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Jill Winder is a Donors' Fellow of the Institute studying post-reunification Germany through the work and attitudes of its artists.

German Film and the Waning of *Ostalgie*

By Jill Winder

MAY 2006

BERLIN—In 2003, a film called *Goodbye, Lenin*, directed by Wolfgang Becker, swept the prestigious German Film Prize's awards, taking seven prizes including the top honor, the "Lola" for best picture. The awards conferred deserved but belated tribute on a film that became a cultural phenomenon the minute it hit the big screen; more people saw the movie in theaters than any other German film in history. *Goodbye, Lenin*, is a charming "tragicomedy" about the fall of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), set in 1989-1990.

In the film, the adorable Daniel Brühl (who won numerous Best Actor awards for his performance) plays Alex, an 18-year-old who lives in an East Berlin *plattenbau* (Socialist high-rise) with his mother Christiane Kerner and sister Ariane. The trouble begins when Alex's mother, a true believer and tireless champion of the GDR regime, has a heart attack and falls into a coma after learning that Alex was arrested for his participation in an anti-Communist demonstration. Over the next eight months, she lies unconscious in a Berlin hospital, missing the end of the GDR and the unification of Germany.

When bed-ridden Christiane gains consciousness, her doctors allow her to return home, but not before ominously instructing Alex and Ariane that Christiane's health is extremely fragile and that they should protect her from any "unnecessary excitement." Alex comes to believe that in order to preserve his mother's life, he must engage in an elaborate attempt to cover up the events of the previous year, and recreate the day-to-day life in the GDR that his mother was so devoted to, at least within the confines of their 850-square-foot apartment. He goes to great lengths in this quest, which comes to dominate his life and the lives of everyone around him.

Comical moments abound—how to explain the huge Coca Cola advertising banner that has been hung on a neighboring *plattenbau*, visible from Christiane's bed? Alex's first interventions in recreating the past—throwing out all the new IKEA furniture his sister

bought and replacing it with their mother's hastily discarded GDR-standard-issue pieces, or purging the kitchen of all Western food products—come to look like child's play when Christiane requests a TV in her room to pass the time. Since there is no more East German TV to speak of, Alex and a friend from a cable company meticulously film fake news reports that Alex plays for his mother every evening with the help of a new VCR hidden in an adjacent room. As the game



Alex (Daniel Brühl) in a still image from the film Goodbye, Lenin. He is holding a portrait of Erich Honecker, the last General Secretary of the East German Communist party (the Socialist Unity Party, or SED), under his arm.

becomes more complicated (and exhausting) for everyone involved, we know that the truth must come out (as it does just before Christiane dies). Yet Alex clings to his mission, involving all manner of deception, lies and surveillance, seemingly unaware that some of his tactics aren't too far off from the hated machinations of the old East German Secret Police (Stasi) agents.

Goodbye, Lenin tapped into a particular moment in German cultural life, at the height of a popular wave of *Ostalgie*. *Ostalgie* (a term that combines the German words for "east" and "nostalgia") emerged almost as soon as the Berlin Wall was triumphantly ripped down. For older, former-GDR citizens, *ostalgie* is a reaction to reunified Germany and the many problems faced by people in the eastern regions of the country. Not so much political as melancholic, this is the "things were so much better in the old days" kind of reminiscence about the pre-1989 world that echoes throughout the older populations of the former Eastern bloc and Soviet Union.

For the younger generations (born in both east and west), *ostalgie* expresses itself in fashion and trends, seen in the tight-fitting t-shirts emblazoned with the GDR insignia worn by hipsters or the cult-status afforded to GDR buildings like the Palast der Republik. Antique stores and markets do a brisk trade in mass-produced GDR-era furniture and household products, which are haggled over and proudly displayed in the newly acquired *plattenbau* flats of upwardly mobile urban professionals. And *ostalgie* is by no means just an eastern preoccupation; as one *Deutsche Welle* writer in a review of *Goodbye, Lenin* pointed out, "The overwhelming reaction to the film has also reinforced the West Germans' enduring love-affair with communist kitsch."

The whitewashing of GDR history is characteristic of all variants of *ostalgie* and its depiction in popular culture. Life in the GDR was "secure," "stable" and "comfortable." GDR design was "cool," "modern" and "alternative". In *Goodbye, Lenin*, for example, life is good, the laudable tenets of Socialism are upheld and repression is kept to a minimum—the massive secret-service machine and state power register as a barely audible whimper against the happy music of comedy and retro style on the screen. *Goodbye, Lenin* is the poster child of a genre known as "GDR comedy," which includes successful films such as *Sonnenallee* (1999) and *NVA* (2005), both directed by Leander Haussman. In these films, Stasi agents are depicted as incompetent idiots, the regime's figureheads are senile and deluded and recruits of the NVA (the East German army) swear their allegiance to the GDR with their fingers crossed behind their backs.

Although *ostalgie* has proved its powerful cultural appeal over the years, recent events suggest that the country might be ready to discard cheery depictions of the GDR and confront the more painful aspects of life under

the East German regime. *Ostalgie*, after all, is losing its most potent icon, the Palast der Republik, which is being dismantled in the center of Berlin as I write.¹ A more critical approach to the GDR was recently shown, for example, in the film *Der Rote Kakadu* (The Red Parrot) (2006), directed by Dominik Graf, in which innocent, rock'n'roll-loving youths in Dresden face arrest and intimidation in the months before the Berlin Wall goes up.

But most people agree the cultural force that is single-handedly reinvigorating debate about the GDR is Florian Henkel von Donnersmarck's astonishing debut film, the Stasi drama *Das Leben der Anderen* (which could be awkwardly translated as "The Life of Others"). As Reinhard Mohr wrote recently in his review of the film in *Der Spiegel*: "*Das Leben der Anderen* is the first German film, which without nostalgia, romanticism and other folklore, seriously deals with the systematic intimidation, abuse and pressure that the GDR exercised on its citizens in the name of 'state security.' Compared to the travesty of Leander Haussmann's ironic caricature of the GDR in his films, *Das Leben der Anderen* is a quiet, almost aesthetic attempt at exploring love and state power, freedom and betrayal, art and politics, life and death."

Florian Henkel von Donnersmarck is just 32 years old. He was born in Cologne, enjoyed a privileged childhood in West Germany, studied philosophy at Oxford and graduated with a degree in Film Direction from the Academy of Television and Film in Munich in 2000. Although he previously won a number of awards for two short films, he was basically unknown when *Das Leben der Anderen* hit theaters. Von Donnersmarck spent five years researching and writing the screenplay for the film, in-



Photo: DDP

Florian Henkel von Donnersmarck at the awards ceremony of the Bavarian Film Prize in January where he won Best Director and Best Screenplay for Das Leben der Anderen. The film is expected to sweep the awards at Germany's equivalent of the Oscars, the German Film Prize on May 12. Das Leben der Anderen is nominated for 12 awards including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor.

¹ I wrote about the Palast der Republik and the controversy surrounding its demolition in JW-1 and more recently, JW-13.

cluding interviews with GDR dissidents and former Stasi agents and extensive work in the Stasi archives.² Critics and audiences have almost universally praised the film for its realistic, thoughtful and emotionally charged story.

At the Berlin premiere, State Minister of Culture Bernd Neumann excitedly called *Das Leben der Anderen*, “a fantastic film that shows recent German history in an emotional and truthful way.” Even former GDR dissident Wolf Biermann was astonished that “this naïve upper-class kid who had been graced with being born so late in the West” managed to tackle the film’s subject matter with artistic and political integrity.

Das Leben der Anderen opens with Stasi agent Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe) teaching a class on interrogation techniques in a drab classroom full of hopeful young Stasi trainees. He plays the audio tape of an interrogation, in which Stasi agents repeatedly question a detainee for 12 hours straight until he finally breaks down and gives them the name they’re after (the viewer sees flashbacks of the scene depicted). At the end of the tape, we don’t hear voices but a strange sound, like something being



Courtesy Buena Vista

In the beginning of Das Leben der Anderen, Stasi commander Anton Grubitz chats with Culture Minister Bruno Hempf while attending the production of Dreyman’s play. Hempf hints to Grubitz that he wouldn’t mind if the Stasi started trailing Dreyman.

unscrewed. Wiesler looks expectantly at the class. “What do you hear?” he asks gravely. None of the trainees can say. Wiesler then explains, with a blank expression and in a completely neutral tone, that the chair detainees sit on during interrogations has a removable cloth cover, which is stored in a jar to aid scent-sniffing dogs in any further investigation. This completely non-violent but nonetheless terrifying scene opens the film.

As the students file out, Wiesler’s boss, Stasi commander Anton Grubitz (Ulrich Tukur), who is the head of the Stasi’s “Culture” bureau, enters the room clapping, praising Wiesler’s good work. He then invites him to attend the premiere of a play that evening. The play is written by a well-known GDR playwright named Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and stars his beautiful girlfriend, actress Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck). During intermission Tukur has a chat with Culture Minister Bruno Hempf (Thomas Thieme). Hempf insinuates that he would like the Stasi (for no apparent reason) to bug Dreyman’s apartment and initiate round-the-clock surveillance of the couple. Hempf’s ulterior motives become clear later, when he pressures Sieland into having an affair with him, threatening to blacklist Dreyman if she does not comply.

Grubitz, who is a ruthlessly ambitious careerist, is eager to fulfill the Minister’s wishes and promptly awards the job to Wiesler. Wiesler meanwhile is happy to jump into the assignment because he doubts Dreyman could possibly be as clean as he appears. After hanging around outside Dreyman’s building



Courtesy Buena Vista

(top) Stasi agent Gerd Wiesler (played by the fantastic Ulrich Mühe) gets down to the business of surveillance. (bottom) In the attic directly above Dreyman’s apartment, Wiesler draws a map of the room layout to improve his intelligence gathering techniques.

² One of von Donnersmarck’s key sources for research was Wolfgang Schmidt, a former Stasi lieutenant who heads a group of former Stasi employees who try to educate the public about the activities of the MfS (Ministry for State Security) and the day-to-day workings of the Stasi. The groups’ website (in German only) can be found at: <http://www.mfs-insider.de>.

for a couple of days to track his movements, Wiesler and a team of Stasi technicians break into Dreyman's empty apartment and proceed to completely bug the flat in under 20 minutes. Wiesler then sets up the control center for surveillance in the attic directly above the apartment and the drama begins.

Although neither Georg Dreyman nor Christa-Maria Sieland have done anything that would definitively mark them as enemies of the state, they have their share of secrets, which Wiesler meticulously notes in his typed reports (documenting everything from the time the couple leaves the flat or receives guests to when they have sex and wake up in the morning). Dreyman has friends who have been banned from working for political reasons and contact with dissidents in the West. As for Sieland, she has a bit of an addiction to painkillers and is drawn under duress into an affair with the repellant Minister Hempf who threatens that she and Dreyman will never work again if she resists his advances. But much of what Wiesler records in his reports is the life Dreyman and Sieland live together: the birthday party for Dreyman attended by writers, actors and intellectuals who discuss the finer points of theater and shower Dreyman with gifts of books (some banned), music and trinkets; the quiet and passionate moments the couple shares in bed; Dreyman's struggle with writer's block.

Wiesler starts off as a career man through and through, completely committed to his job, convinced that the GDR state has the best interests of its citizens at heart and that the Stasi is there to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Ulrich Mühe gives an outstanding performance in the role of Wiesler, playing a man so blind to his role in state repression that he seems as gray as the jacket that is his work uniform. He comes across as genuinely oblivious to the atmosphere of fear and intimidat-



Courtesy Buena Vista

Gerd Wiesler heads to his lonely apartment after a long day of work eavesdropping on Dreyman and Sieland. In the elevator, he has an awkward and darkly comic encounter with a little boy who lives in the building.

tion that pervades East Germany. He's an anonymous but deadly cog in an Orwellian machine. Mühe is a slight man and he uses his body to great effect—his narrow shoulders and stiff, awkward carriage contrast brilliantly with the immense power he can exercise over those who come in contact with him. In a particularly funny and telling scene, one evening on his way up to his apartment Wiesler is forced to share the elevator with a boy of four or five, who's holding a ball. The child, utterly unaware of the potential dangers of such an exchange, looks at Wiesler (who is practically huddled in the corner of the elevator, stiff and seeming repelled by the thought of actual human contact) and asks, "Do you really work for the Stasi?" Wiesler coolly looks down at the boy. "Do you even know what the Stasi is?" "My daddy says they are bad people who put people in prison," replies the boy. Without missing a beat, Wiesler reflexively starts to ask "And what's the name of your father?" but at the last moment says, "And what's the name of your... ball?" At this point, the little boy, mystified by this strange man, looks him right in the eye and says, "Boy, are you weird! Balls don't have names."

Dreyman and Sieland are a beautiful couple who represent everything about a life filled with love, culture, creativity and freedom that is foreign and exotic to Wiesler. As one reviewer noted, "Lonely and unhappy, like an ascetic monk in the GDR religion, until his contact [with Dreyman and Sieland], he's miserably conceded to the bondage of his obligations." Wiesler's own empty personal life—the sterile modern apartment he goes home to, the regular late-night spaghetti dinners he carelessly prepares and eats alone in front of the TV, the pathetic five-minute visit from an aging prostitute courtesy of the MfS (Ministry for State Security) sex service he resorts to to quell his loneliness—in the end makes him vulnerable as he is emotionally drawn into the couples' lives. His fascination for Dreyman and Sieland chips away at his stoic professional distance and Wiesler slowly begins to switch allegiances.

A defining moment for both Dreyman and Wiesler is the suicide of Dreyman's friend Albert Jerska, a venerable theater director who had been barred by the GDR



Courtesy Buena Vista

Writer Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and his girlfriend, actress Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck) relax in their apartment, unaware that they are under 24-hour Stasi surveillance.



Courtesy Buena Vista

Stasi commander Anton Grubitz observes as Christa-Maria Sieland is interrogated.

regime from working for seven years. When Dreyman gets a call from a friend with the bad news, Wiesler picks up the line in the attic upstairs and listens in, as he does with all conversations. Dreyman, wracked with grief and guilt (he tried to intervene on Jerska's behalf with Minister Hempf at great personal risk but to no avail), sits down at his piano and begins to play a piece called "Die Sonate vom guten Menschen" (Sonata of the Good Man) Jerska's birthday gift to him. As Wiesler sits in the attic with his headphones on, his façade cracks and he begins to weep. From this moment on, Wiesler can't quite bear the burden of the job assigned to him and he slowly starts to protect Dreyman. This dramatic change of heart is fortuitous because Jerska's suicide is the impetus for Dreyman's first real act of treason.

Appalled by his friend's desperate suicide, Dreyman decides to write an article about the shockingly high suicide rate in the GDR, figures that the regime keeps out of the press, and Jerska's demise. Dreyman has regular meetings in his apartment with friends and contacts from the West, who plan to smuggle the article out of East Germany and print it in a West German newsmagazine, *Der Spiegel*. They ask him repeatedly if he is sure the apartment is clean, and Dreyman convinces them that he is not under surveillance. Of course, Wiesler is privy to the plot, but begins to fabricate his surveillance reports, noting instead that Wiesler and his friends are writing a tribute for the GDR's 40-year jubilee celebrations. When the article appears in *Der Spiegel* it creates an uproar, and Grubitz gets a furious call from GDR Party Secretary Erich Honecker, who demands to know who the author is. Grubitz increasingly suspects Dreyman and arrests and interrogates Sieland in the Stasi headquarters and prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen. Sieland knows about the article, and even where the

typewriter Dreyman wrote it on is hidden. She confesses the information and is set free. By now, Grubitz knows that Wiesler has been protecting the couple with false reports, and they go with a Stasi team to Dreyman's apartment for a search. Although Sieland has already trashed the typewriter (without Dreyman's knowledge), her betrayal is clear. In a panic, she runs outside onto the street and stands in front of a truck, which kills her.

At this point, the movie flashes forward four years. Wiesler's promising Stasi career was destroyed by the Dreyman affair and he has been relegated to the basement mailroom

of the Stasi offices. He hears that the Wall has come down and calmly walks out, clearly looking forward to starting a new life. In the next scene, which takes place two years later, Dreyman sits in the former Stasi headquarters, reviewing a thick stack of reports from the period he was under surveillance. Through close reading, he realizes that the Stasi agent, code name HGW XX/7 (Wiesler) wrote false reports to protect him. Dreyman finds out the agent's real name from the offices and then trails him in a cab, watching as Wiesler, looking haunted and blank, suffers through his demeaning new day job, stuffing advertisements into mailboxes. Dreyman seems to want to confront him, but in a moment mixed with fear as well as compassion, he drives off.

The final scene offers some kind of redemption. Wiesler is delivering advertisements when he passes a bookshop. In the window is a poster advertising Georg Dreyman's new novel, entitled "Die Sonate vom guten Menschen" (Sonata of the Good Man), a title that Wiesler instantly remembers. Wiesler enters the shop and opens a copy of the book. There is a dedication, and it is an overture to him. Dreyman



Courtesy Buena Vista

Georg Dreyman reads through a stack of his Stasi files in post-1989 Berlin. While carefully combing the reports of agent "HGW XX/7," Dreyman realizes that the Stasi agent assigned to his case deliberately did not include incriminating evidence about Dreyman's writing activities, which he was aware of.

has written, "Dedicated to HGW XX/7, with thanks."

•••

Das Leben der Anderen has ignited a debate in Germany about GDR repression, and especially about the role of the Stasi and the ruthless interrogation and imprisonment that took place in the Berlin-

Hohenschönhausen prison. It has also renewed debate about the rights of those persecuted by the regime. These discussions and the taboos *Das Leben der Anderen* confronts have resulted in some interesting twists in political fortunes since the movie's release. One notable example is a debacle involving Berlin's Senator for Culture, Thomas Flierl. Flierl grew up in the GDR art scene and

Remnants of the Regime

Hohenschönhausen Prison

In 1994, the main interrogation center and prison of the former East German Ministry of State Security (or "Stasi") was officially renamed the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial and opened to the public. The memorial staff is charged with researching the history of the prison (1945 to 1989) and educating visitors during guided tours, most of which are led by former prisoners. Most of the buildings, furnishings, and equipment remain intact, providing, according to the staff "a very authentic picture of prison conditions in the GDR." Nearly 600,000 people have visited the memorial to date. The memorial staff reports increasing numbers of foreigners and tourists, and an upswing in visitors they attribute in part to interest generated by *Das Leben der Anderen*.³



Aerial view of the former Stasi interrogation center and prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen. The complex is now home to the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial, whose staff engages in research and documentation and offers tours of the complex to the public (often led by former prisoners).

The Stasi and its Files

The East German Secret Service (Stasi) was one of the most well organized in the former Eastern bloc and boasted more full-time agents and informants per capita than any other Communist country (including the Soviet Union). It was known to be more terrifying and thorough than the Soviet KGB. By 1988, the Stasi employed 170,000 informants in addition to 100,000 agents and ministry workers—astonishing numbers when one realizes that "about one of every 50 adult East Germans had a direct connection to the secret police."⁴ Not surprisingly in a country known for its love of bureaucracy, the Stasi produced hundreds of thousands of files detailing the surveillance of GDR citizens and foreigners. By the end of 1989, Stasi officers had already shredded thousands of pages from the archive. West German troops were installed in the former Stasi offices to prevent the further destruction of records.



Row upon row of massive grey cabinets hold records of surveillance and reports that Stasi agents filed about GDR-citizens during the Communist regime. Citizens are able to access their Stasi file after applying to the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the National Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic.

After German unification, Joachim Gauck (a Lutheran minister) was appointed as the first Federal Commissioner for the Records of the National Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic, a post he held from October 1990 until October 2000. (This federal authority still exists, and was known colloquially as the "Gauck Authority.") The legal basis for enabling citizens, members of the media and researchers access to the Stasi surveillance files and archives was the December 1991 passage of the Stasi Records Law (StUG) by the German parliament. The law created "new judicial territory, because nowhere else were the records of the secret service of a dictatorship protected from destruction and disclosed by a constitutional state to such an extent as in this case." Reviewing one's Stasi file became a painful rite of passage for many former GDR citizens, and when agents and informants were exposed, many a political career, marriage and friendship were destroyed. Over 5 million people have applied to review Stasi records since 1991 (numbers are only available through 2003).⁵

³ More information can be found at the Memorial's website: www.stiftung-hsh.de.

⁴ Timothy Garton-Ash, *The File: A Personal History*.

⁵ I found most of the information about the Stasi files quoted here from the website of the Federal Commissioner (in German) at: www.bstu.bund.de.

was for a time under Stasi surveillance (he has a Stasi file of his own). He was supposed to mediate a discussion at the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial in mid-March about Stasi terror. Over 300 guests, including as many as 200 former Stasi employees, attended. As reported by every major news source, the tenor of the discussion was essentially “Things in the Stasi prison were really not all that bad.” The former Stasi employees were also aggressively unapologetic, leaning on a defense (uncomfortably close to the one heard at the Nuremberg Trials) that they were simply following orders from above and did not break any laws. Many were furious that Flierl (in this official position and from his personal experience) did not intervene in the discussion, which basically amounted to a public apology for ex-Stasi personnel. His behavior so incensed the public that there have been calls for his

colleges at the theater.” For years, Mühe’s ex-wife has strenuously denied any involvement with the Stasi and his claim is the basis of her libel suit. The case is currently pending in the Berlin courts.

In the end, the furor created by *Das Leben der Anderen* is understandable. It deals with a topic that is still painfully fresh and explosive. It is also a beautifully well-written film, with fantastic acting and compelling cinematography and design. Nonetheless it is quite striking to see how much power films have to ignite important political and cultural discussions in Germany—the fact that much of the German public takes film so seriously must be envied by filmmakers the world over. *Das Leben der Anderen* and the discussions it has generated probably do not signal the absolute death of *ostalgie*, but rather



Courtesy Buena Vista

Ulrich Mühe as Gerd Wiesler in Das Leben der Anderen. Mühe, who was born in 1953 in East Germany, spent his early career as a prominent GDR actor. He has accused his former wife of being a Stasi informer.

resignation—the headline in one *Der Spiegel* expose read: “It’s all Lies...Flierl Must Go!” He apologized soon after the event and admitted that he didn’t “mediate the discussion offensively enough,” but is still suffering immense political fallout.

In another bizarre plot twist, the Berlin government issued a temporary injunction ordering Suhrkamp, the publishing house that printed von Donnersmarck’s screenplay for *Das Leben der Anderen*, to stop selling the popular book in mid-April, pending a trial. The injunction is the result of a libel suit filed by the ex-wife of actor Ulrich Mühe, who has the lead role of Gerd Wiesler in *Das Leben der Anderen*. In an interview with von Donnersmarck, Mühe said that his wife (an actress) “worked the whole time we were together for the Stasi as an informant.” He also said, “I didn’t know when it was happening... She didn’t inform on me, rather on her

show that after 17 years, the Germans might be ready to toss off simple caricatures of the GDR in favor of a more painful but truthful reassessment of East German history. Dominik Graf, director of *Der Rote Kakadu* (The Red Parrot), another recent film that takes a somewhat critical look at the GDR, even thinks that the trend appeal of East Germany for youths may have paved the way for the popularity of *Das Leben der Anderen*. I’ll leave the last words to Graf: “Perhaps the adoption of East Germany by the young and hip got the whole debate going. Before the whole topic of the GDR was covered only in television dramas about the Stasi. And then came *Goodbye, Lenin* and everybody was quite ready to turn things around and look at how cute and sweet the GDR was. But that is also not the whole story. Compared to 15 years ago, people are much more ready now to look in more detail at what East Germany originally wanted to achieve, and why things went wrong.” □

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Richard D. Connerney (January 2005 - 2007) • **INDIA**

A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Logic at Rutgers University, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • **FRANCE/MOROCCO**

An editor for the *New York Times*' Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for *Somerville This Week*, in Somerville, MA.

Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • **ROMANIA**

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceauscescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • **IRAN**

Nicholas is a freelance writer interested in the intersection of culture, religion and politics in Asia. He is spending two years in Pakistan writing on issues of ethnic, sectarian, and national identity. Previously, he has reported from Central Asia and Iran, and his work has been published in the *Washington Post*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and others. Nick received an M.A. in International Affairs - Regional Studies from American University in December 2005. He lives with his wife, Rikki.

Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • **SYRIA/LEBANON**

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the *Economist Intelligence Unit*. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • **GERMANY**

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

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