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Ways of Light: An Analysis of the Motif of Light in Thomas Brussig`s Wie es leuchtet

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Ways of Light:
An Analysis of the Motif of Light
in Thomas Brussig's *Wie es leuchtet*

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College
by

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Introduction

Thomas Brussig`s voluminous novel *Wie es leuchtet* was published in 2004¹. This work thematizes and problematizes the “Wende,” the political turning point in Germany in 1989 and thus, can be considered part of the “Wendeliteratur.” The story unfolds through the perspectives of numerous different characters. The multi-facetedness of the book can be demonstrated through the complex and reoccurring notion of light.

The writer, Thomas Brussig, was born in East Berlin in 1964. After attending the "Heinrich-Hertz" School, he went on to train as a builder. In 1984 he finished school and training, and served in the East German National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee* or NVA). Brussig found it difficult to wield a weapon and had a hard time. He worked as a museum guard, cleaner and hotel porter among a variety of other odd jobs until the early 90s. In 1990 he studied sociology at the Free University of Berlin. He changed universities three years later to study the art of film-making. He graduated in the year 2000.²

The central theme of the book is the demise of the socialist regime, the “Wende” and the fall of the Berlin wall. These crucial events changed the lives of both the East German and the West German citizens. It is intriguing to consider Frederick Taylor`s words on the influence of the wall that divided Berlin:

For Berliners, the drastic power-political surgery of 13 August 1961 was, of course, an especially tragic and painful experience. It was also a devastatingly intimate one. Familiar streets, parks, even individual buildings, were turned into perilous human

¹ Brussig, Thomas. *Wie es leuchtet*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 2004, Henceforth quoted with page numbers in the main body of the text.

²<http://www.thomasbrussig.de/biographie>

traps, in which the squirming, helpless captives were often the westerner`s own friends and relatives.³

Since the construction of the wall was a drastic and extreme experience, when it fell on 9th of November in 1989 it elicited an outburst of excitement and celebration. This iconic event was the culmination of preceding demonstrations against the communist regime. The “Wende” is described by Peter Grieder as “the first essentially peaceful and successful revolution in the history of Germany. What began as a movement against totalitarianism in the GDR quickly became a movement for liberal democracy, capitalism and national unity.”⁴ The “change” was welcomed as a positive event that reunited Germany, however, it also had its drawbacks: even though the physical obstacle between the two sides of Berlin had been demolished, a mental barrier stayed in the head of East and West Germans. Their culture, traditions and even the language were different and, thus, East Germans were forced to assimilate, or at least, attempt to fit in.⁵

The main topic of this project is the complexity of the motif of light. Light seems to play an exceptionally important role in the work. The motif occurs throughout the novel, and the analysis of numerous examples will bring out its significance for an interpretation of *Wie es leuchtet* as a whole. It indicates the concrete, physical appearance of light and more abstract and figurative meanings associated with it. Luminescence highlights the crucial moments and it does not only provide an aid to depict the emotional state and current mindset of major characters, but also has a fundamental quality that might help the reader understand the way the

³ Taylor, Frederick. *The Berlin Wall, A World Divided, 1961-1989*. First U.S Edition ed. New York: HarperCollings Publishers, 2006, XIX-XX

⁴ Grieder, Peter. *The German Democratic Republic*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 111

⁵ Jozwiak, Joseph F., and Elisabeth Mermann. "The Wall in Our Minds?" *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39 (2006): 781-2

novel is arranged. For instance, Lena, the physical therapist, is one of the figures who embodies the notion of light. She, similarly to the other characters in the book, represents one shining point, one individual life among the many that one gets to know.

The work is divided into seven books, each one consisting of numerous chapters that have their own subtitles. The structure is rather fragmented, without one concrete thread to follow: the reader gets to know various characters who seemingly have no connection to each other. These figures are the representatives of everyday life; writers, poets, policemen, reporters, a photographer and a physical therapist. The order in which their stories unfold appears to be random; however, all these individual records stand for one segment in the whole; they help the reader to understand the “Big Picture.”

Even though it might be difficult to detect a central theme, one can find that through the motif of light, which goes along the entire book and is connected to most of the characters in one way or another, it is possible to create a close-to-comprehensive look at the work.

First Chapter

Light and Photography

Wie es leuchtet starts with an introductory part subtitled, “Blurry Pictures.” This section, in which light is associated with photography, is of great importance, since it provides a fundamental perspective to the entire novel. The product of photography is the photo that encapsulates the present with the aid of light. The camera catches the instant and by doing so it arrests a certain event that otherwise would only be a passing moment. In the novel, Lena’s “Older Brother” is the first character the reader gets to know. He is a photographer and is keen on capturing the richest events. His camera, a Leica M3, is a small, convenient and simple machine, in which light has no mirror in the way – compared to the modern, single-lens reflex cameras (8).

The photographer’s job seems to be extraordinarily significant, since his pictures are the puzzle pieces that hold together the complete work. The very first sentence of the book – and also one that reoccurs several times in the work: “*Alles, was ich über diese Zeit weiß, weiß ich von deinen Bildern*” (7) supports this idea: in order to see the story as a whole, one has to examine all the individual fragments - or in this case all the individual life stories. The photographer attempts to list all the people who he has made a picture of - numerous and various nationalities, employers, employees, students, musicians and individuals of the working class – however, since there are so many of them, he is only able to list those that stand at the beginning of the alphabet:

Ich habe sie alles geknipst, die Albaner und die Albinos, die Athleten und die Amputierten, Aktivisten und Adventisten, Astrologen und Astronauten, Alkoholiker wie Antialkoholiker [...] die Asse aller Abteilungen sowie die Angsthasen, die Arschgeigen, die Arrivierten, die Atheisten, die Armleuchter, die

Angestellten, die Aushilfen, die Arbeiterklasse und schließlich auch die Antisemiten. Der Rest des Alphabets ist ähnlich vertreten. (7)

All these fractions of human history – that are seized and riven from the present moment in order to be immortalized – are seen through the lens of the photographer, through the eyes of the camera. This device appears to be the most appreciated companion and most trustful partner of the photographer. In the introductory part he refers to it as “das gute Stück” (7) that sees everything but remains invisible. He endows the camera with humanlike characteristics and, even though he is the one who operates it, the apparatus seems to have a life of its own.

One can find a parallel regarding the relation between the photographer, the camera and the appearance of light. The photographer relates to his camera the way the camera relates to light: directly. As he describes it, “Bei meiner Leica steht dem Licht kein Spiegel im Wege” (8). Thus, the light that enters the camera is not blocked by a mirror but arrives straight into the apparatus. This movement can also be seen metaphorically: no distraction can hinder the pictures the camera takes, they appear to be the exact imprints or proofs of reality, without distortion.

Paradoxically, the fact that the photographer closes his eyes one moment before the picture is taken also supports the idea of directness: he blocks his own eyes from observing the reality through the lens of the camera thus letting the device act on its own. He trusts his own ability and the competence of the apparatus so much that he hands over the responsibility of capturing the event to the camera: for a split second he is blind and the camera opens its eyes:

Einen Moment vor dem Knipsen schließe ich die Augen. Und gerade in diesem Augenblick, den ich sich selbst überlasse, steigert sich das Geschehen. Nur 10 meine Leica schaut zu, wenn das gewisse Etwas geschieht, wenn sich der magische Moment ereignet. (11)

One shall see a similar occurrence later in the case of the blind woman, Sabine Busse, who gains eyesight for the first time in her life. However, in her incident she appears to “see” and comprehend more of her surroundings while blind. In that connection, as she opens her

physical eyes and attempts to perceive the world through that she loses her ability to be able to do so. Thus, in a sense, as she gains actual eyesight she becomes more blind than before.

For the photographer the device functions as though it was an extension of his body: they are in a harmonious relationship. This connection allows him to concentrate on the most important events that are to be captured. They are not only in a corresponding interdependence that provides them the opportunity to grab significant moments of everyday life, but they also own the unique ability to remain undetectable. Even though the apparatus is described as an “unscheinbares Ding” (7) and the photographer also should only be seen as a “Hinterwädler” (8), their remarkable cooperation – according to the very first sentence of the book – results in the photographs that determine the keystones of the entire book. Therefore their appearance, that is mostly unnoticeable or underestimated, and their function, that is highly important regarding the book, stand in a reversed relation.

This connection is paradoxical: the label “Hinterwädler” used on the photographer implies that he is somewhat behind the situation and is not up-to-date regarding what is happening. Abstractly it could stand for the notion of “darkness” as opposed to the camera that uses light, so as to “enlighten” what can be considered truth from the photographer’s perspective. Thus, the complex interrelation between light and darkness can already be detected by the reader.

The fact that the photographer can work together with the camera so effortlessly and silently enables the opportunity to observe the events from an objective point of view. It is not the standpoint of the man who takes the picture that matters but rather the phenomenon that it perpetuates. Another feature that helps the photographer to maintain his disguise, and thus his impartial viewpoint, is his ability to move swiftly and also to occasionally stay in a sculptural rigidity. This fact implies that light is related not only to motion but also to stasis. Since he is not

using either flashlight or a tripod in order to create the pictures, nothing hinders him from approaching and snapping all the intriguing events. The camera helps him to unfold his extraordinary abilities and he allows the device to complete the photograph.

Light plays a fundamental role in taking a picture, since it is light that is used, refracted and captured by the film inside the photo machine. However, light can also stand for metaphorical meanings, such as hope or a ray of talent. As the photographer describes it, besides his phenomenal camera and his own skills there is a third ingredient that should be taken into consideration: his zodiac. Zodiacs are connected to the movement of stars and planets. Stars emit a good amount of light, such as the sun, and thus can be considered fundamentally necessary. The constellations of stars are believed to have an influence on human lives and fates and tend to have an effect on how events eventually turn out to be.

This notion implies that there is an invisible power that can be observed through the movement of glowing orbs of gas. The unseeable power can hint at the presence of some sort of unexplainable and unearthly being that sends particular gifts to certain people that are born under the desirable constellation of stars. “Doch meine Tante prophezeite mir an meinem zwölften Geburtstag eine hellseherische Begabung, die sich in Gestalt von Geistesblitzen äußert” (9). Based on the prophecy of his aunt, the photographer seems to meet these criteria. He is said to acquire a clairvoyant gift that manifests itself as a flash of genius.

There appears to be inconsistency between the photographer's ability to identify those moments that are worthy to be captured – which allows one to associate it with enlightenment - and the fact that it is mostly influenced by astrology that is considered to be a pseudo-science. In this sense light appears to be related both to enlightenment and to superstition, which notion otherwise stands closer to “darkness.”

Even though he does not understand it at first, later as his father takes him to a hunt, he realizes how extraordinary his senses are. In that situation it is not light rather the lack of light that plays a determining role. Near a forest, he and his father are waiting at the high seat for the wild animal to appear, however, since the nightfall starts to approach, they are unable to see anything. He is holding a weapon and as his visual capabilities cease to function due to the darkness, his hearing seems to be amplified. In a sudden and unexpected moment he raises the rifle and shoots into the darkness. Even though he does not see the animal, he is able to shoot it with ease and casualness. After they find the carcass, he realizes what it means to be clairvoyant (10).

The photographer's case yet again can be compared to Sabine Busse, the blind woman. Similarly to Busse who trusts and leans on her extraordinary tactile, audible and olfactory senses, the photographer's sensory functions also become more sensitive as his ability to see weakens.

One can juxtapose the act of the "blind" hunt with the photographer's habit of closing his eyes before taking a picture. Just a second before the event he thoroughly abandons himself to his incomprehensible "hellseherische" talent and simultaneously relinquishes his hold on the situation that is happening. By doing so the talent itself acts and accomplishes his intentions in his stead. One is inclined to believe that the German word "hellseherisch" implies a more adequate meaning than what the English translation "fey" can offer.

The first part of the German word "hellseherisch," "hell," has multiple meanings, however all of them are connected to light. It can be referred to as "bright", "radiant" or even "clear". This word can also indicate in a certain sense purity or a particular predisposition towards impalpable or elusive notions. The second part of the word, "seherisch" carries the meaning "visionary" in English. It does not only signify the usage of the physical visual organs,

but also conveys a meaning in connection with a “third eye” or “second sight” that is known to have such sensibility that it can receive information from the “spiritual world.” Furthermore, the word “Hellseher” can also refer to a sixth sense or to the capability of seeing the future or at least being different from the “normal.”

The other English translation that comes to mind is the word “clairvoyant,” which however, derives from a French origin, and dividing the word one can see that the meaning stands very close to the German one. However, the second part of the concept – when translated from French to English – stands for “loud” or “ostentatious.” These meanings carry certain extra connotations - such as being boasting or eager to be noticed - that one can consider when thinking about the implications of this word.

It is thought-provoking to note that this “gift” of seeing - or being able to sense significant moments that others would not be able to - happens mostly when the photographer is not using his actual, physical vision. In certain situation he detects the perfect situation without too much effort. As a sport photographer, due to his talent, he stands behind the right goal when the players score. As a theater photographer, he only takes a couple of pictures but always at the perfect, most fascinating moments. He expresses his own opinion about his talent: “Ich spüre, wo ein Bild entsteht, und ich habe die – sogar bei Fotografen seltene – Begabung, aus dem Kontinuum der gleichmäßig verstreichenden Weltzeit den Augenblick herauszuberechnen, der Verewigung lohnt” (10).

One might find this sentence quite meaningful and beautifully composed. He does not know but rather senses where and in what circumstance a worthy picture emerges – due to his “hellseherische” ability that derives from a fortunate constellation of stars under which he was born. He realizes that he possesses a unique gift and acts accordingly not only by noticing but

also by arresting the most exemplary and precious moments from the permanently whirling river of time. This skill endows him with almost god-like characteristics, since he is capable of discerning the quintessential instants: he decides which of those are worth existing for an eternity. Furthermore, the photographer does not only perform these acts of preservation with the aid of light but also he himself “casts light” on them, that is, he metaphorically highlights them by considering them to be worth his while.

As mentioned, before taking a picture, the photographer closes his eyes and allows the camera to do the work instead of him. As he says:

Einen Moment vor dem Knipsen schlieÙe ich die Augen. Und gerade in diesem Augenblick, den ich sich selbst überlasse, steigert sich das Geschehen. Nur meine Leica schaut zu, wenn das gewisse Etwas geschieht, wenn sich der magische Moment ereignet. Wenn ich die Augen wieder öffne, dann habe ich bereitsgeknipst – aber trotzdem habe ich das schließliche Bild gesehen. (11)

The photographer secedes from the event by abandoning the moment and lets the situation unfold its magic. In his mind`s eye he can already see the picture prior to its actual existence and is confident that the result is going to match what he has, by that time, imagined. After realizing this, he finally understands what his aunt meant when she was explaining him the “hellseherische Begabung, die sich in Gestalt von Geistesblitzen äußert” (9).

One can elaborate on the meaning of the notion “Gestalt von Geistesblitzen.” “Geistesblitz” could be translated to English as “flash of genius” or as “sudden inspiration,” and regarding the photographer`s talent both of them could be appropriate. The second half of the word, “Blitz,” is an expression that is closely related to both photography and light. Furthermore, it implies an action that happens in a very short period of time. It might be that the moments of inspiration approach the photographer only in special moments and even in those instants it does not last for too long, however, their functions are paramount.

The camera is not the only inanimate object that is endowed with human characteristics: the event itself is personified as well. It has its own way of developing into something “magical” that the photographer cannot influence after a certain point, however, due to his ability and his apparatus, he can observe it, grasp it and finally capture it. All these movements happen almost without the photographer’s conscious participation: he only triggers the camera, which then performs the act. He appears to be only a mediator, a conduit, through which the intriguing mirror of reality can manifest itself.

The photographer’s approach to capturing an event is simultaneously objective and subjective. Even though he attempts not to disturb the people he is taking a picture of and tries to remain “invisible” – thus staying objective – after all, he is the one who picks the right moment he personally wants to capture.

One would imagine that the pictures he is taking are going to record the events of the past for the future observer, however, the photographer’s archive is annihilated due to a heavy flood. This flood later is named “*Jahrtausendhochwasser*” implying its significance, and probably referring to the destruction it did. He elaborates on the thought of snapping the situation, in which thousands of photos are swimming on the surface of the water. Unfortunately he did not succeed to do so, and any reconstruction of his pictures was impossible. The image of the cataclysmic flood involuntarily reminds us of The Great Flood from the Bible. This ruinous event can also be compared to a later one: the destructive surgical intervention of the blind Sabine Busse that leaves her unrestorably handicapped.

The pictures the photographer took most probably meant a world to him, since he attempts to immortalize the most relevant and meaningful moments of the history of his time. These instants – that were perpetuated with the aid of light – were than seriously impaired by

water. Thus, the “world” of photos he created was devastated the way God destroyed his creatures in the Bible. However, in the photographer’s case he did not do it on purpose, the situation was out of his control. The reaction to the horrifying condition was quite surprising: his first thought was to take a picture of his damaged archive. The very first deed he wanted to do was to capture the chaos, and so create something new out of it. He did not have the chance to accomplish his wish but following his instincts he did catch another moment:

Dank meiner hellseherischen Ahnung war ich zur Stelle, als die Meißners in ihre Musikalienhandlung zurückkehrten, den Flügel erblickten, der wie der Schabernack eines Herkuleschen Eindringlings wirkte - und knipste das absurde Arrangement und ihre Verblüffung. Autos, die wegschwimmen, haben wir schon hundertmal gesehen, aber ein Flügel, der hochbeinig auf Klavieren steht - das ist eine spektakuläre Bebilderung für ein Jahrtausendhochwasser. (12)

His “hellseherische Ahnung” led him to his neighbor’s music shop that had also been flooded. The water lifted all the instruments – guitars, flutes, clarinets, oboes – and also a grand piano. The entire shop reminded him of a drowned orchestra. Even though he could not take a photo of that, he was exactly at the right time at the right place to snap how the neighbors stepped in the room and looked at the grand piano that was standing on smaller pianos. This spectacular instant was captured by the photographer and was nominated to be the press photo of the year. Yet again, out of chaos and destruction – trusting his clairvoyant intuition – the photographer created something unique, something that nobody had seen before. This one-of-a-kind situation is still an unusual one that represents the world out of its everyday, normal context. The motif of being inverted and overturned can again be linked to the story of the blind Sabine Busse who, after a brain surgery, is able to see, however, only upside down.

This notorious flood destroyed his archive and also the pictures that Lena loved. Here, through the photos, the photographer introduces Lena, the physiotherapist who wore roller skates and became the author of one of the most famous songs in Berlin at the time of the paramount

political and governmental change and a figurehead of the revolution. Among her many talents there was one that the photographer singles out: she could rearrange any room in a way that it looked much more comfortable and familiar than before (13).

Her motto was that a seemingly useless skill made people the most unique. Thus, one can see that both of these characters included in the introductory part of the book are blessed with one-of-a-kind talents that only they can harness worthily. For Lena, this talent manifests itself – among others - in a rather tasteful interior furnishing skill. The photographer and Lena have the ability to observe reality and comprehend the most essential parts of it. After grasping it, they can capture and rearrange it.

Lena can turn any hotel room, waiting room or even a tent into a warm and welcoming place. The interesting fact is not only her ability to do so, but rather that the atmosphere she creates stays around for a longer period of time: she leaves her own mark wherever she goes. As the photographer says, “Von hundert verlassenem Hotelzimmern kann ich das eine herausfinden, in dem Lena gewohnt hat. Lena ist wie die Sonne: Wo sie ist, wird es warm, und wenn sie geht, wärmt es nach” (13). For the first time Lena is likened to the Sun and through this she is also connected to the notion of light and warmth.

She possesses a positive aura and radiates a particular type of brightness that influences the lives of people around her. This ability will reoccur later in the book, thus making it possible to link Lena`s actions to the concept of light. The idea is also supported by the assumption that she herself “emits” and “transmits” luminescence in a metaphorical way. For example, as she stands on an ambulance, giving a speech to the crowd, she laughs and her blue eyes shine: “Lena lächelte, und ihre blauen Augen leuchteten – man konnte glauben, sie dufteten” (86)

Furthermore, the way she is described by the photographer also support her connection to light: “ihr Gesicht hatte eine frische Farbe, und ihre Augen leuchteten” (53).

According to the photographer`s description, Lena also develops a certain sensibility towards his pictures. The more she is looking at them, the more the photos enchant and fascinate her. The most exciting pictures are the ones that were taken in the Fall of 1989, when the determining and crucial events of the political change happened. Even though Lena is not the only person to whom that year meant a really unique experience, there is no book written about it that would summarize those events.

As Lenas older brother writes, “Lena suchte nach Bestätigung, nach Reflexionen des Erlebten – und fand sich letztlich immer über meinen Fotos wieder. » Alles, was ich über diese Zeit weiß, weiß ich von deinen Bildern «” (13). The very first sentence of the book reoccurs here as almost the last sentence of the introduction. This recurrence gives the whole prologue a frame and it also implies the notion of returning to the very beginning.

The significance of “photos” and the concept of returning plays an important role here: the way the story turns back to the starting point, Lena always returns to the photographer`s pictures as she is searching for an approval, for a reflection of all the events and actions that happened in those years. At this point it is necessary to talk about the title of the prologue: “Verschwommene Bilder” translated as “Blurry Pictures.” The German original seems to imply some sort of connection to “schwimmen” which is linked to water. According to this idea, the title refers to the flood that annihilated the photographer`s archive, thus making all his pictures, all the documents of that important event – the fall of the Berlin wall and the change in 1989, blurry.

The last sentence of the introduction gives a new ray of hope after the destruction: “Die Bilder sind verschwommen, und die Geschichte beginnt von neuem” (13). The formation of the sentence is thought-provoking. The conjunction between the two clauses of the sentence is “und” and not, for example “aber” or “deshalb.” This might imply that it is acceptable that those pictures are not in existence anymore, since life goes on and new actions and events are to be experienced. It supports the idea of creating something new out of chaos and ruination.

After analyzing the introductory section of the book, one can elaborate on further examples in the work where photography plays an important role as a device that captures the most worthy moments. For the first time in the book the photographer`s talent is being observed and professionally recognized by Leo Lattke, a journalist of great importance, thus the photographer has the chance to gain public importance. He watches him as he takes pictures of a family consuming a chocolate bar. His style of photographing, his perception of the situation and also his instinctual behavior captivate him immediately. He notices, how the photographer approaches his objects without being impolite, obtrusive or boisterous.

While being in a camp in Budapest-Csillebérc, the reporter Leo Lattke notices the photographer, and from safe distance, examines his style of photographing:

Aus sicherer Distanz beobachtete er einen Fotografen bei der Arbeit. Ihm gefiel dessen unscheinbare, harmlos wirkende Arbeitsweise, ihm gefiel das Auge, der Instinkt dieses Fotografen. Wie naher der an seine Motive herangelangte, ohne dabei aufdringlich und beutegeil zu wirken. Wie der eine Familie fotografierte, die Schokorigel verzehrte – der ältere Sohn genüßlich, der jüngere trotzig, der Vater erschöpft und die Mutter selig. Sie saßen vor einer Wäscheleine, auf denen ihre vier marmorierten Jeans hingen. Als sie bemerkten, daß sie fotografiert werden, fragte der ältere Sohn, ob sie das Foto zugeschickt bekämen. »Wohin? « fragte der Fotograf, und in dem bestürzten Moment, als die vier begriffen, daß sie keine Adresse haben, knipste er erneut. (29)

The moment he captures could be an everyday family occasion: mother, father and their children are sharing a chocolate bar. However, in this case, the situation is different: this certain

family settled down in a camp in Budapest-Csillebérc that was established to help those people who decided to leave their homes and escape from the GDR. The presumably facial expressions of the family members can imply their emotional state at that moment, when the picture was taken. The older son appreciatively, the younger one defiantly, the father exhaustedly and the mother blessedly eats the treat. They sit in front of a clothesline rope, on which their four marbled jeans are hanging. One can assume, based on the circumstances that those pieces of clothing are all they possess.

Je länger Leo Lattke zuschaute, desto mehr gefiel ihm der Fotograf. Der fotografierte nicht wie jeder. Der holte aus dieser Nachrichtensoße tatsächlich was Besonderes. Der knipste so, wie Leo Lattke schrieb.
 »Für wen sind denn die Fotos? « fragte Leo Lattke.
 »Weiß ich nicht«, sagte der Fotograf. »Bis jetzt für noch niemanden. «
 »Dann schick sie mir mal«, sagte Leo Lattke. Er überreichte dem Fotografen seine Visitenkarte, mit dem Signet seines Blattes. [...] Er hatte inzwischen – innerhalb der letzten zehn Sekunden – entschieden, seine Reportage doch nicht von diesem Fotografen bebildern zu lassen. Wer war er denn, einen Namenlosen zu protegieren? Er wollte die Bilder nur aus Prinzip: Er war es gewohnt, daß alles nur ihm zuarbeitete. Einem Leo Lattke steht das Privileg zu, Zeit und Hoffnungen anderer nach Belieben zu verschleißen. (30)

As the older son notices that they are being photographed, he asks for the picture, however, they soon have to realize that they do not have an address where the photo could be sent to. This thought elicits another instant that is arrested by the photographer. While he is busy shooting, Leo Lattke keeps observing him and the more he does so, the more the photographer appeals to him. It seems that he recognizes particular character attributes that they share: both of them try to get the best out of a certain occasion. As the narrator explains: “Der knipste so, wie Leo Lattke gerne schrieb” (29).

Eventually the journalist addresses the photographer and asks for his pictures, handing over his business card. The magazine he works for is apparently a famous and major one, as it is described as the following: “Dieses Blatt war eine Autorität, eine Instanz, es war der Inbegriff

der Pressefreiheit überhaupt. Die Einladung, für dieses Blatt zu arbeiten, kam unter Journalisten einem Ritterschlag gleich” (29). Thus, the unknown photographer is recognized by a distinguished reporter. This moment brings back the paradoxical relation between the photographer - the “Hinterwäldler” -, his camera, which was described as an “unscheinbares Ding”, and their rather significant function of capturing the most memorable moments that was mentioned in the introductory section. In this sense the private pictures that the photographer captures function as political documents.

The journalist, Leo Lattke who later writes a significant reportage about a blind woman who gains eyesight, appears to be a rather arbitrary person. Compared to the humble and reserved photographer, he prefers to be the one who is always in charge and has power over others. However, they somehow seem to be the two sides of the same coin: both of them are in possession of a certain type of “talent” that serves them as an instrument to manifest their imaginations. While the photographer uses a camera – and the aid of light – to do so, the reporter waits for the metaphorical aid of light, the “flash of genius,” in order to be able to produce a writ that he is proud of and satisfied with. They both intend to shed light on events that they consider worthy.

After pondering about the photos, Leo Lattke decides that he will not use them after all in his work. Despite his remarkable talent, the photographer is not well-known, he has no reputation. The reporter wanted to take them only to wield the power of his professional status over him. He is used to the fact that he is allowed to use other people`s hopes and time at his leisure.

The photographer, besides taking photos of the family in the camp in Budapest, also captures the moment when Lena encounters the police face to face at the train station during a strike. He appears to be free to move around and to snap as many pictures as he wishes.

Die Fotos, die Lenas Bruder in jener Nacht knipste, sind später oft gedruckt worden. Es waren seltene Fotos. Polizisten mögen es nicht, fotografiert zu werden, schon gar nicht aus allernächster Nähe. Doch die Leica wurde ihm nicht aus der Hand geschlagen, und sein Film wurde auch nicht eingezogen. Lenas Bruder blieb unbehelligt, obwohl er genau zwischen den Fronten war. Vielleicht half ihm, daß er trotz der Nacht auf das Blitzlicht verzichtete, daß er sich statt dessen auf sein lichtstarkes Objektiv sowie die statuenhafte Starre seines rechten Armes verließ. Vielleicht half ihm, daß seine Leica so diskret und anheimelnd klickte, daß sie im allgemeinen Tumult überhört wurde. Vielleicht half ihm, daß er es unterließ, durch den Sucher zu schauen, wodurch er sein Tun verleugnete. So knipste er straflos die wütende Lena, die einem stur dreinblickenden Polizisten in einer Wand aus stur dreinblickenden Polizisten frontal gegenüberstand, Nasenspitze an Nasenspitze. Ein dünnes, gezacktes Licht dazwischen, das von einer Leuchtreklame weit im Hintergrund stammte, erscheint wie eine elektrostatische Entladung zwischen den Nasenspitzen. Dieser Moment ist so intensiv, daß das Bild nie ironisch wirkt. Kein Betrachter hat je die Echtheit des Funkens bezweifelt. (69)

The notion of photography is also connected to the concept of revolution. Lena takes part in a conflict-situation at the railway station, where numerous policemen are trying to keep the people out of the station, since a major number of citizens intended to flee from Germany to Hungary by trains. Under these tense and stressful circumstances, the photographer actively takes part in capturing the most intriguing moments. Even though the police do not like to be photographed, he manages to snap the memorable events. Despite the fact that he stands at the frontline, nobody disturbs him, nobody tries to confiscate his device. This might be due to the fact that - although it's night – he does not use a flashlight but rather relies on the, as described in the introductory part, lens speed of the apparatus and his own ability to stay in a sculpturesque rigidity.

Besides that, the device's silent nature can also provide aid for him not to be noticed, since, due to the turmoil, nobody can hear it clearly. When photographing, he does not look into the viewfinder. This fact can be seen as connected to the idea, according to which he closes his eyes a moment before taking the photograph. Here as well, he subjectively chooses the instant that he wants to capture but at the same time he allows the camera to accomplish the job by not influencing the final second before the picture is actually taken. This intriguing complexity of capturing might appear to be pseudo-objectivity.

Like many times, in this situation as well the photographer aims his attention at Lena. As a figure of the revolution, she appears to be eager to participate in the confrontation against the police. She stands face to face with one policeman out of an entire row of cops. The most intriguing point of the event is that there is a thin ray of light exactly between them. As it is described: "Ein dünnes, gezacktes Licht dazwischen, das von einer Leuchtreklame weit im Hintergrund stammte, erscheint wie eine elektrostatische Entladung zwischen den Nasenspitzen. Dieser Moment ist so intensiv, daß das Bild nie ironisch wirkt. Kein Betrachter hat je die Echtheit des Funkens bezweifelt" (69).

The beam of light cutting between the two figures makes this event even more powerful and expressive. It can carry different metaphorical meanings. As we have seen in the introduction, Lena's character is closely related to light and warmth. Wherever she goes, she brings a certain notion of glow and ease with herself. However, in this particular situation it seems to me that this flash, coming from a neon sign from the background, supports and emphasizes not only Lena's blaze of anger but also the strain and almost electrical, flaming tension between her and the policemen. The jagged and traverse sparkle appears to be a manifestation of Lena's current emotional state.

One can detect a certain discrepancy between light as it appears in reality and as it is depicted on the photo. In that situation the ray comes from an artificial source of light, namely an illuminated advertising, which does not carry any significance, besides its obvious role. However, as it is being photographed and captured exactly at the right moment, its message changes. The momentousness of the event influences the otherwise insignificant light coming from an advertisement and endows it with a notable and symbolic presence. On the photo the beam functions as an “elektrostatische Entladung” (69), - an electrostatic discharge - a manifestation of tension between Lena and the policeman.

Wenige Augenblicke, nachdem sich Lena von dem Polizisten abgewendet hatte, nachdem sie an ihm verzweifelt war, machte Lenas Bruder ein weiteres Foto von ihr. Der Ruf »Wir bleiben hier! « hatte die Umstehenden ergriffen, und während die sich in eine Euphorie des Protestes steigerten, kam Lena zur Besinnung. Sie nahm ihren großen Bruder wahr, und daß der die ganze Zeit hatte knipsen können. Da war was faul. Der große Bruder mit der Leica. Big Brother is watching you. Sie konnte diesen häßlichen Gedanken nicht aufhalten. Wer so dicht bei den Polizisten Fotos macht, ist bei der Stasi. Und das – in dem Augenblick knipste er sie – ist für meine Akte. Welch ein Verrat!, stand in ihrem Gesicht. (69-70)

Je länger er diese Stimmung in den Straßen beobachtete, desto klarer wurde ihm, daß er einen Fotografen braucht. Es wäre Wahnsinn, allein mit Worten das alles abdecken zu wollen. (136)

The photographer keeps taking pictures of Lena; however in one moment the observed becomes the observer: she realizes that he has been zealously snapping. Amidst the euphoria of the people surrounding her, she perceives her big brother, the photographer and makes an assumption according to which he is working for the Stasi, since he is able to take all those pictures without being disturbed or stopped. Being a revolutionary person, she obviously considers that not righteous. As she thinks: “Wer so dicht bei den Polizisten Fotos macht, ist bei der Stasi” (69). In this sense she likens the photographer – who is her so-called “big brother” – to the socialist government that supervises every event and keeps an eye on everyone. Thus, he

might symbolically stand for a power that watches over people, along with his camera that documents the events. Her instinctual behavior recalls that of the family who was photographed by Lena`s older brother beforehand.

The idea, according to which the photographer can be connected to the socialist government, is rather peculiar. The way the government was watching over its people, controlling and monitoring them seems to be reflected in the way the photographers takes his pictures: he is allowed to approach the police from a close distance and he is not hindered or stopped from shooting. His function is also supported by the fact that he remains anonymous throughout the entire book and the only name he receives is “Lenas großer Bruder.” Since the photographer is related to light – he highlights important events and captures them – the Statsi, as an organization that intends to shed light on every detail and every citizen, also seems to be connected to this concept, which adds even more complexity and multi-facetedness to the notion of light.

One of the most intriguing features of the photographer is the fact that he closes his eyes one moment before taking the picture. Lena is the first person who ever questions this action:

»Warum machst du beim Fotografieren immer die Augen zu? «
fragte Lena, kaum war die Tür in Schloß gefallen.

»Du bist die erste, die mich das fragt. «

»Weich nicht aus, « sagte sie. » Ist doch komisch, daß du ausgerechnet immer dann die Augen zumachst, wen du klickst. Als ob du...nicht mehr hinsehen kannst und statt dessen ein Foto machst, so stellvertretend, was weiß ich.«

» Vielleicht, weil das Wichtige immer dann passiert, wenn wir die Auge zu haben.«

» Glaubst du das wirklich? « fragte sie.

»Nein. «, sagte ihr großer Bruder.

» Weshalb dann? « fragt sie, und weil er nichts erwiderte, setzte sie fort, indem sie ihn genau beobachtete: » Du wirkst wie eine gesplante Persönlichkeit. Als ob du gleichzeitig anwesend und abwesend sein willst. Als ob du nichts zu tun haben willst mit dem, was du machst. « (70-71)

» Du wolltest wissen, wieso ich beim Knipsen die Augen schließe
 « sagte ihr großer Bruder. »Ich glaube, weil mir der Unterschied zwischen
 dem, was ich noch sehe, und dem, was dann stattfindet, so viel bedeutet. «

»Gibts denn einen? « fragte Lena.

» Das ist mal so, mal so «, sagte ihr großer Bruder. » Manchmal
 gibt es keinen, und manchmal ist das, was ich zuletzt gesehen habe, gar
 nicht mehr zu erkennen. Wenn jemand ins Bild läuft. Das Fotografieren
 hat mich nicht schlauer gemacht. Ich weiß nicht, was damals passiert ist,
 als ich die Augen zu hatte. Alles oder nichts oder irgendwas...« (74)

In this section one can finally receive an answer for the photographer's habit. Lena is the first person who ever asked this question about him; however his answer is not concrete. Lena's assumption about it is rather thought provoking: "Als ob du...nicht mehr hinsehen kannst und statt dessen ein Foto machst, so stellvertretend, was weiß ich" (71). According to her the photographer takes the picture because he can no longer look at the event that is happening and instead of that, as a substitutionary act, he captures the moment. He explains that the most important things happen exactly at that moment when he closes his eyes, however he does not even believe in this statement.

Lena, again, makes an intriguing observation about him: "Du wirkst wie eine gesplattene Persönlichkeit. Als ob du gleichzeitig anwesend und abwesend sein willst" (71). It seems to her that he has a split personality which manifests itself in the fact that he wants to be simultaneously "present" and "absent." This claim makes his existence look paradoxical. However, it can also be seen as an appropriate explanation for what he is doing: he attempts not to be noticed but at the same time intends to capture those events that are worthy. This tendency to be paradoxical harks back to his function both as objective and subjective and is also supported by the fact that he remains completely anonymous in the book: the reader never gets to know his actual name. He seems to cut himself adrift from the situation that is happening in order to see it more clearly. Thus, he can be considered both blind and seeing.

Since this answer does not satisfy Lena`s curiosity about the topic, the photographer cannot choose but tell her an uncomfortable story from his childhood. When he was studying photography, one day on the train, as he was going home, he was asked by a person if he wanted to be hypnotized. Out of sheer desire to experience something he has never done before, he consented. The person invited him to his house but eventually they met at the photographer`s home. He was indeed hypnotized by that person – whose personality was rather intrusive and antipatic – and by the time he woke up, the person had left the house. To his horror he had to realize that he was most probably abused and raped.

The terrifying experience of hypnotization and being violated while unconscious by someone at his leisure left the photographer with the conclusion that something life changing can occur while one is not the master of the situation. As he explains it: „Ich glaube, weil mir der Unterschied zwischen dem, was ich noch sehe, und dem, was dann stattfindet, so viel bedeutet.“ (74) There is a difference between what he sees and what actually happens when he closes his eyes. Sometimes it is exactly the same picture that he saw before closing his eyes and taking the photo but sometimes it is not even recognizable. Even though the photographer introduces himself as a person with a special skill, his explanation seems to carry an ambiguous and uncertain notion: “Ich weiß nicht, was damals passiert ist, als ich die Augen zu hatte. Alles oder nichts oder irgendwas...” (74) Thus, before capturing the moment he abandons it and allows “blind luck” to accomplish the job.

Lenas großer Bruder wußte seit langem, daß die besten Fotos dann entstehen, wenn er überhaupt nicht bemerkt wird. Der beste Fotograf ist der unsichtbare Fotograf. Lenas großer Bruder feilte an seiner Unsichtbarwerdung – er benutzte eine unscheinbare Kamera, die er unauffällig bediente. Er liebte den Schnappschuß als Methode, er verzichtete darauf, seine Szene zu arrangieren. Wie er seine Bilder gestaltete, davon bekamen die auf den Bildern überhaupt nichts mit. Wenn es dennoch geschah, reagierten sie immer gleich: mit Mißtrauen. Lenas großer Bruder besaß unzählige Bilder von Menschen, die als sie

entdeckten, daß sie fotografiert werden, einen Blick abschickten, als würden sie in ihrer Ruhe gestört. Lenas Bruder glaubte, in dieser Reaktion einen Instinkt anzutreffen, der noch aus dem Tierleben stammt. Selbst wenn er die Erlaubnis zum Fotografieren einholt – was zum Beispiel bei einer Fotoserie in einem Eisenbahnteil unumgänglich ist -, gibt es dieses Mißtrauen. (93)

Once again one can detect a paradoxical relation between the photographer's appearance and his actual function: his main goal is to stay as invisible as possible, however, he still intends to capture those moments, that he considers to be worthy. Photography is connected not only to the motif of light but also to the motif of invisibility, anonymity and surveillance. This idea is supported by the fact that the text contains numerous words that are linked to concealing and staying away from the eyes of the public. As mentioned before, the photographer remains unidentified, the reader does not get to know his real name, besides that he is "Lenas großer Bruder". He is characterized as "unsichtbar," and by using an "unscheinbare Kamera" – that he operates "unauffällig" – his purpose is to polish and improve his "Unsichtbarwerdung" as much as he can. The choice of words seem to strengthen the mystical features of the photographer.

His favorite method of capturing pictures is called the "Schnappschuß," which could be translated to English as snapshot. The most important aspect of the "Schnappschuß" is that using that method one can photograph casual events instantaneously. Thus, the relevance of the photographer lies in the fact that he is able to act rapidly.

He is willing to give up the possibility to arrange or organize the event before taking a picture of it. As it is described: "Wie er seine Bilder gestaltete, davon bekamen die auf den Bildern überhaupt nichts mit" (93). The photographer intends to alienate and separate himself from the subjects of his pictures: they should not know or notice that they are being photographed. He attempts not to influence their lives in any direct way, however, just the fact that he does not ask for permission from the subjects might be considered a violation of privacy.

We are reminded of a nature photographer who observes and captures his subjects – the animals – from a safe distance. This idea might allude to the introductory part again, as the photographer went hunting with his father: “Aber in einem Moment, der sich durch nichts ankündigte, hob ich mit größter Selbstverständlichkeit und Leichtigkeit das Gewehr, die Schleuder des Todes, und schoß in das schwarze Loch der Nacht. Bis heute weiß ich nicht, warum. Ich hatte das Tier nicht mit den Augen gesehen, aber ich wußte, da war eins – ein großes schwarzes Tier” (9). One can find a parallel between the photographer’s younger self aiming and firing with his rifle in the night without knowing exactly what he is pointing at, and his older self aiming with a camera and shooting his subjects, who are now not animals but rather people – with animal-like instincts.

Just the way he killed the animal in the darkness, the people who are being photographed are also able to „kill” the perfect moment for the photographer, the moment when magic appears, with their distrust upon being observed. This duality is also present on the level of words in German language. In the phrase “ein Foto schießen“ one can detect the verb „schießen” which applies both to photography and hunting – or using firearm.

Importance of being able not to be seen and remaining inconspicuous lies in the reaction of the public. When the subject of the photo notices that he or she is being photographed the natural and genuine flow of events becomes disturbed. This interruption results in the person acting in a way that, according to the photographer, derives from animal life. This instinctual response is a particular type of suspicion or distrust. As the narrator says: “Lenas Bruder glaubte, in dieser Reaktion einen Instinkt anzutreffen, der noch aus dem Tierleben stammt” (93). The suspicion can derive from the long-ago „animal life” but it can also come from the fact that the government of the GDR used to control and supervise the citizens of the country.

Suspicion became a part of everyday life and - as Lena previously talked about it, likening the photographer to the „Big Brother“ who is „watching you,“ „der große Bruder mit der Leica“ (69) - a man who is able and allowed to capture significant moments without being interrupted or stopped might as well be working for the government. This thought supports the idea why people, who discovered that they are being photographed „einen Blick abschickten, als würden sie in ihrer Ruhe gestört“ (93). As already alluded to, the photographer`s act indeed appears to be the violation of a basic human right, which is the right to privacy.

Alles was ich über diese Zeit weiß, weiß ich von deinen Bildern, sagte Lena oft. Von der Silvesterfeier am Brandenburger Tor knipste ihr großer Bruder drei Filme. Er knipste den Horror. Er knipste ein Volk, das außer Rand und Band geraten war, in einer Feier, die zu einer Orgie der Selbstüberschätzung wurde. Er knipste Männer, die sich ihre Knaller wie Zigaretten zwischen die Lippen steckten, er knipste Jugendliche, die ihre Raketen nicht nur in der Hand zündeten, sondern obendrein das fauchende Feuerwerk festhielten, anstatt es in den Himmel fliegen zu lassen. Lenas Bruder knipste die Feiernden, die wie entartete Früchte in den Bäumen hingen, bis die Äste brachen und sie, andere mitreißend, unter den Linden aufeinanderfielen. Er knipste das Volk, das sich noch immer und unablässig die Mauerkrone eroberte, deren Fassungsvermögen unerschöpflich schien. Er knipste die Lebensmüden, die das Branderburger Tor über einen Blitzableiter erklommen und den allerletzten weißen Fleck des Niemandlandes in Jedermannsland verwandelten. Er knipste die Reiter der Quadriga. Er knipste die Verrückten, die das haushohe Gerüst einer Videoleinwand hundertfach in Besitz nahmen und – stehend oder sitzend, doch mit bedenkenswerter Schwere – die luftige Konstruktion belasteten. Er knipste, wie das Gerüst wankte, knickte und schließlich zusammenbrach.

Er knipste eine Volk, das irre geworden war.

Die größte, die schlimmste Irrsinnstat knipste er nicht. (351)

The animal-like instincts, discussed previously, appear not only in a form of suspicion or distrust but also in more physically present, violent ways. The photographer also captures those moments, when people run riot and act beneath human dignity. He takes pictures of the insanity and disorder that happened at the first new year`s eve celebration at the „Branderburger Tor“ following the fall of the wall. The very first sentence of the book appears again: „Alles was ich über diese Zeit weiß, weiß ich von deinen Bildern“. Repeated often, this sentence usually stands

in front of passages in which something of high importance or something intriguing is going to be described. In this case, the concept of light is connected to violence and animalistic human behavior but, as always, the photographer makes a record of it.

It is intriguing that – even though he usually only takes a couple of pictures of the most significant moments – in this situation the photographer uses up three films in order to be able to reflect the multi-facetedness of the event. He takes pictures of numerous types of figures: a man who uses firecracker as a cigarette, young boys, who do not only kindle their rockets in their hands, but also keep the firework there instead of letting it up in the air. Here, firework, or light, should be associated with celebration and joy, however, through the brutality and irresponsibility of the people it is more linked to violence and danger, even death. The behavior of the crowd can also be seen as a Dionysian, ecstatic celebration.

The photographer likens the aggressive and thronging group of people to decadent and degenerate fruits that hang on a tree, whose branches are not strong enough to hold up that many of them: it breaks and the people fall under the tree. It is interesting to note that the expression „unter den Linden” is used in this simile: „Lenas Bruder knipste den Feiernden, die wie entartete Früchte in den Bäumen hingen, bis die Äste brachen und sie, andere mitreißend, unter den Linden aufeinanderfielen“ (351). “Unter den Linden” is one of the most well-known streets of Berlin, which ends at the also quite famous „Brandenburger Tor. “

This metaphor might imply the fact that an overflowing number of people fled from the East side of Germany to the West, overwhelming the government and making integration harder. If one considers the original name of the Brandenburger Tor – which was *Friedenstor*. “Peace Gate” – it is even more paradoxical that the aggressively celebrating people were gathering

exactly at that monument. From another approach, “Unter den Linden” and the “Brandenburger Tor” are the symbols of Prussia’s absolute power and they represent authority.

The expression “entartete Früchte” is worthy of further elaboration. These two words form an oxymoron, a literal device that is meant to combine seemingly self-contradictory notions. The word “Früchte” - fruits – implies numerous positive associations, such as blossoming, developing and the start of a new, promising life. In this sense “fruit” can symbolize the beginning of a new era and a new political approach. Even though the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the socialist government hold out a promise to a better future, the reality unfolded differently. The word “entartete” - meaning “degenerate” – has a specific implication that is connected to the National Socialism. The word was used to describe modern works of art that were considered dangerous and un-German. One can see a parallel between the GDR and the National Socialist parties: both were totalitarian governments, determined to control and regulate every single aspect of public and private life without limits.

The motif of collapse and destruction appears multiple times. The raving people do not only climb the wall but also go up on a video canvas, which results in the wreckage of the construction. Some individuals also climb up the lightning conductor and make themselves comfortable there. The way it is described is rather interesting: “Er knipste die Lebensmüden, die das Brandenburger Tor über einen Blitzableiter erklommen und den allerletzten weißen Fleck des Niemandslandes in Jedermannsland verwandelten” (351). It seems that people intend to occupy and conquer every single angle and point of the Brandenburger Tor in order to demonstrate their superiority and power over the government that oppressed them for so long. The best place to do so is, of course, the emblem of Berlin, the Quadriga.

Even though the photographer captures so many events that happen throughout one single day, and even though his possession of the “hellseherische Ahnung” he does not take a picture of the most horrifying happening: the death of Wilder Willi.

Chapter Two

Major Characters and Light

Besides photography, there are certain characters in the work who have a particularly close connection to the motif of light: one of them is Lena, the physical therapist. She is one of the first characters the reader gets to know, and various events from her life can be followed up until the end of the book. One could already see from the introductory part, that she is linked to light and warmth: “Wo sie ist, wird es warm, und wenn sie geht, wärmt es nach” (13).

Sie kam die Straße der Nationen heruntergefahren, auf Rollschuhen. Sie schwebte heran wie ein großes flatterndes Sommerglück. Er hatte noch nie etwas so Schönes gesehen. Das volle, wellige Haar und ihre Brüste, jung wie der Mai, wippten im Rhythmus der Bewegungen. Auf Rollschuhen wirkte Lena noch größer, als sie ohnehin war. Ihre fließenden, harmonischen Bewegungen, ihre aufrechte Positur verliehen ihr königinnenhafte Präsenz. Sie trug ein Sommerkleidchen, orange mit großen weißen Blütenmotiven. Die Rollschuhe nötigten zu einer Haltung, in der die Vorzüge ihrer Figur zur Geltung kamen: Ihre langen Beine wurden durch die leicht eingeknickten Knie betont, während der durchgestreckte Rücken Lenas Rundungen um so deutlicher ausbildete.

Sie kam vor dem Eiscafé zum Stehen und schaute such um. Lena zog die Blicke der Passanten auf sich, und er war der Glückliche, der mit dieser Frau verabredet war.

Sie war etwas außer Atem, ihr Gesicht hatte eine frische Farbe, und ihre Augen leuchteten. (53)

It is thought-provoking to notice that Lena's character is mostly described through her physical appearance. Her brother is waiting for her at a cafe house and as he sees her arriving – wearing her roller skates -, he elaborates on how beautiful she looks. Her outer characteristics seem to make her unique: she is likened to “ein großes flatterndes Sommerglück.” The usage of particular words, such as “heranschweben” and “flatterndes” make Lena's presence ethereal and lightsome, almost like a graceful butterfly. “Sommerglück” comes across as a very expressive compound: it encapsulates her most remarkable and appreciable idiosyncrasies. She does not

only radiate warmth and makes people feel themselves comfortable around her, but also possesses an aura of delight. Thus, she carries good luck and happiness around her. Her figure is connected to hope, brightness and so, through her, the motif of light carries a positive implication.

It is interesting that the German word “Glück” has multiple meanings in English. On the one hand it suggests “happiness,” on the other it conveys the meaning “luck” or “fortune.” The combination of these two words describe Lena in a perfect way. The notion of fortune, besides conveying the meaning related to “happiness,” also has the implication of fate. This concept links Lena and the “hellseherische” photographer together, whose talent presumably derives from a fortunate constellation of stars. The word “Glück” returns back later in the book – in an ambiguous way - connected to Sabine Busse, the blind woman who gains eyesight.

Since “Sommerglück” is not a palpable object but rather an evanescent moment or a volatile notion, it endows Lena with sublime and agile characteristics. Based on the rather detailed description of her physical looks, she appears to be “fließend” and harmonious, her entire character represents joy and alleviation. Her features, “Das volle, wellige Haar” and “ihre Brüste, jung wie der Mai” seem to imply that she embodies an ideal, fertile and flourishing woman from a sexualized, male perspective. The fact that she wears roller skates appears to be a rather odd or even revolutionary trait; still she manages to take advantage of it and to turn it for the benefit of her already stunning image.

Not only her appearance is remarkable but also the way she moves represents ease and lightness: “Ihre fließenden, harmonischen Bewegungen, ihre aufrechte Positur verliehen ihr königinnenhafte Präsenz” (53). These advantageous attributes endow her with a queen-like aura. Thus, not only her acts are connected to light but her entire self manifests a phenomenon that

provokes other people`s interest and evokes trust in them. It is obvious that Lena is being observed by a man, who puts emphasis mostly on her feminine characteristics: “Ihre langen Beine wurden durch die leicht eingeknickten Knie betont, während der durchgestreckte Rücken Lenas Rundungen um so deutlicher ausbildete” (53). She is being elevated and praised by the male narrator.

Lena represents a muse for the photographer not only in his works but also in his private life. Even though he is not the only one who notices Lena as a figure that stands for beauty and, as we will see later in the book, revolutionary thinking, he is the one who captures her presence in its most expressive and determining moments. Thus, she symbolizes a kind of genuine and transparent light that inspires the photographer to capture Lena whenever this pure embodiment of glow bursts out of her in the forms of anger, happiness or euphoria.

The photographer realizes how lucky he is to know Lena and this thought is also expressed: “Lena zog die Blicke der Passanten auf sich, und er war der Glückliche, der mit dieser Frau verabredet war” (53). Lena engages the attention of people only by her appearance and her first impression and the mere thought that she chooses to meet up exactly with the photographer, out of all the men she could meet, makes him think that he is lucky. Thus, Lena appears on the horizon as a figure of luck and fate.

As she looks at him, she seems to be happy and her eyes are shining. It is intriguing that the presence of “light” and glow often times are expressed through Lena`s eyes. This organ plays an essential role not only in receiving most of the information, but also in expressing one`s current state of mind. There is a connection between Lena and her older brother when it comes to the use of the eyes: while the photographer – after subjectively, but driven by a clairvoyant talent, selecting the most worthy moments he intends to capture – closes his eyes one instant

before the actual shot, Lena appears to be exactly the opposite. She uses her eyes, either intentionally or also motivated by an impalpable influence, in order to have an effect on people or to react to a particular situation.

The topic of Lena`s and the photographer conversation appears to be rather intriguing and might reveal another type of approach to Lena`s character:

»Es gibt eine neue Theorie. Die Chaostheorie. « [...] » Alles ist Chaos! « Sie warf die Hände in die Luft, um zu zeigen, was sie mit *alles* meinte. [...] » Die Chaostheorie sagt, daß der Flügelschlag eines Schmetterlings in Thailand etwas in Gang setzen kann, was zu einem Hurrikan in der USA führt. (54)
 » Überall hocken Zufälle. Das, was wir für den Zustand der Welt halten, ist wahrscheinlich etwas sehr Empfindliches, etwas Flüchtiges. Es beginnt immer mit einem Wassertröpfchen. Oder mit dem Flügelschlag eines Schmetterlings. Das ist mein Empfinden. Mein Empfinden von der Welt«. (55)

After the detailed physical description of Lena, one gets to know her perspective of the world. She believes that there is a concept, called Chaos theory, according to which even the stroke of a butterfly`s wing can trigger a chain-reaction that leads to a hurricane in the US. It means that even the smallest, seemingly trivial moment can lead to a significant change in the world. She does not only give credence to this idea but also incorporates it. As we shall see, she becomes the figure of the revolution and, thus, the stroke of the butterfly`s wing. Previously she was described by her older brother as a “großes flatterndes Sommerglück.” This depiction can already allow the reader to liken Lena to a butterfly that flatters around, bringing happiness by her mere presence.

Her conversation with the photographer seems to foreshadow the events that are to happen later in the work. According to her, the world is a fragile and ephemeral notion that is not carved in stone and can be altered quite simply. Her example of the “*Kondenswasser*” demonstrates how the theory might work in real life: an accidental drop of condensed water makes a man, sitting in the café house, notice his long not seen love, who just happened to be

walking down the street. She also recognizes him and they start to have a conversation, where she asks the man if he is still the member of the socialist party. The man hesitates and attempts to make up lies about it. As a result he eventually gets fired from the party (55).

As Lena says, “Die sicherste Methode, um rausgeschmissen zu werden, ist: Einfach laut sagen, was einen anstinkt und schon immer angestunken hat. Das macht er. Und plötzlich fangen auch andere an, weil sie das toll finden, wie der sich Luft macht. Mal grassiert das – alle sagen, wie sehr sie die Schnauze voll haben. Damit ist das Land praktisch unregierbar. Und womit fing es an? Mit einem Tröpfchen Kondenswasser” (55). With this story Lena intends to explain how the butterfly-effect functions. Later she does the exact same thing, when giving a speech on the top of an ambulance: she expresses her own opinion and the opinion of the oppressed citizens. She becomes the drop of water that changes the direction of the flow:

Plötzlich stand Lena auf dem Krankenwagen, wie ein genialer Einfall. Sie war schön wie die Verheißung dieses Tages. Lena trug noch ihre weiße Schwestertracht. Unter der war nichts, außer einem knappen Schlüpfert. Sie hatte den Haarknoten gelöst und ein Mikrofon in der Hand.

Da zeigte das Neue. Es gab Gedränge; die Männer hatten bemerkt, daß sie direkt am Krankenwagen, weit, weit an ihren langen Beinen emporschauen läßt... [...]

Lena war die einzige, die ein Mikrofon benutzte, und niemand hatte so weit oben gestanden. Der ganze Platz konnte sie sehen und hören. Sie sprach von ihrer Arbeit im Krankenhaus und von ihren Patienten: [...]

» Wir haben ja nie offen gesagt, was wir denken. Wir haben es nie gelernt. Und wenn ich jetzt hier oben stehe, das weiß ich nicht, was ich zuerst sagen soll. Ich finde, wir müssen auf jeden Fall weitermachen. « Sie wurde von Beifall unterbrochen. »Ja! Wir müssen weitermachen. Es hat doch gerade erst angefangen, oder? « Jetzt hatte sie gelernt, den Beifall zu locken, und siehe – es kam! »Und wenn es uns schon am Anfang so gut gefällt, wie werden wir uns erst fühlen, wenn wir nicht mehr aufhören? « Während es dafür Riesenbeifall und Jubel gab, gelang Lenas großer Bruder das schönste Foto, das er je von ihr gemacht hat. (85-86)

Lena`s character had been linked to the notion of revolution already earlier but she achieves her highest potential as she is standing on an ambulance car, giving a speech to the

crowd. She is, again, described mostly based on her physical appearance and she is likened to the notion of “promise”: “Sie war schön wie die Verheißung dieses Tages” (85). Thus, she becomes a symbol, a ray of hope in the eyes of the crowd. She is placed literally above all the other people, she stand high and looks down on them. The fact that she is still wearing her nurse uniform can imply that she also symbolizes a healing figure who cleanses the minds of the masses and leads them towards light, towards the right way.

She is a revolutionary character who dares to initiate progressive ideas or at least she is courageous enough to point out the direction in which it is worth going. Since her beauty is likened to the “Verheißung dieses Tages” – the promise of that day – her character can also be associated with a Biblical figure: Moses. He lead his nation to the Promised Land and, in a certain sense, Lena also guides her people towards a prosperous future.

Lena lächelte, und ihre blauen Augen leuchteten – man konnte glauben, sie dufteten. Der Himmel über ihr war voller zerwühlter weißer Wolken, doch Lena war erleichtert, ja, wie befreit. Nicht nur, weil sie zum Mikrofon gegriffen hatte und sich alle um sie scharten und ihr applaudierten, sondern auch – das zeigte ihr erinnerungsvoller Blick – *weil etwas vorbei ist*. Die Anspannung, die finstre Gefahr waren weg. Ihre Gesichtszüge waren harmonisch. Niemand auf dem Bild hatte eine negative Ausstrahlung, Lena faszinierte alle. Der wilde Willi hatte sich halb aus dem Krankenwagenfenster gewunden, um Lena zu erleben.

Lena hob die Hand und der Jubel verebbte. » Ich habe diese Nacht etwas geträumt. Ich habe geträumt, daß wir alle vor Freude die Blätter hochwerfen, die auf der Straße liegen. Überall wirbeln Blätter herum. Ich weiß nicht, was passiert ist, aber es steht ein großes, ein unermeßliches Glück bevor, noch in diesem Herbst.

Der ganze Platz schwieg verblüfft, und Lena, die sich nicht sicher war, ob ihre Rede großartig oder peinlich war, erfuhr, daß die gewaltigste Wirkung einer Rede darin besteht, für einen Moment vollkommene Stille in die Massen zu senken. (86)

She becomes a central character: each and every person in the crowd is able to hear and see her, in a way she turns into a mouthpiece for all the oppressed individuals. She expresses her, and the crowd’s thoughts in their stead and draws a conclusion: “Wir müssen weitermachen”

(86). At this instant, she experiences the first moments of success: the mass replies to her statement with applause and appreciation. She conveys a positive attitude and thus, people react to that in a similar way. Her own behavior and optimistic charisma is mirrored back to her through the public. As they celebrate her, the photographer manages to take “das schönste Foto, das er je von ihr gemacht.” The interaction between Lena and her audience boosts her confidence and makes her even more radiant, which, naturally, motivates her older brother to capture the moment.

Lena`s character appears to emphasize the paradoxical nature of light as a motif. Even though she shines through the masses, guides and encourages the crowd not only with her words but also with her positive radiation, her speech is not political at all. In this sense, reason – or enlightenment – stands against the more metaphysical connotations of light. She influences the people and effects their sensory perception by almost enticing them, as though she was a mythological siren. She vanquishes a totalitarian, highly political government in a non-political, rather spontaneous and intuitive way.

Apparently the response of the people inspires Lena and frees her from her shackles: “Lena lächelte, und ihre blauen Augen leuchteten – man konnte glauben, sie dufteten.” (86) The eyes play an important role in this situation, since they express her uplifting emotional state of joy and are also connected to the motif of light. She herself seems to emit a positive energy that influences all those, who are witnesses to her shine. Her eyes do not only glow but they also appear to be fragrant. Her presence affects other people so strongly that she does not only stimulate their visual organs but also reaches out to their olfactory senses.

In that moment reality and the picture of the reality seem to overlap. The description of Lena`s appearance and influence is narrated based on the picture the photographer took: “gelang

Lenas großem Bruder das schönste Foto, das er je von ihr gemacht hat" (86). The most significant part of her presence as the hub of the crowd is seen through the lens of the camera: "Ihre Gesichtszüge waren harmonisch. Niemand auf dem Bild hatte eine negative Ausstrahlung, Lena faszinierte alle" (86). There appears to be such a subtle but sudden change between what the reader thinks the reality is and what turns out to be the description of a picture, a remembering.

Lena represents the opinion and will of the crowd and brings forth the ray of hope and the prospect of a brighter future. She continues her speech and talks about a dream she had. This dream endows her with a visionary quality and, thus, links her to the „hellseherische Ahnung“ that her older brother possesses: "Ich habe geträumt, daß wir all vor Freude die Blätter hochwerfen, die auf der Straße liegen. Überall wirbeln Blätter herum" (86). One can wonder, what the „die Blätter“ stand for.

First of all, the thought of children`s game comes to one`s mind. Lena embodies not only revolution, light and positive radiation but she also carries a sense of spontaneity in herself. Her dream might imply that, since "die finstre Gefahr" is not around anymore, people can allow themselves to be more spontaneous and joyful and do instinctive and unplanned things that they have not even thought of doing – for example to cast up leaves from the street. The fallen leaves might symbolize the fallen government that becomes the toy of everyday people.

Since "Blatt" has multiple meanings when translated to English, the word might also allude to the translation "newspaper" or "journal" in Lena`s dream. It would imply the freedom of press, the abolition of the censure and not only the unrestrained flow of information and individual opinions but also the opportunity to make these news available for everyone. Since the leaves swirl everywhere in the dream, in a sense it carries the notion of chaos. In her next sentence Lena expresses her certainty in uncertainty: "Ich weiß nicht, was passiert ist, aber es

steht ein großes, ein unermeßliches Glück bevor, noch in diesem Herbst” (86). Since the leaves fall down in autumn, this movement can again represent the death of one political era and the rebirth of another one.

At this point many of Lena`s characteristics remind me those of the photographer`s. She also appears to have a certain “hellseherische Ahnung” even if there is no clear reference to it. She seems to have a sixth sense as well that anticipates the historical event that is going to happen. When she asks her older brother what happens in that moment when he closes his eyes, he answers: “Ich weiß nicht, was damals passiert ist, als ich die Augen zu hatte. Alles oder nichts oder irgendwas...« “ (74). Like the photographer when closing his eyes and taking a picture, she is also uncertain of herself: “Ich weiß nicht, was passiert ist” (86). However, similar to him, Lena also senses, while her blue eyes are shining from the picture her brother took of her, that something special is about to come forth and the wind of change is in the air.

Since the “unermeßliches Glück” is believed to happen still in the autumn of that year, the season itself conveys the allegorical meaning of death and rebirth. In the fall the trees shed their leaves but in Lena`s dream they become vivid again and are endowed with metaphorical connotations due to the people who pick them up from the ground and let them fly in the air. Even though they are the dead remains of something that was living before, they still symbolize the fragments of hope. The word “Glück” appears to have a connection to Lena. Previously she was described by the photographer as “ein großes flatterndes Sommerglück” which implies that she is the one who triggers a change in people`s lives by having a particular kind of forward-looking and constructive attitude.

The entire scene of Lena standing on the ambulance, giving a heartwarming speech and being applauded by celebrating people around her can be juxtaposed to another kind of

celebration that is also captured by the photographer: the festivity of the New Year after the fall of the Berlin wall. There one can observe a very different reaction from the public. Instead of being joyful, they behave like untamed animals and, contrary to what Lena's dream would suggest, they do not run around happily throwing up leaves from the streets but rather they themselves fall down to the ground like decadent, degenerate fruits (351). One can draw a parallel between the falling leaves in Lena's dream and the falling bottles in reality. The dream might stand for light, and a brighter future but in the reality it can easily and quickly turn into darkness and violence.

After her speech the public's response is unexpected: they are not applauding, but rather appear to be dumbfounded. This reaction makes Lena doubt herself. She is not sure whether the speech was amusing or awkward but later realizes that the distinctiveness and impact of a great speech can be measured in the utter, flabbergasted silence of the people: "die gewaltigste Wirkung einer Rede [besteht] darin, für einen Moment vollkommene Stille in die Massen zu senken" (86). The moment of silence, the magical instant when the crowd attempts to comprehend the brave statements Lena just made, can be likened to the moment when the photographer closes his eyes before capturing a picture. In both cases one of the sensory organs are out of use and the most important events emerge in that brief time period.

Lena is of the opinion that there is a theory, according to which the most trivial events are able to trigger a process that result in a radical change in the world. One is inclined to believe that the most intriguing link between Lena and the butterfly-effect lies in the notion of spontaneity and unpredictability: "Plötzlich stand Lena auf dem Krankenwagen, wie ein genialer Einfall" (85). The notion of improvisation that derives from Lena plays a determining role in starting to plant the idea of revolution into the heads of people.

As mentioned earlier, Lena`s character is mostly described through her physical appearance. Previously her older brother depicted her in details but he is not the only one who noticed the positive radiation that she represents. An albino, Werner Schniedel, also observes her from a male point of view and has conclusions similar to the photographer`s: Lena appears to be the incarnation of beauty from their male perspectives. Being an impostor, who always pretends to be someone who he is not, the albino come forth as an ambiguous character.

He is waiting at a train station, collecting coins from a malfunctioning cigarette automat when he sees Lena coming. Since the cigarette automat has a blockage inside, all the people who attempt to buy a product lose their money. However, the albino comes up with an idea to dissolve the jamming: he beats the machine intensely and at the same time he inserts a coin, thus he is the only one who is able to access the money. His plan is to dissolve the blockage after every fifth person that tries to buy the product.

He keeps on collecting the wasted coins of those people who tried to buy a cigarette, however, he assumes that at some point a repairman will come, which would mean the end of his easy way of obtaining money. Instead of such a person, Lena arrives. She, again, is described physically, through the lens of a male:

Sie war groß, größer als Werner Schniedel, und schlank. [...] Ihr Haar war dunkel, schulterlang und leicht gewellt, und jeder ihrer Schritte ließ es sacht wippen. Ihr Gesicht war fein und weich zugleich, strahlte aber etwas Königliches aus. Werner Schniedel dachte unwillkürlich an Nofretete. Ja, er konnte sich die junge Frau sofort als Königin vorstellen.
Werner Schniedel verliebte sich innerhalb weniger Augenblicke in sie. (298-299)

As the photographer elaborated on it before, Lena seems to have a certain queen-like, or royal presense: „Ihre fließenden, harmonischen Bewegungen, ihre aufrechte Positur verliehen ihr königinnenhafte Präsenz“ (53). Comparing the two remarks, Lena does not only appear to be having a harmonious and floating movement, but she also possesses a composure that is

exceptionally noble. She functions as a muse for the photographer and she embodies a perfect female figure for the albino.

Among other passersbys, Lena also attempts to use the cigarette automat. She is the fifth person to do so, which means that after her, the albino can dissolve the blockage in the machine and get access to the money inside. However, instead of collecting the coins, he cannot resist Lena`s radiant character and decides to help her: “Er kannte sie kaum, aber er wußte, daß er ihr ewig immer neue Gefühle bereiten könnte – nur im ihr zuzuschauen. Und so entschied er, daß sie sich auch freuen sollte” (299). The albino, overcoming his own greed, helps Lena. He dissolves the blockage and lets her take the cigarettes. In that moment he influences Lena`s mood: “und tatsächlich – sie strahlte!” (300) Glowing, Lena offers him half a cigarette and that gesture makes him feel like a human being again: “Werner Schniedel sah in ihrem Gesicht, daß er, der Albino, der sogar auf einem U-Bahnhof im November Sonnenbrillen trug, ihr, der Nofretete aus dem Osten, nicht geheuer war” (300).

Er kannte sie kaum, aber er wußte, daß er ihr ewig immer neue Gefühle bereiten könnte – nur um ihr zuzuschauen. Und so entschied er, daß sie sich auch freuen sollte.

»Na, weil du es bist «, sagte er, steckte ein Zweimarkstück von sich in den Automaten, drückte oben und ließ die Seitenwand vibrieren – und die Blockierung löste sich. Anders als sonst drückte er nicht auf die Geldrückgabe, sondern überließ es ihr mit großer Geste, ihre Zigaretten aus dem Schieber zu ziehen. Und tatsächlich – sie strahlte!

» Ne halbe? « sagte die junge Frau. Werner Schniedel sah in ihrem Gesicht, daß er, der Albino, der sogar auf einem U-Bahnhof im November Sonnenbrille trug, ihr, der Nofretete aus dem Osten, nicht geheuer war. (299-300)

She does not seem to be concerned about the albino`s strange and unusual physical appearance, but rather she is grateful for his help. She is described as the “Nofretete aus dem Osten”, thus, like Nofretete in Egypt, she seems to represent East-Germany and embody a queen-like leader, a dignified personality who can be perceived as a trustful authority figure based on

her gracious presence. Nofretete was famous and known not only for her stunning beauty but also for her importance as the reformer of Egyptian religion and as a co-ruler next to her husband, Echnaton.⁶

It is interesting to notice that Lena and the albino represent two extremes, however both are connected to the notion of light: she possesses flawless, radiating beauty and an appealing appearance whereas he is an outcast of the society, cursed with looks that are recognized as unusual or even unacceptable. In a certain sense, both of these characters represent the motif of light, but here again it appears to be quite ambiguous and multi-faceted.

While Lena is connected to light through her behavior, aura and actions, the albino can be associated with it based on his odd and unique features: his skin is white and since his eyes are unwontedly red, he wears sunglasses at all times. He and Lena seem to be the exact opposites of each other. As he is describes:

Er war klein und schwächig, und sein rundes Gesicht hatte aufgrund der Pigmentlosigkeit nicht nur eine tatsächliche, nicht mehr zu steigernde Blässe – der ganze Ausdruck seines Gesichts war blaß. [...] Er hatte zuweilen die Motorik eines Zwölfjährigen; war er unkonzentriert, stellte er sogar die Füße nach innen. Außerdem war sein Kopf immer etwas nach vorn gereckt, wodurch er unsouverän wirkte, als gehöre er nicht zu seiner Umgebung. (286)

One can juxtapose this description to Lena`s: “Sie war groß, größer als Werner Schniedel, und schlank. [...] Ihr Gesicht war fein und weich zugleich, strahlte aber etwas Königliches aus” (298). Both Lena and the albino are noticed by people surrounding them, so to say, light is cast upon them by the society. Schniedel stands out of the crowd due to his pigmentless skin and hair and Lena attracts attention due to her beauty and radiance. They could symbolize two approaches to the concept of light: the glowing, bright, revolutionary notion

⁶ Reeves, Nicholas. *Akhenaten, Egypt's False Prophet*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001, (172)

personified by Lena, and the pale, blanch and sneaking perception of it impersonated by the albino.

It seems that – after analyzing the motif of light through the photographer`s perspective and connecting it to the notion of closed eyes and anticipating the story of the blind woman who gains eyesight – the albino`s character can also be linked to the previously mentioned reoccurring phenomena. As a kid, he was bullied and maltreated by other children because of his appearance and, interestingly, of all things the main targets were his red eyes:

Er hatte die Brille noch nicht aufgesetzt, er blickte sich aus roten Augen an. Bis in die zehnte Klasse hinauf hatten sich seine Mitschüler einen Spaß daraus gemacht, ihm die Brille abzunehmen; wenn er sie verteidigte, wurde sie ihm mit Gewalt abgenommen. Dann schloß er die Augen. Nur ein einziges Mal war es ihnen gelungen, seine Augen wirklich zu sehen. Mehrere hielten ihn fest, und ein Feuerzeug wurde ihm ans Ohr gehalten. »Augen auf, oder wir sengen die Haare an! « »Nein! « schrie er und riß die Augen auf. Die Meute wich erschrocken zurück, und Werner Schniedel fühlte sich mehr als Ungeheuer denn als Mensch. (284)

One can detect a reverse motion when observing the photographer`s and Schniedel`s behavior. While the photographer closes his eyes a moment before taking a picture in order to let his clairvoyant talent take over, the albino opens his eyes for an instant only to be mocked and excluded. Against his will, he is forced to open them and as a result, his tormenters recoil with fear and disgust. It is worthy to note that they use a lighter to make him open his eyes. Here, light, or more precisely an artificial source of light, again is linked to violence and abuse.

Lena`s character has been closely linked to the idea of light from different perspectives, such as revolution, radiation, warmth and hope. Through Leo Lattke, a new function of light is brought to the picture. She seems to appeal to him from the very first moment: “Leo Lattke hatte sie nur auf den Fotos beim Gesundheitsminister gesehen und nicht für möglich gehalten, daß die leibhaftige Lena die geknipste noch übertrifft” (422-423). After their first meeting in person,

they appear to mutually captivate each other`s attention. Lena does so with her radiating beauty, and Leo Lattke with his self-confidence: “Er strahlte eine unendliche Selbstsicherheit aus” (424).

They both appear to possess an aura that entices the other.

Sie sah sich am Fuße einer Düne liegen, im Schatten, und mit jedem Stoß wurde sie ein Stück höher geschoben, der Sonne entgegen, und sie wußte nicht, wie hoch die Düne ist, aber plötzlich, nach einer schönen Weile, war die Krone nahe, war die Sonne nahe, und plötzlich brach Licht in ihr aus und sie kam über die Krone der Düne auf die andere Seite und sie rutschte herunter, mit dem Kopf zuerst, und da war die Sonne und es war warm und es war so schön. Ihr war schwindlig geworden, und sie hatte wohl auch geschrien.

Sie öffnete die Augen, und sie wußte, daß es aus ihren Augen leuchtet, und sie sah seine Augen, den Blick verhangen, und ihr war, als hätte sie all seinen Strom abgezogen. Das Feuer, das seine Augen vorher noch hatten, schien in sie gelangt zu sein. Und während sie die Aufrichtung all ihrer Sinne erlebte, während sie von einer Euphorie, einem Redebedürfnis und einer Hingezogenheit überschwemmt wurde, erschlaffte Leo Lattke. Träge wurde er, ganz entspannt und von einer untätigen Zufriedenheit. Er war erloschen, und sie war entzündet. (427)

The aspect of light that Leo Lattke brings about is connected to desire and sexuality. Lena`s first experience with a man is strongly linked to the positive qualities of light: she imagines a dune in her mind`s eyes and a journey from the shadow, from the bottom of the dune to the sun. The sun in this case stands for satisfaction and the fulfillment of lust; it implies warmth, safety and belonging. However, it takes two individuals to reach this state, in which one of them receives energy and “light” from the other. Thus, Lena is the one who is “lit up” by this relationship and Lattke the one who provides it.

The role of eyes emerge again in this situation:

Sie öffnete die Augen, und sie wußte, daß es aus ihren Augen leuchtet, und sie sah seine Augen, den Blick verhangen, und ihr war, als hätte sie all seinen Strom abgezogen. Das Feuer, das seine Augen vorher noch hatten, schien in sie gelangt zu sein.

They are experiencing each other`s closeness via their eloquent looks: the eyes - as explained already in regards to Lena – represent and express their current emotional states.

Furthermore, as she opens her eyes, she realizes that the light she is experiencing radiates from her own self: “Sie öffnete die Augen, und sie wußte, daß es aus ihren Augen leuchtet” (427). Here, again, Lena as a character is closely connected to the notion of light. She is a figure who does not only radiate but also absorb the light – or aura - that other people emit and she applies it.

Even though the intimacy between Lena and Lattke is described in a physical way it is also depicted from a perspective, where the role of light as a metaphor is actively present. The notion that connects them is the exchange of energy and light in a reverse motion. Lena appears to embrace the flow of energy from Lattke, she experiences a euphoria that overwhelms and deluges all her senses, while he becomes dull and exhausted. This “energy transfer” can be represented not only through the metaphor of light but also through the metaphor of fire – which can be seen as a more concrete, palpable manifestation of light: “Das Feuer, das seine Augen vorher noch hatten, schien in sie gelangt zu sein” (427). Lena seems to be the torch and Lattke the spark that inflames her.

Their relationship is not a perfectly balanced one, since in order for Lena to be ignited, Lattke has to be extinguished: “Er war erloschen, und sie war entzündet.” The choice of words in this sentence is rather interesting: “erlöschen” and “entzünden” are both closely connected to the concept of fire and one would associate them with a candle or another body of light. Furthermore, the previously used phrases to describe their states are also contrasting. Lena becomes the light itself; she reaches the imaginary sun, while Lattke gets lightheaded and depleted.

Their sexual relation can also be approached from a political point of view. Lena is referred to as the “Nofretete aus dem Osten“ and Leo Lattke is a journalist who comes from the

West. Their intercourse implies the encounter of „Ossis” and „Wessis.” These rather derogatory terms were used to describe the citizens of East and West Germany.

The idea of this physical and metaphorical “unification” can be observed from two different perspectives. Lena and Lattke represent the two sides of Germany, East and West, and with their physical fusion they metaphorically stand for the union of the country. However, this concept can also be seen from a satirical angle where Lattke - the representation of West – brings the light in a Promethean way. He fosters and enlightens the East – embodied by Lena. This intercourse is presumably the first one for Lena, thus it implies the loss of innocence.

After elaborating on Lena`s complex relation to the notion of light from an outward perspective, in the following excerpt she herself explains her insight into the connection between light and the crucial political event that happened in Germany and concludes that it affected not only her but many people`s lives.

»Weißt du noch, was ich vor einem Jahr gesagt habe? – Daß so ein Leben – mein Leben zum Beispiel – auch völlig anders gelaufen sein könnte und verlaufen könnte. Das Flirren und Flimmern der Zufälle regiert. So ist das nun mal. Weißt du noch, wo ich die das erzählt habe? «

» Na klar. Als du das erste Mal auf Rollschuhen unterwegs warst. «

» Aber wenn man etwas nimmt, das an vielen Stellen flimmert und flackert, und man schaut sich *das Ganze* an, dann sieht man, wie es leuchtet, verstehst du? «

»Nicht so richtig «, sagte ihr großer Bruder, der sich aufs Fahren konzentrierte.

» Wir zum Beispiel, mit unseren Scheinwerfern sind wir nur ein Lichtpunkt in der Nacht. Aber in New York zum Beispiel, da ist abends und nachts so viel Licht auf einem Haufen, daß man das sogar vom Mond aus sehen soll. Und das Leben – ich finde, es leuchtet manchmal. Wenn die Zufälle nur wenig flimmern und flackern, dann kommt nichts zustande. Aber im letzten Jahr, da ist so viel passiert. Natürlich nicht nur mir, sondern auch vielen andern. Und da denke ich das leuchtet. Das leuchtet so hell, daß man es noch lange sehen wird. «
(600)

The reader gets access to Lena`s thoughts regarding the essence of the events that had happened. She elaborates on life and fate, and links them to the “Flirren und Flimmern der

Zufälle.” According to her, coincidences flicker and shimmer like the stars or like the headlights of cars at night. In this passage, for the first and for the last time, the title of the book – “wie es leuchtet” – is included. As Lena explains it: “wenn man etwas nimmt, das an vielen Stellen flimmert und flackert, und man schaut sich das Ganze an, dann sieht man, wie es leuchtet” (600). All the fragments and details form and shape the big picture, they give out the complete story that emerges only when one takes the small particles into consideration.

This concept resembles the entire structure of the work: similar to the flickering points of light in the night, the stories of various, almost randomly chosen people can be followed through the book, which is rather fragmented and leaves certain events to the imagination of the reader. Lena and her older brother, the photographer, are also only two shining points, two lives in the concept of “*das Ganze*.”

Lena also implies, that the entirety of the fragments can only be seen from a certain distance: “Wir zum Beispiel, mit unserem Scheinwerfer sind wir nur ein Lichtpunkt in der Nacht. Aber in New York zum Beispiel, da ist abends und nachts so viel Licht auf einem Haufen, daß man das sogar vom Mond aus sehen soll” (600). This idea alludes not only to the necessity of an objective point of view, a particular distance from all the small ingredients, but also to the relevance of the “whole.”

When the tiny points of flickering and shimmering merge together in order to create something that is bigger, that is more important than the lives of the individuals, then the magic happens, which has such a huge impact that it could be observed even from the moon. However, in order to reach this goal, the individuals have to accomplish something extraordinary: “Und das Leben – ich finde, es leuchtet manchmal. Wenn die Zufälle nur wenig flimmern und flackern, dann kommt nichts zustande” (600). A small amount of flickering does not have enough

influence to change the course of the events but when a whole nation unites and approaches a common goal, it shines through history.

Like the stars, the impact of the events also remain in the memories of people for a long time and function as a guiding light that leads towards a brighter future. Yet again the concept of light is connected to the notions of coincidence and fate.

In the work there is one individual who connects Lena and her older brother, the photographer, together: Masunke. Both of them were abused and mistreated as a child by this person. While the photographer was hypnotized and taken advantage of, Lena was exploited in a mortifying situation that happened in an elevator. It is interesting to notice that, even though the photographer was closely linked to the concept of “clairvoyant talent,” in this particular case he is not the one who applies this ability in order to demonstrate power and authority. Lena takes control of the circumstance driven by a spontaneous intuition.

Lena stand auf, oder nein, sie wuchs aus ihrem Stuhl empor, beugte sich vor, stand über Masunke, und dann...Es war eine hellseherische Ahnung, von der ihre Hand in Bewegung gesetzt wurde – sie wußte selbst nicht, was ihre Hand wollte, und zudem ging es sehr schnell. Ihre Hand ohrfeigte Masunke nicht, und sie bildete auch keine Faust – aber sie packte das Gelenk der Hand, in der Masunke den Löffel hielt, und sie riß sie weg, so daß er die Suppe verkleckerte. Sie ließ sein Handgelenk nicht los. Sie starrte Masunke an, und der Irrsinn flackerte in ihren Augen. (598-599)

As an abused child, Lena finally gathers her courage and attempts to confront the person, who mistreated not only her but also the photographer. This scene plays a role of high importance in the work: it seems to be the culmination of many of the events that happened before and incorporates most of the significant notions as well – such as the “hellseherische Ahnung” and the role of the eyes. She meets him in the cafeteria of a theater, where he works as a director. Even though Lena and the photographer accuse him of abuse and exploitation, he always seems to find a way to confute and deny it.

After a certain point, Lena cannot stand his indifference and peccability and decides to do something about the infuriating situation. She rises from her seat and towers over Masunke, and, just like her older brother beforehand when using the rifle, driven by “eine hellsehersche Ahnung”, she grabs Masunke`s wrist. She does not hit him, she does not even clench her hand but she seizes the wrist with an astonishing and almost superhuman power. She spills his soup and does not let him go; by doing so, she displays her ultimate supremacy over him. As in intense and momentous situations before, the role of the eyes carry a meaningful message: “Sie starrte Masunke an, und der Irrsinn flackerte in ihren Augen” (599). After being linked to anger, hope, happiness and satisfaction, Lena`s eyes – and with them the notion of light - are finally connected to insanity.

The German word for insanity is “Irrsinn.” This word implies the loss of control in one`s behavior and also a certain kind of mental sickness. Even though Lena was connected to rage before - as she was confronting the police at the train station and was photographed by her older brother: “So knipste er straflos die wütende Lena, die einem stur dreinblickenden Polizisten in einer Wand aus stur dreinblickenden Polizisten frontal gegenüberstand, Nasenspitze an Nasenspitze” (69). - it appears that she has not yet experienced such a strong and overwhelming rush of anger as in that situation with Masunke. Her eyes convey madness and frenzy and since this insanity flickers in them, light plays an essential role in the projection of her current state of mind.

Masunke war erschrocken. Das hatte er nicht erwartet, und er wußte nicht, worauf es hinausläuft. Lena hatte in ihrer hochkochenden Wut erstaunlich viel Kraft; ihr Zugreifen duldeten keinen Widerspruch. Sie kannte den Quell ihres Impulses nicht; Ahnungen zu haben und sich ihnen zu überlassen, war, das wußte sie, Sache ihres großen Bruders. Und jetzt erlebte sie selbst, wie klar und machtvoll eine Ahnung sein kann und wie wohltuend es ist, sich von ihr tragen zu lassen. (599)

Lena`s forceful reaction leaves Masunke speechless and dumbfounded. Due to the immense anger boiling inside her she appears to be endowed with increased physical power that cannot be resisted. For the first time in her life, she experiences the impact of the clairvoyant talent that her older brother also possesses. She is overflowed by it and simultaneously senses how vivid and powerful it is: “Und jetzt erlebte sie selbst, wie klar und machtvoll eine Ahnung sein kann und wie wohltuend es ist, sich von ihr tragen zu lassen” (599). She is not scared of this clairvoyant intuition and her power but rather she embraces, and finds joy in both, and lets herself be carried away by the flow.

Ja, es war nur eine Ahnung, die ihre Hand Masunkes Handgelenk packen ließ – und ihre Tat bescherte auch Masunke eine Ahnung, die bescherte dem ganzen Theater eine Ahnung: Masunke schaute erschrocken, ja ängstlich zu Lena, die groß über ihm stand, die sein Handgelenk gepackt und seine Suppe verkleckert hatte – das, so verstanden es alle und so war es auch gemeint, war eine Szene, die es in Masunkes und in Lenas Leben schon einmal gegeben hatte. Nur hatte Lena die Rollen getauscht: Jetzt riß sie an seinem Handgelenk, und er schaute sie erschrocken und ängstlich von unten an. (599)

This moment can be linked to the opening section of the book, when the photographer experiences the first encounter with his smouldering clairvoyant talent: “Aber in einem Moment, der sich durch nicht ankündigte, hob ich mit größter Selbstverständlichkeit und Leichtigkeit das Gewehr, die Schleuder des Todes, und schoß in das schwarze Loch der Nacht. [...] Wir gingen zum Waldrand, [...] und fanden das Wildschwein, das ich erschossen hatte. Ich war schockiert, doch ich wußte nun, was es bedeutet, hellsichtig zu sein” (10). In both cases, the notions of spontaneity and shock are present, however, on the one hand, Lena seems to handle her first experience with the “hellseherische Ahnung” better than her older brother: she is not shocked but dauntless and unshakeable in her action.

On the other hand, regarding both of the situations, the “hellseherische Ahnung” to appear from an unknown place, without any notice: “Aber in einem Moment, der sich durch

nichts ankündigte, hob ich [...] das Gewehr, [...] und schoß [...]” (9). Similar to the photographer, Lena also receives the clairvoyant intuition out of the blue, unexpectedly: “Es war eine hellseherische Ahnung, von der ihre Hand in Bewegung gesetzt wurde – sie wußte selbst nicht, was ihre Hand wollte, und zudem ging es sehr schnell [...] Sie kannte den Quell ihres Impulses nicht” (599).

There is a difference between the way the “hellseherische Ahnung” effects Lena and the photographer. While Lena’s older brother’s action is actual violence and killing using a rifle – however, in an isolated place, in the darkness and from a fairly great distance – Lena’s deed is observed by numerous people and the act itself is face to face, without using any firearm or any weapons. Thus, her behavior endows her with a public role, that she has possessed before as “das Symbol der Revolution” (152), and so it implies a greater impact, a signal for all the people who witnessed it. In this sense, she brings the truth to light, she enlightens the public. The difference between the photographer’s and Lena’s attitude also reflects a gendered approach to violence.

Due to her bravery and fury, that flickers brightly from her eyes and endows her with the “hellseherische Ahnung,” Lena gets the upper hand; she becomes the person who is in control of the situation. Even though at their previous encounter Lena was oppressed, exploited and subordinate to his will, the power relation between Masunke and her is now reversed: “Masunke schaute erschrocken, ja ängstlich zu Lena, die groß über ihm stand, die sein Handgelenk gepackt und seine Suppe verkleckert hatte – das, so verstanden es alle und so war es auch gemeint, war eine Szene, die es in Masunkes und in Lenas leben schon einmal gegeben hatte” (599). In this situation Lena represents dominance and authority and Masunke is the one who is overpowered by her devastating presence.

Even though Lena punishes and embarrasses him, her vengeance is more connected to the mere idea of overcoming the person who abused her – thus coping with her own inner fear – than to actual physical violence. Despite the fact that she could manhandle and hit him, she does not do that. Instead, she demonstrates her moral strength and control over him by grabbing his wrist, just the way he grabbed hers when he mistreated her in the elevator, and by staring in his eyes with a blazing and cutting glance.

One could say that Lena's visage, that is glowing with insanity and anger, hypnotizes Masunke in a way he hypnotized Lena's older brother. In both cases the embarrassment and shame come from the realization that one has been exploited and humiliated. The way the photographer grasps the sheer fact of the abuse after gathering his consciousness following the hypnotization, Masunke comprehends his abasement as he sees Lena's overwhelming confidence and rage and also the reaction of the other people surrounding them in the cafeteria of the theater. Similarly to Lena when she was afraid of him in the elevator as the abuse happened, now Masunke is shocked and scared of her: "Masunke schaute erschrocken, ja ängstlich zu Lena, die groß über ihm stand" (599). In the past Lena was the one who was defenseless and overpowered by the act of a pervert but in the present situation he is not only physically but also morally crushed by Lena.

The fact that she "groß über ihm stand" implies not only a literal reading but also a figurative one: she conquers him and reveals his true nature not only through her pure and spontaneous intuition but also through her superior moral integrity. It is thought-provoking that Lena does not use open and direct violence against Masunke but – even though "der Irrsinn flackerte in ihren Augen" – she still does not lose control over herself and applies a restrained use of violence.

The recurrence of the “hellseherische Ahnung” gives the reader a certain familiarity and also provides a frame for the book. Through this, the life stories of Lena and the photographer lock into each other and grant a connection amongst all the fragmented events and actions. The photographer was the one who introduced the notion of the clairvoyant talent as a phenomenon that subtly but permanently led and guided him through the story and aided him to find and capture valuable moments with his camera. Here, at the end of the book, Lena takes the upper hand driven by the very same intuition and thus announces her moral superiority over the man who mistreated her as a child.

The entire confrontation between Lena and her nemesis, Masunke, can also be seen as a political metaphor. Masunke, who hypnotizes and abuses children, stands for the government of the GDR that also exploited and deceived its citizens. In a satirical way, Lena – the revolutionary figure, “das Symbol der Revolution” (152) - is the one who puts Masunke off, who uncloaks and reveals his true nature by embarrassing him and by spilling his soup. The whole ideology and attitude that Masunke represents – the system of the GDR – is easily reduced to a wasted drop of soup, to a stain. The entire oppressing political regime is symbolically humiliated by Lena and the only reminiscence of Masunke – or the GDR`s – pride and confidence is a spot of spilled soup on the table.

Third Chapter

Light as an Allegory

The two previous topics, the photographer's actions and Lena's character - that are connected together through the notion of light, can also be linked through the story of a blind woman from East Germany, who gains eyesight. The roles of the eye – as the organ that receives light – has already proved to be a significant element when talking about the state of mind of characters, such as Lena, or about the use of the organ – such as the photographer closing his eyes before taking a picture. The case of the blind woman opens up new perspectives on the complex and multi-faceted topic of light.

The title of the report is “Der glücklichste Mensch der Welt.” It is intriguing to consider that „glücklich” has multiple meanings when translated to English: it carries the connotation “happy” and “fortunate” at the same time. However, this title, after reading the article, might be seen as misleading, since the interviewed subject is most definitely neither the happiest nor the most fortunate person on earth: „Das größte denkbare Glück? Sabine Busse hat es erlebt. Sie war blind. Ihr wurde das Licht gebracht. Und damit begann ein Alptraum” (487). These sentences were the first ones that the reporter Leo Lattke jotted down on a piece of paper before he started to work on the actual report.

Already in these thought-fragments the notion of “light” and “nightmare” are – paradoxically - interconnected. These two concepts can be considered the opposites of each other: while light stands for hope, clear vision and brightness, a nightmare is the experience of a terrifying, dark dream. It is connected to the night – which represents the lack of light, the realm of darkness and confusion – however, it is also a state in which the mind plays an important role. This idea can be connected to the blind woman in multiple ways. On the one hand, after she

experiences a surgical intervention targeting her brain, her life becomes a nightmare – not in the state of sleep but while being conscious. On the other hand, she undergoes a change that elicits strong emotional responses coming from her brain: just like a nightmare would.

In his report, Leo Lattke – a journalist, presumably working for the Spiegel - writes about the life of the blind woman, Sabine Busse, who regains her eyesight through a revolutionary and modern brain surgery. She has been blind since she was born. She cannot distinguish between dark and bright; however, she is perfectly accustomed to that lifestyle. Her other senses – such as hearing, smelling and tasting – are much more developed and serve as her primary contact to the world surrounding her. She can differentiate between the seasons based on their fragrances; she can hear the distinctness of certain sounds, and can tell the age of the speaker.

Her disability makes her different from others, from people who experience the world predominantly through their visual perception; however, Sabine Busse attempts to fit into society by following the customs that are conventional for any common person. For example, as it gets dark she also switches on the light, so that the neighbors do not think that no one lives in that house. She also has a curtain on the window and a mirror above the sink. The walls are decorated with paintings: “Wenn es dunkel wird, schaltet sie das Licht ein; die richtigen Zeiten hat sie gelernt. »Gibt es ja Blinde, die sind auf ihre kleine Stromrechnung stolz«, sagt sie. »Aber was soll das, abends im Düstern sitzen – das denken doch die Nachbarn, da wohnt keener «” (527).

The exact cause of her blindness is uncertain – her eyes appear to be healthy and also the reflexes are impeccable – however, according to the neurosurgeon her primary visual cortex is impaired by a congenital vascular abnormality. Her visual center is disconnected from the blood circulation and as a result, she is blind. It is interesting to note that when being asked if blindness was an illness, her answer is yes; however, it is `yes` only because she has found out that it can

be treated or cured. Before she obtained this knowledge, her life was balanced and she did not necessarily mind the lack of light and of visual conception of the world. She had her own isolated but well-functioning way of perception, in which she felt confident and knew her way around. She could unequivocally tell apart East- and West-Berlin based on the typical noises and smells.

One can detect paradoxical and unexpected facts in Sabine Busse`s life: she works as an operator in the city library in East-Berlin and she is able to describe what West-Berlin looks for those people who cannot travel there. Out of defiance and pride she chooses a hobby that disregards the conventions of blindness: she appreciates paintings and is particularly interested in Max Liebermann. Since she is given the hope to grasp the world around her in a way she has never grasped it before, Busse decides to take her chances and sacrifice her habitual life on the altar of the unfathomable and indefinite future.

Interestingly, the fall of the Berlin wall does not trigger the same reaction in Busse as in any other non-blind person. She is not able to share their excitement since the event itself is mainly connected to a visual experience: for the first time, Busse feels that she is incapable of projecting herself into the current situation and thus, she appears to be inferior, incapacitated and uninvolved. Her desire to see the world and make herself similar to anybody else can be observed as the pressure of society that forces her to conform and fit in:

Da war sie von einem Freudenfest umgeben, das ihr unbegreiflich war: Gewiß, die Mauer war gefallen – aber warum dieses Glück, diese Euphorie? [...] Wo sie sich einfach nur wohl fühlte, erlebten andere Überschwemmungen des Glücks. Warum nur? Was war da? »Und dann steh ich auf der Tauentzien und hör immer nur *Guck mal!* Oder *Oh, siehst du das?* Und *Hast du gesehen?* « Sie konnte weder gucken noch sehen. Sie konnte nicht mitreden, konnte sich nicht mitfreuen. Die ganze Welt schien ihr zuzurufen *Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst!*
Sabine Busse fühlte sich das erste Mal in ihrem Leben blind. (528)

The euphoria and enthusiasm surrounding Sabine Busse left her untouched and cold. The most important factor in experiencing the fall of the Berlin wall is essentially linked to the notion of vision – which is connected to the idea of light and enlightenment. Neither of these concepts are known to her, thus, she is unable to be part of the passionate flow of celebrating people. She is isolated and left alone in her darkness.

Even though based on her extremely sensitive olfactory, tactile and audible senses Sabine Busse - like the photographer, or Lena – can also be associated with a certain kind of “hellseherische Ahnung” or with a particular ability that enlightens her through her insightful sensitivity, a sixth sense that distinguishes her from other, common people, during the meaningful event of the wall’s fall, she remains in obscurity and suffers from the lack of light. In that moment she decides that her deepest wish is to belong to the community of those people who can experience the world through vision. As her doctor explains it later: “Aber es war ihr leidenschaftlicher Wunsch, zu sehen” (538).

After the “successful” operation, Busse experiences something that she has never sensed before: she sees details and shadows. This extreme turning-point allows her to get an insight into the state when she is finally able to comprehend and appreciate euphoria. One can see the parallel between the fall of the Berlin wall, its elicited reactions from non-blind people and Sabine Busse’s reaction to her brain surgery. While the first one generates lively reverberations and loud celebrations, the latter implies the success of one, lonely person, who attempts to grasp silently the unbelievable event she experienced.

Sie öffnet die Augen – und lacht. Es ist ein ungläubiges, ein staunendes Lachen, das niemand vergessen wird, der dabei war.

Die neuen Eindrücke rufen in Sabine Busse eine Euphorie hervor, die stärker ist als die Benommenheit der nachklingenden Anästhesie, stärker als die Nebenwirkungen der frischen Hirnoperation. Ihr Arzt kann sich ihrem sehnlichen Wunsch nach Licht und Farben nicht widersetzen – und dreht behutsam, in

winzigen Schritten, am Dimmer. Aus Dunkel wird Schummerlicht. Farben treten hervor. Details und Schatten. Was im Dunkel flächig war, wird räumlich, plastisch. Es ist noch längst nicht so hell, daß man sich beim Lesen nicht die Augen verderben würde. Aber Sabine Busse ist glücklich. Sie lacht und sagt *Wahnsinn!*. Eine halbe Stunde später singt sie, wenn auch nur leise und allein, So ein Tag, so wunderschön wie heute. Sie ist der glücklichste Mensch der Welt. (530)

For the first time in her life, Sabine Busse opens her eyes and is able to sense colors and blurry details. This first experience appears to be a rather positive one, since she laughs and enjoys the state of overwhelming happiness. The enthrallment surpasses even the impact of the anesthesia and the side-effects of the brain surgery. She has an irresistible desire to see light and colors. Her state of being a person, who has never experienced “vision” as such before reminds us of the Creation in a biblical sense or of enlightenment in a political one, as we shall see later.

The biblical parallel can be supported by the following statements: “Aus Dunkel wird Schummerlicht. Farben treten hervor. Details und Schatten. Was im Dunkel flächig war, wird räumlich plastisch.” Besides the content, the structure of the sentences also recalls that of the Bible: short, articulated and straightforward phrases:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.⁷

First, there is darkness: the absolute lack of light, lack of order. Then a slight and dim ray of light appears, it is referred to in the text as “Schummerlicht.” “Schummerlicht” could be translated to English as “dim light,” thus it has a particular blurriness and obscurity to it that is half-way through light and darkness. At first Sabine Busse is enabled to situate herself spatially

⁷ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version. New York: American Bible Society: 1999; Bartleby.com, 2000, Genesis 1.1-5

by the aid of light. This new way of orientation does not only open up so far unknown possibilities for her but also gives her a chance to identify herself as a different person.

It is not only the structural aspect that reminds the reader of the Bible; the “miracle” of gaining eyesight is also a transformation of biblical proportion. In the New Testament, Jesus heals the blindness of a person who was born without the blessing of sight:

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.⁸

Even though at first the result of the surgery seems to be promising, soon it turns out that Busse`s eyes do not function the way they are supposed to. Her body and brain – which are not accustomed to sight and thus have to rely on all her other senses – are not capable of adjusting to the new, extreme situation. She considers the surgery and the following time period a journey of discovery, the most important adventure in her life. She is given the chance to enjoy the beauty of a colorful sunset, a bouquet of flowers and the paintings of Max Liebermann. She is mesmerized and embraced by the world that consists of hues.

First of all, Sabine is eager to go to the cinema and experience a movie through visual perception. The film appears to be a confusing event for her. The various colors and forms are emerging and disappearing in front of her eyes without making any perceivable sense to her brain; she is only able to recognize the happening on the screen when an appropriate and peculiar

⁸ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version. New York: American Bible Society: 1999; Bartleby.com, 2000, John 9.1-7

noise connected to it activates her senses that are accustomed to receive information. The storyline of the movie remains obscure to her and as a result she is not able to retell it.

Later her doctor draws the conclusion, saying paradoxically, that while she was a blind person she always knew what she saw; however, the excess amount of unexpected pictures and colors distracted her from grasping the actual movie: “Sabine Busse öffnet den Mund – und merkt, daß sie den Film nicht nacherzählen kann. Das ist ihr noch nie passiert. So paradox es klingt: Als sie blind war, wußte sie immer, was sie sieht. »Es war nur zu viel los in diesem Film. « Die Bilder haben sie vom Film nur abgelenkt” (531). One can detect that the clear and definite meanings of “blindness” and “sight” slowly merge into one another. While Sabine Busse was blind physically, she was able to adapt herself to any given situation with the aid of her other sensitive and sophisticated ways of perception, however, as the gift – or in this case rather the curse – of “light” was given to her, her solid identity and confidence was shaken and the delicate balance between Sabine Busse and her surroundings has been upset.

This results in the following paradox: “Als sie blind war, wußte sie immer, was sie sieht” (531). Here, „sehen“ refers yet again to an inner sight, a „hellseherische“ seeing that once more can be linked to the clairvoyant talent of the photographer, who explains his unusual procedure multiple times: „Einen Moment vor dem Knipsen schließe ich die Augen. Und gerade in diesem Augenblick, den ich sich selbst überlasse, steigert sich das Geschehen. Nur meine Leica schaut zu, wenn das gewisse Etwas geschieht, wenn sich der magische Moment ereignet” (11).

When asked why the photographer does that, he answers: „Vielleicht, weil das Wichtige immer dann passiert, wenn wir die Augen zu haben” (71). In this sense, Sabine Busse might have overlooked and given up the most significant ability that she possessed: the ability to observe

and understand the world surrounding her, in the most profound sense of the word, while being blind.

Another activity Sabine Busse is keen on is soccer. She had always thought about it as more than just a game; it appeared to be a form of art to her. Before she gained eyesight, she relied on her hearing to determine what happened exactly in the stadium; but after being able to observe the event she sees only colorful dabs wandering and roaming around the field. For Busse the match seems to have a certain sophisticated quality to it; it is not a sport contest, rather the permanent fluctuation of optical arrangements. She observes the match and also the entire world as if she was looking through a kaleidoscope. Although she was anticipating the moment when she would be able to detect colors, patterns and movement, her eyes are not functioning properly. Even though she sees everything, she cannot recognize what she sees.

Ein Fußballspiel ist für Sabine Busse kein spannender sportlicher Wettkampf, sondern ein folgenloser, doch frappierender Wechsel optischer Arrangements. Spieler zu sein bedeutet, Farben über das Spielfeld zu bewegen. Die Bewegungen der Farben, ihre Richtung und ihre Geschwindigkeit bieten nur in der Tendenz eine Ordnung. Nie ist die Ordnung perfekt, wie bei einer Parade oder einem Cancan. [...] Sabine schaut auf alles, wie andere in ein Kaleidoskop. Ihre Augen wollen nicht arbeiten. [...] Ihre Augen machen ihn nicht mit, den zweckmäßigen Blick. Sabine Busses Augen sehen alles. Aber sie erkennen nichts. (532)

The paradoxical relation between seeing and being blind reoccurs in this passage. For Busse the scene of the roaming dabs – the soccer players in the stadium - appear to be an aesthetically pleasing visual experience, even though she cannot see them clearly: they emerge in front of her eyes as blurry and vague moving objects, whose movements have no preplanned routes but rely on suddenness and spontaneity. The tendency of fragmentedness is also connected to other characters in the work, such as Lena, whose elaboration on the millions of starts and car

headlights can be linked to the fractured and shattered world view of Sabine Busse. This concept brings out the complexity of “vision” as an ambiguous notion.

Hans-Werner Kiehn, an expert from Frankfurt diagnoses the core of the problem: Sabine Busse has learned to live with the loss of sight and as long as she is not able to acquire a way to use her eyes it is impossible to handle the issue. To attempt to remedy her problem, unusual measures have to be taken. Busse observes the world not only as if she was looking through a kaleidoscope, but also she perceives it upside down: „Das Auge besteht auf einer Linse, die das einfallende Licht als kopfstehendes Bild auf die Netzhaut projiziert. Weil aber die Sinnenorgane dem Menschen die Welt nicht abbilden, sondern sein Zurechtfinden in der Welt erleichtern und, ganz pragmatisch, sein Überleben sichern sollen, sieht niemand die Welt kopfstehend” (533).

When she was born, her brain did not learn to rearrange the pictures that the eye lenses received through the incoming light and projected to the retina. At that point, it seemed to be too much extra effort for her visual center to reorganize the perceived reality. The first measure is to give special glasses that are used to make people, whose sight is normal, perceive the world upside down. According to professor Kiehn`s calculations that would result in Sabine being able to see the world in its normal arrangement and if she experiences it so, her mind might also be capable of processing the received information. Contrary to all expectations, she does not use – even after applying the glasses – her eye sight to orient herself. Sight as such has to be integrated into her world.

The second measure that Dr. Kiehn attempts is to force Busse to use her eyes. He throws a big, yellow ball at her and her task is to catch it; however instead of relying merely on her visual perception, she uses her highly developed tactical sense to detect the direction, speed and position of the ball. She is also unable to recognize or distinguish certain faces: she remains a

blind person when it comes to identifying features of individuality and the peculiarities of a view or her own reflection in the mirror:

Am enttäuschendsten war die Stagnation bei der Gesichtererkennung: ob Fotos, Plastiken, Zeichnungen, Filmbilder oder reale Gesichter – Sabine Busse konnte keine Unterschiede in den Gesichtern wahrnehmen. Sie blieb blind für die Individualität, für die Einzigartigkeiten eines Anblicks, und ihre Unfähigkeit hatte frustrierende Ausmaße: Zeigte man ihr die Fotografie eines Totenschädels, dann hielt sie auch den für ein Gesicht. Selbst mit dem eigenen Spiegelbild konnte sie nichts anfangen. (534)

Due to the surgical intervention Sabine Busse does not only lose her individual sense of the world but she also is deprived of the ability to tell apart faces. Decoding the world as visually perceivable entities requires too much effort and Sabine`s other senses are accustomed to compensate for her blindness. The third measure Dr. Kiehn attempts is to hinder all her sensory organs in order to amplify her need for sight. She receives a nose clip, earplugs and mittens. In this grotesque situation, Sabine appears to be the embodiment of a human guinea pig.

In order to make the process more effective, Busse is required to communicate only in writing. It is apparent that by this measure she agrees to give up all her familiar ways of perceiving the world, letting only her eyes do the job. She is able to maintain this situation only for three days; however, her eyes do not function. The result of the method, in which she is allowed to use only letters to exchange information eventually leads to the destruction of all her previously perfect senses.

After the third measure, Busse is relieved of the devices – except for the special glasses - meant to hinder her senses and she is sent back to Berlin. Ten weeks after the operation, she is finally out of the sanitarium; however, the events turn out not as expected. This turn is not a positive change but the beginning of chaos: “Es war keine Wende zum Guten – im Gegenteil: Es

war der Beginn der Katastrophe” (536). As Sabine Busse sits at a soccer game – attempting to perceive as much of the events happening on the field as possible – she gets hit by the ball:

Sie sah ihn kommen. Es war ein optisches Phänomen, auf das sie nicht reagieren konnte. [...] Sie fand den Augenblick, an dem der Ball auf sie zuflog, sogar schön. Sie erlebte einen höchst ästhetischen Moment. Im nächsten Moment jedoch traf der Ball sie genau im Gesicht, zerstörte ihre Spezialbrille und drückte eine Scherbe unterhalb des Auges ins Fleisch. (536)

She sees and observes the ball as an optical phenomenon and is not able to react to it. The ball gets closer and closer and she is not able to estimate the trajectory of the ball. First, she experiences the flying ball not as a dangerous object that she should fend off, but rather as a supreme aesthetic moment. However, the ball hits her exactly in the face, destroying her special glasses and stabbing a fragment of them into the flesh under her eye. The wound has to be stitched.

The unfortunate event that happens to her is an indescribable shock. Due to the accident she associates the experience of visual perception with the notions of danger and pain and thus, the notion of light is linked to a negative and disappointing incident. As she finds out, her eyes are not only unable to protect her even from the simplest threats but they are also responsible for enticing her into something dangerous. On that day Busse decides to turn away from vision as such. The euphoria and confidence she had, has faded; all she wants now is to recover the tactile, audible and olfactory senses she had before, however, the finely attuned apparatus of her perception has been corrupted and cannot function the way it was functioning before.

The damage derives not only from the measures taken after the operation but also from the injury of the surgery; Busse`s skull has been opened up and later, due to the accident at the soccer field, she receives a wound under her eye. These factors ruined the highly sensitive acoustic surface of her face. She is still able to hear but her earlier hearing was more

sophisticated and delicate. The months-long stay at the sanitarium impaired her olfactory senses and her sense of taste becomes sloppy. She is overcome by a general disinterest towards feelings as such and she becomes skeptical about her abilities. All the events that occur after the surgery lead her towards isolation.

Leo Lattke questions in his report whether it is possible to view Sabine Busse's case as a story of unbelievable luck. Since Busse was born blind and has not experienced the miracle of sight for 31 years, one might consider her story fortunate; no one would think of it as an unhappy event. However, due to the operation, she lost her perfectly polished senses that she was already accustomed to, and, in return, she did not even receive a proper way to perceive the world visually.

Her wish was to simultaneously see the world but remain blind; however, she became blinder than she was before: "Sie wollte sehen und gleichzeitig blind sein. Jetzt ist sie weder das eine noch das andere. Das Sehen bereitet ihr keine Freude, und die Blindheit beherrscht sie nicht mehr. Sie ist blinder als sie es je war. Und ihr Versuch, die Blindheit loszuwerden, wird ihr von den Blinden nicht verziehen" (537). Now she does not belong either to the community of blind people – since her eyes are functioning flawlessly, even though her brain cannot process the information appropriately – or to the community of non-blind people, since her approach to everyday life still remains that of a sightless person. She turns out to be a castaway that cannot fit into any social group. Her previously ordered and balanced life is now changed into a hopeless state of existence that cannot be altered anymore. This exclusion or in-betweenness can also be seen as a political metaphor for the state of East-Germany after the fall of the wall.

When asked whether she believes herself to be unhappy, she admits that the answer is yes. However it is not an easy task to decide whose fault the eventually unsuccessful process

was. Busse was not aware of the burden she was going to take upon herself. The doctors have a hard time considering the case as an unsuccessful event; after all, they reached an achievement nobody else has ever reached in the world. They elaborate on the thought of choosing the wrong patient but the fact that the surgery itself was brilliant cannot be denied.

One of the very first people who read Leo Lattke`s report is Lena. Her reaction, as usually, is unconventional:

»Wie soll ich sagen «, begann Lena. » Da steht einiges drin, was ich auch fühle. «

»Ach ja? « fragte Leo Lattke. Das war ein Einstieg, der ihn munter machte. Mal was anderes als das ewiggleiche Toll! Suppa! Großartig!

»Ja«, sagte Lena. » Das Glück schmeckt fad inzwischen. Und wenn man das einem von euch erzählt, das wollen die nicht hören. Immer nur, wie schlimm es damals war und wie phantastisch jetzt. Aber so einfach ist es nicht. *Ich werde nie dazugehören*, das habe ich noch nie so deutlich sagen können. Erst jetzt, durch diese Reportage «. (543)

In her response, Lena brings out the multilayeredness of the article and the event, and by doing so, she also refers to the paramount political event of the fall of the wall. Happiness and fortune appear to be a cliché or a boring utopia to her that never entirely matches the reality. She expresses that she never wants to belong to those people who see the events of the political change merely „black and white,“ or referring to the case of the blind woman as “Glück” or “Albtraum” – meaning that the past was horrible and the present is fantastic and ideal. Leo Lattke`s report seems to be a mouthpiece, an instrument through which Lena is able to experience what she has also been undergoing. In this sense, Leo Lattke accomplishes his wish of shedding light on the complexity of the “Wende” and the significant political changes in Berlin in 1989; he opens up Lena`s understanding of the event.

Leo Lattke intends to use Sabine Busse`s story as an allegory for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification. Describing the German “turning point” from the perspective

of a blind person who, seemingly, receives eyesight for the first time in her life, he suggest, was not necessarily as successful as it was expected to be. For him, the story symbolizes the conflict between East and West Berlin and depicted through a patient who comes from the East. He himself describes the symbolism of his report: the blindness attempts to symbolize life behind the wall and the wall itself stands for darkness. Even though the wall falls and the patient receives the gift of sight, she is not able to adjust to the new way of living; since there is no chance to undo what has been done, life becomes unpromising and almost hopeless for her.

It is interesting to note that the whole idea of writing about a blind woman who gains eyesight originally comes from the father of the reporter Leo Lattke:

Als Leo Lattke zurück nach Berlin fuhr, wußte er endlich, worüber er schreiben wird. Endlich hatte er ihn, den Aufhänger für die besondere Reportage: Einem Blinden wird das Licht geschenkt. Der Einfall seines Vaters war ein *Geistesblitz* im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes: elektrisierend, hell und von einem gewaltigen Einschlag. Was er schreiben wollte, mußte nur noch Wirklichkeit werden. (347)

In the case of Leo Lattke, the notion of light is connected to the „Geistesblitz“– a flash of genius, or a brilliant idea – that helps him to continue his carrier as a successful reporter. Even though this sudden inspiration does not come from him but from his father, he is the one who applies, unfolds and gives further considerations to it. The concept of “Geistesblitz” has already been introduced in regard to the photographer, who possesses a clairvoyant talent: “Doch meine Tante prophezeite mir an meinem zwölften Geburtstag eine hellseherische begabung, die sich in Gestalt von Geistesblitz äußert” (9). In both cases the original concept, or the impulse that triggers the brilliant idea, comes from people who observe the characters from an outside perspective, disconnected from the further development of what they have generated.

The idea that comes from the father of Leo Lattke is an instinctive and sudden one and is linked to the notion of light on multiples levels: it is “elektrisierend, hell und von einem

gewaltigen Einschlag” (347). Here, the flash of genius is linked to light through an electrifying outburst of thought. One could already observe the relation between light and the presence of an electrostatic burst in the case of Lena: “Ein dünnes, gezacktes Licht dazwischen, das von einer Leuchtreklame weit im Hintergrund stammte, erscheint wie eine elektrostatische Entladung zwischen den Nasenspitzen“ (69). While in Lena’s case the brief “elektrostatische Entladung” represents her outpouring anger, thus, a negative and violent emotion towards the policemen who stand in front of her, regarding the electrifying idea of Leo Lattke’s father, it is a rather positive and constructive kind of outburst.

Another parallel between the father’s unexpected conception and Lena is the spontaneity of the “Einfall.” It reminds us of Lena’s bravery as she stands on an ambulance car in an unrestrained manner and gives a heart-warming speech to the crowd: “Plötzlich stand Lena auf dem Krankenwagen, wie ein genialer Einfall. Sie war schön wie die Verheißung dieses Tages” (85). These examples bring out not only the complexity of light but also the importance of reoccurring notions – such as the “hellseherische Ahnung” and “Geistesblitz” - throughout the book.

Wenn er beschreiben kann, wie jemandem zum ersten Mal im Leben die Binde von den Augen genommen wird, dann wird er die Gefühle beschreiben, die die Nation mit sich erlebte – das märchenhafte Ende eines unnatürlichen Zustandes, auf dessen Überwindung niemand noch ernsthaft zu hoffen wagte die massiven, überwältigenden neuen Eindrücke, aus denen überschwemmungsartige Glückszustände hervorbrechen, die kindliche Unschuld, die Offenheit, die Zuversicht - , und all das wollte Leo Lattke auf eine unerwartete Art neu erzählen, in einem Gleichnis, das jeder verstand [...]. (347)

The story of the blind woman, Sabine Busse, can also be compared to the “verschwommene” – blurry - pictures of the photographer: “Vor zwei Jahren, am 16. August, hat das Hochwasser, welches eine Woche später *Jahrtausendhochwasser* genannt wurde, nahezu all meine Fotos vernichtet. Gern hätte ich ein Abschiedsbild gemacht: Tausende Fotos schwimmen

auf der Oberfläche des träge weichenden Hochwassers. *Die Bilderflut*” (11). Both examples provide the description of a cataclysmic event – which is the annihilating flood for the photographer, and the cathartic operation in the case of the blind woman. None of these actions are reversible or changeable and they have a significant influence on the lives of the endurers.

As mentioned before, Leo Lattke`s goal is to demonstrate the political change and the fall of the Berlin wall through a simile, in which the life-changing event is compared to the story of a blind person who receives eyesight. As he hints at, this change carries fairytale-like or even magical features: “das märchenhafte Ende eines unnatürlichen Zustandes.” Even though the unnatural condition, that should be ended, indicates the authoritarian regime of the GDR, the blind person is not necessarily an ideal metaphor for it, unless blindness is considered to be against nature. He is not the first one who draws a parallel between unreality and the GDR. Prior to him, Lena has referred to the political system as “Zauber:”

»Dann freust du dich also nicht darüber, daß Hurrikane auch von Schmetterlingen gemacht werden können«, sagte Lenas großer Bruder [...]
 »Doch«, sagte sie. »Darüber freu ich mich auch. Weil das nämlich bedeutet, daß der ganze Zauber hier auch mal zu Ende gehen kann.« (54)

In both cases the existing social organization that is in power is likened to the state of being mesmerized and manipulated, as though the citizens were not conscious of what is going on exactly around them or in the socialist party. Even though Leo Lattke attempts to shed light on the events from a different perspective, his report cannot be seen as an objective record since the he approaches the question of the “Wende” from his subjective point of view.

Der Blinde sollte aus dem Osten sein, und er sollte schon immer, von Geburt an, blind sein. In dieser Story ist alles drin, was es zu sagen gibt: Ost-West, Mangelwirtschaft, geraubtes Leben, Neubeginn – und alles an einem Einzelschicksal durchdekliniert. Vom Symbolischen mal abgesehen: Blindheit als Metapher für ein Leben hinter der Mauer. Der Mauer aus Dunkelheit. Die Mauer wird niedergerissen, und bei diesem Mauerfall ist er, Leo Lattke, endlich dabei! Oh er ist ein wahrer Teufel unter den Reportern! (347)

The reporter makes an effort to illustrate East and West Germany in a metaphorical way; however, one cannot abstract him from the fact that he presents the occasion from the perspective of a West-German. He believes that the writ will contain all the information about the event worth mentioning, such as “economy of scarcity,” the robbed lives of the citizens and the glimmer of hope for a new start. The individual, through whom it is represented, is Sabine Busse. Thus, she – and East Germany represented by her – undergoes a surgery of great importance and risk in order to be able to “see,” in order to be enlightened by West Germany – exemplified by the doctors who perform the operation.

Even though the surgery itself, as mentioned earlier, is “successful,” the patient is still not able to see and process the incoming information adequately. She cannot change her condition anymore and can only hope to find a purpose in her life:

“Ist sie glücklich? – Sabine Busse schweigt einen langen Moment, versucht das Ausmaß der Worte zu erfassen – und nickt. Und wer hat schuld? Sie holt tief Luft und atmet mit einem schweren Seufzer aus. »Ich wußte nicht, was auf mich zukommt«, sagt sie schließlich zu ihrer Verteidigung, als hätte der Fragende schon beschlossen, ihr die Schuld zu geben. Und: »Mir blieb doch gar nichts anderes übrig, als mir zu wünschen, sehen zu können.« (538)

In spite of the fact that she is more isolated and outcast than ever before in her life, she considers herself lucky, however, when asked whose fault the result was, she instinctually starts to defend herself, as though it was hers. The last sentence she says is rather paradoxical: “Mir blieb doch gar nichts anderes übrig, als mir zu wünschen, sehen zu können” (538). Regardless of the fact that her organs of vision can function, she still cannot use them. In a sense, she remains sightless and becomes even blinder than prior to the surgery. From her perspective, from the point of view of an East-German citizen – the conclusion of the report is bitter and unfortunate: a life is ruined in a way that cannot be changed, only endured.

Observing the case from the angle of the West-German doctor, Dr. Sternhagen, the surgery was definitely a success:

» Es tut mir Weh, die Behandlung als Mißerfolg werten zu müssen. Um das vorauszusehen, fehlte es mir an Phantasie. Unsere Operation war eine Pioniertat, weltweit! « War es die falsche Patientin? Gibt es nicht auch Blinde, die erst in der Pubertät ihr Augenlicht verloren haben? »Sicher. Aber es war ihr leidenschaftlicher Wunsch, zu sehen. Und selbst wenn ich so tue, als hätte es keinen beruflichen Ehrgeiz gegeben – ich bin nicht sicher ob ich die Operation verweigert hätte. Wo alle die Risiken dieser Operation gesehen haben, da waren wir bravourös. Unser Fehler war vielleicht, daß wir sie auch dann noch in eine Sehende verwandeln wollten, als sie die Augen auf ihre Art benutzte. « (538)

He considers the operation flawless and is extremely confident of himself: West-Germany has done everything that is possible in order to make East-Germany see. The fact that it did not work out as they wished is not their fault anymore. In this sense Sabine Busse – representing the citizens of the GDR – is instrumentalized and used as an object. In the end, it is nearly her fault – since it was her wish to gain eyesight - that the operation did not bring her the desired result. The doctors – from a Western perspective – provided her with all the necessary know-how. The ending paragraph of the report brings out the phlegmatic and indifferent attitude of the surgeon even more:

»Der Mensch, heißt es, ist doch keine Straßenbahn, die auf eingefahrenen Spuren fährt. Aber Sabine Busse ist es nicht gelungen, aus der Spur zu springen. Sie war die perfekte Blinde – aber sie wollte sehen. «

Herr Professor, produzieren wir Unglück, wenn wir allen geben, was fast alle haben?

Das ist die Frage, sagt er. (538)

The surgeon, in order to attempt to find an explanation and excuse to the failure, starts to philosophize instead of admitting his lack of success, and concludes that life is not like a train that runs on a preplanned track. The entire report ends with a question, thus, it is left open to further elaborations. Following the Western doctor's stream of thought one might conclude that, according to him, the fact that the citizens of the GDR – after the reunification of Germany –

ceased to be satisfied and lost the initial enthusiasm is their own faults that derive from their desire to change, and it was not West-Germany`s responsibility.

Leo Lattke is confident and completely certain of the fact that his report is the perfect allegory for what has happened in Germany and that it is going to be successful and widely published. However, he has to face reality and understand that his report is not matching the criteria of the newspaper, thus they will not print and publish it: “Jetzt müssen wir es ihm sagen. Das tat der Herausgeber. *So was kommt mir nicht ins Blatt*” (540).

Instead, the director of the magazine sends him to New York, where he, again, is sure that the American press will be fascinated with such a great report. Like before, he is refused once more: “Susan wollte sein Zeug nicht drucken. *Very interesting* sei seine Geschichte, *marvellous* und *amazing*, *great* und *wonderful* und sie würden das sofort drucken *if this had happen to an American.*”

For the first time in his life, Leo Lattke cannot find his way to success: in Germany, his report is denied since it deals with the negative, less advantageous side of the reunification of the country, and in America, it is refused, since it is a writing focusing on a foreign issue that the American press has nothing to do with. He is not the most shining star anymore, only one segment, one point of light, out of all the individuals who form the luminescence universe of society.

Conclusion

Light, a fundamental motif in the book, does not only carry multiple abstract and concrete meanings but also stand for the life stories of all the individuals who are depicted in the work – and thus, provides an aid to see and understand the “Big Picture” from a distance. One of the most representative instances for this idea is told by Lena: the example of the flickering stars – the individual points of light representing the lives of the characters in the book. This concept can also be understood as a micro-version of the entire book’s structure: it is fractured, has no linear storytelling and jumps from the description of one figure’s life to the other without introducing the character.

As mentioned before, the noun and verb forms of light represent not only a physical occurrence in the novel, but they also fulfill an abstract role; they express and support excitement and meaningful events. An example for this role is Lena’s speech on the top of the ambulance car. She experiences the attention of a mass audience and the excitement of giving a speech for the first time in her life. As she perceives the acknowledgement of the crowd, she laughs and her blue eyes shine. This shining light creates an atmosphere that derives from her optimism and radiates through the masses.

Plötzlich stand Lena auf dem Krankenwagen, wie ein genialer Einfall. Sie war schön wie die Verheißung dieses Tages. Lena trug noch ihre Schwestertracht” (85). [...] “Lena lächelte, und ihre blauen Augen leuchteten – man konnte glauben, sie dufteten. Der Himmel über ihr war voller zerwühlter weißer Wolken, doch Lena war erleichtert, ja, wie befreit. (85-86)

After discovering the intriguing connections that links certain characters to the notion of light, one can return to one of the most obvious occurrences of this concept: the title, “*Wie es leuchtet.*” It appears to be rather complex: the subject of the sentence is not specifically described; it rather leaves the exact or abstract meaning to the imagination of the reader.

Providing a literal translation from German to English, which is “*How it shines,*” would not necessarily incorporate the multilayeredness of the title. The German original suggests the comprehension of an event and the understanding of the stream of history. In order to be able to successfully approach the possible implications of it, one has to examine incidences with light separately but also search for the inner thread that holds them together. The search for the latter only ends when the book ends, with an incidence where the title is present in its original form, in a discussion between Lena and her older brother:

»Weißt du noch, was ich vor einem Jahr gesagt habe? – Daß so ein Leben – mein Leben zum Beispiel – auch völlig anders gelaufen sein könnte und verlaufen könnte. Das Flirren und Flimmern der Zufälle regiert. So ist das nun mal. Weißt du noch, wo ich dir das erzählt habe?«

»Na klar. Als du das erste Mal auf Rollschuhen unterwegs warst.«

»Aber wenn man etwas nimmt, das an vielen Stellen flimmert und flackert, und man schaut sich *das Ganze* an, dann sieht man, wie es leuchtet, verstehst du? «

»Nicht so richtig«, sagte ihr großer Bruder, der sich aufs Fahren konzentrierte.

» Wir zum Beispiel mit unseren Scheinwerfern sind wir nur ein Lichtpunkt in der Nacht. Aber in New York zum Beispiel, da ist abends und nachts so viel Licht auf einem Haufen, daß man das sogar vom Mond aus sehen soll. Und das Leben – ich finde, es leuchtet manchmal. Wenn die Zufälle nur wenig flimmern und flackern, dann kommt nichts zustande. Aber im letzten Jahr, da ist so viel passiert. Natürlich nicht nur mir, sondern auch vielen andern. Und da denke ich, das leuchtet. Das leuchtet so hell, daß man es noch lange sehen wird. « (600)

While driving with her older brother she starts to elaborate and explains that life is ruled by the shimmering and flickering of coincidences; however, in order to understand what these luminescent events mean one has to observe the picture as a whole.

In her thought process, Lena uses the sentence of the title “*Wie es leuchtet*” and in that incidence it seems to imply the comprehension of the small fragments as an aid to observe the entirety. For example she talks about the headlights of their car; Lena and her older brother are only one small point of light in the night, but in New York there are thousands of lights like that

and they are so shiny that one would be able to observe them even from the moon. However, if the individual points of light are not shining together, driven by the same goal, they do not have enough cohesion in order to initiate change. For a revolution to happen, every single person has to be motivated and has to act together. As Lena implies: “Aber im letzten Jahr, da so viel passiert. Natürlich nicht nur mir, sondern auch vielen andern. Und da denke ich, es leuchtet. Das leuchtet so hell, daß man es noch lange sehen wird” (600). This concept suggests that the citizens of a nation are able to trigger a transition from an oppressive, socialist regime to a democratic one and their achievement do not fade away in the course of time but become brighter and even more meaningful.

Thus, returning to a political interpretation, one can apply these two ideas – the individual points of light and the observation of them from a distance – to the historic turning point that happened in 1989. The fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany were occasions in which not only the notion of coincidence but also the concurrent reaction of the citizens played an essential role. The book’s fragmented and seemingly incoherent structure supports the atmosphere of this momentous instant, since it attempts to deal with the simultaneous confusion and relief that the masses must have felt.

The fact that the book was published in 2004 also contributes to the attitude of looking back to a significant historic event from the distance, in order to be able to cope with it and to understand the additional implications it might offer.

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