

# Kleine Klaus 16

Halle, the “Tripperburg” (“clap castle”)  
and myself



A feature by Irene Schulz

Final project for the master's programme Multimedia und  
Autorschaft (University of Halle)

# Project description

- Content note: violence practised by medical staff -

A walk of less than two minutes from the market. Yet hidden in a winding side street: Kleine Klausstraße 16 in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) a central polyclinic used to stand here – the Poliklinik Mitte. Here, in the venereal ward, women and girls were forcibly admitted and abused to re-educate them into “socialist personalities”.

I grew up in Halle. Nevertheless, I only found out about this place in my mid-20s. How can it be that such a place full of historical meaning is in danger of being forgotten?

KLEINE KLAUS 16. HALLE, DIE “TRIPPERBURG” UND ICH (Halle, the “clap castle” and myself) is a feature (= documental radio play) that tells the story of the so-called “Tripperburg”. I travel to northern Germany to meet a former patient, I talk to an association in Halle that remembers the place, to a scientist who is still researching on venereal wards in the GDR, and to artists who have dedicated themselves to the “Tripperburg”. And I stand in the streets of Halle’s city centre and wonder. What does it actually mean to grow up among contemporary witnesses in the post-reunification East? And what does the “Tripperburg” still have to do with us today?

Between summer 2022 and spring 2023 I developed the feature as final project for my master’s programme **Multimedia und Autorschaft** (= Multimedia and authorship / digital journalism) at **Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg**, Germany. It lasts **53 minutes and 10 seconds** and was published **Friday April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023** on Soundcloud:

<https://soundcloud.com/ireneundso/kleine-klaus-16>

Furthermore, I built a website on which additional to the feature you’ll find the script (in German), a timeline about the venereal ward in Halle and information about me and my career path:

<https://kleineklaus16.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/>

## Credits

Idea, editing, production and host: Irene Schulz

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Golo Föllmer and Maren Schuster M. A.

Additional speaker: Philipp Reinheimer

Music: Arian Hagen <https://arianhagen.bandcamp.com> and Iva Svoboda <https://dustiv.bandcamp.com>

## **Used tracks**

- A Sweet Grudge by Arian Hagen
- Stercus by Iva Svoboda
- Planetarium / Transcendance by Arian Hagen
- Trachea by Iva Svoboda
- When I See Her by Arian Hagen
- Balanceakt by Arian Hagen

The musicians agreed to the utilisation of their music **on condition that they are mentioned.**

## **Translated script**

**SPEAKER** Two hints before we start: This feature contains descriptions of physical, mental and sexual violence practised by medical staff. Furthermore, the words ‘women’ and ‘girls’ are used, which mean persons who were classified as female because of a binary understanding of sex and gender.

*[a trolley suitcase is moved from left to right]*

**IRENE** This was a trolley suitcase. And here is a train station of a small town next to Hamburg. It is Saturday morning in November 2022. Cold and nasty. Well – just November.

I have an appointment with Bettina Weben, an interview partner. Until now we phoned twice and have changed some WhatsApp messages.

After a few minutes a car arrives. I have seen an old TV report with Bettina as protagonist. This is why I recognise her right in the moment she leaves her car. She recognises me – probably – by the microphone in my hand.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Irene?

**IRENE** Yes!

**BETTINA WEBEN** Have you been around here for long?

**IRENE** Nope, for five minutes.

**BETTINA WEBEN** By train?

**IRENE** Yes.

**BETTINA WEBEN** I didn't see it. Hi!

**IRENE** Hello, nice to meet you.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Fine! You good?

**IRENE** Yes.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Come on, let's go.

Since our first call Bettina and me are on first-name terms. And we have something in common: The both of us grew up in Halle (Saale). She in the German Democratic Republic. Me in the Federal Republic of Germany.

**BETTINA WEBEN** I was standing over there a moment ago.

**IRENE** Ah!

**BETTINA WEBEN** Then the bus came, so I had to leave.

When I meet Bettina, I have already been in research for months. It's about a very specific place in Halle. A building in the middle of the city centre. And it's only now that I'm really getting to grapple with its history. Back then, this building was a medical facility. Officially. But it was also a re-education centre.

**SPEAKER** Kleine Klaus 16. Halle, the "Tripperburg" and myself. A feature by Irene Schulz.

## One. Picked up.

*[Construction site noise. Footsteps.]*

**IRENE** In here?

Halle, October 2022.

**IRENE** Hello!

**CONSTRUCTION WORKER** Hi!

**ARCHITECT** Hello.

**CONSTRUCTION WORKER** Hi!

*[unintelligible murmur between architect and construction worker]*

I'm at Kleine Klausstraße 16. It's unmistakable: they're building here right now. Flats.

The building has been disused for a long time. Actually, I only remember it as vacant. Until the end of the 90s there was a medical centre here. In the GDR, the whole thing was called Poliklinik Mitte (= central polyclinic).

Kleine Klausstraße 16 is in a side street on the market. It's in the middle of the city centre but still quite hidden. I didn't walk past it very often. However, I do associate memories with the surrounding places. I made out with my boyfriend at the time in a car park in Große Klausstraße. I was 17 years old at the time.

**BETTINA WEBEN** 17. I was 17 years old.

Back in northern Germany. Bettina Weben picked me up at the station. Now we're at her place, in a house with an adjoining garden and rabbit hutch....

*[a bright dog - well - 'greet's' me and barks loudly]*

...and two Olde English Bulldogs.

*[Bettina Weben talks reassuringly to the dogs]*

**IRENE** I'd love to get a picture of what you were actually like. Can you tell me what 17-year-old Bettina was like?

**BETTINA WEBEN** Yes. Well, first of all, from home, she was quite a character. Always funny. And then her mother died and she went into a children's home. And her sense of humour was pushed down a bit by the circumstances, the way they treated you there.

Bettina grows up in a children's home in the GDR in the 1960s. In 1969, at the age of 17, she and a female friend meet two young men.

**BETTINA WEBEN** And we met them a few times and then they invited us to dinner at their place. They lived in the tower block where I was in the home. They were immigrant workers who worked in the GDR. Anyway, they invited us to dinner and we went with them. Everything was nice. The food was delicious. And then we had some drinks and spent the night there.

Spending the night away from home. And without notice. That's forbidden, of course. Bettina and her friend know that. But they think: there's going to be trouble anyway – so we might as well stay the rest of the weekend. The two decide to come back on Monday, when they must go to education anyway.

**BETTINA WEBEN** But it didn't go that far. Sunday morning the doorbell rings. And there were two of them in civilian clothes standing in front of the door. "Well, Bettina" – Wagner was my name then – "Bettina Wagner and – here Bettina says the name of her friend –

**BETTINA WEBEN** "Yes?" – "Come along." Was a sound, nah?

The two men in front of the door are Volkspolizisten (= policemen in the GDR). They take Bettina Weben and her friend downstairs into the car and drive off.

**BETTINA WEBEN** And then we thought they were taking us to the home, right? No. And then they drove us to the Poliklinik Mitte.

At the time, there are several outpatient facilities at Poliklinik Mitte. But there is also a ward. The so-called closed venereal ward. Venereal means: treatment of sexual transmitted diseases (STDs). There are several such wards in the GDR where women and girls are forcibly admitted. In the same year that the ward in Halle is opened, a GDR law comes into force:

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** In 1961, the so-called Ordinance on the Prevention and Control of Venereal Diseases comes into force, on 23 February 1961.

This is Professor Doctor Maximilian Schochow. Former staff member at the Halle Institute for the History and Ethics of Medicine. Together with Florian Steger, he wrote a book on the venereal ward in Halle. He is still researching the subject today.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** And based on this ordinance, forced admissions take place. We have to be specific about this: On the one hand, the ordinance says that these regulations apply to people who have a sexually transmitted disease, i.e. who have syphilis, who have gonorrhoea and then there are two or three other sexually transmitted diseases that are listed there. Only for these people this regulation does apply at all.

Over time, this definition opens up more and more. The suspicion of having an STD is enough to be admitted. At least, if one is classified as female. There are a few closed venereal wards in the GDR where men are admitted. But far fewer.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** And it's done much more often with men: they just get medication and can go home.

In the venereal ward in Halle, the focus is on one aspect above all: discipline. The medical goal – the diagnosis and treatment of actual STDs – is more in the background.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** So the accusation was ultimately anti-sociality and they were supposed to be educated there.

## Two. Treatment.

Immediately after her arrival at the ward, Bettina Weben is examined. Demonstrated – that's how she feels.

**BETTINA WEBEN** You had to get naked in the room where you came in. Really naked! Then they looked under our arms and then they shaved us – it was all crap. And hurt.

**IRENE** Did they talk to you in any way during that?

**BETTINA WEBEN** No, not at all from the nurses there.

The ones who tell Bettina what's actually going on, where she is now – that are her fellow patients. They also tell her why women and girls are admitted here, to the so-called "Tripperburg".

**BIRGIT NEUMANN-BECKER** They are supposed to function properly. Well, they don't function. But they are supposed to function.

This is Birgit Neumann-Becker, the Saxony-Anhalt State Commissioner for the Re-appraisal of the SED Dictatorship.

**BIRGIT NEUMANN-BECKER** That is firstly: going to work, regularly. Secondly, having children and starting a family, because the GDR was constantly losing people through emigration and flight, which means that they needed female citizens to have children here. That was also a state goal.

That is the short version. Who the GDR classifies as "non-functional": that can be very diverse. There are very different reasons why women and girls are forcibly committed.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** One major reason is that they have been accused of being runaways.

They can be girls who have run away from home. Who spend the night at their boyfriend's house without permission. Who prowl at the train station. Girls and women who are accused of prostituting themselves. That is forbidden in the GDR from 1968 onwards.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** There is a third variant, one that is ultimately inconceivable to me, but there are also parents who actually turn to this closed venereal ward and say: We can't cope with our daughter anymore. Here, take her, and whatever. What the parents then had in mind. But at least take her and lock her up here.

The youngest documented patient in the venereal ward in Halle. She is twelve years old.

Bettina Weben must hand over her personal belongings. Like all the other patients, she now wears a grey gown. The patients sleep in five-bed rooms. The windows are barred and look out onto Große Nikolaistraße. This street is still home to a club that is famous in the city.

**BETTINA WEBEN** The "Palette". And then you heard the music they played there. That was also a bit for the psyche.

Bettina stays here for four weeks. The daily routine is always the same.

**BETTINA WEBEN** I can describe it quickly: Getting up at six. Washing, quickly. Down there. Because then you had to queue for a smear test. Every morning.

Bettina means a gynaecological smear test. Every patient must go through it. Every day. After 20 to 30 negative smear tests a patient can be discharged. From a medical point of view, that doesn't make sense.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** Because either you have an STD, then you can diagnose it once and then you can start a therapy and when the therapy has been completed, you can take a sample swab and then see how to proceed, but you didn't have to take these smear tests every day.

The smear tests are part of the discipline. They are often done very brutally. One nurse is particularly notorious. She is called "Crank-Dora".

**BETTINA WEBEN** After breakfast there was nothing again, so you sat around and maybe played a few games or talked quietly because you had to be quiet. Then there was lunch. After that there was a nap. Then you waited for supper. And after supper you waited again until you could go to bed and then for the night to be over.

On top of the smear tests and daily boredom, there are also punishments. Sometimes carried out by fellow patients, so-called parlour elders. This can be isolation for days. Sitting on a stool in the corridor all night long. Smear test ban – that means no smear tests for days, which of course delays discharge. Or: so-called bombs. These are injections that cause the patients to run a violent fever.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** In the 1930s and 1940s, this was a tried and tested remedy. They tried to create fever curves, fever spikes, with the fever injections in order to stimulate the gonococci. But this became completely obsolete in the 1960s.

Beside the nurses, doctors also work on the ward. Welfare workers who ask the patients about their sexual partners. And medical students who must do an internship. Some of them are still working in Halle today.

**ANNE KUPKE** It happened to me once, at a barbecue party the hostess told me: "I was there, too." And she immediately said: "But that was completely different, I can tell you that right away."

Anne Kupke from the Zeit-Geschichte(n) (= contemporary history/stories) association in Halle. She regularly gives guided tours of the city and provides information about Kleine Klausstraße 16. In addition, she often had situations in which ancient staffs say: "It wasn't like that at the ward."



**ANNE KUPKE** Then I always ask them if they have ever dealt with it, for example, whether they have read the book by Florian Steger or otherwise... The answer is always “No”, they don’t know that at all, they usually refer to reports that were in the media. And that they haven’t experienced it personally, that could be or they perceived it differently, or maybe they were working there at a time when the conditions were no longer like that. But you can listen to the people concerned. I am a bit shocked by this lack of willingness to deal with it.

It’s June 2022 and I’m at my dermatologist’s. She is into her 60s. I wonder if she studied in Halle. If she was on the venereology ward as part of her training. If so, what she learned there. How she feels about it today. I don’t dare to ask her. After all, I am here as a patient.

### **Three. Socialist personalities.**

1962 – the venereology ward in Halle has only existed for one year – there is a criminal complaint against Dr. Gerd Münx. Münx is the medical director of the Poliklinik Mitte – and heads the venereology ward. The reason for the complaint are the brutal educational measures. But this does not lead to the abolition of all the punishment methods. Instead, Münx writes house rules.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** He writes them himself and these house rules explicitly state in the preamble that the purpose of this institution is to discipline, to educate the women who are forcibly admitted there. To educate them to what? – To socialist personalities.

**QUOTE FROM THE HOUSE RULES** “Through educational influence it must be achieved that these citizens, after their release from the hospital, respect the laws of our state, show a good discipline at work and that their behaviour in our society is guided by the principles of socialist coexistence of the citizens of our state.” (BArch Best. DQ 1. No. 4228, p. 1).

Münx thus justifies the brutal treatment of the female patients. During her time on the ward Bettina Weben does not often meet Münx.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Seen him, right? He’s not doing anything. Or he didn’t do anything, he had his people. But you saw him. Sometimes he sat in the office.

Other witnesses describe Münx as a tyrant. And even if Münx – as Bettina says – “is not doing anything”: He gives the instructions how to deal with the patients. To him, the women and girls are inferior.

Gerd Münx studies medicine under National Socialism and passes his state examination shortly after the Second World War. In the GDR, he works his way up from

being a clerk at the public health department to medical director of the Poliklinik Mitte. A doctor in a position of power who acts in the spirit of the GDR. That would be a pleasing narrative. But it's not that easy.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** The Stasi, the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (= secret service and secret police of the GDR), uses its informers everywhere and in this context Gerd Münx is also being monitored.

Münx is being spied on. From 1976, by a colleague. It's because of the repeated complaints about Münx' treatment methods. And even though there are rules of the house to educate the patients to become socialist personalities: What happens on the ward and that girls and women are admitted almost arbitrarily is illegal according to GDR law.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** And one can say: Yes, certain institutions of the GDR knew relatively well at a relatively early stage that in this institution, that was led by Gerd Münx, had violated the law. It is also formulated that clearly: Gerd Münx admits women without any medical indication, without the legal framework taking effect in any way, and nobody does anything against it. And that, of course, leaves the question open: Why? If the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit knows so early on from various unofficial collaborators what was going on in the closed venereology ward and does not intervene there, the question really does arise as to why.

Why the GDR did nothing for years although it – or at least its secret service – knew that Münx was against the law: I have also asked Birgit Neumann-Becker, the State Commissioner for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship.

**BIRGIT NEUMANN-BECKER** I can't tell you that. The aim or task of this station was to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. And as long as this goal was fulfilled or this task was fulfilled in such a way that there were no external conflicts and no problems, there was little reason to go into this in such a fundamental way, because one would have had to think of an alternative.

Well. For example, outpatient treatment with medication. Of patients who are really sick. But the balance sheet for only 1977 shows: only thirty percent of the women and girls admitted to the ward had any venereal disease at all. Seventy per cent were not treated at all. Nevertheless, Münx remains head of the ward. Even though he is no longer director of the entire Poliklinik Mitte since the middle of the seventies.

**BIRGIT NEUMANN-BECKER** I think there's just a bit of that, too, but I can only really think about that, that a little bit of the path of least resistance was taken. They didn't want a scandal, of course, but as long as it worked somehow, it worked.

At the end of 1978, it doesn't work somehow anymore. A patient is isolated in the bathroom for days. But then a ward doctor diagnoses her with open tuberculosis. The incident is reported to the police. Münx is discharged. This ends the system of violent punishments. After him, a new doctor takes over the ward until it is closed in the early 80s. Münx is not held criminally responsible. Neither in the GDR nor in the FRG. He dies in 2000.

1969: Bettina Weben has been on the venereology ward for four weeks. And one morning she is called into the office.

**BETTINA WEBEN** And then they said, "It's all right now" and they would discharge me, but first, I have to sign that I won't say anything about what happened here. If I don't do that, then I'll stay here for another time like this. They didn't say "four weeks", four weeks didn't come out of their mouths, but "another time like this". I would have signed anything.

When she is discharged every patient must sign this confidentiality agreement. Otherwise, she can't get out. After Bettina has signed, she gets her clothes back. She gets dressed and is picked up by the head of the home.

**BETTINA WEBEN** I asked the head of the home on the way back to the youth home, why he did that. And he answered: "To scare off the others." Because we weren't in the home that night.

**IRENE** How did the others in the home react?

**BETTINA WEBEN** Not at all. Not at all. I suppose they've been inoculated that they wouldn't talk to us. No one said anything, it was as if we had never been away.

## Four. Silence.

Lately someone asked me if I identify myself as East German. I find that difficult to answer. I grew up here in Halle, in the post-reunification East. But I was born in Hamburg, as were my parents. On the other hand, my grandmother was born in Halle. She married into the West at the end of the 1950s. So far, so back and forth. What I want to say is: my parents do not know anything about a so-called "Tripperburg". And apart from the fact that my grandmother left before the ward opened, I can't ask her anymore.

**ANNE KUPKE** So I have the impression that many people know something about it.

Anne Kupke from the Zeit-Geschichte(n) association again.

**ANNE KUPKE** By something I mean they've heard about it before, but it's a lot of rumours, because my impression is that in Halle everybody knows someone who at least knows someone who has either been there or worked there or thinks they know something.

Even though my parents don't come from Halle: of course they have contact with people who lived in the GDR in Halle. So I want to talk to them about the Poliklinik Mitte. If they were aware of anything at that time.

I am writing an email to an acquaintance of my parents. She used to work in the health service in Halle. Maybe she knows something. She replies that a friend of hers worked at the Poliklinik Mitte. Although not on the venereology ward. But she hadn't noticed anything special. I ask twice if I could talk to her friend. But to no avail.

Then I phone an acquaintance of my father's who grew up in Halle. She said that nothing had leaked out to the public. But she always had this creepy feeling when she walked past the house.

This diffuse "somehow you knew that something was wrong" is something my friend Liane Pförtner knows as well. We still know each other from school.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** My mother definitely told me that once: It was a hospital once and there was a ward for STDs called "Tripperburg".

Unlike my parents, Liane's come from Halle. And even if they didn't have anything to do with this place: somehow they knew that something wasn't going right.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** In fact, as a place that is somehow in your consciousness, where you definitely don't want to go. So that's what I took with me from my family: There was this Poliklinik in the centre of the city, this hospital, and when you had to go there, it was really bad. You wouldn't have wanted to go there because you were immediately stamped or something: Why did this person go there?

I really found out about the venereology ward through Liane. She has known the story for years. On the one hand, there were the conversations with her parents or a tour of the city, where it was also a topic. However, she also knows stories from her family that don't quite match the picture we have.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** ...that I already talked to my grandma about it a few years ago and she still had this image of: Well, people have come there who... Yes, who were somehow difficult or something and that this was somehow accepted.

**IRENE** Because they deserved it.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** Yes...

What must not be forgotten is that this is a ward for STD patients. All right – the majority of the patients were not ill, but the treatment of STDs – that was the public image of this ward. And STD patients – or supposedly sexually ill people – were socially ostracised. And not only in the GDR.

In the 1980s, for example, gay men were used as scapegoats for HIV in Western Germany. Such reservations still exist today.

2022, when mpox emerged in Germany: This is a disease that can be transmitted not only through sexual intercourse but in general through close skin contact. The first cases occurred in the MSM community. That means men who have sex with men. And the media coverage of it... Well. In the autumn of 2022 Professor Schochow and I talked about it. He sums it up quite well:

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** If you look at the press coverage on this: It is always pointed out, and very smugly, that it essentially affects men who love men and it's a catastrophe how mpox is reported and how same-sex couples are stigmatised. And that goes right through, through politics, through medicine, through the media, it reaches, so to speak, the regulars' table. And mpox, that's clear, that sort of sticks, would sort of be a disease or a problem of same-sex forms of love.

The fact that individual population groups are used as medical scapegoats – this is still an important issue and not just a "back in the GDR" story. But the difference is this: This is being discussed in public. Affected, queer people express themselves on social media, in journalistic media. Their voices are being heard – even if it is late and still not enough.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** There are differences to what happened in the GDR because on the one hand people are stigmatised, excluded, discriminated against, that's true. That has serious consequences. There's no question about that. But in the closed wards, they were not only stigmatised, disciplined, excluded but they were also traumatised physically and psychologically with devastating consequences.

These consequences of treatment in the venereology ward – they can be sleeping disorders. Sexual aversion. The inability to form stable relationships. Incontinence. Miscarriages or complications with births.

**BETTINA WEBER** So after-effects are present anyway. There's the gynaecological. And then nightmares. I still have them today.

Fear of gynaecological examinations – this is also a typical consequence for former patients. For Bettina Weben, a gynaecological smear test as a cancer screening is impossible. And then, of course, there are all the memories of what happened.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Well, and if something happens. If you hear something, then you think of it immediately. It's not forgotten. It doesn't go away either.

In the years after her time on the closed venereology ward, Bettina does not talk about what she experienced. As a young woman, she is forcibly admitted a second time. Afterwards, she confides in a colleague at work.

**BETTINA WEBEN** She lived in my street. And then I went to her and talked to her about it. She asked me where I had been and at first I didn't want to tell her because I was afraid. But I thought: Now you're out here...

Bettina doesn't tell her colleague any details about the treatment. She is embarrassed. But that she was locked up in a ward against her will. That's what she tells.

**BETTINA WEBEN** I had the impression that she didn't believe me. And then you don't tell anyone else. And so I never told anyone again. Not to anyone.

Opposite Kleine Klausstraße 16 is a residential building with trees. At the end of September 2022, I meet three young schoolgirls there. They are here almost every day, one of them tells me. I ask them if they know what the building opposite them is. They don't. When I tell them that girls and women were forcibly committed here in the GDR, they are very surprised. They had already talked about the GDR at school. "It's incredible that we don't know that" one of them says. Although it's about their hometown.

To be honest, I'm not surprised that they haven't heard of this place before. A day before, I spoke to a friend on the phone. He studied in Halle. When I tell him about the Poliklinik Mitte and the so-called "Tripperburg", he says: "Doesn't ring a bell." He is a history teacher.

## **Five. Stories.**

**ANNE KUPKE** Many years ago... It's really been a long time now, maybe... 15, 20 years.

To be more precise: the year 2000. That's when former patients first contact the association Zeit-Geschichte(n). The project leader at the time, Heidi Bohley, receives the reports.

**ANNE KUPKE** ...and Heidi believed these reports and tried to make enquiries, asked around. And found out that there are people who confirm this. But nothing else was known to us. The aim of these people who got in touch of

us was, of course, to obtain some form of legal rehabilitation. Possibly also compensation. But primarily to achieve that someone listens to them.

Former patients are now entitled to this compensation. They can apply for criminal rehabilitation. But it is a long way from the first eyewitness accounts. And for the time being, the focus is on one thing above all: education. Birgit Neumann-Becker is at the Zeit-Geschichte(n) association once a month and speaks with people who have experienced SED injustice.

**BIRGIT NEUMANN-BECKER** And it was in this context that it was reported and when there were 10 or 15 women, I asked myself what I was going to do with them and I said, "Okay, then we have to take a closer look."

She contacts the Institute for the History and Ethics of Medicine in Halle. Here Florian Steger and Maximilian Schochow come into play. They look for sources in archives. And: they interview contemporary witnesses.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** We were lucky in a way, because we didn't only talk to women who had been victims of this institution, but we also have been contacted by police officers who were involved in the feeding of the victims; we have been contacted by doctors who once did voluntary work there or worked there for a while. And they told us their different perspectives, their stories that they have associated with this institution.

Not only the perspectives themselves are different. But also the view on whether what happened at Poliklinik Mitte was actually right or wrong. Steger and Schochow talk to former nurses who, even now, are of the firm opinion: It was all the right thing to do.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** And then there were also people, it must be said clearly, who, from today's perspective, have actually established a new relationship to what happened in the 60s and 70s, to what they saw, in what they have also participated, where such a reflection, an inner reappraisal took place.

And then there are the interviews with the former patients. Women who often did not talk about their experiences for years or even decades. Who talk about their experiences for the first time ever. Or: who are believed for the first time.

**MAXIMILIAN SCHOCHOW** For us as interviewers, this was of course also a great challenge because in certain situations, dams were broken, women cried heartbreakingly.

**BETTINA WEBER** That was a disaster. And above all, what I found bad: About the smears in the morning, where they hurt me so much. And then

there are two strange men who you don't know and then you have to tell them. I don't know how I managed that; I can't tell.

Steger and Schochow's book *Disziplinierung durch Medizin* (= Disciplining through medicine) is published in 2014. After that they do research on other venereological stations in the GDR. The Zeit-Geschichte(n) association repeatedly gives guided tours of the city, which also pass by the former Poliklinik Mitte building. There are newspaper articles, television reports. And art, too. In 2022, the novel *Herumtreiberinnen* (= Women prowlers) is published. The author is Bettina Wilpert. Not to be confused with Bettina Weben. Among other things, Bettina Wilpert's book is about a young girl who is admitted to a venereology ward.

**BETTINA WILPERT** And in the novel *Herumtreiberinnen* there is also quite a lot. Of course, the venereology ward is the focus, but there are many other stories as well, like about a contract worker or a female punk. I realised that there are so many aspects of GDR history that are perhaps not so well known, but which interest me very much.

Bettina Wilpert was born in 1989. So she didn't live through the GDR – and she also grew up in Bavaria. After finishing school, she goes to Berlin and studies in Potsdam.

**BETTINA WILPERT** And that's when I had a key experience, so to speak: When I took the S-Bahn to Potsdam, two female fellow students were sitting next to me and one of them asked the other, "Have your parents been in the Stasi?" and the other one said, "I don't know, I'll have to ask them". And I think that's when I thought about it for the first time – it may sound silly at first, but it was like: Oh yes, it wasn't that long ago with the GDR.

Eventually Bettina Wilpert moves to Leipzig, where she still lives today, and where her novel *Herumtreiberinnen* is set. Her point is not only about dealing with the GDR in general, but also specifically with the place where she lives.

**BETTINA WILPERT** And that I just have the feeling that as a West German I also have a responsibility to deal with this history. And I think that was a little bit of the personal background that I simply realised for myself: Ok, I just find it strange to live here and to know so little about it.

And then there is Liane Pförtner, with whom I went to school. She studies Art at Burg Giebichenstein (= art university in Halle). In a basic course she is supposed to create a sculpture that can be integrated into the cityscape. She decides to work on Kleine Klausstraße 16 and builds a sculpture out of wire mesh and stone cardboard.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** So it's a sculpture that has a stone look. The look of a curtain with a person standing behind it. So you can guess that behind it a



human being is hiding, who perhaps even wants to break out of what's happening in the background.

When I go to northern Germany to talk to Bettina Weben, I take a photo of the sculpture with me. After our conversation – the dogs are already getting restless – I ask Bettina Weben if I can show her something.

**IRENE** I don't know if you can recognise it well, because it's all black and white now, this sculpture that's in the photo.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Here's the head, isn't it? And hands, fingers...? What's that?

**IRENE** It's a work of art by a friend of mine who studies at the Burg. And it's called *Verdeckt* (= Covered). And with this she just referred to...

**BETTINA WEBEN** ...the Poli Mitte.

**IRENE** ...to the Poli Mitte. And it was actually through her that I...

**BETTINA WEBEN** That's good.

**IRENE** ...really got to the subject.

**BETTINA WEBEN** You can see everything in there. Horror. That's good! That fits the Poli Mitte.

**IRENE** Why?

**BETTINA WEBEN** First of all, in the picture you see pain, misery and horror. It's really sad. And all behind the curtain. That the world doesn't know.

I would like to know: What is it like for Bettina as an affected person, when people make art out of what she experienced in real life? During our conversation she told me that she would prefer the house to be torn down. Because all the memories of it are so bad. I brought something else with me. The novel by Bettina Wilpert, *Herumtreiberinnen*.

**IRENE** So the author is only a few years older than me, she was born in '89. And you just told me: You'd prefer to be remembered not at all. And now there are two young women – or me, for example, I was born in '94, I never experienced the GDR – and they're making art out of it. Or a media project, like me.

**BETTINA WEBEN** Yes, basically it contradicts itself when I say: "It's best not to be remembered." But then again if you're not remembered it doesn't come to light. I mean I talk about it, too. And even though it's sometimes quite difficult for me, but I talk about it. I think it must be. And what I meant now, so directly... When I'm in Halle, when I see the house, it automatically brings up...

the tears come. And now, when the house is renovated, and it looks nice and friendly with a balcony and maybe a bit colourful or whatever, that it doesn't immediately bring tears to your eyes, that you say: Look, they've done something nice. Maybe.

## **Six. Flats.**

It is now spring 2023. The construction at Kleine Klausstraße 16 is largely complete. More than forty flats have been built here – from one-room to five-room flats. Where a vacant, increasingly dilapidated medical building stood for years, now stands a residential building with a smooth façade.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** So I personally find it problematic from a feeling point of view. Now the place has been or the building has been a ruin for years and therefore is was also not really visible in the city. Apart from the memorial stone, you didn't really know what happened there. But the idea that flats are going to be built there now and then it just disappears into the cityscape and the residential area, or it's not becoming a memorial, I think... There is somehow the feeling that it will be forgotten.

**ANNE KUPKE** Well. I'll tell you honestly: I think it's good. I mean, we can't make this a museum. So if we should have made this a museum, then the state or the city would have had to buy it.

Instead, a construction company from Leipzig bought the house. Parts of the house have now been restored to how they looked before the GDR, when the building was an inn for many years. Goethe was here.

**ANNE KUPKE** I understand that the people who will live there later on – and it's a very, very, very attractive location, close to the market – when they go in and out of their house, they don't want to walk past an exhibition about the atrocities that took place there. That is absolutely understandable.

Liane originally thought about having her sculpture put up in front of Kleine Klausstraße 16. Problem: it is not weatherproof. And the client didn't want the sculpture in the house itself. Actually, that wouldn't really make much sense – after all, the idea is to catch the attention of people who otherwise would not have dealt with the subject. There is, however, one thing on site that reminds people of the venereological ward: the memorial stone. An erratic block with a metal plaque. But how effective it is – opinions are divided.

**BIRGIT NEUMANN-BECKER** I would say that I am very happy about this stone and with it, this chapter of remembrance was, so to speak, closed for me.

**BETTINA WEBEN** First of all: A stone. Good. You could say it can remember. But it doesn't compensate. And above all: what is a stone? It stands there so stupidly between houses. No one can see it.

It's clear that a memorial stone doesn't compensate injustice. But what Bettina Weben refers to here, that the stone does not catch attention: That's true. I think of the schoolgirls who regularly spend their break here and who, before talking to me, seem never to have noticed the stone.

In summer, when I am still at the beginning of my research, I go to the City Museum. In the permanent exhibition there is a large history complex on Halle in the GDR. I find nothing about a "Tripperburg". And I increasingly get the impression: Anyone who is interested in GDR history, but neither notices the memorial stone, nor takes part in one of the city walks organised by the Zeit-Geschichte(n) association, will not stumble upon the topic. In the meantime, there is material on the subject. You just have to look for it.

**LIANE PFÖRTNER** But that doesn't bring it into the public consciousness and that's why something like the situation I had with my grandmother persists. That people somehow don't know about the actual events that happened there, but then such an image of it still exists in the public, which is not at all right and which is not true. That's really the problem.

At the beginning of the year, I am writing this feature. It's late in the evening and a friend has come over for co-working. At some point we take a break and go outside for a moment. There are young people hanging around. Listening to loud music and drinking beer. You could say they're prowling.

I tell the friend that I just don't know how to end. Because I'm still holding loose threads in my hand. For example, that doctors are authorities who are trusted, which is not necessarily bad in itself, but also gives them power. That the venereal ward is part of a pattern: people who can get pregnant are disciplined by having their bodies interfered with. And then there is a question that just won't let me go: How many times since I was a child, without knowing it, have I dealt with people who were in this ward? Or knew about it?

"I can't think of a conclusion," I tell the friend. "I can't close the case."

She replies, "Maybe that's the point."

**SPEAKER** Kleine Klaus 16. Halle, the “Tripperburg” and myself. A feature by Irene Schulz.

The following spoke: the author and Philipp Reinheimer.

Idea, editing and production: Irene Schulz.

With music by Arian Hagen and Iva Svoboda.

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KLEINE KLAUS 16 is a final project for the master’s programme Multimedia und Autorschaft (Multimedia and Authorship) at the University of Halle.

Supervision: Golo Föllmer and Maren Schuster.

**IRENE** Thanks to all the interviewees who took the time to talk to me. And many thanks to Christopher Fust, Frauke Rummler, Ireno Wand, Mareike Herz, Nadia Schmidt and Steve Amende.