

Conflicting Evidence

Jones, Sara

DOI:

[10.1111/j.1468-0483.2009.01456.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2009.01456.x)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Jones, S 2009, 'Conflicting Evidence: Hermann Kant and the Opening of the Stasi Files', *German Life and Letters*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 190-205. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2009.01456.x>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

The definitive version is available at www3.interscience.wiley.com. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2009.01456.x/abstract>
German Life and Letters Volume 62, Issue 2, pages 190–205, April 2009

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

CONFLICTING EVIDENCE: HERMANN KANT AND THE OPENING OF THE STASI FILES

SARA JONES

In *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, Mary Fulbrook notes a tendency post-1989 to divide the population of the GDR neatly into ‘Mitläufer’ and ‘Opfer’, without consideration for the multitude of possible reactions from individuals and groups to the SED regime.¹ Fulbrook considers the difficulties of analysis of GDR history in such a charged political climate² and states that she seeks to understand the ways in which East Germans ‘perceived and played a role in the political patterns of a state, which existed for forty years’.³

The various sources that might help the GDR historian achieve this goal, however, present many problems. The files of the SED and of the ‘Ministerium für Staatssicherheit’ (MfS) are drenched in ideological terminology and the researcher must always consider the purpose and addressee of these documents and the pressure to report successes, rather than failure.⁴ It is exactly those files that might offer particular insight into individual perceptions of the state, the reports of ‘Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter’ (IM), which require perhaps the most careful approach.⁵ Not only are these files frequently written by the Stasi officer, rather than the IM him- or herself, and thus filtered and restructured, but these files were also produced in a context that is difficult for the outside observer to reconstruct, but which must be considered if the content of the files is to be properly understood.

The potential advantages of autobiography and other forms of life-writing in this process of understanding are clear: in autobiography, the author seeks to explain his or her life as he or she perceives it in his or her own terms. However, the use of life-writing as a historical source is also problematic: life writing is always particularly subjective; the past is written from the viewpoint of the present; the presentation of the past depends on the author’s

memory, a notoriously unreliable filter and, particularly in the political climate of the 1990s, writers might deliberately lie about what they did or what they remember.

Although both sources, autobiography and archives, may refer to the same event or individual, they were written from different perspectives, with different goals and different addressees. Moreover, autobiographies written after the 'Wende' and the opening of the archives are not produced in isolation from the files; these different perspectives on the individual interact with each other. Barbara Miller argues that victims of the Stasi 'may begin to re-remember the past on the basis of the information which has been recorded in the files'⁶ and the reading of the files in the post-Wende context is likely to lead to a specifically post-Wende interpretation of these texts, as the reader brings a present viewpoint to these historical documents.⁷ One possible approach to the analysis of these texts is, therefore, to compare these perspectives, goals and addressees. The aim is not to prove which source is more reliable or valuable, but rather to use the differences and tensions between these various perspectives to tease out the complexity of intellectual life in the GDR and of the position of the GDR intellectual writing his or her autobiography after the Wende.

In this article, I demonstrate this approach through examination of the interaction between the Stasi files and autobiography of the East German writer and cultural functionary, Hermann Kant. In his autobiography, *Abspann*, published in 1991, Kant flatly denies having ever acted as a 'Späher, Spitzel oder Spanner in geheimen Diensten';⁸ he describes the attempt to recruit him by various secret services, but states that, ultimately, all their efforts were unsuccessful, as he out-manipulated them, demonstrating cleverly that he could not be trusted with undercover operations (*Abspann*, pp. 246-57). Similarly, when, on the opening of the files in the archive of the 'Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR' (BStU) in 1992, *Der Spiegel* published an extensive report on Kant's regular involvement with the Stasi as an informer between 1957

and 1976,⁹ Kant responded once again by denying ever having been, ‘Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter des in Rede stehenden Ministeriums’.¹⁰ In this respect, the very existence of the lengthy IM file 2173/70, recording the information provided by Hermann Kant, as ‘Kontaktperson’ (KP) Kant and as ‘Geheimer Informator’ (GI)¹¹ and IMS ‘Martin’,¹² stands in contradiction to Kant’s presentation after the Wende of his connection with the MfS.

What can an analysis of the files tell us about Kant’s conception of and motivations for working with the Stasi? These sources are compared with Kant’s statements after the Wende on his involvement with the MfS in *Abspann*, in articles in newspapers from the early 1990s and in a collection of interviews conducted since unification by the East German journalist, Irmtraud Gutschke, and published in 2007. I examine the contradictions and tensions between these different sources in order to gain a greater understanding of Kant’s complex position both in the GDR and within post-Wende political discourse. The relationship between autobiography and file leads to broader questions regarding the possibility of remembering the GDR and the role of intellectuals in the East German state and reveals itself to be a key issue in debates in the post-Wende period about what will emerge as the dominant image of the GDR after it has ceased to exist.

1. The File

The ‘Ministerium für Staatssicherheit’ dates Kant’s involvement with the Stasi from 6 August 1957, when the 21-year-old Kant was the research assistant of Professor Alfred Kantorowicz at the Germanistisches Institut in Berlin.¹³ On 14 October 1957, Kant is registered as a ‘Kontaktperson’ and, as KP ‘Kant’ he meets and gives information to officers of the ‘Hauptabteilung’ (HA) V.¹⁴ On 12 November 1958, Leutnant Dreier reports that Kant agreed to meet regularly with the Stasi, and gave a verbal declaration of his support for the MfS, although he refuses to put this in writing.¹⁵ However, it is not until 9 August 1960 that the MfS take the decision to start the process of formally recruiting Kant as an IM, specifically

with the purpose of reporting on the preparations for the approaching Writers' Congress to be held in May 1961.¹⁶

On 26 November 1962, Oberleutnants Schindler and Treike draw up the plan to recruit Kant formally as a 'Geheimer Informator' for the HA V.¹⁷ A file note dated 18 February 1963 records that the registration of Kant as GI 'Martin' takes place on the 1 February 1963 and, although Kant does not sign a written undertaking, subsequent reports are filed under this code-name.¹⁸ From 1963 to 1966, Kant meets regularly with Stasi officers and reports on the situation in the Writers' Union and the PEN, the activities of colleagues in both East and West, the mood amongst fellow writers and the behaviour of those whom the Stasi considered to be dangerous critics, such as Wolf Biermann, Günter Kunert and Stephan Hermlin.¹⁹ Between 1967 and 1969 there was a long pause in Kant's meetings with the MfS, but he resumed contact in October 1969. Kant's IM file was closed in 1976, when, due to his election to the Berlin 'Bezirksleitung' in 1974, he was no longer considered suitable to work unofficially for the Stasi.²⁰

2. Motivations

Writing in 1993, Frauke Meyer-Gosau considers Kant's motivations for assisting the Stasi to be a result of his fundamental identification with the state and the Party and a consequence of Party discipline.²¹ The files themselves indicate that ideological commitment to the GDR and the socialist project, and the importance of Party discipline, were indeed key reasons for Kant's decision to meet with the Stasi. In the report dated 12 November 1958, Dreier records that Kant stated that, despite being unwilling to give a written declaration, he occupied a position of trust in the Party and would give them all the information they required.²² In a file note dated 26 January 1969, in which Oberleutnant Schönfelder suggests Kant be re-registered as an IMS, Schönfelder declares that Kant's initial recruitment was on the basis of 'politisch-ideologische[n] Überzeugung'.²³

However, this statement should not be taken at face value: Joachim Walther notes that political and ideological conviction was, for the Stasi, the most desirable motivation for collaboration. In the field of literature, this was given as the method of recruitment in ninety percent of IM files, but it could mask other motivations, for example financial or career-related.²⁴ Similarly, Ulrich Schröter questions the high percentage of IM who are recorded as reporting on the basis of ideological conviction and considers that this might be the result of a blindness on the part of Stasi towards the reality of the position of the informer and a reinterpretation by the officer writing the file of the fear of the consequences of refusing to collaborate.²⁵ The documents in Kant's IM file indicate that his reasons for agreeing to inform for the Stasi may indeed have been more complex than simply a feeling of duty and identification with the state. Walther notes that some IM in the literary scene informed because they believed that they might influence the literary and social development in the GDR for the better.²⁶ Meyer-Gosau argues that the attempt to instrumentalise the officers of the MfS with a view to effecting some change in SED policy is linked to the concern for the welfare of the socialist state and identification with the Party and notes that this too is a motivation frequently given by the writers of Kant's generation.²⁷ The documents in Kant's file contain hints that, over the course of his meetings with the officers, Kant may also have attempted to use his Stasi contact to express criticism.

One such example of Kant's apparent attempt to pass on critical opinions via the Stasi can be seen in a file note relating to a meeting between Kant and Stasi officers dated 10 September 1966. Kant is reportedly asked about the situation in the Writers' Union and the atmosphere amongst writers in the wake of the Eleventh Plenary of the Central Committee of the SED.²⁸ Working within the framework of the Party's desire for prestige through the production of world-class literature and the demand that socialist writers produce literature related to the socialist present, Kant informs the Stasi that currently no 'wesentliche neue

Gegenwartsliteratur' is being produced; since the works of Christa Wolf and Erik Neutsch have been 'aus unbekanntem Gründen zurückgezogen', no new works of prose are on the horizon; there are no films with contemporary themes and no proletarian heroes in television features, and the theatres of the GDR are not performing plays relating to the present for fear of criticism from the Party. Kant makes clear that the current state of uncertainty amongst writers and other artists is a direct result of the Eleventh Plenary. He is very critical of the newly appointed First Secretary of the Writers' Union, Gerhard Henniger, and adds that when a leading functionary in the Soviet Writers' Union had enquired about new 'Gegenwartsliteratur', he had been disappointed when directed by Henniger towards Erwin Strittmatter's *Ole Bienkopp*, published three years earlier.²⁹ Kant thereby indicates that this situation is also damaging to the image of the GDR in the eyes of the Soviet Union and thus works within the Stasi's own terms of reference and couches his criticism in the language of commitment to the image of the state. It is not possible to judge from these sources to what extent Kant was using this expression of loyalty in a calculated fashion and to what extent he believed in what he was saying. However, as will be seen, Kant employs a similar tactic in his presentation of critical writers whom he considered to be friends.

The attempt to use the Stasi to express criticism of Party policy is indicative of a particular view of the GDR and of the most effective communication strategies. Unpublished documents in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin show that, throughout the course of the GDR, Kant was reluctant to express criticism publicly, preferring instead to use the semi-public sphere of behind-the-scenes communication in correspondence with Party officials or in Party meetings.³⁰ The interaction with the Stasi can be seen partly as a result of this reluctance to express criticism in the public sphere and as a point on the scale of public and private communication, representing the most discreet manner of passing on critical views, whilst remaining in the sphere of inner-party discussion. Walther links this mode of thinking to the

belief in the possibility of reforming the practice of actually existing socialism in line with the real utopia of socialism, ‘mit Hilfe der Staatssicherheit die alten Ideale wieder zu inthronisieren’, and adds that many IM believed that only the Stasi were capable of and willing to pass on critical opinions to the SED leadership.³¹ It is also important to note that Kant is only critical of the very specific area of cultural policy and never calls into question the power of the Party or the organisation of the state.

3. Scruples and Distancing

Alison Lewis notes that the files of the MfS served a ‘dual bureaucratic purpose’: not only did they record the actions and attitudes of potentially subversive subjects, they also monitored the attitude of the informers themselves.³² In this respect, the files are also a useful source of information on Kant’s approach to the MfS and his collaboration with them, or at least the Stasi officers’ perception of this. Meyer-Gosau argues that Kant was, for the MfS, the ideal informer, ready and willing to collaborate.³³ Closer analysis of the files indicates, however, that Kant’s position was more ambivalent. In a file note dated 7 December 1960, recording a meeting with Kant on the 30 November 1960, Leutnant Paroch states that, in response to a request for information regarding the Writers’ Congress, ‘Gen. K[ant] erklärte sich ohne Zögern bereit, solche Auskünfte zu geben.’ Only a few months earlier, however, in an assessment of Kant dated 25 August 1960, Leutnant Dreier states that he suspects that Kant may not always have behaved honestly in their meetings. Furthermore, although Dreier feels that Kant had always shown a ‘parteiliche Haltung’, he wanted to know more than was necessary about the workings of the MfS and he was not, of his own accord, interested in working more closely with the Stasi.³⁴

Kant is described as being particularly reserved at moments when he is asked for information pertaining to close friends or colleagues. In their recommendation for the recruitment of Kant, dated 26 November 1962, Oberleutnants Treike and Schindler state that,

although the candidate is prepared to give information at meetings, he still has reservations when it comes to informing on those close to him.³⁵ Meyer-Gosau notes this hesitation to inform on friends in both Kant's and Christa Wolf's IM files and links this to the motivation of commitment to the state and to the Party: 'Private Freunde standen da für die Gesprächs- und Auskunftsbereiten selbst natürlich außerhalb der Verdachtszone.'³⁶

Kant's scruples regarding the relaying of information pertaining to individuals he considered friends are most clearly demonstrated in the files relating to Stephan Hermlin. Kant and Hermlin had been friends since the middle of the 1950s and, as Karl Corino notes, the files indicate that Kant made an effort, 'Hermlin in seinen Berichten an das MfS nicht "abzuschießen"'.³⁷ For example, in a report on a meeting with Kant on 14 September 1965 (dated 16 September 1965), regarding the election of Biermann as a member of the PEN-Zentrum Ost-West in April 1965, Kant is recorded as stating that he could not make out who had nominated Biermann.³⁸ However, in a report dated 7 February 1966 relating to the Party meeting of the Writers' Union on 4 February 1966, it becomes clear that Kant is aware that Hermlin was responsible for the nomination. In this report, Kant is recorded as criticising Hermlin's statement to the Party meeting that, 'zu den Fragen der Schriftsteller habe er eine andere Auffassung, aber er beuge sich der Parteidisziplin'. However, in this report, his emphasis is on Hermlin's assurance that he did not want to stand against the Party, but to promote a young talent for the GDR. Furthermore, Kant is recorded as stating that, in a private conversation, Hermlin refused to be placed in the same category as outspoken critics, such as Stefan Heym.³⁹ This suggests that initially Kant refused to name Hermlin as Biermann's nominator, but, when this became common knowledge, he attempted to demonstrate that Hermlin should not be considered an enemy of the state.

As Kant can be seen to attempt to influence cultural policy, while couching his criticism in the language of loyalty and concern for the image of the GDR, he frames his

defence of his friend in terms of Hermlin's commitment to the Party and to the state. The question remains to what extent this attempt to 'play the game', that is, to work within the framework of the Party while following one's own agenda, was a satisfactory and successful strategy for negotiating the system and to what extent it represented a subjugation to this framework which compromised one's ethical position. Critical writers, such as Günter de Bruyn, who had used similar tactics in their negotiation with functionaries in the earlier parts of their career, came to view these methods as unacceptable: de Bruyn describes how, in the early years of the GDR, he considered that, 'man, um Schlimmeres zu verhüten, schlimme Posten wenn möglich besetzen sollte' and, in order to promote particular works of literature when he worked as a librarian, it was necessary to use the prescribed theories and vocabulary, rather than attempt to refute them.⁴⁰ Moreover, he states that he was prepared to compromise and make significant changes to his first novel, *Der Hohlweg* (1963), in order to ensure its publication (VJ, p. 96). Later in his career, however, de Bruyn feels this position is no longer tenable and seeks clarity in his relationship with power: he refuses to state publicly that his novel *Neue Herrlichkeit* (FRG, 1984; GDR, 1985) had been misinterpreted by critics in the West, even though this decision might result in a ban on the publication of the text in the East (VJ, p. 250). However, de Bruyn admits that such clarity was not possible in the complex system of the Party's desire for both prestige and control: he was not punished and the novel was published a year later (VJ, p. 251). He is left to write in peace, but the price is that Party functionaries use his name as proof of a tolerant cultural policy: he notes that 'Gewährenlassen auch Vereinnahmungen bedeuten konnte' (VJ, p. 251). In this respect, it is his earlier willingness to compromise and 'play the system', in order to become a successful GDR writer, which is the prerequisite for this 'Gewährenlassen' and which leads to this process of incorporation into the system of the GDR. Kant cannot be condemned by de Bruyn's point, but the comparison with de Bruyn demonstrates differing interpretations of

similar behaviour. The case of de Bruyn shows that the sense of acceptable and unacceptable moral compromise is subjective and changing.

4. After the Wende: A Question of Terminology?

Despite these indications of an ambivalent attitude towards working with the Stasi, and in contrast to Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller, Kant did not attempt after the Wende to justify or explain his involvement with the MfS, but rather simply denied it. As Barbara Miller notes, Kant is not alone in denying his role as ‘Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter’: a ‘substantial number of former IM deny all contact with the MfS until irrefutable evidence from the files renders any further denial futile’. Miller argues that this pattern may be the result of a combination of ‘intentional dishonesty’ and ‘some element of suppression’, but one must also consider the impact of ‘terminological considerations. [...] Few IM were aware of the nomenclature or of the wider structure of the IM system’, thus ‘the entire “Stasi” debate is carried out using what are for the majority of IM previously unfamiliar linguistic concepts.’⁴¹ In an article in *Neues Deutschland* of 27 October 1992, Kant states:

Niemals in meinem Leben hat sich mir jemand mit der Behauptung genähert, er sei mein Führungsoffizier, und nie hat mich ein Offizier oder ein anderer Offizieller zu seinem Formellen oder Informellen Mitarbeiter ernannt – selbst mit den Begriffen wurde ich erst bekannt, als hierzulande die Gauckelei begann.⁴²

As Corino notes, it is indeed very unlikely that the officers who worked with Kant would introduce themselves as ‘Führungsoffiziere’, nor would they have informed him of his status as an ‘Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter’.⁴³ Kant’s denial of the relevance of these terms to his own past and his comment that he was even unaware of the existence of this terminology until the opening of the archives might indicate that the accusations of Stasi contact were put to him in unfamiliar terms.

That Kant's view of his own behaviour differed from the view of IM prevalent in the debates of the early 1990s is further demonstrated by Kant's comments in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that he did speak to Stasi officials in the context of his role as a functionary, but when they had attempted to recruit him, he had stressed that he felt unable to take on any 'geheimdienstliche Tätigkeit' for fear that this might restrict or endanger his activities as functionary, journalist and writer. He states that any registration of him as an IM was, therefore, without his knowledge.⁴⁴ As stated above, the Stasi files do indicate that Kant never signed a written undertaking, a 'Verpflichtungserklärung', and that he felt that working for the Stasi was part of his duty as a Party functionary. For the Stasi, this did not preclude Kant from being an IM; however, the officers would not necessarily have informed Kant of his status and, after the Wende, Kant claims that he continued to perceive these conversations to be part of his role as a functionary, not part of a wider network of informing. Kant's emphatic rejection of the files in these articles suggests that the material contained within them is either alien to his memory of his contact with the MfS or to the manner in which he perceives himself and wishes others to perceive him, or indeed both.

However, Kant may also be using the problem of terminological considerations in order deliberately to confuse the issue. His treatment of his contact with the Stasi in his autobiography, written before the opening of the files, points towards this conclusion. In his discussion in *Abspann* of his apparent escape from collaboration with the MfS, Kant presents the traditional image of the spy as secret soldier being given missions to fulfil in the West. He is asked not to inform on colleagues or friends, but to find out if a particular building is still in place between Pöseldorf and Alster (*Abspann*, pp. 256-57). Similarly, in his portrayal of his attempted recruitment by Russian and Polish secret service agents, the focus is on their interest in the West and documents relating to his newspaper directed at West German students, that is in foreign intelligence, rather than informing on his fellow citizens (*Abspann*,

pp. 245-47). He discusses at length his contact, or rather his lack of contact, with Markus Wolf, the former head of international, rather than domestic, espionage (*Abspann*, pp. 262-64). Moreover, a large section of text is devoted to the accusations of Joachim Seyppel in 1983 that Kant 'bekleide das Amt eines Oberstleutnants des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit'.⁴⁵ Kant reminds the reader that he took Seyppel to court and won (*Abspann*, p. 261).⁴⁶ Indeed, Kant is not being dishonest when he maintains that he was not an 'Oberstleutnant' of the MfS, as this does not rule out an involvement as IM. As seen above, Kant sets this account of his contact with secret services in the context of the heightened interest in the early 1990s in the issue of the Stasi and the role of IM: he states at the start of the chapter: 'Es gilt wohl zu keiner Zeit als unbeträchtlich, ob jemand Spion oder keiner war, aber gegenwärtig wird besonders streng darauf geachtet, daß einer nicht als Späher, Spitzel oder Spanner in geheimen Diensten stand' (*Abspann*, p. 230). However, Kant denies being a 'Spion' principally in the context of the spy as a secret agent of international espionage, or a paid employee of the state, not as an individual who informs on friends, colleagues and neighbours. This demonstrates a willing or unwilling 'misunderstanding' of the terminology of the debates of the early 1990s.

As discussed above, this misunderstanding may be the result of a lack of knowledge of the extent of the system of informers in the GDR and of the significance of his 'conversations' with the Stasi officers. However, the tension between Kant's discussion of the spy as a secret soldier of international espionage and his use of the terms 'Späher' and 'Spanner' suggests that he is, in 1991, well aware of the use of GDR citizens in domestic intelligence by the Stasi and is blurring the boundaries between the two, allowing him, by denying the former, seemingly to deny the latter. Furthermore, Kant does engage with the accusations that he was a 'Spitzel', in the general understanding of the term, in his denial of the charges by Kantorowicz in 1964 that Kant had spied on him for the Stasi. Corino notes

that it is indeed very unlikely that Kant informed on Kantorowicz while he was still resident in the GDR, as Kantorowicz fled to the West only two weeks after Kant's first recorded contact with the MfS.⁴⁷ Kant denied the accusations just as fervently when they were first published in April 1964.⁴⁸ Thus he engages only with things he has not done, rebutting only a very specific allegation, rather than addressing his lengthy service as KP 'Kant' and GI/IMS 'Martin'. The Stasi files themselves, specifically where they show his reluctance to inform on those close to him and his attempts to protect Hermlin, indicate that Kant was well aware that his 'conversations' with the Stasi might have serious consequences for those he named.

Kant further clouds the issue of terminology and the exact nature of his relationship with the MfS in his discussion of meetings with Stasi officials in the collection of interviews with Gutschke. In contrast to his portrayal of these events in his autobiography, Kant must, in 2007, engage with the material relating to his Stasi contact now available in the public sphere, notably the documents reproduced in Karl Corino's 1995 publication, *Die Akte Kant*. In reference to this material, Kant states that he was never, as suggested by the files in Corino's text, given an 'Auftrag' by an officer of the MfS. He states that even the keenest 'MfS-Verbandsbeauftragte' had never given him missions to fulfil, but rather that they came to him to ask his opinion on particular writers or situations.⁴⁹ However, the issue of whether or not Kant was given clear 'Aufträge' by the Stasi, or if this detail of the reports is, in fact, a product of the fantasy of the individual officer, does not address the wider question of the nature of these meetings. In a similar manner to his discussion of the accusations by Seyppel and Kantorowicz, Kant only engages with his file in terms of a denial of particular details, rather than dealing with the larger issue of his exact relationship with the Stasi.

As in his newspaper articles in 1992, in this collection of interviews Kant points towards the official nature of his meetings with the Stasi: he describes the officer he met with

as the 'Verbandsbeauftragte', suggesting a formal arrangement in which a particular officer worked officially with the Union, and he notes that Gerhard Henniger was also reporting to the MfS in his role as First Secretary of the Union.⁵⁰ However, Kant does not state explicitly that the meetings he is referring to here are those he readily admits to having in the context of his position as Vice-President and President of the Writers' Union. Furthermore, in reference to these meetings, Kant comments: 'da kann heute natürlich ein Außenstehender sagen, mit solchen Leuten dürfe man nicht sprechen. Aber für mich war es ein Teil meines Staates, von dem ich wollte, daß er bleibt.'⁵¹ This statement that he viewed the MfS as a necessary part of the state is strikingly similar to the defence of commitment and Party discipline given by other members of his generation who admit to having collaborated unofficially with the Stasi.⁵² Kant further blurs the contours of the debate and the reader is left uncertain as to whether Kant is again discussing his contact with the Stasi as a leading cultural functionary or confirming the evidence of the files that he also worked with the MfS on an unofficial basis.

Thus fifteen years after the opening of the files of the MfS, Kant still seems unable to offer his reader any clarity on the issue of his relationship with this organ of oppression. This ambiguity in Kant's reflections on his role in the GDR and the nature of his relationship with the Stasi, might, in turn, result from a lack of clarity in his position during the existence of the GDR and his complex balancing act between public adherence to the Party line and behind-the-scenes criticism of cultural policy. This is a lack of clarity reflected in the statements of critical authors, such as de Bruyn, and in the files themselves: Kant informed for the Stasi intermittently for more than 20 years; however, especially after 1978, he was frequently the subject of critical IM reports. Any attempt to neatly divide individuals into 'Täter', 'Mitläufer' or 'Opfer' does not allow for such ambiguous positions.

5. Rejecting the Files

In the 2007 collection of interviews, Kant calls into question the reliability of any of the material contained within the files of the MfS through pointing towards apparent gaps in the material. He states that he cannot take the ‘Stasi-Enthüllungen’ seriously, as, if the files were accurate, Karl Corino, when researching *Die Akte Kant*, would have found material relating to the stop on the publication of *Das Impressum* in 1969.⁵³ However, Kant states that he has not read his file and does not intend to do so;⁵⁴ he thus both denies the validity of the material reproduced in *Die Akte Kant* and yet bases his denial on Corino’s selection of documents. Indeed, the Stasi files do contain material relating to the publication of *Das Impressum*, including reports from IM in the publishing house and from IMS ‘Martin’ himself.⁵⁵ Kant also states that he has not applied to see his file because he does not want to give the impression of condoning an institution he despises (i.e. the BStU) and, once again calling on Corino’s text to support his argument, he asserts that the material reproduced in *Die Akte Kant* has shown him that ‘Gauck und Co. [. . .] alles mögliche über mich an die Öffentlichkeit geschaufelt [haben], was nicht stimmt’.⁵⁶ He states that a document sent to him by the BStU suggests that Stephan Hermlin had spread rumours of Kant’s marital problems at a PEN meeting and, arguing that Hermlin was far too discreet for such behaviour, questions how such a report is produced and how reliable other material from the files can be.⁵⁷

Kant’s rejection of the material contained in the archives of the BStU is similar to, if more extreme than, the reaction of other prominent figures. Kant refuses to accept the validity of the material contained in the file at all, dismissing these documents as a false view on his past actions. Sascha Anderson has also refused to apply to see his file and, in his 2002 autobiography, *Sascha Anderson*, he does not include information from his file in his discussion of his involvement with the MfS, but rather, according to Lewis, gives a ‘tokenistic, impressionistic attempt at documenting his activities with the Stasi’.⁵⁸ In her 1999

text, *Pawels Briefe*, Monika Maron relies not on the files, but on her memory and the testimony of others to reconstruct her behaviour during the brief period in which she worked with the Stasi. Although she does not deny her involvement, she implicitly rejects the file itself as a source of information on her past, even though, as Lewis has demonstrated, the files suggest that she attempted to use her contact with the MfS as a means of critiquing the system – and in a far more confrontational manner than Kant.⁵⁹ In the case of Günter de Bruyn, there is a tension between the use of the file to reconstruct his own biography and a denial of the validity of this second perspective on his life. De Bruyn states that without the files he would have remembered his brief involvement with the Stasi as an IM differently, but rejects much of the material as being motivated by the desire of the Stasi officers to please superiors or of the IM to avoid harming him or even as a product of pure fantasy (*VJ*, pp. 190-202). Gabriele Eckart rejects her file as a source of information on her past behaviour, stating that it presents a false view of the length of time over which she was an informer, but embraces the material as evidence that it was not her father who pumped her for information, but rather the writer Paul Wiens and his wife.⁶⁰

Barbara Miller argues that many victims of the Stasi have, ‘an ambivalent relationship to the files’: on the one hand they reject much of the material as inaccurate, yet on the other hand hope that it will help them reconstruct their past.⁶¹ The examples of Kant, Anderson, Maron, de Bruyn and Eckart indicate that this ambivalent relationship between the files and the reconstruction of biography and construction of autobiography is not only seen in the statements of the victims of the Stasi. In the reactions of both IM and those observed by the secret police there is a tension between the acceptance of the material as an aid to the memory and a rejection of it as an invalid second perception of the self. In this respect, the files form, to use the terminology of Alison Lewis, a ‘hostile biography’,⁶² not only when the author is hostile to the subject, as Lewis suggests, but also when the portrayal of the

individual in the files does not correspond to his or her memories. The tension between the files and memory can be seen to result in a crisis of memory, a crisis that Kant resolves with a total refusal to accept the validity of the archive and an assertion of the superiority of his memories over the second biography of the files.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of Kant's Stasi file does not simply reveal the complexity of his role as 'Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter' and of his motivations for informing on his colleagues. Comparison of the content of the files with Kant's statements about his contact with the Stasi in his post-Wende autobiography and journalism also indicates the difficulty of discussing these issues after the opening of the files. This difficulty lies not only in the charged political climate of the early 1990s, when, as Timothy Garton Ash notes, 'it was a regular occurrence for a prominent East German politician, academic, journalist or priest to be identified through the Stasi files as an IM and to disappear from public life as a result',⁶³ it is also a result of the terminology of the Stasi, unfamiliar even to those who worked as IM, being appropriated for this discussion. Those affected could not discuss their experiences as they had lived them, but were forced to refer to these second, 'hostile' biographies, and many demonstrate a need to reject this material as irrelevant to their understanding of their past behaviour.

It is also important to consider the implications of the Stasi terminology being used to classify individual behaviour. Kant informed for the Stasi for more than twenty years, but was frequently the subject of critical IM reports. In the period when Kant does work as an informer, he can be seen to be critical of cultural policy in meetings with the MfS. Kant's behaviour, as revealed by the files, is, in turn, very different to that of de Bruyn, Maron and Eckart, yet all of these individuals were considered IM by the MfS. As Walther argues, although the state and the MfS fixed the framework in which individuals informed, the individual portraits of the IM reveal multiple variations.⁶⁴ The boundaries between complicity

and criticism were fluid and the Stasi files might simultaneously reveal that an individual was considered loyal to the state and a dangerous critic of it, that they were willing to inform, but not on close friends, that they were happy to converse with the Stasi, but would not give any personalised information. This demonstrates the complexity of intellectual involvement with the Stasi and indicates that, as Frank Hörnigk argues, the categories of ‘im Staatsdienst’ and ‘in prinzipieller Opposition’ are inappropriate when discussing writers in the GDR.⁶⁵

In my analysis of Kant’s post-Wende account of his Stasi involvement, I do not aim to prove Kant is guilty by demonstrating the gaps in his post-Wende autobiography, but to illustrate the complex strategies used in his negotiation of how he is to be viewed after the Wende within the context of the debates of the early 1990s regarding intellectual involvement in the GDR. Some of these strategies show similarities with Kant’s tactics in negotiations pre-Wende, that is, a combination of alignment with the dominant discourse and evasion of difficult issues. Probing the ambiguities of his position turns out to be not merely informative about his state of mind in particular. The analysis meshes very readily with the analysis of other writers’ complex relationship with the Stasi. Kant may have cultivated particular forms of ambiguity, but cultivating ambiguity was clearly a major part of intellectual life in the GDR.

1 Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship. Inside the GDR 1949-1989*, Oxford 1995, p. 9.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

3 *Ibid.*, iv.

4 Cf. Manfred Wilke and Michael Kubina, ‘Von der Aussagekraft der Akten’, *Text + Kritik: Feinderklärung: Literatur und Staatssicherheitsdienst*, 120 (1993), 91-7.

5 For more detailed analyses of the value of the files, including IM files, for historical research see the contributions in *Aktenlage: Die Bedeutung der Unterlagen des*

Staatssicherheitsdienstes für die Zeitgeschichtsforschung, ed. Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Roger Engelmann, Berlin 1995.

6 Barbara Miller, “Wiederaneignung der eigenen Biographie”: The Significance of the Opening of the “Stasi” Files’, *GLL*, 50 (1997), 369-77 (372).

7 Cf. Alison Lewis, ‘Reading and Writing the Stasi File: On the Uses and Abuses of the File as (Auto)biography’, *GLL*, 56 (2003), 377-97 (394).

8 Hermann Kant, *Abspann: Erinnerung an meine Gegenwart*, Berlin 1991, p. 230. Further references appear in parenthesis in the text.

9 “Vermisse das Wort Pinscher”: Ein Staatsschriftsteller im Stasi-Dienst: Die Spitzel-Karriere des Genossen Hermann Kant alias IM “Martin”’, *Der Spiegel*, 41 (1992), 323-36.

10 Hermann Kant, ‘Ich, der Geheime’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 October 1992.

11 This was the term most frequently used by the Stasi for civilian collaborators in the 1950s and early 1960s. The term Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (IM) became more widely used after the implementation of ‘Richtlinie 1/68’ in 1968. See Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Berlin 1996, p. 470.

12 IMS = Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter zur politisch-operativen Durchdringung und Sicherung des Verantwortungsbereichs. This category of IM corresponded most closely to the image of the ‘ordinärer Spitzel’, who generally kept his or her ears and eyes open and reported on friends, colleagues or neighbours in his or her particular environment. See Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, p. 561.

13 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 9.

14 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/, Bl. 175-6. Reprinted in Karl Corino, *Die Akte Kant: IM ‘Martin’, die Stasi und die Literatur in Ost und West*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1995, pp. 64-8. HA V was the precursor of the HA XX and responsible for the observation of the state apparatus, art, culture and underground.

15 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 181-2. Reprinted in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 78-81.

16 Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, p. 92 and pp. 102-04.

17 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 48-54. Reprinted in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 136-41.

18 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 9 and 25. Reprinted in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 149-51. Walther notes that in the Direktive Nr. 48/55 of 30 November 1955, Minister Ernst Wollweber described the caution with which intellectuals, considered particularly sensitive individuals, should be approached and stated that a written undertaking or ‘Verpflichtung’ was not always necessary: ‘Entscheidend ist nicht die Verpflichtung, sondern die positive Mitarbeit des Kandidaten’. See Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, p. 475.

19 See Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 151-237.

20 As Walther notes, the accession of an IM to higher Party organisations led to a conflict with the professed subordination of the MfS to the Party leadership and, in most cases, such IM were released from their role as unofficial informer and were expected to work with the Stasi in an official capacity. See Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, p. 693.

21 Frauke Meyer-Gosau, 'Hinhaltender Gehorsam: DDR-Schriftsteller über ihre Kooperation mit der Staatssicherheit', *Text + Kritik*, 120 (1993), 103-15. (107).

22 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1 1, Bl. 81-2.

23 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 55. Reprinted in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, p. 243.

24 Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, p. 486.

25 Ulrich Schröter, 'Das leitende Interesse des Schreibenden als Bedingungsmerkmal der Verschriftung – Schwierigkeiten bei der Auswertung von MfS-Akten', in *Aktenlage*, pp. 40-6 (pp. 45-6).

26 Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, p. 467.

27 Meyer-Gosau, 'Hinhaltender Gehorsam', p. 108.

28 The Eleventh Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the SED took place in December 1965. At this meeting several leading Party functionaries, including Erich Honecker, fiercely attacked critical intellectuals and artists, notably Stefan Heym, Wolf Biermann and Robert Havemann. A period of more rigorous control of cultural production followed.

29 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 II/2, Bl. 10-21.

30 See for example Kant's criticism of the decision to halt the publication of *Das Impressum* in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR, Bundesarchiv, DY 30/IV A2/2.024/65, Bl. 28-33 and his reported support for the publication of the second edition of Erich Loest's *Es geht seinen Gang* in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 387-90.

31 Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, pp. 514-15.

32 Lewis, 'Reading and Writing', p. 389.

33 Meyer-Gosau, 'Hinhaltender Gehorsam', p. 110.

34 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 164. Reprinted in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 105-07.

35 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 I/1, Bl. 53 and 55.

36 Meyer-Gosau, 'Hinhaltender Gehorsam', p. 107.

37 Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, p. 31.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 216.

39 BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 A/I, Bl. 189-190. Reprinted in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, pp. 225-7.

40 Günter de Bruyn, *Vierzig Jahre: Ein Lebensbericht*, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, p. 36. Further references are given after the abbreviation *VJ* in parenthesis in the text.

41 Miller, 'Wiederaneignung der eigenen Biographie', pp. 373-4.

42 Hermann Kant, 'Für die Wahrheit will ich geradestehen, gegen Angedichtetes möchte ich angehen', *Neues Deutschland*, 27 October 1992.

43 Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, p. 10.

44 Kant, 'Ich, der Geheime'.

45 Quoted. in Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, p. 14.

46 For a more detailed discussion of the Kant/Seyppel case see Karl Corino, 'Tabusieren, Ausklammern, Verschweigen: Stasi als Nicht-Thema', in *Die Stasi in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Franz Huberth, Tübingen 2003, pp. 33-67 (p. 36).

47 Corino, *Die Akte Kant*, p. 20.

48 See Hermann Kant, 'Wie ich ein Türke wurde', *Neues Deutschland*, 22 April 1964. Reprinted in Hermann Kant, *Zu den Unterlagen: Publizistik 1957-1980*, Berlin 1987, pp. 60-65. The original accusations were published in *Die Welt* on 3 April 1964.

49 Irmtraud Gutschke, *Hermann Kant: Die Sache und die Sachen*, Berlin 2007, p. 114.

50 Gutschke, *Hermann Kant*, p. 113.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

52 For example, Meyer-Gosau cites Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller as individuals who stated that their willingness to work with the Stasi was based on a fundamental identification with the state. See Meyer-Gosau, 'Hinhaltender Gehorsam', p. 107.

53 Gutschke, *Hermann Kant*, p. 83.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

55 See particularly the report from the publishing house: BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 3, Bl. 172-184. Examples of comments on the publication process by IMS 'Martin' are found in BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 3, Bl. 321-323 and BStU MfS AIM 2173/70 3, Bl. 164-171.

56 Gutschke, *Hermann Kant*, p. 113.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

58 Lewis, 'Reading and Writing', p. 396.

59 Alison Lewis, 'Erinnerung, Zeugenschaft und die Staatssicherheit: Die Schriftstellerin Monika Maron', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 6 (2005), 22-33.

60 Gabriele Eckart, 'Brief an den Vater', *Europäische Ideen: StasiSachen* 3, 81 (1993), 19-25.

61 Miller, 'Wiederaneignung der eigenen Biographie', pp. 369 and 372.

62 Lewis, 'Reading and Writing', p. 383.

63 Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History*, London 1997, p. 12.

64 Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur*, p. 467.

65 Frank Hörnigk, 'Die Literatur ist zuständig: Über das Verhältnis von Literatur und Politik in der DDR', in *Geist und Macht: Writers and the state in the GDR*, ed. Axel Goodbody and Dennis Tate, Amsterdam 1992, pp. 23-34 (p. 30).

This article was published as: Sara Jones, 'Conflicting Evidence: Hermann Kant and the Opening of the Stasi Files', *German Life and Letters*, 62.2 (2009), 190-205. The definitive version is available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2009.01456.x/abstract>