

## Stasi style! How East Germany's secret police dressed their agents to ensure they could infiltrate the lives of suspects

- Ridiculous pictures hide a dark and terrifying reality
- The fashion victims are actually deadly and powerful Stasi agents
- They kept the population in line with ruthless and invasive surveillance
- The man who collected them said their 'banality' makes them 'repulsive'

By [Sam Webb](#)

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With their ridiculous fur hats, conspicuous sunglasses, absurd facial hair and awkward catalogue poses, you'd be forgiven for laughing at these cringe-worthy retro pictures.

But the reality behind the images is horrifying. These are agents of the dreaded Stasi, East Germany's startlingly effective secret police that turned the Communist country into a paranoid dystopia.

The pictures show how agents dressed in an effort to remain inconspicuous as they attempted to invade the privacy of suspected dissenters and gather evidence, before ruthlessly interrogating them - often for days on end.

The banality of evil: Two of the outfits agents of the Stasi would have employed as they went about their repressive work. Ironically, the outfit on the right makes the agent look like a stereotypical movie spy

They were also a photographic record of how their agents would have dressed when undertaking Cold War missions to the hated West.

Some of the disguises seem laughable to us now. One of the images, featured on [Foreign Policy](#), shows a stereotypical tourist disguise laden with cameras, shades, a hat and garish red trousers. Another shows what could be a student, complete with cut-off jean shorts and a backpack. The Stasi fashion collection was extensive. The agency sent thousands of spies into West Germany and had access to vast amounts of cash to buy western goods to equip agents with.

Blending in? The extraordinary images form part of the Stasi



secret police course on the 'art of disguising'

While the pictures are amusing, the sinister purpose of the disguises should be considered

The extent of Stasi snooping is seen in other photos in the book. They include snapshots agents took of houses before they were to be searched for contraband or material 'harmful to the state.' The Stasi always took photos of rooms they ransacked so they could put everything back in its place and the victims would not know they had been to visit them. The photos were found in the miles and miles of paperwork found in Stasi offices across East Germany that the agency's shredders and furnaces did not have time to destroy in the hours and days following the collapse of the regime in 1990.

German artist Simon Menner spent two years poring over materials from the archive of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives of the German Democratic Republic for his forthcoming book *Top Secret: Images from the Stasi Archives*.

This range of casual decor was likely employed on a mission to the democratic, capitalist West

The photos were found in the miles and miles of paperwork found in Stasi offices across East Germany

The artist amassed the images over a period of two years. He pored over materials from the archive of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives of the German Democratic Republic

He says he aims to show 'the act of surveillance from the perspective of the surveillant'.

'Many of the images reproduced here might appear absurd or even funny to us,' he said.

'But it is important not to lose sight of the original intentions behind these pictures. They concern photographic records of the repression exerted by the state to subdue its own citizens.

'For me, the banality of some of these pictures makes them even more repulsive.' To see more of Mr Menner's work, take a look at his website [simonmenner.com](http://simonmenner.com)

## THE LIVES OF OTHERS: THE SCALE AND METHODS OF THE DREADED STASI

The former East German secret police 'Stasi' headquarters in Berlin

The German Democratic Republic's Ministry for State Security (Stasi) was one of the most effective surveillance apparatuses ever.



Proportionally to the size of its population, the East German Stasi had far more agents working for it than the KGB or the CIA. The Stasi turned one in three of the 17 million people of the German Democratic Republic into an informant. Children sneaked on their parents at school, wives informed on husbands, lovers betrayed one another. Additionally, Stasi agents infiltrated and undermined West Germany's government and spy agencies. The Stasi often broke the will of the victim by targeting their private or family life. This often included breaking into homes and messing with the contents smear campaigns, denunciation, provocation, psychological warfare, psychological subversion, wiretapping, bugging, mysterious phone calls or unnecessary deliveries. Usually victims had no idea the Stasi were responsible and some suffered mental breakdowns or even committed suicide. The Stasi employed one full-time agent for every 166 East Germans. The Stasi had one informer per 6.5 people. By comparison, the Gestapo employed one secret policeman per 2,000 people. When East Germany collapsed in 1989, the Stasi had 102,000 employees.





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