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## Thomas Ammer and Hans-Joachim Memmler, eds.: Staatssicherheit in Rostock. Zielgruppen, Methoden, Auflösung

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## BOOK REVIEWS

***Staatssicherheit in Rostock: Zielgruppen, Methoden, Auflösung.* Ed. Thomas Ammer and Hans-Joachim Memmler. Bielefeld: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1991. 212 pp. Paperback DM 19.80.**

I regularly read the newspapers, as well as several magazines, so, by most standards, I would count as a well-informed citizen. Nevertheless, I do not have the feeling that I understand the society in which I live. Perhaps the complexity of this society renders comprehension impossible? Perhaps I underestimate my own knowledge? Or perhaps there is essential information which, for all the vast amount of printed matter, remains simply unavailable.

These are not really questions for scholarship. Yet my work on the GDR over the past decade and a half now makes me suspect the last of these possibilities could be true. For many years I monitored the GDR for Amnesty International and several other human rights organizations, while simultaneously doing research on the literature of the GDR. I was entrusted with writing a report on human rights in the GDR which was presented to a United Nations Committee in Geneva, as well as a review of the country for Human Rights Internet. Yet, for all the vast amounts of information I reviewed, I knew nothing at all about the network of the Ministry for State Security.

This was hardly mentioned in the samizdat publications which came out of the GDR. Citizens of the GDR, at least in dissident circles, were aware of it, but only as a sort of amorphous danger. It seemed almost more a mood, a sense of menace, than an actual phenomenon. There were sometimes vague rumors and speculations, yet that was all. Furthermore, nobody I know even attempted to find out more.

Yet now, only a few years after the dissolution of the GDR, the experience of living in the shadow of the MfS, of being constantly shadowed by agents, is recognized as the defining experience of life in the GDR. It is this, more than anything else, which sets former East Germans apart from their Western counterparts.

And we have suddenly gone from nearly complete ignorance to a bewildering surplus of information. The files kept by the MfS on citizens comprised 125 miles of shelf space, not to mention the many audio and visual recordings. Sifting through the

materials and trying to make sense of them will be enough to occupy many scholars for a long time to come.

Some progress has, indeed, been made. The first published collections of MfS documents such as the excellent *Ich liebe euch doch alle*, edited by Mittler and Wolle (1990), were largely centered on the dramatic impact of the documents. As much as anything else, the papers were used to document the paranoid atmosphere which, apparently, prevailed within the upper echelons on the MfS.

Now that the shock of the extent of the files has worn off, *Staatssicherheit in Rostock*, published two years later, is considerably more scientific in purpose. *Staatssicherheit in Rostock* is the report of a citizen's committee in the district of Rostock that was entrusted with presiding over the dissolution of the MfS. It is full of very precise detail about whom the State Security agents targeted, how they were organized and what relations they maintained with other government organizations from the ruling party to the Free German Youth.

A section is even devoted to the finances of the MfS, a significant part of which came from confiscated property and money. Many documents are reproduced, and the book includes several photographs, but all seem to be chosen strictly for their value as information. Nothing is there simply for the sake of human interest.

For all the exactness of most of the information included, the book tends, in sharp contrast to that of Mittler and Wolle, to leave out names, both of agents and their victims. This is probably a conscious attempt to soften the emotional impact of the text in the interest of objectivity. The decision may be questionable, yet it says much for the human decency of the editors, who are at pains to avoid even a hint of sensationalism.

The historical value of this book is very considerable, but there is a danger that the sheer mass of detail may, for the present, overwhelm any attempt at a unifying analysis. For those who lived in or near Rostock at the time, the context of the materials in this book is certainly not abstract. There are bits of information which will surely trigger personal memories. Just to give one fairly random example, many MfS documents tell of a perceived decadence among the GDR youth, a tendency that the Ministry tried to combat by greatly increasing the penetration

of youth organizations by agents (“inoffizielle Mitarbeiter”). But for those who lived outside the country, or even in a different part, it will be hard to provide a context for much of the information.

At times I find myself envying the citizens of the former GDR who have this information available. As a student in the early seventies, I took part in what I thought was a militant protest against the war in Vietnam. Almost too late, I realized that the leaders of the protest were acting with incredible stupidity (admittedly, I didn't look too smart either) and brutality (one charge that definitely couldn't be turned against me). They could hardly have done a better job of alienating the public if they had been trying. But maybe they were trying? And maybe they weren't stupid at all? I wonder to this day how many of the leaders of the protest were agent provocateurs. How many black panthers or weathermen, for that matter, may have been working for the FBI or the CIA? And what is the extent of government and corporate espionage today? It is highly unlikely that I will ever know the answers. But analogies with East Germany at least inspire speculation.

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**De Bruyn, Günter. *Mein Brandenburg. Fotos von Barbara Klemm.* Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1993. 165 S.**

Was nach der Wende geographisch von der DDR geblieben ist, sind ihre Landschaften—unberührt von der Neuverteilung der politischen Einheiten. Neu ist die Hausse ihrer Erschließung, sei es von Touristen, den Massenmedien oder der Literatur. Auch die sieben Essays in *Mein Brandenburg* zeigen, daß die Provinz “in” ist. In DDR-Zeiten erzielte der Rückzug in die Provinz vielleicht noch einen dissidierenden Bonus, weil auf diese Weise dem verordneten Nationalismus entgegengewirkt wurde—anno 1993 setzt der Regionalismus auf andere Wirkungen. Wo die Zentren der europäischen Macht, sei es Berlin, Brüssel oder Sarajevo, wirtschaftliche und militärische Krisenherde anfachen, sollen die Regionen an der Peripherie Europas idyllische Ruhe stiften. Brandenburg scheint solch ein krisenfestes Refugium zu sein. Gewollt oder nicht trifft Günter de Bruyn mit seinem neuen Buch genau jene Marktlücke, die nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges und seit Anfang des europäischen Größenwahns immer anziehender wirkt. Denn, wenn es an nationaler bzw. pan-europäischer Identitätsfindung fehlt, steht einem immer noch die regionale Arkadie offen.

Die Kategorie des Regionalismus erschöpft sich jedoch im Falle de Bruyns keineswegs in der Rede von der Heimatkunst, sondern erfaßt ein grundlegendes Problem: das der privaten Heimatsuche in dem sich grenzenlos wahnenden alten Kontinent. Günter de Bruyn versucht sich in seinen Beiträgen zur “märkischen Kleingeschichte” nicht nur der Landschaft und Kultur zu nähern, sondern eher den Prozeß seiner Aneignung vorzuführen. Aus sowohl touristischer, kulturhistorischer als auch literaturkritischer Optik konstruiert er *sein* Brandenburg.

Ließe man seine Lektüre hauptsächlich durch die das Buch illustrierenden Fotos von Barbara Klemm leiten, stellten die Texte fast ausschließlich eine heile Welt, die dem Ausruf “Es lebe die alte Zeit” genüge tun würden, zur Schau. Aber das ist nicht, was de Bruyn den Lesern vermitteln möchte. Er berührt öfter die Fallen, die ihm die Idylle stellt: “Eine hundert Jahre alte Allee sollte man wie ein eigenes Haus schützen; denn sie braucht auch in modernen Zeiten wieder hundert Jahre zum Wachsen” heißt es in den “Nachrichten aus dem Spreeland.” Die Warnungen, daß eine Zerstörung der brandenburgischen Umwelt eine Zerstörung ihrer Kultur, und somit die von de Bruyns eigener kultureller Identität, beinhalte, korrespondieren in keiner Weise mit Klemms