to get out of the conundrum imposed by using secret-informant-generated evidence by planting evidence to frame the person under investigation. The case of Thomas Klein, which I discussed in chapter 7 (p. 386) offers a case in point.

The third reason why legal closure was rare is that the GDR underwent progressive legalization throughout its history. The notions of substantive rationality came increasingly in conflict with a legal-formal rationality that emphasized proper process. In the 1980s the GDR still had no system of administrative justice or a multitier legal review system. So it would be quite premature to speak of a "rule of law" or "due process." However, the GDR was also no longer simply an Unrechtsstaat (state operating with disregard for legal procedure), as much of the popular (cf. Kocka 1999, 17; Jarausch 1999, 63) German literature on the GDR claims. In fact, the officers I have spoken with have universally reported that the requirements for legal proof were becoming more stringent in the course of time. Stasi had its own legal department investigating the legal merit of cases submitted by operative departments for consideration of opening legal procedures. An interesting case that speaks to these higher requirements with regard to the quality of the evidence supplied is the Stasi’s sequestration of the inoperable printing press in its search of the environmental library (pp. 449–50) which was dismissed by the prosecutor as unusable evidence. There is no doubt that in the 1950s and or even in the 1960s nobody would have cared for such "details."

Decomposing people and groups

The second form of closure envisioned by the Stasi was called “decomposition” (Zersetzung). It is the method that garnered the attention of the public after the GDR’s fall. This is not surprising, because its practice fits Friedrich’s (1956) popular model of totalitarianism, which garnered a lot of renewed interest in the immediate aftermath of the GDR’s dissolution. The hallmark of his model is his emphasis on secret police terror as a constitutive element of the political institutions of a country. And in spite of the fact that Stalinist socialism cannot adequately be described as operating on the basis...

29. Arendt’s (1968) theory of totalitarianism is often lumped together with Friedrich’s because both try to identify totalitarianism as a state form and because both link totalitarianism to the practice of terror. However, what Arendt has in mind with the term terror are not concentration camps and gulags (even though they can be its consequence) but the institutionalization of repression. I have differentiated into absolute finality and monolithic intentionality in chapter 1. Arendt: “Terror is the realization of the law of movement; its chief aim is to make a race..."
of mass terror, the Stasi's technique of decomposition was certainly a form of terror. In contradistinction with the mass terror that early totalitarianism theories have in mind, however, this terror was wielded against a select few. Moreover, it did not work with physical threats to life and limb, but operated with social and psychological means of influence. Here is how the directive 1/76 describes it (in Gill and Schröter 1991, 389–90):

Measures of decomposition are to be directed toward the creation as well as the utilization and the amplification of contradictions and disagreements between inimical-negative forces through which they can be splintered, paralyzed, disorganized, and isolated, so that their inimical-negative actions including their effects can be preventively averted, essentially reduced or completely stopped. ... Measures of decomposition are to be used especially if the casework has yielded the prerequisite proofs for the commitment of a political crime or of an ordinary crime while the operative case cannot be closed through criminal procedures, because of political or political-operative reasons in the interest of realizing a higher social utility. (My emphasis)

The document continues to explain that measures of decomposition also have their place in operative casework where the opening of criminal procedures are quite likely, if decomposition can actually help to reduce the inimical-negative behavior.

What strikes me as noteworthy about this placement of decomposition as a means of control into a wider context of Stasi practices is the contradiction that emerges between the drive toward increasing legalization and the kind of legitimacy it affords on the one hand and the Leninist assertion of the absolute primacy of the party's current goal that has to be pursued if necessary through extralegal means on the other. Decomposition had no legal status as a regular sanction of the state, and if it did, it would have undermined the state's legitimacy. One could put it yet differently: decomposition is the attempt to generate power in a situation where it faces legal and reputational constraints; it is an attempt at politics (the destruction of a budding set of institutions) where its publicly available means are deemed insufficient; it is ultimately an attempt to reassert sovereignty in a nonsovereign environment. How so, becomes clearer as the directive becomes more concrete in spelling out the range of means envisioned (in Gill and Schröter 1991, 390–91):

Proven methods of decomposition to be used are:

- Systematic destruction of public reputation, standing, and prestige on the basis of the connection between true, verifiable, and discrediting as well as untrue, credible nondisprovable, and thus equally discrediting information;
- Systematic organization of professional and social failures to undermine the self-confidence of individual persons;
- generation of distrust and mutual suspiciousness within group, groupings, and organizations;
- generation respectively utilization and amplification of rivalries within groups, groupings, and organizations, with the help of the goal-directed use of personal weaknesses of individual members;
- busying groups, groupings, and organizations with their own internal problems with the goal to limit their inimical-negative actions;
- local and temporal disruption respectively limitation of mutual relationships between the members of groups, groupings, and organizations on the basis of valid legal norms, for example, through the utilization at their workplaces or the assignment of work at distant places.

Decomposition was above all a method to undermine the agency of supposed PUT carriers. To research and teach how this could be done, the Stasi's university in Potsdam–Eiche maintained chairs in "operative psychology" (Behnke and Fuchs 1995). In the introduction I argued that agency is enabled by the conjunction of understanding and resources. Since understandings are always social (as I have shown in chapter 3), one can accordingly analytically differentiate between three fundamental approaches to decomposition: epistemic manipulation, interference with social relationships, and resource deprivation. The first, the more prominently featured approach in the above quotation, encourages officers to interfere systematically with the spaces of validation of individuals or of groups as a whole. It proposes the manipulation of the quality and quantity of validations available to certain discursive, emotive, or kinesthetic understandings. It also offers as a means of manipulation the introduction of new understandings, which, if actualized, stand a chance to undermine the life of the group. Finally, it advocates the manipulation of processes of thinking through, working through, and practicing. The second aims at manipulating people's reputation and the level of trust characterizing their relationship. The deprivation of resources as a third method to limit or destroy agency comes more prominently to the fore in the last item on the list. The resources that matter here most are the time somebody has at his or her disposition to meet and to engage in action, the space that groups need to meet and/or to perform their action, and finally the means to communicate, that is, to projectively articulate actions across time and space. Interestingly, money or income played a more limited role in the power calculus of decomposition, because the state had to offer employment while essentials such as rent and basic foodstuffs were comparatively cheap. If one could live with little and had no children to feed and clothe, income ceased to be an existentially menacing point of intervention.
Using the sociology of understanding as a structuring device, I will provide in what follows a quick survey over Stasi's measures of decomposition.\textsuperscript{30} I do so keeping in mind that in the following section I will discuss the efficacy of these measures, which requires a theory of how they have operated. It should also be kept in mind that measures of decomposition were often not applied singly, one after another, but in combination and over a longer period of time.\textsuperscript{31} Certain individuals who were consistently identified by the Stasi as the leaders of PUT activities in Berlin—Wolfgang Templin, one of the founding members of the IFM, is a good example and so is Rainer Eppelmann, pastor of the Church of the Samaritan—were subjected to a whole barrage of such measures (Pingel-Schliemann 2002, 294–300; Eppelmann 1993, passim). Finally, it is important to keep in mind that not all members of particular groups were treated uniformly.\textsuperscript{32}

Among the tools of epistemic manipulation the easiest and most widely used strategy was to use the network of secret informants to recognize understandings selectively to affect their actualization in the desired direction. Where informants were unsuitable for such a task because the risks of blowing their cover were deemed too high, anonymous letters or phone calls could be used. Here are some characteristic examples. Informants were asked to raise security concerns among the activists, thus feeding other members' existing anxieties; they were asked to raise doubts about the group's ability to carry through a particular action, thus amplifying other activists' self-doubt, and all of that under the guise of care and thoughtfulness. The technique of selective recognition was also used at larger open events taking place in lecture halls, churches, or performance venues to steer the atmosphere in a desired direction, for example, by cheering the contribution of more party-friendly speakers while meeting those of critics with icy reserve. For this purpose Stasi used "social forces" (gesellschaftliche Kräfte), as this was far too risky a strategy for moles placed within the group. In

\textsuperscript{30} To some degree I will list measures of the secret police, which the officers themselves would not have labeled "decomposition." Yet even in their own use the concept was blurry. Following the Stasi's logic I will include in it all of their activities that intentionally interfered with activists' lives to end activities Stasi interpreted as PUT.

\textsuperscript{31} For an overview covering cases of variants of decomposition from all over the GDR, see Pingel-Schliemann 2002.

\textsuperscript{32} Although this may well have been intended in theory, the documents I have been able to consult do not suggest that this was a deliberately carried out strategy. Pingel-Schliemann (2002) argues that the level and intensity of means of decomposition unleashed against an individual were more dependent on the personal inclination of the individual case's leading officer and the willingness of superiors to support such measures. Based on my interviews and the cases I have studied in depth, I can only support this conclusion.
the simplest variant, these were prebriefed secret police cadets, in more complex ones (involving more coordinating preparations), comrades from the local party organizations were involved. Well-targeted recognition also be employed to amplify opposing opinions between fractions. In the group splitting I discussed in the last chapter, selective recognition was employed. In particularly disturbing cases, children were mobilized through pressures in school to influence their parents in a more conformist direction.

Secret informants also deliberately planted understandings that were likely to have strong resonances with preexisting, potentially destructive beliefs or desires. This was the idea behind combining existing with new information, amplifying the validity of the old in combination with lending credibility to the new. In this way, secret informants were used to feed ambitions, misgivings, or desires that could lead to friction; they were amplifying mistrust as well as aesthetic and moral discomfort of one member with another. Rumors were planted, most commonly about a person's link to the secret police, which was building on the group's hunches that they probably had moles in their midst. Another tried and tested means of planting understanding used especially against Protestant ministers, was spreading lies about persons' sexual life (e.g., suggesting infidelities, dissipation, or perversion) or about inappropriate levels of alcohol consumption. These were often backed by planted corroborating circumstantial evidence, such as retouched photographs, sexual toys, or strategically placed liquor bottles. The effect the Stasi aimed at with these measure was the destruction of the targeted person's self-confidence by creating shame-saturated events and/or the erosion of this person's authority in the eyes of other network members, thus ultimately destroying the operability of the network by depriving it of nodal figures.

Manipulating corroboration was also employed as a tool of decomposition. Most notably, the secret police managed to prevent people from obtaining a desired job or place at an educational institution. It arranged for people to be fired or dismissed. Stasi also influenced performance reviews, grading, and decisions to send somebody to continuing education or to an international conference. Decisions to have a manuscript for publication accepted or rejected or to award a particular research project to a particular person, could all be influenced by the Stasi in the interest of molding the targeted person's understandings. Where such measures caught their targets unaware of their entanglement in the Stasi's web of machination, they were meant to confirm doubt about their own abilities. Where people knew who was responsible for their misfortune, the "organization of failure" was meant to shape people's assessment of risk involved in party-critical activities. With the same intention, the Stasi often flaunted its presence in front of residences, on the way to and outside of events, to enhance movement members' fear that surveillance was inescapable. They tried to smother ac-
tions at people's doorsteps to confirm activists' anxieties that the Stasi knew everything and that they were ready to take action and certainly would not let them do what they wanted to do. If people could not be prevented from attending, the Stasi might also try to suffocate a wider participatory event by providing the majority of the audience. The political night prayers I discussed in the last chapter were, from the second one onward, strongly frequented by the Stasi's social forces attempting to corroborate the group's frustrations about not being able to conduct events as planned and to reach a wider audience in the GDR. Finally, the Stasi even broke into apartments, not just for searches, but to show that they could, with impunity, do as they pleased in this regard. All activists I spoke with found this measure particularly insidious because it confounded basic kinesthetic background understandings about the boundaries between inside and outside, control and contingency, safety and risk.

The manipulation of corroboration requires a high degree of environmental control. What helped the Stasi enormously in this respect were the means available to it in a centrally organized state oriented toward a common goal by the membership of most significant actors in the same Leninist vanguard party. Even though the Stasi had no formal authority to issue directives directly to other branches of the administration or the economy, it produced a formidable track record of organizing workplace pressures on dissidents. These were often facilitated by employees who were co-opted as secret informants and on whom the Stasi could rely as their own influence agents. The Stasi's success is also owed to the willingness of employees in their role as party members to cooperate with their comrades from the fabled secret police. After all, the Stasi could take for granted a basic agreement among comrades about the dangers of political diversion that were prominently discussed in general propaganda. A further reason for workplaces to comply with the Stasi's requests was that they did not want risky troublemakers among their ranks who could potentially endanger the productivity of their work collectives or attract unwanted party attention by creating a stir around some ideological issue. In either case this would have entailed blame of leaders for lax discipline or unsuccessful ideological work.

The control of resources available to dissidents offered another set of means for the Stasi to try their hand at decomposing dissidents and groups. A necessary resource for action is time, and so the Stasi tried to deprive activists of the time to engage in oppositional activities. Prison terms mark the extreme end of such measures. Keeping dissidents employed was at times also chosen as a means to keep them busy. The Stasi learned in the course of time that activists' underemployment in nondemanding jobs was detrimental to their intentions. It gave activists time to think and to prepare actions; and perhaps even worse: it left the activists with dissidence as their main career.
By contrast, meaningful employment offered at least some leverage for intervention. Time was also restricted on a smaller scale. The Stasi tried to keep activists from getting vacation time granted for days of planned actions or for the attendance of meetings in other cities. Another way to limit time availability was to let groups slide into excessive self-politics. Security concerns or tactics could potentially be discussed ad nauseam. Secret informants could delay the completion of tasks they were assigned. Activists were at times busied by yet other means. Stasi would place ads in periodicals in the name of a dissident with the offer to buy or sell particular kinds of goods with the effect that the targeted activist had to busy him or herself fending off buyers or sellers on the phone or worse even, at the door. A variant of this measure consisted in ordering repairs the dissident never thought of undertaking.

Space is as necessary as time to bring about action. After the party state's own performance venues became definitely closed to more critical programming after the Biermann denaturalization, the Stasi tried to dissuade activists from staging readings or concerts in their own apartments by fining them for the violation of city codes after repeated injunctions. Such fines could quickly reach the level of a monthly salary. The Stasi used the state's compact with the Protestant Church, as well as its network of secret informants among church officials, to induce local ministers to refrain from providing church spaces to dissident activities. Other resources that mattered were those the movement members needed to projectively articulate their actions, that is, especially means of communication and transportation but also the organizational capacities of the Protestant Church. As far as the technological means of communication are concerned, the Stasi had to balance two opposing rationales. On the one hand, severely curtailing dissidents' means of communication would have limited their ability to coordinate even such simple things as meetings. On the other hand, their use of telephones offered enhanced means of surveillance, more simple to carry out than, for example, bugging apartments. Apparently, the Stasi gave preference to the surveillance aspect and sometimes provided telephones to dissidents more quickly than to ordinary citizens. Stasi also monitored the personal correspondence addressed to activists. Knowing or at least suspecting comprehensive surveillance, they had to use personal couriers for important messages they did not want the Stasi to know anything about, or they had to begin encrypting what they transmitted via monitored channels. Finally, the secret police attempted to constrain the physical mobility of activists. I mentioned that many peace and civil rights movement members could, from a certain point on, no longer freely travel even to Eastern European countries. Activists working in the provinces could be prohibited from traveling to Berlin. In at least one case I have come across (Eppelmann 1993, passim), Stasi tried to immobilize a person by tampering repeatedly with his car.
In sum, then, the Stasi tried to influence almost all aspects critical to the formation of dissident institutions: understandings and their validation, resources necessary for action, the means of projectively articulating actions across space and time and with it the size and shape of networks. Given that these efforts were in theory rather encompassing, two questions emerge: "were there any limits to these efforts?" and "how effective were they in fact?" The following two sections provide some answers to these questions.

Were there limits to decomposition?

Particular officers and departments in the Stasi were not content with the means of decomposition provided to them through directive 1/76. Well documented is the case of section 4 (responsible for church affairs) of department XX of the Berlin district office of Stasi, which saw itself as a kind of PUT-fighting vanguard. Owing to security lapses and secret informant activities deemed problematic by superiors, it was investigated repeatedly by the ministry's "central group for analysis and information" (ZAIG) (BStU MfS-ZAIG 13748). Department XX of Stasi's Berlin district office was deeply steeped in efforts to control Berlin's ever-expanding peace, civil rights, and environmental movements. Among others, section 4 of department XX had taken on Rainer Eppelmann as well as his blues-mass collaborator and IFM member, Ralf Hirsch. During the 1980s many, perhaps even most PUT-casework leading officers, were frustrated about their difficulties with closing cases. After all, their ability to bring casework to an end was a formal bureaucratic yardstick for personal and organizational performance reviews even though it was quite clear that PUT cases were unlike others. As I mentioned above, the possibility to close cases through the initiation of legal procedures became increasingly blocked for political reasons. At the same time, however, the regular means of decomposition just described did not produce the desired effect either.

These frustrations ran particularly high in Berlin, where the size of the problem strained the Stasi beyond its organizational capacity. Still, the officers were charged with the task of stopping PUT, and they took this very seriously. Since they found the means available inadequate to achieve the goal set for them, they began to think of ways out of what they perceived

33. The material presented in this file is interesting for other reasons, too. It provides insights into Stasi's bureaucratic culture, including the competition between various departments. It also shows how some individual Stasi officers could use their powers to their own advantage by stealing from the perceived enemy, here the Protestant Church. Interestingly, the same officers who were particularly active in coming up with violent means of decomposition sought to reward themselves with illicit material privileges.
as stalemate. Hence, several of them began a personal crusade, planning further-reaching and better-coordinated measures of decomposition. Plans were made to criminalize dissidents by smuggling goods they did not buy into their shopping bag or by feigning robberies in such a way that movement activists were implicated; physical assaults were concocted and even the ultimate became thinkable: the provocation of accidents entailing the potential death of the victim (Eppelmann 1993, 188). Typically, superiors further up in the chain of command refused to provide their agreement to such extreme measures for the obvious reason that substantial physical harm to say nothing about the death of any of the well-known peace and civil rights movement activists, would have entailed a major public relations disaster for the GDR.

In consequence of the Stasi's internal investigation, a change of leadership personnel ensued, and the operative officers were relieved of their work with informants. This case nicely illustrates how ultimately decomposition found its boundary in its utility to the overarching goals of the party. The officers have told me that they had limited discussions among themselves about the moral standing of certain means of decomposition. Some argued that communists, Chekists of a socialist secret service, should, in contradistinction from imperialist secret services, not do certain kinds of things (BStU MfS-ZAIG 13748, 68). Such discussions also occurred in the context of investigating and harassing communists such as Biermann and Havemann. Indeed, there were elements of deontological reasoning in socialist discourses. While I have no doubt that there were such considerations, I suspect that if there had ever been a serious confrontation between the logic of goals and the appropriateness of means, the latter would probably have lost, because the former would have had much stronger resonances with doctrine as well as with the ways in which careers in socialist organizations were negotiated.

The effects of measures of decomposition

I have shown in the last two chapters how important the formation of alternative networks of authority was for the emergence of dissident identities and political understandings. I have also placed great emphasis on the experience and celebration of successful actions as a constitutive part of activists' trajectories into dissidence. Since measures of decomposition aimed to interfere with such crucial moments in the formation of dissident institutions, the question that poses itself is whether decomposition worked. The detailed analysis of a case may help to shed light on the conditions for success or failure of measures of decomposition.

A fine example for the ways in which Stasi tried to subvert the institutionalization of oppositional activity by measures of decomposition
is its attempt to paralyze the Berlin group Frauen für den Frieden by en-
meshing it in infighting during the late winter of 1983/84. The arrest, the
opening of preliminary legal proceedings, and six weeks of jail for Bärbel
Bohley and Ulrike Poppe derailed the group's activities by spreading fear.
Although the imprisonment of the two women fundamentally destabilized
processes of institutional maintenance by significantly altering understand-
ings about the risk involved in the group's work, the arrest itself is not what
Stasi meant with decomposition. Yet, the situation resulting from the arrest
provided the Stasi with a docking point for a measure of decomposition.
When it became clear to other group members that Bohley and Poppe were
arrested because they had, unbeknownst to almost all other group mem-
ers, met a peace activist from New Zealand who wanted to write an article
about the them in an English publication (see chapter 7, p. 429), a number of
members felt betrayed, even ruthlessly put at risk. This led to an emotional
argument between various members both before and after the release of
Bohley and Poppe from jail (Kukutz 1995, 1310). As set out in directive 1/76,
the Stasi's secret informants were asked to watch the groups they spied on
for any possible rifts. Simple character incompatibilities, conflicting ambi-
tions, sexual jealousies, divergent interactional styles, ideological frictions,
anything that could lead to distrust or even open animosities among group
members was of great interest to the Stasi. The informants were for that rea-
son asked to provide ongoing character assessments as well as atmospheric
reports about the state of the group. In the case of Frauen für den Frieden
case officers saw the discussions about the moral valence of the secret meet-
ing between four members of the group with a Westerner as a possible ful-
crum for an intervention with the potential to place groups onto a path of
destructive self-politics. Through its top-secret informant Monika Häger
(IMB "Karin Lenz") and others, Stasi was well informed about the group's
anxieties and controversies surrounding the arrest of Poppe and Bohley.

In mid-February the Stasi set out to exploit its clandestinely acquired
knowledge for its intended work of destruction. As so often in the Stasi's op-
erations of decomposition, the methods used stem from the classic repertoire
of intrigue. Some Stasi officer in collaboration with a secret informant—the
latter was important to produce a text in an authentic sounding register—
concocted an anonymous letter for circulation in the women's group. Enti-
tling the letter "impulses" (Anregungen), it was distributed to group mem-
ers in the style of a circular placed directly into their mailboxes.34 The letter
indirectly charged Bohley and Poppe with an "arrogant leadership style."

34. The original letter is lost. Most members of the group threw it away after it became clear
to them of whose pen it was. All references to its content are from other documents citing it
directly or indirectly.
as evidenced by their high-handed clandestine meeting with the foreign peace activist. As insinuated by the anonymous letter, this meeting revealed significant asymmetries of information (and by implication: power) in the group. Tellingly, the letter also took position against considerations floating around at that time to associate the group more formally with the Protestant Church in an effort to better protect its members from Stasi actions. This was controversial in the group as it was clear to most members—who were overwhelmingly secular in orientation—that activities planned and conducted under the auspices of the church were once more subject to authoritative approval and de facto restricted by the church’s complicated compact with the party state.

On February 16, 1984, Lieutenant Jäger of the department 2 of the ministry’s division XX, the likely author of this measure of decomposition and the guidance officer of secret informant Monika Hager, wrote a report about a meeting with her in which he characterized the effect of the letter on three members of the group who had met two days earlier in Beate Harembsky’s apartment. All four participants (especially the three not working on behalf of the Stasi) are depicted as agreeing with the basic propositions of the anonymous letter. The officer describes how the informant (the likely coauthor of the letter) chimed in with this sentiment by calling the dynamics of the group as having arrived “at ground zero.” Through this recognizing intervention, she thus nudged the interaction even further in the direction of the result desired by the Stasi. The officer claims that the conversations of the evening and the letter have encouraged the three women to seek an open confrontation with Poppe and Bohley during one of the next meetings. The report concludes:

The source [i.e., the informant Hager] is of the opinion that the letter’s content and time of distribution will probably deepen the extant contradictions in the women’s group.

In other words, the guidance officer and his informant are reporting an emergent success of an implemented measure of decomposition to the higher-ups in the Stasi hierarchy.

Nine days later, on February 25, 1984, officer Jäger reports about a report35 of his informant about a conversation she had the day before with Ulrike

35. Although the language in what follows may sound awkward, it is important to keep in mind to which degree the case officers were actually removed from the persons they investigated. Sometimes it would be tempting to add a little number in superscript to the verb “to report” in order to indicate through how many links a particular occurrence was reported. To say in this notation, if an informant reports1 (that is, something he or she has directly witnessed), the guidance officer reports2 and the case officer or analyst summarizing these reports3 actually
poppe about the letter. Therein, Poppe is depicted as hesitant about what to make of the letter. She is said to have emphasized the importance of a democratic atmosphere in the group but also to have shown considerable anger toward the letter by burning it upon receipt.36 Another two days later, with the help of a bug installed in the apartment of Lutz and Bettina Rathenow, the Stasi eavesdropped on a conversation between Bettina Rathenow and Ulrike Poppe. The two have, according to the eavesdropping protocol,37 led a frank and open discussion about what was going on with the group during Poppe's imprisonment. Rathenow is said to have assured Poppe, by pointing to the language of the letter, that she has no doubt that it must be a Stasi fabrication. Perhaps not so surprisingly, then, Stasi officer Jäger had to report yet another two days later about the account of his informant Hager concerning a meeting she had attended on February 27 with a larger group, which this time included Bohley and Poppe. This report makes clear that the Stasi's effort to decompose the group created a temporary friction at best, and that the positive assessment of the anonymous letter's effects were premature. Even though Jäger reports that the evening began with an open airing of the conflict, several members, including the secret informant, are said to have calmly defended the necessity of some measure of secrecy within the group. Three other members close to Poppe and Bohley, among them Bettina Rathenow, are credited with the suggestion that the letter was a Stasi forgery launched to divide the group, thus taking a position against the claims made in the anonymous letter. The Stasi report suggests that after several members of the group had declared in the meeting to have destroyed the letter for this reason, the correct interpretation seems to have prevailed in the discussion. This does not mean that the conflicts were not taken seriously. Quite to the contrary, according to the Stasi report, the women proposed more common activities to get to know one another better on a more personal level. Clearly the women were eager to engage in trust-building exercises. In keeping with its PID/PUT/"opposition" theory the Stasi, however, interpreted the women's plans to get to know each other better as an effort to differentiate friend from foe (using the Stasi's own term—"who-is-who reconnaissance"). One member of the women's group

36. MDA, OV “Zirkel” M 20/2 “Bericht zum Treff des IMB “Karin Lenz” am 24.2.84” dated 25.2.84.

37. Since, as every ethnographer knows, verbatim transcriptions are incredibly time consuming, the Stasi's department 26 (interestingly always set in Arabic numerals), the unit responsible for eavesdropping operations, has typically provided only summarizing reports about the verbal exchanges recorded on tape. One can therefore not assume that the language reported by the Stasi was in fact the language used by the spied upon persons.
proposed that the women could meet weekly at the sauna in a public pool. That proposal was apparently acknowledged by Ulrike Poppe with the comment: "Women sweat for peace." The rest of the meeting was dedicated to the organization of future activities. At the end the report has to implicitly acknowledge the failure of the decomposition measure while still trying to make good of it.

In the estimation of the source [Häger] Poppe and Bohley did no longer appear as much in control [of the group] as before their internment. In both women the absolute demand to lead is no longer so clearly discernible.

Here is a concrete example of how Stasi tried to selectively validate those understandings floating around in the group that served its purposes best. It did so with the help of the anonymous letter, recognizing certain understandings that were deemed to have been corroborated by the course of events and that obviously had considerable resonance with what a number of women must have felt or thought already. This resonance is the real kernel from which the operation could proceed, lending the anonymous letter its initial credibility. The Stasi also used the direct commentary of the secret informants in the discussion to actively steer understandings in this direction.

From the Stasi's perspective, these interventions would ideally have been sufficient enough to propel the dynamics of the group along a self-reinforcing trajectory of destructive self-politics. The reasons why this did not happen reveal the limits of decomposition measures as techniques of control. In chapter 4 I argued that all recognitions of understandings are precarious because in voicing them the status of an authority is potentially put in jeopardy. This means that neither the letter nor the oral interventions of the informants could be worded in such strong terms that they would have risked losing their authority. In fact, the necessity of continuing secrecy forced the Stasi to ambiguous interventions. Monika Häger, the informant in question, for example, had to counterbalance indirect insinuations that Irena Kukutz might be a Stasi spy with assistance to Poppe and Bohley, justifying their restrictive information policy. Finally, the effective application of selective recognition presupposed authority. With only a few exceptions (e.g., Wolfgang Wolf, Ibrahim Böhm), however, secret informants were not among the small group of most authoritative figures in movement circles, even though many of them advanced to important second-tier positions. The reason is simple. As activists have pointed out to me time and again, authority within the movements came with a track record, with ideas for action and leadership in carrying them out. However, the Stasi did not want their secret informants to take the initiative. They were typically not employed as agents provocateurs; given the political circum-
stances the radicalization of the movements could not be in the interest of the Stasi since trials were unlikely to come forth anyway. Accordingly, except for those informants who seem to have pursued their personal agenda, in playing their double role as secret informant acting within the Stasi’s rules of engagement they could not advance to first tier group leadership positions.

The problem with selective recognition as a tool of influence was amplified if the recognizing agents were readily identifiable as agents of the state. This was typically the case with the Stasi’s use of “social forces,” who were often enough recognizable as party members by linguistic register, habitus, and dress. Thus identified they typically became anti-authorities for the activists. As far as recognitions are concerned the epistemic effect of the action thus achieved exactly the opposite of what it was meant to accomplish. What the Stasi could do in the most extreme cases was to literally inundate an open group with the presence of social forces. The effect was produced in such cases not through selective recognition, but by corroborating the fear that party-critical work was futile anyway: The Pankow peace circle was, for all practical purposes, dissolved in this manner (Lengsfeld 1992).

The case of the anonymous letter to the women’s group still holds other lessons. In principle the method of planting destructive understandings is limited by the understandings already actualized in the group so that they can enjoy plausibility through their underlying resonances. Since such understandings are often emotive rather than discursive, they take empathy to discover with sufficient precision. With its anonymous letter to the women’s group the Stasi had calculated correctly. Its claims obviously hit a raw nerve with the feelings of a significant number of group members. And yet, the discursive culture prevailing in the group enabled the women to work constructively with disagreements. In particular, they resisted the de-autorization of other group members in the face of contradicting recognitions. This success at defusing subversion has an institutional and more contingent basis. Institutionally, the women’s resolution of the conflict was enabled by a number of closer, even intimate friendships that offered spaces for empathy.

38. One of the last acts of Monika Häger as a secret informant was to write a short analysis of how to improve the work with secret informants in the Stasi. There too she argues that informants should be allowed to become more active to acquire authority within any group (1989 Passim, especially 25).

39. This can be argued, for example, for Wolfgang Wolf (alias “Max”) who was a vocal member of the Friedrichsfelde peace circle (BVB, AKG, April 12, 1989). It can also be argued for Ibrahim Blume (alias “Maximilian”) who became an important member of the IFM (Lahann 1992, 209–21) after its near breakdown in 1988 (see below). In the Prenzlauer Berg’s poetry scene, Sascha Anderson (IM “Fritz Müller” or “David Menzer”) and Rainer Schellinski (IM “Gerhard”), played a similarly active, even intimate friendships that offered spaces for empathy.
for the open discussion of the accusations. Multiply crosscutting ties between the women prevented the polarization of the group into two antagonistic camps. History also treated the group favorably precisely at this moment. The release of Poepke and Bohley gave everybody a sense of relief, of common purpose and of success. In the end, both friendships and common goals were fortified through the debunking of the Stasi action. What the Stasi intended to destroy found itself to be strengthened.

The Stasi did not fare much better in other projects of decomposition. Unlike in the case of the letter, the measures were frequently devised so clumsily that after the initial discombobulation gave way to reflection, the fabricator of the trouble was easily and quickly identified as the secret police. In such cases the Stasi typically achieved the opposite of what it wanted. What worked in the Stasi's favor, however, is the fact that people, at least at the beginning, did not think of the secret police first when something disquieting had happened to them. Who would imagine that the secret police took the trouble to rearrange one's desk or the photographs on the wall? In the face of sexual blackmail, who's first thought is of the security forces of one's country? The Stasi relied on the fact that common purposes and common narratives notwithstanding, the members of the peace, environment, and civil rights movements hailed from different social milieus where trust first needed to be built against habit. The Stasi could also rely on structural or institutional fault lines. Tensions between ministers and their congregations are not uncommon, especially if the former is young and associating her- or himself with punks and such while the latter is made up chiefly of older and more sedate members.

Resource deprivation would have been a more effective tool for the Stasi had the party state not decided to grant the churches institutional autonomy. The church did, time and again, provide vital resources for dissidents. Within limits, it could even provide meaningful employment. Many of the Stasi officers were painfully aware of how the existence of the church limited the efficacy of their actions, their ability to control the movements. My interview partners were all angry about the "constant abuse of the church." Hence, the many efforts of the Stasi leadership to confine the church to matters spiritual. And it might have succeeded had the church not been so differently organized from the party state, in the sense that at least in Berlin-Brandenburg it granted lower levels of organization, most notably the parishes, a high degree of autonomy. The ire of officers is discernible in the measures of decomposition they had designed for ministers, which in viciousness are comparable only to those against former party members. In view of the party's project of creating a monolithic intentionality, the church became an island, nourishing difference, and at its margins, dissidence. It was not quite the Trojan horse that the Stasi at times imagined it to be with
its PID/PUT/"opposition" theory. Yet it was a shelter for people who saw themselves as different and who refused to assimilate.

Real reality shows as alternative forms of control

With the route to criminal persecution closed, with the applicability and effectiveness of decomposition limited, and with forced exile as an option disappearing, the Stasi needed new ideas. Individual officers engaged in some preliminary discussions about how to more effectively control critical thought and critical activities. With a vocabulary developed in response to phenomena that postdate the GDR, one could call these "real reality shows." Karl Maier says, "Since we could not escape the formation of an opposition, why not create one ourselves, which we could control from beginning to end?" Wolfgang Schermerhorn reports about similar thoughts with regard to writers who could no longer publish in the GDR: "Projects were developed in department XX/7 which aimed at busying these writers by commissioning collected volumes through the Aufbau publishing house." None of these thoughts went very far, not least, perhaps, because these officers or their superiors sensed that such measures sat ill at ease with the positivism of party ideology, or because, the party's incessant intentionality notwithstanding, they sensed something of the eerie uncontrollability of institutions that do after all seem to have a life of their own. And what, then, if through whatever dynamic the real reality show dropped its showlike existence to become really real?

STASI'S MAIN WEAPON: THE SECRET INFORMANTS

Stasi's attempt to control the "political underground" was primarily work with and through secret informants. In many directives, orders, and instructions, the Stasi honored their clandestine helpers with the epithet "our main weapon." Indeed, secret informants were the Stasi's main tool for gathering information of any kind: they stole blueprints of Western technology; they provided accounts of production problems in factories; and they told on the political opinion of fellow citizens. Secret informants—in official Stasi jargon, "inofficial employees" (inoffizielle Mitarbeiter or IM)—were also the Stasi's main device for directly intervening in particular processes of institution formation: they were mobilized for efforts to improve the productivity of a factory as much as for destroying the self-confidence of a particular person. Having a few good IMs was crucial for the career of an operative employee in the secret police. In the words of former officer Martin Voigt: "A [Stasi] employee lived off two, three good informants." The reputation of entire departments was contingent on the quality of their informants, on the
department's ability to know what was going on and to inform those higher up before anybody else could. Accordingly, the Stasi paid much attention to improve its recruitment and systematic employment of secret informants. Most directives regulating operative work contained a major section outlining the implications of work with secret informants, and many key directives were entirely dedicated to the recruitment and guidance of secret informants.46 Directive 1/79 (in Müller-Enbergs 1996, 305–73) set the framework for what was to be considered good work with informants for the 1980s. Through the ways in which it urged officers to recruit and handle informants effectively, the document reveals how the Stasi understood the people on whom the success and failure of its work was so crucially dependent.

Recruiting underground dwellers

The directive reminds officers that the motivations for collaboration with the secret police among potential and actual informants varies widely and that officers therefore need to adjust their recruitment strategies and the manner of interaction and collaboration with informants accordingly. The fact that the Stasi employed roughly 180,000 informants of all grades and kinds coming from diverse social, educational, and professional backgrounds underscores this point. The Stasi officers I interviewed were all at one point in their careers more or less successfully involved in recruiting informants for whom they became what is known in English spying argot as "handlers," or in Stasi lingo as "guidance officers." They were all familiar with the intricacies of working with informants. Considering the motivation of their own informants the officers agree with official teaching materials that forced recruitment based on blackmail was relatively ineffective. Such informants typically worked to rule and frequently they blew their cover intentionally to end their relationship with the Stasi. Recruitment based on material interest or other more personal motives (such as revenge) were considered more effective but also tended to create a dynamic that could be at variance with the intentions of the Stasi. All officers complained that they were wasting time with ineffective, not properly motivated, or even unmotivatable informants whom they should have quickly abandoned. Sometimes it was clear from the beginning that the collaboration would be a tedious affair. And yet, the officers were wrestling with recruitment quotas that forced them to maintain full rolls. Like every other production unit in the country they had to fulfill (or better, overfulfill) the plan.

40. The standard work outlining the development of the Stasi's work with informants from the beginning of the organization in 1950 to the end in 1990 is Müller-Enbergs introduction (1996, 5–154) to his edition of the major directives and orders dealing with informants.
Comrades, that is, other members of the party, were much more responsive targets for the Stasi’s recruitment efforts than other citizens. The directives see in “convictions” (Überzeugung), that is, belief in the feasibility, goodness, and justice of the party’s project and of the Stasi’s role in it, the best basis to establish a productive relationship with an informant. The former officers confirm this by pointing out that there was never a shortage of suitable informants where party members could take over this role. However, the party-critical circles in which the Stasi did take a particular interest scarcely offered possibilities to recruit informants on the basis of their convictions. Under these circumstances the directives foresee two possible recruitment strategies: “the prying out” (Herausbrechen) of current members as well as the “infiltration” (Heranführung) of suitable candidates. According to the officers the former strategy was a total failure. Indeed, the operative case documents show repeatedly that officers attempted to recruit movement activist but failed. This is not surprising given the experiences that have given rise to an involvement in peace or civil rights groups in the first place and the social networks in which activists moved.

As far as the peace, civil rights, and environmental groups of the 1980s are concerned, infiltration was quite successful by contrast. It was facilitated by the fact that unlike the discussion and reading circles prevalent in the 1970s, the peace, civil rights, and environmental groups defined themselves as counterpublics that were in principle open to new members. Yet, the strategy of infiltration still faced particular difficulties. The Stasi afforded work in this area the highest political priority. For this reason, they placed great importance on recruiting reliable, ideologically firm, and diligent men and women. The need for qualified personnel was further emphasized by the consideration of PUT as a secret service-like operation habitually weary of moles. Ideally, therefore, the Stasi should have liked to use tried and tested comrades for this task. This was unrealistic, however, for the following reasons. The Stasi had to find people who were in fact infiltratable, which is to say that they had to look like the other activists in some crucial respects. To blend in, they needed a plausible story about their desire to become involved. More, this story needed to be verifiable by the movement members, in core components at least. Creating such a story credibly embodied by a particular person is what the Stasi called “building a cover” (legendieren). Plausible carriers of a cover needed to have an educational background to match that of the group’s members. They needed to be willing to spend extraordinary amounts of time within the movements while also working a job resembling those of other activists. In other words, they needed to be capable and willing to accommodate to the group member’s habitus. Taken together, these conditions implied that potential candidates could not be holders of demanding career jobs that required their full attention and/or people with
families, lest they risk alienation from their children and partners. "Trained and tested comrades" (verdiente, zuverlässige Genossen) had both a habitus and a vita, which would have made their sudden involvement in something the party officially decried as subversive rather unlikely. They would have reeked of "Stasi mole." So the officers went on the lookout for comrades who looked as if life in the GDR got the better of them, that is, people who either a real career break, a sudden fall from grace, or others who were willing to have such a break stage-managed.

When I speak of secret informants on the next couple of pages, I have a very particular kind in mind, which is typical of spying work among dissident movements but not representative of the category of secret informants as a whole. The request to become a secret informant was in many ways similar to being asked to become a full-time employee of the secret police. It was something candidates pondered before they encountered the possibility. Instead, at the particular moment the proposal dropped into the candidate's life it offered a possibility for a new self-understanding. To be acceptable it had to resonate on some level with extant self-understandings.

Here are six short biographical sketches of secret informants whose real lives offered the Stasi possibilities to blend them with a cover story to plausibilize the informants' introduction into dissident circles. For Monika Hager, for example, the Stasi's offer was the call to a special commission by the party

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41. What I will have to say in this section of the book is based on thinner empirical grounds than my reporting on the full-time Stasi officers and the opposition members. In the year I spent in Berlin, I managed only to find three informants operating in the dissident scene I was studying who were also willing to grant me an interview. For two more relevant informants there exists either a book-length printed interview conducted by former dissidents (Kukut and Havemann 1997) or a book-length biography by a respected journalist (Lahann 1992). The informant covered in the first of these books, Monika Hager, had become, pursuant on the publication of this book, so often interviewed by journalists and television crews that she was no longer interested in speaking with me. The second, Ibrahim Böhme, had died before I entered the field. Another possible interviewee (Wolfgang Wolf) had in the meantime moved abroad and was only occasionally in Berlin. Yet, in his case I can rely to some extent on a biography written up by the Stasi (BSTU, BVB, AKG 11) in conjunction with the commentary of movement members and guidance officers familiar with him. Other important informants had disappeared seemingly without a trace. Not only did nobody know where they lived, not even whether they lived, but even countrywide phone searches ended nowhere. There is one further autobiographical account of a well-known informant, Sascha Anderson, which however, is owing to its literary style dealing in multiple metaphors and allusions, barely usable for my purposes. Even though Anderson was a central figure in the literary scene in Prenzlauer Berg, he was rather marginal with respect to the peace and civil rights groups. All positive leads in the end owed themselves to contacts that the former peace and civil rights activists had built after finding out that they were informants. In what follows I have altered the names of my interview partners only.
that she had been longing for. The Stasi’s call gave her the feeling that her commitment to the party was recognized. And if the fact that she was a lesbian might have stood in the way of a more official party career, her sexual preferences proved an asset for this particular calling. So, she felt special when the Stasi knocked at her door. she felt needed in a way she never did growing up in an orphanage, abandoned by her mother and her grandparents. The fact that in taking up the party’s commission she had to give up her work in the editorial department of the publishing house Junge Welt, where she was in part responsible for paper toy kits of war implements, did not bother her. She felt honored to be given a chance to fight against the enemies of the country she loved more than anything else. The fact that officially she had to be expelled from the party to make her story of pacifist refusal to work on war toys credible did not faze her either, since she was to be secretly readmitted with all the more honors. For the secret police she was the ideal candidate: motivated, clearly committed, free to make this task the center of her life, and easily endowed with a credible cover.

Philip Kaminski (named changed) had become a teacher. His dedication to the party’s project, his ease at working with young people, the signs of appreciation he had received from functionaries, made him hopeful of a significant career in the communist youth movement. However, his work with students also made him realize that he was gay. Caught in a relationship with a minor (only a few years his junior), he was sentenced to a prison term and thrown out of the party. Having assisted the Stasi in prison with a case of right-wing violence, they called again after he was released. For Kaminski this was a way to remain connected to his old life, and maybe also a way to insure himself against future unjust treatment. For the Stasi he was attractive now precisely because his vita showed the kind of break that lent itself to the production of a credible cover. A case in some ways similar to Kaminski’s is that of the above mentioned Monika Häger (Kukutz and Havemann, 1990). Abandoned by parents and grandparents, she grew up in an orphanage where she dedicated herself to the socialist cause. Her extraordinary commitment, her particular biography, and the fact that she too was homosexual made her a prime candidate for the Stasi’s infiltration efforts.

Wolfgang Wolf, Ibrahim Böhmé (Lahann 1992), and Manfred Winkler (name changed) had nowhere near the linear party conformist development that Häger or Kaminski had undergone. They were dedicated to socialism to be sure, but to a socialism that was not always in line with how the party liked to understand it, and thus each of them had run into trouble with the authorities of state and party. Winkler, son of a Weimar-era communist mother with bohemian tastes and close ties to painters and intellectuals, had an uncanny knack for getting embroiled in historical upheaval, or from the perspective of the party, to find himself at most suspicious time-space
knots. Visiting Berlin from his native Saxony to interview for a job as a
teacher, he got embroiled in the June 17, 1953 uprising, landing him in a West
Berlin refugee camp, where he, barely out of school, dreamed of starting all
over again as a lumberjack in Canada. Being too young for the Canadian
recruiters he ended up mining the Ruhr Valley for coal while, to the chagrin
of his employers, spreading enthusiasm for his communist ideas as a union
organizer. Married to a West German comrade, he eventually returned to
Leipzig. Back home he again became active as a union representative fight-
ing against the privileges of management in the company he worked for.

This did not go down all too well with the local party apparatus, however,
where he earned the reputation of being a quarrelsome and unruly comrade.
Always on the lookout for opportunities to be in touch with the big wide
world he befriended the first Cuban students who came to Germany in the
mid-1960s. Through them he became interested in Chinese socialism just at
the time when such interests came to be frowned upon by the party leader-
ship. A packet with brochures sent to him from the Albanian embassy (then
a Chinese ally) got him into serious trouble. Worse, even though banned
from traveling to Czechoslovakia, he got caught in Bratislava just as Russian
tanks were rattling in. Even though the ensuing chaos allowed him to sneak
back undetected across the border, the careless telling of his tale in a pub
finally landed him in prison. Luckily he had to stay there only for a relatively
short period of time thanks to the connections of his mother and the post-
1968 overcrowding. To him, the Stasi's call in the 1970s created echoes of spy
novels, and never shy to embark on an adventure, he was happy to oblige, all
the more so since the first task seemed interesting enough: visiting openings
of art exhibitions, readings, and similar events at Western embassies.

Werner Müller (name changed) was approached by the Stasi with an en-
tirely different profile of work in mind. He had just begun to study philoso-
phy and economics with vague notions that he would pursue a career in some
official trade or policy function that would take him abroad. In the context
of these plans, the request to work for the Stasi seemed to him as a test of
loyalty and beyond that simply as part of the deal. When these original ca-
reer plans did not come to fruition his connection to the Stasi lay dormant,
simply because he lost his relevance for the secret police's foreign espionage
operations. This changed years later when he was working for the academy
of sciences in the department of critical Marxist philosopher Peter Ruben
(Rauh 1991). When Müller was dismissed from the academy and thrown out
of the party alongside Ruben, the Stasi approached him again, this time with
domestic spying work in mind. He appeared as a perfect candidate for Stasi's
efforts to introduce informants into Berlin's dissident circles.

The cases of Wolfgang Wolf and Ibrahim Böhme are more obscure. The
unsteady lives of both men, moving in and out of intense professional and/
or personal engagements and similarly intense quarrelsome breaks, suggest that both might have suffered from what psychopathologists now call bipolarity. It appears that both had signed on to working with the Stasi as a means to realize their dreams about a proper socialist society. They were excellent informants for the Stasi, but they also played their own games in which they (with naive grandiosity) hoped to use the secret police as much as the Stasi expected to use them.

At least five of the six secret informants under consideration here were at some level very lonely people. Hager’s longing for a mother and a friend were constantly disappointed. Kaminski lost most of his friends during his time in prison. Müller had always been a loner. Böhme, who typically managed to place himself in the middle of a corona of fans who were charmed by his unconventional, quirky character, was also ready to drop them at a moment’s notice, throwing himself into new relationships seemingly with the same abandon with which he had entered the ones he now severed so abruptly. And even though Winkler seemed to be always in love, always with friends, he too abandoned lovers, friends, and family, it seems without much hesitation. This loneliness was constitutive of their new roles, which did not leave them the time to manage other intensive or extensive networks of social relations. It was important for their work as informants that they would not miss anyone too much and that others would not miss them all that much either when the informants spent several weekday evenings and most weekends in the company of the people to be spied upon.

With the exception of Kaminski, none of them had anybody but their guidance officer who knew both sides of their existence. Therefore, only their guidance officers were in a position to recognize the goodness of their self-understandings as spies. More, as they lost other ties, the officers also became vital links to their own pasts, their real biographies rather than their cover stories presented in meetings with the movement activists. In some cases, as for Monika Hager, this led to intensive relationships with their guidance officers, who appeared more and more friendlike. In other cases this led to tensions, because the guidance officers were unable to strike the kind of rapport the informants wanted or even needed. Then other satisfactions moved to the foreground, such as the constant reminder that they were important (why else would secret police officers want to meet them in the middle of the night in some car?). Werner Müller says that he very much enjoyed the fact that he could determine when the meetings were taking place. For once, he felt in control. Böhme and Wolf seemed to have enjoyed their intellectual superiority over their guidance officers, which afforded them the feeling that in the end they knew better than the party state!

This situation created a remarkably skewed social world, a very unique authority network structure. On the one hand the informants had frequent,
long, and intensive contact with a set of people who were supposed to be anti-authorities. Yet they ate with them, drank with them, played with their children, listened to music together, and seemingly shared their opinions and their feelings. On the other hand, they met one single officer, often several times a week, who for the most part was not a friend, a buddy, but in crucial ways knew more about them than anybody else. That officer had to remain a bureaucrat, even if he also once in a while cooked for them, received them with coffee and sweets at their meetings, but who had, after all, a job to do, a report to write that had to follow a particular script to satisfy his superiors. The informants were thus sandwiched between people who thought and acted like friends even though they were supposedly enemies, and an officer who was a comrade, who, qua rules and regulations, was not supposed to become a friend or even an intellectual partner because his eyes had to remain fixed to the particular goals of the casework.

The secret informants' most peculiar social situation helps us to understand a curious phenomenon. After the dissolution of the GDR, when the former informants were asked by the former dissidents why they had betrayed them, the informants often said something to the effect that they had only partially betrayed the activists, that they had in fact done both, work for the groups in which they participated and work for the secret police. They described their situation as "thoroughly schizophrenic," or as "full of contradictions." When the Wall fell and the Stasi was dissolved, most of them were relieved that their double life came to an end (not quite anticipating yet the ostracization that was soon to follow).

In living and breathing with the movement members, these had, perhaps imperceptibly at first, often become authorities for the informants. The activists' recognitions began to count, and they began to transform the informants' understandings. The Stasi was aware that what anthropologists call "going native" was a constant danger of their informant's work. Therefore, guidance officers were asked to impregnate their informants with a firm "foe image." They were asked to convince them that the activists were dangerous carriers of PUT, threatening the socialist project. For example, Hager was told by her guidance officer that Gerd Poppe had once said that "if matters were ever to change again, they [presumably the Stasi officers and their informants and leading party members] would all be hung." Yet, such explanations did not satisfy all informants, and if they did for a while they lost some of their credibility in the course of time. Winkler, Müller, and Kaminski say in unison that they tried to raise doubts with their guidance officers with regard to the Stasi's assessment of the groups' dangerousness for the GDR. They all read the movement members as desiring a reform of socialism as it was—and that a reform was necessary, they themselves had no doubts. Most of their guidance officers rigorously blocked such conversations, and
so the informants dropped the theme. And yet the informants drew their own conclusions in response to this, building tension, new feelings, and old commitments. Winkler says when there were group meetings he always volunteered to do the kitchen work or watch the children so he would not even have the possibility to hear something he could betray—a self-interpretation that Ulrike Poppe confirms. Kaminski fell into the habit of leaving the meetings early, before they had drawn to their culminating conclusion, with the excuse that he had to get up early for his job—something even his guidance officer constantly bemoaned. And Wolfgang Wolf felt by no means limited by the directives he had been given by his guidance officers, proposing and participating in activities of the groups apparently as he saw fit. This met the ire of higher-ranking officers, ultimately leading to the investigation of his case. So each individual informant created something of a comfort zone, something he or she felt he or she could still defend while not severing ties with the secret police, an ultimate step none of them was ready to take (even though it would have been easily done by simply blowing their cover, which in turn could have just as easily been depicted as a regrettable mistake vis-à-vis the Stasi). The consequences of such a step seemed too dramatic, because it threatened to deprive them of all that lured them into informant work in the first place.

CONCLUSIONS: MIRROR HALL CONSTRUCTION IN ACTION

The picture I have painted of the Stasi’s work to control the peace, civil rights, and environmental movements in the GDR is bleak—not just seen from the perspective of the movement members who became subjected to state terror in the form of decomposition, but also seen from the perspective of the Stasi and the party state. My central argument has been that the Stasi and party were entangled in a theory of oppositional behavior that prevented them from understanding oppositional activity in such a way that they might have enabled themselves to fight its causes. In fact, the Stasi never made a concerted effort to empirically investigate the phenomenon of disdience. If the party state deemed it so important—and there is every reason to believe it did, given its self-understandings as an ideology-driven project of social transformation as well as the enormous efforts that went into suppressing it—then the question of why the causes were never investigated in greater depth is central. In fact, I would argue it throws into relief the party state’s political epistemics, the ideologies and practices that governed its knowledge-making capacities about itself and the world and thus ultimately its capabilities to engage successfully in politics and self-politics.

Given that the party state systematically discouraged social scientific inquiries into such matters—the Institute of Opinion Research started un-