

## PERMANENT IGNITION : THE STASIEDITS

C.CRED / Collective CREative Dissent

C.CRED / Collective CREative Dissent started out in the late 90s as an artistic collaboration and developed, in the early 00s, into an artist collective in the broader sense of the word. Based in London, UK, but operating largely as a nomadic and event-based platform for the development of critical forms of dialogue and conviviality, self-organized modes of collective learning, and collaborative forms of social and political research and intervention, the overriding concern of the collective was to foster links between art and aesthetic practices and the wider socio-political contexts in which they are situated. Since 2001 various people have been involved with the collective in different capacities, some more permanently, others on a project by project basis.

Premised on the notion that in order to construct a critical and reflective space for contemporary forms of cultural and socio-political dissent one needs to seriously and continuously explore various historical formations of resistance and opposition in different fields, the *Permanent Ignition* project emerged as a platform for collaborative forms of research on specific historical manifestations of dissent, often including both reading and discussion based research, and conversations, dialogues, interviews and other forms of direct collaboration with people involved in or affected by the historical moments and processes engaged with. The earlier manifestations of the *Permanent Ignition* project include: *Permanent Ignition: Turin*, a collaboration with former activists involved in the radical left-wing movement in Turin in the 1960s and 70s, revisiting sites in the city associated with this period, thus generating photo and text collages superimposing a plurality of narratives and perspectives on the movement and its history, collages that were later projected onto public buildings and sites around the city; and, *Permanent Ignition: Stuttgart-Stammheim*, a project involving three trips through Germany, building up a photo and text archive contextualizing the alleged 1976-77 suicides of the core group of militant activists of the first generation of the Red Army Faction in the prison in Stuttgart-Stammheim, an archive that was later used for displays and presentations, and as a basis for a series of public discussions of the historical narratives implied and the way they have been commemorated.

In the most recent manifestation of the project – *Permanent Ignition: The Stasi Edits* – C.CRED sets out to explore dissent within the framework of the former GDR and, in particular, the repressive control and surveillance system developed by the Stasi, including the phenomena of so called 'informal co-workers' and conspiracy dwellings. What narratives of dissent do these histories present us with? What do they

articulate and what can be articulated, in turn, from their history? What space do they leave for dissent in our current political situation?

Within this context – and within the context of the overall Conspiracy Dwellings exhibition – it soon became clear that any investigation into particular East German mechanisms of surveillance and social control and the concrete strategies of dissent and resistance these generated could not be discussed in a vacuum, but instead needed to be contextualised in current German political debates. Between the perspective of the victims of Stasi surveillance, nostalgic glorifications of the “good old days” by large parts of the increasingly economically and socially marginalised East German population or their reductive banalisation in the mass media, and attempts by a small, but well-organised and vocal group of ex-Stasi personnel and among certain parts of the new post-communist party to re-contextualise the Stasi as a legitimate tool of national security there is little or no space for a consensus on how and by whom these histories should be represented. Former dissidents feel ignored and not taken seriously by the leftwing spectrum of the mainly West German dominated political and cultural elites who continue to strategically draw on examples of positive aspects of the East German system in current political debates or to use dogmatic socialist thought in general as a valid source of intellectual and political engagement – while these in their turn have little time or use for the lived experience of political dissidents in the East, and resent the way their experience is often used to promote a narrative of a universal historical victory of capitalism as the only remaining viable political system and to discredit any form of current or historical leftist project.

*Permanent Ignition: The Stasi Edits* tries to give space to and at the same time contextualise these different current political manoeuvres and the many coexisting and conflicting ways of talking about the Stasi and the GDR in general that they give rise to.

In more concrete terms, *Permanent Ignition: The Stasi Edits*, in its current version, consists of an audio installation based on a series of conversations recorded in Erfurt in August 2007 with various people we encountered that agreed to participate in the project. Without targeting specific groups or people, and not wanting to operate under the pretension that the project would somehow provide the ‘whole picture’, the conversations we entered into were premised on our position being an ‘outside’ one and the conversations themselves being a form of improvisation, an improvised way of gathering knowledge and mapping out perspectives through meeting people who would introduce you to other people, who would in turn, introduce to yet another set of people. For the audio installation, these informal and improvised conversations have been edited into a series of themed tracks that have been installed on four different sets of speakers positioned on low plinths in the exhibition space. The tracks are looped and played

simultaneously on all four sets of speakers, creating a complex soundscape of overlapping voices that at times can be distinguished from one another, and at other times become little more than white noise, forcing the visitor to sit down next to a particular set of speakers to make out the theme, narratives and perspectives outlined in the recorded conversations. Each set of speakers is also provided with a small booklet containing an elaboration on our position coming into this situation, organizing the interviews and editing the recorded material, thus juxtaposing our different positions as ‘artists’ coming into this situation to the diverse range of positions of those participating in the project, positions that are further emphasised by one word ‘citations’ taken from the different conversations and outlining different positions and perspectives on these issues, that are printed on panels installed on the walls of the exhibition space.

*Permanent Ignition: The Stasi Edits* thus deliberately creates disarticulations by superimposing and counterposing sometimes conflicting narratives and voices so that the sound comes to oscillate between meanings, narratives, syntax, articulations and disarticulation, non-syntactical sound, openness. It engages with history not in the sense of a meta-narrative, the history, or even one history, but in the sense of critical practice whose direction is future, transformative, constructive and affirmative of an alternative to a repressive and recuperative, fixed image of the past that dictates the rules both of the present and the future. A kind of history, in other words, as a crystal image that cannot be owned, that does not provide the whole picture, that does not totalize but remains partial and fragmented. Like looking into a crystal, coming into the audio installation, one doesn’t get the whole picture, the whole story, an easy answer or dichotomy of positions, one gets only a series of slightly skewed fragments of a history, fragments repeated from different angles and perspectives to form an entity that is not closed into any one meaning or position, but that opens up a potential to think difference and to think differently. Within this context, and premised on such notion, we hope that the *Permanent Ignition: The Stasi Edits* installation, and the audio tracks that feed into it, will simultaneously construct and problematize, help articulate and disarticulate, form a kind of polyvocal speech that simultaneously destabilizes dominant articulations and accounts and renders possible critical reflection and ‘other’, new perspectives that exceed the reductive and often legislative, authoritarian and moralizing binary logics that tend to constitute the framework for historical reflection available to us. *Permanent Ignition*, crystal images of a history that can never be owned but the function of which is to continuously assert our irrevocable dissentious potential.

Listen to extracts from the *Permanent Ignition* interviews on the CD enclosed. (NB – This is a data CD and cannot be played on normal CD players.)