

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Cansu Yersal, B.A.

## Yesterday Girl (1966)

Alexander Kluge (1932- )

### Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

#### OVERVIEW

*Auteur:* Alexander Kluge is a German author, philosopher, academic, and film director. He was born in Halberstadt, Province of Saxony. He studied history, law, and music. He received his doctorate in law in 1956. While studying in Frankfurt, Kluge befriended the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno. Kluge began writing his earliest stories during this period. At Adorno's suggestion, he began to investigate filmmaking. In 1958, Adorno introduced him to filmmaker Fritz Lang, for whom Kluge worked as an assistant on the making of *The Tiger of Eschnapur*. Kluge directed his first film in 1960, *Brutality in Stone*, a twelve-minute, lyrical montage work that explores the Nazi past. He later directed films that critique commercial cinema through creating a counter-public sphere and deploying experimental forms, including montage. They include *Abschied von Gestern (Yesterday Girl)* (1966), an adaptation of Kluge's story *Anita G.*; *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: Ratlos (Artists under the Big Top: Perplexed)* (1968); and *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (1985).

*Film:* *Yesterday Girl* (German: *Abschied von gestern, 'Farewell to Yesterday'*) is a 1966 drama film written and directed by Alexander Kluge. The film is based on the short story *Anita G* (1962), which was written by Alexander Kluge. The film is about the story of Anita G., a young East German migrant to West Germany, and her struggle to adjust to her new life. *Yesterday Girl* stars Alexander Kluge, Hans Korte, Werner Kreindl, Edith Kuntze-Pellogio, Palma Falck, Günter Mack, Eva Maria Meineke, and Alfred Edel. The film won four German Film Awards and a Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

*Historical background:* *Yesterday Girl* is associated with New German Cinema. New German Cinema (German: Neuer Deutscher Film) is a period in German cinema that lasted between 1962 and 1982. In this period, a new generation of directors emerged who worked with low budgets and gained notice by producing small motion pictures that caught the attention of *arthouse* audiences. *Arthouse films* are typically independent films that aim at a niche market. They intend to be serious, artistic, experimental works. They are made for aesthetic reasons rather than commercial profit. They contain unconventional or highly symbolic content. *Yesterday Girl*, marking a shift in German cinema, employs a jarring editing style, discontinuous sound, and a non-sequential narrative which work to destabilize the audience and reflect a sense of chaos.

#### SYNOPSIS

Anita is a young woman who has come over from East Germany to West Germany in search of a better life. She has been working as a nurse in Braunschweig. However, she is brought before the court because of stealing a cardigan belonging to one of her colleagues. She serves her sentence in prison. Later, she is released on probation. The parole board officer finds her a job and tries to make her a better person by praying with her. Next, Anita works in a record company that markets records for foreign language learning. Yet, she has problems with her work. Later, Anita has a short-lived affair with her boss. Nevertheless, her boss reports Anita to prove to his wife that nothing has happened between them. So, Anita leaves her job and finds another one as a housekeeper in a hotel. Soon, however, she is blamed for having stolen something and is fired. Because she cannot pay her rent, she also has to leave her place. Next, we see Anita and her lover spending an evening together. Anita has dreams and starts going to university. She is interested in sociological problems. Yet, once again, she has problems with paying her rent and has to leave the hotel she stays at. Later, she has an affair with a married man called

Pichota. Pichota tries to educate Anita even though he cannot help her financially. In the end, they break up. Anita finally decides to go to the police. She gives birth in the facility she stays in. However, her baby is stillborn. Later in the film, she gathers pieces of evidence for her wrongdoings and is expected to serve a sentence of about four to five years. The film ends with the quote: 'We are all to blame for everything, but if everyone knew it, we would have paradise on Earth.'

## CHARACTERS

<i>Anita G.:</i>	A 22-year-old women who migrates from East Germany to West Germany
<i>The Judge:</i>	A legal official who deals with the case of Anita G.
<i>Record company's owner:</i>	Anita's boss who later has an affair with her
<i>Parole Board Officer:</i>	An officer who tries to make her a valuable member of society
<i>Ministerialrat Pichota:</i>	A government official with whom Anita falls in love
<i>Mrs. Pichota:</i>	Wife of Ministerialrat Pichota
<i>University professor:</i>	Professor whom Anita asks for advice

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### Anita

Anita G. is the main character of the film. She is a 22-year-old person who comes over to West Germany from East Germany. She is Jewish and her grandparents suffered damages in 1938 during the Second World War. After school, she works as a telephone operator. Then she moves to the West and becomes a nurse in Braunschweig. Throughout *Yesterday Girl*, we witness how Anita drifts from job to job and place to place, trying to find her place in society.

*Unlawful:* One of the noticeable characteristics of Anita is that she does not obey societal laws. At the very beginning of the film, she is brought into the court because she steals a cardigan from her colleague. Therefore, she is sentenced to prison. Later on in the film, we witness her stealing again. For instance, she tries to steal wine in a shop but someone notices her, and she runs away. In another scene, a woman from whom she has stolen before recognizes her in the streets and catches her. She makes Anita write a statement about swindling her and being guilty. From these instances, we can see that stealing almost becomes a habit for Anita.

*Aimless:* Anita is a lost soul. Throughout the film, we see her drifting from job to job, from place to place. She cannot fit into the society even though she tries to. She is again and again fired from her job. Because she cannot pay her rent, she also has to leave her place again and again. Moreover, she does not seem to have a specific goal or dream about what she wants to do with her life. She can be likened to a leaf aimlessly floating in the air, driven by the random movements of the wind.

*Adventurous:* Anita is an adventurous soul, that is, she is willing to take risks or to try out new methods, ideas, or experiences in her life journey. After she finishes her sentence, she works in a record company that markets records for foreign language learning. Later, Anita leaves her job and finds another one as a housekeeper in a hotel. Soon, however, she is fired for various reasons. Next, she starts going to university and tries to learn French. As can be seen from these examples, she explores her environment and experiences a variety of jobs, places, and so on. Thus, she is an adventurous person.

*Alienated:* Alienation from the society one finds herself in is one of the major themes of *Yesterday Girl*. Anita searches for a better life even though she herself does not know what that *better life* should consist of. To that end, she drifts from job to job. She frequently changes her address as well. Moreover, people that enter her life all play only temporary roles. Therefore, she does not have a stable ground that she can rely on. As can be seen at the end of the film, the only place she can count on is—ironically— the prison. Thus, she is separated and alienated from society.

### The Judge

The judge is the legal official who deals with the case of Anita stealing the cardigan of her colleague. We only see him at the very beginning of the film and he plays only a minor role. Nevertheless, his dismissive attitude toward Anita and her family's past struggles can be extrapolated to other members of German society and may be interpreted as Alexander Kluge's attempt to criticize society.

*Dismissive:* We learn from the court scene that Anita's grandparents suffered damages in 1938 as they were Jewish. The judge asks Anita whether the damages her grandparents suffered have anything to do with her present situation (and her act of stealing a cardigan from her colleague). Anita says no. The judge responds: *'Then let's leave it. It's in the past.'* This response indicates that the judge does not want to be reminded of the Nazi past, Second World War, and what the Nazi government did. Thus, he is dismissive of an important part of the society's past.

### **Record company's owner**

The record company's owner is Anita's boss who later has an affair with her despite being married. He plays a minor role in the film. He assigns to Anita her duty which is about marketing gramophone records for learning foreign languages.

*Unfaithful:* The record company's owner has a short-lived affair with Anita which can be seen in the scene where he and Anita sit on the stairs while the record company's owner hugs her romantically. Thus, he is unfaithful to his wife.

*Conscientious:* Despite being unfaithful to his wife, he is a conscientious person. He knows that what he does is wrong. Therefore, the boss reports Anita to prove to his wife that nothing has happened between them. In the end, Anita has to leave her job. Thus, we can conclude that in the end, he chooses his marriage and work over this short-term affair with Anita.

### **Parole Board Officer**

The parole board officer is responsible for observing Anita's behavior and trying to make her a valuable member of society. She is a dutiful person as can be observed in her behavior toward Anita and her attempts to inculcate good ethics and morality in Anita.

*Dutiful:* We first see the parole board officer when she explains that the court may release a prisoner on probation with her consent. Later, we see her helping Anita during the probation period. In particular, they pray together. The parole board officer tries to direct Anita to goodness and good behavior when they pray: *'I only want to do good. My heart rejoices when I do good'*. After praying, the officer also asks her about the meaning of various words such as 'threat', 'probation', 'good', etc. So, she tries to train her in good ethics and behavior. From these scenes, we can infer that the officer is a dutiful person.

### **Ministerialrat Pichota**

Pichota is a government official with whom Anita falls in love approaching the end of the film. Pichota is married and thus unfaithful to his wife. Despite this, he does not seem to have any moral scruples about his behavior. Nevertheless, at the end of the film, Pichota and Anita break up.

*Unfaithful:* Pichota is married. Despite being married, he has an affair with Anita. He even takes her to an official dog training event where people believe that Anita is Mrs. Pichota. Pichota tells Anita that he would do anything for him. He says that he would go to Africa or Alaska for her and start a new life. Pichota's wife knows about his betrayal but does not say anything to him. Both Pichota and Anita do not have any moral scruples about their immoral act.

*Sophisticated:* Since Pichota cannot help Anita financially, he tries to educate her in other ways. He is a sophisticated person who knows about various kinds of art. So, he reads her passages from Franz Kafka and sings through an opera with her. His knowledgeable and cultured disposition may be one of the things that attracts Anita.

## University professor

The university professor plays a minor role in the film. Anita asks him for practical advice. However, the professor does not seem to understand her question and gives vague and irrelevant responses to her.

*Impractical:* When Anita asks the professor for advice, she talks about herself as if she is speaking about a friend of hers: 'A friend from the East has been stealing here. She's wanted by the police.' The professor does not answer her question and says to her: 'You should read. Reading trains the mind.' 'His vague, abstract, and empty responses show us the inability of the education system to help Anita and her problems. So, the professor is an impractical person who fails to help Anita.

## THEMES

### SOCIETY

**Society** The society Anita lives in is a post—war society. World War II is over and the Nazi government no longer rules Germany. Yet, the remnants of the war are still existent. Anita has a Jewish background and we learn that her grandparents suffered during the war. Thus, Anita's Jewishness makes her different from most of the Christian German population. Her religious and familial background may therefore be said to be one of the factors leading to her not fitting into and alienation from society. In the film, we see that Old Germany is being demolished and a New Germany is being built. These are not just metaphorical claims, rather they are quite concrete. In one of the scenes, Anita witnesses the demolishing of an old building which symbolizes the Germans' will to forget about their blameful past and look forward to a better and hopeful future. Yet, there is still no total unity in the society. There is a separateness between East Germany and West Germany. Anita is an individual who neither belongs to the East nor the West. She seems to be in a liminal space where it is not clear where she belongs. Moreover, the society is not welcoming of Anita. Despite Anita's efforts and multiple attempts to secure a stable place in society, she is not successful. She tries many jobs but eventually gives up on all of them. She has short-lived relationships that lead to nowhere. Even the education system fails her as the abstract and impractical pieces of advice of the professors are not helpful for her concrete problems. As ironic as it seems, the only place that provides Anita with a certain degree of security and stability is the prison, a part of society that is looked down upon by many as the place of *'the other and unlawful'*. All in all, we can assert that the post—war German society is in need of healing its own wounds, and thus not a very welcoming place for individuals like Anita. Therefore, Anita cannot find herself a secure place in it.

**Identity** Identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and expressions that characterize a person. In *Yesterday Girl*, we see that Anita G. trying to find her identity and her place in society. Anita is originally from East Germany. She migrates to West Germany in search of a better life. However, she has problems fitting into society as can be seen in how she drifts from job to job and place to place. She is Jewish whose grandparents suffered damages during World War II. Already this quality makes her different from most of the German population which is Christian. As we see in the film, she tries to find financial security by trying a variety of jobs: She works temporarily as a telephone operator, a nurse, a seller, a housekeeper, and so on. Yet, she cannot keep any of these jobs. Thus, we see her failing to find a secure place and identity as a productive member of society. Moreover, she also develops a habit of stealing. Firstly, she is brought to the court because of stealing a cardigan from a colleague. Later on, we witness her attempting to steal wine from a shop. In all these scenes, we see a young adult trying to form her identity, to find some stable ground but failing to do so, even succumbing to immoral acts in the process. We can thus conclude that Anita G. does not have and cannot form a firm identity throughout the film.

### CRIME

**Injustice** There are certain acts of injustice that the viewers witness throughout *Yesterday Girl*. First of all, Anita steals a cardigan from her colleague while she works as a nurse. As a result of this stealing act, she is brought before the court and sentenced to prison for a certain amount of time. Later on in the film,

we see her stealing wine and also being caught by a woman whom she has stolen before. This woman makes Anita write a statement about being guilty. Thus, we can assert that Anita participates in acts of injustice. However, during her trial, we also find out that her grandparents suffered damages during World War II. Her parents, likewise, were affected by the atmosphere of the country. So, we come to realize that perhaps Anita's behavior does not completely stem from a lack of morals but is a result of generational trauma. We know that she migrates from East Germany to West Germany in search of a better life and tries to fit into society, yet to no avail. Thus, we as viewers recognize that there is a series of causes and effects that resulted in Anita forming a habit of stealing.

**Punishment** Anita is punished at the beginning of the film for stealing. As a result of her immoral act, she serves her sentence for a certain period. Afterward, she is released on probation. A parole board officer observes her behavior closely and tries to transform her into a better human being by frequently praying with her. However, this punishment does not stop Anita from engaging in similar acts of stealing. In a later part of the film, we see, for instance, Anita trying to steal wine from a shop. Thus, we can conclude that her punishment and probation period failed to change Anita into a better human being. At the end of the film, after a long time of drifting from job to job and place to place, Anita decides to go to the police herself to confess all the wrongdoings she has been engaging in (acts of stealing). Later, she helps gather evidence for her sentence. While she talks with an official about her past and studies, she tells her that she thinks her sentence will be four or five years. At the end of the film, we do not know how Anita's future will be after she serves her second sentence and leaves prison. However, the quote at the very last scene reminds us that it is not only Anita who is to be blamed but the whole society that contributed to her current condition.

**Guilt** Guilt is a moral emotion that occurs when a person realizes that they have violated universal moral standards and bears significant responsibility for that violation. Guilt is related to the concepts of remorse, regret, and shame. Anita frequently engages in immoral acts and seems to have an indifferent attitude regarding her behavior, that is, she does not seem to have many moral scruples about stealing. It is only at the very end of the film—after she has tried to fit into society many times by drifting from job to job and place to place, yet has failed to do so—that she finally decides to go to the police, confesses her wrongdoings, and gathers evidence for her sentence. So, we can certainly assert that Anita feels a sense of responsibility, at least at the end of the film. Moreover, there is another scene before Anita meets Pichota where she goes to talk to her professor and asks for advice. She speaks to the professor as if she is talking about a friend of hers who has been stealing and is wanted by the police. However, the professor does not truly listen to her and gives vague and irrelevant responses. Based on this scene, we can say that what appears as Anita's indifference on the surface is not what it seems. At a deep level, Anita cares about her future and feels responsible for the immoral acts she has committed. However, the society around her is incapable of helping her to a great extent. Overall, we can conclude that despite seeming indifferent and not having any moral scruples on a surface level, Anita does indeed feel responsible for her acts at a deeper level, and thus experiences guilt.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**Alienation/Otherness** Social alienation is a person's feeling of disconnection from a group—wider society—to which the individual has an affinity. This is a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values. It can be asserted that Anita is alienated from the society at large. She is a lost soul who does not fit into the accepted frameworks of society. She tries to find a stable place or ground which she can rely upon. We witness her efforts as she works as a nurse, a seller, a housekeeper, and so on. However, she cannot hold these jobs for long periods and has to eventually leave them. She stops being a nurse after stealing a cardigan from her colleague. Later, she tries to be a seller of records for foreign languages. However, things fall apart after she has an affair with her boss and her boss reports her so his wife does not become suspicious of him. Next, she works as a housekeeper. Yet, she is soon accused of stealing something even though she did not and is fired. As we can see from these instances, she is alienated from her work environment and cannot find her proper place in society. Moreover, she violates the established laws of society in that she frequently steals. As a result of these immoral acts, she is further estranged and becomes *'the other'*.

**Boredom** Boredom, ennui, or tedium is an emotion characterized by uninterest in one's surroundings, often caused by a lack of distractions or occupations. Boredom seems to be a specific mental state that people find unpleasant—a lack of stimulation that leaves them craving relief. We can see Anita being bored in quite a few scenes in the film. First of all, when she serves her sentence in prison, her facial expressions and body language reflect a sense of tedium. In the prison scene, we see Anita resting in her bed while listening to a cartoon show. She has a flat expression which indicates that she is bored by her environment. Later on, when she is released on probation, there is a scene where she goes to have tea with certain people, including the parole board officer. As she listens to them talking about various subjects such as theft, Christianity, and freedom without listening to one another, she once again has her flat expression reflecting her sense of otherness and not fitting into her environment. She is thus bored by what is going on around her. A third scene of boredom is when Anita and her lover sit in a restaurant. She looks at her environment with a sense of being lost regarding what she shall do about her life. She keeps on eating something but she seems to do that automatically and seems ultimately disinterested, lost, and aimless.

## FLAWS

**Greed** Anita's flaw is that she is greedy to possess items that do not belong to her. From the beginning to the end of *Yesterday Girl*, we witness how greed to possess causes a variety of problems for Anita. First of all, she is brought to court because she has stolen a cardigan from a colleague. As a result of her stealing act, she is sentenced to prison. However, even though she is fully aware of the legal consequences of her unlawful actions, she does not stop stealing. In the later parts of the film, we see her trying to steal wine from a shop. In addition to this, a woman whom she has swindled before recognizes her on the streets and makes her write a statement about being guilty. We also see Anita asking for advice from a professor regarding a friend of hers who has been stealing. The viewers know that the so-called friend is Anita herself and that she is asking for advice for herself. From these instances, we can infer that stealing is almost like a habit for Anita. Her greed to possess items and things that do not belong to her is almost a core part of her character. Here, the question that might come up is whether this habit is purely a result of her greedy personality or something else is at play. Whether Anita's past and being Jewish contribute to her feeling like a stranger in society and lead her to do unlawful acts or whether the unwelcoming and indifferent German society is to blame are questions that the viewers may ponder.

## QUEST

**Explore** Anita explores herself, people, and various kinds of environments throughout the film. She tries many different jobs. This means that she experiences and explores different walks of life such as being a nurse, a seller, a housekeeper, and so on. She also does not stay in one place for too long and drifts from place to place. This shows us that she also explores different surroundings and places. Moreover, she has temporary relationships with three men: her boss, her boyfriend, and Pichota. Thus, through her relationships, she explores the personalities and inner worlds of different people. Furthermore, she goes to university in order to educate herself. Through this, she learns about the education system and gets to know different professors. In addition to all these experiences, she also comes to know about the justice system. As a result of her act of stealing, she spends time in prison and explores a radically different environment where *the others* of society are to be found. All in all, *Yesterday Girl* can be seen as a presentation of Anita's inner and outer explorations, that is, her explorations of herself, the people around her, and the society at large.

## RELATIONSHIP

**Marriage** Anita is not married. Therefore, marriage is not a major theme of the film. However, we see Anita having relationships with married people. One of these people is her boss at the record company. The other person is Pichota. Regarding the first relationship, because her boss does not want her wife to become suspicious of his behavior, he reports Anita and she is fired from her job. As we can see in this particular instance, the boss betrays his wife but ultimately decides that his relationship with Anita is not going to last long and chooses her wife. Another married person with whom Anita has a relationship is

Pichota. Pichota is married, yet does not seem to have any scruples regarding the fact that he betrays his wife. On the contrary, he is ready to do anything for Anita. In his words, he 'would go to Africa or Alaska' with Anita. It is noteworthy that Anita also does not seem to have any moral scruples about the fact that she is having affairs with married men. Even though she feels responsible for her stealing acts, she does not feel the same kind of responsibility and guilt for having relationships with married men. In the end, Anita's relationship with Pichota also comes to an end as they both understand that their affair is not going to work and Anita leaves for someplace else. The viewers are thus left with questions about the concept of marriage and the nature of betrayal.

**Caring** Pichota cares deeply for Anita as can be seen in his behavior toward her. He cannot support her financially because his wife controls all his money transfers. Therefore, he decides to educate Anita because he sees this as the only way he can help her. To that end, he reads her passages from Franz Kafka and they discuss the meaning of the read passages. He also sings operas with her and thus tries to teach her art. He is sophisticated and cultured and he wants Anita to be the same. At a later point in the film, he also helps her financially. He gives Anita one hundred marks in their final meeting. Through these sets of behaviors, we can infer that Pichota truly cares about Anita.

**Love/Attraction** Love and attraction are themes of the film insofar as they relate to Anita's life. In *Yesterday Girl*, we see Anita in three different relationships. The first of these is the affair she has with her boss at the record company. This is a very short-lived affair and the boss ends this affair as he ultimately chooses his marriage and wife over Anita. The second relationship Anita has is with someone who is more or less her age. We see them in a restaurant and later, at Anita's place spending the evening together. This relationship is characterized by a sense of friendship between the two. Anita's third relationship is with Pichota, a government official with whom Anita falls in love. Unlike the first two relationships, there is a visible attraction between Anita and Pichota as can be inferred from their facial expressions and body language. Pichota falls deeply in love with Anita despite being married. Anita knows that Pichota is married but she does not have any moral scruples regarding their affair. Pichota's love for Anita is expressed when he tells Anita that he would do anything for her. He would go to Africa for her or Alaska and start a new life. However, even this relationship does not last and they eventually break up. Thus, Anita cannot find the stability she is looking for in a relationship.

## **APPEARANCE**

**Lies** Throughout the film, we witness Anita lying from time to time. For instance, she lies to her boss at the record company about not having filled in the documents herself. Her boss complains that the addresses she wrote down do not exist and tells her that she should not fill in the document herself. However, Anita behaves as if she does not understand what is going on and tells her boss that she does not know how the addresses she wrote down do not exist. Thus, she lies. Another scene where we witness Anita lying is when she is caught by a woman whom she has stolen before. The woman makes Anita write a statement about being guilty. But while she writes her statement, she lies about her address which makes the woman furious. As we can see from these instances, Anita does not hesitate to lie whenever she sees fit and does not truly have moral scruples about the act of lying. Another example where Anita lies is when she tells her landlady that she will soon pay the rent when she gets her check. However, we know that Anita is merely coming up with these excuses to save the day. In reality, her checks never come and she always has financial problems.

**Dreams** There are two scenes that resemble a dream, or at least, seem to be products of Anita's imagination. One of these scenes is when Anita runs away from the police and people. We witness Anita running away from several people. They seem to be the police, soldiers, or other governmental officials. This scene seems to be the product of Anita's imagination. Another scene that has a dreamlike or hallucinatory quality is when Anita behaves disrespectfully toward the parole board officer: In this scene, Anita and the parole board officer are together in a room. All of a sudden, Anita steps on the table and presses on the hand of the parole board officer. However, when we see the hand of the officer, we see that it is not a human hand but a liquid material that Anita stepped on. This suggests that this scene is also a product of Anita's imagination. We can assert that these two scenes reflect Anita's subconsciousness. Anita is aware that she has been unlawful and stolen before. So, it is natural for her to

imagine that she is wanted by the police and dream about it. In addition to this, the parole board officer is a strict lady who expects Anita to behave well at all times. Anita's stepping on her hand may reflect Anita's subconscious wish to rebel against the authoritarian nature of the official.

## **PAST**

**Memory** *Yesterday Girl* is about the struggles of a young lady trying to adapt to West Germany. Anita tries to build a life herself but things are not easy. First of all, Anita is of Jewish background which makes her different from the German population most of which is Christian. Secondly, her Jewish background and her past are filled with the remnants of the memories of the Second World War. We know that Anita's grandparents suffered damage during World War II. Likewise, her parents were also affected by the Nazi government. However, their factories were eventually returned to them. Anita is thus a product of a generation that has suffered a lot during the rule of the Nazi government. We learn about the details of Anita's past in the scene of her trial. There is a particular scene where we witness the symbolic demolition of Old Germany. As Anita walks through the city streets, she comes across an old building that is being demolished. This demolishing indicates that Old Germany is being replaced with New Germany. Thus, we see that Germans want to forget the times of the Second World War and the Nazi government. However, the past cannot be erased and the memories of the difficult times are reflected in various facets of life.

**Transience** Transience, ephemerality, or impermanence is one of the major themes of *Yesterday Girl*. As we see Anita drifting from place to place and job to job, we realize how difficult it is for a young lady to find some stability and permanence in an environment that is not suited to her needs. Anita changes many jobs, has short-lived relationships with various men, and she travels from place to place. She searches for some stable ground which she can rely upon. Yet, she cannot find any point of stability. Even the education system fails her as the impractical pieces of advice of the professors are not what Anita has been looking for. In the end, Anita returns to the only safe place she knows which is, ironically, the prison. Thus, we can conclude that even though Anita searches for a ground of permanence, she cannot find it as everything around her is in a process of change.



## SCENES

**Anita G. laughs and reads** The film begins with a quote: *'What separates us from yesterday is not a rift but a change of position.'* In the first scene, we see Anita breaking into a peal of laughter while reading the material in front of her: 'Did he separate the daughter from the mother? Did he separate the mother from the daughter? Did he not set free a prisoner? Untie a prisoner?...'



**Anita enters a coffeeshop** In the next scene, we see Anita enter a coffeeshop where live classical music is played. She sits on one of the sofas. She waits. Soon, a waitress comes to ask for her order.

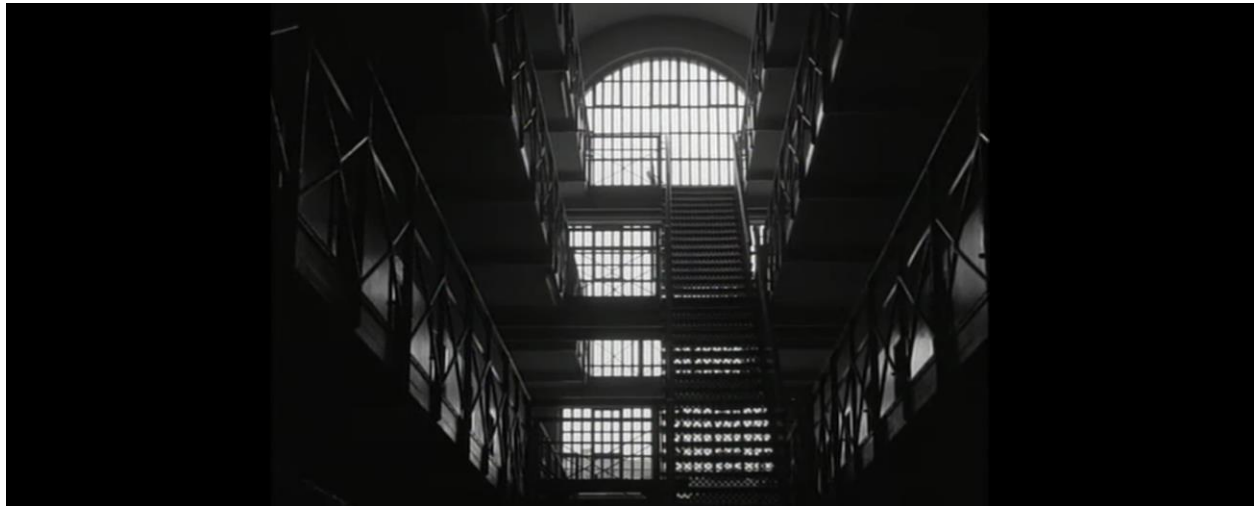


### **Anita is brought before court for stealing a cardigan**

Anita is brought before the court because she steals a cardigan belonging to Angelika Hus with everything in it from her locker. The judge wants her to confirm that she is Anita G., aged 22. Throughout the trial, we learn that she has come over from East Germany and is originally from the Leipzig area. Her grandparents suffered damages in 1938. She is Jewish. The judge asks whether the damages her grandparents suffered have anything to do with her present situation. Anita says no. The judge responds: 'Then let's leave it. It's in the past.' Later, Anita explains that after school, she worked as a telephone operator. She wanted to study something but got scared and moved to the West. Then she became a nurse in Braunschweig. There she committed the said offense.



**Anita serves her sentence in prison** We see a prison and Anita resting in her bed while listening to a cartoon show. She has a flat expression and seems to be bored by her environment.



**Anita eats** We see Anita eating while standing. She seems to have a lot of appetite. Her eating in a very fast manner may have to do with the stress and anxiety she experiences.



**Anita is released on probation** We see a legal official. She says that the court may release a prisoner on probation with her consent: 'Here judges usually give 2 years probation for 6 months remaining.' We see the official coming into a room and greeting Anita. Anita is eating and reading the newspaper. She says to Anita that she may thank God that they've managed to find her such a pleasant job. She asks her whether she still prays as often as she did with her in prison. They arrange the items and sit on the ground. Then they start praying: 'I only want to do good. My heart rejoices when I do good.' After praying, the official asks her about the meaning of various words such as 'threat', 'probation', 'good', and so on. The official corrects her when she doesn't like Anita's answers.



**Anita has tea with the officials** Anita goes to have some tea with the officials. They talk vaguely about various topics such as freedom, theft, Christianity, meaning of certain words. While they are talking, Anita keeps eating in a fast manner which reflects her impatience and anxiety surrounding the situation.

**Anita has a new job** Anita sits in the office of an official who explains to her about her new job: 'It's about gramophone records of foreign languages.' 'We market convenient boxed sets of 36 records for learning foreign languages'. Anita has to interview people for this job and fill in some documents with information about them such as their addresses.



**Anita's past** Next, we are abruptly presented with several old photographs, presumably belonging to Anita's past and family. Next, we also see daily scenes from West Germany. We see markets where they sell popcorn and almonds. We see the traffic and cars driving through the lit city.



**Problems with work** We see Anita once again at the office of her boss. The boss complains that the addresses she wrote in the forms do not exist: 'You mustn't fill in the form yourself.'



**Anita buys a coat for herself** Anita goes to a fur shop to buy herself a fur coat. At first, she tries on a white opera-cloak. However, the shop assistant thinks a blonde lamb coat is more suitable for her needs. In the end, she decides to buy the Persian-lamb coat.





### **Affair between Anita and her boss**

There is an affair between Anita and her boss at the record company. However, the boss reports Anita to prove to his wife that nothing had happened between them. So, Anita gathers her belongings, prepares her suitcases, and leaves her place.



**Anita has once again a new job** Next, Anita works as a housekeeper in a hotel. We see fragmented bits and pieces from her life as a housekeeper. In her free time, she listens to her friends playing the piano. We see her working hard for her job. However, one day, in the manager's absence, Anita is fired. She is once again blamed for having stolen something. She says: 'I've been doing the rooms all morning. It really wasn't me!'



**Anita has to leave her place** Anita also has problems with paying her rent. Her landlady takes her suitcase without informing her. So, Anita is infuriated about it. The landlady wants her to pay her rent. Anita says that she'll pay her in the third month when she gets her check. After this argument with her landlady, she has to leave the house immediately.



**Anita spends time in a coffee shop** Anita sits in a coffeeshop. She has an expressionless look on her face, perhaps reflecting to us the viewers her alienation from her environment and her being an almost stranger. On the walls of the coffee shop are pictures of important people such as Dr. Wolfgang Jaenicke (1881—1968) who was a lawyer and secretary of the state. We also see Centennial Hall in Wroclaw. These pictures and photographs take us back to the beginning of the century and the Second World War.





**Old Germany is demolished** Anita leaves the coffee shop and walks through the city streets. She sees an old building demolished. This demolishing indicates that Old Germany is being replaced and New Germany is being built. Germans want to forget the times of the Second World War and the Nazi government.



**Anita and her lover spend the evening together** Anita and her lover sit in a restaurant. She looks at her environment with a sense of being lost and aimless regarding what she shall do about her life. Then they go to her apartment. They listen to the radio. Anita talks about Hohenzollers (a formerly royal German dynasty whose members were various princes, electors, kings, and emperors of Hohenzollern, Brandenburg, Prussia, the German Empire, and Romania), Thirty Years' War (one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in European history, lasting from 1618 to 1648), Kapp Putsch (was an attempted coup against the German national government in Berlin on 13 March 1920, its goal was to undo the German Revolution of 1918–1919, overthrow the Weimar Republic, and establish an autocratic government in its place). They keep listening to the radio and kiss each other. Then they sing along to the radio.



**Anita goes to university** Anita wants to start a new life. So, she starts going to university. We see her listening to the rector's speech and later to a moral philosophy lecture. Next, we are presented with scenes from the library and daily scenes in the university.



**Anita talks to a professor about a sociological project** The professor asks Anita whether she has any special interests. Anita replies that she is interested in sociology. The professor mentions Max Weber's teachings on domination in connection with the problem of sovereignty of the people. He also says that she should be familiar with Rousseau's views and asks her whether she speaks French.



**Anita cares about her education** We see Anita studying French in her hotel room. Next, we see her at the university secretary's office. She asks her whether she can matriculate. However, the university needs to have her Abitur certificate for the matriculation.



**Problems with paying bills** Anita has problems paying her bills. She stays in a hotel and has not been paying the bills for weeks. She tries to convince the official that she is going to get a check a week later. However, the hotel official does not accept her excuses anymore and wants her to leave the flat.

**Anita asks for advice from her professor** Anita tells her professor that she needs a piece of advice. However, the professor seems not to be listening to her. He speaks vaguely, using phrases such as: 'I want to do good for you. I want to educate you.' Anita talks about herself as if she is speaking about a friend of hers: 'A friend from the East has been stealing here. She's wanted by the police.' The professor, once again, doesn't answer: 'You should read. Reading trains the mind.' 'Knowing what to fear and what to love, that's what counts.'



**Anita runs away from the police and people** We are presented with scenes of the police going after Anita and Anita running. Next, we see a police show. Later, we witness Anita running away from several people. They seem to be soldiers or other governmental officials that she is running away from. This scene seems to be product of Anita's imagination.



**Anita behaves disrespectfully toward the parole board officer** Anita and the parole board officer are together in a room. All of a sudden, Anita steps on the table and presses on the hand of the parole board officer. This scene may, once again, be a product of Anita's imagination.



**Anita meets Pichota** Pichota, a civil servant, waits for his colleagues. Pichota sees Anita and asks her what it is she wants. She says she has been looking for the canteen and the exit. But the building is like a labyrinth and she cannot find the way out. Next, we see Pichota and Anita sitting very close to one another and smiling.



**Anita and Pichota become lovers** Anita and Pichota spend time in a hotel. Pichota thinks that staying in a hotel is not good for them. Next, we see Pichota's house. Anita arranges the small items on the table but when Pichota comes, he puts them back in their old places. Pichota asks Anita whether she has a steady job.





**Anita and Pichota attend an event where dogs are trained** Pichota attends the event as the spokesman of the Ministry of Culture, sports section. The show that people present is that of dog training. They also present a hypothetical/imaginary case of a young woman being attacked by a man and tied to a tree. Her dog comes and frees her showing that dogs successfully protect their 'masters'.



**Despite being married, Pichota wants to start a new life with Anita** After the event, Anita and Pichota are back at Pichota's house. Anita tells him that they called her Mrs. Pichota. For Pichota, this is a complicated situation. But he tells Anita that he would do anything for her. He would go to Africa for her or Alaska and start a new life.



**Mrs. Pichota knows all about Pichota's betrayal of her** Mrs. Pichota says to her friend: 'If he finds out I know, he'll go mad. He goes mad whether I say something or not, so I don't say anything.' She seems to be resenting yet accepting the fact that Pichota is disloyal.



**Pichota and Anita make love** Pichota explains to Anita that they've found an unknown notebook from 1788 that belonged to Goethe. The notebook will be presented to the minister. First, Pichota prepares himself to go to the event. But then he makes love to Anita. At the end of the scene, we see a photo frame of Mrs. Pichota, as if she has been witnessing Pichota's betrayal all this time.





**Anita is guilty of swindling someone** As Anita walks through the streets, a woman from whom she has stolen before recognizes her and catches her. She makes Anita write a statement about being guilty. But while she writes her statement, she lies about her address which makes the woman angry. She says: 'Pay up, or I'll report you!'



**Anita steals wine and runs away from officials** Anita tries to steal wine in a shop but someone notices her and she runs away. We see that stealing has turned into almost a habit for Anita.

**Anita reads about Dr. Bauer** Dr. Bauer is an old man who works as part of the court. However, one thing that distinguishes him from the others is how he thinks about the way things work. We are presented with a scene where he talks about the case of a young woman who had to confess and stood up for forty-five minutes talking about her case while he sat there. Dr. Bauer was embarrassed because of this incident. He asks himself: 'Is it right for the court to sit there, while the poor accused have to stand?' He is someone who works for truth and justice.



**Pichota doesn't believe Anita's words** Pichota says to Anita that she can't keep moving like a gypsy. Anita responds that she has just bought a flat in a building under construction. He asks her where she got the money but she does not want to answer. Pichota doesn't believe Anita's words. So, Anita says that they could drive to the building. Then they go to see the building.

**Pichota cannot help Anita** On their way back, Pichota says to Anita: 'You could have said; I have to pay a building-cost contribution. Can you lend it to me?' Then Anita asks him if he could lend her one hundred marks. Pichota responds that his wife checks all the transfers so, he cannot do that at the moment.

**Pichota tries to educate Anita** Pichota tries to educate Anita in that he reads to her passages from Franz Kafka. They discuss the meaning of the passages. Then they sing opera pieces together.



**Anita and Pichota break up** Pichota and Anita talk to each other. Pichota asks her whether he cannot help her in any other way. Anita shakes her head. He advises Anita to go to North Rhine-Westphalia. Then he gives her one hundred marks. Then Anita says goodbye to him and leaves.



**Anita sleeps in the building under construction** Because Anita doesn't have any place to stay, she sleeps in the building under construction where she cannot fall asleep because of the construction noises.

**Anita is a lost soul** Anita leaves the place. We see her walking through a bridge with her bags. She doesn't know what to do or where to go. So, she walks through the endless streets of the city. She watches an airplane flying in the sky. Later, she keeps on aimlessly drifting on her own in the city.



**Anita goes to the prison once again** After her day-long walk through the city, she finally decides to stop the struggle and goes to the police. Next, we see her entering through the big gates of a prison. This is at least a place where she knows she will be safe and somewhat taken care of. This place is also the only place that can provide a kind of stability and groundedness for her.



**Anita gives birth** Anita gives birth. We do not know about her pregnancy process. But we can infer from the scene that she gives birth to a baby. However, we do not see the baby after she gives birth from which we can infer that the baby has not survived. Next, we see her crying in sadness and anger. The nurse tries to calm her down.

**Anita talks to an official about her situation** Anita helps gather evidence for her sentence. She talks with an official about her past and studies. The official asks her about how high she thinks her sentence will be to which Anita responds: 'Four or five years'. The official tells her that they have a psychologist in their team whom she could go and see.

**We are all to blame** We see a close-up of Anita, and the film ends with the quote: 'We are all to blame for everything, but if everyone knew it, we would have paradise on Earth.'

