The discoverable orderliness of the hidden: The production of secrets in the work practice of the Stasi

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Abstract

A natural course of professional reasoning of the former GDR secret service (Stasi) is the specific discoverable orderliness of the secret, which is bound to the way of its professional seeing and doing. Here, the discoverability of secrets goes hand in hand with the idea that there exists a hidden, dangerous manipulation behind every action and thus to restore a lack of accountability it needs to be discovered. In this way, what the Stasi seeks and finds is constituted as a secret, i.e., as something intentionally concealed. It is not just a question of uncovering of the hidden, but also of creating a secret out of a given situation, documenting it in an institutionally relevant way, and processing it in secret. In Stasi jargon, this was carried out using special operational methods of "covert reconnaissance of suspected enemy activity." The article will describe Stasi's professional methods and practices on different levels, namely as a subject of intelligence training, as a process of operational work, and as a reflection of the results obtained. To this end, the article uses various media and formats of surviving internal communication, such as written official reports, audio recordings of telephone conversations, and visual images. The central question here is: How do the members of the Stasi understand the nature of secrets to make sense of their work, so that certain characteristics of secrets are constituted by secret service practice?

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1950, the Ministry for State Security (Stasi) was the secret police and domestic and foreign intelligence service of the GDR, with executive powers. According to former insiders, the Stasi's activities included "systematic evaluation, professional guidance and monitoring in accordance with the Minister's instructions" (Großmann and Schwanitz 2010, 138), which were largely determined internally by institutional needs and objectives. Particu-

1 This article is based on research conducted within the DFG-funded project *Calls to the Ministry for State Security: Relationship-Building as the Practice of Mutual Observation* (2020–23), grant number 427723908. I would like to thank Eric Livingston for the very helpful discussions on the topic of this article.

lar focal points of the Stasi's work were the control of the national economy (through Main Department XVIII), counterintelligence (Main Department II), and the fight against "political underground activity" and "political-ideological diversion" (Main Department XX). The Stasi defined the central task of its work as "the single-minded, concentrated, and focussed prevention, detection, and combating of all subversive attacks by the enemy" (Directive 1/76, 316).

The special feature of this authority was the absolute secrecy surrounding its activities. First, it operated under the assumption that the enemy was acting covertly: "The enemy is constantly developing its goals, plans, intentions, means and methods. It endeavours to keep them secret and conceals them. . . . Researching the goals, plans and intentions of the enemy always remains, therefore, a core question in political-operational work" (Neiber and Treffehn 1970, 73–74).[2] So the main task of the authority was to uncover these hidden enemy activities and "to prevent acts of terrorism by uncovering planned military attacks and provocations against the German Democratic Republic and other socialist countries" (Statute of Ministry of State Security, 1976, § 2).

Second, all evidence had to be gathered in secrecy. According to the Stasi dictionary of political and operational work, this means "the use of covert forces, methods, and means that remain hidden from both the enemy and the public; the concealment of political-operative plans, intentions, and measures; the execution of active and offensive tactics to surprise, deceive, mislead, and disinform the enemy."[3] Ultimately, the discovered enemy activities needed to be suppressed at the appropriate level of secrecy. "The behaviour of all operational forces is fundamentally governed by strict rules of confidentiality, adherence to which is mandated by official regulations" (ibid.).

According to these descriptions, secrecy is not only a guiding principle in relation to the outside world; internal secrecy directed toward one's own employees also played a crucial role. It is therefore unsurprising that the word "secret" not only appears in the authority's name but also emerges as one of the most frequently used terms to describe the indispensable qualities of one's work in official directives.

The role of secrets in intelligence work can be summarised as follows: the Stasi seeks to discover what the enemy keeps hidden, turning these discoveries into secrets of its own. Concerning this matter, the present article focuses on the institutional practices that make the discovery of covert events (secrets) accountable and investigates the work of gathering intelligence as a practice in its own right.

Using operational materials from Stasi files, this paper first examines how the unseen becomes an interpretative accomplishment within secret service work, generating specific forms of attention in case development. Subsequently, the focus shifts to discovery as an ob-

2 BStU, MfS, JHS, Nr. 21796, Bl. 1–298 (https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/dissertation-die-planung-der-politisch-operativen-arbeit-im-ministerium-fuer-staatssicherheit/blatt/1/).

3 From the definition of the term "Konspiration" (Wörterbuch der politisch-operativen Arbeit des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR), 1985, MfS JHS GVS 0001-400/81 1985).

ject of "critical reflection" within the intelligence work of the Stasi, with particular emphasis on practices designed to prevent detection by external sources and ensure the invisibility of its own operational work. Finally, Stasi training material is examined to analyse the processes inherent for learning how to gather intelligence.

SECRECY AS AN INTELLIGENCE OPERATION BY THE STASI

In this section I will examine the main features of the Stasi's investigative work on three levels: (1) as an expectation of hidden activities by the enemy and a source of constant vigilance and suspicion; (2) as an element of the institutional procedures for case discovery; and (3) as an aspect of casework discovery practices.

The prevalent attitude of any police sense-making and routine work is characterised by the expectation that hidden illegal activities are taking place. Harvey Sacks describes this key feature in his study "Notes on Police Assessment of Moral Character" in which he asks the following questions:

> How, by way of their street activities can one look at persons so as to be able to use their appearances to isolate candidates for investigation, and How can one then use what candidates do both as materials for discovering the courses of action in which they are engaged, and for determining in terms of those courses, that sense of their observable acts on the basis of which a strategy may be generated for demonstrating the observable character of their activities as the assembly of a crime? (1972, 290).

In his study, Sacks describes how police officers view others with the assumption that they may be concealing a crime behind seemingly innocent activities. Moreover, police officers master certain methods to sensitise to mistrust and question the accountability of observable actions: "Given these expectancies the patrolman must so sensitize himself as to be arousable by whatsoever slight variations appear which seem to be warrantable bases for making of the explanation of presented appearances a matter for investigation" (ibid., 285). If police officers observe some policeable actions and become suspicious, they must seek direct contact with the persons under observation in order to avert the suspected danger and, to this end, they must ask for more details about their observations in order to allay their suspicions, as Sacks illustrates with the following example:

> Coming to a street intersection, the officers observed a man crossing the intersection who did not appear to know where he was going. The officers alighted from the car, questioned this man, and searched him. He provided the police with full credentials and indicated that this was the first occasion on which he had ever been questioned by a police officer. His answers satisfied the officers that this man was quite "legitimate." They thanked him for his cooperation and sent him on his way. (1972, 287)

Such methods for discovering a potential threat to public order in policeable situations is constitutive as well for the work of secret service agents. The focus of these agents differs from the police in that it involves defining and maintaining certain elements that have been deemed secret by the state. The work of the professional practice of the secret service is to be aware of and to develop mistrust towards the potential secrets of others in such a way that it can be verified in internal institutional communication, but still remain a secret for outsiders.

In comparison to the common understanding of secrecy in classical sociology (Simmel 1906), "secret" here are not so much an abstract concept, but something expedient for the development of suspicion and for practical Stasi investigative activities:[4] "It was not implemented across the board, but in a focussed manner" (Großmann and Schwanitz 2010, 140). Furthermore, the Directive 1/76 justifies an institutionally relevant questioning of the innocuousness of certain actions and the assumption that these actions conceal a hidden wrongdoing: "It can be concluded with probability that one or more offences have been committed on the basis of verified unofficial or official information or evidence" (ibid.).

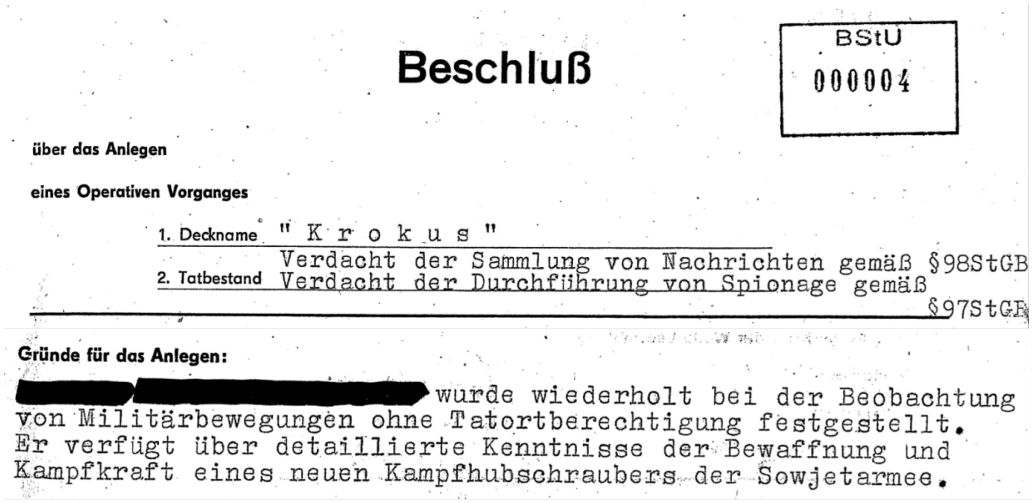
In this way, the decision to open a case is legitimised, and thus begins the official trajectory of an operational procedure. Each case file starts with a written reason for initiating the investigation. This always appears on the first page of the file as the main title and as a justification for initiating the operational procedure.

Beneath the code name, the suspected offence of "gathering of intelligence" and "espionage" is listed, supported by the reference to specific paragraph numbers from the criminal legal code. From these follow the "Reason for case creation." Suspicion is thus framed by a description of the situation that is intended to justify the discovery of covert activity. When analysing how these formulations are aligned with institutional purposes and "structural provisions" (Jefferson 1972, 315), the following section from the official directive on the creation of operational procedures is key:

> In the political-operational and criminal law assessment of the source materials, and the subsequent assessment of the political-operational and criminal law requirements for the creation of operational procedures, the secured knowledge and experience obtained about the direction and targets of attacks, plans, intentions and measures as well as resources, means and methods of the enemy, specific methods of perpetration, in particular those of stealth and concealment, as well as information on the political-operational situation in the area of responsibility and on the character of the suspects must be thoroughly analysed and must correlate with the facts contained in the source material to justify a decision in line with political-operative aims. . . . At the time of the decision to create an operational case, it is not necessary for verified information and evidence on all objective and subjective circumstances of the offence to be

4 The former Stasi first lieutenant Wolfgang Schmidt reported on this: "In the case of an (initially vague) suspicion, 'operative identity checks' (*Operative Personenkontrollen, OPKs*) were initiated, and in the case of a consolidated, well-founded suspicion, 'operational procedures' (*Operative Vorgänge, OV*). Approx. 90% of the OPCs and approx. 60% of the OVs resulted in the conclusion that the suspicion was not confirmed. The exonerating evidence therefore also played an important role" (Interview from 26.04.2024).

available. What is required is verified information and evidence from which factual findings on the suspicion of the perpetration of an offence can be obtained. (Directive 1/76, 337)



Beschluß

BStU
000004

über das Anlegen

eines Operativen Vorganges

1. Deckname " K r o k u s "
2. Tatbestand Verdacht der Sammlung von Nachrichten gemäß §98StGB
Verdacht der Durchführung von Spionage gemäß §97StGB

Gründe für das Anlegen:

[redacted] wurde wiederholt bei der Beobachtung von Militärbewegungen ohne Tatortberechtigung festgestellt. Er verfügt über detaillierte Kenntnisse der Bewaffnung und Kampfkraft eines neuen Kampfhubschraubers der Sowjetarmee.

Figure 1. "Krokus"

Decision

on the creation
of an operational procedure

1. **Code name:** "Crocus"
2. **Offense:** Suspicion of the gathering of intelligence according to §98StGB
Suspicion of carrying out espionage according to §97StGB

Reason for case creation:

[redacted] was repeatedly detected observing military movements without authorisation to be at the scene. He has detailed knowledge of the armament and combat capabilities of a new Soviet Army combat helicopter.

How does this document establish the verifiability? At first glance, the document makes accountable the deductive reasoning: an observation of some questionable conduct and deduction of the reason for that conduct. Here, however, the writer of the report makes the suspicion credible/accountable as the result of an abductive logic of discovery. While an untrained observer might see only a random passerby, the report constructs another narrative: a man is repeatedly seen near a military base without authorisation and is presumed to possess hidden expertise, suggesting that he has "improper intentions" and is "attempting to pass military information to the enemy." The Stasi explains this reasoning as follows:

> Political-operational work is not only aimed at combating identified enemy activities, but also at uncovering latent enemy activity. To detect latent enemy activity requires the organisation to systematically search for the enemy in their sphere of operational responsibility by consistently following up on all possible leads in the form of clues, signs, phenomena and incidents that give rise to suspicion of enemy activity or alternatively by consequently applying the political-operational experience and findings of other service units in detecting enemy activity to one's own sphere of responsibility. This also involves constant monitoring of the incidence and progress of crime in general, in particular serious crime that comes within the sphere of responsibility in terms of its connection with enemy activity (e.g., weapons offences, murder, homicide, arson, etc.). Particularly in connection with the clarification of the basic operational question "Who is who?," a solution has emerged as to how to track down latent enemy activity in a targeted and systematic manner. (Neiber and Treffehn 1970, 27)[5]

According to this description, the work involves the collection and systematic categorisation of an extensive body of evidence for the targeted intensification of suspicion. Taking observable events as a starting point, the aim is to draw conclusions about the enemy's covert activities, which can then be unmasked through intelligence work. The method of clarifying "Who is who?" is mentioned, for example, which permits the operatives to "responsibly scrutinise" people's lives in detail. This method of investigation is supposed to prevent people from somehow fooling the undercover agents though outward deception, to resist "the enemy's increased efforts to penetrate the MfS network" and to "detect the intended act of treason . . . in good time and thus prevent more serious harm."[6] Much like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle, a Stasi agent must make accountable a rearrangement of "inter-relational solution-relevant details" (Livingston 2008, 48) and sort the relevant from the irrelevant, so that what was previously invisible is uncovered or "disclosed" (Dreyfus 1991) and a new image emerges. Peirce[7] saw such abductive reasoning as a way of discovering new things in a logically organised way:[8]

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5 BStU, MfS, JHS, Nr. 21796, Bl. 1–298 (https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/dissertation-die-planung-der-politisch-operativen-arbeit-im-ministerium-fuer-staatssicherheit/blatt/27/).

6 "Who Is Who?" Training Film about the IM (unofficial collaborator of the MfS) "Eva," BStU, MfS, HA II, Vi, Nr. 119.

7 In the later works of Peirce, abduction is a flash of insight that arises in the face of a problem on the basis of knowledge of the facts that only emerges after a process and is barely affected by logical rules (cf. Reichertz, 1991, 2013).

8 Umberto Eco, i.e., distinguishes between different levels or types of abduction, the transition between which is often fluid, so that a large continuum of abductive reasoning includes the following forms: "(a) There is a *hypothesis* or an *overcoded abduction* when the law is given automatically or quasi-automatically. ... (b) There is an *undercoded abduction* when the rule must be selected among a series of equiprobable alternatives. ... (c) There are, finally, cases of *creative abduction*, in which the rule acting as an explanation has to be invented *ex*

> The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of *insight*, although of extremely fallible insight. It is true that the different elements of the hypothesis were in our minds before; but it is the idea of putting together what we had never before dreamed of putting together which flashes the new suggestion before our contemplation. (Peirce 1997, 242).

If the above-mentioned abductive explication serves as the basis for initiating an operation, the following developments follow. This method of establishing suspicion is instrumental in systematically sharpening attention and focusing institutional resources (such as time, as well as technical equipment and personnel). This can be exemplified by the following series of images from a file about a "show trial"[9] (and, in that respect, an exemplary operative procedure).

This series of images was taken with an analogue camera. In order for the images to make the investigation process accountable and traceable, the film had to be developed and selected images printed and integrated into the file as an ordered arrangement. There, they are available to the viewer.

The series works proactively with shot size and cropping. It begins with a medium long shot of an overview of the flat taken from the hallway, then includes the bookshelves in the next. The camera then isolates the bookshelf itself, before drawing the viewer in to close-up detailed images. From an unremarkable bookshelf, the camera zooms in to a particular volume to reveal a note with names and contact details hidden inside. The photos depict the process of the house search in its chronological sequence, in accordance to the principle: "They are what they are. It's objective evidence of something" (Burri 2013, 375). Through a

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novo. ... As in every case of creative abduction, this way of reasoning required a sort of meta-abduction, which consisted in deciding whether the possible universe (or state of things) outlined by the creative abduction was the same as the 'real' universe" (Eco 1986, 41–2). Even today, many social scientists consider abduction to be a method of discovery practice that logically organises new findings and thus liberates research from the serendipity and psychological idiosyncrasies of the researchers (Habermas 1973; Oevermann 1996). Other important fields in which abduction has been utilised accordingly are creativity research (e.g., Mahrenholz 2011), the semiotic or literary discussion of what a trace is (Kessler 2012), or the debate on whether and how the art of reading traces can be used by the police (Bidlo 2011).

9 This series of pictures comes from the case file of a full-time MfS officer. During a lengthy interrogation, he confessed to having toyed with the idea of fleeing to the West and delivering documents containing state-secret information. To this end, he stole official documents and hid them at his home. As part of the investigation against him, the Stasi searched his flats in East Berlin and searched for these documents, which the Stasi depicted in the photo report of the flat search. The person involved in the case and the owner of the objects pictured were not only arrested, but also sentenced to death and executed in a show trial. MfS, AU, No. 26/90, p. 117–158 (https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/bildbericht-der-wohnungsdurchsuchung-bei-werner-teske/blatt/117/).

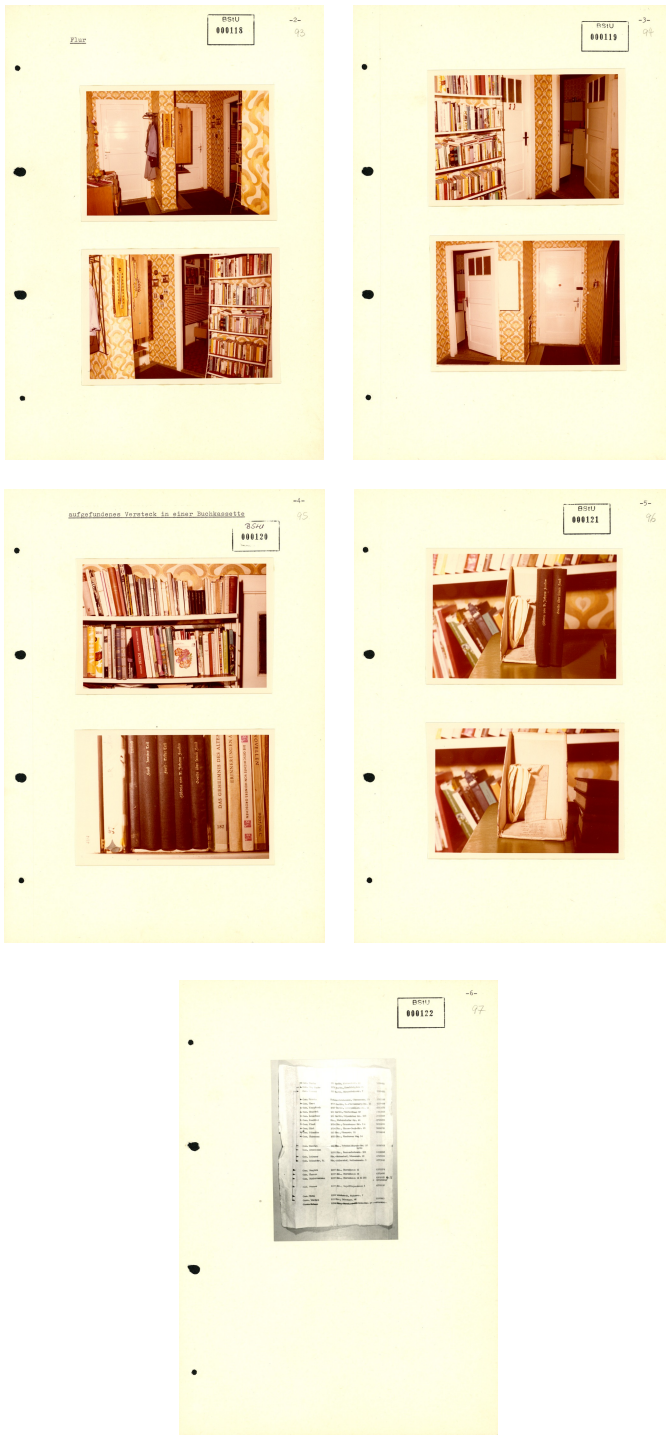


Figure 2. Flat search[10]

10 BStU, MfS, HA IX, Nr. 24636, Bl. 117–158.

coherent layout and a symbolic numbering system such as the addition of page numbers (Stöckl 2004, 292), the viewer is encouraged to interpret the passage from image to image as a temporal relationship. This serialised temporality is underpinned by logically well-structured and visually convincing storytelling. The narrative turns an unremarkable array of books into a secret hiding place, a folded piece of paper into a clandestine object, and thus reassures the supervisor reading the report that a vital piece of evidence has been found and a crime solved. The arrangement of images and the technique of zooming in on certain details works to direct the viewer's attention. As a result, the viewer, who is initially distanced from the content, becomes an observer in the medium long shot, and then through the close-up becomes ultimately a more direct participant, to whom the context of this story is presented unambiguously: a hidden note has been discovered. Above all, this note gains its operational relevance through this act of visual exposure of a hiding place, and not through any subsequent explanations in written documents (Galanova, 2020).

This ordering of the development of suspicion within the logic of revealing a secret is thus similar to a proof, whose properties organise geometric theorems, as described by Eric Livingston:

> The discovered orderliness of the "proof" makes up its practical objectivity as a "proof." Each proposition of the "proof" appears from within the work of recovering its reasoning as the natural, sequentially next proposition, "seeably" factual in and as its placement in the sequence, and, therein, making available the purported claim that the chain of propositions proves the theorem. (Livingston 1986, 46)

The work to uncover clandestine activity becomes accountable in the "objectified orderliness" of logical conclusions set down in writing.[11] The Stasi guidelines for processing operational procedures state:

> Based on the analysis of the operationally significant evidence about persons and on the precise control objectives [which have already been developed from a suspicion — OG], the political-operational measures are to be determined and carried out that are aimed at developing the suspicion of anti-state activity. (Directive 1/76, 327)

This shows that there is nothing naïve and unintentional in the secret service's assumptions about the world. Rather, the whole process of intelligence gathering can be described as "examining the puzzle pieces so as to discover therein how the pieces may be fitted together" (Livingston 2008, 48). It is, then, organised on the basis of the expectation of always having to reveal something new in order to prevent hostile covert intentions. This is because, while a secret suggests that there is "something unseen behind it," if nothing can be detected by the Stasi members, this still leaves the nagging suspicion that there still could be something lurking "behind it" that may have been overlooked. The more confidently it can be as-

11 Nevertheless, the agents also made pragmatic exceptions to the logic of the regulations and operational rules of thumb (cf. Daston 2022).

serted that the interpretation of certain observations must be corroborated through further leads, new clues, and additional details that have yet to be gathered, the more confidently an intelligence service can assert itself.

In the next section, I examine how the secret service protects itself from potential detection by external observers and how it operates to remain unseen. This will elucidate the relevance the secret service assigns to detection efforts which it anticipates from surveillance targets and seeks to counteract.

PRACTISING SECRECY: CONCEALMENT AND SECRETS OF THE SECOND ORDER

This section focuses on how the intelligence service operates by means of concealment and covert practices (cf. Siebert and Czarniawska 2018). Thus, secrets are not just the target, but also characterise the modus operandi of their activities, as stated by former Stasi officers:

> The attacks against the state security of the GDR were secretly planned, prepared and carried out. In order to counter them effectively, the measures of the MfS also had to be largely covert, concealed, i.e., conspiratorial. Their effectiveness depended to a large extent on keeping them hidden until they were realised. (Großmann and Schwanitz 2010, 51)

In other words, it is secrecy of the second order: the enemy's secrets are to be revealed, but the means of revealing them are to remain secret. The architectural concealment of their own facilities (see fig. 3), covert wiretapping in the offices of West German journalists, undercover eavesdropping and surveillance, secret home searches and arrests were regularly used as methods to detect and prevent undesirable activities.

Although this secrecy was intended to make it possible to "set tasks (combinations and legends) aimed at creating favourable conditions for carrying out political-operational work, e.g., exposing an enemy and developing and documenting the necessary evidence of enemy activity" (Neiber and Treffehn 1970, 70), it also seems to have been used by the state to cover up actions that were legally and socially inappropriate.[12]

This is where the secret service's practice of revealing secrets differs from that of the natural sciences, as described by Gerald Holton in the conversation with Harold Garfinkel:

> The issue is how actually do scientists do their work? His [Garfinkel's] favorite way, then, of replying to his own question was to insist that what was needed was that we put our eyes to the keyhole, by which he didn't mean thereby that we preserve the anonymity of the observer but rather that we go to places and

12 One of them is disinformation. Here, too, the enemy is accused of manipulation and disinformation, but this is also actively used in intelligence work: "The term 'disinformation' referred only to a very narrow area of these tasks, where deception through constructed representations seemed appropriate and useful. High standards had to be set for the quality of these activities so that the intention to deceive and the perpetrators of the deception could not be detected" (Großmann and Schwanitz 2010, 3).

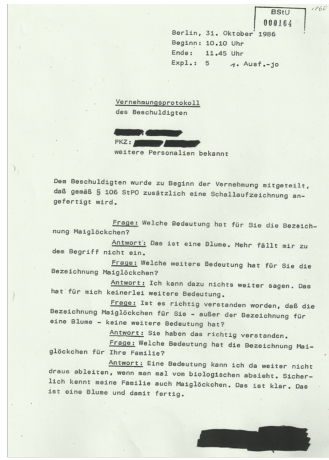
look into those places that otherwise are hidden, secretive, out of the way, and not ordinarily come upon. (Garfinkel 2022, 108).

Figure 3. Hidden entrance in the Stasi building[13]

Like scientists, the agent is also on the lookout for "hidden keyholes," which are not hidden by the reason of cognitive inaccessibility, but are, in fact, material places that are protected by privacy and discretion. If the agent gains access to these places, their challenge is to produce reportable, documentable and reproducible evidence in the form of texts and images. The above quote also helps to identify another difference: the degree of preserving the anonymity of the observer. While both seek hidden knowledge, the agents are also concerned with hiding themselves.

Whether and how the Stasi's legally and morally dubious methods of intelligence gathering could counter state threats, can be examined by means of an analysis of interactions. In the following Stasi interrogation, multiple questions on the same subject are formulated in a manner designed to conceal the reason for asking them:

13 BStU, MfS, BdL, Fo, Nr. 227, Bild 8 (https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/die-stasi-zentrale-in-berlin-lichtenberg-in-den-70er-jahren/blatt/8/).


BStU
000164

Berlin, 31. Oktober 1986
Beginn: 10.10 Uhr
Ende: 11.45 Uhr
Expl.: 5 4. Ausf.-jo

Vernehmungsprotokoll
des Beschuldigten

[redacted]
PKZ: [redacted]
weitere Personalien bekannt

Dem Beschuldigten wurde zu Beginn der Vernehmung mitgeteilt, daß gemäß § 106 StPO zusätzlich eine Schallaufzeichnung angefertigt wird.

Frage: Welche Bedeutung hat für Sie die Bezeichnung Maiglöckchen?
Antwort: Das ist eine Blume. Mehr fällt mir zu dem Begriff nicht ein.
Frage: Welche weitere Bedeutung hat für Sie die Bezeichnung Maiglöckchen?
Antwort: Ich kann dazu nichts weiter sagen. Das hat für mich keinerlei weitere Bedeutung.
Frage: Ist es richtig verstanden worden, daß die Bezeichnung Maiglöckchen für Sie - außer der Bezeichnung für eine Blume - keine weitere Bedeutung hat?
Antwort: Sie haben das richtig verstanden.
Frage: Welche Bedeutung hat die Bezeichnung Maiglöckchen für Ihre Familie?
Antwort: Eine Bedeutung kann ich da weiter nicht draus ableiten, wenn man mal vom biologischen absieht. Sicherlich kennt meine Familie auch Maiglöckchen. Das ist klar. Das ist eine Blume und damit fertig.

[redacted]

Figure 4. Interrogation about "lily of the valley"[14]

Interrogation report
on the accused

[redacted]
ID number: [redacted]
further known persons

The accused was informed at the beginning of the interrogation that a sound recording would also be made in accordance with Section 106 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Question:	What does the name lily of the valley mean to you?
Answer:	This is a flower. That is all I can think of when I hear the term.
Question:	What other meaning does the name lily of the valley have for you?
Answer:	I can't say anything more about that. It has no further significance for me.
Question:	Am I to understand correctly that the name lily of the valley has no other meaning for you than the name of a flower?
Answer:	You have understood that correctly.
Question:	Which meaning does the name lily of the valley have in your family?
Answer:	I can't draw any meaning from it, apart from the biological ones. My family certainly has heard of lily of the valley. That's obvious. It's a flower and that's that.

The interrogation was carried out on the basis of a suspicion that an act of illegal emigration was being planned. But what does this have to do with lily of the valley? The Stasi suspected that a coded telephone conversation was held with relatives living in West Germany in preparation for this departure. The Stasi agents grew suspicious after they intercepted a call

14 This interrogation is part of the investigation file of a man suspected of planning illegal immigration to West Germany. MfS GH, Nr2/88, Bd. 8, S. 164

in which the suspect's wife had discussed in September that the lily of the valley was in bloom. Following their own inability to understand why someone would choose this topic of conversation, accountability is now restored through the assumption of the existence of a secret code for illegal emigration (Galanova 2019). And if this coded language was intended to conceal something, it has, in fact, achieved the opposite. For every (suspected) act of secrecy has the effect of attracting attention. It is in this context that the accused is repeatedly questioned about the significance of the lily of the valley during the interrogation, in order for the Stasi agent to prove these (coded) conversations are evidence of an intention to escape.

The small talk of an intercepted private telephone conversation enables the agents to discover an inexplicable inconsistency and secret, after this secret has taken on a form that can be articulated and documented. The next step is to present the secret as already discovered in the interrogation. By constantly focusing the questions on the lily of the valley, its relevance is established as something significant.

The secretive and clandestine principles that the Stasi adheres to do not allow its agents to ask the accused direct questions about the content of the intercepted telephone call and the use of codewords. The agents not only learn to use this indirect line of questioning as a method of obtaining secret, but also how to spot it in their counterparts, as can be seen in the next excerpt. The following sequence from the Stasi training film "Who Is Who?"[15] presents an interrogation in which the accused with the code name "Eva" and her West German friend respond to the interrogator's questions with counter-questions (Pomeranz, 1984). In the film, this reaction to their line of questioning is not interpreted as bewilderment or as an outright denial or rejection of the charges brought. Rather, this behaviour is interpreted by the Stasi as being a strategic attempt by the accused to test how much information the Stasi know.

N: Both "Eva" and X tried for a long time to deny their actions and intentions at the beginning of the interrogation in order to test how much we knew.[16]

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E: I don't know what you want to hear from me (cries).

I: I've told you that. Everything you've arranged to get to west-berlin or to the BRD.

15 BStU, MfS, HA II, Vi, Nr. 119 (https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/wer-ist-wer-mfs-schulungsfilm-fuer-fuehrungsoffiziere-ueber-die-im-eva/).

16 N = narrator; I = interrogator; E = Eva; M = man.

E: NOTHING (drops her shoulders) what did I do? I didn't do anything (raises her shoulders).
I: that is not true at all.
E: what have I done (drops one shoulder))
I: don't ask me, TELL me
E: I haven't done anything
I: of course (.)
E: I didn't do anything (covers face with handkerchief) I didn't do anything (cries).

———

I: well, what else have you taken over there?
M: (scratches his forehead) taken over
I: to west-berlin?
M: nothing else at all
I: nothing else at all?
M: no, what did I ( ) take over? nothing. how, in what way do you mean, uh, took over?
I: yes, took over
M: I mean pfft.
I: to west-berlin.
M: no, absolutely nothing else.
I: no?
M: nope
I: nope?
M: no, um. well, I once got a bottle of sparkling wine for myself or something, if that's what you mean. things like that.
I: I didn't really mean anything like that - a bottle of sparkling wine.
M: well, things like that.
I: I think you know what I am talking about.
M: no, really, I don't have, er, I don't really have anything else like that, a bottle of champagne, as I said, a cognac once, but otherwise…

Figure 5. "Who Is Who?": interrogations

The two dialogues are not included in the training film to show an exemplary investigation. Rather, the film demonstrates that the suspects have been successfully apprehended and are behaving in an uncooperative way under interrogation. This, according to the Stasi, is evident in the fact that the accused pose many counter-questions, which is perceived as proof that they are seeking not only to cover up their guilt, but are also strategically testing

the Stasi's own knowledge of the case. This kind of persistent questioning is used by the Stasi itself as a structure in secret service reasoning to reveal what is hidden, and is also recognised in suspects who may have something to hide.[17]

The Stasi's methods for investigating covert activity were not just operative principles, but also the subject of professional training. Based on an analysis of further Stasi training materials, the next section shifts from describing investigative practices to emphasising the "overdoing" of the work of discovering secrets, in order to highlight key aspects of work routines for Stasi recruits.

DISCOVERING SECRETS THROUGH THE OBSERVATION OF THE UNSEEN AS A LEARNABLE PRACTICE

Looking for the unseen and discovering secrets is a teachable and learnable professional practice. For example, in an interview given by former Lieutenant Klaus Panster, he describes the first time he was entrusted with operational work as a trainee of the Stasi. While observing someone at Friedrichstraße station, which is located by the border with the West in Berlin, he was ordered by his superior to go in search of any details that could incriminate the suspect. At first, he had no idea where to look, or what to search for. Finally, while carrying out a house search, he noticed some remnants left in an ashtray. Piecing together the scraps of paper revealed a West German telephone number, which finally completed the picture. The suspect's regular appearance at the East-West border in connection to the note with the West German number that had been destroyed to avoid detection gave rise to a suspicion of illegal contact between the person under surveillance and the enemy. The subsequent conclusion is interesting for two reasons. On a practical level, the trainee has learned, as Garfinkel puts it, "how to get the phenomena out of your data" (2022, 24). The trainee also learnt how a happy coincidence can help in the "discovery of secrets" because it can shed light on visible behaviour that has been observed. This is similar to what Peirce means by the discovery of the new: while the unknown lies beyond the known, it can only be familiarised with and thus discovered by connecting it to the known.

17 Although both interviews are in the same training film, there is a difference in the way Eva and her boyfriend are interrogated. The insinuation of secret intentions to escape is expressed much more directly to Eva than it is to her alleged West German boyfriend. (By contrast, he is questioned about information documented by the Stasi, but which only constitutes indirect evidence of his involvement in Eva's escape as an accomplice.) The reasoning could lie in the fact that Eva was recruited as an IM (unofficial collaborator of the MfS) and had been involved in operational work for a long time, while the West German boyfriend has no relationship with the authorities. As Eva was one of them, the interrogators are perhaps more direct with Eva, and make no pretence of secrecy, even if a betrayal has already been proven.

This section explores the concept of investigative work as a subject of professional training, based on an analysis of two training films "Fiat II"[18] and "Revisor".[19]

The film "Fiat II" includes an exaggerated reenactment of the illegal smuggling of people into West Germany using specially modified cars and trucks designed for escape attempts. A variety of hidden compartments served as hiding places for the fugitives.

Figure 6. "Fiat II": the "fugitive" climbs into a hiding place in the trunk of a car

The purpose of the film is to instruct border control officers how to detect hiding places such as these. In the film, fugitives are shown hiding in the trunk of a car, hoping to pass through undetected. The educational impact of the film lies in developing the ability to discover "illegal escapes" that must be detected, photographed, and collected as evidence. One of such photographs can be seen in figure 7.

The image depicts the discovery of a person hiding in a car boot in an attempt to cross the transit route between West Berlin and West Germany. A group of customs officers can be seen opening the boot of a West Berlin car where a woman is hiding, who is allegedly being smuggled out of the GDR. The depiction of the successful detection of the hidden escapee aims to enables trainee agents to detect any further potential "illegal fugitives" to the West.

Another example of this is the training film "Revisor." It presents a variety of methods for detecting covert activity in intelligence work. The film depicts an "operational procedure" against Mr Bento who was looking for a way to publish his poems, novels, and other writings in the West and had contacted various West German reporters in East Berlin. The document accompanying the film states its purpose to be a "presentation of the basic pro-

18 BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Fi, Nr. 37 (https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/fiat-ii-schulungsfilm-zur-verhinderung-von-fluchten-durch-die-schleusung-in-fahrzeugen/).

19 BStU, MfS, HA II, Vi, Nr. 70 (https://admin.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/mfs-schulungsfilm-revisor-ungesetzliche-verbindungsaufnahme/).

cedures and individual stages of case processing up to the arrest of a person suspected of unlawful liaison under article 219 of the German Criminal Code (GDR)."[20]

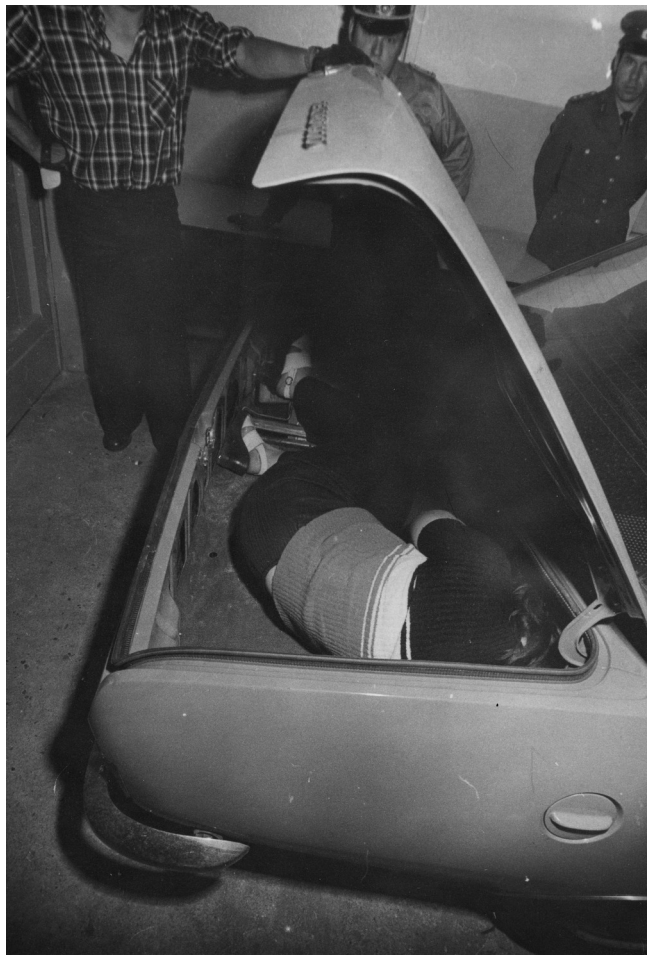
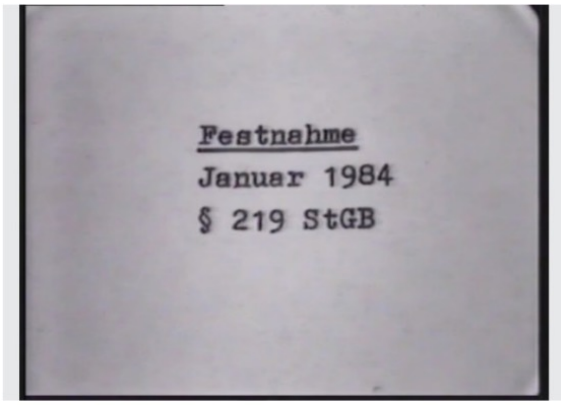


Figure 7. Discovery of an escapee in a car[21]

20 StGB (German criminal code), § 219 "Unlawful establishment of contacts" states: (1) Anyone who establishes contacts with organisations, institutions or persons whose aim is to carry out activities directed against the state order of the German Democratic Republic, with knowledge of these aims or activities, shall be punished with imprisonment of up to five years, a suspended sentence or a fine. (2) The following shall also be punished: 1. any person who, as a citizen of the German Democratic Republic, disseminates or causes to be disseminated abroad news which is likely to harm the interests of the German Democratic Republic or produces or causes to be produced records for this purpose; 2. any person who, in circumvention of legal provisions, hands over or causes to be handed over to organisations, institutions or persons abroad writings, manuscripts or other materials which are likely to harm the interests of the German Democratic Republic. (3) In the case of paragraph 2 number 2, the attempt shall be punishable.

21 BStU, MfS, HA XX, Fo, Nr. 113, Bild 1–13.

In order to understand how the procedure was rewritten or moulded to serve as a blueprint for secret service practice, the visualised content of the film can be compared to the original documents of the operative procedure. The film begins with the following image, which is commented on by a male narrator:

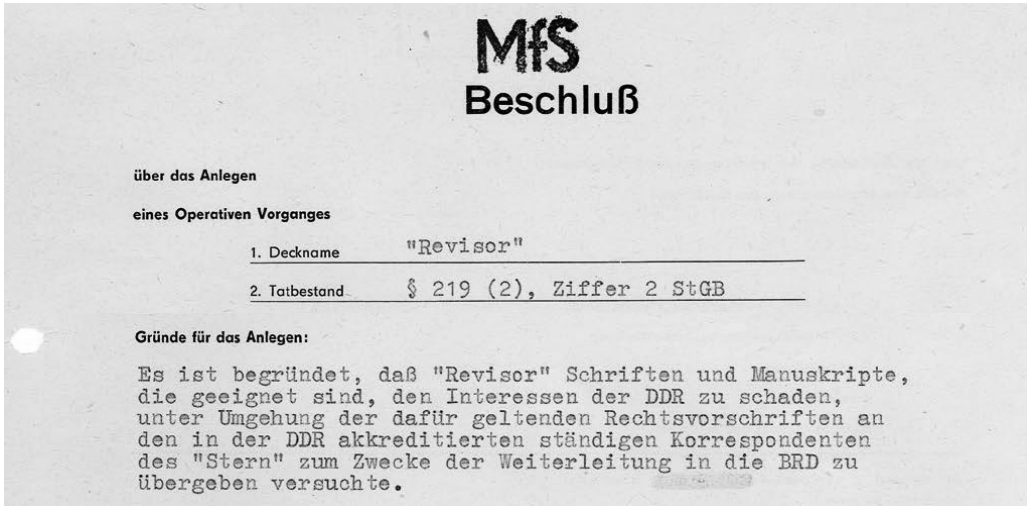


N: In January 1984, Main Department II arrested the person being investigated as part of the operational case "Revisor" on suspicion of unlawful liaison under Paragraph 219 of the Criminal Code and initiated preliminary proceedings.

Figure 8. "Revisor": "Arrest, January 1981"

The chronological order of the film does not correspond to the actual temporal structure of the operational work: it starts with the arrest which happened at the end. In the following, I will look at possible reasons why the Stasi has sequenced the story in this way.

The wording of the allegation in the decision to open the file is as follows:



MfS

Beschluß

über das Anlegen

eines Operativen Vorganges

1. Deckname "Revisor"

2. Tatbestand § 219 (2), Ziffer 2 StGB

Gründe für das Anlegen:

Es ist begründet, daß "Revisor" Schriften und Manuskripte, die geeignet sind, den Interessen der DDR zu schaden, unter Umgehung der dafür geltenden Rechtsvorschriften an den in der DDR akkreditierten ständigen Korrespondenten des "Stern" zum Zwecke der Weiterleitung in die BRD zu übergeben versuchte.

Figure 9. The file on the creation of an operational procedure[22]

22 BArch, MfS, AOP 2687/85, Band 1, Bl. 4.

Decision

on the creation
of an operational procedure

1. **Code name:** "Revisor"
2. **Offense:** §291(2), section 2 StGB

———————

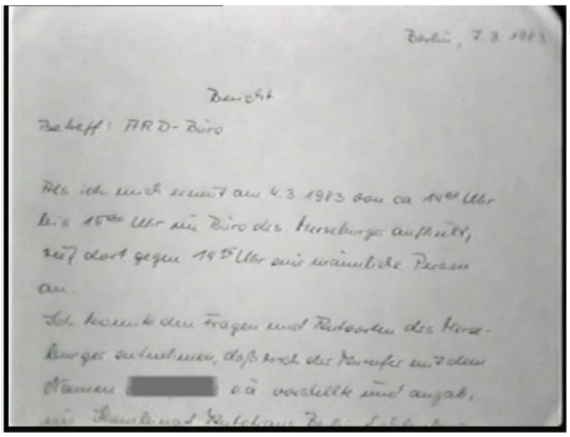
Reason for case creation:
There is a reason to believe that "Revisor" attempted to pass writings and manuscripts that are likely to harm the interests of the GDR to the Stern correspondent accredited to report in the GDR with the aim of forwarding them to the FRG, circumventing the applicable legal provisions.

In comparison to the "Crocus" case analysed above where an offence is suspected, here the facts of the matter have already been "substantiated." This formulation indicates that the suspicion of unlawful liaison has not only been established with certainty, but that a critical mass of legitimate evidence has already been gathered in the preparatory stages of the operation and that there is no longer any doubt that a case must or can be opened. The training film goes even further than the file does in this respect. By showing the arrest first, it depicts it as an inevitable outcome of the investigation, underpinning the certainty of the secret service's conclusions. The film's focus on the success of well-prepared intelligence work thus shows a desired outcome that future agents should be guided by and aspire to.

Unbeknownst to the trainees watching the film, however, the film does not tell the rest of the story. Following an investigation, it transpired that the "class enemy" in question had been falsely accused, and was finally released after being held in custody.[23] The omission of this information in the film indicates a conscious decision not to depict the specific professional techniques and procedures involved in the operative work, but rather to portray the seemingly straightforward and seamless progression of the work at hand.

The film specifically highlights the way in which the Stasi officers become aware of the suspect. Firstly, the suspect telephoned the West German journalist at the same moment that an agent happened to be in his office and was able to listen in on the (normally inaudible) phone call. This part of the film is accompanied by the following photograph of the report and is narrated by a male voice:

23 Berliner Zeitung, 12 March 1993 (https://dfg-viewer.de/show?tx_dlf%5Bdouble%5D=0&tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=https://content.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/zefys/SNP26120215-19930312-0-0-0-0.xml&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=3&cHash=2af991b-b6f6cd5a018947 1d182399019).

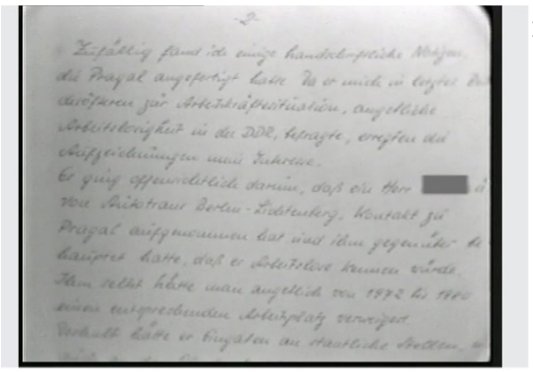


N: At the meeting on 7 March 1983, the IMB [unofficial collaborator of high calibre] reported that he had visited the ARD office at 4 Schadowstraße in Berlin on 4 March 1983 as instructed and had a conversation with the correspondent Merseburger that lasted about an hour. During this time, he witnessed a phone call in the ARD office. The IM report states:

IM: When I visited Merseburger's office again on 4 March 1983 from around 2pm to 3pm, there was a telephone call from a man at 2.15pm. From the questions and answers given by Merseburger, I learnt that the caller introduced himself by the name [redacted] or something similar and stated that he worked at the Kombinat Autotrans (freight company) in Berlin-Lichtenberg.

Figure 10. "Revisor": report of an unofficial collaborator

The discovery of hidden also plays a decisive role in the work of another agent, according to the training film. The agent discovered the name of the "Revisor" because he was secretly able to intercept the private notes of a correspondent. The voice of another narrator reads out the following text, which is accompanied by an image of a written report:

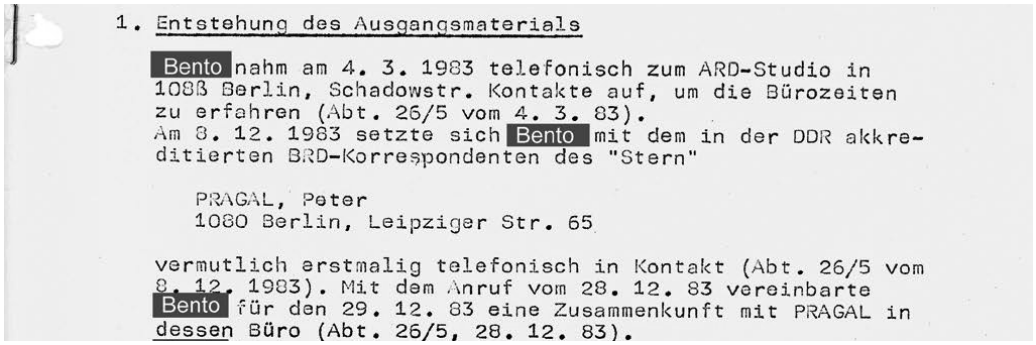


IM: By chance, I have found some handwritten notes that Pragal had made. As he had recently been asking me about the labour situation, alleged unemployment in the GDR, the notes aroused my interest. It was obviously about the fact that a […] GDR citizen would write documents […] in which the author apparently expressed the view that the ideology in our country was a sham and that there were no human rights. That the GDR citizen believes that he cannot publish his material in the GDR.

Figure 11. "Revisor": report of an unofficial collaborator (continued)

The portrayal in the film of how the "operational information" was collected is interesting here, as it does not correspond to the original file of the operational case. In the opening report in the file, it is clear that the Stasi did not learn of the "Revisor's" communications

through the involvement of secret agents. Rather, this information was gathered and passed on by Department 26/5 following the unlawful interception of communications by wiretapping, as evidenced in the following section from the operational file:



1. Entstehung des Ausgangsmaterials

Bento nahm am 4. 3. 1983 telefonisch zum ARD-Studio in 108ß Berlin, Schadowstr. Kontakte auf, um die Bürozeiten zu erfahren (Abt. 26/5 vom 4. 3. 83).
Am 8. 12. 1983 setzte sich Bento mit dem in der DDR akkreditierten BRD-Korrespondenten des "Stern"

PRAGAL, Peter
1080 Berlin, Leipziger Str. 65

vermutlich erstmalig telefonisch in Kontakt (Abt. 26/5 vom 8. 12. 1983). Mit dem Anruf vom 28. 12. 83 vereinbarte Bento für den 29. 12. 83 eine Zusammenkunft mit PRAGAL in dessen Büro (Abt. 26/5, 28. 12. 83).

Figure 12. "Revisor": report of the Department 26[24]

1. **Origin of the source material**

Bento contacted the ARD studio in 108ß Berlin, Schadowstr. by telephone on 4 March 1983 to find out the office hours (Dept. 26/5 from 4.3.83).
On 8.12.1983 Bento sat down with the BDR correspondent of "Stern" accredited in the GDR.

PRAGAL, Peter
1080 Berlin, Leipziger Str. 65

probably made contact for the first time by telephone (Dept. 26/5 from 8.12.1983). In the call of 28.12.83, Bento arranged a meeting with PRAGAL in **his** office for 29.12.83 (Dept. 26/5, 28.12.83).

It seems as if the film producers preferred the narrative of discovering hidden evidence through the eyes and ears of undercover agents rather than revealing the observational techniques used by intelligence services themselves. After first acquiring "operational information," the secret service seeks to identify and make visible the "unknown motive." The documents depicted in the film (see below) indicate that the motive, in this case, was to provide journalists from the West with materials that are defamatory to the GDR.

24 BArch, MfS, AOP 2687/85, Band 1, Bl. 7.

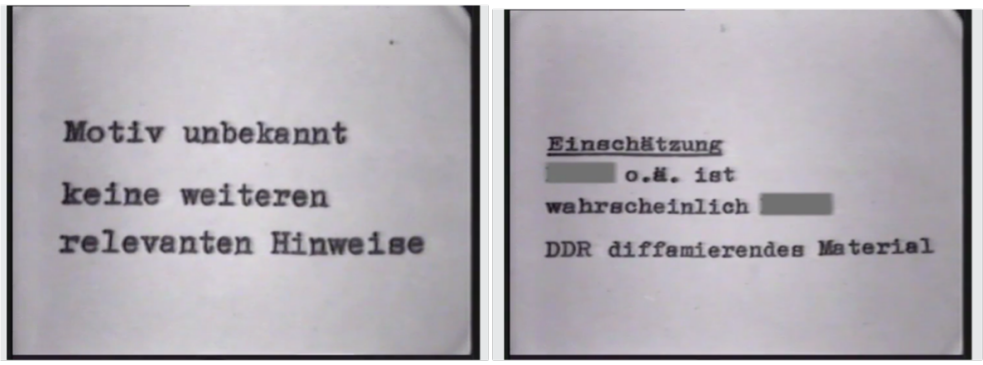
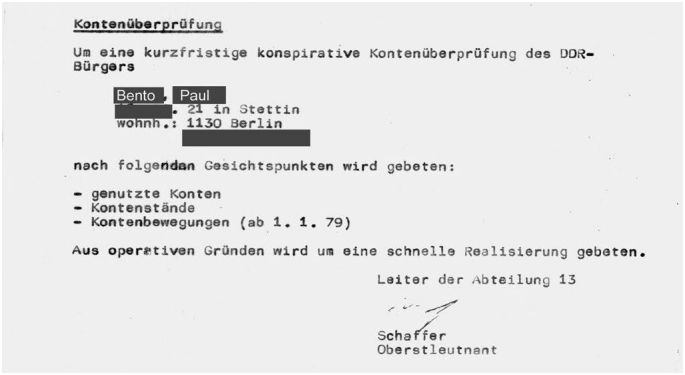


Figure 13. "Revisor": information and assessment

Motive unknown	**Assessment**
	[redacted] or similar is
no further	probably [redacted]
relevant information	material defamatory of the GDR

With this in mind, the Stasi agents had to put three further pieces of the puzzle together to complete the picture: firstly, they needed proof of a receipt of a monetary reward, and secondly, they needed to locate the defamatory writings, as well as find out specific information on the time and place of their handover to the enemy. After this, the suspect's bank account was checked and his house was searched for the manuscripts. These operational steps are described in the file as follows:



Kontenüberprüfung

Um eine kurzfristige konspirative Kontenüberprüfung des DDR-Bürgers

Bento Paul
[redacted]. 21 in Stettin
wohnh.: 1130 Berlin
[redacted]

nach folgendan Gesichtspunkten wird gebeten:

- genutzte Konten
- Kontenstände
- Kontenbewegungen (ab 1. 1. 79)

Aus operativen Gründen wird um eine schnelle Realisierung gebeten.

Leiter der Abteilung 13

Schaffer
Oberstleutnant

Figure 14. "Revisor": inspection of bank account

Inspection of bank account

In order to carry out a short-term covert inspection of the bank account of a GDR citizen

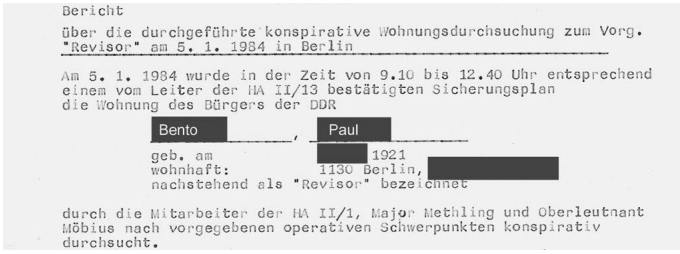
Bento, Paul
[redacted]. 21 in Stettin
residence: 1130 Berlin
[redacted]

access to the follow aspects is requested:

- bank accounts in use
- bank balance
- bank transactions (from 1.1.79)

For operational reasons, please implement this quickly.

Head of Department 13



Bericht
über die durchgeführte konspirative Wohnungsdurchsuchung zum Vorg. "Revisor" am 5. 1. 1984 in Berlin

Am 5. 1. 1984 wurde in der Zeit von 9.10 bis 12.40 Uhr entsprechend einem vom Leiter der HA II/13 bestätigten Sicherungsplan die Wohnung des Bürgers der DDR

Bento [redacted], Paul [redacted]
geb. am [redacted] 1921
wohnhaft: 1130 Berlin, [redacted]
nachstehend als "Revisor" bezeichnet

durch die Mitarbeiter der HA II/1, Major Methling und Oberleutnant Möbius nach vorgegebenen operativen Schwerpunkten konspirativ durchsucht.

Figure 15. "Revisor": report on the covert flat search

Report
on the covert flat search carried out as part
of the "Revisor" case on 5.1.1984 in Berlin

On 5 January 1984, between 9.10 am and 12.40 pm, the flat of the citizen of the GDR

Bento, Paul
born [redacted] 1921
residence: 1130 Berlin, [redacted]
hereinafter referred to as "Revisor"

was searched by the members of HA (Main office) 11/1, Major Methling and First Lieutenant Möbius, according to a security plan drawn up by the head of HA (Main office) 11/13.

The first line of enquiry proved to be irrelevant and was therefore not included in the film. The Stasi was not able to confirm their suspicion that Bento had secretly accepted money from West German "enemies." Bento also denied this accusation under interrogation.

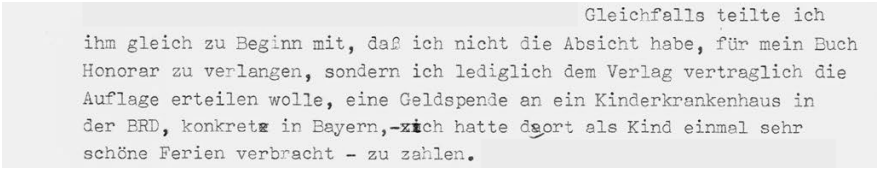

Gleichfalls teilte ich
ihm gleich zu Beginn mit, daß ich nicht die Absicht habe, für mein Buch
Honorar zu verlangen, sondern ich lediglich dem Verlag vertraglich die
Auflage erteilen wolle, eine Geldspende an ein Kinderkrankenhaus in
der BRD, konkret in Bayern, - ich hatte dort als Kind einmal sehr
schöne Ferien verbracht - zu zahlen.

Figure 16. "Revisor": interrogation[25]

I told him right from the start that I did not intend to ask for a fee for my book, only that I wanted to contractually oblige the publisher to donate any profits to a children's hospital in the FRD, to be exact in Bavaria, – where I spent a really nice holiday once as a child.

As a consequence of the deliberative omission of this unfounded suspicion in the film's presentation of the case, the viewer is misled into believing that they are witnessing a "dense ecology of unforgivably strict sequences" (Garfinkel 2022, 23) of an ideal trajectory of the investigation. Furthermore, only those methods of securing evidence that are successful are depicted in the film, such as the flat search to obtain the manuscripts shown below.

Figure 17. "Revisor": obtaining manuscripts

The film depicts the discovered "concealed writings," but more than this, it draws the viewer's attention to the white-gloved hands of the searchers. The film features these gloves prominently. In practice, the wearing of such gloves was intended to ensure that no visible traces were left on the objects, thereby preventing the house search from being detected.

25 BStU, MfS, UV 14079/85, Bd. 2, Bl. 49.

The film aims to present a rosy prognosis, one in which the operational work of the secret service will prevent a future threat to national security. This kind of favourable prognosis—that the secret service will defeat the enemy—is a central indicator of success of the exemplary intelligence operation in the film. For this reason, the subsequent evidence that the "Revisor" did not actually pose a threat to the state does not serve the film's narrative at all. Instead, the depiction of scattered West German magazines serves as an allusion to a threat to the future of the GDR, which has now been prevented by the arrest:

N: After evaluating the results of the meeting with IMB "Klaus" and analysing the operational material compiled up to that point, it was concluded that […] material which "Revisor" wants to hand over to Pragal, is defamatory material about the GDR. If it fell into the hands of the enemy, it would presumably lead to an extensive smear campaign against the GDR in the Western media. This assessment made it imperative to immediately take effective political-operational measures to stop the activities planned by the "Revisor" and to prevent the material from being handed over to Pragal on 7 January 1984. […] Thanks to the prudent and rapid reaction of all personnel involved in the operation, the handover of the material to the enemy was prevented and the interests of the GDR were thus protected from damage.

Figure 18. "Revisor": Western media

The purpose of this commentary is not only to summarize the outcomes of the investigation but also to emphasize the dangers posed by the discovered "operational materials" by drawing parallels between Bento's novels and Western critical mass media.

The forbidden writings and malicious motives of the "Revisor" thus become the result of an "objective" analysis which, on the one hand, substantiates existing suspicions and, on the other hand, helps to determine future work in preparation for an arrest. As a result, the conclusions drawn from what is observed and articulated on the surface is transformed into the fact of the secret.

CONCLUSION

The moments of discovery in the Stasi operational und training materials were described in situations in which agents developed their future actions out of a state of not-knowing (being unsure of a crime) and non-accountability (being unable to find an explanation for certain behaviour). When the members of Stasi believed certain behaviours or situations confounded accountability, they sought to restore it for themselves. To do so, the agents needed

to point to inconsistencies (e.g., a person walking by a military facility), to suspect that secret intentions were behind them (e.g., a hidden note), to initiate operational procedures to establish accountability and thereby compile evidence (e.g., bank statements), to formulate relevant conclusions (e.g., preparation for illegal departure), and ultimately to prevent an action that has become accountable (e.g., through arrest). In this sense, secrecy acquires the status of a constitutive organising feature of intelligence practice in that it problematises the inexplicable and the unaccountable. It shapes the professional vision and action of the Stasi agents with the intention of ideologically establishing accountability by the "members' methods of making evident the settings' ways as clear, coherent, planful, consistent, chosen, knowable, uniform, reproducible connections" (Garfinkel 1967, 34).

These processes bear significant similarities to the organization of certain social science inferences, when observations are gathered over time and then organized according to specific conceptual frameworks. As soon as a clear, definitive statement of fact emerges, it indicates that much of the organizational work has already been completed. At this stage, the main task of the readers of final reports is to infer the underlying model from these organized events, which enables them to categorize the events as proved facts (Smith 1976). In this way, the secret agents asserted their unique status as individuals capable of seeing and recognizing things that others—whether due to naivety or intentional disregard—overlooked or dismissed.

However, this exclusive status as omniscient observers stands in contrast to processes of discoveries that remain independent of ideological bias. This usually includes mistakes, leaps, loose ends, and happy accidents which Harold Garfinkel conceptualises as "shop floor contingencies," i.e., as "local and specific, unavoidable real constraints of contingent facticities of achievements in designed enterprises that somehow escape from accountability" (Garfinkel 2002, 26) or may be regarded as "wasting time" (ibid., 29).

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