

## Chapter 4

# DETERRITORIALIZING THE STASI IN *DEUTSCHLAND 83/86/89*

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To a certain extent, the international success of *Deutschland 83*, *Deutschland 86*, and *Deutschland 89* was one of the least remarkable aspects of the three-season series. A reflection of how “over the last two decades, transnational co-production has become the new normal for high-end television drama,”<sup>1</sup> *Deutschland 83* was co-financed by the American television channel SundanceTV and the German channel RTL. This was an interesting partnership given SundanceTV’s reputation as a broadcaster of independent features and world cinema productions, whereas RTL has long been known for broadcasting American entertainment programs. However, this somewhat surprising collaboration instilled the series with transnational marketability that undoubtedly contributed to its international success. Firstly, *Deutschland 83* was able to be marketed both as popular entertainment (a point that, as I will later argue, is particularly significant for the series’ domestic reception) and as “quality television” in international territories. Indeed, when the series was broadcast outside Germany, it frequently did so on channels that aligned far closer with SundanceTV than RTL.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the German channel RTL is a subsidiary of the RTL Group, an international company operating in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Hungary, and Luxembourg.<sup>3</sup> This opened up transnational distribution opportunities that are not immediately visible through the designation of the series as a US–German co-production. For example, the international distribution rights for the series were handled by Fremantle, a UK-based subsidiary of the RTL Group. Finally, while the series marked a new venture for both SundanceTV and RTL, bringing German history to a mainstream international audience was certainly familiar (and successful) territory for the series’ producers UFA Fiction, a production company known for its high-budget historical dramas frequently set in the dark chapters of

Germany's twentieth-century past, and itself both a subsidiary of the RTL Group and a production unit integrated into Fremantle.

*Deutschland 83* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and subsequently became the first German-subtitled series to play on American television. The series enjoyed its German television premiere at the end of 2015 and was subsequently sold to over one hundred countries. However, the international success of the trilogy places what is perhaps the most surprising aspect of the series in the spotlight, namely its limited domestic success. Viewing figures for *Deutschland 83* fell by nearly 50 percent over the course of the series run, which put the commissioning of the planned second and third installments in doubt. However, the proven international and online success of the first season drew the attention of Amazon Prime Video, which in turn provided over 80 percent of the funding to ensure the production of *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89*—and the continued international reach of the series.<sup>4</sup>

Anna and Jörg Winger's *Deutschland 83* (2015), *Deutschland 86* (2018), and *Deutschland 89* (2020), henceforth collectively referred to as the *Deutschland* series, were always planned as a trilogy. *Deutschland 83* introduces the series' hero, the East German soldier, Martin Rauch. Martin is recruited against his will to the Stasi's foreign espionage agency, the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (Main Directorate for Reconnaissance, HVA) by Lenora Rauch (his aunt) and Walter Schweppenstette (an HVA agent who is later revealed to be Martin's father).<sup>5</sup> His mission is to infiltrate the West German Bundeswehr by assuming the identity of the murdered West German soldier, Moritz Stamm, who had been serving as an aide-de-camp to Major General Edel, and thereby send details of the West German and American plans to station missiles in Western Europe back to the HVA in East Berlin. Martin reluctantly accepts the mission having been told that his cooperation will allow his mother (Ingrid Rauch) to receive an urgently needed kidney transplant. While undercover, Martin befriends the son of General Edel, Alex, whose commitment to the peace movement and identity as a gay man position him as an outsider in the military. Meanwhile, Martin's girlfriend, Annett Schneider, is pregnant with their child and moves into the Rauch family home, where she is shown to be a committed socialist willing to inform on those around her. The series is underpinned by personal and political misunderstandings between West and East. Indeed, almost certain nuclear conflict is only averted after Martin exposes his true identity to General Edel and is forced to flee back to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), where he reveals that the military operations unfolding in the West are only an exercise and not, as the

HVA had believed, preparation for an attack. Upon this revelation, it becomes clear that Schweppenstette has been omitting key information from the reports that he has been sending to his superiors.

*Deutschland 86* seeks to demonstrate the global reach of the Cold War. The first episode reveals that Martin is in exile in Angola, where he has been sent by the HVA as punishment for his actions in the first season.<sup>6</sup> The plot of the second season initially moves between South Africa, Angola, and Libya, and it quickly becomes clear that both the Federal Republic and the GDR are pursuing covert weapon sales, which, if made public, would compromise their publicly stated positions and be in breach of UN sanctions. Back in the GDR, Annett has been promoted to the HVA, while Schweppenstette is seeking to rehabilitate himself within the organization by leading "Operation Traumschiff," an operation that is designed to use the purchase of a cruise ship (the one used for the popular West German television series, *Das Traumschiff*) as a means of smuggling weapons to South Africa and thus gaining much needed money for the East German state. Lenora is living in South Africa, where she is working alongside an ANC operative, Rose Seithathi, with whom she is also in a relationship. Martin becomes romantically involved with a West German intelligence agent from the Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Service, BND), Brigitte Winkelmann. He travels to France and then to West Berlin and the GDR, where his presence threatens to expose the covert trade deals facilitated by a new unit in the HVA, Kommerzielle Koordinierung (Commercial Coordination, KoKo). Headed by Barbara Dietrich, the unit's primary objective is to secure much needed foreign capital for the bankrupt East German state. The clash between economic and ideological priorities becomes a growing point of discord within the HVA, and links the second season with the third.

The final installment of the trilogy, *Deutschland 89*, is set between November 1989 and March 1990, and covers the chaotic weeks that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the debates about the future political and economic course of Germany. Martin is now working in the GDR, but he reluctantly accepts one final domestic mission not only from the HVA, but also from the CIA and the BND. His mission quickly spirals out of control after he is tasked with assassinating the newly installed East German head of state, Egon Krenz, while also infiltrating a West German terror network. Lenora is in prison in West Berlin, but she is freed during a prison break that has been orchestrated by Rose, who is subsequently shown to be working for the CIA. Lenora is positioned as the most ideologically orthodox of all the East German characters,

and she becomes determined to assassinate West German chancellor Helmut Kohl in order to prevent reunification. Her attempts fail and she is killed by a CIA agent, Hector Valdez. Meanwhile, Valdez has become convinced of Martin's complicity in recent terror attacks, and he arrests and tortures Martin. The series' hero is eventually rescued by Schweppenstette, who, with the cooperation of a second CIA agent and the BND's Birgitte Winkelmann, helps Martin to fake his own death. With his new romantic interest Nicole Zangen, Martin then leaves the GDR for one final time for Morocco. The trilogy concludes with a montage of political figures, predominantly from Germany and the United States during the 1990s and 2000s. The final images are designed to accentuate the series' "meta-story" through a focus on "mafia-like capitalism" by seeking to create a link between the nationalist policies of Donald Trump and the fall of the Berlin Wall. This link is not only informed by the political motif of constructing a wall, but is also designed to convey how "the victory of capitalism has led to wanting even more capitalism."<sup>7</sup>

The *Deutschland* series may employ props and a soundtrack designed to situate the audience firmly within the contexts of 1983, 1986, and 1989, but the showrunners Anna Winger and Jörg Winger were adamant that they were not seeking to tell a historically accurate story.<sup>8</sup> Rather, their aim was to use historical events to tell a novel and engaging story in ways that would appeal to younger audiences in particular. Accordingly, the focus of this chapter is not to interrogate the historical fidelity of the plot, but rather to examine the ways in which the *Deutschland* series was shaped to appeal to audiences at home and abroad. By focusing on the series' production, the reshaping of the past, and the presentation of key characters as outsiders, this chapter will explore the ways in which the deterritorialization of the Stasi is at the heart of the series' transnational strategy, above all through the ways in which it combines temporal specificity with spatial relocation.

## Anatomy of a Hit

When *Deutschland 83* received its international premiere in February 2015, it was heralded at home and abroad as evidence of Germany's belated ability to produce internationally attractive high-quality drama series. The first two episodes of the eight-part series were screened at the Berlin International Film Festival as part of the inaugural section Berlinale Series, and the full series was subsequently screened on the

American cable network SundanceTV in June 2015, when it became the first German-language series to be broadcast in the United States.<sup>9</sup> The American success boosted the credentials of the series further, and when it returned to Germany in November 2015, *Deutschland 83* was greeted with considerable anticipation. When Tom Hanks—who at the time was on the European press tour for the Cold War thriller *Bridge of Spies* (2015)—described the series as “fan-tas-tisch,” the stage was set for *Deutschland 83* to achieve new viewing records in Germany.<sup>10</sup> However, while the first episode drew 3.2 million viewers (representing a 14.6 percent audience share), viewing figures rapidly decreased with just 1.63 million viewers (a 5.3 percent audience share) tuning in to watch the final episode.<sup>11</sup> Not only did the series lose nearly half of its audience in a month, it lost over 300,000 viewers between its first and second episodes, a drop all the more remarkable given that the first two episodes were screened back-to-back as a double bill.<sup>12</sup> *Deutschland 83* was subsequently described as “the biggest flop of the year,”<sup>13</sup> “a major flop,”<sup>14</sup> and “a surprise hit in the wrong direction of travel: a surprise flop.”<sup>15</sup>

While domestic reviews were largely negative, it would nonetheless be misleading to dismiss the impact of the series. Much of the criticism was underpinned by the failure of the series to live up to the perhaps overly high expectations set by early international reviews. In spite of the series’ mixed reception, *Deutschland 83* was nominated for—and, in a number of categories, won—the prestigious Deutscher Fernsehpreis, the Goldene Kamera, and the Grimme-Preis. Yet it nevertheless remains true that the series made a far greater popular and critical impact outside of Germany. The series was sold to 110 territories, which made it “one of the most successful German-language series of all time,”<sup>16</sup> and it has been described as “a door opener for German series on the international market.”<sup>17</sup> *Deutschland 83* won the International Emmy Award in 2016 and, when the first episode was watched by 2.5 million viewers in the UK, *Deutschland 83* became the most-watched foreign-language drama in British television history. In stark contrast to its domestic reception, the series was subsequently heralded as “Germany’s most eagerly awaited drama,”<sup>18</sup> “a cultural phenomenon,”<sup>19</sup> and the “coolest show of the year.”<sup>20</sup>

The series’ production company described *Deutschland 83* as a “game changer” for German television, but its success nonetheless needs to be placed in a broader industry perspective.<sup>21</sup> In spite of the poor commercial performance of *Deutschland 83* in Germany, it very much builds on highly successful established domestic formats. While international

audiences have become increasingly familiar with German historical films since the 2000s, especially when it comes to depicting the National Socialist past and the German Democratic Republic on screen, German television has only recently found an export market. As I will later argue, the *Deutschland* series is undoubtedly informed by the commercially successful approaches adopted in German heritage films. However, in order to understand how the series was positioned domestically, we first need to consider what Klaudia Wick has termed “a purely German viewing habit [*Sehgewohnheit*], but not an international television format,” namely, the ninety-minute TV film,<sup>22</sup> often billed as “event television.”

Since the early 2000s, German television has produced a number of high-budget miniseries and television films, which have been marketed as “must-see TV.”<sup>23</sup> Overwhelmingly, miniseries and multipart television films such as *Stauffenberg* (Das Erste, 2004), *Die Luftbrücke—Nur der Himmel war frei* (Sat.1, 2005), *Dresden* (ZDF, 2006), *Die Flucht* (ARD, 2007), and *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (ZDF, 2013) have focused on World War Two and the immediate postwar years. These series enjoyed considerable success at home, with *Dresden* drawing 12.68 million viewers (a 32.6 percent audience share) and *Die Flucht* drawing 11.25 million viewers (a 31.2 percent audience share). Productions designated “event television” employ high production budgets to infuse often politically problematic periods of German history with melodramatic narratives.<sup>24</sup> The production company teamWorx, led by the highly successful producer Nico Hofmann, very quickly established itself as the leading producer of “event television.” The showrunner of the *Deutschland* series, Jörg Winger, has cited the success of *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (also a teamWorx production) as “paving the way” for the *Deutschland* series, not least in production design and cinematography, which he described as “a style that we know from some event movies.”<sup>25</sup> The influence of “event television” can be seen at each stage of the material’s development. Like “event television,” the *Deutschland* series combines well-known domestic stars (who are often cast against type) with emerging talent.<sup>26</sup> Not only did RTL market *Deutschland 83* as a “German series event,” but the series producer was none other than Nico Hofmann, who repeatedly took part in press events and attended screenings.

While the visual language and narrative approaches of the *Deutschland* series undoubtedly have their roots in a domestic format, the commissioning of the series was also very much a response to changing in-

ternational trends. The emergence of multi-episode high-budget series as a highly exportable format has not only impacted audience viewing habits, it has also changed the funding landscape. In this regard, the commissioning of the *Deutschland* series needs to be seen in relation to two important developments in the audiovisual media market. Firstly, the emergence of OTT (Over-the-Top) media services, and VoD (Video on Demand) and SVoD (Subscription Video on Demand) platforms created an international distribution model that had long eluded German television producers. The entry into the German market of Netflix in 2014 and then Amazon Prime Video in 2016 quickly started to shape production trends and viewing habits. According to the findings of the 2018 *Produzentenstudie*, 53.8 percent of 14 to 29-year-olds in Germany watched linear television in 2017, while 29 percent watched nonlinear television. Just one year later, this had essentially flipped to 28.7 percent and 55.8 percent respectively.<sup>27</sup>

German media funding boards have been key to enabling the international success of German cinema as well as promoting Germany as a favorable location for international film production. In this regard, the second key shift instrumental to the success of the *Deutschland* series came in 2015 when the media boards began to fund television series. The change in funding eligibility was further accelerated by the establishment of the German Motion Picture Fund (GMPF) in 2016 by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.<sup>28</sup> Alongside funding for films, the GMPF funds “high-end TV and VoD series,” with the explicit aim of “enhanc[ing] the competitive strength and innovative power of Germany as a film location, and to offer producers an incentive to produce new and creative formats.”<sup>29</sup> While the launch of the GMPF pre-dated the production of *Deutschland 83*, it did provide funding for *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89*.<sup>30</sup> In relation to the *Deutschland* series, perhaps the most significant aspect of the GMPF’s financial backing lies in the prerequisites for funding: productions must have a budget of €1.2 million per episode and €7.2 million per season.<sup>31</sup> With GMPF funding capped at €10 million for a series, producers thus have to target international markets in order to ensure financial viability and success. The industry changes that facilitated the production of high-end series resulted in German broadcasters commissioning such content. Indeed Jörg Winger has stated that RTL “explicitly wanted . . . a quality series,”<sup>32</sup> and *Deutschland 83* was subsequently marketed by UFA Fiction as “the first German series format ever.”<sup>33</sup>

## Recasting the Past

To a certain extent, discrepancies between domestic and international reception are not new when it comes to the treatment of German history on screen. The German heritage film trend of the mid-2000s and early 2010s was marked by such divides with films such as *Der Untergang* (2004), *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (2008), and *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) performing significantly better abroad, both critically and commercially, than they had done at home. Much of the criticism of the films also centered on their melodramatic treatment of the past, with Jan Schulz-Ojala, the film critic for *Der Tagesspiegel*, memorably likening the approach of the production and distribution company Constantin Film to “a waste-disposal company for history [. . . that] deals with the nation’s radioactive contemporary history waste and buries it in the permanent disposal site of moving images.”<sup>34</sup> There are certainly parallels between the German heritage film and the *Deutschland* series, not least the ways in which they were positioned to appeal to international audiences, above all in English-language markets. At the same time, positioning *Deutschland 83*, *Deutschland 86*, and *Deutschland 89* simply as televisual reiterations of earlier cinematic trends would be to overlook the significance of key narrative and aesthetic strategies employed in the series. German heritage films were overwhelmingly underpinned by historicist approaches designed to create points of identificatory consensus through the avoidance of explicit socio-historical frameworks, while employing a “museal” gaze that “transform[s] the past into an object of consumption.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, German heritage filmmakers sought to draw attention to the specificities of German history visually (for example, through the use of authentic props), while simultaneously appealing to universalizing tropes of victimhood, sacrifice, and love. This, in turn, served to lift the German past from the political specificities of its temporal setting. By contrast, the *Deutschland* series embraces the details of the time. Indeed, the use of music, clothes, and references to precise historical moments such as Able Archer 83 (*Deutschland 83*), the assassination of the Swedish prime minister (*Deutschland 86*), and Günter Schabowski’s press conference (*Deutschland 89*) self-reflexively draw attention to the cultural, social, and political specificities of the period.

Criticisms that the series deviates from, or simplifies, the historical record overlook the far more important issue of how the *Deutschland* series engages with the past, and the multiple viewing perspectives this then enables. Despite the explicit use of historical events in structuring



the series' plot, the *Deutschland* series does not rely on viewer knowledge of the period. Here the series owes a particular debt to the film *Good Bye, Lenin!*<sup>36</sup> The 2003 film employed what the director termed "flashes of memory" that "were not crucial to the narrative, but [were] included to remind audiences of that eventful year, and especially to enlighten foreign audiences, whose knowledge of German history was likely to be less detailed."<sup>37</sup> Like Wolfgang Becker's film, the *Deutschland* series overwhelmingly conveys information about specific political events through archival television footage, but it also adds a further level of complexity to this. The television archive that is used to establish the political timeline in the *Deutschland* series is multilingual and multi-perspectival. Not only does this further illustrate the reach of the global Cold War far beyond the German–German border, but it also acts as a subtle commentary on the consumption of news, above all by the series' HVA agents. The HVA agents are repeatedly shown watching Western television reports in order to learn about key events unfolding in the GDR and the Soviet Bloc. For instance, when a secretary interrupts a meeting to tell the assembled agents that Gorbachev has announced details about the Chernobyl disaster (*Deutschland 86*), the agents are shown to be watching the West German RTL news report *7 vor 7* with Hans Meiser.<sup>38</sup> A further example of the multilayered use of the televisual record can be found in the significance of the television program *Traumschiff*. In *Deutschland 86*, Schweppenstette proposes naming the HVA operation to smuggle arms to South Africa "Operation Traumschiff." It is clear to audiences that Schweppenstette has borrowed the name "Traumschiff" from his favorite (West German) television series, *Das Traumschiff*. We are thus presented with a high-ranking HVA officer employed in an organization termed the "sword and shield" of the SED party, who not only enjoys the geographical—and possibly even ideological—escapism of the West German series in his private life, but uses this as inspiration for one of the organization's most important operations. The hypocrisy of this is laid bare: Schweppenstette is responsible for the arrest of Thomas Fischer for running an illegal library of banned books in the basement of Ingrid and Martin's home, while he himself continues to watch West German television illegally. What is particularly striking about the incorporation of these historical details, however, is that no attempt is made to highlight, let alone decode, their significance for an international audience. In so doing, the series establishes a multilevel engagement with the past by addressing two different audience groups at the same time: those with a detailed knowledge of the period depicted on screen, and for whom

the subtle reworking of ideological frames of reference plays out in the mise-en-scène and dialogue; and those for whom the events primarily serve to structure the action narrative.

The significance of the series' multilayered presentation of historical events also alerts us to the playful reworking of established narratives of the past, not least the decision to place women at the heart of the espionage events. In both the East and West German intelligence agencies, men may occupy the senior and most prominent roles, but the key decisions, actions, and outcomes are driven by Lenora Rauch (HVA) and Brigitte Winkelmann (BND). Meanwhile, Barbara Dietrich (HVA), Annett Schneider (HVA), Rose Seithathi (ANC), and Frau Netz (BND) are instrumental in directing the actions of their respective agencies.<sup>39</sup> The series' recalibration of gender roles is introduced in the very opening moments of the first episode of *Deutschland 83*. The episode opens with an exterior shot of the East German Diplomatic Mission in Bonn to the diegetic sound of President Ronald Regan delivering his "Evil Empire" speech on television. After the first line of the series—"The greatest evil is not done now, but it is conceived and ordered in clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices"—the action cuts to the dimly-lit interior of the building. The camera slowly zooms in on the back of a seated character. Upon the line, "by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails, smooth shaven cheeks: they are the focus of evil in the modern world," the inferred image of "evil" evoked by Reagan's speech is shown not to be male but female, as the shot switches to a medium close-up revealing Lenora sitting in a chair, calmly smoking. The opening sequence thus immediately alerts the viewer to the fact that what we see might not correspond to what we hear, and that women will be instrumental to this recalibration.

The most significant reference to the playful reworking of the factual historical record can be found in episode one of *Deutschland 86* when we are introduced to Barbara Dietrich as the head of KoKo (Kommerzielle Koordinierung or Commercial Coordination). Dietrich, who, dressed in a suit and tie, introduces herself through reference to her film actor namesake, outlines the role of her *Sonderkommission* (special commission) in "looking for new ways to turn data into profit." The reason for this is laid bare: "The GDR is expensive. And that's not because we're greedy. It's because equality is expensive. Our ideals are expensive and it's up to government organizations such as ours to support these ideals efficiently." At this point, Annett interrupts Dietrich to ask whether this is "because Moscow is abandoning us." What is particularly striking about this question is the limited context given to viewers. Annett's

question appears to suggest that the Soviet Union is “abandoning” the GDR economically, whereas what her question actually alludes to is the political and social reforms of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, which the East German leadership opposed. Dietrich then responds with the rhetorical question, “If your neighbor decides to tear off the wallpaper for a change of scenery, does that mean you do the same?” Viewers familiar with East German political history will recognize these words from the infamous interview given by Central Committee member Kurt Hager, often referred to as the chief ideologue of the GDR, to the West German magazine *Stern* in 1987. By reattributing the words to the head of KoKo, a unit whose loyalty to socialist ideals is repeatedly called into question by both Lenora and Martin, the series thus playfully undermines the SED Central Committee’s purported motivations for resistance to reform: opposition here is not driven by ideological orthodoxy, but rather by economic need. Finally, the exchange once again affirms the series’ reworking of gender roles. Not only are Kurt Hager’s words reallocated to one of the only two women in the room, but, in her reply to Annett, Dietrich specifically uses the female form of “neighbor” (*Nachbarin*), once again underlining the move seen throughout the series’ retelling of the past to place female figures in the center of the frame.

The use of historical events as building blocks upon which to construct a fictional storyline affords the series’ makers the artistic freedom with which to re-present the historical record. With two notable exceptions (namely Ilich Ramírez Sánchez in *Deutschland 83* and Egon Krenz in *Deutschland 89*), care is taken to avoid depicting historical figures on screen through actors. Instead, characters are shown watching television footage of key figures, thereby creating a direct line of continuity between the decisive events in the series’ present tense and history’s archival record of the past, which is familiar to the viewer. The use of props and music also plays a pivotal role here. While the series certainly draws on tropes from *Ostalgie*-inflected films of the early 2000s through close-up shots of East German food items and technology, this is overwhelmingly used to convey the scarcity of materials or limited technological knowledge in the GDR. This, however, alerts us to one of the series’ most significant interventions in representing the GDR on screen: the impulse to point to similarities on both sides of the Wall and the drive to “resist an overtly one-sided understanding of the dominant historical narrative.”<sup>40</sup> The temporally estranged gaze that underpins *Ostalgie* is also employed in the sequences set in the Federal Republic. When Martin is shown the hotel room selected for NATO analyst Henrik Mayer in *Deutschland 83*, the manager proudly shows off “all the

modern luxuries: central heating, clock radio, three television channels, remote control [. . . and] dimmer switches on the lamps."<sup>41</sup>

The attention to period design is complemented with a carefully curated soundtrack. Much attention has been paid to the choice of songs, which are designed to situate the action firmly in 1983, 1986, and 1989. Indeed, one of the motivations for selecting 1983 for the first season was the music because, according to Anna Winger, "the hits . . . instantly transport you to that moment, even if you were born after the fact."<sup>42</sup> In this way, the strategy employed in the *Deutschland* series certainly exhibits parallels with the German heritage film by means of "reinvent[ing] the national past with the help of an excessive accumulation of visual and sonic signifiers."<sup>43</sup> However, once again the *Deutschland* series develops this strategy further in order to provide an additional commentary to the on-screen events. On one level, the soundtrack instills an aural texture to the period detail by means of "sonic signifiers." Without any knowledge of German, audiences can still appreciate the significance of the employment of different musical genres and languages depending on the context of the scene. At the same time, viewers who recognize the titles of the musical choices and the specific lines or sections chosen are afforded an additional layer of commentary. For instance, when Martin is learning how to be an HVA agent in the West, the song in the background is "Keine Heimat" (literally, "no homeland") by Ideal.<sup>44</sup> When we first see Martin return to the family home in Kleinmachnow, the East German pop song "Am Fenster" is playing outside, whereas inside the house where the far younger guests (who, after all, would be the first generation to be educated and socialized exclusively in the GDR) are gathered, "99 Luftballons" by the West German singer Nena is playing. The careful curation of the soundtrack further alerts us to the ways in which the series interweaves multiple points of engagement with the material in ways that never make the plot dependent on audiences decoding them, but rather instills additional layers of meanings beyond the on-screen events.

The opening title sequence has come to represent the series' most iconic use of music. The title sequence opens to the soundtrack of Peter Schilling's English-language version of "Major Tom," with a map of the world featuring North America, Europe, and the Soviet Union divided into yellow countries for the capitalist West, red for states in the communist East, and black for other countries, thus representing the colors of the German flag. As numbers count down on screen, a yellow outline map of divided Germany is replaced by a red outline map of divided Berlin featuring the Brandenburger Tor, which in turn

is replaced by a map of divided Europe with stills of the Gedächtniskirche in West Berlin and the Ministry for State Security headquarters in East Berlin. Within the outline of divided Germany, a yellow and red-tinted sequence featuring Jonas Nye as Martin plays out in the West and East sections of the map, which is then followed by shots tinted in yellow, red, and black from the series, and the other actors' names. Various words and phrases such as "Stop Cold War" and "Defcon" flash on the screen, before a red-tinted image of Martin in a West German Bundeswehr uniform walking toward the camera closes the sequence as the lyrics "coming home" fade out. This title sequence is often pointed to as evidence of the series' playful navigation of the historical past, and an interweaving of domestic and international viewing positions. What is frequently overlooked, however, is that this sequence was not used for the RTL broadcast of the series. Both the song used—New Order's "Blue Monday"—and the images were replaced for the international market. The RTL title sequence begins with archival footage projected onto Jonas Nye's bare torso: the Brandenburger Tor, Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl, Soviet tanks, fighter jets, the West German peace movement, and footage of a nuclear bomb explosion, all interwoven with multilingual news reports. Two reasons underpinned this change. Firstly, the lack of reference to the 1980s, above all through the music selected and the absence of geopolitical background, was considered "not sufficiently comprehensible" for international audiences. Secondly, executives from SundanceTV feared that the naked torso of Nye would "look like a cheap version of *The Americans*."<sup>45</sup> Remarkably then, the title sequence was changed precisely because it was considered to be both too nationally specific and too transnationally similar.

## Searching for Home

This chapter has discussed the multilayered narrative and aesthetic codes employed in the *Deutschland* series. However, multilayered constructions of the series' dialogue, visual references, and soundtrack should not be conflated with a transnational aesthetic. Whereas the multilayered references allow the dialogue, mise-en-scène, and soundtrack to play out on different levels, transnational strategies should be understood as the means that facilitate the series to travel both within and beyond national borders. Of course, the transnational need not be in creative tension with the national. As Koichi Iwabuchi has noted, "transnational cultural flows neither fully displace nationally delin-

eated boundaries, thoughts and feelings, nor do they underestimate the salience of the nation state in the process of globalization."<sup>46</sup> As we have seen, the *Deutschland* series owes a considerable debt to domestic "event television" and the German heritage film. Alongside *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the series also repeatedly draws on the internationally successful (but domestically poorly received) film *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006), both in relation to the interrogation scenes at the Stasi headquarters and at times through the employment of a desaturated color scheme to signify the East visually.<sup>47</sup>

Benedict Schofield has argued that transnationalism should not be understood as a straightforward process of import and export, but rather as one of circulation according to which a "continual process of encounter, translation, and productive dislocation" shapes ideas.<sup>48</sup> Applying Schofield's analysis of theater exchange to series and films, it becomes clear that the use of tropes from domestic and international films and series in the *Deutschland* series is far more complex than it first appears. As Mareike Jenner stresses, transnationalism has "no stable center," and the absorption of such tropes from film and television is accompanied by their localized modification according to the context of both the plot and the production.<sup>49</sup> When series such as *Deutschland 83* then enjoy considerable degrees of success at home and abroad, the erstwhile modified tropes often become the object of export themselves and then become incorporated into international productions. Thus begins an interconnected network of inward absorption and outward export, and inward reabsorption and outward reabsorption. The tropes themselves do not remain stable, but rather are continually modified in relation to self-image and projected external images of what constitutes, for instance, "Germanness."<sup>50</sup>

Here it is particularly helpful to consider Andreas Hepp's distinction between physical and communicative deterritorialization, both of which are applicable to the *Deutschland* series.<sup>51</sup> According to Hepp, communicative deterritorialization should be understood as both the global cross-border reach of the media products themselves, and the representational strategies they employ. Communicative deterritorialization is most evident in the production and reception histories of the series. The *Deutschland* series draws on espionage tropes from international films and series such as the James Bond films, *Homeland*, and *24*, but transforms these within its own reimagining of Cold War German division (inward absorption). This approach has subsequently influenced films such as *Atomic Blonde* (2017) and series such as *Berlin Station* (2016–19), *Honigfrauen* (2017), *Der gleiche Himmel* (2017), *1983*

(2018), and *The 355* (2022) (outward export). However, marking the process of transnational absorption and reabsorption, *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89* are also influenced by the ways in which these productions adapted tropes from *Deutschland 83*. This multi-nodal approach allows us to understand not only the impact that previous depictions of the Cold War exercise on *Deutschland 83*, but also how *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89* as well as series such as *Der Palast* (2021), *Kleo* (2022), and *Spy/Master* (2023) come to be in creative dialogue with modified tropes from the series' own first season (inward reabsorption).

The most important factor that facilitates the *Deutschland* series' transnational circulation (or to use Hepp's terminology, its physical deterritorialization) is found on the level of plot. At the heart of this strategy is the deterritorialization of the Stasi. The series' protagonist is repeatedly positioned outside of the GDR. This facilitates the mutual disorientation process that is at the heart of the series: no character is ever at home, and everyone perpetually acts as an outsider. Even the characters who are territorially "at home" are positioned as outsiders through their ethnicity, language, sexuality, or political views. As Olivia Landry has argued, deterritorialization can also be understood as being "uprooted from a place (a territory) of belonging or positioning, to exit a space of normativity."<sup>52</sup> In the *Deutschland* series, this form of uprooting not only enables narrative exposition (as characters repeatedly explain their actions, nominally for the sake of other characters, although above all for the audience), but crucially it ties the viewer to the protagonist by denying narrative privileges normally facilitated by dramatic irony. This strategy is introduced in the very first episode. After Martin arrives in the West, he changes into new clothes, and begins his training on how to be an undercover agent. The audience is aligned directly with this immersive instruction through Tischbier's voice-over, which serves to address the audience directly through the blurred connotations of the grammatical object "you":

In the coming weeks, I'll train you in the key technical aspects of your mission. I'll teach you how to use micro-cameras to photograph documents, how to read texts upside down, and pick security locks. We'll practise the brush pass until you can do it in your sleep. Don't be conspicuous, don't ask questions, and don't try to play the hero . . . We'll teach you all the skills you need.

The overlapping connotative communities of the first-person plural "we" in this sequence, from Martin and Tischbier, to the viewer and Tischbier, and finally from the post-Cold War viewer to the fictional-

ized HVA, create multiple vantage points, and serve to integrate the viewer into the mission. Meanwhile, a combination of point-of-view shots and sequences in which we observe Martin learning techniques further aligns the viewer with the protagonist, not only as an identificatory hero but also as an outsider who needs to be able to pass as an insider in order to undertake the mission. This strategy enables a process of mutual orientation between the East German spy and the contemporary viewer. In short, both character and viewer learn together what it means to be a Stasi spy.

The dislocation of identity does not only affect Martin. In *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89*, the actions of KoKo, which Lenora and Martin liken to capitalism, also seem at odds with the socialist ideals repeatedly defended by Lenora. Consequently, while Lenora is unquestionably the most ideologically resolute of all the HVA agents, it is her very conviction that marks her as an outsider. The full implications of this come to the fore in the third season, when her vulnerabilities and ultimate downfall are directly attributable to her refusal to subjugate socialist ideals to capitalist necessity in the GDR in the 1980s, and her subsequent inability to adjust to the new realities of post-Wall Germany. The death of Lenora at the end of the series suggests that there is no place in reunified Germany for such beliefs, however much they may have been exaggerated in the plot by this point.

This sense of estrangement through deterritorialization is by no means limited to the East German characters. Alex Edel is also marked as an outsider in *Deutschland 83*, this time on account of his sexual orientation and political convictions. In *Deutschland 83*, he is repeatedly ejected from spaces in the Federal Republic. On multiple occasions, he is reprimanded by his father, a senior officer in the Bundeswehr, for his Green Party affiliations. Yet when he attempts to join the West German peace movement, he is rejected by its members for his aggressive stance. His rejection of his father's model of masculinity, which Alex at one point likens to National Socialism, is followed by his own rejection by Tischbier, who suggests that Alex is pursuing a gay relationship as, in part, an act of rebellion against his father. When Alex then walks out of Tischbier's villa, he reports to the Diplomatic Mission of the GDR in Bonn in order to enlist as an agent, but he is promptly rejected for having embarked on a naive course of action. When he tries to prove the effectiveness of direct action by holding the US officer General Jackson hostage, his plan ends in tragedy. Only when Alex leaves his family and moves to West Berlin does he start to move beyond his status as an outsider. Yet when the mother of his American boyfriend, Tim, reacts



angrily when she realizes that Alex was romantically involved with her critically injured son, the series underlines how “belonging” is also a socially determined process in which self-agency can never exercise full autonomy.

By framing key characters—above all, the series’ protagonist—as outsiders, characters and viewers become aligned in trying to negotiate the codes that regulate different interactions and situations. Where this approach breaks down, however, is in the reduction of ideological difference to surface-level variations. During Martin’s initial training session, differences between East and West are at one point reduced to the different words for bread rolls, plastic, supermarket, and orange. This superficiality underpins Martin’s mission in *Deutschland 83*. Here, ideological frameworks are reduced to the interchangeability of uniforms. As Tom Smith has discussed, we are first introduced to Martin in his East German military uniform as he interrogates two Western students accused of smuggling books out of the GDR. Here Smith highlights the significance of the shot composition, which ensures that Martin’s uniform remains in view throughout.<sup>53</sup> During his admonishment of the two students, Martin effortlessly repeats lines such as “the greatest privilege of socialism is freedom. Freedom from greed,” and “Who will win? You greedy capitalists or we, the socialists, who work together for the collective good.” After ordering the two students to leave, Martin and an unnamed fellow soldier burst into laughter, thereby revealing their presentation as fierce border guards to be a performance. When Martin adopts the identity of Moritz Stamm in order to infiltrate the Bundeswehr, he continues to perform a role, this time that of a West German soldier. Here his performance is also compelling. He effortlessly tells Alex, “We have to build up our nuclear arsenal to keep the Soviets under control. We have to show those assholes who’s boss,” leading the general’s son to remark, “You sound just like my father.”<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, characters for whom geopolitical rivalries are not simply a matter of rhetoric and performance, for instance the orphaned Angolan child, Roberto, and Rose’s daughter, Tandie, in *Deutschland 86*, are reduced to minor characters who appear and reappear for dramatic expediency. Their ability to determine their future cannot be overcome by a simple costume change.

The physical deterritorialization of the characters has a profound impact on the series’ depiction of both the Stasi and the GDR. It is telling that while in many films “identification with a ‘homeland’ is experienced and represented as a crisis” for the transnational protagonist, which leads to “national identity often becom[ing] a placeholder for

idealized sites of cultural memory and imagined social security,” Martin rarely expresses a desire to return to the GDR in any of the *Deutschland* seasons.<sup>55</sup> Rather, his “homeland” is overwhelmingly framed locally; he repeatedly states his wish to return to Kleinmachnow. The drive to align the series’ hero with positive connotations of the GDR, which are almost exclusively expressed on a local level and are framed through the prism of the family, serve as a counterpoint to the alignment of the series’ villains with the political structures of the East German state.<sup>56</sup>

Deterritorialization not only takes Martin and the other agents beyond the GDR, it also places them in narrative and sociohistorical dialogue with other nation states and their intelligence agencies. As a result, the familiar markers of the East German state—above all, its leadership and the Ministry for State Security—are not unique to the GDR in the series. Rather, the use of archival footage of other state leaders’ statements in relation to nuclear conflict (*Deutschland 83*) and the global Cold War (*Deutschland 86*), and the revelations about the espionage tactics carried out by other spy agencies, not only toward foreign targets but also their own citizens (in particular in *Deutschland 89*), serve to demonstrate that through this global interconnectivity the Stasi’s actions had echoes of—but by no means direct parallels with—other institutions in the West. An understanding of the specificities of the Stasi is not necessary precisely because the ultimate aim is to demonstrate the operational parallels rather than ruptures with Western agencies.

The drive to frame the actions of the Stasi beyond the confines of the Berlin Wall nonetheless risks downplaying the national specificities of the agency, especially the consequences of its actions on its own citizens. This in part accounts for the introduction of a second storyline in *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89*, namely the focus on Tina Fischer following her attempt to flee the GDR with her family. This exposes a tension that the series is ultimately unable to overcome. The Fischer storyline requires the re-territorialization of the Stasi. However, by this point the series has established neither the political foundations nor the cultural tropes through which to explore this. It is not my contention here that there are uniquely East German or German cultural imaginings of the Stasi. Rather, what the on-screen realization of the Fischer storyline demonstrates is the extent to which the series has become reliant on generic tropes, whose circulation requires them to be decoupled from specifically national sociopolitical contexts.

The simultaneous physical and communicative deterritorialization of the Stasi in the *Deutschland* series allows for its transnational storyline and accounts for its transnational success, but it also serves to

reveal the inherent tension within this approach: *Deutschland 83* and *Deutschland 86* rely on the jettisoning of the national framework at the very point that *Deutschland 89* requires its reintroduction. The refocus on the national that is required with the introduction of the Fischer storyline is also realized through these same generic tropes, which have hitherto primarily been associated with a deterritorialized setting. When the former Stasi interrogator, Rudi, arrives at Tina's apartment in *Deutschland 89*, the series draws heavily on horror thriller tropes, above all from home invasion films. Yet the very nature of these tropes means that they facilitate action and affect over understanding and explanation. Tina and Rudi's exchanges are designed to address both the lack of justice for the Stasi's victims and the question of how to punish its agents, but the focus on the HVA rather than the domestic actions of the Stasi prior to this point means that the audience has a limited context in which to understand the specific issues at stake. Instead, they are reduced to similarly generic moral issues which may serve to condemn the perpetrator, but still fail to do full justice to the continued trauma of the victim.

This becomes particularly problematic when the series seeks to achieve narrative resolution. The final episode of *Deutschland 89* suggests that there are only two possibilities for the Stasi's agents: death or atonement, but never justice. Not only is there no place in reunified Germany for Lenora, but there is seemingly no place for Martin either. Fuchs and Dietrich are also killed by two former Stasi agents, not in a form of vigilante justice for their victims, but because the former agents are enraged at the couple's attempts to cheat them financially and professionally. Meanwhile, Schweppenstette announces that he intends to use money he acquired while working undercover as a Stasi agent in the West to compensate Stasi victims "and perhaps turn the Stasi headquarters into a museum." The fact that a former Stasi agent is seemingly permitted to determine the parameters of who is a victim and how the Stasi past will be commemorated are issues of little concern for the series. At this very point, the series moves away from the national and returns to its transnational and deterritorialized setting. As Martin leaves for Morocco with his girlfriend and son, the series concludes with REM's "It's the End of the World." Documentary footage of Honcker and Kohl is replaced by images of Angela Merkel, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, and pictures of the wall at the US–Mexico border are followed by a reverse image of the Berlin Wall falling, thus making it appear as if it were being re-erected. The images of two walls—the US–Mexico border and the Berlin Wall—are certainly designed to be

a visual challenge to the seeming certainty of the final episode's title ("The End of History") and to the final lyrics we hear ("It's the end of the world as we know it"). In so doing, however, they ultimately serve to expose what underpinned the success of the series' deterritorialized approach in *Deutschland 83* and *Deutschland 86*, and the shortcomings of *Deutschland 89*: the images may look similar, but their contexts are not.

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## Notes

1. Hilmes, "Transnational TV."
2. For example, the series was broadcast as part of the "Walter Presents" collection on Channel 4 in the UK, on DR2 in Denmark, on NRK in Norway, on SVT in Sweden, on Yle TV1 in Finland, and on Sky Atlantic in Italy.
3. RTL Group, "Über RTL."
4. Produzentenallianz, "*Deutschland 86* entsteht zu 80 percent finanziert über Amazon."
5. The English-language subtitles actually fail to capture the moment that this plot point is revealed. During an argument between Schweppensteppe and Ingrid in the final episode of season one, Schweppenstette shouts "Lass unseren Jungen aus dem Spiel!," which is subtitled as "Leave Martin out of this!" rather than "Leave *our* boy out of this!"
6. An important plot point in *Deutschland 83* is the fact that Martin is an ideal replacement for Moritz Stamm in every regard except for one: he cannot play the piano. In *Deutschland 86*, we first encounter Martin playing the piano.
7. Jörg Winger cited in Weis, "*Deutschland 86*-Schöpfer Anna und Jörg Winger."
8. Jörg Winger believed this to be a key reason why the series underperformed in Germany. In an interview with *The New York Times*, he argued: "In Germany, there is a certain look that is called 'authentic.' I think there is a certain audience in Germany that doesn't want its historical drama to be stylized." Rogers, "*Deutschland 83* was a hit abroad but a flop at home."
9. This marked the first time an "A festival" created a dedicated space for so-called "Quality Series" in recognition of "changing viewing habits and the growing signifi-

- cance of serial storytelling." Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin, "Berlinale Special & Berlinale Series."
10. *Focus Online*, "Tom Hanks schwärmt von *Deutschland 83*."
  11. Ehrenberg and Huber, "Diese Serie passt nicht ins deutsche Fernsehen."
  12. *Der Spiegel*, "Mäßige Quoten trotz Hype."
  13. Schlacht, "Darum ist meine Serie im TV gefloppt."
  14. Hanfeld, "Wieso sieht das keiner?"
  15. Tieschky, "Verloren im Netz."
  16. Roxborough, "MIPCOM: Amazon Germany Orders Second Season for *Deutschland 83*."
  17. Eichner, "Selling Location, Selling History," 205.
  18. Hughes, "Germans fascinated by life on either side of the Berlin Wall."
  19. Channel 4, "Sequel to critically acclaimed hit Cold War spy thriller *Deutschland 83*."
  20. Quote from *Grazia* magazine, republished in Channel 4, "*Deutschland 83* becomes UK's highest rated foreign-language drama."
  21. Posener, "Von jetzt an geht Fernsehunterhaltung anders."
  22. Wick, "Für alle Bedürfnisse des Fernsehmarktes," 64.
  23. Cooke, "Heritage, Heimat," 175.
  24. In an interesting sign of how German broadcasters are seeking to compete with OTT and SVoD providers, such series are increasingly broadcast linearly as three ninety-minute programs on consecutive evenings, but made available at the same time as nonlinear fifty-minute episodes on the broadcasters' online VoD platform.
  25. Winger, "Making of *Deutschland 83*."
  26. Cooke, "Heritage, Heimat," 181.
  27. Castendyk and Goldhammer, *Produzentenstudie 2018*, 111.
  28. The GMPF is now under the control of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.
  29. Filmförderungsanstalt, "German Motion Picture Fund (GMPF)."
  30. In its first year, the GMPF supported *Babylon Berlin*, *You Are Wanted*, *Dark*, *Bad Banks*, and *Berlin Station*. Mikos, "TV Drama Series Production in Germany," 182.
  31. Filmförderungsanstalt, "German Motion Picture Fund (GMPF)."
  32. Jörg Winger cited in Krauß, *Teen and Quality*, 167.
  33. Orth, "Kulisse DDR," 297.
  34. Schulz-Ojala, "Extrem laut und unglaublich fern."
  35. Koepnick, "Reframing the Past," 50.
  36. The series also references *Good Bye, Lenin!* in the first episode of *Deutschland 83*. The shot of Martin in the supermarket in Bonn is a direct reference to Alex in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, which itself was an interfilmic reference to *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (1997). *Good Bye, Lenin!* featured Alexander Beyer as Rainer, a West German who pretends to be a committed socialist in the GDR for the sake of the protagonist's mother, who is at risk of suffering a fatal heart attack if she discovers the truth about the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the *Deutschland* series, Beyer plays Tobias Tischbier, a West German law professor and politician who is actually an undercover East German agent, and who teaches Martin how to pretend to be West German.
  37. Hodgin, "Aiming to Please?" 108.
  38. My thanks to Stephan Ehrig for his help in identifying this.
  39. To this list, we could also add the assassins Nina Rudow (HVA), and the unnamed agent in episode two of *Deutschland 83*, as well as Beate—Walter Schweppenstette/Dieter Baumann's "wife" in *Deutschland 89*—who we are told is an accomplished HVA agent but, in a subtle reference to the often limited social and professional roles

- afforded to women in public life in the Federal Republic, is not given a surname in the series.
40. Dueck, "Political Ambiguity," 314.
  41. This scene also draws attention to the extent that positive evocations of the National Socialist past remained socially acceptable in certain contexts in West German society. When showing Martin and Alex a hotel room reserved for the NATO chief analyst, the hotel manager boasts to the two soldiers that it is "one of our best rooms. Hitler slept here." Another example occurs in *Deutschland 89* when a West German bank executive enquires about "racial science" as a means of identifying appropriate candidates.
  42. Mitchell, "*Deutschland 83* Creator on the Show's Music."
  43. Koepnick, "Amerika gibt's überhaupt nicht," 199.
  44. Given the importance of music to *Deutschland 83*, it is interesting to note that far fewer songs are used in *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89*. This may well be the result of the series' transition to Amazon Prime Video. The Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte (GEMA) licenses music for use in German television. As GEMA's catalog is extensive and the organization has a "monopoly" on licensing rights, producers are able to select almost any piece of music. However, GEMA only provides rights for German broadcasts, and covers neither foreign territories nor online use. The centrality of the soundtrack to *Deutschland 83* would have meant that rights had to be purchased for the series' export. Once RTL was no longer involved, the associated costs may well explain why far fewer songs are used in the subsequent two seasons. See Mitchell, "*Deutschland 83* Creator on the Show's Music."
  45. Lückerrath, "Wir wollten etwas schaffen, was sich abhebt."
  46. Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 17. See also Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television*, 191.
  47. Christian Petzold, who explored the 1980s in the GDR in his film *Barbara* (2012), criticized the use of desaturated color schemes to depict the GDR, arguing that "today, almost like propaganda, we tend to imagine that East Germany had no color at all, that it was all just grey—as if a sunflower that grows in the West somehow reaches up to the sun with much more brilliant color!" Cited in Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 162.
  48. Schofield, "Theatre Without Borders," 235.
  49. Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television*, 187.
  50. See Schofield, "Theatre Without Borders" and "Who is German?"
  51. Hepp, *Cultures of Mediatisation*, 108–9.
  52. Landry, *Movement and Performance*, 147.
  53. Smith, *Comrades in Arms*, 20.
  54. See also *ibid.*, 21.
  55. Ezra and Rowden, *Transnational Cinema*, 7–8.
  56. This itself is reminiscent of filmic engagements with the GDR from the early 2000s, perhaps most notably *Good Bye, Lenin!*

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