

The Third Archive Art Detective - Akte KW

| | |
|--|---|
| Title | The Third Archive Art Detective - Akte KW |
| Subtitle | Not provided. |
| Lead-in / Abstract | Erfurt - a city in the former German Democratic Republic is the focus of this cross-disciplinary collaborative, visual arts project that sets out to collect visual evidence of a decade of Stasi surveillance methods by documenting the 500 conspiratorial meeting places that were found in a copy of a lost file at the Central Archive for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic, Berlin. |
| Participants and speakers | Clausmeyer, Tina (NL) Skelton, Pam (GB) |
| Short biography of participants | Art Detective is a cross-disciplinary group comprising on artists, Pam Skelton, England, and Tina Clausmeyer, Netherlands, environmental health researcher Achim Heinrich, Germany and sociologist and historian Heinz Mestrup, Germany, that sets out to discover what has become of the Stasi meeting places known as KW's. |
| Full text | <p>Using the Akte KW (KW files) we set out to unveil all KW's in Erfurt, a medium sized city in the former GDR. We use the city as an example: as a case study of Stasi surveillance methods in the 80s and to visualise an architectural map of surveillance. This could suggest the Stasi as a State authority in fear of the people and operating outside of logical spheres of behaviour, in a space, where fear and acute distrust motivate governance.</p> <p>A key member of our project team, Achim Heinrich, attracted the attention of the Stasi because of his active role as an ecologist in a local environmental group in the 1980's in Erfurt. To Stasi methodology, this was critically observed as 'underground activity', which had the immediate potential to easily form an oppositional working group that discredited the environmental politics of the GDR. Achim Heinrich was therefore suspected to having carried out political dissident activities. As with all</p> |

individuals under Stasi surveillance and suspicion, a substantial file was built up on him, which after German unification he was able to access at the Central Office for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former GDR, in Berlin. Since then he has been researching - as a case study - into the working methods of Stasi control patterns and repressive state structures, particularly in relationship to the environmental group, in which he was an activist. Drawing on his research, knowledge and experiences of the city in which he lived and worked, and in cooperation and support with the archive of the outpost Erfurt, we have recently accessed the files that locate all the KW's operational in the last decade of the regime (1980 - 1989) and are finally in a position to navigate the city in relation to its history.

The architecture of the city becomes both, the material and receptacle of our investigation, where its buildings and spaces will be examined as evidence of semi-enduring, three-dimensional inscriptions of past events. Together they will form a geographical grid of diverse architectural spaces that attempts to mirror the disciplined society, the complete security apparatus at a time when its surveillance strategies were arguably at their height. The conspiratorial venues here referred to as 'meeting places' are therefore neither fiction nor fabrication, but a reality that frames the history of East German cities today. Historical data will be given a visual identity by remembering and absorbing these blank, often banal and ordinary spaces into a form of memory work that see the former free-floating net of control. The urban geography of Erfurt's cityscape at that time is as important for us as it is 'now', almost 15 years later. The meeting place, as an architectural site of cryptographic space becomes therefore an indicator of the multiple layers of history that mark out the progression of a city's historical/cultural/socio-political meaning.

Source MaterialThe 'meeting places' were the locus of a highly refined system of observation and control. Stasi-officials and their unofficial informers (IM) would meet in a designated place at a specified time on a regular basis. Here, the unofficial co-workers/informers would be instructed by their Stasi officer to spy on colleagues, family and/or friends. Their reports often contained banal but potentially personal incriminatory information on targeted individuals who were under surveillance. For these clandestine meetings, the meeting places were situated throughout the cities in civic and domestic spaces, in hotels, café's, homes, cars, public buildings, offices and objects that were established specifically for the purpose of meetings etc. It was as if the city was a receptacle for these secret locations, 'blank spaces' absorbed by the urban geography.

The Files KW

We are now in possession of many copies of the existing dossiers of KW meeting places. A fascinating picture begins to appear even after a cursory glance of the dossiers, which have only just been made available to us at the time of our recent fieldtrip to Erfurt in July 2004. However, here are some preliminary results. Each KW had its own file with information relating to what kind of accommodation it comprised. Groundplans and drawings of the flat/room etc. were included in the files as well as sometimes indicating furniture and fittings. Routes of access and directions or approaches to the building were also provided, some files containing extremely detailed information. Sometimes they even contained photographs - worthy of note - that illustrated the neighbourhood in which the individual flat or building was located. The number of photographs included in a file varied considerably. One file included around 30 images. It was standard practice that a contract would be drawn up between the Stasi and the occupier. These hosts or landlords were recruits to the 'Firm' (the nickname for the Stasi) to provide safe and reliable Stasi accommodation. Here, a Stasi official would meet with his IM's (unofficial co-workers, informers) on a regular basis. The 'host' was nevertheless instructed to provide a pleasant, comfortable and clean environment for their 'guests'. In Stasi terminology, they were called IMK/KW, unofficial informers, who only collaborated with the Stasi in the sense that they provided a conspiratorial venue for their meetings. Before vacating the premises the host was also responsible for providing refreshments for the meetings, savoury snacks, drinks (alcohol) and tobacco for the men or tea and cakes, for the women.

Each KW was given a pseudonym, although a fair number of KW's inadvertently shared either a similar name or even the same name. Individual names were often used i.e. Siegfried, Hertz, Müller or Rose. Rose and Müller were the most popular choices and appear several times in our files. Sometimes a pseudonym may refer to a landmark location such as local bookshop close by, i.e. 'Buch'. Or perhaps the pseudonym would borrow a part of the street name, for example in Blumenstrasse, the name 'Blume' (flower). The road, Juri-Gagarin-Ring used the pseudonym 'Ring' on three occasions for three different KW's. The main international Hotel Cosmos that was also situated in Yuri-Gagarin-Ring possessed the pseudonym 'Cosmos', the

same name as the hotel. No marks for originality here. Plenty of KW's in the nearest surrounding were using the same name, too, which of course could create a great deal of confusion.

In some instances it appears that KW's were strategically positioned. The Juri-Gagarin-Ring again provides an interesting proposition. Built in the 70's this major thoroughfare is a ring-road dividing the old town from the suburbs. It is also the main access route in and out of the city. The Ring is predominately but by no means exclusively made up of mid to high-rise blocks of flats. Its significance as a series of look-outposts is convincing as views from a KW would have provided excellent views of passing traffic, especially the ones positioned at the corner of cross roads and other intersections. Perhaps this reflects other models of urban control such as Haussmann's project for his development of 19th century Parisian Boulevards. In addition an extremely high number of KW's are located on this ring road. To be more precise, perhaps six or eight KW's can be found in one tower block, with two or three neighbouring blocks also contaminated.

Erfurt is a pretty medieval town and the regional centre with a population of over 196,000. It contains many important listed buildings and it can easily be described as picturesque. Situated close to Weimar, Erfurt is the capital of Thuringia, and has again become a popular tourist destination. One can take a guided tour around the old town, where knowledgeable guides elaborate on the cities history, architecture, trades and guilds, but hardly a word about its more recent history, the GDR. In fact an alternative tour could soon be arranged to accommodate the towns KW meeting places, which are also amply distributed throughout the old town. A good example of a KW in the old town is in 'Grosse Arche'. It is the 16th century 'Haus zum Sonneborn' or Wedding House, that according to the files was occupied in its entirety by the Stasi unbeknown to the locals even now. This famous town house is the main Registry Office and apparently always has been.

The photographs

The meeting places KW were distributed throughout most of the districts of Erfurt. These can be described as 'the City Centre locations, Yuri Gagarin Ring, Erfurt North, Roter Berg and Erfurt South East. The files that we have grouped together and have begun to work with are all the files that contain original photographs of the KW and its environments. Some of the Stasi photographs are truly impressive both for their technical and creative sensibilities as well as their historical significance, often leading to strong visual impressions of a former East German town. At present, we only have photocopies of these photographs. We have though made a request to the Records of the State Security Service of the Former GDR for an estimate of the cost for making high quality copies of a selection of original photographs, (funding permitting). These images are significant in the sense that they often show the exact location of the KW. A photograph may have arrows to indicate a window, or a cross to identify the entrance. Some of the photos while shot on a wide-angle lens are composites cleverly put together to recreate a panorama of the site.

Information and Communication technologies Old and new methods of surveillance

What are the conspiratorial meeting places of today's western world in relation to nation states and surveillance? In the capitalist west, information and communication technologies transform information into economic value. Here we talk about information abundance, open networks, uncertainty, and trust and risk societies. In controlled discipline societies such as the former GDR and the Soviet Union we may consider contrary and binary oppositions such as, information deficit, closed networks, certainty and fear. When referring to the conspiratorial meeting places, how can the three-dimensional grid of located KW's be transformed and translated from their physical presence in the urban architecture of the city to that of a vast collection of information data into the non-linear network dynamics of the Internet? Can the physicality of the KW be adapted to the so-called Internet architecture of cell-locations? By mapping the power structures and control mechanisms of the Stasi in a real physical space of the 21st century, can one further pursue or transform its evaporated presence (since German unification) into a reoccurring, but asymmetric and dynamic network of cryptographic spaces. Since the conspiratorial meeting place was embedded within the architecture of the city, each space was clearly defined in its physical terrain, named, carefully documented and clearly observed by one assigned Stasi-official. With the emergence of a new information and surveillance technology in the early 90s, the methods of

surveillance have opened up to an unlimited, dynamic and less controllable so-called cryptographic space, where new modes of surveillance and counter-surveillance can be carried out, with the Internet as its new home. Control and surveillance strategies have therefore left the physical terrain of border, the meeting-place, and transformed itself to the borderless, non-physical gigantic cryptographic space of the electronic world, the Internet. The invisibility of electronic data flows makes it even impossible for the inexperienced individual to detect the all-observing eye of this new surveillance apparatus that has emerged itself online. Strangely enough the Internet is often referred to as the postmodernist dream - a yet uncontrollable, non-hierarchical space enabling individuals to meet and communicate in secret as well as to hide and isolate information.

However, it cannot be denied that even now in the age of Information and Communication Technologies cities still remain as important meeting places and power centres which structure all economies and technologies. These real spaces provide the traditional reference points where human 'management' reside and where the time consuming GDR Big Brother methods of information management and control took place. And yet some Big Brother tactics are openly sought after now as popular entertainment (seen so frequently as live TV) which has embraced the rush of celebrity that accompanies being watched and hits the box offices with the highest audience ratings ever.

Cryptographic architecture as conceived in its physical presence has supported and created a most intriguing net of public surveillance in the GDR. Here, each conspiratorial meeting place was clearly labelled (even though with duplicated pseudonyms), and could be perceived in its singular appearance. In comparison the cryptography of the electronic landscape cannot be perceptible as a whole. Comparing asymmetric surveillance and networking as it is made possible via the Internet to the totally structuralized and bureaucratic Stasi methodology of the most confined control apparatus could become another challenging area to explore.

A Third Archive

The collection of information and writing of endless reports about the KW's was always carried out in a standardized way using filing and archiving procedures. With the emergence of cryptography as the science of information security, cryptographic writing enables information to be hidden in storage or transit. This may not only change the role of the traditional archive but also the way information is gathered, changed, distributed and archived. In the linguistic sense, a whole new agglomeration of words has spread out where information becomes data and is gathered, sent or distributed as the archive becomes storage space and is saved, filled up or deleted. In what had once been a publicly closed and secret archive, Akte KW becomes public and aims to represent its own research outcomes as a territory, an archive, but where data privacy concerning individuals will be ensured and protected since this is not a site of confinement.

Research Directions

Using the Stasi files as our principle referencing material we intend to map our target city and in a pragmatic way, we will investigate how control and information networks have manifested itself in the GDR: where and why the numerous meeting places were created and situated, how secrecy was maintained and managed and how cryptographic space has been documented over a decade of time. While mapping the entire city, Akte KW is interested in considering recent methods of surveillance and their impact on contemporary cultures and societies: how civil rights are contested today, how ordinary citizens may, in so-called 'democratic societies' become the extensions of the police apparatus.

Art Detective is interested in extending participation to artists and theorists, who are particularly sensitised to issues of state control.

Note:

The Third Archive, Akte KW project is based at London College of Communications in the Photography and the Archive Research Centre. Access to this information has been made possible by the support of the Outpost in Erfurt for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic and the State Commissioner of the State of Thuringia for the Records of the State Security