

TO THE FILES

ANJA BOHNHOF



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64 photographs, c-prints, 75 x 90 cm

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When does a state ever collapse? In the last two decades, since the demise of the GDR dictatorship, a broad and intensive field of research has opened up. At times, there appears to be an intellectual gold-rush mentality regarding GDR history. The research that is done is mainly based on archive material, which is stored by various institutions.

How do these places look, these rooms where the GDR is stored by order of the state? The job of remembering how things were is the province of the museums and memorials that give an idea of the GDR itself, of its everyday life and monuments, of the Berlin Wall, of the Stasi headquarters and of its detention centres. However, for all that there is still something missing – we have no clear image of the places and spaces that exist because the GDR existed.

To the Files shows the places where these processes of collecting, administration, archiving, evaluation and research are carried out: aloof functional buildings, endless corridors and shelves with row upon row of files, film reels and papers, which have been labeled, numbered and stored in acid-free cardboard boxes. The photographic view is reserved and objective. No attempt was made to go looking for unexpected finds or eye-catching items in the collections; rather the idea was to show papers that have been ordered and filed in grey boxes.

The interpretation and analysis of GDR history is entirely based on the documents that have been saved and kept in these rooms. The visual aesthetic that is applied in the photographs makes these places, which are inaccessible to the public, appear both mysterious and powerful, without revealing anything of their content. The pictures that come out of this work deny the viewer any (apparent) means of participation and thus operate on the principle which increasingly guides media-based communication when it seeks to expressly influence people's opinions based on certain interests.

To the Files refers to the limits of what can be visualized in the age of the image. It also refers to a society's reliance on time and the prevailing values of the day when it comes to the interpretation of history.

INVOLVED INSTITUTIONS:

Federal Archives: Berlin Lichtenfelde & Hoppegarten
Federal Film Archives: Berlin Wilhelmshagen & Hoppegarten
Federal Foreign Office
Central State Archive Berlin
Central State Archive Dresden
Central State Archive Weimar
Agency of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi records (BStU):
Berlin & Magdeburg
Academie of Arts Berlin