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Das Leben der Anderen

Movie scene: Captain Gerd Wiesler is keeping Georg Dreyman and his girlfriend Christa-Maria Sieland under surveillance overhearing a very intimate scene. One senses his longing for having a love life of his own and his ambiguity on whether he will succeed... Prison scene: two inmates talking to a master student wishing they could have a cup of tea with the guards, sense a feeling of normality. The prison guard later reflects – “what if I am the one not letting them in, not being able to tear down the walls”.

By watching lives of others, longings and dreams may be brought to life and the potential relatedness may challenge the solving of the primary task.

The scenes provide us with some understanding of what it means to be human in a system and how we relate in the meeting with others. How do we relate to the otherness in ourselves (am I the one excluding the other?) and how do we relate to the lives of others. Am I intruded by the otherness, moving myself in an unwanted direction or am I able to maintain and face, that the other is a human being just like me? If I am able to find the universal themes, that connects us, then I am able to relate and be human.

The prison is a mirror of the surrounding society. Therefore, prison life can provide us with some valuable insights concerning defenses against otherness and the walls within. The scenes from prison life can provide us with understanding not only in relation to the otherness but also in relation to understanding the other. How do we relate to, integrate and take up relations with others?

In her master study, the presenter examined a co-creation project between prisoners and prison guards concluding, that the ambition of creating a common third and improving the environment was challenged. Guards being frustrated finding the new porcelain dinner sets in the dustbin and prisoners expressing sad feelings that their wishes were not really taken into account by the guards and the system. Being very cheerful though in the meeting with two master students in psychology, because with “your psychological understandings you must be able to read our minds”.

The psychoanalytical theory framework provides a valuable framework of understanding in order to read and understand the dynamics in prisons. Understanding the existence of the unconscious, we are able to understand the meaning of psychological projections. Understanding projections, we are able to uncover the functions of prisons in society in order to provide psychological containment of anxiety. It is in the recognition of this the stories from prison life offer us valuable insights concerning the meeting between the other and me.

“I think it is the mental barriers in our minds that hinders the co-creation, because the inmates are really interested in getting into a relationship”.¹

¹ Quote from a master study (2012) investigating, which psychological management processes take place, when an organisation matches its primary task?