

## Permanent Ignition: Erfurt (The Stasi Edits)

Extract from sound installation, C.CRED [Collective CREative Dissent]

I had a very shocking experience, during the Wende period, I had trained to be a lawyer in the GDR, and after Die Wende, I had to retrain to adapt to the western system, and as part of this process, I met a former East-German prisoner who was trying to get himself rehabilitated, and the crime he had committed was he had raped a woman, and the reason he thought this was a political crime and he should be rehabilitated was because she was a party member, and so he argued he had damaged the party by raping her and therefore he should be rehabilitated.

That is exactly the problem with any totalitarian system. They try to establish one view of history, but history comes only in histories. You have to tell stories in order to capture history. You cannot have a mono-mythical attitude to history – that is already inherently totalitarian. That's the worst thing that can happen.

*This whole notion of ownership and authorship of history relates to other issues as well, perhaps. For instance, somebody is funding us to be here right now, to do this work, and so we come as artists from a different part of the continent to engage with these histories – it is perhaps problematic in one sense, yet it is perhaps only when you get such multiplicity of perspectives and viewpoints that a ground for criticality can be established. I guess what I'm asking, in other words, is whether or not there is any sense in this happening, in us being here, doing this project, or should this, in your view, be more of an internal affair?*

It is difficult to talk about an internal debate in an East-German context, because there is no internal East-Germany anymore. It is a German debate, and a lot of the people joining the debate are actually outsiders but they're claiming a say in this debate, so it's different than in other Eastern European countries. In East Germany it is never going to be an entirely internal debate. I went to Moscow a few years ago and I was talking to somebody who was one of the constructors, alongside Gorbachev, of perestroika and glasnost, and he said in order to put aside one's morals one needs to have a moral. His theory was that in the Soviet Union you were so indoctrinated that it was hard to build up one's own sense of morality. You were always looking to whomever was on top of you in the hierarchy to find out what was expected of you. But in East Germany it was never quite like that, because it was never that isolated. We had West German television, we had the same language as West Germans, so already at that point there was always a sense of an outside perspective. But still there are people who have this zombie mentality and so it is good that people come from the outside to this debate.

I really like that they have opened the archives, so that everyone can look at their files and work through this history. I saw my file and I thought it was ridiculous, you can just trash it. There were some people I knew, but I have no anger, hatred, whatsoever. But what I think was almost a trick was that the Stasi is now considered something that was not related to the real politicians, to the SED. They've been stylized as a state within the state. But the people responsible for it was in the party, it is not something happened just because some nasty guys wanted to have some work. They managed to separate these perceptions, and that, for me, is surprising. And for that reason, a lot of people have no problems in the PDS, because the awful Stasi we have now targeted, and we are somewhere else, we had a different goal. **But time goes by. I think it's pretty sad. Some of them still work, you know, they still have their little microphones, they have no one to report to write but they still make their little files, in private. I think it's irrational.**

There were three possible ways the Stasi could deal with a person. The first level was where there was a simple file. The material collected was things like if a person had applied to go on a trip abroad or if somebody at work filed a complaint, it would go in the folder, as would any contact with Westerners. That was collected, and if that got too much, if there was too much indication of activity, they would start a second level or degree of more active surveillance. And then the third degree, the aim of that was to actively get the person to give up his or her oppositional activity by whichever means, the actual, mental destruction of the person, breaking a person's will power and get them into line again, or get them expelled from the country, or in some cases, the physical destruction of a person.

**My more recent files were destroyed, either entirely destroyed or shredded, maybe they'll find something when they try to puzzle the shredded files together. But it is also possible to find information about yourself in other people's files. The Stasi didn't quite understand how the opposition worked in networks. Their idea was that there had to be leader figures that led the movement because they didn't understand other forms of organisation. So quite often in other people's files, you could find something about yourself.**

**I had the impression that as a member of the women's movement, we weren't taken as seriously as the men's groups. It was only later on that they started putting together a file on the women's movement in Erfurt.**

The difference between the situation in the former Czechoslovakia and the GDR, was that in the GDR dissidents were very isolated, because previous generations of people who had a problem with the system or who were more liberal-minded, had left to go to the west, whereas in Czechoslovakia that wasn't possible, so you had a much stronger tradition of dissent and a much stronger theoretical basis. The other interesting thing is that the whole intelligentsia in East Germany – intellectuals, authors, artists – were totally pampered by the State. They got privileges that the rest of East Germans didn't have, they could, for instance, travel to the West, so they would have never really stood by the dissidents because they had their own interests to pursue, in a way, different from the dissidents. That made it special as well, and different from, say, Czechoslovakia.

**You need to separate between a classical and a post-totalitarian dictatorship. East Germany is an example of a post-totalitarian dictatorship. In a classical dictatorship you have a junta at the top with a border around it and then the suppressed people, so that the line between those in power and those suppressed is horizontal, cutting the people in two categories. In a post-totalitarian dictatorship, the division between suppressors and suppressed is within each person, and that's why it makes sense that they had a file on Honecker, because he as much as anybody else he was somebody who was suppressed and oppressing, and the ideology was the thing that was actually oppressing, and everybody was both suppressed and oppressing.**

The voices of those who inhabited these conspiracy dwellings, we need them too. An approach that is immediately to moralizing or judgemental will close their mouths forever, of course, so we need to get these different perspectives, these different voices. The result of a criminalizing approach is that we don't get the insights we need to really understand how the system worked and how different people involved have been, and you need to know this in order to see the dangers in different contexts, situations and societies. You will be more successful in prevention if you adopt an approach different than to punish perpetrators.

**The worst thing that can happen to the victims is that they do something now, which they later come to understand is an imitation of the acts of their perpetrators. You cannot defend a pluralistic democracy by excluding those who violate it.**

*My work for the party was not political. It was only work.*

If you are talking about perpetrators and victims in this situation, there are 17 million victims and 17 million perpetrators. The Stasi could never have operated without the informers, people that were not part of the Stasi but that informed on others. And that could potentially be anyone. As much as there wasn't 17 million perpetrators, there wasn't 17 million victims. It is not possible to talk in these categories. It is not helpful. I am very wary of any tendency to classify all East Germans as criminals or for supporting or being part of the State.

*My problem was more with the Party than with the Stasi. I feel that all the instances of people telling on other people went through the Party rather than the Stasi. The Stasi only came into the picture once somebody had told on a friend, or colleague, or neighbour or whatever. There were party committees in every company and in each factory that would criminalize certain behaviours and pass the information on to the Stasi. I was a party member, and my conflict was more with the Stasi, because I was being punished for certain things that I did, I was constantly in a conflict with the Party. It is important not to forget that the Stasi was actually only an instrument of the Party. The Party was the main actor, as it were. And also, in this discussion, it is really important to be aware that the reason we're not talking about the Party so much is because all their files were shredded or disappeared.*

I think that the legal system failed to deal with the perpetrators, particularly the party members, apart from in very few cases. In my circle, I knew of only one person who was persecuted, and he was charged with possessing a weapon, which was really nothing. The reason West German society was so lenient against these people was that they had a bad conscience as they had also been lenient to the Nazi regime, so now to be stricter with the SED might not have looked so good.

**Why East German history? Why not German history? What happened in 1990 was that the West was imposed upon us as a system and this was not a voluntary or equal process. Although there were initial ideas to create a new constitution, this never happened, and so the West German constitution was imposed on the East. And now this strange thing is going on where CDU ministers are almost doing what people were asking for back then, for some things from the GDR to be taken onboard and integrated into the new system, but that's happening now coming from a different direction, and at the same time to always criminalize and devalue the East, this I think is not helpful. If you're going to look at the history, you must look at the history of East and West both, and things that went wrong in both systems, and also this thing where always when you talk of the east, you bring up the Stasi, which is not always helpful. My personal standpoint is that if there are crimes committed by the Stasi they should be persecuted through criminal law and the criminal courts, and that should certainly be done, but to always bring up the Stasi whenever they run out of other things to talk about or to blame, and to criminalize my life, because he was part of the system, is not helpful.**

*We didn't have much of East German history in school. Maybe once, for two hours, in tenth grade, and that was it. They didn't say much. I think they brought us to a GDR museum in Leipzig and they were, like, look at this. I think that was about it. And maybe once they played us a speech by Honecker, and we were all laughing about his voice and that was it. It was more of a joke. It was not much at all. I wish there would have been more.*

**I wasn't aware of the extent of surveillance in the GDR. But the Stasi was very much present in the debate in West Germany, as one of the key secret services. The Stasi issue, from a West-German perspective, had to do more with spies and a cold war set up. Although we were aware of political prisoners, and torture methods of interrogation, but we had no idea of the incredible extent of the network of informal co-workers.**

Now it is a very pressing topic for an important minority in the east. When I go to visit my family, in the west, it is not a pressing issue to them, because there have never been any contacts. My family doesn't know anybody who has been a spy, and they don't know anybody who has been under surveillance. And very often there is a lack of understanding. What surprises me is the attitude of a majority of people now, after the end of the GDR, having made this experience of real conspiracy dwellings or imagined ones, having been subjected to spying, surveillance, or suffered from the very possibility of it and not taking risks, to what sort of nonchalant attitude a lot of people take to the debate we have now around the information, the right to self-determination, debates around our home minister's wishes to come up with incredible high-tech new means of control, internet control, email control, etc. etc. in order to combat terrorism. There is always a reason – combatting counter-revolution in the GDR, now combatting terrorism, and suddenly the State is only ready to give up its normative basis in order to prevent the enemy to be successful.

**Most people were aware that it was a not a good idea to deal with the Stasi, that it was something they should try and stay away from, but the actual extent of what would happen to them if they came into conflict with the Stasi wasn't clear to people. One example of this is the uprising of 1953 when a lot of people were arrested under very Stalinist conditions still, and so because the country was still very Stalinist, at this time, these people that were arrested, they never spoke to anybody, not even to their families, about what had happened to them when they were arrested and this was the social trauma, this is one of those examples of social trauma where they aren't aware of how much an incident has affected a country.**

*If you hung out with specific boys, and artists, it was always a discussion, who was this guy? What was his car doing over there? Stories from people, but I was never – at least I say this now – I don't think I was ever scared. We made jokes about it. Oh, it's so important what we're talking about over the phone, hopefully someone is listening, that we were not just talking for us, but for eternity. If they tape record everything you say, 80 percent, 90 percent might be totally useless bullshit. But I cannot remember how it was, really. It's just what we're left with – memories, histories, stories. And you repeat these stories, and you think it is how it was, but it could have been very different. I don't know. I don't really want to go into these feelings or how it really was. **But they didn't break me.***

*I didn't know about the network, or the dimensions of the network. I didn't know about that. The only thing I knew, from my parents, from friends, was that the Stasi was not something that you should be involved with. You wouldn't say that out loud, but I didn't know anybody who wanted to be involved. Or once, at university, I knew somebody who was educated for the Stasi. It was a technical job, of course, but he had a long record also, parents in the military, grandparents, all communists, whatever, so, he was the only one who actually said he was going to work for the Stasi.*

**Now we know about the 500 conspiracy dwellings in Erfurt, but talking to people makes it clear that a lot of people have been aware of it, so we have not only the 500 actual conspiracy dwellings, it would also be interesting to complement that map with another map of all those flats where neighbours and others thought, where there were rumours going around, that there's something going on there, this must be a Stasi meeting point. Because I have talked to quite a number of people who looked at the files and registers and who were very surprised not to find certain addresses, because they always thought, that this must be some sort of Stasi flat, and now they realize it wasn't. I have the impression that for people like me, from the West, it was a total surprise – 500 conspiracy dwellings! – whereas some people are surprised at how many flats and houses are not on the list. And so it would be interesting to do research on the one hand, on the people suspecting that something like this exists, undercutting the credibility and the legitimacy of the system, but on the other hand, imagining they are everywhere would intimidate people from joining the opposition, and it's interesting to see when it changed, so for example, the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig or the Thursday demonstrations in Erfurt , that was always the case, people were watching, how many protesters are on the streets, and suddenly the mystique of the omnipresent state and the Stasi collapsed. As soon as they couldn't demonstrate that they were in control of everything then very suddenly they lost almost all control.**

The perspective is that everyone could be an informer, every flat could be part of this network of surveillance.

*I was about 16 or 17, and I actually... I had a lot of aunts and uncles in the West, and we were in contact, so I knew the other side. We also watched a lot of West-German TV, partly because we couldn't get East-German TV – it's behind the Thuringia forest – but it was very easy for us to watch Bavarian television, but not as easy to watch East-German television, so I had a very different view of the world, and at school I got East-German socialist philosophy, and in the evenings, when I got back home, I watched West-German television with, I don't know, some show or other, but still, I had the feeling that this is my country, and I don't have to feel that it's really good in every sense, but still, all in all, it's ok, because it is a country where everybody is more or less equal, got more or less the same money, everything was, in a way, very good, or it should be good in the near future. But then in high school, we got into contact with alcohol, when we were maybe 16, and once, we was in a youth club and – I don't know if you know Udo Lindenberg, he was a very famous West-German singer, very popular in the 70s, and he was invited to the GDR to have a concert in Berlin, and after this invitation, he wrote a song called, "A Special Train to Pankow." The melody was from a famous American saxophonist, Glenn Miller, a very famous melody that you could easily sing, and he wrote a song, for the melody, about him and Erich Honecker, saying that Erich Honecker, he is also a nice cowboy, he likes to listen to the western radio at the toilet, and so on – it was a really disrespectful song about Honecker, and the GDR immediately said, you're no longer*

*invited, you can't come to Berlin, and at school I asked my philosophy teacher, why the State of GDR does that to a simple songwriter, why don't you just say, it was a good joke, please come, because he wasn't really disrespectful to Honecker in a bad sense, you could have easily said, ok, I laughed about that, it's your sense of humour, ok, but they took it very seriously. So we talked about it at school, and the teacher said, what does the class say about Honecker, and the class said, oh, no, it's impossible to speak to our head of state like that, that you can talk like that is impossible, so after 45 minutes of that lesson, I said, ok, Udo Lindenberg is a very bad person, forget about it, everybody has the same point of view, and so we left the class, but obviously in my head, it wasn't finished. So in the evening we met to go to the youth club, and, of course, there was beer, and we drank a little bit too much of it, and I started singing that song, and two friends of mine, they also sang it, because they have all heard it on the radio, everybody listened to western radio, privately, and it was a nice song, a really nice song, and we got, well, somebody must have heard us, it might have been the manager of the youth club, it might have been somebody else, some youth secretary, and he or she felt inclined to go to somebody else and say, I listened to some really drunk youths, probably from the high school, singing this song, and I had to tell you, and then this person told somebody else, I don't know how many in between, but the next day, we still felt dizzy from the beer, and somebody, a school friend of mine, he's mother was in the party, and he said, I heard you sang that song yesterday, somebody heard it, and I guess you are in trouble, and we had to go to the school master and say, ok, ok, we're sorry, and promise to do something really good know, I don't know, but it took only another minute, and somebody else went into the school, into the school master, and told us, ok, you, you and you, out of class, into this office, and there was the school master, who was also my philosophy teacher, with whom I had the discussion the day before, and behind her was sitting another man, very quietly, and she didn't give us any chance to say anything, so then this other man said, ok, I would like to talk to you privately, if you, you and you come with me, we'll talk, and so I went in last, my friends went in before me, and they came out, and then I went in, and he told me he was from the Stasi and that he heard we sang that song, and he understood that we were young and obviously something like that can happen, and that he understood that we obviously were not from the wrong side, we were not the enemy, you probably just got overwhelmed by the alcohol, ok, but, he said, if you sit in a youth club, you might hear others telling things – not singing stupid songs – but telling things they heard from the enemy, trying to weaken the socialist philosophy or whatever, trying to get people to think bad things about socialism, and if I hear something like that, if I could then imagine going to him and telling him about it, because he has a very difficult job to do and he knows that there is a lot of enemies around, and television, trying to get us off the right path, if I could tell him it would help him catch the really bad boys, not me, but the really bad boys. I was really afraid, so I told him, of course, if I heard something I would immediately tell him, about traitors to the socialist idea, I would tell him, he looks like this, and we spoke for about 10 minutes and in the end he said, ok, I can accept that, here's a little piece of paper, please sign here that you will never speak of this discussion, so I signed it, and went out, and he said, ok, from us you will have no more trouble. I was really relieved. Nice, I got over that. And still, the school master tried to fire us from school, but we were in our final year, and the other teachers said, we can't just fire three good students in their final year like that.*

**It's a huge problem, and interesting to what an extent it seems to be invitation for a lot of people to escape from the burdens of autonomy. To pass on the burden of judgement to an institution. It makes life more complicated on the daily level. We have to keep the camouflage and to play the role, but it spares you from having to face the really troubling questions of judgement, passing it on instead, giving up responsibility to the Stasi. But I think it is interesting to see the very special relationships that were developed between Stasi agents and unofficial co-workers or informers. It is not just the abstract institution that is required – the State, or the Stasi – but also the personal connection to that one guy, really in charge of them. I think it is interesting to see what very special, intense relationship, loaded with a strange kind of affection, was developed. All the loyalty and affection they withdrew from the people with which they actually lived – their colleagues, friends and family members – were projected to this guy.**

People used to be really worried about someone knowing too much about us, and abusing it, whereas nowadays, talking to students of mine, the younger generation, they seem to be more worried about living a life where nobody notices them, seeing

then the Internet not as a danger because they're leaving traces, other people could gather and put together. They see the Internet as a chance, just hoping that enough people look at their websites, and they want to leave traces, they are so driven by a certain kind of – I don't mean it nastily, but a certain kind of exhibitionism.

I had contact with the Stasi, both as a perpetrator and as a victim. As a person who had qualified to travel, he also worked as an unofficial co-worker and informer. But my task was not so much to observe particular people, but to report on special things that happened. As the director of a State distribution system of supermarkets I had to report every four weeks on the supply-demand situation and on the general situation in the shops. There are six pieces of information on particular people in his Stasi files, but three of the pieces of information they had listen was not actually from him, and the three other cases were instances where the head of human resources asked him to give a report on the character of three people in order to find out if they were trustworthy enough to be sent abroad, and he compiled these reports thinking they were for human resources, but in the end, they ended up with his Stasi file. So, his Stasi files mainly compile his reports from his travels, and also reports by my contact officer about their meetings at a "conspiracy dwelling," and other meetings held out in the open, in a meadow or in a forest. My first contact with the Stasi was in 1965. He worked in an export company so he was privileged and allowed to travel to the west. He was working in Suhle, which is famous for the production of hunting weapons. And when I was allowed to take my first business trip to the West, that's when he had his first contact with the Stasi. A stranger invited me to have a beer with him one night at a restaurant. And he said that in order to protect peace, and all the other arguments that they had, he asked him to observe or watch his colleagues who were also travelling to the west with him. And in particular they were interested in any non-permitted contact, either his colleagues contacting people whom they were not authorized to contact, or vice versa, other people contacting one of his colleagues. But a colleague of his had had the same conversation with the Stasi officer the night before, and he now saw him having a conversation with the same man, so he asked him if he had been asked to watch him, in the same way he had been asked to watch him. So the third person was a driver, and they asked the third guy too, if he had been asked to watch them, and when he said yes, then all three of them agreed that they would talk to each other and to decide together what to tell the Stasi officers. It was commonly expected that after each visit to non-communist countries you had to write a report of about three paged when you came back. And part of this report had usually to do with the border control, how they were treated by the West-German border officials, and what questions they were asked. And another thing they had to report about was at the hotel, if anything noteworthy happened there, if their baggage was controlled or checked, and if there was any contact. As long as you were travelling with friends it was not a problem, because you could always talk to one another and agree on what to tell the Stasi officers, but if you were travelling with strangers or people you didn't know so well, as for example when you were travelling to fairs, you had to be more careful about how you behaved in the west and what you said. When he travelled to the trade fair in Frankfurt in 1979 an old friend that he'd known since the 1950s tried to contact him on the phone there. And some of his colleagues found out that he had received this phone call. He didn't mention this in his own report. And a few days later a Stasi officer approached him and asked why he hadn't mentioned that incident. And because of this contact that hadn't been permitted he was no longer eligible for international travel and he wasn't allowed to work in the export company.

The error of the thinking of people from the outside is that the GDR was a State based on fear. That was not the case. It was more of a patronizing State. It was a dictatorship, but not a terrorist dictatorship. A terrorist State is a State where acts of violence are carried out that are entirely arbitrary, where you don't know who it's going to hit, and when and where. In East-Germany this was not the case. You knew how to behave, and if you behaved in certain ways, and complied with certain rules, you wouldn't be affected. So, in that sense, it wasn't a terrorist state. Even though in some periods, in the 50s, when it was still more Stalinist, that was slightly different, but the times we have experienced, weren't as bad, weren't as unpredictable. The only experience of terror for most people was the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1953. It is always difficult to describe to people how the system worked. There were a lot of things going on between the lines, as it were. For example, when I was at school, and got my school report at the end of the year, there would be phrases that you wouldn't recognize as such but there was always something that would describe the political attitude of a person so in his report there would be something like "has yet to find a clear attitude towards our socialist system". This was implying that he had not fully understood that he was perhaps a little bit stupid, but once he'd come to understand everything will be fine. So, if you were thinking differently, if you had a different opinion, the initial reaction of the State would be to say that he just hasn't fully understood yet. But if you didn't learn, then you were in trouble. You would become the enemy, and then you'd have to deal with repression in the sense that you may not be allowed to study, or pursue a certain career, and then you'd have to arrange your life within those constrictions, but it needs to be said that it wasn't as constricted as it was made out to be, so a lot of people were almost too quick to comply with certain regulations. So, if you chose this path, of not having a career, that part of your life was cut off, but at least you had a certain amount of freedom, that you could live more freely and think more freely. You were aware that you were being under surveillance but wouldn't let that stop you from trying to achieve something.

**There wasn't any material power or status in the GDR. I earned less than a person in charge of one supermarket or restaurant in the trading organization that I was the director of. And so political power was a lot more important. For example, I couldn't sack somebody. I would have had to re-employ this person, be it in a really lowly position, as a dishwasher, but I had to, as there was no unemployment. So, the power I had was political. I could do somebody damage, as a small person, by telling on someone else. It wasn't possible to threaten somebody with unemployment. To damage somebody was only possible to have someone transferred to a much lower position.**

*I did see it as part of my work. Initially when I worked in foreign trade, obviously it came with the job, and I recognized and accepted that as part of the job. Later, when I was working for this trading organization, my role was almost a positive one, of informing the people in charge of how problematic the situation was. And informing them and making them aware that if things didn't change, that would be a problem. Sometimes I would even be reprimanded for drawing such brutal and negative picture of the situation.*

*The interesting thing for me is that when I got kicked out of my first job, because of the Stasi, I had to retrain as a lawyer. And in my previous position, working for the trade organisation, I wouldn't have been able to work in the West after Die Wende, but in my new position, as a lawyer, it was possible for me, after retraining, to find work in the West. But the problem, now, is that he's Stasi files aren't victim files. One of my co-workers was the daughter of a bank director and this bank director had defrauded some money. Normally, this would be a material, criminal problem, but in East-Germany, because it was perceived as being damaging to the State, it also became a political problem and therefore was relevant to the Stasi. During this court case, I had to make sure, as the boss of the daughter, to give the daughter so much work, or keep her so busy, that she couldn't take part in or attend the court case. I didn't have so many material advantages from working for the Stasi, but it came with his job and who wouldn't have liked to travel to the west in those days?*

**If you had a club for breeding rabbits on the birthday of the GDR they would sit down and write a little statement saying now they would breed an extra 3000 rabbits to contribute to the great nation of the GDR. Everybody did this knowing it was stupid, but this was their way of buying some sort of peace and quiet.**

*The power of the Stasi was that you never knew whether you were imagining more than there actually was or less than there was. And they played a lot on childhood fears, of something outside, you don't know what it is and you don't know how big it is, and this worked really well.*

*One of the leading officers from Gera once visited me at home. He introduced himself to my wife as Hr Muller. He wasn't at home at this particular time, so a couple of weeks later the same officer appeared again and now he introduced himself as Hr Meyer. The unofficial co-workers were instructed by the Stasi to keep absolute confidentiality. They weren't even allowed to talk to their wives about this, or tell their wives that they were working for the Stasi. So because of this issue with the name – Muller/Meyer – my wife of course knew that something strange was going on. Mostly, though, it wasn't a problem to keep it a secret from my wife as apart from this once they never came to visit him at the house, and I never kept regular working hours so it wasn't suspicious if I came home a little bit later. And eventually I did tell my wife, already in the 60s. I told her I was working for the Stasi but I never told her about anything that I actually told the Stasi, or what exactly I was doing for them, just for my own safety, because she might tell somebody at work and then that might get back to the authorities, so it was for my own safety it was important not to tell of any details.*

*The concept of transmoral conscience helps to understand a lot of things that happened in the Nazi times as well, and helps you understand that so many people felt no remorse, because they immunized their moral conscience by declaring that they had to sacrifice their moral conscience for the greater good of the State, the Idea, the Movement, or whatever. This works even more easily, when you water it down to the scale of the Stasi crimes and everyday life in the GDR. You spy on people, you intrude on their privacy, you win their trust, and you abuse it, but at the same time you tell yourself, these are the enemies, these are the dangerous guys, and I do this for the greater good of the State.*