced some facts (Dennis 245). Other problems of collecting the data were

the difficulties in identifying and prioritizing data at the collection stage; perceiving the ["enemy"] in one's own image; striving for cognitive consistency; perseverance with initial conceptions and existing policies. (245)

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<sup>16</sup> The abbreviation ZAIG stands for the "Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe" (Central Assessment and Information Group).

In some instances, former data subjects resorted to their own diaries as a corrective source of information, as in Ash's case, as he says:<sup>17</sup> "even the partly blacked-out names, addresses and telephone numbers unlock memory's doors and send me back to my diary" (28). Sometimes, his diary entries allow him to confirm information or to remember events portrayed differently in his file (23). A comparison between his file and his diary allows him to read "two versions of one day in a life. The 'object' described with the cold outward eye of the secret policeman and [his] own subjective, allusive, emotional self-description" (Ash 10). The reading of a file is not as much as self-study as an exercise of comparing memory to this document.

Vismann argues that file-based autobiographies are written either to counter the file or to reconcile file and memory. According to her, former data subjects write their file-based autobiographies as a counterstatement to their files. "[T]hat is, the autobiographical book [...] is a denial of the inspected file" (Vismann 156). As a result, file-based autobiographies differ from the files that were handed over to the former data subjects because each of those files "was confronted [by the data subjects] and made to coincide with [...] their] life stor[ies]" (156). As a result, file-based autobiographies are constructed with or in response to the files' reports. This data, although sometimes inaccurate, helps former data subjects to hone their arguments and frame their entire life stories. At times, their autobiographical narratives seek to refute information contained in these

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<sup>17</sup> This tendency indicates, once again, that the former data subjects rely on external forms of recorded information instead of their memories, as if their lives were continually mediated, structured, and recalled by an alternate external source of memory than their own recollection power.

files, and at other times, their argumentation is supported by evidential material from their files.

Therefore, file-based autobiographers view writing process and the work they produce as a different product than other autobiographers. Unless their Stasi reports also describe their childhood, their narratives do not consider their early years; in this sense, the bio of file-based autobiographies includes only part of the life in question, the time period documented in the Stasi files: generally the “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” and the political views and beliefs of the data subjects at that time, and in some cases also the time periods in which their arrests, political activities, “suspicious behavior,” and “crimes” occurred. At the same time, file-based autobiographies include their writers’ reactions to the reading of their own Stasi records, a component that other sub-genres of autobiography do not contain.

Paradoxically, these autobiographies, while challenging the hostile documents compiled by the secret police, are sometimes also structured to correspond to them. This tendency to use someone else’s reports and recollections when narrating one’s own life challenges the usual autobiographical process. Sidonie Smith specifies a major tendency for autobiographical writing in comparison to biographies and defines a method of collecting data in autobiographies in general that differs from biographies. Since file-based autobiographies are partly written and constructed with the file, they differ from the autobiographical genre in which the authors write their lives according to their own perspectives and primarily with their own memories. I use Smith’s quotation to illustrate that when file-based autobiographies tend to be written based on material compiled by a third party, they are then forcibly a subcategory of autobiographies:



Relatively few biographers use their personal memories of their subject as reliable evidence, unless they had a personal relationship to the subject of the biography (as a relative, child, friend, or colleague). For life narrators [autobiographers in general], by contrast, personal memories are the[ir] primary archival source to support, supplement, or offer commentary on their idiosyncratic acts of remembering. (Smith 6)

File-based autobiographies are necessarily autobiographies since they are about the life of the authors written by the same authors and these writers comply with the pact of truth. However, the way in which data subjects consistently engage with their pasts through their files distinguishes file-based autobiographies from other autobiographical genres. Only file-based autobiographies rely on or originate from the stories of hostile third parties – not to mention of a spy agency – rather than arising from their writers’ personal memories. These autobiographers re-enact the autobiographical situation defined by Gunn in which the life narrative is constructed “by the autobiographer who, in effect, is ‘reading’ his or her life” (Gunn 8). These autobiographers do not produce the story of their lives by themselves; rather, they react to or draw inspiration from their files. These autobiographers seek support — or are *forced* to seek support — for their personal memories in their Stasi records, which allows most of these writers to use the files both to authenticate their life narratives and to fulfill their personal agendas<sup>18</sup> in writing their file-based autobiographies, whether these consist of revenge, self-defense, or self-justification. Whatever their authors’ motivation, these file-based autobiographies appear

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<sup>18</sup> Agendas refer to personal intents and motives to write and publish their autobiography. Even if they say that they are an “experiment” (Ash 19) or an example of a historical happening (Jauch *Stasi* 11), these authors usually have more to say than just naïve reflections about this personal experience. Their personal story in the form of historical testimony encloses judgements and criticism towards the Stasi, the file opening or the records of the MfS.

to be documentaries because of their inclusion of photocopied files or quotations from them. From a historical point of view, this act of re-functionalizing someone else's archives for one's contrary personal purposes is unique: Germany was the first country to pass legislation (the so-called *Stasi Files Act*), allowing secret police files to be viewed by their former data subjects.

Given the pivotal importance of files to this sub-genre of autobiography, my research always returns to their roles, whether as the initial impetus for the writing process, accounts that interact with the data subjects' memories, or re-functionalized literary tools and supporting evidence. In addition to exemplifying memory processes, file-based autobiographies raise the issues of counter-memories<sup>19</sup> and personal agendas of denouncing the Stasi's abuse of trust, its mechanisms of power, or its malicious intent. In these ways, this literary sub-genre frequently allows former data subjects to represent themselves as victims or to counter accusations that they collaborated with the Ministry for State Security (MfS).

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<sup>19</sup> I use the term "counter-memories" to designate the memories of the former data subjects that go against the information in their files.

### 3 Archive Theory and Files

Since the opening of the files of the Ministry of State Security in 1992, data subjects have been able to assess how specific events in their lives might have been influenced by their Stasi files.<sup>20</sup> More than six million Stasi “Personendossiers” (personal files) exist, four million on citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and two million on both Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) citizens (Gauck *unheimliche* 11), and on foreigners living in East Germany and suspected of spying prior to 1989.<sup>21</sup> While reading their records, some former data subjects have engaged in acts of recall and counter-memory that prompted them to write their life narratives using their files as evidence. That the files in this way initiated the autobiographical writing process is one way in which file-based life stories differ from other kinds of autobiographical writing. Furthermore, by using their Stasi files to serve not only initially as mnemonic and literary devices but ultimately as support for critical reflections or political messages regarding their files or the Stasi itself, these writers have uniquely acquired material originally intended to help the state control their lives. In this sense, they have reversed the original situation, becoming subjects rather than objects in relation to the Stasi.

Their individual backgrounds and reactions to their files have caused each writer of a file-based autobiography to deliver a different message. For example, although Vera

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<sup>20</sup> “The aims of the act basically follow those of the original *Volkskammer* law, that is, to enable individuals to access information stored by the Stasi on their person while at the same time providing protection against the violation of individual rights and privacy; to promote historical, judicial and political appraisal of the MfS and the GDR; to provide public and private bodies with access to information in criminal prosecutions, in particular those connected with Stasi operations; to assist in the screening of individuals for jobs; and to help in the rehabilitation of victims of Stasi persecution” (Dennis 239).

<sup>21</sup> Magdeburg's Central Archive also houses at least 15, 000 bags of destroyed material each containing several thousands of paper scraps (*Firma*).

Lengsfeld and Katarina Witt, the two public figures studied here, both felt compelled by public allegations of collaboration with the Stasi to refute those accusations, Witt justifies her becoming a beneficiary of the Stasi<sup>22</sup> and supporting the GDR by emphasizing that she was also its victim because she was spied on, while Lengsfeld attempts to clarify to friends, relatives and fellow peace activists that she had no involvement with the Stasi. In contrast, Ash and Jauch felt no external pressure to narrate their stories, instead deciding for themselves that they wanted to write. Unlike the three other autobiographers discussed in this dissertation, Ash explores how reading his Stasi file affected his memories, what that experience has meant to him, and why some individuals collaborated with the Stasi. Jauch still seeks compensation for the suffering she experienced under the Stasi and tries both to justify her attempt to flee and to evoke sympathy.

Despite these differences in their file-based life stories, in appropriating their Stasi files and re-functionalizing them as narrative tools all four authors engage in an atypical “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” in the context of the German Wende. Their narratives are a departure from other victims’ narratives (like those written during the post-war period or by the Holocaust survivors) because they constitute unprecedented engagement with Stasi records and because they embody a re-conceptualization of the definitions and purposes of administrative or personal files in archive theory. Other victims of totalitarian systems did not benefit from a legislation like the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz*.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, other

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<sup>22</sup> “The term ‘beneficiary’ refers to those persons who benefited in various ways from the Stasi, for example, [those who received] cash payments” (Dennis 239).

<sup>23</sup> The *Stasi Unterlagen-Gesetz* is also known as the *Stasi Files Act*. According to Part One Section One, “[t]his Act regulates the custody, preparation, administration and use of the records of the Ministry for State Security of the former German Democratic Republic and its preceding and succeeding organizations (State Security Service).”

kinds of literature of “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” or of the Wende focus more on the demise of the political system itself than on the power of police files, a power that is actually inherent in all surveillance societies. Only writers of file-based autobiographies such as those discussed below have used the tool (their files) of a defunct state security service in order to analyze critically the issues related to that medium and the state’s mechanisms of power.

### 3.1 Definitions of *File*

Since the files are the constitutive elements of file-based autobiographies I initially establish the definition files and archives theories as parameters to understand file-based autobiographies. The following definition of *file* derives from etymological, historical and philosophical perspectives. The German etymology of the word “Akten” (files)<sup>24</sup> refers to acts and deeds rather than the physical aspect of files: “The very term *Akten* emphasizes the quality of action (*Handlung*). The plural noun for files, *Akten*, derives from Latin *agere*, to act. The Old Middle High German *händel* or *hendel* for *Akten* also contains *handeln* (to act)” (Vismann *Files* 10). In its singular form, the noun *Akte* is the collection of pieces of writing on one subject or case study, the “(Sammlung von) Schriftstück(en) über einen speziellen Fall, zu einem bestimmten Vorgang” (“Akte,” *Wortfamilienwörterbuch*). An *Akte* belongs to a category of documents called *Archivalien* and defined as “Schriftstücke, Dokumente, Urkunden; Akten in, aus einem Archiv” (“Archivalien”). These definitions clarify the physical aspect of the word file and its

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<sup>24</sup> For clarification, the Stasi Files Law, the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz*, refers to *Unterlagen*, synonymous with *Akten*. The word *Unterlage* (the singular form of *Unterlagen*) is “etwas Flächiges aus verschiedenstem Material, was zu einem bestimmten Zweck, oft zum Schutz unter etwas gelegt wird” (“Unterlage”).

relationship to the meaning of the verb acting; both these aspects are present in autobiographies where the writers use the documentation in their Stasi records in order to act like the subjects of their life stories.

The meaning of “action” that the German word implies is not present in the English word “file” which originates from the French “filer” or “filé,” which in turn derives from Latin “filum” (thread) (Vismann *Files* 137). In 1871 Louis Leitz made an important contribution to the reform of filing systems by introducing loose-leaf binders designed to facilitate access to files (Vismann *Files* 136-137). Although documents are no longer necessarily bound together with thread, that original physical characteristic of the medium provided the term: *Le petit Larousse illustré* defines *files* as various documents and papers that have been sewn together into collections on distinct subjects (“Dossier”). Before forming part of any file, data undergo classification processes, receives a reference number or title, and is assigned a place for insertion into the file. *The New Oxford English Dictionary* defines files as documents serving to arrange papers according to a specific order so as to facilitate later reference, especially for administrative or legislative instances (“File”). After files have been opened, they are kept in the archive or storage rooms of the regulating institution from whence they can be retrieved and viewed only by those authorized by the institution. Livelton and Schellenberg emphasize the importance of the institution in shaping, administering, and controlling the circulation of its files (Livelton 16).

Files in circulation are not limited to paper documents. According to Theodore Schellenberg, the term *record* can refer any type of media<sup>25</sup>:

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<sup>25</sup> The Stasi reports include not only written (or typed) documents but also tape-recorded documentation

All books, papers, maps, photographs, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any public or private institution in pursuance of its legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of its proper business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that institution or its legitimate successor as evidence of its functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities or because of the informational value of the data contained therein. (Schellenberg 16)

Schellenberg points out that it is the value of these documents for future reference and their function for other individuals, organizations and successors rather than their medium that classifies them as records. Since both the terms records and files are organized data regulated by institutions for future reference, these words are used interchangeably in this research project.

The Stasi used their files to record the daily habits, subversive activities, and political attitudes of specific subjects. With the exception of reports from higher ranking Stasi officers, the informal collaborators penned most of these files. These documents record not only occurrences but also information that could prevent infractions or any types of subversion. “In the Stasi’s view, the greatest national threat [wa]s an attack by the West or another popular uprising like June 1953” (*Firma*) a fear that provided grounds for extensive surveillance and for using the files to monitor the population. In its attempt to control Germans, the Stasi intended to “stop what were offenses to the Party before they even took place. Not to let them advance to the point of imprisonment but nip them in the bud through disintegration measures and such. And likewise to sniff out every potential stirring of criticism, preferably before it was even thought of” (*Firma*). In this

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and telephone calls (Dennis 103).

sense, the files served the Stasi as a powerful tool with which to control potential dissidents before the subversive acts took place. In this sense, the Stasi was proactive in its interventions because the “[p]olitical criminal law pursue[d] not so much actual acts as potential acts” (*Firma*). Suspected criminal activity was recorded on file before it occurred.

Although the Stasi used spying mechanisms that in most ways compared to those of similar secret agencies like the CIA and the Gestapo, the Stasi differed from other agencies in the greater degree to which it used informers to infiltrate both public institutions and people's private lives (Dennis 91). The Stasi infiltrated households and most private relationships: “Die Öffentlichkeit weiß schon, dass Ehemänner ihre Frauen ausspionierten, Kinder ihre Eltern, und dass Ostdeutschland das wohl am meisten ausgespähte Land der Weltgeschichte war” (Macrakis 13). Those in charge of collecting this incriminating data on target individuals were the informal collaborators of the MfS, called the “inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter.” The sheer number of informers suggests the Orwellian nature of the society in which citizens of the former GDR lived: Over 250 000 Stasi officers and agent were employed in the 1980s (Dennis 103). Given this high number of employees, the German population could suspect to be under observation at any time. Any remarks on personal habits or daily activity could be kept on file.

The Stasi files were not exclusively recording devices since they also served to control the lives of their subjects under observation. Vera Lengsfeld's autobiography indicates that these files not only recorded information on the data subjects but also specified plans to spread mistrust among individuals considered to be “negative forces” with the aim of disintegrating their relationships (Wollenberger 33). Thus, the Stasi not



only pervaded East German society, but also operated with criminal intent (Lengsfeld “Personal”). Even small details in files “could be highly damaging as they sometimes contained intimate details on individuals” (Dennis 103) that the informers could use later.

The Stasi’s complex organization of its files illustrates how much its archives were a product of the administration that organized them. Even after the demise of the Stasi, its new regulating institution, the Gauck Behörde, required the assistance of Stasi informers in order to understand the Stasi’s alphabetical classification and filing practices. For instance, code names<sup>26</sup> (whether they were for data subjects or informers) were ordered phonetically instead of alphabetically,<sup>27</sup> and nicknames such as “Fred” and “Lotte” were classified under “A” for “Alfred” and “C” for “Charlotte” rather than under the letters “F” and “L.” This classification system explains why the autobiographers’ working through of their pasts could not occur without the cooperation of former IMs or officers of the MfS in helping clarify the administration’s structuring of its files.

A sense of secrecy and power is associated with such documents, as is the case for the records of the MfS. Indeed, “[p]ower has always relied on media and has been consti-

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<sup>26</sup> Code names were given to all data subjects. These code names could be a noun like “Virus,” and “Lyrik,” or a (nick)name that could be similar to the actual name of the data subject in question but could also be different from it. Since all informal collaborators also had a code name, their identity could be revealed only if the data subjects accessed the card that indicated both the actual identity and the code name of the informer in question.

<sup>27</sup> Some people may find it confusing to imagine that names are classified phonetically rather than alphabetically. The following observation is aimed at providing clarification about this practice. During my visit to the Stasi Archives in February 2010, the tour guide talked about the organization of files according to the way names would be pronounced as opposed to the way they were spelled. I deduced from this comment that names like Müller, Mueller and Mueler would be grouped together regardless of whether other names would have otherwise been placed alphabetically between them: hence, “Mueliger” would presumably not have appeared between “Mueler” and “Mueller,” but rather before that entire group of phonetically similar names.

tuted by media effects. Government not only consists in overt media effects [...] but is equally based on less obvious medial procedures such as the recording and archiving of data or the reception and transmission of information” (Horn “Media” 129). Cornelia Vismann goes further, emphasizing that a “bureaucratic administration always tends to exclude the public, to hide its knowledge and action[s] from criticism as well as it can” (Vismann *Files* 146), a strategy which has always helped fundamentally hostile bureaucracies to increase their authority over citizens:

The poison of universal fear and mutual distrust was more effective than most people now want to admit. Ultimately, the State Security’s power rested on precisely that diffuse irrational fear born of uncertainty. Nobody really knew for sure how far the Stasi’s tentacles reached, how much information they had about each individual or how tight their network of spies was. (Wolle 139)

Stefan Wolle suggests that the mere suspicion that the actions of the German population were observed and documented on file affected the behavior and life of this society (Wolle 139). In order to maintain this atmosphere of constant mistrust, it was in the Stasi’s interest to keep its files secret.

Unlike police files which merely record events, the Stasi files both documented and controlled the lives of their data subjects. Instead of gathering data only on the behavior of these subjects of observation, agents purposefully recorded information that could also impact the futures of those who were being observed. In addition, these Stasi files served to incriminate individuals, find evidence that they threatened the system, or evaluate the possibility of the Stasi collaborating with them.

The breadth of information in these files increased their potential impact on the lives of the corresponding data subjects. The Stasi files showed, for instance, that they could sway the outcome of a trial. Lengsfeld illustrates this problem as follows:

Ich fragte ihn [ihren Rechtsanwalt], wann ich mich auf meinen Prozeß vorbereiten könnte. Er war erstaunt: Was denn für eine Vorbereitung nötig sei? Ich antwortete ihm, daß er im Grunde [R]echt hätte, denn bei dieser Art von Prozeß wäre es schließlich wirklich egal, ob ich mich vorbereiten könnte oder nicht, denn das Urteil stünde schon von vornherein fest. Ob ich damit andeuten wolle, daß ich keinen fairen Prozeß bekäme? Allerdings. Mir sei auch klar, daß ich nicht wegen meiner angeblichen Delikte verurteilt würde, sondern wegen meines Engagements in der Friedensbewegung und möglichst so, daß mir in Zukunft der Mut zum selbständigen Denken verginge. Ob ich das auch vor Gericht sagen würde? Nein, das würde ich meinem Anwalt überlassen. (Wollenberger 108)

These files affected trial outcomes. Lengsfeld was betrayed not only by her husband but also by her lawyer (Childs 110) since he used her file against her. In her file-based autobiography, Lengsfeld exposes the Stasi's control of her life by providing evidence of the "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen" used to destroy her life (Wollenberger 57-58, 130). Similarly, Jauch criticizes the judicial system for its arbitrary functioning (Jauch *Stasi* 87). In other words, by detailing on the specific effects of Stasi files on their lives, these former data subjects have identified how these records differ from other types of archival police materials.

### 3.2 Definition of *Archive* and Archive Theory

In German, the word *Archiv* derives from the Late Latin word *archivum* or the Greek word *archeion*, which means the location of something, *Regierungs-, Amtsgebäude* ("Ar-

chiv,” def. c). *Archiv* therefore implies the systematic organization of material or the room itself where files and other documents are preserved. The word *Archiv* also refers to the content of the location called an archive. In this sense, an archive, or archived material, is the “geordnete Sammlung von [historisch, rechtlich, politisch belangvollen] Schriftstücken, Dokumenten, Urkunden, Akten (“Archiv,” def. b). Files are intrinsically related to the meaning of the word “archive,” as the location where such documents are stored or archived. In fact, of course, files can be removed from the archives, be misplaced, become the possessions of private individuals, or be destroyed. However, their original storage location, the archives of an institution, distinguishes them from other types of documents and lends importance to them.

In English, the word “archive” comes from the Greek *arkheia* and the Latin *archīv* or *archīa*, which refer to the magisterial residence or the public office that houses official documents (“Archive”). The earliest archives were constructed because “[k]ings and princes who had no permanent residence used to preserve these documents, together with the treasury and precious relics of saints, in a safe place or to deposit them with the institutions of the church, which were the first to develop a certain system in keeping records” (Posner 3-4). Archives for paper documents first appeared at the end of the Middle Ages: when “[t]he residence of the monarchs became fixed, the scope of their administration expanded, [and] the communities, especially in Italy, began to establish a primitive kind of archival depository . . . finally, paper came into use” (Posner 3-4). Accordingly, after the seventh century the word *archive* came to refer to

[a] place where historical records and other important documents are preserved; also, the materials themselves. The first National Archives were established in France in 1789. Such institutions, known elsewhere as Public Record Office-

es, are usually the centralized repository of a nation's official documents. In recent years, the term has also come to be used for the backup storage of computer data files. ("Archive")

In modern usage, "archive" refers to the selected data which an organization, a nation, or a group of people have decided to preserve while having discarded other versions or interpretations of the same persons, objects, or occurrences.<sup>28</sup>

Archive scholarship has focused on what archivists have come to view as the best archiving principles and procedures for their personal work context. That is, archive theory focuses on the administration and definition of those documents called files, on how to archive effectively and retrieve those records, and on providing guidelines that determine who should access those files, under what conditions, and after what period of time.

Since archive theory centers on storage practices and time considerations rather than on the insertion of files into life stories, its focus is on how institutions and their agents regulate files.<sup>29</sup> However, due to my literary focus, my approach to Stasi files differs from archivists' preoccupation with the role and functions of files: rather than defining files in relation to archivists' storage principles, I draw on etymological and historical approach-

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<sup>28</sup> Archive theory is "directed toward achieving, understanding, or improving archival practice" (Livelton 21) by developing ways of working efficiently and formalizing the treatment of specific documents to be stored within their regulating institutions.

<sup>29</sup> Existing scholarship on archive theory focuses on the administration and definition of documents called Copyright issues as well as personal protection laws apply to literary archives but they have not been an issue in file-based autobiographies so far: in fact, Ash, Lengsfeld, Witt, and Jauch view their Stasi files as *their* property because they are the main subjects of those documents, even if they were written by and for third parties. None of these authors mentions instances of former collaborators raising copyright issues following the quoting and printing of file extracts in their file-based autobiographies. Personal protection laws do not come into play either because the authors themselves selected which pieces of information they were ready to divulge.

es and study what these files have meant to the Stasi as well as to the autobiographies based on these documents. These file-based autobiographies have led scholars me to reconsider what archive theory means in this literary context. Although both archivists and the writers of these autobiographies use archives, they understand their usage of this type of material differently. The study of file-based autobiography as literary texts suggests that the Stasi archives are then detached from existing archive theories as developed and understood by archivists.

Through history, archives have been associated with the concept of memory due to its capacity to record almost limitless information. Unlike the human memory, it can preserve this data for extensive time periods. Vismann suggests that anything not on file will likely be forgotten (“Out of File” 98), perhaps the reason why in the 1800s the Prussians described their archive as “the ‘soul’ or the ‘memory’ of the . . . State” (99). Similar to memory, an archive can lead to oblivion, not only to memory storage. In fact, the production of files contributes both to the organization of forgetting as well as remembering (100): Since archives store material for posterity, they determine what data is available to interested scholars, historians, or other people. Present-day archives may include information on any person or event and appeal to an enormous range of interests. Therefore, archivists attempt to remain as impartial as possible during the classification processes, attempting to encompass the future needs of as many individuals as possible:

It is his [the archivist’s] duty and privilege not merely to be as truthful as he can himself, but to be the guardian for the benefit of others of countless truths of all kinds – truths which interest him personally and truths which do not; yes, and truths of which he himself does not perceive the existence. (Jenkinson 21)

Hence, the term “archives” refers to the circumstances in which certain things can be remembered while others are forgotten: Archives are responsible for the presence or absence of written data and utterances.

### 3.3 The Stasi’s Archives

From the Stasi’s point of view, their files served in part to collect and remember information on potential IMs that would indicate if the individuals under observation showed any willingness to work for the Stasi and if they demonstrated “personality traits of the ‘model’ IM: the ability to assess situations both quickly and accurately” (Dennis 95). Additionally, the Stasi files gathered information on personal weaknesses that would facilitate their recruitment by Stasi agents: “Karrierewünsche, materielle Bedürfnisse und Ansatzpunkte für eine Erpressung, aber auch weltanschauliche Überzeugungen, die als Motiv für eine Mitarbeit dienen konnten” (Gauck *unheimliche* 57). During this checking process, the close relatives, work colleagues, neighbors, and friends of the potential IM were viewed as possible sources of information about that individual. This person’s political views, personal characteristics, habits, sexual behavior, contacts in West Germany, and membership in organizations were focal points during this assessment period, which could last up to seven years (Dennis 96).<sup>30</sup>

Primarily, however, Stasi files aimed to record observations on citizens who explicitly or implicitly represented a threat to socialism (Dennis 94). To this end, these rec-

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<sup>30</sup> All informers underwent this checking process, since the Stasi selected its informers rather than accepting volunteers: “Für eine Tätigkeit beim MfS konnte man sich nicht bewerben, sondern wurde prinzipiell angesprochen und geworben” (Gauck *unheimliche* 63). In fact, the Stasi suspected people seeking work at MfS to be already involved in (counter-) espionage activities (*Firma*).

ords not only recorded the past but also contained scenarios (“Zersetzungsmaßnahmen”) that could help the Stasi purposefully and often maliciously influence the future of the individuals under observation. Furthermore, informers could manipulate the files’ contents by manufacturing incriminating evidence on data subjects (Wollenberger 57).

Kept for the purposes of the State Security Service, the Stasi’s files included daily observations of data subjects (Loest 30-31, 92-93 among others), details and justifications of arrests, evidence supporting crimes, and records of transcriptions of interrogations with the subject in question (Jauch *Stasi* 76, 80). In that they thus represented the state’s hostile actions against those who seemed to threaten the GDR’s project of socialism, these files differed from those archived in schools, hospitals, or other administrative systems in Germany at that time: as Lewis explains, along with other common measures to deal with dissident activity, such as expulsion, interrogations, house-arrest and imprisonment, the file was a ‘technology of power’ that formed part of a suite of finely calibrated mechanisms designed to ruin people’s reputations, to jeopardize their careers and education prospects and generally to demoralize and intimidate them (388).<sup>31</sup> From a legal perspective, Stasi files could be used to justify and provide evidence to support the MfS’s arrests and detentions.

Although the MfS appeared like a “conventional intelligence agency” (*Firma*) it was distinct from other state security services because it was a “secret police against its own people [and i]t maintain[ed] its own detention facilities alongside the jails of the regular police” (*Firma*). In fact, the Stasi did not need court-issued arrest warrants before proceeding.

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<sup>31</sup> Lengsfeld supports Lewis’s claim here with details about how the Stasi manipulated and edited photos in order to discredit individuals as well as spread false rumors (Wollenberger 33).



It was not common to be handed or shown an arrest warrant. A person might be picked up off the street. By law, an arrest warrant had to be issued by a judge or a court of law but could also be issued by a State Prosecutor, or in special cases, by the investigating authority which was Division IX of the Stasi. And the Stasi itself decided what qualified as a ‘special case.’ (*Firma*)

Since the files of the MfS could provide details supporting the designation of “special case,” the Stasi used them as an instrument of power over detainees, some of whom did not even know the reasons for their arrests (*Firma*).

Despite its power the entire Stasi apparatus was subordinated to the ruling Party, for which the files were intended. “Die absolute Unterordnung der Staatssicherheit unter die Partei und deren Führung geht aus unzähligen offiziellen MfS-Dokumenten und Äußerungen von Erich Mielke<sup>32</sup> hervor” (Gauck *unheimliche* 72). The Politbüro was primarily responsible for operating the Stasi’s surveillance apparatus (75). Within the GDR government, the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei*) was responsible for giving orders to execute the Stasi’s operations as well as to run the structure of the Stasi’s ministry: “Vielmehr war der eigentliche Befehlsgeber der Stasi die SED-Führung, die ihre Kontrolle nicht nur über die entsprechende ZK (Zentral Komitee)-Abteilung ausübte, sondern auch über die Parteistruktur innerhalb des Ministeriums” (Gauck *unheimliche* 71). In return, its service to the SED party the Stasi earned the nickname of the *Schwert und Schild der Partei* (“the Sword and Shield of the Party”).<sup>33</sup> The Stasi files were kept to protect

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<sup>32</sup> Mielke was the Minister of the MfS after 1957.

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, however, when the time came after the fall of the Berlin Wall to take responsibility for the acts of inhumanity committed in the name of the Stasi, the IMs refused to acknowledge their roles. Egon Krenz, former secretary of the Zentralkomitee and representative of the security police, argues that Minister Mielke and Honecker, the General Secretary of the SED and national

this system and to protect it against potential enemies, just as if these documents were also the sword and shield in defense of the ruling party. Seen through these historical perspectives, this section indicates how the archives of the Stasi differed from the original concepts of archives as outlined by encyclopedias, etymology and other historical periods like the Prussian state (1918-1933).

### **3.4 The Files after the Dissolution of the Stasi**

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the downfall of the MfS generated an unprecedented attitude towards the files: many former observed subjects claimed their Stasi files as their personal possessions and sought to preserve them. In mid-January 1990 in the Lichtenberg district in Berlin, slogans such as “I want my file” or “Freedom for the files” attested to the population’s demand for the preservation of the files (Vismann *Files* 152). The public storming of Stasi central on 15 January 1990 in fact resulted from the clouds of

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defence representative, bore responsibility for the Stasi’s actions, but both refused to consider themselves guilty of any wrongdoing. For his part, “Honecker, als Generalsekretär der SED und Vorsitzender des Nationalen Verteidigungsrates mächtigster Mann der DDR, wollte nicht einmal gewußt haben, wie viele Mitarbeiter das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit beschäftigte. Und von den vorbereiteten Internierungslagern für Andersdenkende hörte er nach seiner Entmachtung angeblich zum erstenmal. Selbst die Mehrzahl der Stasi-Offiziere wies nach der Wende alle Schuldvorwürfe erbittert zurück. Sie bezeichneten sich oftmals selber als Opfer und suchten in der Behauptung Entlastung, sie hätten doch nur ihre Befehle ausgeführt. Wenn nun die für diese Befehle Verantwortlichen – Egon Krenz als zuständiger ZK-Sekretär, Erich Mielke als zuständiger Minister und Erich Honecker als Staats- und Parteichef – von dem gigantischen Überwachungssystem der Stasi auch nichts gewußt haben, trägt offenkundig niemand die Verantwortung” (Gauck *unheimliche* 70).

smoke signalling that former IMs were destroying files<sup>34</sup> — in fact, they attempted to annihilate all the Stasi's material but only succeeded in destroying one third of it (*Firma*).<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, without this public intervention the documents might have been entirely destroyed. Further, without the pressure of East German citizens, there might not have been a *Stasi Files Act* shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and a longer period of time would have been required prior to the file opening (Mitter 74 and Danielson 177). “In Europe there is a trend to harmonize privacy laws along the lines of a thirty-year closure for records containing personal information” (Danielson 192). However, when victims have to wait thirty years before viewing their files, they might be too old by the time they are granted permission to read those documents, which amounts to never having been permitted to view them. Nonetheless,

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<sup>34</sup> A month earlier in Rostock a similar incident took place. “In the night of December 4<sup>th</sup>, citizens occupied the Stasi's District Offices in Rostock. [...] Word had gotten out that files were being destroyed in great quantities everywhere. Mielke had given a special order to do so, which was backed up by Prime Minister Hans Modrow. For once East German technological backwardness worked to our [the East German's population or the former data subjects] advantage because the Ministry did not have enough shredders. So [Stasi officers] started burning files in remote Stasi offices and people took notice” (*Firma*). “More importantly, that same night the rebellious citizens of Rostock demanded that the police take custody of this building and secure all the files. A group of citizens with police accompaniment combed it, sealed the rooms and disarmed and discharged the Stasi personnel [...]. That was the end of Stasi work. The citizens' group, which later formed itself into Rostock's independent investigative committee, [and] then tackled the enormous task of viewing the entire body of documents left behind by the Stasi. This, if you will, was the genesis of the Federal Commission for the Stasi Records” (*Firma*).

<sup>35</sup> Most of that material deals “with the so-called Western activities that the central Divisions for Intelligence conducted in the former Federal Republic” (*Firma*). The Federal Commission for Stasi Records is currently re-assembling by hand what was destroyed. One employee can reconstruct up to ten pages a day and usually finishes with one bag in nine months, although in one case, an employee had to spend two years reconstituting the shredded material of one single bag (*Firma*).

[t]he national archives of West Germany, known as the Bundesarchiv, advocated the consistent application of West German archival policy. This plan would have closed the Stasi archives for thirty years, except for privileged government access. Personal files would be closed for longer periods, typically thirty years after the individual's death. This thirty-year rule had been standard practice in West Germany for decades, having been codified in the nation's 1969 archival law. Chancellor Helmut Kohl also adamantly expressed his opposition to opening the files. (Danielson 177)

Questions about access to the Stasi records raised the issue of whether they should be either preserved and disclosed at all. A more drastic approach was the suggestion to destroy them altogether:

Despite the heroic work of the January 15 citizens' groups to save the Stasi archives, the hastily assembled Control Commission for the Dissolution of the Ministry of Security advocated complete destruction of the records, largely out of fear that they would be exploited by the West German intelligence service and its allies, including the CIA. (Danielson 178)

The CIA indeed acquired some files during those days (Danielson 178), thus, justifying the argument of those who wanted to obliterate the files. Additionally, both the Ministry of Security and proponents of the files' destruction based their arguments against opening the files on security, stating that "an era of politically motivated murder and manslaughter" (Danielson 178 and Gauck *unheimliche* 90) would follow access; citizens would not necessarily be ready to cope with the weight of the past (Danielson 178). Using these concerns as reasons for the files' destruction, in mid-January Minister Modrow ordered that the Stasi's magnetic bands (which contain similar information than the Stasi files) of all unofficial Stasi collaborators be destroyed (Gauck *unheimliche* 82), and in February

1990 Germany's advisory Round Table ordered the interim East German democratic government to destroy more electronic security files of the unofficial collaborators (Danielson 178). The destruction of these magnetic bands and electronic security files shows how easily the overall Stasi files might have been destroyed as well if Germany's advisory Round Table had ordered to do so.

The prospect of opening the Stasi files raised a number of concerns. Pastor Rainer Eppelmann, Minister of Defense and Disarmament after 1990, feared that denunciations and revenge would jeopardize political freedom (Dennis 236); prime minister of the East German Democratic Republic Lothar de Maizière, Diestel's chief, predicted that providing access to the files would cause murder and manslaughter (Dennis 236). At the same time, other West German representatives argued that the practices of secret organizations would be better protected if the files remained closed (237) so that neither the general population nor other secret agencies could learn about the Stasi's secret methods of operation. Additionally, controversies arising from the files might impede the more pressing task of rebuilding the GDR (237). Another argument against opening the files was voiced by Peter-Michael Diestel, the Minister of Interior, who claimed that it was an unnecessary process since everyone in the former GDR except newborns or alcoholics was to some degree implicated in the Stasi's surveillance machine, and "files could not prove [their] innocence" (Dennis 236). At the same time, the consequences of divulging the identities of those represented in the records codenames that would occur with public access to the Stasi files posed significant concerns:

The UNESCO report remains tacitly sceptical of the use of the files as a form of an extra-judicial truth commission. It does not advocate allowing hundreds of thousands of vic-

tims [to] see their files and to learn the identity of their accusers. (Danielson 192)

Under these conditions former data subjects would continue to doubt the sincerity and integrity of their relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

The very nature of the files themselves and their unethical means of producing detail also presented an argument against their being opened: some were of “the opinion that illegally collected data should be destroyed as quickly as possible, or at least be banished to the depths of the archives for all time” (Wolle 140) because their ultimate use would justify the unethical Stasi practices in the first place, which included betraying family members or friends, bugging apartments or suspected individuals, and listening to the private telephonic conversations of these individuals.

Moreover, if all the files’ reports were considered accurate, candidates applying for political positions or those already involved in politics would risk being blackmailed by competitors. False statements from files could be taken as truthful accounts with detrimental consequences for data subjects seeking employment and especially those seeking positions in politics or social services (Wolle 140). Therefore, Joachim Gauck, the first elected administrator of the Stasi archives after 1989, argued, if data subjects did have the opportunity to read their files, they would have to balance their right to know what their file contained with the duty to read them from a critical, sceptical perspective; aside from this critical reading, reconciliation between victims and perpetrators needs time and dialogue (Gauck “Dealing” 284).

Those arguing for access to the files, on the other hand, pointed out that for all their potential impacts and their inaccuracies, the files could contain elements of truth or evidential material showing the impact of the Stasi on the lives of data subjects. In fact,

destroying or locking away the files would eliminate all evidence, making it impossible to punish culprits or to compensate or rehabilitate victims. Above all, each person had the right to ‘informal determination[,]’ the right to know what data an agency had collected about [that person]. (Wolle 140)

And as Danielson explains, “countries that invoked privacy to cover up widespread denunciations in fact lost credibility with the public and underwent more turmoil and political instability than Germany did with its policy of openness” (192). Thus, despite these many concerns, the right of former data subjects to view their file was granted in 1992 because it was considered that

individuals had the right to discover how they had been pursued and persecuted by the Stasi; the files were needed to determine criminal charges, to assess people’s suitability for political and administrative posts and to provide evidence in connection with claims for rehabilitation and compensation; and ex-Stasi operatives should be deprived of their ‘intellectual ownership’ of the contents of the files. The files, it was also argued, were an essential tool in the reconstruction of the past and in avoiding the kind of delays which were symptomatic of the historical reworking of the Nazi era. (Dennis 237)

The prompt opening of the MfS’s files after only three years was unprecedented, considering the usual required waiting period of thirty years (Mitter 74). Joachim Gauck stressed that opening the archives would help the state regain the population’s trust and recommended allowing data subjects to decide whether or not to view their files. A sizeable response resulted from this decision: Within five years of the Wende, “[m]ore than

1.85 million requests for access ha[d] been made, over 650 000 by private citizens, wishing to see their own files” (Gauck “Dealing” 281); and within the first ten years of the files being accessible, the government had processed 1.5 million applications (Danielson 183).<sup>36</sup> Germany is to date the only country in the world to implement a law like the *Stasi Files Act* that ensures and facilitates<sup>37</sup> former data subjects’ right to view their files (Danielson 184), although citizens of other post-socialist countries like Herta Müller in Romania have also accessed the files of their collapsed national security service.<sup>38</sup>

The opening of the files did not lead to acts of general manslaughter, vengeance and blackmail that the opponents of this choice feared since for Germany’s reunification process, the overall demand for truth outweighed the demands for punishment and vengeance. Gauck initially believed that “[t]he Stasi files were to be used for ‘judicial reckoning with the past’ in order to facilitate prosecution where crimes had been commit-

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<sup>36</sup> “Some thirty kilomet[er]s are personal dossiers in the narrow sense of the word. The vast majority of remaining materials are subject files, i.e. files which are primarily of interest for historical research. The personal files, on the other hand, are for the most part only of interest for research as examples” (Wolle 141).

<sup>37</sup> Germany spends a budget of 102,000,000 Euros annually to administer 170 kilometres of files. Despite this large budget for these archives it can take a considerable amount of time before a file is handed to the former data subject in question since information on third parties is blacked according to Article 13 (4) of the *Stasi Files Act*. The file itself is depersonalized and removed from its original context.

<sup>38</sup> “Several countries tried to address the problem through the judiciary rather than through an archival authority. In the other post-Communist countries more attention was paid to vetting public officials than to providing people with information on their individual lives. ‘Lustration’ became the term used to describe the process of examining people’s past in order to determine their suitability for public service in a democracy. Two fundamental flaws in this approach quickly became evident. When closed files are used to determine a civil servant’s reliability, the charges cannot be verified. Careers may be ruined. Politicians with a questionable past are vulnerable to blackmail. In addition, closing the files, except for verifying holders of high public office, means that the pervasive spying and culture of denunciation at lower levels of society remains unexamined” (Danielson 184).



ted, but also to vindicate those who had been wrongly accused” (Gauck “Dealing” 280). In this sense, those who decided to view their files were allowed to verify the extent to which the Stasi influenced their fate and how loyal their friends had been. However, files have been used for restorative justice in less cases than Gauck anticipated. “In some sense, the failure of the unified state to punish widespread abuses of trust in the former regime was compensated for by opening otherwise restricted information. It was a form of parliamentary rather than judicial justice,<sup>39</sup> an important component of transitional justice in democratizing societies” (Danielson 188).<sup>40</sup> This parliamentary justice in Germany seemed the only justice possible to offer to the German population and particularly to the victims of the Stasi since there was no single perpetrator but a dense network involved in the mechanisms of power and oppression that the Stasi produced. In this sense, it was almost impossible to find the exact culprits and their crimes, not to mention that some of these *crimes* were actually justified by the legal system prior to 1989. Instead of punishing countless German citizens the German government allowed the opening of the Stasi files so that the subjects of observation could determine the extent of the Stasi’s surveillance and impact on their lives.

During the dissolution of the Stasi, a new regime for administering the files had to be established and revised definitions of what material constituted Stasi “files” had to be applied, in accordance with the new state’s rules regulating these documents. The *Volkskammer*<sup>41</sup> drafted the *Stasi Files Act (Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz)* in order to respond

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<sup>39</sup> The Stasi files cannot be used to punish past crimes (Gauck *unheimliche* 91).

<sup>40</sup> However, some data subjects found the viewing of their files insufficient, both on the financial and psychological levels (Jauch “Personal” and Lengsfeld “Personal”). In addition, some of them still believe that parts of their files are missing (Jauch “Personal” and Lengsfeld “Personal”).

<sup>41</sup> Here, the *Volkskammer* means “the first and last democratically elected East German parliament”

to this emerging need. “One of the key outcomes of th[at] law was that it stipulated a bipartisan democratically elected official (the first of whom was Joachim Gauck) would govern an authority separate from the unified government and the federal archive, where privacy laws dictate no access for 30 years” (Beattie 4). Gauck initially assumed responsibility for the files’ administration as well as the enforcement of the *Stasi Files Act*.<sup>42</sup> According to Gauck, “[t]he East German parliament’s intention [wa]s to return the former rulers’ instrument of knowledge to those it had ruled and oppressed” (Gauck “Dealing” 279) so as to answer victims’ need to identify who had and had not spied on them. Accordingly,

unlike the of the American Privacy Act of 1974, the Stasi Records Act enabled victims of spying to have nearly complete access to the identity of those who informed on them. Not only was information that enabled the victims to identify code names made available to the researchers, but the staff of the archives actively assisted with the decoding of pseudonyms. (Danielson 182)

The *Stasi Files Act*, however, applied to no other data than that contained within the Stasi’s records: as article 1(1) of the *Stasi Files Act* specifies, its first purpose is to facilitate “individual access to personal data which the State Security Service has stored regarding him, so that he can clarify what influence the [S]tate [S]ecurity [S]ervice has had on his personal destiny.” Historically speaking, both the *Stasi Files Act* and the subsequent opening of the Stasi files marked a change in archive administration that recalled amendments which occurred during the French Revolution. In his article “Some Aspects of Archival Development since the French Revolution,” Ernst Posner identifies the three

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(Sperling 401) – that is, from 1949 to 1990.

<sup>42</sup> Marianne Birthler succeeded him as federal commissioner of the Stasi files in 2000; and since 28 January 2011, the journalist Roland Jahn has served in this role.

outstanding contributions emerging from the French Revolution as all involving archival practices: First of all, “the framework of a nationwide public archives administration was established” (Posner 5). Second, the state made a conscious effort to protect, preserve, and respect “the care of the documentary heritage of the past” (Posner 5). Third, Article 37 of the Messidor decree specified that the public could access and inquire about archival material in every depository (Posner 5-6). The accessibility to those files after the French Revolution marks a parallel to the ultimate outcome of the Stasi Files Act on the accessibility of the Stasi files since, as a result of these three contributions, anyone can inquire if Stasi records are kept on oneself in any of the Stasi’s depositories. I make a parallel between the outcome of the *Stasi Files Act* and the French Revolution’s impact on archive administration because these are two major historical instances when the regulation and access to archives have been fundamentally transformed and have thus affected archive theory.

In the case of the Stasi files a breakthrough in Germany’s archive administration occurred after the demise of the Stasi and the resulting *Stasi Files Act*: this was the first time that such secret data was made available to those who had been spied on by the Stasi. First, a regulating body took charge of the archive of the former national secret service and determined, according to the data in these files, which people were victims, perpetrators, or both. Throughout the process of removing the Stasi files from this original regulating body and transferring their responsibility to the Gauck Behörde, all Stasi files which is administered by a single nationwide body.<sup>43</sup> Second, the state acknowledged the public’s interest in these records and passed the *Stasi Files Act*, which is a law to protect

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<sup>43</sup> This entity is named in accordance with the federal commissioner for the Stasi files holding that position: Gauck Behörde, then Birthler in 2000, then Jahn in 2011 lending their names to this body.

them, invested money to reconstitute shredded files, and hired employees to prepare and preserve this archival legacy for former data subjects and scholars. Third, according to Article 3(1) of the *Stasi Files Act*, “[e]ach individual shall have the right to enquire [at] the Federal Commissioner if the records contain personal data regarding him. If this is the case, the individual shall have the right to obtain information, to inspect the records, and to be provided with records as directed by this Act.” Similar to the Messidor decree, the *Stasi Files Act* resulted in an increased accessibility to the files. It is precisely this opening of the files that revolutionized the archiving principles of the Stasi and the perception of these archives from the perspective of the data subjects, the general public and scholars alike, since this documentation was never intended for public viewing. In the eyes of the Stasi, the primary purpose of these files was for internal use within the Ministry of state security and the Politburo.

Despite the parallels between the *Stasi Files Act* and the Messidor decree in revolutionary France, a major difference is the primary purpose of the *Stasi Files Act* was non-legislative. “[T]he BStU<sup>44</sup>, as an administrative organ, has a responsibility to provide private corporations and public bodies with the pertinent data, which is information related to the employment in the Stasi of an individual who currently seeks a new job in the public administration or politics, but no intimate details on that individual’s life. The BStU is not, however, an investigative and prosecuting body and nor does it make recommendations on dismissals” (Dennis 241) of those who were indeed former collaborators prior to 1989. Nevertheless, the viewing of the Stasi records directly affected those working in the civil service and those working in other fields: “By February 1997, ac-

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<sup>44</sup> The BStU stands for the “Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Stasi-Unterlagen.”

cording to estimates by the BStU, 42, 066 people had been dismissed from the civil service and around 12,800 non-civil servants removed from their jobs on account of their Stasi connections” (Dennis 241). However, in terms of providing restorative justice, the opening of the Stasi files had had almost no repercussions. “While SED Politbüro members such as Krenz and Schabowski have been jailed for indirect participation in manslaughter relating to the border regime, the difficulties in a judicial reckoning with the past are well exemplified by the failure to convict Mielke on a charge other than the offence which he committed in 1931” (Dennis 242). These examples show how the Stasi informers, officers and the Stasi minister were not subject to judiciary justice after the demise of the Stasi though they were involved at the core of the Stasi’s authoritative mechanisms; retroactive justice did not occur. The problem of applying legislation retroactively was how precisely to define offences, especially those committed under a dictatorship functioning with a different legislation system altogether, so as punish individuals who participated in unethical spying practices or corrupted abuse of power in the name of the Stasi prior to the Wende:

Even the modification of the prohibition against retroactivity by the Basic Law of the FRG and the Unification Treaty by means of convictions based primarily within the framework of a reinterpretation of GDR law still leaves many loopholes and underscores the dilemma of judging offences committed under a dictatorship by means of the instruments of a *Rechtsstaat*. (Dennis 242)

Another weakness of the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz* was that it was not framed to support judicial actions. In fact, Article 1(1) of the *Stasi Files Act* specifies that access to the files can only provide former data subjects with insight into how their lives have been affected by the file; it cannot provide a basis for legal action. Vismann argues that this act,

in providing insights into one's life, appears thus nonjuridical and is applied in non-legislative contexts. Perhaps the nonjuridical nature of this new law enabled the production of life stories based on the biographies written in the Stasi files which were made accessible through the *Stasi Files Act*. "This remarkably nonjuridical goal [of the *Stasi Files Act*] – expressed with the equally nonjuridical term *fate* (*Schicksal*) – is based on the assumption that the Stasi files are capable of storing individual life stories" (Vismann *Files* 154). For Vismann, perusing those records therefore corresponds to reading a diary written by a third person, if not by an enemy. In a personal interview in February 2010 Vismann explained that she saw Stasi files as windows on the past: these reports were merely observations on a subject's daily life, preferences, habits, and activities. In the files, the data subject seems to come to life: "[d]as ganze Subjekt wird zur Sprache gebracht" (Vismann "Personal"). In this sense, the Stasi files provide a sense of this subject's life while under Stasi observation. This personal life story on file provides the starting point from which data subjects embark on file-based autobiographical writing in response to their reading of their files, or rather the overall material that was considered as their file.

The fact that after the passing of the *Stasi Files Act* Stasi records were redefined affected what information those data subjects who decided to write file-based autobiographies was made available to them. Files and other material accessible to data subjects include not only paper documents but also, according to Article 6(1) of the *Stasi Files Act*,

1. all information-recording media, irrespective of the form of storage, in particular a) files, data files, documents, cards, plans, films, visual material, audio material, and

other recordings b) machine-produced or handwritten copies and other duplicates of the above c) evaluation aids, particularly programs for automated data processing to the extent that they came into the possession of or originated at the State Security Service or Department 1 of the Criminal Police Division of the Volkspolizei (People's Police) or were given to them for their use; 2. records submitted to the State Security Service by the courts and public prosecutors.

However, before being read by data subjects or scholars granted permission to view Stasi archives, the files were blacked out in accordance with Article 13 (4) of the *Stasi Files Act*: “In den Duplikaten sind die personenbezogenen Informationen über andere Betroffene oder Dritte zu anonymisieren.”<sup>45</sup> As a result, the material available to those former data subjects wishing to reconstruct their pasts and to compose their autobiographies accordingly was limited: Not only might some sections of files be missing, but some interrogation statements also seemed to have been distorted, leaving former data subjects with the impression that their real files remained hidden, as Vismann explains:

[T]he very fact that the records have been officially precensored leads to the inevitable conclusion that there must be a real file [. . .] the indisputable proof that the released file has been tampered with and is therefore incomplete is the *envelope* that accompanies it. It contains the pages that for legal reasons are not to be read by anybody else after having been read by officials. (*Files* 155-56)

In these circumstances, the file itself seemed less valuable for many than the envelope containing the censored material. “It [the envelope containing censored material] fuels

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<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, code names of the employees in the files could also be divulged if data subjects requested that they be (*Stasi Files Act*, Section 13.5).

the suspicion that the legible file is nothing but an inferior, secondary text lacking the truly important pages” (Vismann *Files* 156).<sup>46</sup>

Once former data subjects could access their files, they were quick to criticize the content and quality of these documents, not only because of the censoring they saw but also because of the questionable reliability of the contents. In her article “One Hundred Miles of Lives: The Stasi Files as a People’s History of East Germany,” Molly Andrews quotes her primarily East German interviewees, former dissidents criticizing the authenticity of their records. Using her interviewees as examples, Andrews makes clear not only that the Stasi’s data was gathered unethically, but that most reports were neither analyzed carefully nor followed scientific methodology; in fact, this data is influenced by biases related to the Stasi’s presuppositions and sponsor (who, in their case was the ruling party called the SED) or to the informer’s assumptions about the data subject in question (Andrews 27-29).

Despite all of these shortcomings, however, the files contain information that enables former data subjects to perceive how and when their files influenced their lives. Once they have read their files, former data subjects have tended to select and incorporate or paraphrase fragments of them to use in framing their critical messages.

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<sup>46</sup> During my interviews with the former data subjects Jauch and Lengsfeld, they mentioned that they were not aware of that envelope’s existence; they had received photocopies of their files and had thought that material was missing from those files, but they had not thought that it might be found in a separate envelope. Every year Jauch and her husband submit inquiries about whether any new material pertinent to their case has been discovered (Jauch “Personal”).



### 3.5 Files and Autobiography Theory

The Stasi files' influence in the writing of file-based autobiographies distinguishes these works as a sub-genre of autobiographical writing. These files influence how these autobiographers remember their pasts, what they discuss in their autobiographies, how they present themselves, and how they support their critical reflections on the MfS. Had they not read their files, these former data subjects would likely not have written their life stories, or at least not the same life stories, since many of the remembered events they recalled only because of details in their files, or other memories were changed due to them; they changed previous memories from false to true and others from true to false.<sup>47</sup> In the process of structuring their life narratives according to their Stasi records, the autobiographers allow the file to guide their memories of their time under Stasi observation. As a result, most of them find themselves with an ambiguous attitude towards their files' veracity; on the one hand, they complain about distortions, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and lack of data in general; on the other, they use their files to support their concerns about the Stasi's abuse of power, infringements of human rights, betrayal or, as in the case of Witt, the media's appropriation of personal information.

The fact that these autobiographers write about such personal concerns indicates that they have written their stories with a personal agenda.<sup>48</sup> Some seek to expose errors in their files or prove their innocence; others want to reveal the Stasi's methods of operating or explain how opening the files affected their relationships and attitudes. In this

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<sup>47</sup> Witt's case offers another way in which a Stasi file prompted the writing of an autobiography: had the media not read her file and published quotes from it, she might not have written her file-based autobiography.

<sup>48</sup> With the term *agenda* I refer to the set of intentions with which autobiographers embark on their projects and make their stories public despite the consequent psychological burdens and costs in money and time.

sense, their autobiographical discourses are in accordance with the autobiographers' personal goals. As material for use in this literary context, the files have neither administrative nor legal value. Rather, they instigate, document, shape, and support the autobiographers' expressive, literary purposes as these former data subjects respond to their experiences of accessing and reading their biographical data and then reconsider their pasts.

Once such life fragments are inserted into file-based autobiographies, their value changes from that of state property to that of a literary and cultural artifact no longer employed for judicial purposes:

The 'Wende' saw the emergence of a new field of cultural production, namely the production of the Stasi file as literature, but it also saw a shift in the generic attributes of the Stasi file itself, that is, in the way the file is read, the conventions the reader brings to bear on the reading process, the purposes to which the file is put and the value ascribed to the file and its contents. (Lewis 382)

The cultural value of the files depends, then, on their audiences. According to Lewis, the (file-based) autobiographies of former collaborators tend to sell better than those of data subjects. However, many of these informal collaborators either downplay or do not mention at all their connections with the Stasi apparatus, aware of the negative connotations of such collusion. It is as if these former IMs rather preferred to avoid public criticism than sell many of their autobiographies. Their narratives do not serve to expose their guilt but to give excuses for their participation in this spy agency. As for known authors (both victims and partial collaborators), they prefer to refer to themselves and their files using a fictional literary approach<sup>49</sup> instead of narrating their stories as au-

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<sup>49</sup> Jürgen Fuchs, Christa Wolf, and Monika Maron, among others, are a few examples of known authors who have narrated in fictional prose about their experience of living under Stasi observation.

tobiographies or based on specific reports from their files, as do authors of file-based autobiographies. Had these known authors of fiction used their Stasi files in their autobiographies, they would have brought their stories into the inherent “regimes of truth<sup>50</sup>” (Lewis 397) associated with this archival material by some data subjects who use these files at their advantages and thus, validate their truth content, or at least the sections that can serve to reinforce their own personal agendas, their individual representations of truth based on the files’ “regimes of truth” (Lewis 397). These “regimes of truth” (397) mean that the files are considered accurate if taken seriously and added into autobiographical contexts. By taking these files at their face value, these authors give authority to these data and thus give them value as archival material. I suggest with Lewis that these authors’ refusal to discuss their files in their autobiographies means that they intend to devalue their Stasi files and thus reject the regime that illegally gathered the file material:

It seems unlikely that Anderson has shunned his file because it contains a hostile perspective on his life, as did a few of the Stasi’s victims. His unwillingness to write his autobiography through his files derives, it could be argued, more from a defiant refusal to participate in the dominant ‘regimes of value’ in which the files circulate in Germany today. (Lewis 397)

Another hindrance to authors using their Stasi records as the basis for their life narratives is that these authors are accountable for any deviations from the truth that their stories may contain. While autobiographers of necessity are sensitive to the issues of veracity and authenticity, these persons writing file-based autobiographies must also consider the

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<sup>50</sup> “Regimes of truth” stand for the authentic and official character of the files, as if they contained always the truth.

authenticity of their files in their efforts to support personal claims of authenticity as surveilled persons.

### 3.6 Discourses of Agency: Derrida's "Archive Fever"

The need of former data subjects to return to their files for personal reasons recalls Derrida's notion of "archive fever." His term describes the file's power to command. Many former data subjects seek to understand where, how, and to what extent their files shaped their lives, as recognized in the 1(1) of the *Stasi Files Act*. Derrida argues that the power of the archives has its etymological roots in the noun *file*. He says:

Ce nom coordonne apparemment deux principes en un: le principe selon la nature ou l'histoire, *là où* les choses *commencent* – principe physique, historique ou ontologique –, mais aussi le principe selon la loi, *là où* des hommes et des dieux *commandent*, *là où* s'exerce l'autorité, l'ordre social, *en ce lieu* depuis lequel l'ordre est donné – principe nomologique. (Derrida *Mal* 11)

The opening of the Stasi files has allowed former data subjects to determine where the state authority commanded changes, so-called "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen," that influenced their lives.

In *Mal d'archive* Derrida explains that the act of returning to a file is a return to a commencement: "C'est se porter vers elle [l'archive] d'un désir compulsif, répétitif et nostalgique, un désir irrépressible de retour à l'origine, un mal du pays, une nostalgie du retour au lieu le plus archaïque du commencement absolu" (Derrida *Mal* 142). This notion applies to the data subjects, who believe that their files can elucidate certain episodes of their lives, or that their lives were altered because of their files' influence, although,

for many of these data subjects, the reading their files arises not from nostalgia but from the desire to understand their past better.

Derrida's idea that archives have the power to command begins with the fact that prior to data being safeguarded in archives, diverse processes of manipulating, selecting, grouping, and discarding take place. After that point, the constructed archive in turn shapes, constructs, and mediates those facts that are remembered while its silence on other facts destines them for oblivion. The archive in this sense *commands*; it not only stores memories but also classifies and selects them, as Derrida explains:

Autre façon de dire que l'archive, comme impression, écriture, prothèse ou technique hypomnésique en général, ce n'est pas seulement le lieu de stockage et de conservation d'un contenu archivable *passé*, qui existerait de toute façon, tel que, sans elle, on croit encore qu'il fut ou qu'il aura été. Non, la structure technique de l'archive *archivante* détermine aussi la structure du contenu *archivable* dans son surgissement même et dans son rapport à l'avenir. L'archivation produit autant qu'elle enregistre l'événement.  
(34)

Files comprise pre-selected and censored data as well as interpretations intended for subsequent referential purposes. Historically, only Greek archons (officials regulating the archives and interpreting the law based on these archives) were permitted to ascribe meaning to the data within their archives (Derrida *Mal* 13). In the process, they imposed their own interpretation of the Greek laws with evidence drawn from the archives that these archons regulated: "Confiés en dépôt à de tels archontes, ces documents disent en effet a loi" (13): that is, they decided what was true.

The Stasi informers compiling files performed the same act of interpreting and imposing meanings, both recording and constructing crimes: "Their job was not so much

to find the criminal but to find the crime and thus assist their officers in playing the infinitely more tricky game of pinning the crime on the criminal” (Lewis 390-91).<sup>51</sup> Given the intention of the Stasi to draft plans to disrupt group meetings or activists, or to change the lives of these individuals, the entries of the Stasi files tend to be biased. These predispositions, in turn, have affected life events of the data subjects in question instead of purely recording these occurrences. Indeed, former data subjects write their file-based autobiographies with the feeling that their archives shape as much as they transcribe their lives’ events. What they have read reveals to them the file’s power to determine paths in life, whether those be the “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen,” subsequent incriminations, group dissolutions, imprisonments, or, in the case of Witt and Lengsfeld, changes in public image.

Even when they have become parts of autobiographies, files continue to assert their power, tending to shape the autobiographers’ arguments and substantiate their narratives. In literary terms the use of Stasi files in file-based autobiographies is reminiscent of Derrida’s discussion of “pharmakon” (a term denoting both remedy and poison).<sup>52</sup> In “La pharmacie de Platon” Derrida mentions the passage in Plato’s *Phaedrus* where Socrates tells Phaedrus the story of Theut, who presents letters and writing to the king as a form of remedy: “Your highness, this science will increase the intelligence of the people of Egypt

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<sup>51</sup> “Informers were usually given a possible crime with respect to which their objects were to be convicted. The most common one was ‘Staatsfeindliche Hetze’ according to Paragraph 106 of the Criminal Code. Other fav[o]rites were Paragraph 100, ‘Staatsfeindliche Verbindungen’, and Paragraph 219, ‘ungesetzliche Verbindungsaufnahme’, which outlawed all contacts with groups or persons hostile to the state. Others were offences against Paragraph 97, ‘Spionage’, and Paragraph 98, ‘Sammlung von Nachrichten’, namely the collection of Western printed matter and propaganda” (Lewis 390-91).

<sup>52</sup> This is the case in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and in Ash’s file-based autobiography where the metaphor of the Madeleine works as both a gift and memory-poison.

and improve their memories. For this invention is a potion<sup>53</sup> for memory and intelligence” (Plato 68). In that story, according to Socrates, the written word, the “pharmakon,” should help Egyptians’ abilities to remember. However, as the king replies to Theut, the “pharmakon” can also alter or even replace memory:

The loyalty you feel to writing, as its originator, has just led you to tell me the opposite of its true effect. It will atrophy people’s memories.\* Thus in writing will [the writing] make them remember things by relying on marks made by others, from outside themselves, not on their own inner resources,\* and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds. Your invention is a potion for jogging the memory, not for remembering. (Plato 69)<sup>54</sup>

Stasi files are also a “pharmakon,” a remedy in providing once-forgotten details from the past and a poison in replacing, altering memories, or simply calling back unwanted memories, whether they are embarrassing or painful, In Ash’s words,

a file opens the door to a vast sunken labyrinth of the forgotten past [. . . ;] the very act of opening the door itself changes the buried artefacts, like an archaeologist letting in fresh air to a sealed Egyptian tomb.

For these are not simply past experiences rediscovered in their original state. Even without the fresh light from a new document or another’s recollection – the opened door – our memories decay or sharpen, mellow or sour, with the passage of time and the change of circumstances. (96)

For Ash, Witt, Jauch, and Lengsfeld, the records of the MfS thus offer alternatives to their own recollections of the past and affect the way it is remembered.

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<sup>53</sup> *Potion* corresponds to a remedy or to the “pharmakon” in Derrida’s “La pharmacie de Platon.”

<sup>54</sup> In this passage the linguistic symbol \* means that the expression is translated with its literal meaning but it is not employed this way in English.

In this sense, each Stasi file constitutes a gift and a *Gift* (German for *poison*) to memory, as Ash describes it. He refers to Plato's idea of "pharmakon" in *Phaedrus* and to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* as he argues that although his personal file first appeared to him as an object "[f]ar better than Proust's Madeleine" (Ash 10),<sup>55</sup> it later became a poisoned Madeleine because it contained episodes he no longer wished to recall. In Proust's semi-autobiographical work the main character remembers his childhood after tasting a spoonful of a Madeleine cake soaked in tea, just as his aunt used to give it to him when he was a child.<sup>56</sup> Ash emphasizes that the Stasi file has allowed him to walk into the past, rather than attempting to find random objects that might reactivate memories. By the expression "walking into the past" Ash means that he feels as if he completely entered his past world rather than just an aspect of it, which perhaps a photograph might bring to life as opposed to the rich details about his whole past under observation which is recorded on file. Instead of relying initially on his personal memories in writing his autobiography, Ash refers to his biography on file, though he complements and contradicts some of his file's data, especially as this document engages him in rather unpleasant memories. His engagement with the file thus recalls the double characteristic of the Stasi records that function not only as a good but also as a poisoned Madeleine. In

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<sup>55</sup> "Et dès que j'eus reconnu le goût du morceau de [M]adeleine trempé dans le tilleul que me donnait ma tante [...] aussitôt la vieille maison grise sur la rue, où était sa chambre, vint comme un décor de théâtre [...] Et comme dans ce jeu où les Japonais s'amuse à tremper dans un bol de porcelaine rempli d'eau, de petits morceaux de papier jusque-là indistincts qui, à peine y sont-ils plongés s'étirent, se contournent, se colorent, se différencient, deviennent des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages consistants et reconnaissables" (Proust 47).

<sup>56</sup> By reenacting in the present a moment from his childhood, this sensuous experience allows the protagonist to recall the remote past. Ash compares his reading of his file to the character's tasting of the Madeleine because in both cases, an object that evokes the forgotten past.



the case of the other file-based autobiographies as well, the writers see their files with the double characteristic: as a gift to memory and also as a memory-poison.

Stasi records are certainly not always a gift to memory. While access to them elucidates the past, they can also poison personal and social relationships. Data subjects start reflecting on events that they would not have re-evaluated had their files remained closed or destroyed. This is the case for Lengsfeld, a former political activist who presents her encounter with the file as a revelation: She portrays herself as ignorant of her husband's collaboration until reading about it in her file. For her, the file thus constituted poison that destroyed their marriage. In her file-based autobiography (1992), the first of this sub-genre to be published, Lengsfeld uses her record as evidence supporting her accusations against Knud-Donald and defending herself against her friends' assumptions that she too might have worked as an informant. The reports recorded in her file constitute powerful proof against Knud-Donald.

Similarly, Jauch understands how her Stasi record can work as a literary tool to help her narrate her story: When she describes her arrest and interrogations, for instance, she inserts photocopies from her file to provide authenticity. This meshing of narration and documentation gives her readers the sense that they too are reading her file as they learn her life story. Although sometimes the poor quality of the photocopies slows down the reading or the fragments from her record do not contribute to the plot, they always add veracity to it while directing and constructing the chronology of her narrative.

Witt, in contrast to Jauch, employs her file as a literary tool with which she builds her story and attempts to rebuild her public image as a champion figure skater, depicting herself as a naïve but dedicated representative of the former GDR. Unlike the other auto-

biographers of this study, however, to this end she relies largely on the media's use and misappropriation of her file. Instead of narrating her autobiography entirely according to her personal memories and her Stasi file as do Jauch, Ash, and Lengsfeld, Witt centers her arguments on the file mostly in relation to the passages that the media accessed and published to the detriment of her public image. In other words, the external storage medium of her file functions as an identity-maker. Witt employs her Stasi records as a discursive medium within her narrative as Lengsfeld does, but Witt's purpose is to provide her readers with passages from the file in order to persuade them to reconsider her public image. In the process, then, Witt uses the same literary tool — her file — that the press previously used against her

In these literary examples the file is a fundamental component of the life story, aside from the autobiographical pact, and the fact that the author is the same person as the one behind the narrative voice. In this autobiographical context the files of the former data subjects serve to authenticate their story and to address their public. In fact, these autobiographers exploit these reports written from a third person's perspective in an attempt to generate sympathy. In this way, these Stasi files serve literary and persuasive functions beyond their original governmental or juristic purposes. They initiate and help to construct and document the autobiographers' life stories and lines of arguments.

## 4 Timothy Garton Ash's *The File*

The varying degrees of emotion with which the four former data subjects express their opinions in the autobiographies discussed in this study depends on how extensively the Stasi interfered in such aspects of their lives as their careers and relationships. Compared with his three counterparts, Ash, a British national, is impartial to the issue of the opening of the Stasi files, and engages with his record as a relatively dispassionate observer. Unlike the others, Ash needed neither to tell nor to write his story: he felt no pressure to make a public statement about the GDR, his past, or his relationship with the Stasi. Moreover, he experienced no personal compulsion to embark on this autobiographical project: he needed no “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” or compensation or revenge. Rather, he seeks to understand why acquaintances betrayed him and draws analytical specific and general conclusions why people collaborated with the Stasi. Additionally, he reflects on the processes of memory that are involved when a person encounters his or her file. This chapter considers first how in relation to the three other autobiographers considered here Ash presents himself and the context of his autobiographical narrative. This chapter then analyzes how Ash thematizes the influence of his Stasi record on his memory, and how, using his record, he negotiates with his memory processes to construct his argument. Because of its central role to my exploration of all four file-based autobiographies, I therefore include a working definition of memory based on dictionary definitions as well as etymological, psychological, and literary perspectives. This chapter concludes by discussing the political hypothesis that Ash formulates about the nature of Stasi collaboration in response to reading his file and encountering the IMs in charge of his case.

Approximately ten years after his time under observation, Timothy Garton Ash read his file and discovered the identity of his informers. His encounter with his Stasi record triggers the memory processes that lead him to reflect critically on his past, the effects on his memory and life, and the motivations of the Stasi collaborators who contributed to his file.

Ash is a distinguished British political writer, contemporary historian, columnist for the *Guardian*, and professor of European Studies at the University of Oxford. During the 1980s he worked as a reporter in Berlin. At the same time, he interviewed dissidents and established connections with Poland's Solidarity movement for his Ph.D. research on Berlin under Hitler (McPherson 1).

It's no wonder that the Eastern European secret services took a keen interest in him. But their interest predated his involvement with the nonconformist movements [such as the Poland's Solidarity movement]. It had begun at least by 1978, when, as a young Oxford graduate writing a doctoral thesis about Berlin under Hitler, he crossed the wall at Checkpoint Charlie in search of materials kept in the eastern section of the city. As a Western scholar and journalist – as a Westerner, to be precise – he was suspect by definition. (Venclova)

Due to their assumption that Ash was engaged in espionage, the Stasi kept him under observation. Quoting from his file, Ash explains that the authorities believed him to have “deliberately exploited his official functions as research[er] and / or journalist to pursue intelligence activities” simply on the basis of his dual occupations, being a foreign student and a journalist (11). Ash did not see himself as having constructed cover stories but he realized that the act of introducing oneself as student and then as journalist could be considered as “legends” from the Stasi's perspective, as he explains: “In the Lieuten-

ant's analysis, I used not just one but three 'legends' to describe what I was really about, friend of a friend, journalist, student of East German cultural life. 'Legend' is the Stasi term for cover story. It is generally used for the stories developed for their own full-time informers, but here is applied by extension to me" (26-27). The Stasi therefore opened a file on him and placed him in category five of their data subjects, the group including individuals involved in subversive activities "on behalf of hostile intelligence services, centres of political-ideological diversion, Zionist, hostile emigré, clerical and other organizations" (Ash 185). Indeed, as a BBC reporter, he published opinions and articles critical of the GDR. Although Ash later denied collaboration with any intelligence services, he admits that the Stasi's doubts on him were not surprising: "Using a pseudonym in the *Spectator*, and obviously not telling the East German authorities what I was up to, I was collecting material about the East German dictatorship. And the more I learned the more I disliked it. Was I making secret preparations for attempted literary subversion? I certainly was" (56). The opportunity to read his file later enabled him to comprehend why his informers suspected him.

Ash's autobiographical project addressed his several motives. In part Ash was about those who betrayed their friends and relatives for the Stasi. He therefore met most of his former informers, seeking non-judgemental understanding of their perspectives on collaborating with the Stasi.<sup>57</sup> In so doing, he felt as if he were investigating human behavior and memory through the mechanism of his file (Ash 19). At the same time, Ash wanted to verify the information the Stasi had gathered on him and determine the extent to which it might have influenced his life. Ash's desire to entertain his readers is also

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<sup>57</sup> As he meets them Ash seeks to comprehend better their point of view instead of condemning them.

suggested in *The File*'s amusing details – like his codename Romeo or interpretations of his intimate relationships with women – revealed as the author reads his file. It appears at first glance to be merely a representation of the author's personal story for acceptance by the general public, but the book ends with Ash's critical reflections on the socio-historical circumstances that encouraged IMs to collaborate with the system and on the possible consequences of opening the files.<sup>58</sup> Other authors continue to live in Germany and to suffer from the social and personal impacts of their files: for Lengsfeld, major disillusion and a divorce; for Witt, a damaged reputation; for Jauch, physical and psychological repercussions. Ash's detachment is due to his file having been inconsequential in his life: "I was not a victim of these informers, as many East Germans really were of theirs. They did me no serious damage. Yet, knowing how the system worked, it is a fair guess that they did harm others" (75). In this passage, Ash implies that his non-German status is linked with his relative immunity to harm from the Stasi, and thus perhaps to his feeling no need for retribution.

Accordingly, Ash is the only former data subject of the four studied here who feels some sympathy for most of his Stasi informers<sup>59</sup>: "When you talk to those involved, what you find is less deliberate dishonesty than our almost infinite [human] capacity for self-deception" (223). Yet he concludes that despite most of them having acted out of human weakness rather than malice, "the sum of their actions was a great evil" (224).

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<sup>58</sup> In attempting to understand why his informers betrayed him, Ash portrays himself as someone with no need for revenge, unlike Jauch, Witt, and Lengsfeld, whose lives were affected (as in Witt's case) or detrimentally altered by the Stasi (such as in the situation of Jauch and Lengsfeld).

<sup>59</sup> This is true except for Michaela, who collaborated with the Stasi for money.

Ash describes with unusual detachment his opening of the files: he presents himself as someone who wants to learn from his personal story what were the reasons individuals collaborated with the Stasi and what are effects on his memory do the Stasi reports have. Since he has no accusations of collaboration to refute, he can write about his encounter with his file as a personal experiment, as if he was doing a test to discover something unknown: “The experience may even teach us something about history and memory, about ourselves, about human nature. So if the form of this book seems self-indulgent, the purpose is not. I am but a window, a sample, a means to an end, the object of this experiment” (19). By presenting his experience as a kind of research project, he attempts to share an authentic story with the public, but unlike a scientist aiming for an impersonal tone, he includes anecdotal comments and personal on his experiment. Ash concludes that reading one’s file can teach one about the Stasi’s methods of operation and the informers’ motives for collaborating (Venclova). None of these concerns appears in the file-based autobiographies of the other authors.

An author writing and publishing a personal story around a political topic like the Stasi files bears in mind an immediate audience. In the case of other authors, the addressed audience implies close friends and relatives. For public figures such as Lengsfeld and Witt, the mass media are also a target. Ash, however, indicates no intended readers other than those curious to learn about what it means to read one’s file. Unlike other authors, Ash does not seem to produce his life story as a legacy for his family, despite its personal nature. At the same time, however, Ash’s reputation as a scholar and the English publication of his file-based autobiography guarantee *The File* a wider readership than most file-based autobiographies can hope for, which have been published in their au-

thors' native German and so receive limited attention in the non-German speaking world.<sup>60</sup>

In his autobiography, Ash focuses, like most file-based autobiographers, mainly on the time during which was being observed, though he complements this main interest with his reactions to encountering his file and learning more about the system responsible for it. Typically, file-based autobiographers seek to establish proximity to their readers primarily by complying with the autobiographical pact of truth to tell their stories as accurately as possible. In addition, however, Ash writes as though composing letters to a confidant, inviting his audience to move even closer to him, psychologically. For instance, he reflects with embarrassment on how reading his file causes him to reconsider his own work as a reporter and writer, a work that required him to interview people, and barge into their lives. Ash muses on how difficult it is to see his past self in this record and then accesses his own diary in order to recall in detail from his personal perspective of several years ago how awkward he might have been as writer and reporter:

The diary reminds me of all the fumbblings, the clumsiness, the pretentiousness and snobbery – and the insouciance with which I barged into other people's lives. Embarrassment apart, there is the sheer difficulty of reconstructing how you really thought and felt. How much easier to do it to other people! At times, this past self is such a stranger to me that where I have written 'I' in these last pages I almost feel it should be 'he.' (37)

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<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Lengsfeld's file-based autobiography *Virus der Heuchler* is out of print because the political statements expressed in it. This publication was removed from the shelf, as she explains. "Im Buch hatte ich das erste Mal den Verdacht ausgesprochen, dass der damalige PDS-Chef Gregor Gysi Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit gewesen sein könnte. Als Gysi erfuhr, dass solches von einem Verlag publiziert wurde, der zum Teil von der PDS finanziert wurde, soll er einen Tobsuchtanfall bekommen haben. Danach wurde mein Buch stillschweigend aus dem Verkehr gezogen" (Lengsfeld *nun* 371).



His reading of his file is thus complemented by his personal diary and portrays him as a *stranger* to himself. This feeling of disconnection with the file's subject — his previous self — arises because about ten years have elapsed between Ash's life as a data subject and his writing of his autobiography. As a result, he feels like a different individual altogether: describing himself, he notes "Yet if the '68ers were exotic to me, this heavy-shoed, tweed-jacketed young Englishman must have been a strange apparition to them. Looking back, he now seems pretty odd to me" (36). While the image of the younger self portrayed in his file is not entirely new to him, it nevertheless consists mostly of half-forgotten facts. Of the four file-based autobiographers central to this thesis, Ash alone refers to the sense of embarrassment that he experiences as he looks back at his diary entries in comparison to his file in order to better understand his record. By allowing himself the freedom to talk about his own uncomfortable feelings and so bringing his readers close to him, Ash gains their trust and understanding when later he expresses his thoughts about what motivated Stasi collaborators. For the same reason, readers are likely to accept as reliable his assertion that he has only an observer's interest in memory and motivation rather than any political agenda in telling his story.

After establishing his credibility as a data subject, Ash turns to the question of why some became collaborators with the Stasi. Ash is intrigued by these informers' motivations. "What is it that makes one person a resistance fighter and another the faithful servant of a dictatorship?" (39). Unlike Lengsfeld, Witt, and Jauch, Ash seems truly interested in understanding those IMs and ultimately suggests that most of them were drawn to the Stasi due to the lack of a father figure in their lives (Ash 225), just like the studies of the historian Mike Dennis suggest (Dennis 100 and 102). IMs were caught in this sur-

veillance apparatus by their weaknesses or drawn to it by personal conviction. Similar to the case presented in the film *Das Leben der Anderen* or in the life of former data subjects, the “conspirational power [of surveillance societies] transforms individuals into media, strips them of their identity, exploits them as mere tools for communication of information, and, most important, exploits their most private feelings.”<sup>61</sup> The conspiracy is the unnatural merging of the political and the private, the intertwining of the most personal, intimate desires and the machinations of a political apparatus” (Horn “Media” 135). Specifically, IMs were reduced to Stasi media as they performed their assigned tasks: spying, unquestioningly following orders, listening to private conversations, reporting on individuals, denouncing individuals, interpreting the lives of their data subjects, and bugging apartments (140), presumably all without much reflection on their unconditional obedience to an oppressive system. As Ash says, although they might have complied because they were weak and provided information that seemed unimportant, even the most banal details could seriously affect the lives of their data subjects; thus, their betrayals amounted to evil (223).

While he criticizes those who spied on him in exchange for personal benefits, he suggests that for most informers, the absence of their fathers constituted a need that the Stasi as a substitute paternal figure could meet

There is the absent father: away at the war, killed on active service, or somewhere in a prisoner-of-war camp. There is the father who was a Nazi or the father who was a victim of

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<sup>61</sup> “In the DDR itself and beyond its frontiers, the Stasi attempted to exploit long-term friendships and sexual relations to gain control over its victims. One other example [beside Lengsfeld’s] was the attempt to destroy the marriage of Gerd and Ulrike Poppe, two well-known dissidents, by seeking to involve an IM with Frau Poppe” (Childs 110).

the Nazis. The psychological legacy of Nazism and war prepares the candidates for the next round of dictatorship. Then, in those vulnerable years between childhood and maturity, the young Romeo years, they are caught. (225)<sup>62</sup>

At the same time as Ash delves into this psychological question, Ash turns his attention to how his file, a form of external memory, has served him as a mnemonic device by engendering and mediating his remembering processes. Ash begins this discussion by exploring definitions of memory. In my view, human memory cannot reproduce the past with factual accuracy; the interaction of memory, past and present inevitably changes over time and according to circumstances, information, and personal perspectives. That is, while human memory appears to be endowed with almost unlimited input possibilities and the ability to retain data in some form for a considerable time, the information transforms itself and undergoes continuous editing processes. If memories are recorded on an external media such as files, however, that information remains is seen as having remained intact, no matter how much time elapses before it is retrieved. Perhaps this is this assumption that an external memory like a file is more reliable than one's personal memory that leads former data subjects to rely heavily on the Stasi archives in the production of their file-based autobiographies. In the process of reading their Stasi files, these former data subjects see their memories changed by this document.

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<sup>62</sup> Ash's hypothesis that in the absence of a supporting father or family in general, the IM was seeking a replacement family in the Stasi has historical support. Mike Dennis, for instance, argues that "the [Stasi] officer was often successful in establishing a relationship of trust and dependence on the part of the IM" (Dennis 102) and this dependence type resembled a family relationship even though the head officer was exploiting his agent. In fact, "feelings of security and a sense of belonging" (Dennis 100) were among the main motives causing people to work as IMs...

## 4.1 Definitions of *Memory*

Memory is “[t]he faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past” (“Memory,” def. 1). It is the ability, with or without aids, to evoke the past. This implies that memory may depend on external documentation like files in order to recall the past. While external forms of memory such as Stasi files help people to remember by recalling specific details of their pasts, these external sources of memory can correct or complement or bring into question personal memories by offering alternate versions of the past or causal links between life events. The former data subjects in fact to varying degrees use their files’ contents as their own memories, depending on how plausible they determine that data to be.

In this section I include the French definition of memory in order to signal that I am aware of the nuances that the French words imply. According to the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, the French word “mémoire” originates from the Latin “memoria.” In addition to its connoting (as in English) remembering and grouping memories and referring to commemorative monuments (“Mémoire,” def. 1),<sup>63</sup> “mémoire” describes one’s choice to remember specific information: “La *mémoire* [et] le *souvenir* expriment une attention libre de l’esprit à des idées qu’il n’a point oubliées, quoiqu’il ait discontinué de s’en occuper: les idées av[a]ient fait des impressions durables; on y jette un coup [...] d’œil nouveau par choix, c’est une action de l’[â]me” (“Mémoire,” *L’encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des métiers*). The latter definition draws attention to memories as a form of data which one may voluntarily recall from

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<sup>63</sup> The *Dictionnaire étymologique du français* mentions that this term derives as well from the Latin “memor”: the one “who remembers” (“Mémoire”).

time to time; that is, the act of remembering is deliberate, although at the same time, we sometimes are surprised by unexpected, unlooked-for memories:

On se rappelle donc la *mémoire* ou le *souvenir* des choses quand on veut, cela dépend uniquement de la liberté de l'[â]me, mais la *mémoire* ne concerne que les idées de l'esprit; c'est l'acte d'une faculté subordonnée à l'intelligence, elle sert à l'éclairer: au lieu que le *souvenir* regarde les idées qui intéressent le cœur; c'est l'acte d'une faculté nécessaire à la sensibilité de l'[â]me, elle sert à l'échauffer. ("Mémoire")

At the same time as this is true, he did also engage in deliberate processes of remembering during the whole time of reading. Although Ash and the other autobiographers brought no premeditated intention to the recollection processes they experienced while reading their file, they did also engage in deliberate processes of remembering during the whole time of reading it. Like other data subjects, Ash found that his memories were produced in response to the records of the MfS itself. His act of recollection, according to *L'encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des métiers*, should therefore be described as reminiscence rather than remembering:

Le *ressouvenir* [et] la *réminiscence* expriment une attention fortuite à des idées que l'esprit av[a]it entièrement oubliées [et] perdues de v[u]e: ces idées n'av[a]ient fait qu'une impression légère, qui av[a]it été étouffée ou totalement effacée par de plus fortes ou de plus récentes; elles se présentent d'elles-mêmes, ou du [...] moins sans aucun concours de notre part; c'est un événement où l'[â]me est purement passive. ("Mémoire")<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Although contemporary definitions of memory include any kind of recalling aside from what one *wants* to remember, distinctions between memory and reminiscence recall both remembering process that take place while former data subjects read their Stasi files: On the one hand, they are letting this documentation guide their memories, as if taken by surprise by unexpected memories, and on the other hand, they are actively engaging in this quest to recovering their own past and intentionally compare data from their files with their personal memories either recorded mentally or in other paper documents such as personal diaries.

While the general action of remembering refers to the ability to recall an episode and to provide explicit information about it (Conway 3), the “autobiographical memory [specifically] includes memories for specific experiences and memory for the personal facts of one’s life” (Conway 4): it focuses on one’s personal life like personal developments, turning points in life, and personal events instead of any other memory facts of other persons. These memories can be either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary memories originate from what I have defined above as remembering: “instances when memories come to mind because they are either willed, intended, thought about, searched for, and so forth [...] voluntary memory appears to be our ability to call up our personal past on demand” (Mace 1). In contrast, involuntary memories are the products of reminiscing, what in psychology have been defined “as instances in which memories come to mind spontaneously, unintentionally, automatically, without effort, and so forth” (Conway 2). Involuntary memories may be triggered by sensations or images but without the subject’s intent.

Like anyone considering external sources of information about their own pasts, former data subjects would have been able to voluntarily reflect on events in their lives and complement their own recollections of their pasts with their Stasi biographical data. Their files in this sense function as a means by which these people could compare, contrast, or supplement their existing memories. Additionally, these files offered the former data subjects evidence they had previously not known pertaining to causal links between

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Since this definition’s distinction between remembering and reminiscing helps clarify my discussion, I rely on it throughout the study.

events, giving them the opportunity to correct false assumptions they had made — about friends' disloyalty, for instance. In the case of data subjects reading their files "remembering" means that these individuals must bring to mind and review their actions in light of information from their files. Without the files to generate this re-evaluation of the past the file-based autobiographies would never have been written.

In fact, the distinct sub-genre of file-based autobiographies, exemplified by the work of Ash, Lengsfeld, Witt, and Jauch, is their consistent engagement in their writing with their MfS files. This role their files play differentiates their life stories from the generally accepted notion of autobiographical writing as expressed by James Olney, who argued in the 1970s that autobiographical memory processes originate directly and exclusively from the single person who is both writer and subject: "What the autobiographer knows, of course, or what he experiences, is all from within" (Olney *Metaphors* 35). From the second half of the twentieth century to date, autobiographical writing has been defined as the action of writing down one's own perspective on one's life story. Accordingly, the autobiographer's primary archival source consists of personal memories and such personally owned aide-mémoires as diaries, personal letters, and photos (Smith 6).

Ash's file-based autobiography, however, challenges this preliminary assumption that life writing extends no farther from a writer's own perspective than that writer's own reminiscences and artefacts. His autobiographical account results instead from his revisions and critique of his Stasi-file biography, and so may be considered to be a new form of autobiography, a literary construct mediated by this external storage medium; its contents are therefore in some respects unlike those of conventional autobiographies. On the one hand, as Ash suggests, his file prompts memories that would probably otherwise not

have resurfaced. On the other hand, the file acts to document his memories. In other words, as he read his file, Ash realized that he could use some of this material to structure and support his argument.

Another distinction between the general genre of autobiography and file-based life-writing is thematic: Ash, for example, explores three aspects of memory that are not typical themes in autobiographies but that interest him because of his own interaction with his Stasi record. First, Ash reflects on how his file prompts in him involuntary memories, a phenomenon that recalls Proust's Madeleine. Second, he explains that his record provides information that corrects and augments part of his personal recollections. Third, in the absence of diary entries or other notes, he tends to assimilate some information from his file as his own memories.

Referring to Ash's file-based autobiography, I answer two questions: In what circumstances does he represent his memories as being triggered by his file, and why does he show that his file replaces those memories? These two questions relate to the three themes of prompting involuntary memories, replacing memories and appropriating them. Ash's argument is that the file, instead of acting purely as an external memory, engages the former data subjects in memory processes that would not have been able without the opening of the Stasi files. Further, Ash, just as the other autobiographers, suggests that, in appropriating parts of his file to construct his life story, what he remembers through this file becomes his life.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> This assumption, that one's life is what one remembers, is reminiscent of Ash's idea: "What we call 'my life' is the mental autobiography with which and by which we all live. What really happened is quite another matter" (Ash 20). For the writers of file-based autobiographies, what they call *their lives* is mostly what they were reminded of their Stasi files.



Ash opens his file-based autobiography with an example of how his file mediates his involuntary memory:

I sit there, at the plastic-wood table, marveling at this minutely detailed reconstruction of a day in my life and at the style that recalls a school exercise . . . . I smell again that peculiar East Berlin smell, a compound of the smoke from old boilers burning compressed coal-dust briquettes, exhaust fumes . . . cheap East European cigarettes, damp boots and sweat. But one thing I simply can't remember: who was she, my Little Red Riding-Hood? Or not so little: 1.75-1.78 meters, that's nearly my height. (Ash 10)

In fact, Ash seems as he reads to be re-experiencing these situations for the first time, just like the main character Dreyman in the final scene of the film *Das Leben der Anderen*. This particular example allows him to classify his autobiographical memory as involuntary autobiographical reminiscence as memories that spontaneously come to mind after being triggered by objects, letters, official documents, or other pieces of evidence. Ash recognizes that his involuntary recalls are related directly to his file, an observation that evokes Benjamin's idea that the past or memories of it are present in the objects of one's daily life, whether or not one is aware of their presence (Benjamin 158). Benjamin explains that it depends on chance whether an individual finds that object that will enable instant reminiscence or not. Marcel Proust provides further detail on Benjamin's observations:

Il en est ainsi de notre passé. C'est peine perdue que nous cherchions à l'évoquer, tous les efforts de notre intelligence sont inutiles. Il est caché hors de son domaine et de sa portée, en quelque objet matériel (en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel), que nous ne soupçonnons pas. Cet objet, il dépend du hasard que nous le rencontrions avant de mourir, ou que nous ne le rencontrions pas. (Proust 44)

According to Ash, the file replaced for him the objects of daily life in its ability to spontaneously evoke the past. “Et tout d’un coup le souvenir m’est apparu. Ce goût c’était celui du petit morceau de [M]adeleine que le dimanche matin à Combray [...] quand j’allais lui dire bonjour dans sa chambre, ma tante Léonie m’offrait après l’avoir trempé dans son infusion de thé ou de tilleul” (Proust 46). When he eats the same kind of cake he unexpectedly remembers his childhood. Ash goes so far as to assert that at times, his Stasi file works “[f]ar better than Proust’s Madeleine” (Ash 10) because it allows him to recall personal life aspects instead of depending on chance. Ash implies that he can go directly to his file and search for specific dates when the reports were written in order to establish connections between causes or the Stasi’s manipulations over some life events instead of waiting whether or not he might per chance find these links. Further, from the examples that Ash provides in his file-based autobiographies, it can be argued that Ash would never have reconsidered some of these life events had his Stasi file not reminded him of them.

Ash’s reference to his file as a kind of Madeleine clarifies how because of their files, former data subjects revisited events otherwise repressed or forgotten over the years. Additionally, Ash recognizes that these files contain detailed information on encounters and actions which the subject of the file might not have noticed at that time. In this sense, the Stasi records are a gift to memory, in the English sense of the word. However, the files can be “Gifts” in the German sense of the word, a poison to memory, when, as for Ash, reading one’s file means unmasking traitors, understanding one’s past or how the Stasi operated, and confronting the embarrassing images of one’s younger self; “[p]eople may envy the possessor of a file, but being carried off by your poisoned

Madeleine is not always a comfortable experience” (36), one that occurs whether or not one wishes to remember or know. .

Although he focuses only on his literary experience, Ash’s involuntary memories as a literary experience should be distinguished from the psycho-analytical concept of involuntary memories. Although Ash’s metaphor of the Madeleine vividly depicts the memory processes initiated by the reading of one’s file, it is atypical of the model of Proust’s Madeleine as seen from psychologists’ perspectives.

While psychology theorists like Mace, Bernstein, and others critically challenge Proust’s concept of the involuntary memory in relation to the Madeleine (Mace 5), literary scholars like Ash seem to accept its truth unthinkingly. Although Mace recognizes Proust’s concept of involuntary memory as accurate, the conditions necessary for talking about it are lacking in Ash’s file-based autobiography. Ash uses Proust’s image without questioning its psychological accuracy; the value of Ash’s employment of the Madeleine thus remains literary in comparison to fact. Psychologists would argue that Ash bases his comparison of the file to the Madeleine on a literary cliché and misconception about involuntary memories: “basic sensory cues (as in Proust’s example) very rarely trigger involuntary memories” (Mace 5). In short, the Madeleine concept is too often falsely attributed as a leading example of involuntary memories.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, since his memories lack the essential characteristics pertaining to Proust’s Madeleine, they should not be, in both my and Mace’s view, directly compared

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<sup>66</sup> According to psychological studies on memory, “motivational and environmental factors [rather than physical objects] interact to produce involuntary memories. Bernstein describes such interactions as occurring between one’s current life-situation (which is an orientation towards the past and the future, including one’s goals and expectancies) and one’s immediate situation (which is the moment when involuntary memories are produced)” (Mace 13).

to it. According to Mace, six conditions are required to define an act of reminiscence as a Proustian involuntary memory. Ash would need to have experienced these pre-requisites in his reading of his file in order to compare this document directly to the Madeleine's power to revive the past: first, prior to its retrieval, such a memory seems to have resided in the unconscious for an extended period of time; second, it relates to an event from the distant past; third, it depends greatly on a prompt; fourth, it is typically activated by sensory cues; fifth, it is usually accompanied by a sense of "traveling back in time" (Mace 26); and sixth, it is accompanied by intense joy (26). In Ash's case, although he does feel that he is going back in time, the events date from only about ten years before, not from his remote past. In addition, his involuntary memory does not depend on a tactile or tasty sensory stimulus such as for the Madeleine but rather on a written document which is merely the sense of sight; furthermore, his literary encounter with his younger self seems to embarrass him more than to evoke a feeling of happiness. So, these three observations of disparities would disqualify Ash's reminiscences to be directly compared to the Proustian involuntary memories. Nevertheless, Ash's directly connecting his file and its influence on his involuntary autobiographical memory suggests that his main idea in using the Madeleine metaphor is to provide a literary metaphor for his file's power to retrieve the past even if it does not match the psychologists' perspective.

The degree to which Ash relies on the external storage medium of his file underscores the files' typical new use after their opening in 1992: To be assimilated by their former subjects as their own memories. In fact, the German word "memory," "Erinnerung," acknowledges the internalization process that these people experienced as they read their files. The *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* indicates that the

Middle High German word “(er)innern” or *imren* is derived from the spatial adjective of the Old High German “innarro,” which means *der* “Innere” and “innerer;” it originally means “machen, daß jemand etwas inne wird” (“Erinnern”). In this sense, memory is that which allows a person to internalize information. In German, “erinnern” means three things: to remind, to remember, and to recollect, but as opposed to these English words the German term implies an internalization process. Due to its meaning of internalization, the German expression “erinnern” is more accurate than its English or French counterparts (memory and “mémoire”), which lack this connotation. “Erinnerung” indicates a return to the inside and means the action of trying to revive or find connections with pre-existing knowledge. The act of “erinnern” therefore seems an appropriate term to describe the experience of former data subjects who use information from their files to fill gaps in their memories or knowledge about their time under observation.<sup>67</sup>

The act of recalling signified by “Erinnerung” means to bring to mind whatever has passed and may have been forgotten. However, “Erinnerung” must not be confused with “Gedächtnis,” a German word that refers to memorials and recollection. The latter relates to thoughts, to the verbs “gedenken” and “denken” as well as the word “Gedanke,” a type of thinking that does not include the same returning to the inside that the action of “erinnern” implies (“Gedächtnis”).

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<sup>67</sup> For instance, until he read his record Ash was uncertain whether or not the Stasi had placed him under observation; Lengsfeld found the only irrefutable proof of her husband’s betrayal in her file. Witt determined the exact extent to which informers intervened in her life by reading her file; and saw her file as evidence that she had remained under surveillance even after being released from prison and moving to West Germany. In all these cases, the files contained information that the data subjects did not hesitate to appropriate and then present as personal knowledge. They assimilated these pieces of information to try to explain past occurrences. In some instances, the consequence of doing so was that any distinction between their own memories and their informers’ reported observations dissolved.

In “La Pharmacie de Platon” Derrida argues, that rather than actually helping memory, writing comprises a kind of external memory that encourages dependency and a subsequent internalization of that information, just as in the German expression “erinnern.” Written pieces of information do not have to be remembered; they can instead be stored and then later accessed to provide data about the past. In the process, though, people relying on such external memory instead of their own, internal memories can be sure only of what has been written and lose faith in their own capacity to remember (*Ash File* 10).

Ash engages in memory processes that recall the German concept of “erinnern” when he internalizes details from his file as his own memories. For example, when he remembers, years later, meeting a friend who in his file was described by the code name “Beret,” he now can no longer remember if she was still wearing a beret when they met again or whether he imagined that detail because of her code name: “I caught a glimpse of her, sometime later . . . . She was still wearing her red beret. Or have I just imagined that final detail?” (12). Here, instead of trusting his personal memory, Ash is starting to depend increasingly on his Stasi file. At times, he actually feels that he is betraying his own past because he cannot independently recall facts about his life that his file describes: “I sit there, under Frau Schulz’s inquisitive eye, sensing an awful disloyalty to my own past” (10).<sup>68</sup> This sense of disloyalty is due to his forgetfulness to the events depicted on file which he then integrates in his mind as his own memories. The record blurs Ash’s memory and leads him to imagine that his life unfolded as his file depicts it as hav-

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<sup>68</sup> He emphasizes his feeling of guilt by naming the employee monitoring his access to his file “Frau Schulz,” a name that sounds like the German word “Schuld,” which means “fault” and alludes to his sense of culpability for not being able to recall the details of his past described in his file.

ing done. The file changes how he remembers and talks about his life under observation, leading him to realize that “[w]hat we call ‘my life’ is the mental autobiography with which and by which we all live. What really happened is quite another matter” (20). Ash is aware that the file gradually integrates itself into his “mental autobiography” as if its details had really happened, no matter whether or not they actually had.

In order to illustrate this malleability of his memory under the influence of his record, Ash describes his memory in archeological terms; his encounter with his record inevitably affects his vision of the past:

As I race up the battered autobahn to Berlin, just as I used to all those years ago, I think back over this conversation: how a file opens the door to a vast sunken labyrinth of the forgotten past, but how, too, the very act of opening the door itself changes the buried artefacts, like an archaeologist letting in fresh air to a sealed Egyptian tomb. For these are not simply past experiences rediscovered in their original state. Even without the fresh light from a new document or another’s recollection – the opened door – our memories decay or sharpen, mellow or sour, with the passage of time and the change of circumstances. (96)

He suggests that the file gradually forms part of his “mental autobiography” similar to the way Sigmund Freud depicts the processes of memory by using the metaphor of a magic pad. In his work titled “Notiz über den ‘Wunderblock,’” Freud pictures human memory as a kind of note pad consisting of two separable layers, a transparent celluloid plate and a thin transparent wax paper (Freud 5). The original impressions inscribed onto the upper part of this note pad (which are like short-term memory) should, according to Freud, imprint themselves onto the bottom wax layer of the note pad in order to be preserved for a longer time period (which is long-term memory). However, because during the transposition process of the impressions from the upper surface onto the one at the bottom, the

lowest wax surface does not store these memory traces in exactly the same form as the original impressions (Freud 7):

Denkt man sich, daß während eine Hand die Oberfläche des Wunderblocks beschreibt, eine andere periodisch das Deckblatt desselben von der Wachstafel abhebt, so wäre das eine Versinnlichung der Art, wie ich mir die Funktion unseres seelischen Wahrnehmungsapparats vorstellen wollte. (Freud 8)

Hence, while some notes or memories are inscribed onto the upper surface, considered as the short-term memory, others reach the bottom layer, the long-term memory. While recollections inscribed on the upper layer are easily erased even those recorded on that deeper level change over time. For this reason, individuals tend to rely on other resources such as external storage media when recollecting. This familiar psychological process perhaps explains why former data subjects tend to rely on others' memories of their own lives, including those recorded in their Stasi files.<sup>69</sup>

Like Freud's wax tablet, Ash's memory before he read his file showed erasures or alterations due to the passage of time. To continue the metaphor, after Ash read his Stasi file, however, new traces of his past were imprinted on that wax tablet of the memory, augmenting and modifying the impressions already there. As a result, Ash's discourse about his past is mediated by what the external storage medium tells him about his past. Although in modern society individuals' memories are constantly subject to the influences of (legally compiled) computerized files or paper documents intended for the purposes of the person viewing them<sup>70</sup>, the act of referring to a Stasi file and using it in one's

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<sup>69</sup> This idea was formulated by my supervisor, Professor Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, during a personal conversation in October 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Such documentations may include employers' evaluations on their employees, personal notes of



life story is fraught with contradictions, primarily because it was a secret document that was never intended for the purpose of the former data subjects, because that file was penned from a hostile perspective with may have personal biases, and it contains illegally collected material.<sup>71</sup> Aside from their illegal nature, some reports are filled with miscomprehensions from the part of the Stasi, as Ash mentions: “A glance at my diary establishes the identity of Dr Georg, as well as the fact that the Stasi have again got the date wrong. . . . This passage illustrates in miniature how small distortions creep into Stasi records . . . . Yet there it is: attributed to me as part of direct quotation” (23, 25).<sup>72</sup> The unreliability of Stasi files, which former data subjects are the first to assert raises the crucial questions of why these autobiographers nevertheless use this material as the basis of their life stories, and how they make their files’ regime of power work to their own advantage by using it as a means to shape their own readers’ memories.

One reason that autobiographers use material from their files in their life stories is that they recognize that a detail from an official file might seem more factual to others

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interviews or the minutes of meeting agendas.

<sup>71</sup> The Stasi’s material was gathered illegally because it consisted of personal information on their data subjects that they compiled without their consent. The Stasi intruded in the lives of those individuals, installed listening devices in their apartments, opened the mail, and listened to the telephonic conversations of these persons. Further, as explained in chapter Two, the “job [of the Stasi informers] was not so much to find the criminal but to find the crime and thus assist their officers in playing the infinitely more tricky game of pinning the crime on the criminal” (Lewis 390-91).

<sup>72</sup> Lengsfeld was equally shocked to realize how information was distorted in her record and was only a “Zerrspiegel” (distorted mirror) of reality (Wollenberger 7): For instance, the number of participants in activist circles was drastically underrepresented in order for the IMs to hide from their superiors the ineffectiveness of their work (Lengsfeld “Personal”). Furthermore, Jauch complains that although her statements taken during interrogations were purposely edited, she had no choice but to sign them despite those distortions (“Personal”). Stasi files clearly cannot always be taken at face value, but they do contain enough truth to elucidate their subjects’ pasts and provide support for their claims.

than personal memories would. Consequently, they use their Stasi records precisely because they are documentary *evidence*: their authority adds authenticity to their narratives.<sup>73</sup> As Ash's autobiography shows, although the Stasi records were begun and kept for hostile purposes, they clarify many past events and provide plausibility in his life story, such as the reasons why the Stasi decided to keep them under observation (Ash *File* 26-27) and what specific activities they recorded. Moreover, in that they mediate both the memories and the autobiographical discourses of former data subjects, the Stasi files become technologies of memory, "systems of 'artificial' memory – not in the sense that the memories are fabricated or false but in the sense that the technologies, as aids to preserving and passing on memories, shape the memories conveyed" (Smith 20). As Ash demonstrates, former data subjects who read their files tend to recall events recorded in those files that they would not otherwise have remembered; and their reading of their records subsequently impacts the themes and arguments constituting their life stories.

These writers acquire the former Stasi documents to serve as basis for their literary texts since these records validate their voices as autobiographers, their claims to authenticity, their critical observations, and their reasons for composing and publishing their file-based autobiographies in the first place. Ash's file additionally confers to him even though he is a foreigner the authority to narrate the experience of encountering one's Stasi file. His having been a data subject himself entitles him to speak publicly about what it means to discover that one has lived under observation. Without his file, his autobiography could not testify to the experience of other former data subjects.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>74</sup> The questions arising from Ash's autobiography about authenticating and validating one's life story, as well as justifying one's critical reflections are also central in the other file-based autobiographies. Having a

Ash extends his political use of his file when he warns about the consequences of opening to the public files that contain errors as well as about the implication of citizens in the mechanisms of power of totalitarian states. Ash describes the “small distortions [that] creep into Stasi records” (25) and downright errors, as when the title “Vorgesetzter” (supervisor or Stasi officer in charge) was wrongly attributed to an individual as if Ash had used it himself.

Now suppose for a moment that the content of this passage were altogether more serious and compromising, suppose that the interpretation of the whole passage hinged – as it sometimes can – on the one word; suppose I had subsequently become a prominent East German politician; and suppose that I woke up one morning to find the passage quoted against me as a headline in a West German tabloid: quote unquote. Calls for resignation follow. Who would be-

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real referential subject who both narrates the story and exists outside the text is crucial to the autobiographical genre. For the authors considered in this study, their files prove their factual existence and their status as former data subjects. File-based autobiographies can be seen as documentary-like life stories that are evidential in the sense that the autobiographers in question use their Stasi files to justify their perspectives and to document their critical statements. Since they all have read their Stasi files, their readers accept their claims to understand the impacts of reading one’s illegally collected biographical records written from a hostile stranger’s vantage point. Their Stasi records thus provide them with evidential material (interrogation transcripts, falsified or misinterpreted information, potentially dangerous intimate details, and “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen”) that validates their critical reflections on their files themselves as well as on the Stasi’s mechanisms of surveillance and power. Ash, for instance, points to specific records to support his claim that Stasi reports were sometimes distorted. Consequently, he can plausibly hypothesize about the possible harmful consequences of the opening of the Stasi files. This documentary evidence takes his reasoning from mere conjecture to authoritative criticism. For the two public figures, Vera Lengsfeld and Katarina Witt, the files also provide not only justification for their publishing their file-based autobiographies but also evidence of how their files affected their careers, relationships, and public images. For Jauch, the main concern is to use her file as evidence validating her voice and story as former data subject; her file renders her account a documented testimony. For Witt, Lengsfeld, and Jauch, this question of authenticity is even more important than for Ash because their autobiographies partly justify their past actions.

lieve me when I protested: ‘No, I didn’t say that! Well, not *exactly*. And anyway, they’ve got the date wrong. And the title of the *Spectator*. And the spelling of my name. (25)

Here the author is explaining the dangers of his file’s errors becoming public misinformation, which could be about what persons said, what they did, how they reacted to some events or the people they met. Depending on the nature of these misinterpretations or plain factual errors, individuals who work or wish to work in the public sphere (like in politics and public administration) can be subject to blackmail or forced to resign by their competitors and other who simply disapprove of them. As a result, the external storage medium of his file, with all its inaccuracies, provides him with material to support his more political reflections about instances when the file’s inaccuracies can be misused at the detriment of the former data subject in question. As opposed to other authors, he wants neither to humiliate nor confront them; rather, he seeks an understanding of this power structure in which IMs were implicated and ultimately trapped, a goal which leads Ash to investigate other recent surveillance societies: “The surveillance societies that emerged over the past two centuries can be distinguished from their predecessors in part on the basis of their new formal policing activities, but particularly because of the role envisaged for citizens, whose duty became to watch, listen, and inform the authorities” (Gellately 931). The role of informers in GDR society is not to be underestimated, especially since they helped to form the idea of a society similar to Bentham’s Panopticon.<sup>75</sup> Ash’s critical analysis of the weakness of his informers leads his readers to consider how

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<sup>75</sup> “[T]he Panopticon] is an instrument of discipline, of influencing the behavior of those who knew themselves of being constantly scrutinized” (Horn “Media” 140).

normal human beings are involved in the mechanisms of power in place in a totalitarian state like the former GDR.

The relationship between citizens and spying leads citizens of former dictatorship to conclude that spying on others is fundamental to good citizenship. In the former German Democratic Republic, the “IMs, the ministry’s most effective weapon in the struggle against ‘hostile, negative and decadent forces,’ provided Mielke and his officers with the eyes to penetrate the nooks and crannies of GDR society and to answer the crucial intelligence question of ‘Who is who?’ Although blackmail and other forms of coercion were deployed to recruit IMs and other contact persons, many East Germans were by no means unwilling collaborators” (Dennis 243). Over the GDR’s history 600 000 people are estimated to have informally collaborated with the state (Dennis 90). Considering their numbers and the extent of their daily betrayals, Ash is intrigued by these informers’ motivations. “What is it that makes one person a resistance fighter and another the faithful servant of a dictatorship?” (39).

Ash values his file as allowing him to unmask his informers and to judge the extent to which they were involved with the Stasi, betrayed him, or might have harmed him.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the file reveals the personal advantages these individuals sought in exchange for their information, permitting Ash to test his thinking about collaboration: “Here is the chance to bring home, with the vividness that can only come from such inti-

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<sup>76</sup> However, Ash debates whether or not he should use the file to confront them: “Might it not, after all, be wiser to allow them their own particular imaginative mixture of memory and forgetting, of self-respect built on self-deception? Or is it better to confront them? Better not just for yourself, for your own need to know, but for them too?” (105).

mate detail, how someone is drawn into a secret police net – and to show where such collaboration will lead you” (114).

Furthermore, although he does not always use his file to construct this analysis of how the Stasi exploited its informers, it is central in his methodology here. That is, his search for truth follows a documentary approach similar to that which his file exhibits since he can discuss his thinking with his informers and use his file as evidence he may turn against them at any time or denounce them openly in his autobiography by naming them by their real names. However, at no time could Ash’s reader identify the author’s informers since, unlike Lengsfeld, he neither names them nor provides specific details about them. Instead of using his file to exact revenge by publicly identifying his informers, then, Ash uses it to support his conclusions. In contrast, Lengsfeld discredits her ex-husband and Jauch denounces the brutal behavior of her cell guard.<sup>77</sup>

The choice to denounce or not one’s Stasi informers is left to the data subjects who read their files. Whether or not that individual decides to denounce the IM, the relationship between both is already destroyed by the evidence of betrayal that the files provide. Ash reminds his readers that for other authors their Stasi files can poison such significant life events as marriage. In such cases, however, the file simultaneously bears witness against those who betrayed their friends or spouses. In the sense that opening the Stasi files had potentially enormous effects on people’s lives, that access can ironically be seen as continuing evidence of the power of these files:

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<sup>77</sup> Witt’s file-based autobiography contains insufficient detail to identify her informers except perhaps for those who trained with her. Her account is aimed not at exposing her informers to her reader but at expressing to the IM in question her disappointment and frustration over the betrayal of their friendship for the benefit of the Stasi. Witt argues that this betrayal proves she was a victim of the Stasi herself.

The effect of reading a file can be terrible. I think of the now famous case of Vera Wollenberger, a political activist from Werner Krätschell's parish in Pankow, who discovered from reading her file that her husband, Knud, had been informing on her ever since they met . . . . Had the files not been opened, they might still be brother and brother, man and wife – their love enduring, a fortress sure upon the rock of lies. (Ash 18)

The harm that often resulted from former data subjects reading their files varied from one individual to the next, but the significant shifts in perspective that have typically resulted attest to the files' ongoing influence in the lives of these people. Moreover, his Stasi file allows Ash to understand both the circumstances in which the IMs lived and the current social demands for surveillance, which may consequently affect the way people live and monitor themselves, just as if they believed that they could be under surveillance at any time.

Reading his file produces in Ash the feeling that he may always be under observation (224), another sense in which his file continues to affect him: "My new principle [which can be understood as a change in his perspective on life and his personal behavior] is to live in this free country as if the Stasi were always watching you! Imagine your wife, or your best friend, reading the Stasi record of what you said about them to another friend last Saturday night, or of what you did in Amsterdam last week. Can you live so you would not be embarrassed by it?" (224). Clearly, Ash has come to re-evaluate not only his past but his present and future according to what he has seen in his file. Not only will he attempt to live his life as if he was always observed so that he attempts to avoid any embarrassment if someone asks him to collaborate with a secret service or if he (or someone he knows) discovered later a file on him one day; but at the end of his story also

plans to return to his son so as not to seem like one of those absent fathers who led so many East Germans to collaborate with the Stasi. To conclude, then, the involuntary autobiographical recalls Ash experiences because of encountering his file lead him to compare that file to Proust's *Madeleine*. The question remains, however, what motivated Ash to compose and publish his experience as a file-based autobiography? Lacking a personal political or psychological agenda, perhaps Ash has gone to these lengths to explore why some people became informers in the former GDR. Ash dissimulates this critical reasoning on formal collaborators as grounds for writing his file-based autobiography as he appeals to his readers' emotional involvement in his experience. In order to render his account as unbiased as possible for the purpose of giving authenticity to his narrative voice, Ash emphasizes how as a foreigner he was affected neither by the Stasi nor by his file; he is therefore merely an observer in his autobiography, not a victim as the other writers were. At the same time, however, reading his file has given Ash's account authority and validated his implication that he is in a position to authentically describe not only his own experience, but by extension also that of other former data subjects. That reading process has also enabled Ash to take his file as a literary tool he can use to document his claims and his file's own inaccuracies.



## 5 Lengsgeld's *Virus der Heuchler: Innenansicht aus Stasi-Akten*<sup>78</sup>

Unlike Ash, Lengsfeld in her file-based autobiography makes clear that she perceives the Stasi's presence in her life and her file as having harmed her. Not only does she feel the need in her book to refute accusations of collaboration with the Stasi; she also must publicly confront her husband with her newfound knowledge from her Stasi record. And in contrast to other literature of the Wende, her account of "Vergangenheitsverarbeitung" (the working of her past) focuses not on previous political and social structures but rather on the crisis that the opening of the Stasi files caused in her marriage.

This chapter explores how Lengsfeld's writing and publication of her file-based autobiography is for her a healing process in which her records played an important set of roles: initially, reading her Stasi file permitted her to see and expose to others the true nature of her husband's relationship with her; it then supported her critique of the Stasi's methods of operation and her ultimate denunciation of its criminal mechanisms of surveillance and power.<sup>79</sup> More specifically, her account discusses how the Stasi file *wrote* part of her life while also recording it, and shows how she re-functionalizes that Stasi file to advance her socio-political critique of her husband, and by extension of the Stasi appa-

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<sup>78</sup> This file-based autobiography is penned under her married name Wollenberger.

<sup>79</sup> Although none of the other autobiographers has felt as enormously betrayed as Lengsfeld, they employ literary strategies similar to hers in attempting to come to terms with their past. Ash and Witt bring attention to the factual errors in their files to undermine their credibility, while Jauch raises the more serious issues relating to the dehumanizing treatment she experienced in Hoheneck, the Stasi female incarceration centre.

ratus itself.<sup>80</sup> This chapter concludes by focusing on how and why her file mediates her memory, and she appropriates it to structure her life narrative.

Born in Thüringen in 1952, Lengsfeld was an early civil-rights activist, meeting regularly with groups that sought to develop awareness of environmental issues in the former German Democratic Republic. Their meetings took place in the early '80s in the safety of a Protestant Church where no one was in danger of being arrested:

Mit dem Machtantritt von Erich Honecker, der als eine der ersten Amtshandlungen mit der Evangelischen Kirche einen Pakt schloss, [der] die Kirche anerkennt, Kirche im Sozialismus zu sein und dafür die Autonomie über ihre eigenen Räume garantiert bekam, war ein Freiraum entstanden, den die Bürgerrechtler nutzen konnten. In kirchlichen Räumen durfte die Staatsmacht keine Versammlungen auflösen, keine Veranstaltungen absagen, keine Ausstellungen abbauen, keine Verhaftungen vornehmen. Solange eine Kirchgemeinde bereit war, entsprechende Aktivitäten zu tolerieren, hatten die Bürgerrechtler die Möglichkeit, ihre Aktionen zu entwickeln. (Lengsfeld "Wahltverablog")

However, the protection of the Church was no deterrence to Stasi spies, acting on the perception that her activism threatened the state: The Stasi in fact chose to destabilize Lengsfeld and to destroy her life, beginning in 1983 by causing her to lose her job and the right to travel outside of East Germany (Lengsfeld "Wahltverablog"). In 1988 she was incarcerated for six months for allegedly inciting a riot at a demonstration in honour of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (Lengsfeld "Wahltverablog"). These major events prompt her to denounce the SED's infringements of human rights prior to writing her file-based autobiography (Lengsfeld "Wahltverablog").

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<sup>80</sup> After the former data subjects appropriated passages from their Stasi files, they re-functionalized them to criticize the Stasi's methods of surveillance or mechanisms of power.

Nowadays Lengsfeld is a public figure in Germany and continues to work as a civil-rights activist. For sixteen years following the fall of the Berlin wall, she was a member of the German Parliament and until 1996, worked for the Alliance 90, The Greens, and then for the CDU (Christian Democratic Union). She was awarded the “Bundesverdienstorden” (the Medal of Federal Merit) in 2008 (Lengsfeld “Wachltverablog”) and during the last federal elections in September 2009 ran for parliament as a candidate for the CDU (Lengsfeld “Wachltverablog”). Meanwhile, since 2005 she has been working as freelance writer in Berlin. As a public figure, Lengsfeld felt pressured to write her file-based autobiography in order to clarify the circumstances in which she lived with her husband and why the allegations of collaboration with the MfS were ill-founded (Lengsfeld *nun* 369); although her husband was indeed a collaborator, she had never worked as an informer.<sup>81</sup>

Ich sollte Stellung nehmen für die verschiedenen Blätter, Kameralente folgten meinen Kindern, um Bilder von ihnen einzufangen. Erst als ich mir entschieden die Belästigung meiner Kinder verbat, hörte das auf. Ich war nicht nur gezwungen, mit einer schmerzhaften Situation fertig zu werden, ich musste es auch noch öffentlich tun. (Lengsfeld *nun* 359)

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<sup>81</sup> “Als mich im zeitigen Frühjahr 1992 ein ehemaliger Studienkollege, Thomas Heubner, anrief und mich fragte, ob ich nicht ein Buch über meine Stasiakte schreiben wollte, sagte ich sofort zu. Ich war ohnehin den Fragen der Journalisten ausgesetzt und musste mich mit dem Geschehenen auseinander setzen” (Lengsfeld *nun* 369). However, she does not want to give too much importance to the Stasi. “Ich erwiderte, dass ich keine Lust hätte, mich auf meine Erlebnisse mit der Stasi reduzieren zu lassen. Ich habe der Stasi keinen großen Raum in meinen Überlegungen gegeben, als ich noch mit ihr leben musste, ich habe nicht vor, der Stasi noch Macht über mich einzuräumen, nachdem sie glücklich verschwunden ist” (Lengsfeld *nun* 368-69).

Lengsfeld's political involvement in the former GDR was, prior to 1989, that of a peace activist seeking to better the state. Other authors are criticized for not taking action against the Stasi (or the GDR in general) and denouncing the non-respect of human rights.<sup>82</sup> Lengsfeld wanted to reform her country by improving living conditions and environmental policies in particular. Advocating these changes, however, meant that she was exposing the problems and deficiencies of the socialist state she lived in. As a result, the Stasi considered her to be an enemy of the GDR.

Since Lengsfeld was still politically active when the Stasi files were opened, she felt pressured to leave her mandate, especially because of her husband's past collaboration with the Stasi: in fact, she was informed "dass es in der morgigen Ausgabe seines Wochenblattes stehen würde, dass Knud ein Stasispitzel war . . . , nun müsste ich wohl mein Mandat niederlegen" (Lengsfeld *nun* 354). Lengsfeld at first rejected these allegations against Knud. When she eventually confronted him with those rumours, however, he refused to admit his betrayal while she simply wanted to continue to believe in his unwavering loyalty to her. She first asked him to tell her the truth, warning him that she

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<sup>82</sup> "Es war leicht, sich vom Ökokatastrophismus anstecken zu lassen. Die DDR war das umweltverschmutzteste Land in Europa. Seit die Energieversorgung des Landes fast vollständig auf Braunkohle umgestellt war, hatten wir katastrophale Luftverschmutzungswerte" (Lengsfeld *nun* 132). An alarming example of these environmental hazards is the direct impact of environmental pollution on the population: "In der Nähe der mitteldeutschen Chemiewerke begannen bei Menschen, die an die hochprozentigen Chemiecocktails in der Luft nicht gewohnt waren, beim Vorbeifahren in geschlossenen Eisenbahnabteilen oder im Auto die Augen zu tränen" (Lengsfeld *nun* 133). As a consequence, people started losing hope in the system: "Am Ende der Siebzigerjahre vermischte sich der Ärger über die Versorgungsmängel, die nicht enden wollenden wirtschaftlichen Schwierigkeiten, die Angst vor einem Krieg und die Sorge um die Folgen der Umweltverschmutzung zu einer eigenartigen Stimmung. Viele Menschen waren überzeugt, dass die Zukunft nur Schlimmeres bringen konnte" (Lengsfeld *nun* 134). However, none of the other autobiographers selected for this study expressed concerns like Lengsfeld's or became involved in peace activist circles.

would go to Berlin to check her file: “Als ich ihm das sagte, fing ich einen Seitenblick von Knud auf, der mir das Gefühl gab, es müsste doch etwas an dem Gerücht dran sein. Alles in mir rebellierte gegen diese Vorahnung. Ich wollte es nicht wahrhaben. . . . Da schwor Knud tatsächlich, dass er kein Stasispitzel gewesen sei. Mein komisches Gefühl blieb” (Lengsfeld *nun* 355). These examples attest to how her the socio-political circumstances surrounding the opening of the Stasi files forces her not only to reconsider her past under observation but her particular relationship with her husband and to also confront him directly about his alleged collaboration with the MfS. Lengsfeld suggests that without her file, she cannot clear her doubts about her husband’s loyalty to her.

Only after accessing her file did Lengsfeld accept what those around her had been telling her about her husband, not wanting to believe that she could have been betrayed by the person (perhaps after her two sons) the closest to her: “Mir war bekannt, dass es Verrat in allen Beziehungen geben konnte. Dieses abstrakte Wissen hatte jedoch nichts mit meinem Leben zu tun. So dachte ich” (Lengsfeld *nun* 352). Lengsfeld had discounted an earlier warning that Knud had previously betrayed others as vindictiveness: “Bei den Verhören sollen sie Indizien dafür gefunden haben, dass Knud es war, der sie verraten hatte. Die Einzelheiten waren wirr, die Anschuldigungen so konfus, dass ich das Ganze für eine neue, seltsame Blüte der merkwürdigen Hassbeziehung hielt, die das frühere Liebespaar jetzt pflegte” (Lengsfeld *nun* 353). Lengsfeld points to examples that could have led her to be more suspicious about her husband even before accessing her file. With these references Lengsfeld foregrounds the shock that the reading of her file might have produced and the complete revision of her marriage in view of material evidence of Knud’s collaboration in her Stasi file.

Ironically, as someone “instrumental in formulating the law that provided access to the files” (McPherson 1) Lengsfeld could not anticipate how that access would affect her own life:

Ich dachte eigentlich nicht, von meinem Recht auf Akten-eisicht Gebrauch zu machen. So gut es ging, hatte ich versucht, die Staatssicherheit zu ignorieren. Zwar wusste ich, dass wir besonders bespizelt worden waren, manche Spitzel waren sogar vor dem Mauerfall enttarnt worden, es interessierte mich aber nicht besonders, wer warum spionierte. Ich war sicher, dass unter meinen engen Freunden kein Spitzel war, und damit hatte ich Recht. Dass es einen Spitzel gab, der noch enger an mir war, wäre mir nicht einmal im Traum eingefallen. Ich hatte meinen Mann Knud geheiratet, weil ich ihm vertraute. Ich habe mich normal verhalten in einer anormalen Situation. (Lengsfeld *nun* 352)

Without her file, Lengsfeld might never have been able to believe that Knud had betrayed her and to leave him. As Ash puts it, “[h]ad the files not been opened, [Lengsfeld and Knud] might still be . . . man and wife – their love enduring, a fortress sure upon the rock of lies” (18). However, Lengsfeld’s reading of her Stasi file initiated a crisis that compelled Lengsfeld to write her file-based autobiography, a step that recalls Egan’s theory that the writing of an autobiography requires a crisis (Egan *Mirror* 4), and in Lengsfeld’s case, her husband’s betrayal put a sudden end to their marriage only because the file revealed it to her. Otherwise, she may not have suspected or at least not verify the others’ allegations against him.

A major distinction between Lengsfeld’s case and those of other former data subjects was how intimate her betrayal was. Her encounter with the file formed a caesura in her life. Had the spy being a stranger to her or a distant relative, she might have continued to live for many more years with her husband in the same manner as she did during

her time under observation. However, since her husband was a spy against her, Lengsfeld decided to approach him with this issue. So he promptly responded that they had to terminate their relationship and divorce ensued as symbolic of a life caesura: “Ich sagte ihm [Knud], was [his betrayal] ich erfahren hatte. ‘Wir müssen uns wohl trennen’, war seine erste Reaktion. Auf meine Frage nach dem Warum antwortete er, die DDR wäre für ihn die Antwort auf Auschwitz gewesen und er hätte als Spross einer jüdischen Familie alles getan, um diesen Staat zu erhalten” (Lengsfeld *nun* 358). Having no choice but to divorce her husband, Lengsfeld remained in their house in Sondershausen, a symbol for her of the emotional situation. While the outside of that home seemed intact, the inside was completely destroyed:

Dieses Haus war symbolisch für meine Situation. [...] Die Balken machten einen intakten Eindruck. Nach Beginn der Arbeiten stellte sich heraus, dass der Anschein trug. Die Balken waren von innen morsch. Fast das ganze Haus musste abgerissen werden. Zum Schluss standen nur noch eine Südwand, ein Rest vom Kerngebäude und der Fußboden im ehemaligen Wohnzimmer. (Lengsfeld *nun* 360)

With her divorce, Lengsfeld felt her life was forced to start a new chapter: “Mein Leben war augenblicklich so leer wie das Haus. Ich musste es neu füllen” (Lengsfeld *nun* 361) – a perception that would not have been likely had her file remained closed.

Ultimately, the acts of re-evaluating her life under observation and then writing her file-based autobiography were healing processes; her file enabled her to correct her own memories and acknowledge reality, as she explains:

Ich wollte mit meiner Geschichte nicht hausieren gehen. Die Auseinandersetzung mit den Akten, die Gespräche und das Schreiben waren für mich vor allem eine Art Therapie. Ich tauchte ein in die Welt des Verates und der Gemeinheit – ich setzte mich mit jeder Seite meines Selbst und meiner

Handlungen auseinander. Ich ersparte mir nichts. Ich wollte nicht verdrängen, ich wollte wissen und begreifen. Am Ende musste ich mich damit abfinden, dass es Dinge gibt, die ich nie verstehen werde. (Lengsfeld *nun* 370)

The questions of why and how both Lengsfeld's memory and her autobiographical discourse were mediated by her file remain. The ways in which her memory processes were guided by her file support Vismann's argument that the Stasi files are capable of storing individual life stories (Vismann *Files* 154) and Article 1 (1) of the *Stasi Files Act*, which acknowledges that a file can store a life story. For Lengsfeld, the file stored her life story under observation in relation to her husband. Lengsfeld argues that her record reveals to her that Knud-Donald influenced her life when he became both her spy and her husband.

Lengsfeld's file corrects her view of her own life by exposing Knud's betrayal.<sup>83</sup>

"Im Operativplan zum 'OV Virus' vom 9. Februar 1984 wird festgelegt, daß der IMB (*Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter mit Feindverbindung*) 'Donald' zur weiteren Aufklärung des

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<sup>83</sup> When the file proves her husband's betrayal, it is not seen as a document full of distortions or the *Zerrspiegel* which she refers to at the beginning of her autobiography. Rather, it can reflect the actual truth about the malicious behaviour of Knud-Donald and the mendacious plans of the MfS against her. She appropriates these pieces of information as facts without doubting them. Her file serves her present agenda to introduce herself as someone betrayed by her husband for the *protection* of the GDR. So the file turns thus into a literary tool and evidential material to support her accusations against him. However, contrary to the other autobiographers, she does not explicitly seek to get too much attention from the publication of her file-based autobiography. It is addressed to a limited readership since it is already out of print. Since she spread rumours about the collaboration of Gregor Gysi, the former director of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), in that file-based autobiography, the publishing house, which was partially financed by the PDS, eventually withdrew it from the shelves: (Lengsfeld *nun* 371). Afterwards, Lengsfeld did not exert any more efforts to draw attention on her personal life story. She did not want any film adaptation of her case either because she wanted to prevent her ex-husband from benefitting financially of her story. "Ich hatte mich hauptsächlich darauf eingelassen, um die Rechte auf diese Geschichte zu blockieren. Ich wollte nicht, dass mein ehemaliger Mann auch noch an seinem Verrat verdiente" (Lengsfeld *nun* 372).



Hauskreises Ökologie und Rüstung und des Leitungsmitgliedes Vera Wollenberger eingesetzt wird” (Wollenberger 50-51). As Lengsfeld’s file shows, Knud-Donald merges the private sphere of his relationship with his wife with the political sphere of his collaboration with the GDR’s surveillance apparatus. The act of reading her file and remembering her past differently because of it resembles Derrida’s concept of the “pharmakon” (“La pharmacie de Platon”) in which someone remembers because of an external form of memory, in her case it is her Stasi file that enables her to remember her past with Knud differently. In the same way as Derrida explains in “La pharmacie de Platon” that the invention of writing replaces memory in *Phaedrus*, Lengsfeld argues that her file corrects and augments her memory of her time under observation and especially her relationship with Knud.<sup>84</sup> She seems to depend on the information from her file in order to recall her past and correct her wrong assumptions of his loyalty toward her.

During the production of their file-based autobiographies, data subjects rely on external storage data; they tend to incorporate their files’ content as it is presented to them instead of attempting to recall their past independently. The file allows them to reconsider life events based on hitherto unknown evidential material from their Stasi file. The records allude to links between life events that data subjects would not otherwise think about or put in question. Similarly, Thamus is concerned that people will no longer remember independently of the “pharmakon,” in this case, the written document. He suggests that the “pharmakon,” as external memory, will make people dependent on this document in order to remember any piece of information.

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<sup>84</sup> Just like a Madeleine or a “pharmakon” – to replace her former understanding of her past.

Similar to the “pharmakon,” the Stasi file also functions as external memory on which former data subjects tend to depend since it documents not only their past but also provides answers to the relationships between causes and effects. While the file and the “pharmakon” are both storage mechanisms, they are also different in some respects. The “pharmakon” refers to a mode of storing memories; it is a remedy against oblivion. The file, however, can also correct false assumptions; in that case, it also changes readers’ understandings about their pasts and, for former data subjects, about how the MfS manipulated their lives.

Lengsfeld’s account adds a new dimension to the concept of “pharmakon” because she perceives her file as more than merely a medium that merely preserves recollections; for her, it corrected and then replaced her false perceptions of her past.<sup>85</sup> The most upsetting example of her file altering her life occurs in a report from 26 March 1985 that specifies that the IM (who, by her deduction, must be Knud) has been hired to record incriminating evidence against her: “Der Einsatz der IM ist zielgerichtet darauf zu konzentrieren, mögliche strafrechtlich relevante Handlungen oder Verletzungen gesetzlicher Bestimmungen von Mitgliedern, insbesondere führenden, des ‘Friedenskreises’ aufzuklären und beweiskräftig zu dokumentieren” (Wollenberger 47). This passage alone completely changes her perception of her husband, vividly illustrating how Lengsfeld realized her file had actually “written” her life instead of merely recording it.

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<sup>85</sup> Another difference between the Stasi file and the “pharmakon” is that for Lengsfeld, her file did not serve to record the past as much as to write it, especially because of the “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” it included. Those measures of destruction are not a form of writing to remember or commemorate the past; rather, they are intended ruin the lives of the data subjects (*Firma*). In this sense, the file represents a medium that can write the future of individuals in question.

Similarly, she finds evidence in her file of how the peace circle she belonged to was destroyed by the Stasi: “Qualvoll liest sich die Geschichte seiner ‘Zersetzung’ [the corrosion and destruction of their peace circle] in den Akten. Die Art des Gesinnungsterors, dem wir ausgesetzt wurden, ist detailliert in einer ‘Richtlinie Nr. 1/76 des MfS zur Entwicklung und Bearbeitung operativer Vorgänge’ festgeschrieben” (Wollenberger 57). Lengsfeld quotes the specific passage from her file that outline the exact

“Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” intended to destroy their peace circle:

Bewährte anzuwendende Formen der Zersetzung sind:

- \*systematische Diskreditierung des öffentlichen Rufes, des Ansehens und des Prestiges auf der Grundlage miteinander verbundener... und diskreditierender sowie... glaubhafter, nicht widerlegbarer und damit ebenfalls diskreditierender Angaben;
- \*systematische Organisation beruflicher und gesellschaftlicher Mißerfolge zur Untergrabung des Selbstvertrauens einzelner Personen;
- \*zielstrebige Untergrabung von Überlegungen im Zusammenhang mit bestimmten Idealen, Vorbildern, usw. und die Erzeugung von Zweifeln an der persönlichen Perspektive;
- \*Erzeugen von Mißtrauen und gegenseitigen Verdächtigungen innerhalb von Gruppen, Gruppierungen und Organisationen durch zielgerichtete Ausnutzung persönlicher Schwächen einzelner Mitglieder;
- \*Beschäftigungen von Gruppen, Gruppierungen und Organisationen mit ihren internen Organisationen mit dem Ziel der Einschränkung ihrer feindlich-negativen Handlungen;
- \*Örtliches und zeitliches Unterbinden bzw. Einschränken der gegenseitigen Beziehung der Mitglieder einer Gruppe, Gruppierung oder Organisation auf der Grundlage geltender gesetzlicher Bestimmungen, z.B. durch Arbeitsplatzbindungen, Zuweisung örtlich entfernt liegender Arbeitsplätze usw. (Wollenberger quoting from her file 57-58)

At the same time as her file opens Lengsfeld’s eyes to a painful truth about her past, however, it also signifies her return to life, as she announces in the opening pages of her file-based autobiography: “[B]ei lebensbedrohlichen Verletzungen ist die

Abwesenheit von Schmerz ein alarmierendes Zeichen. Das Wiederkehr des Schmerzes signalisiert oft die Rückkehr ins Leben – ich weiß, wovon ich rede” (Wollenberger 8). Lengsfeld refers here to the “Rückkehr ins Leben” (8) that she experienced after reading her Stasi file and realizing that her husband had collaborated with the Stasi ever since they met. By the expression *return to life* she means that her newfound knowledge has awakened her from her illusion about her relationship with her husband and led her to initiate their divorce and her life without him.

Privat habe ich mein Problem durch die sofortige Trennung von meinem Mann gelöst. Meine Kinder haben das zu meiner nicht gelinden Überraschung von Anfang an respektiert. Jacob und Jonas hatten die DDR im Alter von fünf bzw. drei Jahren verlassen. Sie waren nun neun und sieben. Sie wussten gar nicht, was die Staatssicherheit war. Sie erfassen das Problem erstaunlich schnell und mit dem feinen Empfinden für Recht und Unrecht, das Kinder noch haben, entschieden sie sich ohne Zögern, bei mir zu bleiben. (Lengsfeld *nun* 373)

Nonetheless, this “return to life” does not lead Lengsfeld to the kind of personal reconciliation with the past hypothesized by Alison Lewis, who suggests that the opening of the files was for all former data subjects a first step towards the overcoming of the past that amounts to an act of reconciliation:

The overriding consideration in granting East Germans permission to read their Stasi files was to provide citizens with evidence of the wrongs that had been committed against them. Opening the files to the victims constituted therefore an important symbolic act of reconciliation on the part of the new German parliament. (Lewis 278)

As Lengsfeld’s life story shows, however, forgiveness alone is not easy and does not guarantee reconciliation: although she has forgiven Knud, she has not reconciled with

him (Boyes 42).<sup>86</sup> Although the opening of the Stasi files to data subjects may not have caused the feared witch hunt for former IMs, it revealed and documented betrayals that ended relationships built on lies (Ash 18) and more generally changed people's perceptions of their pasts under observation.

Thus, while Ash simply suggests that the file functions like Proust's Madeleine by triggering memories, Lengsfeld finds in her file a new, more accurate version of the past although that vision is not hundred percent true to reality. She acknowledges that the file, like her own perceptions before reading it, does not reflect reality exactly as it was,<sup>87</sup> that

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<sup>86</sup> Despite her feeling that reconciliation is not possible, Lengsfeld feels some pity for her ex-husband. As opposed to Ash, Jauch and Witt, Lengsfeld is able to see firsthand how informers suffer from their betrayal: "Er [her ex-husband] litt unter der Trennung, es war die schlimmste Strafe für ihn. Ich habe aber meinen Kindern nie den Umgang mit ihrem Vater verboten. Ich hatte nur kein Vertrauen mehr, sie mit ihm allein zu lassen" (Lengsfeld *nun* 374). In fact, Knud literally fell sick, most probably in part because he felt guilty. "Die Vergangenheit ließ ihn nie los. Sie machte ihn buchstäblich krank. . . . Bei ihm wäre eine Art galoppierender Parkinson festgestellt worden, der ihn bald an den Rollstuhl fesseln könnte. Als Jacob und Jonas ihn daraufhin besuchten, stellten sie fest, dass sich sein Zustand innerhalb von zwei Monaten tatsächlich sehr verschlechtert hatte. Er sprach und bewegte sich wie ein Betrunkener, obwohl er es nicht war" (Lengsfeld *nun* 375). Knud's sickness softens Lengsfeld's judgement and anger against him. "Seine Krankheit brach meine Versteinerung ihm gegenüber auf. Er war ein Stasispitzel, jetzt ist er der hilfededürftige Vater meiner Kinder. Dass ich ihm verzieh, war für mich keine Frage. Ich konnte es noch nicht über mich bringen, ihn zu treffen, aber das wird irgendwann nicht ausbleiben. Er war immerhin einer der wenigen Stasispitzel, die es wenigstens eingestanden haben. Diese Ehrlichkeit [although belated and forced] schadet ihm bis heute, während die leugnenden Stasispitzel ehrenvolle Positionen bekleiden oder anstreben" (Lengsfeld *nun* 376). According to Lengsfeld, informal collaborators like Knud who try to escape the truth do eventually become sick: "Knud ist nicht an seinem Eingeständnis krank geworden, sondern daran, dass er danach versucht hat, es von sich wegzuschieben. Es hat fast zehn Jahre gedauert, bis er seine Schuld anerkannt hat. Ich hoffe, dass sich dies positiv auf den Verlauf seiner Krankheit auswirkt" (Lengsfeld *nun* 376).

<sup>87</sup> She noticed for example that the number of participants to the activists' circle was often significantly reduced: "Wie haben diese Leute uns gesehen, was haben sie über uns gedacht? In ihren Berichten sind wir faul, inkompetent, unzuverlässig, schlampig, konfus, um nur einige der meistgebrauchten Adjektive zu nennen. Gleichzeitig hängten sie an ihre Berichte Auflistungen unserer Veranstaltungen an. Nach ihren

record effectively reinterprets her life for her but also distorts part of its reality. Her encounter with her Stasi file leaves her with the impression that reading it is like looking at her past in a distorted mirror: “Eines der merkwürdigsten Rummelplatzvergnügen ist das Kabinett, in dem verschiedene gewölbte Spiegel die eigene Gestalt in unterschiedlicher Verzerrung wiedergeben. Man erblickt seine Verunstaltung in den unerträglichsten Formen, peinlich berührt von der eigenen scheinbaren Häßlichkeit” (Wollenberger 7). Not only did the file allow her to reconsider entirely her relationship with her husband but also to terminate it. In fact, Lengsfeld is the only one of the selected autobiographers who has been forced to make such a sudden and radical change in her life after reading her Stasi file since she could no longer live with him after having learned the truth about his betrayal.

One important reason for Lengsfeld writing her autobiography was that it presented her with an opportunity to engage in a healing process by expressing to others her view of her past (Lengsfeld *nun* 370). Writing this file-based autobiography was part of her “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” because it entailed re-functionalizing her file to prove how the Stasi infringed on her life and privacy. Yet she does not explicitly identify herself as a victim.

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immer noch unvollständigen Angaben hat unser Friedenskreis in den Jahren von 1983 bis 1985 über hundert, zum Teil sogar mehrtägige Veranstaltungen organisiert und durchgeführt. Und das ohne finanzielle und fast ohne technische Hilfsmittel. Ist den Heren der schreiende Widerspruch in ihren eigenen Berichten nicht aufgefallen? . . . In meinen Akten fand ich Berichte über Wochenendseminare mit angeblich nur einem (!) oder zwei bis drei Teilnehmern. Die Teilnehmerzahl für das ‚Mobile Friedensseminar‘, das jährlich von hundert, wenn nicht gar hunderten Menschen besucht wurde, bezifferte die Stasi 1985 mit zehn” (Wollenberger 61).

Ich hatte das Stasiopfer vom Dienst werden und alle Talkshows in Deutschland besuchen können. Ich habe das nicht getan, weil ich keine Lust auf die Opferrolle hatte. Ich war auf schlimme Art verraten worden, aber als Opfer fühlte ich mich nicht. Ich habe immer anerkannt, dass Widerspruch und oppositionelles Handeln sanktioniert werden können. Ich habe diese Sanktionen als den Preis für mein selbstbestimmtes Handeln in Kauf genommen. (Lengsfeld *nun* 359)

Her attempt to come to terms with her past and heal from it was possible by exposing her story without, nevertheless identifying herself exclusively as a victim. Lengsfeld seems to imply that self-victimization would signal the continuation of the Stasi's power over her life.

At the same time, however, she points to examples when she was indeed a *victim* and not a collaborator of the Stasi in the past in order to address herself to friends who wrongly suspected her of having collaborated with the Stasi. Lengsfeld writes her autobiography to clarify to lost friends, in particular the Misselwitz couple, that she was never an IM herself. Thus, Lengsfeld explains that she did not understand their mistrust toward her in the '80s because even though a man married to one of her family members and her own husband were spies, she had no involvement with the State Security Service. According to her, nothing apart from the file could have enlightened her about the changes in their attitude toward her; but having now read her file, she can point to specific episodes that aroused others' suspicions about her loyalties. For instance, she describes how her file documented how when one of her distant relatives, a Stasi collaborator, attended a meeting of the activists' circle she belonged to, and his presence alone raised other members' doubts about Lengsfeld's motives for getting involved in this activists' circle:

Ich mußte mich in den folgenden Jahren noch öfter mit diesem Gerücht auseinandersetzen, aber daß, wie ich jetzt den Akten entnehme, Ruth und Hans Misselwitz selbst diesem Gerücht Glauben schenkten und deshalb versuchten, mich aus dem Friedenskreis herauszudrängen, wäre mir nicht im Traum eingefallen. Ich war nur unglücklich über das Erkalten unserer Freundschaft, dessen wahre Ursachen ich nicht erkannte. (Wollenberger 32-33)

As a result of Lengsfeld introducing in this way specific examples of life events that led others to mistrust her, her file-based autobiography seems primarily intended for lost friends who wrongly suspected her of collaborating with the Stasi.

Obwohl ich mich in gewisser Weise über die Begegnung amüsierte, war sie mir keineswegs angenehm. Daß einer der Luzis, die uns so zusetzten, ein, wenn auch ganz entfernter und nur angeheirateter, Verwandter von mir war, fiel mir sehr schwer, auch nur den engsten Vertrauten unseres Friedenskreis mitzuteilen. Ich sprach dennoch mit Misselwitzens darüber und nahm mir vor, meinen Schwippchwager beim nächsten Friedenskreis anzusprechen. Aber er kam nie wieder. Dafür wurde im Frühjahr 1985 im Friedenskreis das Gerücht gestreut, ich sei Mitarbeiterin der Stasi. (Wollenberger 32)

Even though her file gives her the chance to correct her friends' negative impression of her, it functions as a poisoned Madeleine since it provides her evidence that some of her closest friends mistrusted her, although Lengsfeld never imagined that the Misselwitz couple, some of her dearest friends, also gave credits to the false assumptions that she might have worked as collaborator.



At the same time as she portrays her innocence, Lengsfeld portrays the absurdity of her life under observation (Wollenberger 12).<sup>88</sup> This approach solicits understanding, if not sympathy. “Der Blick in die Akten hat jedenfalls jene faszinierende Sogwirkung, der man sich immer wieder durch ein Lachen entziehen muß. Glücklicherweise gibt es genügend unfreiwillige Komik, die Anlaß dazu bietet. Aber jedes Lachen erstirbt sogleich wieder bei dem Gedanken, daß es immer bitterernst war” (Wollenberger 7). The author’s anecdotal examples in particular make her readers sympathize with her after she learns of her husband’s betrayal. Lengsfeld particularly emphasizes the absurdity of their relationship at the beginning of her relationship with Knud: While she is thinking about comforting his broken heart.<sup>89</sup> As absurd as it now appears to her, she was protecting the one who most abused her trust.

In order to emphasize this irony of her life with Knud, she mentions wondering at that time how Stasi collaborators had determined her whereabouts and looked into her personal papers:

Damals habe ich mich gewundert, woher die ‘Einbrecher’ so genau meine Angewohnheiten kannten. Nun brauche ich mich nicht mehr zu fragen: Donald war einer ihrer zuverlässigsten, ergiebigsten Quellen. Er berichtete auch über die privatesten Dinge.

Nach diesem ‘Einbruch’ überredete Donald mich, meine Tagebücher, Liebesbriefe und andere persönliche Dinge,

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<sup>88</sup> Lengsfeld was attracted to Knud and identified with him since they both suffered previously from a relationship that failed. She wanted to give him support and protect him but he, on the contrary, was betraying her (Wollenberger 12).

<sup>89</sup> He, in contrast, is about to give the Stasi information that could lead to her being imprisoned for several years (Wollenberger 154). “Knud-Donald erinnerte also an meine beiden großen Lieben, bediente meine literarischen Neigungen und war unglücklich wie ich. Er hatte ebenfalls eine große Liebe hinter sich und litt so sichtbar, daß in mir Beschützerinstinkte geweckt wurden: Hier ging es jemandem noch schlechter als mir” (Wollenberger 12).

von denen ich nicht wollte, daß sie von der Stasi gelesen würden, außer Haus zu schaffen. Er selbst übernahm den Abtransport und brachte sie in Sicherheit. In des Wortes doppelter Bedeutung. (Wollenberger 37)

Here, Lengsfeld plays with the double meaning of “Sicherheit,” describing her most private documents being brought *to safety* in the sense that they are directly handed over to the State Security Service, not to a safe place as she would have imagined. In part, these anecdotal references from her file serve to justify the extent to which she was a victim of the Stasi.

The author then turns her file into a more political tool, using it to discredit the reports of the MfS. This strategy is part of her healing process because it simultaneously undermines the integrity of the Stasi officers while giving her authority over her life. She is able to point to and rectify errors in her file. In this way, although the Stasi record itself was originally intended to buttress the power of hostile strangers, Lengsfeld turns that record against her oppressors. For example, Lengsfeld excerpts passages from her file that illustrate how ridiculous the Stasi were to intervene in the gatherings of completely unthreatening peace activists, such as when she and other peace activists organized a picnic and were playing when the MfS surrounded them and ordered them through loudspeakers to disperse and take the shortest way back home.

Mein damals zehnjähriger ältester Sohn hatte damit seine erste herbe Begegnung mit der Staatsmacht. Mein zweiter Sohn kam acht Tage später auf die Welt, bereits als Kind eines ‘feindlich negativen Elementes’, einer Observierten. (Wollenberger 23)

Here she ironically calls herself a “feindlich negatives Element” ( an enemy negative element), how she understands herself to have been perceived, in spite of her innocent

and legal activities: “Obwohl wir keinerlei Spruchbänder oder Symbole mit uns führten, erschienen Volkspolizisten, um uns darüber zu belehren, daß wir provokatorische Handlungen zu unterlassen hätten” (Wollenberger 23). The more detail she provides about her life under Stasi observation, the more absurd her daily life appears in hindsight to have been.

Furthermore, Lengsfeld points to the absurdity of the Stasi asking her husband to spy on her activities as a peace activist when he also helped her to pursue them. In other words, he encouraged and supported her in acts that the Stasi considered subversive. “Daß ich Mitbegründerin des Friedenskreises Pankow wurde, habe ich Knud-Donald zu verdanken” (Wollenberger 17). In fact, Lengsfeld emphasizes that she owes her involvement in peace circles to Knud: it is *with him and because of him* that she becomes the co-founder of the peace circle Pankow. She inserts a photocopy from her file that documents his role in founding the peace circle: “Die Arbeitsgruppe wurde Mitte 1982 von Vera und Knud Wollenberger gegründet” (Wollenberger 19). As absurd as she shows this situation to be, this act of belonging to the activists’ circle provides the Stasi with grounds to continue spying on her.

Yet despite its evidential nature, Lengsfeld sometimes must refute her Stasi record because her own memories reveal her file’s errors:

Wir können in den Akten erkennen, wo Fehler und Irrtümer unsere eigenen und wo sie stasigemacht waren. Wir können so grundloses Mißtrauen und grundlose Feindschaft überwinden. Doch über uns selbst können wir aus den Akten wenig erfahren. Wir sehen nur unser Zerrbild. Unser Verstand, unser Gefühl, unsere Erinnerung sind das notwendige Korrektiv. (Wollenberger 8)

In these cases, Lengsfeld juxtaposes information from the file with her own critical assessment of that data, revealing obvious inaccuracies intended to discredit the people or associations under surveillance and thus bringing the credibility of the Stasi into question.

In der Regel war kaum einer der Mitglieder genügend sachkundig, um realistisch und objektiv Ökologieprobleme zu diskutieren. Insbesondere Vera Wollenberger versuchte immer wieder aufs neue, den Mitgliedern der Arbeitsgruppe zu suggerieren, daß es die Schlamperei der staatlichen Stellen sei, die Unfähigkeit der Politiker und der steigenden Rüstungsausgaben, die die Umweltprobleme hervorrufen und das im Westen viel mehr für die Umwelt getan wird als in den sozialistischen Staaten. (Wollenberger quoting from her file 19)

Lengsfeld argues that these were intentional misrepresentations: for instance, the Stasi purposefully underreported how many events were organized by the ecology circle in order to degrade its participants as being unsuccessful or inactive.

Wie haben diese Leute uns gesehen, was haben sie über uns gedacht? In ihren Berichten sind wir faul, inkompetent, unzuverlässig, schlampig, konfus, um nur einige der meistgebrauchten Adjektive zu nennen. Gleichzeitig hängten sie an ihre Berichte Auflistungen unserer Veranstaltungen an. Nach ihren immer noch unvollständigen Angaben hat unser Friedenskreis in den Jahren von 1983 bis 1985 über hundert, zum Teil sogar mehrtägige Veranstaltungen organisiert und durchgeführt. Und das ohne finanzielle und fast ohne technische Hilfsmittel. Ist den Herren der schreiende Widerspruch in ihren eigenen Berichten nicht aufgefallen? (Wollenberger 61)

Such inaccurate numbers should have seemed implausible to MfS officers even before they were recorded: it would have been logistically impossible for Lengsfeld's peace circle to have conducted more gatherings than it did during that period without any financial

or technical assistance. Yet these clearly inaccurate conclusions appear as facts in her Stasi record.

Similarly, on another occasion Lengsfeld accuses her informal collaborators of drastically underreporting the actual number of participants at their seminars: “In meinen Akten fand ich Berichte über Wochenendseminare mit angeblich nur einem (!) oder zwei bis drei Teilnehmern. Die Teilnehmerzahl für das ‘Mobile Friedensseminar’, das jährlich von hundert, wenn nicht gar hunderten Menschen besucht wurde, bezifferte die Stasi 1985 mit zehn” (Wollenberger 61). Such a distortion in recorded detail illustrates the ambivalent nature of the file as a gift to memory: While it contains objective facts, such as the proof of her husband’s involvement with the Stasi, it also contains inaccuracies which former data subjects should be alert to. As a result, Lengsfeld carefully distinguishes between that data which acts as “pharmakon” to her personal memory and that which reveals the Stasi’s unreliability.

In fact, part of the healing process inherent in Lengsfeld’s autobiographical writing is the formulating of accusations regarding the Stasi’s criminal mechanisms of power and surveillance initiated by the Stasi. Her file-based autobiography raises ethical questions about the Stasi’s interference in the lives of its data subjects in order to spy on them, destroy their reputations, and not just record but also in part *write* their lives. Lengsfeld defines the Stasi as “eine Institution, die mit krimineller Energie und ebensolchen Methoden in das Leben der von ihr Verfolgten eingriff. Aus manchen Observierten hat sie Opfer gemacht. Aber noch mehr haben sich nicht zum Opfer machen lassen, obwohl sie tiefe, manchmal unheilbare Wunden davongetragen haben” (Wollenberger 7). Lengsfeld

complains that the Stasi acted unethically when it intruded in her private sphere in order to gather information on her and destroy her life.

Next to the issue of the Stasi's unethical practices, Lengsfeld raises the issue that contemporary acquaintances did not tell her that she was being betrayed, although they knew that Knud was working as an IM; they disregarded the Stasi's invasion of her privacy by remaining silent about Knud's collaboration.

Werner Schulz brachte es fertig, ein Jahr mit mir in der Abgeordnetengruppe zusammenzuarbeiten, ohne mich merken zu lassen, dass er wusste, welche Zeitbombe über mir schwebte. Auch meine alten Freunde Hans und Ruth Misselwitz gehörten zu den Informierten; die Seelsorgerin Misselwitz sah keinen Grund, mir Gelegenheit zu geben, mit meinem Schicksalschlag selbstbestimmt umzugehen. (Lengsfeld *nun* 357)

Lengsfeld's criticism of others here is typical and distinctive in file-based autobiographies; for her, it also evokes the reader's sympathy and helps her defend herself against allegations of collaboration and against her ex-husband's accusations. In short, like other authors, Lengsfeld uses her file as a literary tool with which she can criticize the Stasi and clarify her past to her (lost) friends.

In Lengsfeld's view, her life has to an extent been written by the Stasi partly because her husband collected incriminating evidence that led to her arrests, career failure, and lost friendships. Moreover, her life was written by the Stasi in the sense that "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen" were drafted not only to change her life path but also to write specific plans intended to destroy the organisation that were part of Lengsfeld's life, as she argues:

Ihr 'Zersetzungsplan' begann erst voll zu wirken, nachdem es der Staatssicherheit gelungen war, den Keim des Miß-

trauens in den engsten Kern des Friedenskreises zu treiben. Als jeder jeden zu verdächtigen begann, war das der Anfang vom Ende. Der Staatssicherheit gelang es, die Freundschaft zwischen einigen von uns zu zerbrechen und uns zum Teil gegeneinander zu hetzen. Ich lese diesen Teil der Akten mit einer Mischung aus Wut, Hilflosigkeit und tiefem Schmerz. (Wollenberger 58)

In response to this wrongdoing, Lengsfeld uses her file in her autobiography as a literary device verifying the wrongs that she claims she and her fellow activists suffered, including the ways the Stasi infringes on her life to humiliate her and wrongly accuse her of adultery: “Im ‘Plan zur Zersetzung zum OV Virus’ [Vera] vom 9. August 1983 kann man unter Punkt folgendes lesen: Hierbei wird er [the IM in charge of that case] unter anderem auch über die ‘Verdorbenheit der Pfarrer’ im allgemeinen und speziell über die Ehebrecherin \*\*\* sprechen” (Wollenberger quoting from her file 33). Lengsfeld provides more details about the Stasi’s corrupted stratagems, documenting her claims with references to her file. She quotes the following from the “Plan zur Zersetzung zum OV Virus”:

Die Gespräche sollen so geführt werden, daß die Gemeindemitglieder beim Superintendenten der \*\*\* vorsprechen und um eine Klärung der aufgeworfenen Anschuldigungen bitten, daß \*\*\* (sie fotografierte während der ‘Mecklenburgswanderung des Friedenskreises’ die Teilnehmer des FKK-Badens) in Verdacht gerät, dem ‘Zeugen Jehovas’ die Bilder in die Hand gespielt zu haben, und daß auch Vera Wollenberger verdächtigt wird, eine Indiskretion begangen zu haben. Durch die geführten Gespräche soll das Vertrauensverhältnis der Gemeindemitglieder zur \*\*\* weiter erschüttert werden. Die ‘Fotos’ werden gemeinsam mit der Bildstelle der BV (Bezirksverwaltung Berlin des MfS – V.W.) durch entsprechendes Retuschieren, Kopieren und durch Bildmontagen hergestellt.  
Verantwortlich: Hauptmann Hasse und Leutnant Kappis  
Termin: September 1983. (Wollenberger quoting from her file 33)

Lengsfeld's appropriation of her Stasi file and the way in which she weaves it into her autobiography is reminiscent of Olney's concept of weaving in life writing (Olney *Memory* 20). Although Olney primarily emphasizes how the unreliability of memory requires the autobiographer to use imagination to synthesize a personal life story from what the memory provides, Lengsfeld shows how data from the external storage system of the Stasi file can be integrated as it is into an autobiography. In fact, former data subjects like Lengsfeld can be said to *weave* a text in the sense that they try to find causal connections between life events by examining evidence from their files. In their case, however, their "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen" rather than their imagination fills these gaps in their memories. In file-based autobiographies, then, *weaving* describes how autobiographers tend to start their life narratives with someone else's data, to which they then add their own recollections and reflections. For many data subjects, incorporating fragments of the files as evidence supports their testimony. Lengsfeld's file excerpts, for example, justify her claim that part of her life was indeed in some sense written by the Stasi with the help of the "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen." In addition, her narrative opens ethical questions regarding the extent to which a state's secret-security service should be allowed not only to record but also to infiltrate and even manipulate the lives of its data subjects (with the use of "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen").

A final concern which Lengsfeld raises about her Stasi file relates to her informers. In fact, her husband sought to use her file to his advantage, seeking benefits from their divorce and attempting to reach to her *roots*, which represent in Lengsfeld's case, the house that she inherited from her grandparents where she spent her childhood. From



Lengsfeld's perspective, any success he might have in either pursuit would be farcical after the betrayal she suffered at his hands (Wollenberger 154).

Fortunately for Lengsfeld, her father-in-law eventually took her part and threatened to disinherit Knud if he gained in any way from Lengsfeld divorcing him. Lengsfeld's father-in-law was one of the few who eventually apologized for their actions in pursuit of communist or socialist ideals:

Knuds Eltern waren von Anfang an mit mir solidarisch, das erleichterte die Sache. Nie werde ich vergessen, wie Knuds Vater, damals fast 80 Jahre alt, nach der Enttarnung seines Sohnes zu mir kam, bis ins Mark erschüttert. Er war Kommunist seit seiner Jugend. Er gestand mir, dass er sich schäme, dem kommunistischen Regime gedient zu haben. Er, dem so viele andere Möglichkeiten in seinem Leben offen gestanden hatten, verpflichtete sich einer Sache, die es nicht wert war. (Lengsfeld *nun* 374)

However, the example of Knud in relation to both his and Lengsfeld's "Vermögensgemeinschaft" shows how the Stasi files could serve both perpetrators and victims if their access were not strictly regulated.

The question might arise why data subjects, whose suffering has been exacerbated by the mendacity of their files, nevertheless use them in writing their accounts of their lives; why, although they are aware of the distortions in their files, they decide nevertheless to incorporate fragments of them as *truth*, or at least as evidence instead of writing from their personal perspectives alone. In fact, their Stasi records provide these autobiographers with material that authenticates their claims. Lengsfeld, for example, quotes the

“Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” from her file to reveal the Stasi’s criminal intentions, to document her husband’s betrayal,<sup>90</sup> and to prove that she was not a collaborator.

Thus, basing her autobiography on her critical reading of her file is for Lengsfeld, as for the other file-based autobiographers, an effective way of turning Stasi’s mechanism of political oppression against the Stasi itself. And in fact, Lengsfeld has no other official documentation with which to show the extent that the Stasi intruded into her life.

Throughout her account, Lengsfeld thus identifies to what extent her record guides her in re-evaluating her memories, leads her to challenge the file’s claims, and allows her to live a life based on truth rather than deception. At the same time, she points to instances when her personal life events might have actually been *determined* by the

“Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” in her file. In these ways, she uses her file to serve her personal agenda, to discredit the Stasi’s purposeful manipulation of facts and of her life and to obtain the responses she wants from her readers. Lengsfeld, like other data subjects, can therefore be seen as appropriating and re-functionalizing her file. In her case, Lengsfeld employs her file to bring clarification to her past, defend herself against her ex-husband, and receive the understanding of her peers.

Lengsfeld’s purposes in writing, particularly in regard to her ex-husband, raise ethical questions about publishing data pertaining to someone else in one’s narrative, especially if the data has been gathered in an unethical way in the first place and is thus il-

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<sup>90</sup> “Schon auf der zweiten Seite fand ich einen Bericht von ‘Donald’, das war einer der IM-Namen von Knud, über unseren Aufenthalt in Malcesine, meine Krankheit, die Gespräche mit Philipp. Hätte ich vorher noch nichts geahnt, bei diesem Bericht wäre mir sofort klar geworden, dass er nur von Knud stammen konnte. Wenn es noch Zweifel gegeben hätte, nun wären sie beseitigt gewesen. Die folgenden Stunden sollten mein Leben verändern. Die schrecklichste Entdeckung lag längst hinter mir, aber was ich in den Akten an Gemeinheiten und Banalitäten des Bösen las, übertraf mein Vorstellungsvermögen” (Lengsfeld *nun* 365).

legitimate. By using this illegitimate data collecting – and use – in her work, she seems to be validating the Stasi's unethical collecting of such pieces of information in the first place. This problem of appropriating others' illegitimate data is true of any file-based autobiographies where the authors use file data to attack a third party. That is, in her exposure of Knud to public criticism, Lengsfeld is also raising the issue of whether her form of testimony against him should be criticized as a form of voyeurism, especially because she of course controls the point of view in her narrative. After all, she chose, organized, commented on, and used the file extracts in her autobiography according to her own interests. This process gives no possibility of self-defence to those who are so accused, like Lengsfeld's ex-husband, unless they in turn publish their own autobiographies. In the case of Knud, he wanted to justify himself and at least apologize for his betrayal but was denied this chance since none of his friends wanted to hear his version of the past (Lengsfeld *nun* 374).

For Lengsfeld, as for other former data subjects, autobiographical writing makes her both the writer and the written subject. "Autobiographers who, within one text, are both subject and object of speech and regard, becoming in turn self and other for each other, play out [...the narration] lived experience as a realistic trope for exploring, defining, and expressing just who they are" (Egan *Mirror* 8). Unlike the Stasi collaborators reporting on them, the autobiographers of course do not describe themselves as dissidents; rather, they mediate their self-images with a combination of personal memories, recollections triggered by their files, and evidence from those records. Thus, Lengsfeld discusses how a file not only contains or documents one's life, but can also serve as literary artefact by the individual against whom it was originally directed. The degree to

which her writing process is healing for Lengsfeld depends on how effectively she can turn her file against her oppressors and clarify to her readers her life under observation. In effect, both while writing and after publishing her file-based autobiography, Lengsfeld, the formerly surveilled, now is the observer, the author of her life, as she was before her file was opened. That is, as she attempts to reverse her friends' suspicions on her and expose the reality of her betrayal, Lengsfeld becomes the subject of her story: she is the one who determines which aspects of her life under surveillance should be observed in her autobiography, why, and how. Through the complex writing of this file-based autobiography, Lengsfeld has reversed the positions of subjects and objects of observation while raising ethical questions.

Insofar as file-based autobiographies orient their readers according to both their authors' accounts and hostile files written by strangers, these kinds of autobiographies raise awareness of life writing being a complex literary process that involves using unethically gathered data that complemented and corrected their personal memories, just like a "pharmakon." Lengsfeld's file-based autobiography prepares the ground for the life narrative of another writer who perceived her Stasi file as a "pharmakon" that caused not only a revision of personal memories but also a personal crisis, which in turn led her to write her file-based autobiography. In Katarina Witt's case, while her file corrects some memories, more importantly it and mass media have already produced a public image of her. Consequently, she uses her file in narrating her story, aware that this *gift* to memory can help her to alter public opinion.

## 6 Katarina Witt's *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür*

Little introduction is needed for Katarina Witt, the professional athlete who was born in 1965 who was placed under Stasi observation at age seven. Recipient of numerous figure-skating medals, including two Olympic golds, Witt received considerable benefits and privileges from the GDR. Known for her success, charm, and beauty, she was regarded, especially in East Germany, as an “Aushängeschild” *der DDR* (figure head of the German Democratic Republic) (Witt *Jahre* 205) prior to the Wende. Nowadays she is known as television star, business woman, and, since 2005, the founder of a trusting aid of sick or disabled children. Katarina Witt signals her intention to work through her past under observation by introducing her file-based autobiography as a “dreifache Verarbeitung der Vergangenheit” (Witt *Jahre* 7), a three-fold working of the past. It is an exercise in which she promises to tell the truth to her audience in an attempt to rectify her public image. In this way, Witt seems to make the “autobiographical pact” (Lejeune *Autobiography* ix) that binds her to tell the truth about her “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” as accurately as she can:

Ich habe dieses Buch geschrieben, damit Sie die wirkliche Katarina Witt kennenlernen können. Die Arbeit daran war auch für mich ein Lernprozeß. Ich habe mein veröffentlichtes und mein in den Stasi-Akten aufgeschriebenes Leben mit dem verglichen, was ich wirklich erlebt und wahrgenommen habe. Es war eine dreifache Verarbeitung der Vergangenheit. (Witt *Jahre* 7)

Thus, defining herself as a non-fiction writer, Witt is responsible for truthfulness in her narrative, with its focus on justifying her position in the former GDR. It is not a coincidence that it appeared after tabloid reporters published detracting passages from Witt's

file, prompting her to formulate brief statements to deny these claims regarding privileges and collaboration, and criticizing the media's use of her file.<sup>91</sup> However, whereas Lengsfeld received no state support, Witt benefitted substantially from the state until the Wende, so her self-justification and claims of victimization must be read critically for both their emphases and their omissions.

Had her file remained closed and hidden from the public, Witt would probably not have written her life story, at least not so soon: "Ich wurde schon lange vorher immer wieder gedrängt, meine Karriere auf dem Eis zu beschreiben. Ich habe das abgelehnt. Warum soll ich über etwas berichten, was nicht abgeschlossen ist? Außerdem: Mein Leben ist noch zu jung für Memoiren" (Witt *Jahre* 7). In fact, Witt gives the impression that she would never have read her Stasi record if her father had not alerted her to the media's accusations of her collaboration with the Stasi. Witt's depiction of that conversation with her father has a literary quality that is reminiscent of an introduction to a novel. On a sunny Sunday morning, as she sits on the terrace, her father calls her to inquire if she knows anything about her Stasi file – twenty-seven folders, the equivalent of 3,354 pages. Then she begins to tell the story of her childhood and her path to success as she becomes a world-famous figure skater. Selecting already-published passages from her file in the mass media, she counters with her version of the facts, emphasizing her ignorance of the Stasi's presence in her life before reading her record and of actual circumstances in the GDR, and protesting that she could have done nothing to change the system if she had known these things. Her autobiography thus discusses her file and the mass

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<sup>91</sup> Witt's file-based autobiography was published in response to the media who attacked her public image. Although the process of crafting this account started immediately after the media quoted fragments from her file, the release of this publication occurred only in 1994, two years after the opening of the Stasi files.

media's portrayal of her, especially through excerpts from her file, in order to define her status in the former GDR.

Witt's file-based autobiography is her appropriation of data that others have accumulated. She appropriates this documentation to revise her public life-story. As Chapter One discusses, autobiographers tend to write or construct their lives rather than writing them down as they happened. Autobiographical writing is the selection of episodes edited and formatted to promote one's autobiographical project. For file-based autobiographers, the acts of self-construction and purposeful statement require evidence from the files in which they were originally data subjects. Although Witt insists from the beginning that her file-based autobiography is neither an indictment of the media nor a defence of the former GDR (Witt *Jahre* 8), her account does appear to be self-justifying.

This chapter analyzes how Witt uses her Stasi file partly to remember, but primarily to support her self-defence. Specifically, it focuses on the narrative strategies she employs to justify herself: countering accusations of complicity with the Stasi, emphasizing her lack of choice in the former GDR, and arguing that she is a victim of both the Stasi and the mass media. Witt explains how, in the production of her autobiography, her Stasi file replaced her memories of the past and in turn, she appropriated it to support her argumentation. In this context, replacing her memory means that the file brings a corrective vision of her past and augments her understanding of the Stasi's perspective on herself as depicted in this file, which forms then part of her life account in which Witt promises to tell the truth.

Her autobiographical pact is likely to be questioned by the media since she may have benefitted from someone else's help to write her account. In fact, unlike Ash's and

Lengsfeld's books, Witt's may have been partly or entirely ghostwritten. Although Witt's publication is billed as her autobiography and does not mention anyone who helped Witt to write it, the book itself is advertised on her personal website as her biography – and not her *autobiography*.<sup>92</sup> Unless this is a mistake, it may acknowledge that someone helped her write *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür*, a possibility on which neither Witt's agent nor the publishing house would comment on in reply to my inquiry. The fact that the ghostwriter Barbara Feinman Todd reveals helping Witt writing her memoirs without providing details of such work strengthens the possibility that indeed Witt's book is not her work alone:

Also, occasionally, as a ghost, I encountered someone I actually admired. A lifelong skating enthusiast, I was elated when Olympic Gold Medalist Kat[a]rina Witt called to talk about the possibility of helping her with her memoirs. And there is a certain satisfaction one can gain from mimicking another human being's idiolect so well that even *they* can't recall if they actually said something to you or if you made it up. (Feinman)

Witt did collaborate with Ed M. Swift to write her other volume of autobiography, *Only with Passion*.<sup>93</sup> Since the question of ghostwriting in *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür* can be neither confirmed nor rejected outright, I must consider that her file-based autobiography may have been written with the help of a third party, despite the book's first-person narrator.

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<sup>92</sup> "Katarina Witts Bücher." Web. 22 Aug. 2009. <<http://www.katarina-witt.de/publikationen.html>>.

<sup>93</sup> *Only with Passion*, as the title suggests, focuses mostly on how Katarina Witt balanced her successes and achieved her goals through her passion for ice skating. It begins with questions about the possible difficulties of maintaining her femininity in such a competitive world where career challenges and victories jeopardize romantic success and it tells the story of how Witt became who she is by following her passion.



How authors or scholars identify a literary work influences how readers understand it (Bruss 4). Since Witt calls her *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür* an autobiography, readers expect to encounter a life narrative, in this case one that focuses on the author's Stasi file and her efforts to understand her past. As discussed in Chapter One, Cornelia Vismann contends that for most file-based autobiographies, "[t]he writing of the biography is prompted by a counterstatement: the authorial file, that is, the autobiographical book, is a denial of the inspected file" (Vismann *Files* 156). Hence, file-based autobiographies are, one would expect, fundamentally attempts to put the Stasi record straight.

Witt, however, wrote her book not to challenge her file but to salvage her public image. The self-image that emerges from her autobiography does come mostly from written sources, both from the press and from her own file; thus her life story remains record-based. It is a public construction that relies on her selection of passages from her record. However, unlike the other autobiographers examined here, Witt makes clear that her public image matters more to her account than her private experience.

Although autobiographical writing is usually based on the subject's personal perspective, Witt limits her book and thus her identity to material written by others, either in her file or in the mass media. Perhaps, one of the reasons for the importance she places on this material is that, as a person with a highly developed public reputation, she has long been defined by what has been written about her: it is through both sources that "[d]as ganze Subjekt zur Sprache gebracht wird" (Vismann "Personal"). The construction of her image, her public identity, is formed as Witt connects fragments from the mass media and from her file. She re-functionalizes her file to fulfill her own agenda: That is,

the file is a source of knowledge and autobiographical material which Witt uses as she wishes, in the process asserting that the data is hers (Vismann *Files* 150).<sup>94</sup> Rather than relying on this external media because of a lack of spontaneous memory, see Nora xxiv, Witt uses her file because of the authenticity that it brings to her narrative.

Since Witt transforms fragments of her file as a literary text to respond to the mass media, she can construct her own story of her life thus becoming a writing subject instead of written object of observation. This reversal of roles exists in the autobiographies of individuals like Lengsfeld who have suffered at the hands of the Stasi. However, in Witt's case the distinction between her as subject and object of her file is less clear. To be a subject is to freely act according to one's own will; to be an object, in contrast, means that one is subordinated to another's will. Although Witt presumably freely selected the passages from her file and media publications to include in her book, she nevertheless appears to limit her comments in response to what has already been written and reported on her instead of bringing new material into her file-based autobiography. Even when Witt also refutes the words of her file, she refers to other passages either from her file or from the mass media instead of distancing herself from these sources. It is as if these pieces of documentation appeared more authentic to her public as her own words.

Since the written documentation in her file has the appearance of authenticity in the eyes of her public, for Witt, unlike for the other autobiographers, reading her file is tantamount to acquiring authoritative evidence with which to counter the accusations of

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<sup>94</sup> "The genealogy of the subject from records returns to its point of origin: after census technologies have for centuries provided information that turned humans into an object of knowledge, this very same knowledge is returned to them as their personal data, of which they may dispose as they wish. In the eyes of the law, the census object becomes the sovereign of its data" (Vismann *Files* 150).

collaboration arising with the published passages from her file. That is, Witt reclaims her file from the media to support her own story of her time under observation, arguing that her record can help her redefine her public image:

Ich muß bei der Gauck-Behörde, die den Nachlaß der Stasi verwaltet, Einsicht in meine Akten beantragen. Tausende tun das jetzt. Es kann Monate dauern, bis der Antrag genehmigt wird. Mir wird schlecht bei dem Gedanken, daß ich vielleicht noch viele Wochen mit immer neuen Vorwürfen und Verdächtigungen leben muß. Ich kann Erklärungen abgeben, so viele ich will. Das wird als Verteidigung bewertet, nicht als Beweis. (*Jahre 14*)

As a direct response to detrimental claims in the media, Witt's file-based autobiography comprises a battle involving the power of the written word. Witt does not elaborate on what the media published but repeats the same information as the media about her intimate life, accusations of complicity in exchange for benefits, and her lack of interest in politics while pursuing her skating career. However, she stresses how, in the articles, she felt the power of the printed word working against her:

Ich hatte meine ersten Lektionen in Pressefreiheit schon hinter mir, ich hatte neue Begriffe gelernt: Unterlassungsklage, Gegendarstellung. Und ich hatte die Macht des gedruckten Wortes zu spüren bekommen: Keine Geschichte kann so falsch sein, als daß sie sich nicht bei einigen als Wahrheit festsetzt. Daran ändert dann auch eine Gegendarstellung nichts mehr. (*Jahre 11*)

Witt is particularly concerned with how statements appear to be no less than *evidence* when they are written, although they may actually be false or at least biased: "Wie viele solcher Berichte, wie viele solcher falschen Berichte wird es noch geben?" (28). However, because Witt provides no specific evidence of distortion in claims against her, readers are left to wonder which pieces of information were distorted. From these examples, Witt

emphasizes the authority of her file in the eyes of her public. As a result, she equally stresses how important it is for her to access this documentation in order to give authority and authenticity to her life account. However, she talks about the authority of the file as a theoretical concept in itself since she does not elaborate on the extent of the false reports that she read in it. Rather, she focuses on how the file's reports, being an official document, seem more valid than her own words from her public's perspective. It is in light of the Stasi file's documents that her public raised the issue of her complicity with the Stasi, not only because of her regular meetings with collaborators but also because of the benefits she received from that spy agency.

In fact, after the mass media accessed part of her file, one of the most damaging accusations against Witt was that she collaborated with the Stasi. In response to the mass media's allegations, Witt explains that any meetings she might have had with the Stasi were in no way related to her acting as an informal collaborator, and points out that she never signed the agreement to collaborate required of IMs. To support her position, she describes her conversation with two former Stasi informers after the media published the excerpts from her file; she asked them if she could have been an IM without her knowledge, as the press claims:

Es ist spät geworden, Gehlert, der dem Gespräch nur noch teilnahmslos folgt, will zurück nach Chemnitz. Diestel läßt ihm einen Chauffeur rufen. Ich will vorher noch eines wissen: 'Könnte es sein, daß ich ohne mein Wissen als Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin der Stasi, wie es mir vor einem Jahr vorgeworfen wurde, geführt wurde?' 'Sie waren keine Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin. Wenn Sie dies gewesen wären, hätten Sie zunächst eine Verpflichtung unterschreiben müssen. Haben Sie eine Verpflichtung unterschrieben?' 'Nein', sage ich. (*Jahre* 244)

Similarly, she refers to another time when she refused to consent to collaborate: a man, presumably a Stasi collaborator or officer, handed her a picture of herself and asked

Schreib doch einfach: Für Herrn Mielke, immer im Dienst der Staatssicherheit, Ihre Katarina Witt. Das habe ich nicht gemacht. Da habe ich draufgeschrieben: Für Herrn Mielke, zur freundlichen Erinnerung.

Also, der wollte unbedingt, daß ich mit der Staatssicherheit schreibe, und dann hätte er ja praktisch eine Verpflichtungserklärung gehabt. (*Jahre* 245)

These examples are clearly intended to show her refusal to collaborate with the Stasi.

However, the Stasi required no written consent from those willing to work as contact people (“Kontaktpersonen” in German or KPs) for the Stasi: “KPs, though sworn to secrecy, did not enter into a binding and official commitment to the Stasi but they did provide information about neighbours, work colleagues and others, and were often recruited as IMs at a later stage” (Dennis 92). Accordingly, Witt may have indirectly collaborated with the Stasi by providing information and swearing to keep her informing secret, even if no written evidence of her doing so exists.<sup>95</sup> In fact, despite this lack of written consent, Witt certainly met with Stasi officers and she is likely to have passed on information:

Despite not being an official informer and being subjected to Stasi surveillance, Witt, perhaps out of self-interest, did have regular contact and a friendly relationship with the Stasi to the point that in 1986 she inquired as to how one would become a Stasi agent . . . . Referring to it [the Stasi] as a ‘partner’ and as a key contributor to her athletic success, the skater [Witt herself] reassured the Stasi that it did not need to open her mail since she informed ‘the MfS’ . . . about everything. (Hewitt 115)

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<sup>95</sup> An oath of commitment was not always obtained, especially for individuals concerned about their public image or the repercussion that such evidence could have in their life in the future (Dennis 97).

The question then arises whether her meetings with the Stasi suffice to support the accusations of collaboration raised against her. Close involvement with the Stasi might have been unavoidable; the department XXB of the Stasi, the “main body for the organization and coordination of sport” (Dennis 133), took particular interest in top athletes because their victory served to “demonstrate the alleged superiority of socialism over capitalism” (132). In the Stasi’s eyes, it was therefore essential to continuously assess athletes’ loyalty to the state.<sup>96</sup> During conversations with the Stasi it would not have been possible for Witt to evaluate the impact and future use of her words. The Stasi could and did assemble new or more complete statements from what the many people they talked to said; Witt, like many others, could have in this way unknowingly been an informer (even if her statements were written later on by interested parties distorting what she had said). Witt is not the only one in such a position where she was benefitting from the state and kept quiet about the GDR’s unethical practices because it was advantageous to do so. Further, she was talking to the Stasi regularly, perhaps unintentionally passing on useful information that the Stasi later used. In fact, Witt is one among many who – be it out of fear or in exchange of privileges – took no action against the unethical practices of the state. Nevertheless, even in the absence of her written consent to do so, if Witt won com-

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<sup>96</sup> There is no information on the exact number of athletes involved with the Stasi. However, the Stasi’s concern about the GDR’s athletes outshining those from capitalist countries is attested to by the numerous doping stories involving East German athletes. Some of these stories led to drastic health complications: “Todesfälle durch Doping, Verabreichung von verbotenen Substanzen auch an Minderjährige ohne Wissen deren Eltern, alles das gab es dort – nur eben keine konsequenten staatsanwaltschaftlichen Ermittlungen und schon gar keine Gerichtsverfahren” (Wonnenberger 360). However, no one was spared in the state’s efforts to showcase its superiority. Although Witt makes no mention of doping, evidence from her Stasi file shows that her trainer, Müller, collaborated with the Stasi (Witt *Jahre* 137) and was under strict orders to keep Witt a world champion.

petitions that served to embellish and support the image of the GDR, these are acts of compliance with the GDR totalitarian state and could therefore be considered acts of collaboration.

Witt's situation raises issues about what should be expected of public figures representing a state that disregards human rights. And how should that public figure react when her state collapses? That Witt has been criticized for having benefitted from the system instead of working to protect human rights in the GDR suggests that the public's expectations are higher for those in the public eye than for ordinary citizens.

Jauch, in contrast, was criticized by her sister for not supporting the GDR. In fact, Jauch claims that even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, her family still does not accept that her reason for leaving the GDR — that it was an unrealistic utopia (Jauch "Personal"). Witt, however, was criticized for supporting the system. People with public images such as writers, politicians, and elite athletes are perceived as bearing extra social responsibility for their ideological convictions: unlike ordinary citizens, they — through their words and acts — are models for many others. Thus, whatever support they lend the political power of their state reinforces and perpetuates its power, no matter how illegitimate its foundations are.

Rather than addressing these charges by discussing the ethical matters touched on above, Witt attempts to avoid them, portraying herself as a young, successful athlete ignorant of the actual state of affairs in the GDR. At the same time, however, she defends the socialist system by arguing that capitalism is not necessarily a better political model:

Ich hatte nicht nur den Glanz im Westen gesehen, sondern auch Armut, Elend, Slums. Wir hatten nicht das Gefühl, daß wir aus einem Armenhaus kommen und das Paradies besichtigen dürfen [...W]ir waren davon überzeugt, daß wir

vieles von dem, was wir nicht hatten, auch nicht brauchten.  
(*Jahre 22-23*)

Witt concludes here by arguing that since she believed that the West was no better than the East, there is no reason to criticize her Heimat at the time.

However, it is doubtful that she really had no knowledge of conditions in the GDR before the Wende: she argues that it would have been hypocritical to act like a “Wendehals” or a turncoat, writing “[e]s wäre vermutlich opportun gewesen, hätte ich mich als heimliche Widerstandskämpferin enttarnt und unsere Politiker als Verbrecher bezeichnet. Ich wollte und konnte mich aber der Clique derer nicht anschließen, die man bei uns Wendehälse nannte” (*Jahre 18-19*). Here, however, her feeling that she did not want to describe the politicians as criminals suggests that she is aware of the possibly criminal politics operating in the GDR. Her intention not to act as turncoat implies that she saw this possibility, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Witt nevertheless continues to protest her innocence, emphasizing her ignorance of the unethical policies in effect in the GDR:

Ich konnte und wollte mich von ihm [meinem Staat] nicht distanzieren, solange ich nicht selbst wußte, welches Unrecht dort Menschen angetan wurde, welche Verbrechen gegen die Umwelt begangen wurden. (*Jahre 7-8*)

She claims that she did not distance herself from the former GDR because she was ignorant of the circumstances in which most people lived. Witt explains that she lived in a rarified world where skating was everything: “Ich lebte in einer eigenen Welt, gut abgeschottet von den Problemen, die es für mich hätte geben können” (*Jahre 252*). Yet one



wonders the extent to which she purposely avoided learning about her country's political and moral corruption.

Moreover, Witt's argument that her lack of action against the GDR's politics was to protect her career rather than to show her loyalty to the state<sup>97</sup> also suggests that she knew about the Stasi's unethical practices. If she had been truly unaware of the GDR's socio-political circumstances, she would not have mentioned that her career was her main concern, no matter the unethical practices being practiced until the collapse of the GDR and the lack of human rights other East Germans suffered in contrast to Witt's privileged life. Witt's role as successful athlete was to restore the deteriorating image of the GDR. However, the fact that this system was heading to its own collapse should have alerted Witt that she was supporting a defective political system and, by extension, supporting a system that was unethical and depended on its athletes as the only positive sign of its alleged superiority over capitalist countries (*Jahre* 205). The ethical issue remains whether athletes, being the only positive side of the totalitarian state, should support it.

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<sup>97</sup> Witt says in other instances that she told everything to the state, that she owes everything to it. Although she did not consent in writing to collaborate with the Stasi, she was clearly willing to trust them. A quotation from her file reads that "Katarina WITT sieht im Ministerium für Staatssicherheit einen Partner, dem sie alle Probleme und Sorgen, bis hin zu ihren Beziehungen zu Männern, anvertrauen kann und auch Rat und Unterstützung im Rahmen des Möglichen erhält, was ihr teilweise beim Sportclub versagt bleibt" (*Jahre* quoting from her file 173). Most likely, Witt would never have jeopardized her career by opposing the GDR: "Und dem [meinem Land] bin ich auch nach wie vor dankbar. Aber jetzt ist mir auch bewußt geworden, warum der Sportler so gefördert worden ist. Weil wir das einzige Aushängeschild unserer Republik waren, weil ja leider unsere Wirtschaft total am Boden war" (Witt *Jahre* 205). In this passage, not only does she recognize that the political system of the GDR is in decline, but she also identifies herself as supporting it by functioning as its "Aushängeschild."

Furthermore, in 1979, during a trip to America for a pre-Olympic competition at Lake Placid when she was thirteen, she was already wondering why so few people in the GDR were allowed to travel: “Das war es das erste Mal, daß mir durch den Kopf ging: Mit unserem Land kann etwas nicht stimmen” (*Jahre* 61). However, even when writing her autobiography, she does not go to the bottom of *why* this is the case and why she is benefiting from a system that deprives other citizens of the same travel rights. Nine years later, Witt still says nothing on these matters when a journalist asks her about human rights in the GDR during the 1988 Olympics. Her reluctance to address these issues in public right after her gold medal win is understandable. She is duplicitous in her writing, and it is not surprising that in private and in her file-based autobiography, she does not explore that issue further when she narrates her reaction to the specific question on human rights that a journalist asked her after she won the gold medal during the 1988 Olympics:

Eine Pressekonferenz findet statt – es kommen über sechshundert Journalisten, das hat es im Eiskunstlauf noch nie gegeben. Ich bin völlig konsterniert, und als auch noch einer fragt, ob ich glaube, daß in der DDR Menschenrechte beachtet werden, falle ich vor Schreck beinahe vom Stuhl. Menschenrechte?

Ich sage, das habe schon alles seine Ordnung bei uns, denn ich denke an das Recht auf Arbeit, auf eine Wohnung und daran, daß keiner hungern muß. Reisefreiheit, Pressefreiheit, Meinungsfreiheit? Ich sehe die Bedingungen, mit denen ich aufgewachsen bin, als völlig normal an. Aber ich gerate bei dieser Frage schon ein wenig ins Stocken. (*Jahre* 164)

Even in her file-based autobiography, she presents herself as someone who still does not understand the problems associated with the politics of the GDR, although she states that she has been concerned about human rights in her country since she was thirteen.

Frankly, the reader has little choice but to conclude that Witt claims that politics was and still is of no immediate concern to her because she does not want to jeopardize her career ambitions. In this light, autobiography appears intended to justify her intense focus on her career:

Und dann wäre es mit meiner Karriere vorbei gewesen.<sup>98</sup>  
Ich wollte Eislaufen, und ich war nicht so mutig wie vielleicht Kurt Masur. Aber ich war auch gerade mal zwanzig.<sup>99</sup> Da verlangen Sie etwas viel. Und nach der Wende plötzlich mutig zu werden, alle verdammen, so tun, als wäre ich schon immer dagegen gewesen, das wollte ich nicht, da wäre ich mir schäbig vorgekommen. (Witt *Jahre* 23)

From Witt's perspective, her autobiography could make the difference between public failure and success. The media publications of fragments from her file meant that she had to answer the difficult questions she had been avoiding to that point: Regardless of whether or not she had provided written consent to help the Stasi or whether she was as ignorant as she had appeared of the GDR's policies, she had at least passively supported a corrupt political system. Her book is thus her attempt to forward arguments that could atone for her decision to pursue her own passion instead of concerning herself with the validity of the system which supported her development as a world champion.

Witt's narrative voice, like her picture on the cover of her autobiography, suggests that she feels that due to the press, after the Wende she has lost her status as the "most

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<sup>98</sup> There is, unfortunately, no comprehensive statistics on athletes who had to abandon their careers because they refused to collaborate, as the film *Der Tunnel* depicts. However, one can reasonably deduce that athletes who pursued their sports careers for opportunistic reasons (fame, travel or financial benefits) also supported the system which allowed the fulfillment of their dreams.

<sup>99</sup> She was actually already twenty-three years old when these Olympics took place and she was asked about human rights abuses in the GDR.

beautiful face of socialism” (Witt *Jahre* 203).<sup>100</sup> She complains about her loss of popularity: “Immer war ich bisher die Katarina, die Kati – Frau Witt war ich noch nie. Katarina, Kati, das ist die Eiskunstläuferin, die Weltmeisterin, Olympiasiegerin. Mit einer, die verdächtigt wird, Menschen an die Stasi verraten zu haben, Freunde, Sportler, ist man nicht mehr so vertraut. Man geht auf Distanz. Frau Witt” (*Jahre* 11). Witt draws goes on to draw a contrast between her prestige prior to 1989 and the disapproval she encountered afterwards:

Ich bin mit meinen Kräften total am Ende, soll aber auch noch pausenlos Erklärungen zur DDR abgeben, zu den Veränderungen in dem Staat, in dem ich aufgewachsen bin, den ich noch immer und trotz allem als meine Heimat betrachte. Es wird von mir erwartet, daß ich mich jetzt in Abscheu ergehe, alles schlimm finde, was bei uns war. Ich bin dazu nicht bereit, mir fehlen auch noch die Informationen für ein endgültiges Urteil. Plötzlich bin ich nicht mehr ‘das schönste Gesicht des Sozialismus’, wie vor eineinhalb Jahren, nach Calgary. Ich bin die ‘SED-Ziege.’ (*Jahre* 203)

In this passage Witt shows the form of sacrifice that public figures must face once the system they support eventually collapses. She depicts herself in face of public criticism as if she never expected that this kind of sacrifice after the demise of the GDR, as if to evoke sympathy for her case. However, going back to the initial pages of her file-based autobiography, one realizes that Witt contradicts herself. In fact, in the beginning chapter of her account, Witt emphasizes that the privilege of being a successful athlete requires

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<sup>100</sup> This photograph stands in vivid contrast to the other picture of herself on the cover of *Only with Passion*, where she is dressed as Carmen during her victorious performance of the 1988 Olympics. The last picture of herself at the back of *Only with Passion* shows an equally dominant Witt who looks simultaneously determined and feminine. In contrast, on the cover page of *Meine Jahre zwischen Pflicht und Kür*, Witt is pretty but emotionally hurt because of the sad facial expressions, in particular her mouth and eyebrows.

sacrifice: “[I]ch müßte lügen, würde ich sagen, daß mir die Aufmerksamkeit, das Auftreten in der Öffentlichkeit nicht gefällt – und ich weiß, daß das auch Opfer verlangt” (Witt *Jahre* 8), meaning sacrifice. Her case shows her reputation being sacrificed to public forces. Had the mass media not published extracts from her file, she would probably not have made the claim that she was a victim of the Stasi.

However, if one considers the quality of life that her career entitled her to, Witt, unlike dissidents, peace activists, or other citizens, never experienced what it meant to be a *victim* of the Stasi. Her position as role model and Aushängeschild of the former socialist state came with significant privileges: she enjoyed material benefits (a new apartment, a new car) and permission to travel abroad, factors that bring into question her claim that she was a political victim. Witt herself admits that her privileges exceeded by far what the general population could ever expect:

Wenn ein Staat, in dem nur wenige in den Westen reisen dürfen, bekannt wird, daß ich angeblich für meine Erfolge mit einem Luxus-Urlaub belohnt werde, ist das für die Menschen wie ein Schlag ins Gesicht. Zumal sie wissen, daß sie mit ihrer Arbeit die Grundlage für unsere sportlichen Erfolge schaffen, daß der Staat einen Teil des von ihnen erwirtschafteten Geldes für uns Sportler ausgibt. Das allein schon war Grund genug, eine Gegendarstellung zu verlangen. (*Jahre* 17)

In fact, evidence from her Stasi file that shows how the MfS was ready to comply with her every wish to ensure her loyalty to the country: “Der Leiter der Bezirksverwaltung entgegnet darauf, daß man aber nur einmal zentralerseite Katarina Witt auf das ‘Goldene Tablett’ gesetzt habe und nun müsse man auch ihre Wünsche erfüllen, weil sonst sofort ‘andere’ da sind, die ihren Wünschen nachkommen” (Witt *Jahre* 189). According to this passage, Witt was not a victim of the Stasi. However, what determines if someone was

victim or not of the Stasi is whether or not the Stasi file of that individual portrays that person as a victim.<sup>101</sup> In fact, according to Witt's layer and to Vismann, the status of victim depends exclusively on the classification found in the file. According to Vismann, "die Zuordnung zu einer der anderen Personenkategorien, die jeweils über die Reichweite des Einsichtsrechts entscheiden, ergibt sich aus den Akten, in die Einsicht begehrt wird, und nur daraus" (Vismann Files 311).

However, if one considers the efforts that the Stasi made to keep her in the GDR, she is not a victim. Witt learns from her file that Stasi employees are concerned that she might not come back to the East after international competitions, so they want to make clear that they have done their best in case she decides not to return to her Heimat (189). These statements give rise to more ambiguity about her situation as potentially both an elite athlete (and by extension, beneficiary of the Stasi) and a victim (someone who has been spied on and whose life has been modified by the file). Yet although in the above passage Witt shows how her file enables her to remember the socio-political circum-

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<sup>101</sup> In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall people who had collaborated with the Stasi, even if only partially, would not like to take responsibility for acts of compliance and therefore ask to be considered a victim of this spy agency under the pretext that they were under observation and had a file, just like other data subjects. However, having a Stasi file does not necessarily imply that one was a victim of the Stasi. In some cases, individuals who first benefitted from the Stasi eventually turned against the system and thus became its victims. As a result, it was necessary for a third party like the BStU, prior to making a judgment on the innocence of these data subjects to access the specific information in their Stasi files that would enable them to determine the nature that these persons' relationship with the Stasi. Additionally, the file plays such an authoritative function in determining who were victim and who was not since the rights to privacy of the perpetrators (non-victims) are inferior than those of the victims in the eventuality that the public media or scholars request to see (and study) the files of these data subjects. The Stasi files of contemporary figures of interest like Witt for instance could be available to the press but not in its entirety if some passages predestined her as victim of the Stasi. These specific pages would not be available to the public due to the victims' right to privacy.

stances surrounding her past under observation, she simultaneously demonstrates how, if one takes into consideration the advantages that it brings her to be the “Aushängeschild” of the GDR, she is in no way a victim of the Stasi.

Attempting to justify herself and the luxurious world in which she thrives, Witt juxtaposes these reports of the benefits she enjoyed with claims that money, after all, does not interest her beyond certain limits: “Mein Interesse am Reichtum hält sich wirklich in Grenzen. Ich will meine Siege und Medaillen nicht als Kreditkarten ansehen, die mir den Eintritt in eine Luxuswelt ermöglichen. Meine Welt ist immer noch die DDR” (*Jahre* 190). However, her success on ice does indeed transform into benefits — specifically, credit cards. Despite her love of ice skating, she would probably not have undergone so much turmoil or pain had she not also received recognition and financial benefits. In fact, her life was shaped by the privileges that she received after winning competitions, as Witt herself acknowledges: “Dieser Staat hat mir Privilegien eingeräumt, weil ich Sportlerin war. Ich habe sie genossen, wie andere auch, Künstler, Wissenschaftler” (*Jahre* 208). Witt’s benefitting from the Stasi distinguishes her from other data subjects, who were exclusively victims. Since Witt knew that her victories could translate into social and economical benefits, one could argue that she collaborated with the Stasi, receiving state support in exchange for the GDR benefitting from the positive image of socialism that her victories presented.

Witt nevertheless argues that the fact the Stasi observed her supports her claim that she was victimized by the system. Focusing on the crucial role that Stasi files can play in directly altering people’s destinies, she emphasizes how the MfS manipulated her life. With an argument that brings to mind the last scene in *Das Leben der Anderen*, Witt

claims that her encounter with her file caused her to reconsider the extent to which her file mediated her life. She focuses particularly on the failure of her relationship with Ingo (*Jahre* 149) and her participation in an international figure skating competition (136).

Here, Witt advances her argument in order to control the public's opinion of her, using her Stasi file as a tool to provide evidence that insofar as the Stasi infringed on her privacy, she should be considered its victim:

Diese paar Zeilen, die ich aus meiner Stasi-Akte lese, bedeuten: Ich wurde beobachtet, im Hotelzimmer belauscht, Telefongespräche wurden abgehört – und ein vermuteter, nur in einem fremden Kopf und nicht wirklich stattgefundener Intimverkehr wurde als Tatsache an die nächste Instanz weitergegeben. Wie viele solcher Berichte, wie viele solcher falschen Berichte wird es noch geben? Wo war die Stasi überall dabei, ohne daß ich es wußte[?] (*Jahre* 28)

When Witt refers, as she does here, to how imagined life scenarios were written into her file, she exemplifies Derrida's theory that files have the tendency to construct rather than to record events. As former data subjects argue, their files, unlike other records, directly affect their lives; rather than simply storing information about their pasts, their Stasi files also orchestrate the "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen" that affect their futures.

However, the few "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen" employed in her case differ from those undertaken to literally destroy the reputations and careers of dissidents. Other authors complain about the harsh treatment aimed at destroying her psychologically, while others point to the Stasi's criminal machinations (Lengsfeld "Personal") and illegitimate procedures designed to eliminate the *enemy*. In fact, the Stasi had no intention of damaging Witt in any way; rather, the MfS gave her every wish on a "golden tray" (Witt *Jahre* 189, trans. C.K.R.). The MfS intervened in her life only insofar as it appeared necessary



from the Stasi's point of view to protect her from distractions that could affect her performances; the Stasi intended to support Witt to assure her success, and by extension assert the GDR's athletic superiority internationally (Dennis 132). Witt chooses not to disregard these roles the Stasi played in her life because she wants to depict herself as a victim of the MfS.

To help shape this self-portrait, Witt cleverly documents how her life was closely observed, documented, and manipulated by the Stasi. For instance, she provides excerpts from her file proving that the state sabotaged her relationship with Ingo. The increased insight into her past that Witt gained by reading her Stasi file exemplifies the first purpose of the *Stasi Files Act*. In that her reading of these parts of her file influences the way she remembers her past under observation, she reconsiders her memories and gains insight into instances when the Stasi, by interfering in her life, can be said to have reduced her to a victim. Her file also led Witt to question her relationships with friends or colleagues who betrayed her trust by working for the Stasi. Witt even finds confirmation in her file that the plan to destroy her relationship with Ingo had succeeded: "Eine Bestätigung, daß diese Verbindung abgebrochen wurde, erhielt ich am 11.09.1984, als die Trainerin Jutta Müller eine diesbezügliche Aussprache mit der W. führte. Da ich mich im gleichen Raum hinter einer Abtrennung befand, konnte ich wesentliche Teile mitanhören" (Witt *Jahre* 120). Had her file not been open, Witt may never have guessed how instrumental that IM had been in terminating her relationship with Ingo. The file replaces her memories of that rupture as it provides her evidence of its causes; the evidence of how the IM interfered into that relationship shows how the Stasi attempted to write the lives of their data subjects instead of purely observing and recording it. Witt refers to her

file as if it stored her life story and could, as a result, replace her memories, in particular those concerning her relationship with Ingo and her participation in various championships. In other words, Witt felt that her Stasi record often corrected her erroneous perceptions of her past. The sense that this revising of memories conveys to the reader is that Witt had no knowledge of the Stasi's role in her life, a stance that supports her claim to be a victim being unknowingly manipulated by the state.

The emotional injury that Witt suffered by her relationship with Ingo being broken was exacerbated by her discovery that the IM behind that event was rewarded for the damage she did to Witt: "Zunächst einmal liefert der IM Sch. einen bemerkenswerten Bericht ab. Sch., das ist der, der für seine Arbeit bei der Trennung von Ingo mit der bevorzugten Zuweisung eines Wartburg belohnt werden sollte. Und der IM ist eigentlich eine Sie" (Witt *Jahre* 131). Witt's Stasi record informs her about the reward that the IM received after the successful breakup. This report in particular provides her with a strong evidence of MfS informers benefitting at the detriment of the subjects of observation. This information alone could support her position as a victim of informers; but Witt keeps quiet the fact that the Stasi ultimately seeks to distance Ingo from her not for the personal gains of IMs but for fear that he would jeopardize her success: Witt was indeed the GDR's most significant symbol of success, especially important because by this point the GDR was gradually eroding.

As a result of her figurehead importance to the state, Witt's training and competing were closely monitored and influenced by the Stasi. However, since her athletic success made her so valuable, it remained in the Stasi's best interests to ensure Witt's loyalty to her *Heimat* and carefully assess the competitions she participated in: For example,

fearing she might defect to the West and so hoping to prevent any contact between Witt and her relatives there, one informer argues that Witt should not participate in the Europameisterschaft, an international European championship. Witt includes in her autobiography the following report from her file: “Aufgrund dieser weiter bestehenden Konfliktsituation [having relatives in the West] bitte ich Sie, über die Zentrale Einfluß darauf nehmen zu lassen, daß die Witt nicht für die Teilnahme an der EM nominiert wird” (*Jahre* quoting from her file 136). However, another Stasi collaborator argues in Witt’s favour because her participation in the competition aligns itself better with the goals of the GDR: “Einerseits erkenne er die sicherheitspolitische Brisanz des Sachverhaltes an, andererseits müsse man auch beachten, daß eine Nichtteilnahme an der EM politisch negative Auswirkungen zum Schaden der DDR haben kann” (Witt *Jahre* quoting from her file 136). As she read her file Witt perceived that the influence of the Stasi on her life was not always negative. Most of the informers had not wronged her; in fact, Witt recognized that many of them actually protected her: “Wenn ich dort nach meiner Zukunft frage, nach den Plänen, die man mit mir hat, bekomme ich keine klaren Auskünfte. Aber ich habe Helfer. Ich habe sie mir nicht gesucht. Sie haben sich in mein Leben gedrängt. Die Männer von der Stasi” (*Jahre* 169).

Overall, then, Witt’s claims that she was victimized by the Stasi are undermined by her own contradictory observations. The protection that she enjoys from the Stasi resembles that provided to Dreyman by the collaborator in *Das Leben der Anderen*. As Witt notes: “[F]ast alle von ihnen haben nichts getan, um mir zu schaden. Manche haben mich sogar geschützt, wenn es nötig und auch möglich war. Das geht aus den Akten klar hervor. Bis auf den IM Sch., der sich so sehr und eine Weile auch mit Erfolg bemüht hat,

Ingo und mich zu trennen” (*Jahre* 254). In fact, Witt’s situation makes clear that merely being a “data subject” or observed does not make one a victim; it simply means that information is collected and life decisions may be influenced by the Stasi, for better or worse. One cannot argue that being observed in itself victimizes the subject of observation, especially if that information is not used against that subject and if the act of spying on that individual has no repercussion on that individual’s life. Many people believed to be spied by the Stasi at any time even though this was not the case. Due to this conviction of living under observation, they may have behaved differently and censored their own conversations. They were suffering from fear of total surveillance but were not victims of the Stasi. Other data subjects who lived under surveillance neither knew nor suspected the Stasi’s presence in their lives. Further, these data subjects may not have felt so much the negative impact than the protection of the Stasi in their lives and therefore cannot be considered victims the same way other data subjects were victims of the Stasi when the Stasi destroyed their lives, careers or relationships. In Witt’s case, most decisions likely protected her or at least did her no harm while bolstering the GDR’s international image.

Except for her break-up with Ingo, Witt discusses no other occasions on which her life was negatively influenced by her file, although she does write about the clues in her file that prove how the Stasi intervened in her life:

Nachdem ich 27 Aktenordner mit 3103 Seiten gelesen habe, weiß ich ein wenig mehr. Es wäre besser, ich hätte manches nicht erfahren. So anders wollte ich Ereignisse, Personen im Nachhinein nicht sehen. Es wäre mir lieber, ich hätte nicht erkennen müssen, wieviel in meinem Leben nicht von mir selbst bestimmt, sondern von anderen gelenkt, auch manipuliert war. (Witt *Jahre* 254)

In order to support her argument that she was more a victim than a beneficiary of the Stasi, Witt would have to provide additional evidence from her file of the Stasi's direct, negative influence on her life, thus allowing readers to judge for themselves how much the Stasi influenced on her life and consequently victimized her. Given that such evidence is missing but that Witt does describe the privileges and support she received from the Stasi (Witt *Jahre* 254), her account makes a better argument that she loyally collaborated with the Stasi than that she was its victim.

As she remembers her past under observation, Witt feels that she had no private life. Although like Ash Witt describes how reading her file revives her memories, in contrast to Ash and Lengsfeld she is primarily shocked that so many informers around her were recording her activities. Thus, Witt sees her file as indicating, by the constant presence of observers in her life, that she has been victimized.<sup>102</sup>

Vieles ist im Kopf schon verschüttet. Es ist erschreckend, daß es ausgerechnet mit Hilfe der Akten wieder zum Vorschein kommt. Auch wenn die ganzen IMS und die Offizie-

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<sup>102</sup> Ash, Lengsfeld, and Jauch in contrast to Witt feel that the presence of the Stasi in their lives or those of their acquaintances is potentially highly dangerous. Like many other data subjects, these three authors point to the criminal purposes for which the data was collected. Ash explains that the MfS observed and recorded his activities to support their suspicion that he was a spy (Ash 27). Lengsfeld describes how her then-husband delivered information to the Stasi that could have resulted in her being imprisoned for many years (Wollenberger 152). Jauch provides evidence from her file that the reports on her were meant to discredit her and her husband by portraying them as criminals for having attempted to flee the GDR illegally (Jauch "Personal"). Witt, in contrast, sees in her file how the Stasi has shaped her personal life and career, but makes no complaint about the MfS's data collection procedures themselves. For Witt the issue is how to rectify her public image. And Witt is simply curious to discover how much the Stasi really knew about her: "Was wird darüber in den Akten stehen? Was über Ingo? Was über... wie nenne ich den Mann, der mir so viel bedeutet hat, noch ein großer Unbekannter, von dem ich nicht will, daß er identifiziert wird? Ich nenne ihn Marco. Was wußte die Stasi über Marco? Ich brenne vor Neugier, ich könnte noch stundenlang lesen" (*Jahre* 96).

re bisher vor allem Ereignisse notiert haben, über die ich heute schmunzeln kann – mir wird eiskalt bei dem Gedanken, daß da Menschen waren, so viele, deren Aufgabe es war, alles aufzuschreiben, was ich gemacht, gesagt, gedacht habe. (*Jahre 96*)

It is unlikely that she was unaware of the Stasi's presence in her life prior to her encounter with the file, especially since she was a public figure living in the GDR and aware of how important the MfS regarded sports to be to the country's image (Dennis 133). She may have been surprised to learn that her file started when she was only seven years old; nonetheless, it remains improbable that the existence of her Stasi file was a complete surprise to her. Rather, her comments and inclusions of excerpts from her file appear aimed at changing the public's views on her by presenting her as a sympathetic Stasi victim.

In addition, Witt emphasizes her lack of freedom in order to illustrate her status as victim: "In der DDR konnte ich kaum einen Schritt tun, kaum ein Wort sagen, ohne daß die Stasi nicht informiert war. Jetzt kann ich mich kaum bewegen, ohne daß ein Journalist hinter mir herhechelt. Und ich kann kaum ein Wort sagen, das nicht gegen mich verwendet wird" (*Jahre 208*). From this point of view, Witt is victim of the press attention that robs her of privacy<sup>103</sup>. In an interview with 3SAT, she is asked, "Fühlst du dich von einem Teil der früheren Regierung der DDR auch irgendwo in deiner Gutmütigkeit mißbraucht?" to which she replies: "Ich fühle mich auch total mißbraucht, im Grunde genommen" (*Jahre 205*).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> However, lack of privacy does not mean lack of freedom. In fact, Witt had more freedom than the average East German citizen, given that she participated to numerous international competitions and received financial benefits surpassing those of the general German population.

<sup>104</sup> There are no statistics on the exact circumstances under which talented athletes were allowed to travel.

Witt seems to use her Stasi record as a tool with which to deflect public accusations. Just like the tabloid reporters who feature her, Witt capitalizes on superficially compelling information about herself. As she engages in her book in acts of counter-memory regarding her intimate life and her weight issues, Witt merely uses the same literary strategies as those reporters, using the key words “intimate life” and “weight issues” to attract her readers’ attention and curiosity on herself without nevertheless providing detailed explanations on these trivial aspects of her life or on other facets of her life that may be more significant in rectifying her public image than those topics already discussed in tabloids.

Witt brings a specific example from her file that shows how the file engages her in counter-memories in order to illustrate how this document can shape her public’s vision of her although the file in question must be read from a critical point of view since not all of its details are true or significant about the life of the data subject in question. The first rumour taken from her file that she mentions is one already disseminated by the mass media: “Ich muß mich beherrschen, obwohl es mir wirklich schwerfällt. *Intimverkehr* von 20.00 Uhr bis 20.07, das wäre denn doch ein bißchen flüchtig gewesen, wenn er denn wirklich stattgefunden hätte, der *Intimverkehr*. Ich erinnere mich genau. November ’88, Hotel Bellevue in Dresden” (Witt *Jahre* 27). Witt asserts that this report is a fabrication: She remembers that evening differently. At the same time, however, the report prompts her to question the circumstances that may have led the Stasi to imagine that she was having this love affair, and referring to a possible love affair with her competition partner, the skater Brian Boitano, she notes: “Die Liebesgeschichte findet nur im Drehbuch statt. Es gab keinen *Intimverkehr*, den haben die Lauscher einfach erfunden.

Vielleicht war es ihnen peinlich, daß sie kein Englisch verstanden und deshalb nicht viel berichten konnten. Brian Boitano ist für mich der ideale Partner – auf dem Eis” (*Jahre* 186). Like tabloid reporters, Stasi informers collected pieces of information that could satisfy the curiosity of their supervisors. In her turn, Witt uses them to undermine the significance and ultimate purpose of details reported in her file altogether.

With regard to her weight issue, it seems as if Witt simply wants to mock the contents of her file: “War ich damals wirklich so fett? Ich denke, der IMS Sch., wer immer das war, hat maßlos übertrieben. Viereinhalb Kilo können es nicht gewesen sein” (*Jahre* 96). She refers to herself as *fat* with a certain humour. Here she is providing details that satisfy the public’s taste of personal, emotional tidbits about the life of a star. Rather than elaborating about the memories prompted by her file, Witt dwells on the memories that replace those reviewed by her file.

Witt does not seem to take seriously the influence of the file into her life as she recaps events recorded by the secret informers. Aware that they reported intimate details of her life in her file, Witt appears curious to discover how successfully she hid<sup>105</sup> the identity of her lovers from informal collaborators in charge of her case and not in exposing their negative influence on her intimate life, as she seemed to be when she narrated about her break from Ingo. In contrast to the others sitting in the rooms of the Gauck Behörde where people are permitted to read their Stasi files, Witt seems amused by the Stasi’s misinterpretations of her life events. “Es ist interessant, in der eigenen Vergangenheit spazierenzugehen” (*Jahre* 96):

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<sup>105</sup> When Witt ponders on how successfully she hid the identity of her lovers to her informers, she gives further evidence that she was aware at that time that the Stasi kept her under observation.



Ich fange an zu lachen und erschrecke im gleichen Augenblick. Mein Lachen ist oft so hoch, da müßte sich eine Sopranistin ganz schön anstrengen. Es zerreit die Stille in diesem Raum – und das ist nun wirklich kein Ort für Heiterkeitsausbrüche. Hier sind Menschen auf der Suche nach ihrer Vergangenheit, die einen tragen ihre Verbitterung im Gesicht, die anderen ihre Angst. Die einen sind voll voller Hoffnung auf eine endlich fällige Gerechtigkeit, die anderen in dumpfer Furcht vor überfälliger Strafe. (*Jahre* 27)

However, Witt's laughter here at the absurd account of her sexual behaviour contrasts with the tension, as suggested by their silence, that others reading their files feel. Witt seems to mention these observations in her file to undermine the credibility of the media's portrayal on her. That is, if the MfS recorded trivial information wrongly, more serious details, including those about collaboration or other involvement with the Stasi might also be erroneous. In this way, Witt seeks to undermine the credibility not only of the tabloid stories about her, but of her file itself, perhaps in an attempt to dampen public interest in it. Yet all of these topics in Witt's book serve simply to distract her readers from the author's primary purpose in writing her autobiography: to justify herself in the public eye.

Witt's use of only publicly available information in her book limits the self-image she produces in *Jahre* which raises the question of whether she actually delivers what she says she has set out to: A portrait of the "real" Witt (Witt *Jahre* 8). Witt also describes her file-based autobiography as a healing and learning process, claiming that in part the latter goal emerges from her deeper reflection on her role in the former GDR: "Mir hat es geholfen, vieles besser zu verstehen. Zum Beispiel meine Rolle in der DDR, in dem Staat, der meine Heimat war" (8). However, Witt says almost nothing about either

what she has learned from her role in the former GDR or the healing process that she experienced thereafter.

Rather, Witt's account is her response to what she clearly felt was a devastating and unfair attack in the media on her public image and her ego. Very likely, then, behind her repeated claim that the writing of autobiographies is most often related to healing processes (Chandler x) Witt intended to assemble information from the mass media and her file simply to achieve her personal and political agenda of restoring her public image.

Her file-based autobiography illustrates, as the other file-based autobiographies also do, how autobiographers can appropriate others' reports on their lives in order to structure personal life narratives and put forward their agendas. In Witt's case, her goal is to change public perception of her. As Witt uses the memory processes initiated by her reading of her hostile file to write her life story, she is re-writing her life through the eyes of others. By showing the example of the influence of the Stasi on her relationship with Ingo as well as her participation to international competitions, she suggests that her file and the mass media have not only recorded her life but also constructed it. However, the inconsistencies in her argumentation put into question the extent to which she is either a collaborator or a victim. As a result, Witt's life story encourages close consideration of the effects of inserting files into the literary, personal, and political contexts of autobiographies.

## 7 Anke Jauch's *Die Stasi packt zu*

Anke Jauch's file-based autobiography *Die Stasi packt zu* starts as a personal testimony narrated partly by Jauch's Stasi file. Jauch intends to convey her memories of Germany's past before reunification: "Mit diesem Buch möchte ich die Menschen in Deutschland mahnen, nicht zu vergessen, wie es war, als es geteilt war" (*Stasi* 9). Her file-based autobiography claims to offer the testimony of someone who suffered under the GDR's totalitarianism and who wants to describe for her family and the public her failed escape to West Germany and her subsequent incarceration. Like Witt, however, had Jauch not accessed her file, she would not likely have composed her account.

This chapter begins by focusing on how Jauch structures her autobiographical narrative and for whom, while also considering why she wrote, how her autobiographical process went and what it meant to her. The second part of this chapter develops two hypotheses in answer to questions about the role of the file in her memory processes: To what extent does Jauch thematize her file to signal that memories emerge from it; and why does she give the impression that details from her file replace some of her personal memories? In answering these questions I focus on how Jauch has inserted portions of her file into her life narrative not only to authenticate her story but also to shape and advance her political agenda, like the other autobiographers of this study.

Born in Leipzig in 1959, Jauch attempted to flee from the GDR with her husband Matthias during their honeymoon in July 1980. However, they were arrested in Dragan, Bulgaria, transferred to Stasi prisons in East Germany, and Jauch then spent a year in Hoheneck, a women's prison located in Stollberg, East Germany. On 2 July, 1981,

both Anke and Matthias were ransomed by West Germany and released, settling near Düsseldorf.

Anke Jauch described many details of her experience of Hoheneck in private journals before gaining access to her file. When she eventually read her record in 1992, she decided to write her autobiography using her Stasi file to support her personal testimony. Readers immediately grasp that hers is the story of an ordinary citizen who was victimized by the Stasi. Rather than pursuing self-understanding, Jauch has chosen to weave file excerpts into her account to document the story of her failed escape attempt and her subsequent imprisonment.

Like Lengsfeld's, Jauch's autobiographical narrative is linked to her political message. However, while Lengsfeld hardly mentions her time in prison, Jauch details the prison in which she was held as well as the physical and psychological trauma she suffered there under the Stasi. While Lengsfeld was politically active, Jauch was not; nor did the state see her as threat before her attempted escape. Only after her arrest did she become, in Stasi terminology a "negative element" in society. After she was released, she suspected but had no evidence that reports were continuing to be kept on her. In fact, although Stasi officers originally planned to spy on her until 1999, her file was closed eight years after her release, with the Wende. Jauch and her husband describe how, due to her arrest and the Stasi's interference in their life, even twenty years after the Wende their relatives still kept their distance from the couple (Jauch "Personal").

Her autobiography testifies to her continued struggle to come to terms with the psychological and physiological hardships resulting from her incarceration. Her autobiography begins like a love story that survives all odds: "Keine Stasi konnte uns trennen,

wir liebten uns und wir litten gemeinsam, das tat gut zu wissen, diese innere Kraft brauchten wir nun, um den Rest gesund zu überstehen. Aber nicht nur das eine Jahr, es gab uns Zusammenhalt bis zum Ende unseres gemeinsamen Lebens” (*Stasi* 84).

My guiding hypothesis is that the writing of any file-based autobiography is triggered by the reading of one’s personal Stasi record, as the film *Das Leben der Anderen* depicts. Jauch’s initial writing of her life story, however, emerged independently from her encounter with her file: although she did not seriously foresee publishing her account of her time in prison and under observation, eleven years before she saw her file she did note many details of her arrest and incarceration after her release in July, 1981, (Jauch “E-mail”): “An dem Tag, 2.7.1981, als wir [f]reigekauft worden und im Übergangslager Gießen ankamen, schrieb ich sofort alle Details auf” (Jauch “E-mail”). Only after reading her file in 1992 and finding the right combination of courage and time did she continue her autobiographical journey.

After their release, Jauch and her husband initially expended their energies on organizing their new lives: “Wir hatten nun auch alle Hände voll zu tun, in unseren Köpfen spielte das Vergangene fast keine Rolle mehr. Zeit zum Aufarbeiten nahmen wir uns nicht. Die Zukunft mit all [ihren] Facetten stand vor uns” (*Stasi* 119). In her free time, Jauch wrote some poems and began to prepare the manuscript of her autobiography, but without relatives in the West to help her, she was absorbed in integrating herself socially and contributing to the family income (Jauch “E-mail”). Her manuscript thus remained in her drawer until February 2006 (Jauch “E-mail”), when her daughter left the family home and she had time for “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung,” working through the past, in her writing (Jauch “E-mail”).

Then, twenty-five years after her release, when her memories began to resurface and haunt Jauch, she felt compelled to write her life narrative. Her autobiographical project, like those of the other file-based autobiographers, contradicts one of the pillars of the autobiography genre as defined by Philippe Lejeune, that autobiography is a “*récit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité*” (Lejeune *Pacte* 14), or as Georges Gusdorf phrases it, a search for turning points in the autobiographer’s life (“Conditions and Limits” 38). Rather than using the autobiography to discover her personality, Jauch documents what happened to her in prison to help her expose important truths about the political system under which she lived. Her task was prompted by her viewing of her Stasi file and by the emotions following that Jauch needed to release and express. In other words, Jauch is not in search of turning points in her life, as Gusdorf’s theory about the purpose of autobiographical writing proposes, nor in search of her real<sup>106</sup> self nor of the meaning of her personal life. Instead, she wants to convincingly articulate injustices committed against her and to seek financial compensation and psychological support in return. To this end, Jauch perceives her time in Hoheneck as a period that compelled her to become an autobiographer, a feeling that reflects Egan’s theory that the autobiographical act is precipitated by a crisis (Egan *Mirror* 4). In other words, Jauch’s autobiographical project is her articulation of a life-changing event and her personal efforts to work through it.

Jauch’s use of her file as primary material may at first seem unlikely, since it was produced by the hostile MfS. However, because that file enables her to return to the

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<sup>106</sup> In this context, *real* stands for her personality and her origins.

source of her crisis it is fundamental to the structure she gives her autobiography and the emphasis she places on various pieces of information: “Die Passagen der Verhöre, der damalige Druck, [...] die nackte Angst, hatte ich wohl in den folgenden Jahren verdrängt, deshalb eine andere Erinnerungswahrnehmung” (Jauch “E-mail”). Jauch points out that her file lacks some information which she expected to find and remembers thanks only to her own notes. Nevertheless, her Stasi record gives her autobiographical account essential authenticity. As is true for other former data subjects, the file as an official document attests that the autobiographer has not fabricated the claim to have been a Stasi data subject (“Personal”).

Clearly, the issue of authenticity is crucial for all file-based autobiographers, especially in regard to the documentary evidence they include within their narratives. For the general public, the file fragments that these autobiographies contain are their only access to Stasi files and thus, seeing them in the file-based autobiography is almost as if the readers had been given fragments of her own file otherwise unavailable to them. Since Jauch was not well-known as a writer, this book evokes more interest and curiosity for her story than if she had a public reputation as a writer of fiction. Furthermore, labelling her file-based autobiography as an authentic document enables her to address it directly to friends and family members who do not understand why she attempted to flee to the FRG or what it means to be incarcerated. Thus, she relies on her file not because of the modern phenomenon of a gradual loss of spontaneous memory and an increasing dependence on archives and external sources of memory (Nora xxiv), but because doing so adds this crucial credibility to her personal testimony. In accordance with Lejeune’s concept of the autobiographical pact of truth, Jauch tells her past as accurately as she can in part be-

cause she hopes that doing so will garner her more financial compensation for the psychological and physiological trauma caused by the Stasi (Jauch “Personal”). In this sense, her file-based autobiography is shaped by the demands of the present<sup>107</sup>, her struggle for public acknowledgement of her sufferings in Hoheneck and compensation.<sup>108</sup> Jauch is thus the only one of the selected former data subjects who states clearly that she is seeking compensation (Jauch “Personal”); Lengsfeld and Witt want only to refute charges of complicity and draw attention to how the Stasi infringed on their lives, while Ash seeks to reflect on how the opening of the Stasi files will affect Germans and on how the Stasi exploited human weakness to recruit collaborators.

Jauch does not demand financial recompense directly; rather, according to a conversation from February 2010, she seeks support for the development of her personality, but such fulfillment of her personality necessitates financial help.<sup>109</sup> She also expresses her wish for compensation in her *Aktionsforschung*.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The other autobiographers in this study have different current needs. Ash neither wants financial compensation nor psychological support for having been under observation. Lengsfeld and Witt, for their part, primarily seek to justify their (non-) involvement with the Stasi. Being public figures, however, means that they already have more financial freedom opportunities for seeking psychological support if needed than Jauch. Furthermore, neither Lengsfeld nor Witt suffered from repeated harsh emotional and physical maltreatments as Jauch did in Hoheneck.

<sup>108</sup> Jauch explains that she would like the state to acknowledge that her present psychoses and physical problems are due to the maltreatments she received in Hoheneck (“Personal”).

<sup>109</sup> However, without some financial compensation, she would be unable to fully develop her personality (Jauch “Personal”). Furthermore, recognizing the repercussions of imprisonment would be difficult to measure without monetary amendments. What Jauch means by the “development of her personality” is a personal working through the past with the help of therapeutic sessions and especially the ability to control or learn to control with the help of a psychologist her emotional turmoil that resulted from psychological torture, her imprisonment, and the subsequent family rejection. Further, Jauch would need physiotherapy to recover the physical damage that she suffered in prison since she had to wear a pair of shoes too small for her (Jauch “Stasi” 100).



Ausdrücklich verweise ich, dass es nicht um Entschädigung auf finanzieller Basis geht, sondern ausschließlich um Anerkennung des erlittenen Haftfolgeschadens, vor allem aber um Hilfeleistungen für Betroffene in [p]sychologischer Hinsicht und Unterstützung in Bildung, denn die Chance auf Persönlichkeitsentfaltung wurde geraubt und vernichtet. (Jauch “Kommunikation” 31)

Despite her efforts — her file-based autobiography, her lawyer, and a television documentary — Jauch claims that she is still waiting for this psychological support and feels

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<sup>110</sup> An *Aktionsforschung* is a therapy that requires subjects to form personal research questions about what they consider dysfunctional in their relationships and life, and write down reflections. For Jauch, her *Aktionsforschung* was meant to establish a friendlier, more consistent relationship with her sister. As its name suggests, it is a type of therapy that involves personal research and action to improve one’s life and relationships. Jauch worked with Professor Moira Laidlaw on an *Aktionsforschung* that covered the themes of freedom, love, and respect and revolved around five central questions: “1. Was will ich verbessern? 2. Was sind die Gründe für mein Anliegen? 3. Wie kann ich sie verbessern? 4. Wer kann mir helfen und wie? 5. Wie erfahre ich, es hat sich verbessert?” (Jauch “Kommunikation” 123). Her *Aktionsforschung* focuses on the steps that she follows to develop her interpersonal relation with her sister in a positive fashion. Jauch documents the subsequent improvement in their communication with quotations from their telephone and postcard exchanges. During her *Aktionsforschung* Jauch felt most influenced by Carl G. Jung’s *Die Beziehungen zwischen dem Ich und dem Unbewußten*, M. Scott Peck’s *Der wunderbare Weg*, writings from Lao-zi (which she does not specify), Hubertus Knabe’s *Die vergessenen Opfer der Mauer*, and Alasdair MacIntyre’s *Der Verlust der Tugend. Zur Moralischen Krise der Gegenwart*. As part of her *Aktionsforschung* Jauch exposes some of the Stasi’s modes of operation instances of injustice, reflecting on ethical questions regarding the morals of the employees of incarceration centres in Germany and on their reasons for cooperating with the system (Jauch “Kommunikation” 169). However, the central focus of her *Aktionsforschung* remains the improvements in her relationship with her sister and her self-confidence. Jauch’s *Aktionsforschung* was published in 2010 in the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* and documents the relationship between her incarceration, her *Aktionsforschung*, and her improved relationship with her sister. Her *Aktionsforschung* is entitled “Wie kann ich die Kommunikation mit meiner Schwester verbessern, damit ich ein lebenswürdiges, konstanteres und ein harmonisches Leben mit ihr führen kann? Eine persönliche Aktionsforschung zur Familienzersetzung in der ehemaligen Ostzone und als Symbol der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands” and represents a step in Jauch’s healing and growing.

distressed that the state has provided so little to help her to engage in a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“Personal”).

Jauch does not say whether she has received financial compensation from the state. However, her discontent might be attributed to the fact that former Stasi officers typically receive more lucrative pensions and compensations than former data subjects, even political prisoners like her. Only those who can prove that they were jailed at least six months and who currently earn less than 9 489 Euros a year may be eligible for a pension of 250 Euros a month (de Quetteville), restrictions which the government calculates as entitling only 16 000 citizens to such a financial support. While these pensions will cost the government about 37.2 million Euros each year, the budget for compensating former high-ranking GDR officials has reached 1.5 billion Euros (de Quetteville). “Margot Honecker, widow of the former East German head-of-state Erich Honecker, who was also minister for education under her husband’s regime, still picks up her pension in exile in Chile. It is thought to be six times the sum being offered to Stasi victims” (de Quetteville). In view of what these other persons receive from the state, Jauch feels that those who suffered from the previous dictatorship still suffer from the past even after democracy was established.

Although Jauch is disappointed by the lack of help from the state to support her “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” she did not primarily intend her file-based autobiography for public support. Rather she wrote it out of a personal impulse. In an e-mail dated 6 August 2009, Jauch explains that her file-based autobiography fulfilled the promise she made to herself while imprisoned to publicly denounce what she defines as a crime

against herself and her husband: “Im Zuchthaus Hoheneck schwor ich mir nur das eine, dieses Verbrechen[,] was an uns begangen wurde, muß an die Öffentlichkeit, egal wie und egal wann. Das war ein Versprechen was ich mir selber gab” (Jauch “E-mail”). For this reason (her personal promise) Jauch planned to write her autobiography, unlike Witt and Lengsfeld; though Jauch did not feel the kind of public pressure they did to record her life story, she, like them, wanted to set the record straight. In her case, Jauch wanted to clarify to her daughter the circumstances of her arrest and her time in prison by providing her autobiographical account.

Furthermore, Jauch is concerned to teach her readers about the GDR’s history by writing her file-based autobiography: “Vor allem würde ich mich freuen, wenn sich unsere jungen Leute damit auseinander setzen, denn unsere deutsche Geschichte geht uns alle an” (*Stasi* 130). For this reason, she reminds her readers of the broader historical context her file-based autobiography belongs in:

Auf beiden Seiten muß fair und verständnisvoll umgegangen werden, denn: ‘Wir sind ein Volk.’<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> With the reference to “ein Volk” or “one nation,” Jauch brings to mind the German literature from after the Second World War when Germany was divided into two different countries: the GDR and FRD (Federal Republic of Germany). This *Nachkriegsliteratur* (or post-war literature) either depicts the phase from the end of the Second World War until the formation of the two German states (1945-1949) or, in a broader sense, the period from 1945 until the ‘60s in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, all of which were affected by this historical shock (“Nachkriegsliteratur”). Major topics in both areas include exile, relocation, the problems arising from war and the return home, reports on the war experience (“Nachkriegsliteratur”). By 1951, this literature clearly was split into works from the GDR with more real socialist idealism, and literature from the FRD, characterized by ties to the classical modern, magic realism, and the avant-garde (“Nachkriegsliteratur”). In the GDR, the end of *Nachkriegsliteratur* coincided with the eighth political convention in 1971 of the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei* or Social Unity Party). Although Jauch’s autobiography does not belong to that literary period, her narrative is related to it in the sense that she works through a traumatic historical experience by writing about it. In fact, Lyn Marven argues that “[t]rauma cannot be integrated into narrative memory and exists only as a gap or blank spot; it therefore cannot be

Gedenkt der Toten, die nichts anderes wollten, als in Freiheit zu leben, die man grausam an der Mauer ermorden ließ.  
Vergeßt uns nicht!  
Verdrängt im pulsierenden Leben dieses Stück Geschichte nicht. (*Stasi* 9)

She refers to Germans as one *Volk* forming a united nation that should remember those who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom. While Jauch is lucky not to have lost her life in her attempt to flee to the West, her file-based autobiographical story reveals the cost of her desire for freedom.

I asked Jauch if her file-based autobiography actually formed part of her therapeutic journey to overcome the past, a question drawing on Witt's and Lengsfeld's descriptions of the benefits of writing of their stories, and on Chandler's theory that autobiog-

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articulated, and returns in the form of surprisingly literal flashbacks, hallucinations, or dreams" (Marven 398). Trying to formulate a traumatic experience as narrative thus represents the initial stages of working through it. After the demise of the GDR, just as after WW II, people were disillusioned about the dictatorship in which they were living. To overcome that disillusionment, many of them made statements about the past, and in particular, about why they were implicitly or explicitly compliant with that prior regime. Those who strove to improve the GDR, as Lengsfeld claims to have done, would like to see themselves as heroes. Jauch, however, was not an activist working to improve the GDR; her book results from personal motives to improve her own life.

In its contents too her file-based autobiography differs from *Nachkriegsliteratur* topics in the sense that she is concerned both about how an individual re-works her own past and about the injustices of the former political system. Additionally, it addresses the issue of living in a country where, to some extent, tension still exists between former East and West Germans. Jauch, for instance, discusses still needing psychological help after the Wende in reconciling herself with her sister, who remained in the GDR when Jauch attempted to escape to the FRG. Nevertheless, since Jauch describes herself as a *survivor* of a traumatic experience, her account is reminiscent of *Nachkriegsliteratur*. Additionally, in its probing of an unethical political system, Jauch's account exemplifies *Nachkriegsliteratur* interest in East-West political conflict ("DDR-Literatur"). However, her file-based autobiography may prove pedagogically useful, since her account focuses so closely on her personal situation, rather than also drawing generalizations and addressing the general population's circumstances during the period she describes.

ographies can function as talking cures (see my Chapter One and Chandler x). In Jauch's view, however the action of working through her past initially caused negative side effects. For the first twenty-five years after her release from prison, she suffered both physically and psychically, trying to overcome memories, but it was only the beginning of working through her memories since she mostly remained silent about her suffering (Jauch "E-mail"). On the other hand, however, it entails severe physical repercussions, for which she still seeks compensation today:

anderer[...]seits hat es mir das Genick gebrochen, Bandscheiben[ve]rfall der Halswirbelsäule, Fibromyalgie, Schulter Ops, die Psyche ist stark verwundet. Habe Gutachten vom Orthopäden und einer Psychologin, weil ich seit 2007 um Anerkennung eines Politischen Haftfolgeschadens kämpfe, nun mußte ich als Demütigung obendrauf noch deswegen einen Rechtsanwalt einschalten. ("E-mail")

Jauch appears to have undergone the very opposite of a healing process. Despite these challenges, however, she avoided sharing these feelings with anyone else for fear of irritating or worrying them. Throughout this difficult period of her life, she nevertheless remained motivated to complete her file-based autobiography by her hope of gaining the interest of younger Germans:

Ziel meines Buches war weiterhin, Aufklärung zu leisten, Wut, ohnmächtige Wut, Verzweiflung um Anerkennung unserer unrechtmäßigen Inhaftierung. Gerade d[en] teilweise arroganten West – Menschen [...] zu berichten, wie es im zerteilten Deutschland zu gegangen ist, sie waren [a]hnungslos. Schonungslos wollte ich die Wahrheit ans Licht bringen. Damit ich wieder ganz frei atmen kann, mir es von der zerschundenen Seele reden. Die Stasiakte hat natürlich dabei eine wichtige Rolle gespielt, ich konnte damit untermauern, wie schäbig man mit uns umgegangen ist. (Jauch "E-mail")

With the financial help of her husband and her daughter, she paid 6900 Euros, a sum that absolutely exhausts their resources, to privately publish what she calls her “Herzenswunsch”:

Im April 2006 suchte ich dann einen Verlag wo ich das Manuskript hin senden könnte. So ist es gekommen, das ich an den [z]weifelhaften Selbstkosten Verlag kam. Wir, mein Mann, meine Tochter, gingen an unsere finanzielle Höchstgrenze, ich mußte für diesen Vertrag 6900 Euro!! zahlen, alleine [u]ndenkenbar. Mein Mann und Tochter standen hinter mir und sie sahen[,] das[s] es ein Herzenswunsch von mir ist, uns war aber auch klar, das[s] wir niemals wieder einen Cent davon sehen werden. (“E-mail”)

Another painful situation Jauch found herself in before and while writing her book was her poor relationship with her family, especially with her sister: “Die politische Strategie der Staatssicherheit mit Unterdr[ü]ckung der Menschenrechte, durch Freiheitsberaubung, Diskriminierung und Verletzung der Intimsphäre, spaltete die Stasi ganze Familien und zerbrach ihre Menschenwürde” (Jauch “Kommunikation” 120-21). At a time when Jauch would have benefited enormously from emotional support, she and her sister were unable to talk calmly together without soon feeling anger, mistrust, and then weariness about their relationship: “Eine lange sprachliche Barriere und Kluft ist zwischen uns durch die Inhaftierung und des geteilten Deutschlands, wie ein Symbol entstanden” (Jauch “Kommunikation” 150).

Yet writing her autobiography did eventually begin Jauch’s healing process but only because of the *Aktionsforschung* that she did afterwards. In an e-mail from 10 August 2009, she emphasizes that viewing her file and writing her autobiography have given her maturity and a better understanding of her life:

Ich habe gelernt, mich zu verteidigen, meinen Geist so leben zu lassen[, ] wie er will. Nichts und niemanden unterdrücken. Mich für den Frieden in der Welt und im einzelnen Miteinander [einzu]setzen. Unserer deutschen Jugend an Hand meines Buches zu vermitteln[, ] wie das Ostzonen System gearbeitet hat, und das so etwas nie wieder passieren darf. Schmerzlich habe ich aber auch gelernt, das[s] [zwei] Familien auseinander gerissen worden [sind], mit Druck und Ohnmacht. Das[s] dieses System meiner Schwester und Nichte den Kopf bis heute verdreht hat. ("E-mail")

The professional counselling from Professor Moira that she received after writing her book seems to have helped Jauch perceive a therapeutic effect since Jauch considers that the autobiographical writing alone is not responsible alone for her gradual healing.

In her autobiography, Jauch does more than simply construct her subject through language; she herself notes that writing her account was the birth of a subject through reflection on herself, the Stasi, and her relationship with her sister. This autobiographical project combined with her *Aktionsforschung* indicates that she is learning to see her past as a set of educational experiences. She implies that both her experience in prison and the articulation of that life period in her file-based autobiography have contributed to her development; and she is proud to have been able to offer her daughter a life in freedom after being ransomed by the West ("Personal"). Nevertheless, the file-based autobiography itself does not focus on her personality development because that occurs only later, during her *Aktionsforschung*. Furthermore, this sense of personal achievement expressed in her *Aktionsforschung* should not overshadow Jauch's aim to be compensated for the wrongs she suffered.

Jauch's Stasi file, her main structuring tool for her autobiography, is divided into three sections: Berlin, Leipzig, and pre-trial custody under the Ministry for State Securi-

ty. It begins with her arrest in Dragoman – although pages from Bulgaria are missing – and ends with the fall of the Berlin wall. Jauch’s file-based autobiography does not follow most of the divisions of her file and begins her account with chronology of her life, starting with her reason for attempting to escape to the West: her love for her husband, who convinced her to flee the GDR. Jauch goes on to comment on her holiday in Bulgaria, her arrest, and her time in prison, reflecting throughout on this chapter of her life and living conditions in the GDR. Her book ends with her freedom, her new life in the West, and the birth of her daughter. Throughout her book she provides evidence pertaining to her past as she has depicted it: a map of Bulgaria, pictures of Hoheneck, and a report indicating that the Stasi intended to spy on her until 1999. These pieces of information are taken directly from her file in order to support her narrative. Furthermore, her file contains information on her arrest, her interrogators’ transcripts, interrogations of others concerning her workplace, and verdicts. Obviously, contrary to her expectations her file was not closed after the ransom<sup>112</sup> paid for her by the West: in her file are observations from the Ministry of State Security about her travels, her mail, and her parents up to 1989 (Jauch “E-mail”).

Based on Jauch’s observation, her Stasi file clearly is a hostile document with which the Stasi intruded in her life. With the help of this document and in particular to some interrogatory transcripts, Jauch is able not only to recall more fully these events but also to narrate them. She refers to and inserts photocopies of sections of her file into her narrative, as if her story could be accurately told only through the combined voices of the younger Jauch documented in her file and her later, narrating self. That is, her file gives

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<sup>112</sup> From the perspective of West Germany it was considered a humanitarian act to ransom political prisoners like Jauch.



the author an authentic, earlier voice that she complements with her existing memories of those incidents and periods. These insertions allow readers almost to hear what was said during the interrogation sessions, thus validating her claims to have actually lived the story that she tells in her autobiography. At the same time, Jauch uses photocopy insertions from her record to function as flashbacks (Jauch “E-mail”): that is, in these cases she uses her file to evoke and complete her personal memories of the events transcribed in her Stasi record. Both uses of excerpts from her file give her autobiography credibility. In fact, Jauch’s warnings about distortions in the file itself give her work greater trustworthiness. These cautions arise in part from manipulation of data: “Es ist ein Kartenhaus der Lügen, von diesem Staat,” (Jauch “E-mail”). According to her, her interrogators’ transcripts were distorted to agree with a Ministry for State Security scheme to support criminal charges against her on the account that she attempted to defect to West Germany. As a result, some of her utterances appear fragmented, out of context, or inaccurately biased, though she was forced to sign these transcriptions of her interrogations with no option to correct them. Her demands that they be corrected were not only ignored, but punished.<sup>113</sup> Jauch eventually signed the reports as they stood, perceiving this to be a meaningless battle and thinking that cooperating might improve her chances of leaving the prison soon, and as healthy as possible (Jauch “E-mail”).

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In part, her psychological and physical torture consisted of having to wear shoes a size smaller than she required (Jauch *Stasi* 100), being insulted by her cell guard (105), and working long shifts (102). In addition, Jauch complained about loneliness (103), lack of sleep (100), poor sanitary conditions, and unpalatable food, “Katzenfutter [;] es bestand aus Fett, Speck, ekliger Marmelade und altem Brot” (Jauch *Stasi* 94). Physical violence also occurred: once, when Jauch saw her husband and tried to kiss him, the cell guard pulled out a handful of her hair and scratched her face as she yanked Jauch away from him (112).

Since many passages from her file represent the past inaccurately I inquired about her selection criteria for the chronology of her autobiography as well as for the specific file photocopies she added to it. She replied that it was not a matter of selecting ideal passages but of bringing authenticity to her narrative (Jauch “Personal”): her real story had also to *look* real. Jauch explained that, at first, her file triggered doubts and rage, especially because of how her interrogations, the so-called “Vernehmungsprotokolle,” had been altered (Jauch “E-mail”). However, in that her file provides her personal account with credibility, Jauch, in authenticating her autobiography with her Stasi file, supports Alison Lewis’ theory that the file, no matter its superficialities and inaccuracies, testifies to the wrongs done to the data subjects (Lewis 378), her primary reason for including parts of her Stasi record:

Mit Originalen von Haftbefehlen, Vernehmungsprotokollen, Gerichtsurteil sowie Briefen von Rechtsanwalt Dr. Vogel bis zur Rehabilitation wird das ‘Stück Geschichte’ über die Macht der Staatssicherheit untermauert. Und jeder Leser kann sich daraus seine Schlüsse ziehen, wie es war, damals, in der DDR. (Jauch *Stasi* 11)

The emphasis of her autobiography rests on documentation of the Stasi’s mode of operation, its injustices, “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen,” and her treatment in Hoheneck. She is the only one of the selected autobiographers who focuses predominantly on how the Stasi treated her when she was in jail, Lengsfeld being the only other of the four who was imprisoned. In contrast, the focus for Ash is attempting to understand the perspective of his informers, and for Lengsfeld and Witt, to try to see how the Stasi have influenced their pasts and, albeit for different motives, to assert that they were not informers.

However, Jauch's file-based autobiography is presented like a complaint about the unjust prison conditions she experienced because she considered her incarceration as unjust. According to German historians, conditions in prison are depressing not only for detainees but also for those who were detained although they were not political activists; they were citizens who only wished to live in West Germany and believed that they had a right to determine their place of residence (*Firma*), as Jauch did:

In 1975, head of Party and State Erich Honecker sign[ed] the Helsinki Accords, the Final Act of the Conference on Cooperation and Security in Europe, which br[ought] citizens of East Germany the possibility to act according to its Human Rights Charter, which include[d] the right of unrestricted movement, free travel and choice of residence. [However, a]fter that point, most detainees here [in the Untersuchungshaftanstalt der Staatssicherheit Berlin Hohenschönhausen] were people who had tried to flee the country or who had petitioned repeatedly for legal emigration and then taken up contact with a Western human rights organization. (*Firma*)

Lengsfeld, of the four data subjects studied here, might seem to have been most psychologically hurt and betrayed by the Stasi; but it is Jauch who writes with greatest anger and who most clearly seeks recompense for the harm she incurred. These differences between how these former data subjects respond to their encounter with the file and their memories attest to the variety of motives prompting the writing of file-based autobiographies. Despite these differences, however, their engagement with their files always remains central to their autobiographical project.

Despite the importance of her five-hundred-page file to her autobiography, however, only a few passages from it appear in Jauch's account. For the most part, her file-based autobiography includes fragments from her file depicting interrogations and mate-

rial related to the reason for her arrest and objects in her possession at that time. However, the location in her file of that data is not clear, and the photocopies are sometimes difficult to decipher; additionally, these fragments frequently seem to interrupt the narrative, though by the same token they provide the reader with an opportunity to pause, reflect on the veracity of her narrative, and read or skip the actual written content of these insertions. The other file-based autobiographies, more clearly introduce and discuss passages from files; in Jauch's account, however, by standing alone these record fragments testify to her narrative of her past and attest to her unpreparedness and thus her innocence, to flee.

In her autobiography, Jauch initially describes herself as undecided and rather unwilling to flee to the West. Nevertheless, although she does not take his idea seriously at first, her husband convinces her:

Vier Wochen vor unserem Urlaub eröffnete mir mein Mann, was ich davon hielte, von Bulgarien aus abzuhausen, in die BRD. Ehrlich gesagt, mich traf der Schlag! In der einen Minute sah ich, wie die heißeste Sonne aus, ich lachte, denn ich nahm allen Ernstes an, es sei Spaß; doch in der anderen Minute kamen dicke Wolken bei mir auf, mein Gesicht verfinsterte sich und ich sagte nur: 'Das kann doch nicht dein voller Ernst sein?' 'Ja, ja, doch. Es ist mein Ernst', meinte er nur. Es gab lange heiße Diskussionen. Ich hatte doch gute Gründe nicht abzuhausen. (*Stasi* 15-16)

Perhaps this reluctance is Jauch's later attempt to atone for her illegal act. Eventually, her husband left her no other option: "Aber Matthias hat mich von Tag zu Tag mehr davon überzeugt, daß dies der einzige Weg für uns ist, um unser Leben in die eigenen Hände zu nehmen, selbst zu entscheiden, was für uns wichtig ist" (Jauch *Stasi* 16). Jauch presents

their decision as involving opportunistic goals coupled with youthful courage and single-mindedness.

However, overall Jauch seems capable of attempting to flee East Germany only because of her husband's intention to do so, an attitude that explains why she experienced her treatment in prison as underserved. She is the only one, in contrast to the other autobiographers, who attempted to cross the border illegally for opportunistic reasons.<sup>114</sup> In order to emphasize the state of mind in which she felt at that time, in her file-based autobiography Jauch's narrative voice distances itself from the younger and unaware protagonist of her life story. "Wir sahen der Tatsache, daß wir verhaftet werden könnten, offen ins Auge. Doch dachte ich niemals mit allen Konsequenzen daran, einmal in ein Gefängnis zu gehen. Wenn wir es wagen, dann schaffen wir das auch, dachte ich treuherzig, blind vor der bitteren Realität, im jugendlichen Wahn" (*Stasi* 16). However, both eventually fall into the grips of the Stasi. As the cover photo for Jauch's story suggests by a red hand seizing a photo of the honeymooners in their tent, Jauch wants to impress upon her readers that the grip of the Stasi extended everywhere, especially into border territories, leaving the citizens of the GDR at its mercy: "Völlig ausgeliefert befand ich mich in den Händen, nein, in dessen Krallen, die wie Adler zupacken und nicht eher loslassen" (*Stasi* 54).

Jauch emphasizes that she sees herself as a victim — and she even says of herself that she was a martyr<sup>115</sup> — of the Stasi, but implies that she was within her rights to flee a

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<sup>114</sup> In contrast, Lengsfeld wanted to better the GDR rather than acting out of personal interest (Lengsfeld "Personal"). Although Lengsfeld's attempts to *reform* the GDR failed, she sees her success as evident in the German re-unification itself, because it improved standards of living, travel, and freedom of speech, while also abolishing unethical political power mechanisms (Lengsfeld "Personal").

<sup>115</sup> In Jauch's autobiography, the word "martyr" stands to describe someone like her who did what was

political system that was too restrictive. She saw her imprisonment as unjust because she originally had personal reasons not to dare to go against East German law and flee to the West: such a move would leave her without a home or clear opportunities for work (*Stasi* 16). However, remaining in the GDR would have made her a victim of the restrictive political system in place. As a result, Jauch writes that she had no other choice but to flee her country with her husband.

Zwei junge Menschen fühlen sich eingeengt, persönlich wie politisch in der Zange der DDR. Sie planen einen Fluchtversuch von ihrer Urlaubsreise aus Bulgarien über die grüne Grenze in den Westen. Mit viel Selbstvertrauen und Courage wollen sie es sich selbst beweisen und der Stasi ein Schnippchen schlagen. Sie werden kurz vor der Grenze bei dem Fluchtversuch festgenommen. Ein Martyrium beginnt. Unfaßbares Verbrechen in der DDR erfahren sie an Leib und Seele. Es wird die Flucht, die Untersuchungshaftanstalt des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit sowie die Gefangenschaft im Zuchthaus Hoheneck geschildert. (*Stasi* 11)

Since Jauch considered her attempted to the West as a justified act, she describes her arrest and subsequent incarceration as a wrong committed against both her and her husband: “Es ist Freiheitsberaubung, was sie den Menschen antun. Jeder Mensch hat das Recht auf Freiheit, auch die Zonenbürger. Sie sind eingeschüchtert und viele wagen diesen Schritt in die Freiheit, durch das Zuchthaus, nicht” (*Stasi* 18). From her point of view both her arrest and incarceration constitute a breach of human rights. According to the Helsinki Accords she is right.

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good (fleeing to the West) whereas others did not dare to take that risk even if they perceived that it was better to flee than to stay in the GDR. Jauch considers the act of defecting to the West to be the act of a martyr because fewer people attempted it than those who wanted to do it. Neither Jauch nor I intend to use the word “martyr” with the religious meaning that it usually connotes.

In her Stasi file, however, far from being portrayed as a martyr or a survivor, she is referred to as a criminal, or simply “Die Jauch.” In fact, she points out to this contrast between how the authorities see her and how she perceives herself: “[M]ich als Person gibt es nicht, abwerten[d], kriminell, staatsfeindlich, Mörder wurden höflicher, als Mensch, behandelt[;] ich war ein Klassenfeind, so wurde man behandelt, auch schriftlich in der Akte [...] Ziel von der Stasi war immer einen [s]taatsfeindlichen Nachweis zu erbringen” (Jauch “E-mail”). In this sense, her file seems to reduce Jauch to a deviant and an object – not a subject – of observation. However, viewing her file and writing her file-based autobiography allow her to appropriate that external storage medium and become the self-governing subject of the data in question (Vismann *Files* 150).

Since Jauch views herself as innocent, she narrates her autobiography in a personal and angry way, especially in reference to the harsh treatment she endured in prison. The result is that she feels profound hatred for the Stasi. The foundation of her shock and outrage are the precision with which the Stasi spied on her and her husband both in the detention centre and after her release (Jauch “E-mail”). If her first reactions to her record are not her primary source of memories, her autobiographical tone of voice, on the contrary, appears to be the direct consequence of that encounter: “In unmenschlichen Demütigungen mußten wir erkennen, wie diese Diktatur an und mit uns gearbeitet hat. Diese Akte zu lesen macht schon krank, darüber nach[zu]denken, bringt einen um den Verstand” (“E-mail”). Jauch suggests here that she has not yet come to terms with her own anger as she embarks on her autobiographical quest. Although the exercise of writing about this past period of her life is the start of a “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” this

working through of the past is a long process that will require ongoing professional support.

Jauch's attitude toward the past and her tone of voice when talking about it challenge Alison Lewis' view that the opening of the files represents a "symbolic act of reconciliation on the part of the new German parliament" (Lewis 378). Lewis founds her hypothesis with the claimed benefits of file-viewing: individuals could determine how much the Stasi had influenced their lives, and the public's trust in the state could begin to be restored with this revealing of the Stasi's questionable modes of operation. Essentially, "[t]he East German's parliament's intention was to return the former rulers' instrument of knowledge to those it had ruled and oppressed" (Gauck "Dealing" 279), though for Jauch, the knowledge about her past under observation is insufficient for a reconciliation with the German state if there is neither public acknowledgement for her sufferings in incarceration nor financial and emotional compensation for the side effects of the maltreatments she incurred at the hands of the Stasi. As a result of this lack of acknowledgement and compensation, Jauch's autobiography is also a denunciation: She draws attention, for instance, to how the Stasi indiscriminately incarcerated political prisoners like her with any other types of criminals, including murderers:

Sooft langgelaufen und nie vermutetet, was hinter diesen Mauern geschah. Sämtliche Asoziale und Kriminelle befanden sich dort, deshalb Räuberknast. Es war die Unterschicht, mit denen wir Politische nun erste Bekanntschaft schlossen. Eigentlich war es zum ausreißen, die Hölle, es war unglaublich, was für Typen von Menschen man hier kennenlernte. Ein Gruselfilm war nichts dagegen. Nun erfuhren wir mit eigenen Augen und Ohren, was es alles in der DDR gab. Ich war entsetzt. (*Stasi* 93)



She explains that this practice was partly responsible for the psychological distress she continued to suffer for years after her release. In an attempt to explain further the downfall of East Germany, she deplores the lack of support other detainees received, as if it was not possible for these former prisoners to be integrated into society once released:

Bei den Asozialen war es immer der gleiche Weg, wenn sie aus dem Gefängnis entlassen wurden, sind sie zur Zwangsarbeit in einem Betrieb verpflichtet worden, meist als Putzfrauen, daraus folgt, daß ihnen die Arbeit nicht gefällt und wieder nicht [zur] Arbeit erscheinen[,] und so setzt sich der Kreislauf für diese Menschen in Gang, aus dem sie ohne wirkliche Hilfe nicht mehr rauskommen. (*Stasi* 95)

Jauch discusses how the Stasi treated its prisoners and how the GDR was duplicitous primarily to explain to her family her dissatisfaction with the GDR and her reasons for trying to escape to the West. While Jauch remembers the social problems of that system, her close relatives maintain, on the contrary, that the GDR was good for the most part (Jauch “E-mail”).

As part of her criticism of the East German system, Jauch describes how her incarceration has affected her psychologically. Although she provides no file documentation supporting her claims of psychological trauma — presumably, such details were of no interest to the Stasi — her file does authenticate her incarceration, and so indirectly verifies that she truly experienced the reality she denounces. Jauch narrates in a tone of voice that tends towards racism to signal the psychological pain and trauma that she still feels due to her cell guard even several years after her release; Jauch comments on that guard as follows: “Sie hat uns allen Politischen das Leben zur Hölle gemacht, mit ihrem kleinen Gesicht, ihren schwarzen, schmalen, böse blickenden Mongolen-Augen. Mit

jedem ihrer Worte und Gesten tat sie uns weh” (*Stasi* 105). Her markedly emotional tone here indicates how traumatic the experience was:

Haß war ein Fremdwort für mich, aber da in Hoheneck, da lernte ich diese Frau hassen, in Freiheit wäre ich ihr sicher nie begegnet und wenn, dann wäre ich ihr aus dem Weg gegangen, aber hier mußte ich mich meinem Haß dieser Frau gegenüberstellen, mußte mich von ihr demütigen, erniedrigen lassen. Okay, das macht stark und prägt fürs Leben. (*Stasi* 110)

It is only after four years following her release that Jauch can eventually start mastering her emotions and, in a metaphorical sense, keep her rage, hatred and pain in an imaginary basement:

Tierisch, ihr unvergeßlicher Name. Was diese Person mir antat an Demütigung, Schickane und Verzweiflung, werde ich bis zu meinem Sterbetag nicht vergessen. Gut vier Jahre habe ich in Freiheit gebraucht, um mich mit ihr innerlich auseinanderzusetzen, daß der Haß, die Wut und der Schmerz bei mir keine Oberhand gewinnt. Ich habe sie besiegt und sie in meinem Keller eingemauert, ich bin frei, lebe ohne sie, aber was mich das an Kraft und Energie im nachhinein gekostet hat, wie viele nächtliche Auseinandersetzungen, das weiß ich nur, das kann man nicht beschreiben. Sie ist und bleibt in meinem Keller. (Jauch *Stasi* 105)

However, Jauch’s writing style, language, and voice show that her psychological struggle with her cell guard continues to affect her. Through this seemingly spontaneous unedited, writing style and angry voice, as exemplified by her choice of words, syntax and overall narrative structure, Jauch seems to be attempting to work through her past and let go of the hatred that has grown in her heart during this time under surveillance. Several times she reiterates that her revulsion derives from the injustice she perceived in her living conditions, her harsh treatment, and the judicial processes she experienced (*Stasi* 11).

As a consequence, her narrative voice is characterized by anger as she asks rhetorically: “Wie macht man Unschuldigen den Prozeß? Was werfen sie einem vor? Daß man sein eigenes Leben leben will? Dafür werden wir verurteilt? Welch ein Hohn, welche schreiende Ungerechtigkeit” (*Stasi* 85). Similarly, she is outraged at the injustice of her Kafkaesque trial:

Welch Hohn, ein Richter, der unser Recht auf Freiheit nicht vertritt, er richtet nach dem Gesetz, was doch nicht der Wahrheit entspricht. Eigentlich dachten wir, wir müßten Richter sein, und die Staatsanwältin, Richter, alle Stasimitarbeiter, die müßten wir verurteilen. Das wäre Gesetz, das wäre die Wahrheit. Ich zweifelte an der Ordnung dieser Welt! Jedes Wort aus dem Mund des Richters war eine Lüge, von einem Lügenstaat hausgemacht. (Jauch *Stasi* 86)

In this passage Jauch denounces the legal system of the GDR that appeared to her unjust at that time but which she could not criticize publicly until years later, when she finally published her file-based autobiography.

Her perspective on the injustice of this legal apparatus during and after her incarceration may be the same but her narrative voice changes in accordance with her freedom, especially the free choice to use her Stasi file to narrate her account. When Jauch uses her file to offer a contemporary perspective on an event that she also discusses in her autobiography, she sometimes takes quotations of her own voice from interrogatory transcripts; in these instances readers are easily able to “hear” that she is relating her story from two distinct phases of her life, the twenty-one-year-old Jauch and the forty-nine-year-old autobiographer, two narrative voices which belong to two distinct phases of her life: although the passages from her file quote her directly, the earlier voice is distinct from the autobiographer’s narration of memory twenty-eight years after the events them-

selves. Jauch makes use of her former narrative voice (recorded on file) when she selects passages that authenticate her statements in her book about what was said after her arrest. The photocopied file report lets readers perceive how the young Jauch narrates the story of her flight to the authorities:

Nachdem wir uns entschlossen hatten, zum Campingplatz bei Kalotina zu trampen, verließen wir S[o]fia zu Fuß auf der Europastraße 5 gegen Mittag des 14.7. 1980. Anfangs mußten wir sehr viel laufen, da wenig Verkehr auf dieser Straße war und uns auch kein Fahrzeug mitnahm. Etwa 2 ½ Stunden warteten wir vergebens, daß uns ein Fahrzeug mitnahm. Wir wollten fast schon wieder zurückkehren, begaben uns jedoch erst einmal zu einer kleinen [G]aststätte, die mir namentlich nicht Erinnerung ist, wo wir etwas gegessen haben. Danach versuchten wir es jedoch noch einmal und gegen 16.30 Uhr nahm uns ein bulgarischer Bürger in seinem Pkw bis Dragoman mit. Danach sind wir nach etwa 10 Minuten weiter in Richtung Kalotina gelaufen, wo wir dann auf einen Straßenkontrollposten der Grenzsicherungskräfte stießen. Wir wurden einer Ausweisekontrolle unterzogen und da wir unsere Personaldokumente nicht bei uns hatten, erfolgte gegen 18.00 Uhr am 7.19.1980 unsere Festnahme. (Jauch *Stasi* quoting from her file 49).

Here, the way in which Jauch lets the interrogatory fragments tell the story of her arrest instead of reformulating this experience in her own words illustrates how the construction of her life story is mostly mediated by her Stasi file. It exemplifies that former data subjects tend to rely on their Stasi files to authenticate their narratives and let the readers perceive her story through this file instead of her contemporary perspective only.

Since Jauch relies extensively on the quotes of her own voice that were recorded on file, I asked her in an e-mail exchange to clarify the context during which her interrogations occurred and from which her statements emerged as opposed to her current take on the events:

Bei der Inhaftierung, stand ich unter einen wirklichen Schock, pure Angst im Nacken, Zwang, es gab kein Entkommen, mußte mich klein machen und fügen um heil, gesund aus den Klauen der Stasi raus zu kommen. Hatte Todesangst, war verwirrt, verzweifelt, konnte es damals nicht bewußt erfassen was und wie es geschieht, dieses Ereignis, Flucht, Verhaftung hat mich voll überrollt. Aussagen wurden unter Drohung gemacht, zum Beispiel, [der] Vernehmer sagte nach dem ersten Verhör, Sie bekommen 1 bis 10 Jahre!! Gefängnis. Kein Anwalt, kein Mensch war da um mich aufzuklären, es hämmerte in der Zelle im Kopf... bis 10 Jahre, WARUM, wozu, was hatte ich nur getan? Eine Ohnmächtigkeit der Gedanken und Gefühle entstand. ("E-mail")

Clearly, the young protagonist felt afraid, confused, and unable to oppose the falsifications in the transcripts of her interrogations. This passage in particular clarifies her perceptions of the Stasi's injustice and the fear this spy organization infused in her at the time of her incarceration. In fact, unlike Ash, Lengsfeld, and Witt, Jauch narrates her story through her voice as it appears in file precisely because of the contrast it offers between herself as data subject and the subject of her own autobiography. While the latter situation seems to have renewed her control over her life story, the file inclusions not only add veracity to her account but also cause Jauch to review her memories of the events it details. In this way, the Stasi files these autobiographers have utilized differ from documents included by typical autobiographers: their documentation tends to substantiate their existing memories, rather than potentially revise or even destroy them. Therefore, the second part of this analysis focuses on why Jauch sees her file as something from which memories emerge, possibly to replace existing personal memories.

One reason that Jauch, like the other data subjects, experienced their files' challenges to their own memories is that they were able to view their files relatively soon af-

ter the events recorded there, rather than having to wait the usual thirty years before gaining access to government documents (see Roy 64 in my Chapter Three, and Mitter 74). Their files thus allowed them to re-evaluate the Stasi's influence in their lives, just as the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz* intended. In turn, some of these people chose to write file-based autobiographies in which they used their records to authenticate their claims not only as former data subjects but also as individuals who have learned about their files and thus about the Stasi's methods of observation and control. That is, with their files in hand, they are in a position to talk about encountering those documents as well as about having lived under observation.

Exactly how her file shaped Jauch's memory can be discovered by considering how the author has appropriated this form of data in constructing her autobiography. Apart from bringing authenticity to her account, her file nourishes and influences her memory, a process that Theodore Platinga describes in his *How Memory Shapes Narratives*. Platinga argues that recollection processes actually tend to be sustained and mediated by others: "[m]emories do not maintain themselves on the basis of any inherent power: they need to be nourished, and other people help us nourish them" (5), just like in the case of former data subjects who seek their files as something that can nourish their memories of their past by correcting and augmenting them. In her life story Jauch talks about memory in two ways that the other file-based autobiographers also do. On the one hand, she notes that some memories are evoked by her file; on the other, she finds that some are modified or replaced by that record. In that sense, Jauch supports Platinga's claim that memory depends on others or at least on what others have written, like in the case of the data subjects who access their Stasi files in order to reminisce about their past

better than if they never read their files. Yet Jauch also engages in a third type of remembering, one that she does not elaborate on in her autobiography but discussed in conversation with me: counter-memory, a process in which Jauch's personal memories have corrected her file's records of events. In engaging in this third kind of remembering, Jauch refers to and incorporates passages from her file into her autobiography in an attempt to rewrite the version of her life previously recorded by the Stasi, rather than simply to describe events as they occurred, as a traditional autobiographer would strive to do. That fact that her appropriation of her Stasi file through her frequent use or reference to it seems integral to her articulation of her testimony means that Jauch's file-based autobiography is more a re-written version of the life recorded in her file than it is a written life.

Jauch's hostile file evokes otherwise-forgotten memories that document her autobiography, as the initial record of her arrest exemplifies. Her file, by describing particular circumstances as well as Jauch's statements at the time, reminds her of details she wants to include in her testimony — for instance, proof of her “Einlieferungsanzeige” (that is, her arrest and transfer to border authorities). Jauch's record thus enables her to remember her first statements – and lies – at the time of her arrest.

She explains that right after her arrest, Stasi informers planned to search her home in order to verify the accuracy of her denials that she had attempted to flee the GDR. Jauch realized at this point that her only option was to reveal the truth to the authorities since she recalled her last words in the letter to her parents she left on her table:

Das war ein Schlag für mich! Nein, damit hätte ich nicht gerechnet. Mir wurde heiß. Hausdurchsuchung, schoß es mir durch den Kopf, der Abschiedsbrief, der alles verriet, lag noch mitten auf dem Wohnzimmertisch, mit dem Inhalt: Liebe Eltern, Möbel aufteilen, endlich frei sein, größ-

ter Wunsch für uns beide... Alles ist nun aus! (Jauch *Stasi* quoting from her file 53)

As she wrote her autobiography, these fragments from her record — both the account of her interrogation and the letter she had written — dominated her perspective on that event, an emphasis foreign to most autobiographers. That letter written years previously, obviously never intended to form part of any autobiographical project and then recorded only to testify against her, in fact partially dictates the form of her narrative.

While Olney talks about weaving memories into a life narrative (Olney *Memory* 8), Jauch refers to this letter preserved in her file in order to articulate her testimony, inserting original statements into her narrative rather than describing her amalgamation of memories and file records. This is an example that Jauch is using her file to sometimes transform or revise her memories as well as to simply weave it into her narrative, providing links between her own recollections of this arrest and the past as recorded by the Stasi. In contrast to this practice of weaving and relying on files when one writes autobiographically, Olney suggests that in “weaving” together imagination (Olney *Memory* 195)— not documentation — and memories, using the imagination to provide causal links, the person remembering changes the memories independently of any form of external memory storage such as files: “like weaving, not archaeological but processual, then it [memory] will bring forth ever different memorial configurations and an ever newly shaped self” (Olney *Memory* 20). Jauch, however, appropriated others’ archives to construct her personal testimony, using her informers’ reports and interrogations in order to acquire more credibility as a former data subject rather than necessarily to complete her memories.



Jauch's appropriation of her file to serve her own purposes initially seems contradictory to the originally hostile function of that file; as Lewis points out, "the political and bureaucratic purpose of file writing was always hostile" (384), so incorporating others' material into one's personal narrative means participating in the "regimes of truth" (397) associated with the files. In the case of file-based autobiographers, this participation initially gives credibility to the Stasi informers and their reports. Established authors (those individuals already known as authors in the literary scene), in contrast to the former data subjects not publicly known as authors before the publication of their autobiographies, avoid giving authority to their files, in the sense that they do not tend to write their autobiographies through or based on their Stasi files. Established authors regard their files exclusively as hostile documentation.<sup>116</sup> Jauch sees using her file as her only possibility of making the Stasi's regime of power work to her advantage because it is the only official documentation of her arrest and thus the only proof that can authenticate her voice as real former data subject.

Although Vismann defines file-based autobiographies as involving counterstatements to Stasi files (156), Jauch decided instead to incorporate sections of her file-based autobiography into her personal record without always making counterstatements. In Jauch's view, it would have otherwise been difficult to verify her statements about her arrest, her time in Hoheneck, and the intrusion of the Stasi into her personal life without evidential material from her file. While her Stasi record therefore does not contain "Zersetzungsmaßnahmen" like those found in Lengsfeld's record, it nevertheless docu-

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<sup>116</sup> Indeed, following Lewis's thoughts, Sascha Anderson's "unwillingness to write his autobiography through his files derives, it could be argued, more from a defiant refusal to participate in the dominant 'regimes of value' in which the files circulate in Germany today" (Lewis 397).

ments the circumstances of her arrest and incarceration, providing Jauch's autobiography with both authenticity and the appearance of authenticity.

In addition to breaking the conventions of other types of autobiographies in these ways, Jauch's reliance on her record also "rais[es] questions about whether the files are always being used in the way the legislation intended" (Lewis 379) – that is, to monitor subversive subjects and intruding in the lives of data subjects, to find evidence of illegal activities, and to document acts against the GDR (*Firma*). In addition, it raises the question of who can use this material and for what purpose.

Although data subjects view their files as *theirs*, these documents were written by others, to whom in some sense they still belong: presently, the BStU, the organization currently responsible for administering, regulating their circulation and editing them (see my Chapter Two). Even though these files belong to others, data subjects who use their Stasi files in their autobiographical memoirs not only subvert the Stasi's goals by re-functionalizing those files, but also draw attention to the tendency to become dependent on external storage media for personal material, as in Ash points out (12). Since the file is so interrelated with their lives, the data subjects seem dependent on it and weave it into their narratives (Vismann "Personal").

Another category of memories, thematized in Jauch's file-based autobiography and characteristic of that genre, are those personal memories for which the record provides substitutes. As she leafed through her file, some of the reports Jauch read seem to have replaced her own recollections. The file passages she directly inserted into her autobiography both interrupt and complement her older narrative voice when at these points her younger voice speaks. The result is a form of dialogue between Jauch as an autobiog-

rapher and Jauch's quotations as recorded on file. She incorporates, for instance, photocopies of part of the interrogation that she underwent after her arrest: why she was carrying a map of VR Bulgaria, her intentions to hitchhike, and her denials of attempting to cross the border illegally. Then, a caesura separates this account of her initial interrogation from her admission that she intended to flee to West Germany:

Meine bisherigen Aussagen zur Zielstellung des Aufenthaltes in der VR Bulgarien entsprechen nicht den Tatsachen. Die gegen mich erhobene Beschuldigung der Durchführung eines ungesetzlichen Grenzübertrittes besteht zu Recht. Ich bin gemeinsam mit meinem Ehemann mit dem Ziel der Nichtrückkehr in die DDR am 1. 7. 1980 in die VR Bulgarien gereist, um an der Staatsgrenze der VR Bulgarien nach der SFR Jugoslawien nach einer guten Möglichkeit für unser Vorhaben des ungesetzlichen Grenzübertrittes zu suchen und diese bei einer risikolosen Möglichkeit ohne Genehmigung zu überschreiten. (Jauch *Stasi* quoting from her file 50)

In narrating this specific event, Jauch quotes directly from her Stasi file and this passage exemplifies how Jauch appropriates the bureaucratic language of the file, characterized by long, impersonal, and nominal sentences. It suggests that her statements in her record were always fashioned by the Stasi in order to fit their bureaucratic language. In fact, despite her use of the personal pronoun "Ich" here, Jauch seems to be writing from a third-person perspective. Similarly, her sentences are rather long and bureaucratically worded, in contrast to her more directly emotional autobiographical voice elsewhere in her narrative: for example, the adjective construction "Die gegen mich erhobene Beschuldigung" and the genitive case "Beschuldigung der Durchführung eines ungesetzlichen Grenzübertrittes" (Jauch *Stasi* quoting from her file 50) are generally not used orally, and so here denote either how Jauch explained herself to the Stasi authorities using a bureau-

cratic language at the time of her arrest or how the Stasi transformed and recorded her statements into bureaucratic prose on file. Regardless whether Jauch or the Stasi initially used that bureaucratic language, Jauch appropriates these statements as her own in the production of her file-based autobiography.

Furthermore, instead of commenting on this event as an autobiographer, Jauch simply provides fragments from her file. In this situation, the external storage medium of her file allows Jauch to both share and mediate memories of her recent past. She tells her story by appropriating her original statements printed in the file dating from her arrest.

For example, the following file photocopy gives her younger self voice:

Gegen Mittag des 14. 7. 1980 begaben wir uns von Sofia in Richtung Kalotina. Wir erreichten jedoch unser Ziel nicht, da wir bereits bei Dragoman gegen 18.00 Uhr am 14. 7. 1980 bei einer Straßenkontrolle durch die Sicherheitsorgane der VB Bulgarien festgenommen wurden. Ich habe das Vernehmungsprotokoll gelesen. Die darin enthaltenen Antworten entsprechen inhaltlich meinen Aussagen. (Jauch *Stasi* 51-52)

In this passage, it appears as if the Stasi file contains the statements Jauch uttered during interrogation. Therefore, while Jauch comments to some extent on her file by supplying the emotional details from which her avowal emerged, she primarily allows her file record of her interrogation to speak on her behalf, simply photocopying questions and answers directly from this external storage medium. Jauch thus suggests that here her file is more significant and accurate than her current memories, and so should replace her personal recollections: the record fragments impose themselves onto the writing act as Jauch appropriates these notes.

Although Jauch selects passages from her file and documents her experience of survival, she provides no direct evidence that the file actually replaces her recollection processes but these fragments of it take precedence over Jauch's narration. In contrast, other types of autobiographies, such as the confessional or the search for personal identity, usually present the writer's story from the perspective of personal remembering, rather than mediating that perspective with external documentation.

In contrast, Jauch, like the other authors of file-based autobiographies, starts with someone else's data rather than with her own memories, suggesting that her knowledge of the past and her autobiographical discourse is based on evidence contained in her file. Since her personal record functions as source of veracity for her statements, Jauch's file-based autobiography testifies to conditions in the ex-GDR rather than to the recollection processes of former data subjects, as in Ash's autobiography. She thus focuses on presenting a story embedded in the particular historical context of East Germany prior to the Wende, using evidential material from her file to authenticate her voice as a survivor of a period she wants to describe (Jauch *Stasi* 11). The way in which her file structures and supports her narrative indicates the extent to which her record mediates her memory, with or without the autobiographer's commentary as she re-functionalizes her file. In fact, although all four autobiographers in this study acknowledge that their files are inaccurate to some degree, they all nevertheless use their files in writing their autobiographies because they have no better data with which to prove that they were victims of the Stasi.

Although autobiographies are generally understood to be the stories of the individuals who wrote them, file-based autobiographies combine others' reports with the autobiographers' perspectives and memories. In this situation, autobiography no longer

consists of life transcribed according to a writer's memory, but rather of life interwoven with information from an external storage medium, a source which to some degree actually determines the content and structure of that life story. In other words, file-based autobiographies are co-authored, or at least written to include external perspectives, regardless of those writers' approval of the written product.

While one personal objective of data subjects publishing their file-based autobiographies may be to highlight the ethical issues behind how data was originally collected, another is to convey an implicit political message. These autobiographers rarely publish their work simply to tell their life stories; rather, they seek to satisfy a personal quest by writing. Jauch's autobiography, for instance, evidences her desire to offer a personal testimony against the injustices she suffered while also securing compensation for the effects of her incarceration (Jauch "Personal"). Like Jauch, both in their file-based autobiographies and during interviews most other data subjects mention how the Stasi has damaged their lives. Some of them make their autobiographies public in the hope of receiving attention and, perhaps, compensation for the trauma and suffering they endured under the Stasi. Jauch counters Lewis' idea that encounters with their files "have provided [former data subjects with] the starting-point for the collective work of confronting the injustices and crimes of the East German past and have been vital in achieving restorative justice" (Lewis 378). In fact, one of the main reasons behind Jauch writing her autobiography was to bring awareness to the problems she discovered and the injustices that she suffered in the GDR in the hope of "achieving restorative justice" (Lewis 378) via financial and social support. From her autobiography, e-mail exchanges, and a meeting in February 2010, I conclude that Jauch is still experiencing difficulties moving on with her life; she seems

unable to attain a full “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” perhaps because she had neither spoken enough about her experience in Hoheneck in order to overcome her personal trauma nor received enough support to do so. As a result, she continues to fight for recognition and support, especially in the academic sphere.

Despite the fact that Jauch has not yet fully come to terms with her past, however, in the conclusion of her file-based autobiography Jauch points to a type of psychological rebirth that is reminiscent of Mildred C. Andersen’s theory suggesting that former prisoners focus “on the promise of renewed life after the darkness of confinement” (Andersen 34). Indeed, Jauch ends her autobiography on this idea of new beginning: “Wir haben unser Leben fest im Griff, so wie wir es haben wollten. Wir gehen zielstrebig unseren erträumten Weg und entscheiden selber, was und wie geschieht, das ist die Freiheit, die wir uns erkämpft und ersehnt haben” (*Stasi* 123). She thus suggests how her autobiographical use of her file has helped her to validate herself as data subject and narrator of her story. Furthermore, as she weaves passages from her file into her life story, she shows how she can appropriate the hostile medium of her Stasi file to prompt and replace her personal memories. Jauch thus shows how her file mediates not only her memories but her autobiographical presentation of this part of her life.

## 8 Conclusion

File-based autobiographies form an autobiographical sub-genre that first appeared in the 1990s. In response to the controversies (such as blackmail, fears of witch hunting, and hesitation to give access to material collected illegally) over the opening of the Stasi archives, the *Stasi Files Act* was passed to enable former data subjects access to their files after only three years rather than the usual thirty-year restriction. As a result, some of these individuals took on the unusual task of writing their autobiographies based on their personal files written by a defunct secret-police agency.

File-based autobiographies present fascinating insights into how the records of a former intelligence agency were appropriated by data subjects and re-functionalized to serve autobiographical goals. They comprise a departure from the general understanding of autobiographical writing as well as from socio-historical accounts of files in archive theory. This thesis has examined how autobiographers uniquely re-functionalized their state files by producing a new kind of life writing. Autobiographers have appropriated their files and transformed them into “authentic” sources and documentary evidence for their narrative voice. The sources support their claims regarding their lives in the GDR and their encounter with their files. As this thesis has explored, the appropriation of their files has assisted former data subjects in reflecting critically on life under observation and the Stasi’s mechanisms of power. Ultimately, the authors’ use of their files inverts their position: from former objects being observed to subjects doing the observing and construct their life stories around the data the Stasi collected on them. The act of writing their file-based autobiographies in this way has allowed data subjects to write back to the mass media, their families and friends.



Coming from a society where almost everyone was under observation, these are the first autobiographers to respond to the effects of the legislation which allowed them to read and transform their unauthorized biographies into their own stories. In contrast to other literature of the Wende, they neither focus primarily on the deficiencies of the collapsed political system nor on nostalgia, but rather on the files which enabled the GDR's surveillance apparatus to produce the illusion of omnipotence and maintain its hegemony. These autobiographers are not attempting to contribute to German literature per se, but rather to address the unique problems stemming from the Stasi files becoming accessible to members of the public. This study has evaluated how public figures and ordinary citizens alike aim to engage their readers with a personal narrative mediated by these official files.

In order to situate my research within German scholarship since 1989, I have discussed the main topics and issues that have emerged after the Wende. Despite the considerable volume of literature that has been written after that point, no genres other than file-based autobiographies either incorporate actual files or explore how these files have affected people's lives. The Stasi and the growing resistance to socialism were taboo topics prior to 1989, although the German Wende did allow the discussion of new topics that used to be censured prior to it: "[n]eue Aspekte wie Flucht und Vertreibung, Luftkrieg und Zerstörung – bis dahin tabuisiert – geraten durch die Literatur in die öffentliche Diskussion" (*Wende* 7). Major discussions during the Wende were about the general public's discontent with the SED government:

Während im Herbst 1989 das Staatsgebilde DDR bereits in Agonie lag, erstarrt an Ignoranz, staatlicher Willkür und politbürokratischer Selbstgefälligkeit, fassten die Bürgerinnen und Bürger des Landes Mut, ihre Unzufriedenheit am

‘Regiertwerden’ öffentlich zu artikulieren. Massenhaft stimmten sie gegen eine zentralistisch ausgeübte SED-Herrschaft mit den Füßen ab. Viele der in den 90er Jahren geführten politischen, kulturellen, aber auch literarischen Debatten leiten sich direkt oder vermittelt aus der sog[enante] ‘Wende’ her. (*Deutsche* 180)

During this historical caesura German authors addressed their concerns regarding the massive exodus of East Germans to West Germany. However, initiatives such as “Fassen Sie Vertrauen!” and “Für unser Land” were unsuccessful appeals (*Deutsche* 663).<sup>117</sup>

Writers and artists of East and West Germany experienced the Wende differently. In the former East Germany, this political change marks the end of state controls on literature (*Wende* 14); writers who were paid by the state feared that this political change would also affect their social status (14). In general, East German authors experienced the Wende as a loss of their role as “kritische Ersatzöffentlichkeit” (15). As a result, they engaged in reflexive texts in which the protagonist writers live through writing crises, such as Wolfgang Hilbig’s *Das Provisorium* and Monika Maron’s *Endmoränen* (15).

No such reflections on the drastic political changes occurred in West Germany, where authors simply did not experience this historical caesura personally; for them there was instead a feeling of continuity:

Während sich die Bürger der ehemaligen DDR nach dem 3. Oktober mit dem Untergang ihres politischen Systems und dem radikalen Wandel ihrer alltäglichen Erfahrungswelt konfrontiert sahen, änderte sich für diejenigen, die bislang in den ‘alten’ Bundesländern gelebt hatten, so wenig, dass insgesamt das Bewusstsein historischer Kontinuität die Empfindung des historischen Bruchs überwog. (*Wende* 15)

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<sup>117</sup> Although such calls for a united German population are generally absent in file-based autobiographies, Anke Jauch does ask for a collective remembering of German history (Jauch *Stasi* 9).

In their writing, accordingly, West German writers do not participate in the same working through the past as East Germans do. Patrick Süskind's essay "Deutschland, eine Midlife-crisis" in the *Spiegel* of 1990 expresses how West German intellectuals feel about being confronted with a political change which they had not expected to occur so suddenly and from which they felt detached: in fact, West German intellectuals avoided writing about the thematic of their understanding of history, preferring instead to regard their childhood nostalgically (*Wende* 16).

For East Germans, however, writing about their past helps them to come to terms with the loss of their Heimat; it serves as "Bewältigungsmodell aktueller Verluste-fahrungen" (*Wende* 16). This feeling of having lost their country or province (16) is expressed, for example, in Erwin Strittmatter's *Der Laden* (1998), Monika Maron's *Endmoränen* (2002), and Martina Oelke's essay "Reisen in eine versunkene Provinz: Die DDR in der literarischen Retrospektive" (2006). Other East German narratives focus on the possibilities and what could have been done to reform the GDR after 1989, like Volker Braun's *Das Nichtgelebte* which appeared in 1992-1993 in the volume *Trotzdestonichts oder Der Wendehals* (*Deutsche* 662). The issue of citizens of the former GDR finding a new place to call home in West Germany after reunification is central to Wolfgang Hilbig's novel *Das Provisorium*, where he explains the inability of a writer to relocate in a new environment: "Vertrieben aus dem östlichen Teil Deutschlands, der ihm die Luft zum Atmen nahm, gelingt es dem Schriftsteller C. trotz großer Hoffnungen und Anstrengungen nicht im anderen Teil des Landes heimisch zu werden" (*Deutsche* 670). Although this protagonist feels uneasy about his life in the West, he feels equally unable to return to East Germany, and experiences an identity crisis.

During this new literary wave a literary debate started in 1990 regarding authors whose work had supported the GDR, like Christa Wolf (*Wende* 14), or who had lacked the courage to oppose the Stasi: “Karl Heinz Bohrer warf der politisch linksorientierten Literatur vor, dass [Christa Wolf] sich mit ihrem gesellschaftlichen Engagement an der Zweckfreiheit von Literatur und Kunst versündigt hätte” (*Deutsche* 665). Ulrich Greiner criticized East German authors who dealt with too political themes instead of separating aesthetics from politics prior to the Wende (665):

Ulrich Greiner brachte diesen Vorwurf auf den Begriff der ‘Gesinnungsästhetik’, worunter er engagierte Kunst verstand, die ‘verschiedene Namen’ trägt: ‘das Gewissen, die Partei, die Politik, die Moral, die Vergangenheit.’ Greiner hielt einem Teil der Literatur der Nachkriegszeit und der jüngsten Vergangenheit vor, dass sie sich zu sehr mit ‘außerliterarischen’ Themen beschäftigt hat: ‘mit dem Kampf gegen Restauration, Faschismus, Klerikarismus, Stalinismus etcetera.’ (*Deutsche* 665)

Other critics argued that authors like Christa Wolf were merely political ideologues promoting the state’s political views and thus supporting the totalitarian regime: “In Uwe Wittstocks Fazit wird der zentrale Punkt der Auseinandersetzung beschrieben; ‘Es geht *nicht* um Literatur, sondern um eine exemplarische Abrechnung mit exemplarischen Lebensläufen. Die Schriftsteller sind Stellvertreter”’ (*Deutsche* 665). During that time the theme of censure of the SED in the former GDR is portrayed in *Zensur in der DDR. Geschichte, Praxis und ‘Ästhetik’ der Behinderung von Literatur* (1991). These publications show that writers were pressed by their audiences to make public statements about their political engagement prior to 1989, just like former data subjects who were public figures (like Katarina Witt and Vera Lengsfeld) and had to write their file-based autobiographies in response to their public’s demand.

Furthermore, among the prominent writers publicly attacked for their cowardice and duplicity in having collaborated with the Stasi are Sascha Anderson, Monica Maron, Paul Wiens, Fritz Rudolf Fries, and Rainer Schedlinski (*Deutsche* 665-66). Public reproaches extend to others who passively complied with the system. “This simple realization, ‘daß Mitmachen Mitverschulden bedeutet,’ accompanies de Bruyn [for example] throughout his narrative; it, more than any other single aspect of the text, sets de Bruyn’s autobiography apart from many post-Wende examples of the genre that, like Kant’s, disavow responsibility and succumb to self-justifying rhetoric” (Reece 72).

Still another recurrent theme in the post-1989 German literature is the problem of memory, considered in such novels as Monika Maron’s *Stille Zeile sechs*, Klaus Schlegel’s *Trug* and *Die Sache mit Randow*, and Ingo Schulze’s *Simple Stories* (*Deutsche* 670). Faced with a political caesura, the characters of those stories attempt to negotiate their own paths in their new lives (*Deutsche* 670). Similarly, Jürgen Becker’s *Der fehlende Rest* tackles the theme of “Erinnerungsarbeit” as he explores his personal past: “[i]n den erzählerischen Zeitreisen, die er unternimmt, tastet er sich an verschüttete Schichten der Vergangenheit heran, sucht er nach Zeichen, nach Spuren, die im Gedächtnis zwar abgelagert, dort aber in Verborgenen liegen” (*Deutsche* 671). The theme of memory is recurrent in file-based autobiographies since former data subjects must negotiate between facts written on file and their own recollections. In the writing process autobiographers rely extensively on the Stasi files rather than on their own memories. However, not the whole German population desired to remember through the files.

Both the attempt of former Stasi informers to destroy the archives and the subsequent debate over the opening of the files testify to the tension felt by a part of the Ger-

man population between the will to remember and the desire to forget. In his 1990 essay “Zur Erinnerung. Brief an alle, die es angeht,” Günter de Bruyn mocks those who prefer to forget. His text functions at two levels: “[a]s satire, the ‘letter’ anticipates the actions of many who will attempt to avoid accountability for their part, whether active or passive, in what the GDR had been and become over its forty-year existence” (Reece 60); such is the case for many former employees of the MfS. De Bruyn’s letter captures the conflict the German population feels about facing the duty to remember, despite the unwillingness of many to do so, not only after the fall of the Berlin Wall but in the post-war period as well:

The reluctance and even active resistance among GDR citizens to examine honestly their own past is clearly reminiscent of the situation confronted by an earlier generation of German authors and intellectuals. In the 1950s and 1960s a new generation of post-war writers in the West used their writing to hold up a mirror to the Nazi past at a time when their fellow citizens were more disposed to leave the past behind and ‘move ahead’ with the project of rebuilding Germany. (Reece 61)

Since autobiographies written after 1989 most commonly serve purposes of self-justification, de Bruyn is especially sceptical of autobiographers who explicitly manipulate facts. As a result, he exposes the problems of autobiographical writing in the GDR and especially of Hermann Kant’s *Abspann. Erinnerung an meine Gegenwart* in his essay entitled “Scharfmaul und Prahlhans. Der ‘Abspann’ des Hermann Kant: der ehemalige Präsident des DDR-Schriftstellerverbandes hat seine Erinnerungen geschrieben.” De Bruyn notes that despite the autobiographical pact implied in autobiographical writing, autobiographies written after the Wende by those who previously were not public figures, just as is the case for those written by prominent authors, athletes, and other public fig-

ures, can “provide ample evidence [of] intentional omissions, self-deception and plain dishonesty (Reece 66, paraphrasing de Bruyn *Ich* 41-42). “There is, de Bruyn seems to suggest, an even greater need [when public figures are compelled by their audiences to make a public statement or self-justify themselves after the demise of a political system] for readers and writers alike to be wary: to mistrust memory, to watch for obvious omissions and evasions, and to question the text for signs of self-delusion and dishonesty” (Reece 66-67). By failing to engage in self-reflections Kant fails to comply with the autobiographical pact. Kant’s autobiography is therefore an example of how, despite the abundance of material that an autobiographer has at hand, the autobiographical act falls apart if the pact of truth (also known as Lejeune’s autobiographical pact) is broken by the autobiographer. It can be argued that Kant attempts to self-justify his collaboration with the Stasi since he was a known author in Germany prior to the Wende and felt a personal responsibility towards his public to justify his political convictions after the demise of the GDR.

The issues surrounding the roles of authors in the former GDR are particularly thoroughly explored by authors who have had to revise their own political convictions after breaking with the ideologies that dominated prior to the Wende:

Es gab bereits eine hinter die DDR zurückreichende bedeutende Tradition von Autobiographien ehemaliger Kommunisten und Sozialisten, deren Zentrum die Entscheidung für den Bruch mit der alten Weltanschauung und ihrer politischen Praxis bildete, so die Bücher von Arthur Koestler, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Susanne Leonhard, Wolfgang Leonhard, Alfred Kantorowicz oder Ralph Giordano; später fortgeführt von Gerhard Zwerenz, Heinz Brandt und Carl-Jakob Danziger, schließlich seit den späten 70er Jahren von Helga M. Novak, Jürgen Fuchs, Erich Loest und Franz Fühmann. Noch vor der Wende waren Stephan Hermlins und Stefan Heyms sehr verschiedenartige Autobiographien

erschienen – beides Bücher kritischer Kommunisten, die allerdings den Bruch nie vollzogen hatten. (Emmering 481)

De Bruyn makes the point that writers living in a totalitarian state see their writing freedom and by extension their own integrity at stake because of the censorship in place. “By linking his own development as a writer to the events that shaped his relationship to the state, de Bruyn is able to provide a psychologically revealing self-portrait that also provides his readers with a glimpse of what life in a broader sense was like in the totalitarian state” (Reece 70). In repressive societies like the former GDR, writers must decide whether to go along with or distance themselves from the state: in either case, their career or integrity is at stake.

Unlike file-based autobiographers, most other autobiographers writing after the Wende were born in the mid- or late 1920s.<sup>118</sup> The authors of file-based autobiographies analyzed in this study were born in the 1950s or 1960s.<sup>119</sup> In other words, all four writers studied here were in their twenties or early thirties, a critical turning point in their lives, when they were placed under Stasi observation. For some of them, the Stasi’s “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen” also directly influenced their life paths.

As for the theme of other relationships between the Stasi and literature other than file-based autobiographies, Reiner Kunze’s *Deckname Lyrik* (1990), Erich Loest’s *Der Ton des Schafes. Aus meinem Tagewerk* (1990) and Hans Joachim Schädlich’s *Aktenkun-*

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<sup>118</sup> Painter and writer Karl Hermann Roehricht’s *Lebensverläufe. Innenansicht aus der DDR* (1991), Werner Heiduczek’s *Im gewöhnlichen Stalinismus. Meine unerlaubten Texte. Tagebücher, Briefe, Essays* (1991) about how a good Socialist transforms into a dissident, Hermann Kant’s *Abspann* (1991), as mentioned earlier, and Heiner Müller’s *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (1992) about his personal experience in two dictatorships (Emmering 484).

<sup>119</sup> Ash was born in 1955, Lengsfeld in 1952, Jauch in 1954, and only Witt in the next decade, in 1965.



dig, the latter a compilation of works from Biermann, Fuchs, Rathenow and Schädlich himself, reveal notable insights into the Stasi's mechanisms of surveillance.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, in their compilation of essays *MachtSpiele. Literatur und Staatssicherheit im Fokus Prenzlauer Berg* (1993), the authors Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski document their activities as IMs and review the debate related to their involvement with the state surveillance (Emmering 487). Thus, file-based autobiographies offer only one approach to the subject of how the Stasi operated and infringed on the lives of the surveilled. Other accounts like Hubertus Knabe's *Gefangen in Hohenschönhausen, Die Täter sind unter uns* and Petra Koch's *Menschenwege. Politisch inhaftiert auf Burg Hoheneck* focus not on how Stasi files have influenced the lives and later the memories of data subjects, but rather on the actual mechanisms of oppression at play prior to the Wende.

While most of the German literature of the Wende focuses on the GDR's political system and the Stasi, file-based autobiographies are concerned with the unique historical legacy of the secret police and the unprecedented opportunity provided by the *Stasi Files Act* for data subjects to access and respond to those files. By appropriating the data that the Stasi illegally collected on them to authenticate their writing, document their self-justification, and support their criticism of the Stasi's surveillance mechanisms, former data subjects in turn mediate their personal life stories.

File-based autobiographies challenge scholars' perceptions of both files and the genre of autobiography. No other types of literature after the Wende show how a hostile

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<sup>120</sup> Although for the most part the literature of the Wende and Stasi literature itself explore the topics of sadness, anger, and survival, the autobiographical story *Zwölf heißt: Ich liebe Dich* by Regina Kaiser and Uwe Karlstedt is an exception to these general negative themes in the post-1989 literature because it narrates the successful love story of a dissident and a Stasi officer (who interrogated her) who both reunited after the Wende and got married.

document can both interact with memories and be re-functionalized to aid reflection on the past. By being positioned in this literary context, the file loses its hostile power to bolster state control and support its pursuit of its “Zersetzungsmaßnahmen,” as outlined by the MfS. Instead the Stasi material becomes the core element of these autobiographers’ expression of opinion about the Stasi. In this way, file-based autobiographies provide a distinct model for how former data subjects can deal with the impacts of a defunct secret security service when they encounter and appropriate records never intended to be publicly viewed. They thereby show how a medium like a file can be displaced from its original regulating context and given a new function and significance for autobiographical purposes. At the same time, these autobiographers offer an example of how individuals can respond to the public while negotiating the memory processes mediated by their files.

File-based autobiographies balance the telling of a very personal story with the need to address public and national concerns. These narratives are examples of what happens when, to offer a form of transitional justice, the successors of a repressive regime grant access to records formerly held secret instead of providing citizens retroactive justice.<sup>121</sup> Access to their files caused former data subjects to formulate their responses not only to this form of transitional justice but also to their needs for self-justification and critical reflection. Ultimately, the opening of the Stasi files raises issues concerning the

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<sup>121</sup> The German government could not provide retroactive justice because there were too many people involved with the Stasi and it is not always clear who exactly were the offenders and what the offences were since they were committed under a different legal code than the one established in Germany after the Wende.

use of files and the tendency of surveillance societies to infringe on the lives of its citizens and reduce them to objects for the purposes of state security service.

In the aftermath of the Wende and the subsequent production of file-based autobiographies, literary scholars must question the extent to which the autobiographical genre is an act of self-life-writing, as its etymological root *αὐτο*, *βιο* and *γραφία* (a life written by oneself) indicates. The four file-based autobiographies studied in this dissertation challenge the notion that autobiographies are written exclusively by an individual about that person's life. As these case studies indicate, file-based autobiographies can include passages that have been written by others but appropriated by the autobiographers. Furthermore, these works consider not only these authors' lives per se, but also the mediation of their lives by their files, material generated for the most part by writers hostile to the data subjects in question.<sup>122</sup>

Autobiographies that foreground how these writers negotiate a path between their lives as mediated by their Stasi records and their constructions of their lives using the same records challenge readers' notions of what the autobiographical genre is, since in this case, unlike in other types of autobiographies, the ideas of self and of bio have been put into conflict by the Stasi's hostile intentions. Taking four case studies into consideration, I have reflected on whether or not a file-based autobiography corresponds to Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography defined as the "[r]écit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (Lejeune *Pacte* 14). Former data subjects challenge Lejeune's definition of autobiography by not focusing on the sto-

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<sup>122</sup> However, Witt's informers, as an exception, mainly protected her.

ries of their personality development and by suggesting that autobiographical writing can be centered on archives compiled by someone else — in this case, a hostile state organization whose work was meant to be kept secret from the public. The fact that file-based autobiographers not only narrate their personal stories as “window[s] to history” (Reece 75) but also become the subjects of their originally objectifying files defeats the original purpose of the Stasi files.

This research has focused on the unique qualities of file-based autobiographies by analyzing how the data subjects engaged with their Stasi records, a process fraught with memories, so as to construct their life narratives. In the process, I have suggested how the opening of the Stasi files offered former data subjects unique and advantageous possibilities for narration, reflection, criticism, and validation. Throughout my study I have focused both on these authors’ thematization of memory as having been shaped and replaced by their files and on the messages they have sought to communicate through their narratives. In addition to providing biographical background information on each autobiographer, I have distinguished their motivations while also analyzing what their writing has contributed to the genre of autobiography and the scholarly understanding of files, showing connections based on how the four data subjects studied used their Stasi files.

This study discussed file-based autobiographies as a unique literary response to an unprecedented socio-historical event, a response that can be considered as a sub-genre that future studies might further analyze. It thus provides a new approach to the literature of the Wende and opens a new avenue in the study of how files mediate and color people’s views of their lives. This study has tried to show how file-based autobiographies both build on the academic understanding of the literary response to the *Stasi*-

*Unterlagen-Gesetz* as an act of transitional justice, and deepen the socio-historical conception of Stasi files and of the autobiographical genre. At the same time, this dissertation takes bold steps by analyzing the publications of individuals who had not been previously known as authors and yet who to some extent have been transformed into literary figures by the circumstances that allowed the production of file-based autobiographies.

I hope that my dissertation initiates discussions on political issues other than those addressed in the literary debates about the disclosure and usage of the files of a defunct secret police as well as the nostalgic discourses following the Wende. I aim also to correct misconceptions about the Stasi files that were initially propagated by their idealized portrayal in *Das Leben der Anderen*, a movie that illustrates something of the struggles of data subjects to come to terms with their past under observation. My study makes these texts more accessible for an audience that is not yet fluent in German and unfamiliar with the problems associated with the files of former state security services, such as that of the former GDR. I wish that this research will initiate further discussions and research into literary responses to the processes of transitional justice of other countries, or in regard to the widespread states' usage of surveillance files in North America.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> In North America, the particular interest of the uses of secret files could be justified, for instance, by the *USA Patriot Act* and its impacts of the citizens' right to privacy.

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