

The Lives of Others: A Screenplay

By Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

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Nothing is private. Nothing is sacred.

In 1984 East Berlin, the Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler is assigned to spy on the playwright Georg Dreyman. Wiesler and his team bug the apartment, set up surveillance equipment in an attic and begin reporting on the activities of Dreyman, who had previously escaped state scrutiny due to his pro-Communist views and international recognition.

One day, however, Wiesler learns the real reason behind the surveillance: the Minister of Culture covets Dreyman's girlfriend, and is trying to eliminate his rival. Though Wiesler continues his surveillance, he struggles to reconcile his sense of professional duty with his personal integrity, as he finds himself becoming increasingly absorbed by the couple’s lives.

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Editorial Review

Review
"Both a political document and an enduring work of art" John le Carré

About the Author
Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck is the award-winning director of *The Lives of Others* and *The Tourist*. Born in 1973, he grew up in New York City, Brussels, Frankfurt and West Berlin, he studied Russian literature in Leningrad (now St Petersburg) before obtaining an MA in Politics, Philosophy and economics from Oxford and a diploma in film direction from the University of Film and Television in Munich. *The Lives of Others* won the European Film Award for Best Film and Best Screenplay, the LA Film Critics' Association award, and the 2007 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

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INT. STASI DETENTION CENTER HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN - MORNING
A PRISONER in civilian clothes is led down an apparently endless prison corridor with a linoleum floor, past dozens of cells. Title on screen: 'November 1984, BERLIN-HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN DETENTION CENTER OF THE MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY'
Suddenly red warning lamps come on all along the corridor.
GUARD?Stand still. Eyes to the floor.
At the end of the corridor another prisoner in a prison uniform is led past along a corridor that crosses the first. When he has passed through, the red light goes out.
GUARD (CONT'D) Walk on.
The guard leads the first prisoner further along the corridor until they stop outside the door of one of the many interrogation rooms.
GUARD (CONT'D) Address him as 'Captain'!
He knocks on the door.

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, INTERROGATION ROOM - AT THE SAME TIME
The interrogation room is decorated with white wallpaper, and sluggish daylight seeps through off-white curtains. The furniture - shelves and a desk - are made of pale laminated wood. A sickly plant without a single flower stands on the windowsill. Hanging on the walls are a photographic portrait of General Secretary Honecker and a faded landscape photograph showing an autumn forest path. GERD WIESLER, a gaunt man in his mid-forties wearing a plain uniform, stands by the window, hears the knocking and calls over to the door.
WIESLER One moment.
He walks to one of the shelves and opens a drawer containing a tape recorder. He switches it on, shuts the drawer and sits down. His movements are precise and minimal.
WIESLER (CONT'D)
Enter.
The guard brings the prisoner in, a slightly built man of about 30. He stands rather awkwardly in the room. Wiesler doesn't look up at him. He studies the prisoner's files on the table.
WIESLER (CONT'D)
Sit down.
The prisoner does so. He sits down carefully on a chair upholstered with orange fabric.
WIESLER (CONT'D) (without looking up) Hands under your thighs, palms

down.
Confused, the prisoner obeys. Finally Wiesler looks up.
WIESLER (CONT'D) What do you have to tell us?
227?I've done nothing. I know nothing... I've done nothing. There must be some mistake.
WIESLER?You've done nothing, know nothing... You think we imprison innocent people on a whim?
227 No, I...
WIESLER?If you think our humanistic state capable of such a thing, that alone would justify your arrest.
The prisoner is speechless in the face of this dialectic.
WIESLER (CONT'D) We'd like to jog your memory, prisoner No. 227... On September 28th, Dieter Pirmasens, your friend and neighbor, fled to the West. We believe that he had help.
PRISONER?I know nothing. He didn't even tell me he wanted to leave. I first heard about it at work.
WIESLER?Please recount what you did on September 28th.
PRISONER It's in my statement.
WIESLER Tell me again.
PRISONER?(as though speaking by rote) I was at Treptow Park memorial with
my children, where I met my old friend Max Kirchner. We went to his place and listened to music until late. He has a telephone, you can call him to confirm this.
Wiesler writes everything down.
227 (obstinately) Do you want to call him? I can give you the number.

INT. STASI COLLEGE POTSDAM-EICHE LECTURE THEATER - MIDDAY
227 (on tape) ...call him? I can give you the number.
A finger presses the 'pause' button of a large reel-to-reel tape recorder fixed to the wall. Wiesler's finger. He is standing by the board in a small seminar room. 15 young men and women are listening to him: his students. On the board are various technical terms used by the Ministry of State Security: 'RECONNOITRE', 'ENLIGHTEN', 'CONSPIRE', 'OPERATIONAL PERSONNEL CONTROL' and 'OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE'. Title: 'STASI COLLEGE POTSDAM-EICHE'
WIESLER?The enemies of our state are arrogant. Remember that. It takes
patience. About 40 hours worth. Let's fast forward...
He presses the fast-forward button. We can only imagine what suffering is being carried past by the swiftly moving tape. As the weird whirring sound continues
CUT TO:

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, REST ROOM - DAWN
Wiesler lies sleeping on a pallet in a room that isn't much more luxurious than a prison cell, but which has pro forma, for example, a curtain. His uniform jacket hangs over a chair. He opens his eyes, gets up, puts his jacket on, leaves the room and closes the door.

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, CORRIDOR - DAWN - DAY
He walks down the corridor to the adjacent interrogation room.

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, INTERROGATION ROOM – CONTINUED
Prisoner No. 227 has changed a great deal since the start of the interrogation. He is pale and his lips are dry. He can hardly sit upright. The guard has to support him by the shoulders. When Wiesler comes in, he gets up and walks out past Wiesler, handing him the key to the rest room. (The whirring of the fast-forwarding tape stops. We hear the click of a play button.)
227?...please... I can't go on... I don't know any more... please let me sleep just a little...
Wiesler sits down behind the table again. He looks at the transcripts that his deputy has written.
227 (CONT'D)

(raises his hands pleadingly, with the last of his strength)
Please... let me sleep.
Wiesler looks at him with a blank expression and raises his eyebrows.
WIESLER?Hands under your thighs.
The prisoner obeys, with great difficulty.
WIESLER (CONT'D) Tell me again what you did on September 28th.
The prisoner drifts off to sleep. Wiesler gestures to the guard to wake him. The guard shakes him.
227 (giving a start) Please, please... just an hour, just a little... a little sleep.
WIESLER?Tell me again what you did on that day.
227?I did nothing... nothing...
WIESLER?What did you do that day?
The prisoner begins to weep quietly. Wiesler remains unmoved.

INT. STASI COLLEGE POTSDAM-EICHE, LECTURE THEATER - MIDDAY
A young student, Benedikt LEHMANN, has become very uneasy. Now he can no longer contain himself:
LEHMANN?Why keep him awake for so long? It's inhuman!
He is immediately taken aback by his own boldness. Wiesler doesn't respond, but pencils a cross by the student's name on the seating plan. We hear the exhausted weeping of Prisoner 227 echoing around the room.
WIESLER?An innocent prisoner will become more angry by the hour, due to the
injustice suffered. He will shout and rage. A guilty prisoner becomes more calm and quiet. Or he cries. He knows he's there for a reason. The best way to establish guilt or innocence is non-stop interrogation.

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT
WIESLER (unmoved)
What did you do that day?
227?(with the very last of his strength)?I was at Treptow Park with... with my children... at the monument... There I met my old friend Max Kirchner… and listened... to music until late... He has a telephone, you can call him to confirm this...

INT. STASI COLLEGE POTSDAM-EICHE, LECTURE THEATER - MIDDAY
WIESLER?Do you notice anything about his statement?
LEHMANN (defiantly) It's the same as at the beginning.
WIESLER?Exactly the same, word for word. Always keep a precise verbal record. People who tell the truth can reformulate things, and they do. A liar has prepared sentences, which he falls back on when under pressure. 227 is lying. We have two
important indicators, and can increase the intensity.

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT
WIESLER?If you don't give names, we'll have to arrest your wife.
227 trembles as he weeps.
WIESLER (CONT'D) Jan and Nadja will be put into state care. Is that what you want? *227 goes on weeping.*
WIESLER (CONT'D)?Who was the person who helped him flee?
227 (barely audibly) Gläske...
WIESLER (quickly) Again! Speak clearly!
227?Gläske, Werner Gläske.
WIESLER?Werner Gläske - where does he work?
227?He's a policeman... In Köpenick...
227 starts shaking. Wiesler looks at him, interested. Like a biologist looking at a laboratory animal. He

gestures to the guard to lead him away. More carrying than leading.
WIESLER (to the prisoner) Now you can sleep.
The prisoner looks at Wiesler with a startled glance that says, 'Really?' For a brief moment Wiesler almost seems to react to the glance. As the door closes,
CUT BACK TO:

INT. STASI COLLEGE POTSDAM-EICHE, LECTURE THEATER - MIDDAY
The students are starting to get noisy, discussing the case amongst themselves. The tape runs on.
WIESLER?Quiet! QUIET!!... Listen...
There's a rattling sound on the tape, hard to identify.
WIESLER (CONT'D)?Can anyone tell me what that is?
No one seems to know.

INT. HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN, INTERROGATION ROOM
We see Wiesler sitting on the floor with white cloth gloves, removing the orange fabric that was stretched over the seat of the chair. He picks it up with a sterile pair of tongs and places it carefully in a labelled jar.
WIESLER (V.O.)?It's the odor sample for the dogs. It must be collected at every interrogation. Never forget it!

INT. STASI COLLEGE POTSDAM-EICHE – AFTERNOON
Now he finally turns off the tape and looks at the students.
WIESLER?Your subjects are enemies of socialism. Never forget that.
Wiesler looks at his watch. He hasn't lost his sense of time: the second hand reaches twelve; it turns 5.30 p.m., and at that moment the college bell rings.
WIESLER (CONT'D)
Goodbye.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sharon Self:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or read a book entitled The Lives of Others: A Screenplay? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have various other opinion?

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