THE SECRET POLICE DOSSIER OF
HERTA MÜLLER

A "FILE STORY" OF COLD WAR SURVEILLANCE

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y = WAGNER RICHARD

z = MÜLER HERTA

VALENTINA GLAJAR

The Secret Police Dossier of Herta Müller

Culture and Power in German-Speaking Europe, 1918–1989

Series editor Julian Preece
(*Swansea University*)

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For my mother

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Preface

THIS PROJECT BEGAN more than ten years ago, when I received the research accreditation from CNSAS (National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives) in November 2010. I would like to thank Cristina Petrescu for (inadvertently) alerting me to the existence of Herta Müller's secret police file in her contribution to a book Bettina Brandt and I were coediting at that time, *Herta Müller: Politics and Aesthetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). I also owe gratitude to Dragoș Petrescu and the CNSAS Board for approving my accreditation application for the research project "Herta Müller and the Securitate." In the summer of 2011, I was finally able to embark on this journey, as I first laid eyes on Müller's and Richard Wagner's files and began to decipher the documents sewn together and organized within solid grayish covers. I went on to read the files multiple times and to make a myriad of notes on the digitized copies, but it was not until my research leave of 2015–16 that I had the chance to put information from the files, clustered around years and events, on an evidence board to visualize it and see the connections. I would like to thank my university and its presidential committee for selecting my project and deeming it worthy of a one-year sabbatical. At the end of that research leave, I had a better understanding of the files and a rough draft of the story. I would like to thank Brigid Haines, with whom I shared this preliminary text at the time, for her interest and feedback.

My work on secret police files, which expanded to include more and more files pertaining to the German Romanian communities, has brought about my sustained and most fruitful collaboration on file writing and surveillance with my academic soulmates and beloved conference companions, Alison Lewis and Corina L. Petrescu. I will forever value their friendship, generosity, and support. They challenged and inspired me, as I continued to refine my concept of "file stories" in the books and special journal issue we coedited: *Secret Police Files from the Eastern Bloc: Between Surveillance and Life Writing* (Camden House, 2016); *Im Visier der Staatssicherheit* (special issue of *Monatshefte*, 2018), which includes my first article that deals with the gaps and contradictions in Müller's file; and *Cold War Spy Stories from Eastern Europe* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2019). I have presented findings from my approach to secret police files at conferences of the German Studies Association; the German Studies Association of Australia; the Modern Language Association; the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies; the Romanian Studies Association; the American Comparative Literature Association; and other specialized conferences in Copenhagen, Jena, and Shanghai.

in November of 2018, although other engagements eventually prevented her meeting with me. Cristian Gaşpar provided me with very specific and most valuable information about train travel from Timişoara to Bucharest in the 1980s. My thanks go also to those who chose to remain anonymous, but whose precious information allowed me to make important connections and bridge gaps in the files; the connections I might have missed are all on me.

Parts of chapter 3 and chapter 4 have been previously published as "Translation and Surveillance: Flaws and Glitches" in *Histories of Surveillance from Antiquity to the Digital Era*, edited by Andreas Marklund and Laura Skouvig (London: Routledge, 2022), and as "Secrecy Matters: The Case of the Securitate Source SORIN" in *Limbus: Australisches Jahrbuch für germanistische Literatur* (2022). I thank Routledge (Taylor & Francis) and Nomos for their permission to revise and reprint my work. I also wish to express my thanks to CNSAS and the Crypto Museum for allowing me to use illustrations from the files and one of a Securitate bug, respectively.

Yet I owe my warmest gratitude to my family in the US and in Romania. My mother, who experienced all the phases of communism in Romania, has pushed and encouraged me to keep going every single morning during this entire process. This book is dedicated to her. My sister and her family have helped in more ways than I can count, and I will never be able to repay their kindness and caring generosity. My loving gratitude also goes to my husband and my son; their constant encouragement and feedback on multiple drafts I value immensely. My husband, who escaped Ceauşescu's Romania in 1981, has been my rock throughout this process; his insights, which have repeatedly drawn my attention back to that grim reality of the 1980s, have been invaluable.

Terms and Abbreviations

ACNSAS	Arhivele Consiliul Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii (The Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives)
AGB	Aktionsgruppe Banat (Action Group Banat—a German-language literary association in Banat, Romania)
AMG	Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn (a German-language literary association in Timişoara, Banat, Romania)
CNSAS	Consiliul Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii (The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives)
DUI	Dosar de Urmărire Informativă (surveillance file)
FD	Fond Documentar (Documentary Fond)
FI	Fond Informativ (Informative Fond)
FP	Fond Penal (Penal Fond)
GEG	Grupul Etnic German (German Ethnic Group; Deutsche Volksgruppe—a fascist organization of German Romanians during WWII)
MI	Ministerul de Interne (Ministry of the Interior)
NBZ	*Neue Banater Zeitung* (New Banat newspaper—a regional German-language newspaper from Timişoara)
NFG	Naţionalişti Fascişti Germani (Nationalist Fascist Germans—FD file about ethnic Germans from Romania)
NL	*Neue Literatur* (a Romanian German-language literary journal)
RFE	Radio Free Europe
SIE	Serviciul de Informaţii Externe (Foreign Intelligence Service)
SRI	Serviciul Român de Informaţii (Romanian Intelligence Service)
T.O.	Tehnică operativă (audio surveillance technology)

Introduction

"Herta Müller should share her Nobel with the Securitate."[1] This comment, made by the former secret police officer Radu Tinu, was in reaction to the news that Müller (b. 1953), a German writer originally from the Romanian village of Nitzkydorf, had just won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009.[2] Communist Romania's infamous secret police was indeed a protagonist in her work, though an undesired and dreaded one.[3] Most of Müller's writings, whether fictional or essayistic, are deeply and explicitly anchored in Ceaușescu's Romania and its pernicious system of secret surveillance. In "Ode to Herta Müller," the Romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu lauds her Kafkaesque writings as "the product of an intense obsession, a unique, paranoid terror of being followed, held in suspicion, [and] persecuted."[4] Müller's Securitate file, discovered in 2009,[5] does indeed trace and expose her surveillance by the secret police even after she emigrated to West Germany in 1987. The author herself reacted to reading her file in the file-based autobiographical text "Die Securitate ist noch im Dienst" (Securitate in All but Name) in 2009.[6] In this work, Müller primarily addressed the gaps in her file; her text raises, then, the question about what information her file *does*, in fact, comprise.

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1 All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

2 Ștefan Both, "EXCLUSIV Șeful securiștilor care au urmărit-o pe Herta Müller: 'Are o psihoză. Fabulează mult!'" (The Head of the Securitate Agents Who Spied on Herta Müller: "She has a psychosis. She lies a lot!").

3 Most notably, Müller addresses life under surveillance in her auto-fictional novel *Herztier* (1993; translated as *The Land of Green Plums*, 1996). The paranoia that occupied the lives of her fictional protagonists is exemplified in *Herztier* by the various signs the first-person narrator left in her apartment to check whether her home had been searched in her absence. Apparently Müller got some inspiration from William Totok, whose file indicates that he left hairs in books for the same reason. In her novel *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (1997; translated as *The Appointment*, 2001) Müller exposes her first-person narrator to Securitate interrogations as she brings to life the fear, trauma, and humiliation associated with them.

4 I used the English translation of Cărtărescu's article published on signandsight.com: "Ode to Herta Müller."

5 Hubert Spiegel, "Die Akte Cristina" (The File Cristina), 31.

6 I use the term "file-based autobiography" as coined by Cornelia Vismann in her study *Files*, 156. Herta Müller, "Die Securitate ist noch im Dienst," trans. Karsten Sand Iverson and Christopher Sand Iverson as "Securitate in All but Name" (http://www.signandsight.com/features/1910.html). The same year, Müller republished a version of this article as *Cristina und ihre Attrappe* (hereafter *Attrappe*). The English translation by Geoffrey Mulligan appeared as *Cristina and Her Double* with Portobello in 2013 (hereafter *Double*).

Opening the secret police files at the end of the Cold War held out the promise of democracy and evidence of the former regimes' repressive actions. Access to these files by ordinary citizens is "a strictly Eastern European method of reckoning with the past," the political scientist Lavinia Stan claims in *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*.[7] Yet few former Eastern bloc countries could keep pace with the government of reunited Germany, which declassified files of the East German secret police in 1992.[8] Romania was no exception to this delay and its case exemplifies the many obstacles other former communist countries faced during the transition period, as most of the secret services remained in place even after the fall of the communist regimes. They may have been renamed, but none of the countries could produce brand new secret agencies overnight, and the existing ones were undoubtedly reluctant to come clean about their recent past. In post-1989 Romania, Stan argues, the new political leaders used (and misused) the files to discredit opposition leaders, while former secret agents realized that the information in these files could become "an efficient secret weapon, allowing them to become the new entrepreneurial elite."[9]

In 1999, Romania passed Law No. 187, according to which it established a national state-sponsored council to administer the files produced by Romania's Securitate. Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS—The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives) received and now houses and manages files from various institutions, including the communist internal and foreign intelligence agencies, and from ministerial and military archives. As some of these institutions were reluctant to release their holdings (claiming national security concerns), the law had to be amended twice, in 2006 (Law No. 16/Feb. 22, 2006) and 2008 (Law No. 24/ March 5, 2008), to finally allow a more acceptable degree of transparency and accessibility. According to the latest CNSAS report, the archives hold now over two million files, yet every year the collection seems to grow due to the "benevolence" of the new intelligence service, Serviciul Român de Informații (SRI— Romanian Intelligence Service), which has yet to transfer all the remaining or still existing Securitate files.[10]

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7   Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*, 59.

8   As of June 17, 2021, the Stasi files were transferred from Die Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Stasi-Unterlagen to the Bundesarchiv (https://www.bundes archiv.de/DE/Content/Meldungen/2021-06-16_integration-stua.html).

9   Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*, 71.

10   According to the CNSAS annual report from 2019, CNSAS now manages over two million files, the equivalent of 27 linear kilometers. The 2020 report mentions that the archive received 300 files from SRI and 930 files from SIE in 2020. CNSAS, Raport de activitate (Activity Report) 2019, 34; and Raport de activitate (Activity Report) 2020, 18. In *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*, Stan claims that the Securitate produced 35 linear kilometers of files (69).

As part of the files in the custody of CNSAS, accredited researchers now have access to the Documentary Fond dossier titled NAȚIONALIȘTI FASCIȘTI GERMANI (NFG—Nationalist Fascist Germans) and dedicated to the German minority, to whom Herta Müller belongs.[11] The Securitate's motivation for opening this file was to control and prevent any "hostile" action coming from this minority that in light of its Nazi past was perceived as an enemy to an emerging communist democracy. In addition to these ethnic Germans' involvement with fascism, their capitalist/bourgeois background made them prime suspects for the Securitate. The title of this multivolume dossier was never changed, which is revealing of the Securitate's and implicitly the Romanian regime's perception of the German minority. The NFG files include intervallic reports from the regional Securitate branches to the Headquarters in Bucharest, correspondence, and domestic and external operations.

As further files archived in the Penal Fond exemplify,[12] the relationship of German Romanians to the communist regime reached a low point in the Stalinist years. Two political trials took place in the Transylvanian town of Brașov/Kronstadt (then Orașul Stalin—Stalin Town) in 1958 and 1959. The first trial, the so-called "Schwarze Kirche Prozess" (Black Church Trial), involved 20 mostly young Transylvanian Saxons who were charged with treason for attempting to undermine the communist regime.[13] A year later, in 1959, "Der Schriftstellerprozess" (The Writers' Trial) targeted five German-language authors, both young and established ones, whose writings were deemed unpatriotic and treasonous.[14] The sentences in both trials were extremely harsh and included for many of them life in prison and hard labor. While all of them were released and pardoned due to a general amnesty in the early 1960s, the consequences were far-reaching, and the Securitate achieved its intended goal of sending a warning and silencing the German community and its writers.

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11   ACNSAS, FD (Fond Documentar—Documentary Fond), file 013381, 46 vols. (hereafter NFG). Its first entry was on August 17, 1971, and its last one on January 27, 1989.

12   The Penal Fond is a collection of files pertaining to trials and convicted persons.

13   For a detailed list of the people convicted during this trial, see Karl-Heinz Brenndörfer and Thomas Șindilariu, eds., *Der Schwarze-Kirche-Prozess 1957/58* (The Black Church Trial 1957–58), 31. See also Corneliu Pintilescu's *Procesul Biserica Neagră 1958* (The Black Church Trial 1958).

14   The five writers were Wolf von Aichelburg (1912–94), Hans Bergel (1925–2022), Andreas Birkner (1911–98), Georg Scherg (1917–2002), and Harald Siegmund (1930–2012). Their interrogations and other information pertaining to their arrests can be found in ACNSAS, FP (Fond Penal—Penal Fond), file 331, 8 vols. See also Peter Motzan, Stefan Sienerth, and Andreas Heuberger, eds., *Worte als Gefahr und Gefährdung* (Dangerous and Endangering Words). Herta Müller wrote her degree thesis at the University of Timișoara on the work of Wolf von Aichelburg. In 1994 the university was renamed and is now the West University of Timișoara.

As a result of their treatment as perpetual hostile elements, the emigration of German Romanians grew to "a psychosis," as the Securitate called it in various NFG documents. For reasons that involved obtaining economic concessions from West Germany and to project a favorable image of communist Romania and its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, abroad, the Securitate produced documents meant to combat the "erroneous" information about the increasing number of emigration applications. Paradoxically, while Romania appeared to prevent ethnic Germans from emigrating, documents attest to Ceaușescu's secret deals with West Germany to "sell" his own citizens. From 1968 to 1989, West Germany paid ransom for ethnic Germans from Romania as part of the largest organized and sanctioned "ransoming" operation of the Cold War in Eastern Europe. While rumors about numbers and a price per capita circulated during that time, the opening of the files revealed the extent and inner workings of this operation.[15] In *Trading Germans*, a documentary made by Răzvan Georgescu in 2014, the German officials involved in this operation justified it as humanitarian and described Ceaușescu's Romania as a "Sonderfall," while the reactions of the bargained-for German Romanians fluctuated between feelings of betrayal and gratitude.[16]

The voluminous paper trail the Securitate left behind not only contains records of the past; most of all it has captured the lives of real people and their personal stories. Whether just in sporadic mentions or in full-blown multivolume files bearing their names, ordinary or less ordinary citizens can find the undesired traces of their past lives in this unusual archive. In the present book we look at Herta Müller's story as captured in her own surveillance file and in other documents collated in several other files, most notably in that of her former husband, the German novelist and poet Richard Wagner, whose own surveillance was closely intertwined with Müller's in the 1980s. The archived documents cover seven years of her life under surveillance, from 1983 to 1989, and contain biographical accounts of the beginning of Müller's career.

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15   CNSAS, *Acțiunea "Recuperarea"* (Operation "Retrieval").

16   Most prominently, Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1927–2016), former West German foreign minister, and Horst Teltschik (b. 1940), advisor to the former chancellor Helmut Kohl, are represented in Georgescu's documentary. This operation far exceeded any such operation on the side of West Germany, including its dealings with East Germany for political prisoners. Between 1968 and 1989, West Germany paid ransom for approximately 11,000 German Romanians a year. Romania had a similar arrangement with Israel for its Jewish citizens. See Radu Ioanid's *The Ransom of the Jews*. On April 18, 2022, the premiere of Carmen Lidia Vidu's play "Menschen. Zu verkaufen" (Oameni. De vânzare; Humans. For sale) took place at the German State Theater Timișoara.

The Files

On March 8, 1983, the Securitate deemed Karl Herta (née Müller) and her literary activities hostile and thus worthy of a personal surveillance file (DUI—Dosar de Urmărire Informativă) under the code name CRISTINA.[17] Why officers came up with this code name and whether it had any significance for them is unclear and not documented. Was it the name of a friend, of a relative, or just a random pick?[18] The made-up protagonist CRISTINA might have gained Müller's traits and become synonymous with her, if only the Securitate officers had referred to her by her secret code name in the filed documents. However, in the process of writing or filing a total of 577 folios in three volumes, the officers simply called her Herta Müller, and sometimes even the more intimate Herta. Only those agents and informers who did not know her, the out-of-towners who seemed to follow the rules of secrecy more rigorously, called her by her code name, CRISTINA.

In the first of these three volumes (317 folios), Müller's case officer, Lt. Ion Beleţescu, and his eventual successors filed their own analyses and contact reports, as well as those created by the informers who were assigned to spy on Müller. The second volume, much slimmer than the other two with a total of 53 folios, includes personal biographies of Müller and Wagner—hers handwritten, his typed, with a passport photo attached—random notes, the background checks on all the neighbors in Müller and Wagner's apartment building as well as a rudimentary sketch of their apartment's layout (CRISTINA, vol. 2, 50). Volume 3 (207 folios) is titled CRISTINA and ZIARISTUL (the journalist—Wagner's code name).[19] It includes transcribed and translated wiretaps dating from November 6, 1984 (the date the installation of the listening devices was finalized), to March 18, 1987, after Müller and Wagner had left Romania and the removal of the microphones was ordered. This last volume has the designation "T" or "T.O." (Tehnică Operativă—audio

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17   Karl is the surname of Müller's first husband. Although she had been divorced for several years and had reclaimed her maiden name by 1983, the Securitate opened her surveillance file under the name Karl, Herta. ACNSAS, FI (Fond Informativ), file 233447, 3 vols. For reasons of readability, I will reference the various files by their code names; thus, Müller's will be CRISTINA hereafter. For the same reason, I have kept the code names in all caps, as they appear in the files.

18   In some cases, Securitate officers used the first letter of the target's family name to come up with a code name, as in the case of two German Romanian writers from Müller's entourage: LUCA for Johann Lippet; SANDU for Horst Samson. Other times, as with Richard Wagner and William Totok, they used the targets' profession or their incriminating trait: ZIARISTUL (the journalist) for Wagner, and INTERPRETUL (the interpreter) for Totok.

19   Richard Wagner's surveillance file was opened on May 9, 1980, under the code name ZIARISTUL: ACNSAS, FI, file 184945 (hereafter ZIARISTUL). It also contains various informers' notes preceding this date. The first note, for example, comes from a classmate, SUSI, who reported on him on April 11, 1972 (ZIARISTUL, 1).

surveillance technology), which indicates the special unit in charge of technical, remote surveillance, or simply "eavesdropping," as the anthropologist Katherine Verdery calls it in *My Life as a Spy* (2018)—a book based on her own Securitate surveillance file.[20]

But why would a young author merit the dubious "honor" of earning a surveillance file in communist Romania in 1983?[21] As a writer, one attracted attention simply through publications that did not adhere to the national communist dogma, which in the 1980s reflected mostly an adoration for the leader of the Communist Party. As a German-language writer, Müller had additional strikes against her: first, because German Romanian writers, like all other ethnic Germans in Romania, were classified in the files of the Securitate as "nationalist fascist Germans." Romanian-language writers, on the other hand, were lumped together under the more generous title ARTE-CULTURĂ (Arts-Culture).[22] Non-compliant German-language texts were more likely to get noticed by the authorities, given the relatively small number of German Romanian authors. Once their writings had raised red flags, the Securitate assigned informers to translate and interpret them. And finally, the Securitate construed these writers' contacts with West German citizens, which were reason enough to set off alarms, as a way to smuggle manuscripts out of the country and publish them uncensored in the West.

Müller's relationship with the already compromised German Romanian writers of the short-lived German-language literary association, Aktionsgruppe Banat (Action Group Banat—AGB), added a new exploitable wrinkle in her story of surveillance.[23] In fact, the first two mentions of her occurred

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20   As a US scholar conducting fieldwork in Romania during the 1970s and 1980s, Katherine Verdery attracted the attention of the Securitate, who suspected her of being an American spy, hence the title of her most recent file-based book, *My Life as a Spy*.

21   CNSAS offers a host of reasons for opening surveillance files: expressing critical thoughts about the party and its leaders; praising life in the West; contacts with Western media, foreign citizens, embassies; espionage; failure to denounce the anticommunist acts of others, etc. CNSAS, *Arhivele Securității* (The Archives of the Securitate), 47–48.

22   In fact, there were documented instances when a Securitate officer added the designation ARTE-CULTURĂ to the notes obtained on Müller and Wagner and another superior officer added instead "Probl. NG" (the Nationalist German problem; CRISTINA, vol. 1, 56; ZIARISTUL, 111).

23   AGB was a group of young, politically engaged Marxist writers from Banat, established in 1972 and dispersed by the Securitate in 1975. Its members were Richard Wagner (b. 1952), Ernest Wichner (b. 1952), Rolf Bossert (1952–86), William Totok (b. 1951), Johann Lippet (b. 1951), Gerhard Ortinau (b. 1953), Anton Sterbling (b. 1953), Werner Kremm (b. 1951), and Albert Bohn (b. 1955). For more information, see Raluca Cernahoschi-Condurateanu's dissertation "The Political, the Urban, and the Cosmopolitan: The 1970s Generation in Romanian-German Poetry" (University of British Columbia, 2010). See also the *Neue Literatur* issue 4 (1974), which was dedicated to the AGB writers; Richard Wagner's "Die Aktionsgruppe Banat: Versuch einer Selbstdarstellung" (Action Group Banat: An Attempt at Self-Representation 1990); Ernest Wichner's

in "informative notes"[24] filed in William Totok's dossier—Totok was the only AGB writer who was imprisoned for his hostile writings.[25] The first note, dated February 5, 1974, came from the source BERT, who reported on the German-language literary activity at the University of Timişoara. We learn that Herta Müller, a sophomore student, participated in a literary circle called Aktionskreis 74 (Action Circle 74), which was considered weaker than Universitas, where most of the AGB members read (INTERPRETUL, vol. 2, 6).[26] The second mention of Müller in Totok's file came from the source HEINE, who reported on October 16, 1975, that Herta Müller, a senior student, had heard that AGB members had been arrested at the border and wanted to know if the rumor was true (INTERPRETUL, vol. 2, 192). Totok, Wagner, Ortinau, and the literary critic Gerhardt Csejka had been arrested on their way to Comloşu Mare, where they intended to visit Totok's parents. Since Comloşu Mare is situated close to the border with former Yugoslavia, the Securitate accused them of having attempted to leave Romania illegally.[27]

This arrest meant the end of the AGB as a group, and its former members eventually found a new home at the Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn (AMG) literary circle in Timişoara, where established and young writers alike had

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anthology *Ein Pronomen ist verhaftet worden* (A Pronoun Has Been Arrested, 1992); Anton Sterbling, "*Am Anfang war das Gespräch*" (In the Beginning Was the Conversation, 2008); and the story of the group's surveillance by the Securitate in Helmuth Frauendorfer's documentary *An den Rand geschrieben* (Written in the Margins, 2010). Additionally, see interviews with Wichner, Totok, and Frauendorfer as part of the CNSAS Oral History Project, and Cristina Petrescu's articles "Aktionsgruppe Banat Reconstructs Its Past" I and II. Adela-Gabriela Hincu also addresses the AGB writers in her master's thesis, "Children of the Cultural Revolution 'Gone Astray'" (Arizona State University, 2013).

24 In Securitate files, a report provided by a source/informer is called "notă informativă" (informative note). The officers' intervallic written contributions were called "rapoarte de analiză" (analysis reports).

25 After his emigration to West Germany, Totok told his own story of persecution in his autobiographical book, *Die Zwänge der Erinnerung* (The Constraints of Memory, 1988).

26 William Totok's surveillance file was opened on November 14, 1974, under the code name INTERPRETUL: ACNSAS, FI, file 210845, vols. 2 and 3 (hereafter INTERPRETUL).

27 While the group were held for seven days and interrogated about their hostile writings, most specifically about Totok's overtly political texts, the Securitate installed listening devices at Ortinau's house to monitor the reactions to the arrest and then the discussions of the arrested AGB members after they were set free. See Gerhard Ortinau's surveillance file, ACNSAS, FI, file 233471, vol. 3. In the same file, there is a request dated October 21, 1975, to install listening devices in cell number 7, which Ortinau and Csejka shared during the arrest. In addition to the initial charges of evasion, the Securitate was also interested in their discussions regarding hostile literary texts and their interpretations (ACNSAS, FI, file 233471, vol. 1, 36).

the opportunity to present and discuss their work.[28] An informative note in Wagner's file signals that as a young 23-year-old writer and student of German and Romanian at the University of Timișoara, Müller also read some of her early poems at the AMG meeting of February 2, 1976. Before this note, the Securitate had not shown any interest in Müller, and her mention in Wagner's file appeared in fact to highlight Wagner's own alleged hostile remarks about censorship in Romania. According to an unnamed source, when one of the participants criticized Müller's poetry for not being sufficiently politically engaged, Wagner remarked "Wer auf die Barrikaden steigt, der gelangt ins stille Kämmerlein" (those who mount the barricades end up in a quiet little cell; ZIARISTUL, 59v). The Securitate (and ostensibly the source who reported it) interpreted this remark of Wagner's to be a veiled allusion to the arrest of Totok, and thus to the potentially dire consequences of writing political texts in communist Romania.

Three years later, a more ominous mention of Müller's name occurred, also in Wagner's file, on December 3, 1979. The source SANDA reported that Müller, along with Totok, Wagner, Johann Lippet, and Balthasar Waitz, was often seen with Dagmar Lehmann, the West German visiting lecturer at the University of Timișoara. According to SANDA, they had formed an intimate "literary circle" (ZIARISTUL, 91).[29] The Securitate was suspicious of any Western lecturers and closely scrutinized their activity and the information they imparted to students and colleagues. The Securitate's goals were to prevent potentially subversive groups from forming, or to disperse them while they were still in an incipient phase, as had been the case with the AGB, which only lasted for three years.

The year 1979 also marked the publication of Müller's first short prose texts in the May and December issues of the German-language Romanian literary journal *Neue Literatur* (*NL*). This event did not initially attract the overt attention of the Securitate, as evinced by the absence of informative notes about Müller's seven texts published in the May issue.[30] However, by the time

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28 Müller later credited these writer friends with her own success as a writer, and she also explained that during these readings and discussions they metaphorically shredded each other's texts, which helped them improve their work. See, for example, her statements in Frauendorfer's documentary, *An den Rand geschrieben*.

29 According to Totok, SANDA was a German faculty member at the University of Timișoara. In his blog entry dated April 30, 2010, he dismisses the existence of this intimate club as a sign of the Securitate's paranoia. https://halbjahresschrift.blogspot.com/search?q=Sanda.

30 The May issue includes the following seven texts under the heading "Seitengassen" (Side Streets): "Damals im Mai" (Then in May), "Abziehbild" (Decal), "Der Mann mit der Zündholzschachtel" (The Man with the Matchbox), "Die Mäuse" (The Mice), "Die Lebenslinie" (Lifeline), "Seitengassen," and "Die Straßenkehrer" (The Street Sweepers). Three of them, "Damals im Mai," "Der Mann mit der Zündholzschachtel," and "Die Straßenkehrer," were later republished in revised and abridged versions in

the *NL* December issue appeared, the Securitate, which was mostly interested in texts by former AGB members (reliably "hostile" writers), must have realized that Müller's texts also deserved close scrutiny.[31] Müller's short stories did not leap to the eye for any political content that could have been spun as subversive, but rather for what the sources considered to be their misrepresentation of rural life and their brazen immorality. As Müller was yet to have a surveillance dossier of her own, the Securitate officers recorded the informative notes pertaining to these texts in Wagner's file.

According to the notes found in Wagner's dossier, one can ascertain that the regional branch of the Timiş County Securitate[32] had weighed three important factors in the proposal to open her file dated February 24, 1983 (CRISTINA, vol. 1, 1–1v). First was Müller's close relationship with former AGB members, who had been kept under surveillance for their "hostile" writings. Of acute interest, and often mentioned in derogatory terms (concubinaj—concubinage), was also Müller's romantic relationship with Wagner, which, according to the file, had begun in 1979. Wagner was of utmost importance to the Securitate because it considered him to be the ideological leader of the AGB, and because for a period of time he was also in charge of the AMG, a hotbed of politically antagonistic German-language literature. Second, Müller's publications, which sources interpreted as negative portrayals of village life in Romania, provided another deciding factor that elevated Müller's level of subversiveness close to that of her writer friends. Based on informative notes, Beleţescu, the writer of the proposal, offers several examples of what he calls "socioeconomic" texts published in *Niederungen*, Müller's breakthrough 1982 book of short stories: "Das schwäbische Bad" (The Swabian Bath), "Meine Familie" (My Family), and "Dorfchronik" (Village Chronicle), which will be discussed in detail in chapter 1 of this book, "The Filed Story of *Niederungen*."[33] In the eyes of the Securitate, Müller had attacked the building blocks of socialist society: family, education, agriculture, and the communist organizational structures, which in her texts appear infected by incompetence and nepotism. Third, Müller had

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Müller's first collection of short stories, *Niederungen* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1982), while "Die Mäuse" became an integral part of the longer prose text "Niederungen" as pages 13–16.

31   The 1979 December issue of *NL* includes three prose texts by Müller: "Der schwarze Kutscher" (The Black Coachman), "Heini," and "Großmutters Schlaf" (Grandmother's Sleep)—all of which were later revised to become key parts in "Niederungen": "Der schwarze Kutscher" as pages 43–48, "Heini" as pages 30–35, and "Großmutters Schlaf" as pages 65–72 in the Kriterion edition.

32   Each county had its own regional Securitate branch, whose organization mirrored that of the Securitate Headquarters in Bucharest. The Securitate of the Timiş County (hereafter Timiş Securitate) had its headquarters in the county's capital, Timişoara.

33   For texts that later appeared in the Rotbuch edition of *Niederungen*, I will use Sieglinde Lug's English translation *Nadirs* (1999).

already attracted the attention of the Securitate's Service III (counterespionage) for her repeated contact with the West German lecturer Dagmar Lehmann. These three reasons sufficed for the Securitate to intervene and order her surveillance, which officially began with the opening of her own file on March 8, 1983. Incidentally and ironically, the day was International Women's Day, a celebration of working women in the communist world.

Yet even after the Timiş Securitate had approved the opening of Müller's surveillance file, documents pertaining to her continued to also emerge in various other files. Most can be found in Wagner's voluminous file that totals 428 folios. In fact, their stories are tightly intertwined, and one has to study them in tandem in order to make sense of the convoluted Securitate chronicle that unfolds in both. Various sub-plots exist also in the files of their writer friends that further contribute to this collage; events, text fragments, phone calls, or minute pieces of information demand to be woven into the texture of the story line. The Securitate's chronology and recordkeeping logic are most accurate at times and in complete disarray at others. For example, the surveillance file of the German Romanian writer Horst Samson includes several wiretaps pertaining to Müller in the T.O. volume that was supposed to document his own phone taps.[34] Information pertaining to Müller is also included in Totok's, Lippet's, Helmuth Frauendorfer's, and Csejka's files, as well as in that of ERIKA, a West German diplomat, and in various Securitate reports in several NFG volumes.[35]

The File Protagonists

Müller's first reaction to reading her Securitate file—in her 2009 article "Die Securitate ist noch im Dienst"—was as condemning and harsh as would be expected of a writer who dedicated her literary career to exposing human rights violations in Ceauşescu's Romania. Müller's article attracted the attention of some scholars who criticized the piece as exuding vigilantism instead of setting an example of transitional justice.[36] Florin Poenaru, for example, integrates Müller's text within the larger historical context of how Romanians have dealt with the fall of communism.[37] The process of historicizing communism, as he explains in his study, was predominantly based on elements

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34   Horst Samson's surveillance file, code name SANDU: ACNSAS, FI, file 184942, 2 vols. (hereafter SANDU).

35   Helmuth Frauendorfer: ACNSAS, FI, file 211348 (hereafter FLORIN). Gerhardt Csejka: ACNSAS, FI, file 157085, 5 vols. (hereafter CAROL). ERIKA: ACNSAS, FI, file 1094789, 2 vols.

36   Florin Poenaru, Contesting Illusions: History and Intellectual Class Struggle in Post-Communist Romania, PhD. thesis, 2013.

37   See Poenaru's interpretation of Müller's reaction to reading her file in his dissertation chapter "The Impossibility of Giving Account of Oneself: Herta Müller as a Spy," 252–69.

of victimization, suffering, and resistance (Poenaru, 132). In his opinion, the autobiographical texts victims of communism wrote after 1989 not only fuse life with writing, and history with memory, they also afford the authors authority, and, quite significantly, the power to control the past (134).[38] In a reversal of the Foucauldian understanding of history as "cluttering" up and occupying our memory,[39] Poenaru defines the process of post-communist historicization in Romania as "history-as-memory," one in which memory and biography obscure and overshadow history (136). Thus the stories of "dissidents" and "victims" on both sides of the ideological divide—the first texts that reckoned with the legacy of communism in Romania—contributed to and developed a historical discourse of lived experience that in their opinion was primarily based on "truth" and "justice." As such, Poenaru contends, the investigation of Romania's communist past cannot be objective, analytical, and dispassionate, but appears rather reduced to a quest for reparation (137). To be fair, Müller never claimed to be writing history, but her accusatory articles and television appearances situate her reaction to reading her file in the very same postcommunist discourse Poenaru describes.[40] Her file-based autographical text, like those of other authors before and after her, added to the corpus of memoirs and autobiographies that in Poenaru's opinion transformed the period of transition in Romania into a "space of denunciation" in which the authors themselves became "vigilantes" of sorts who indiscriminately revealed the names of informers (268). Indeed, as Lavinia Stan also contends, the most sought-after information in the Securitate files was the identity of the secret informers.[41]

Müller's initial reading of her Securitate files elicited visceral reactions similar to those of other protagonists—targets—of surveillance files. Outing the Securitate informers happened less due to a "vigilante" instinct on the side

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38   In *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*, Stan welcomes the involvement of former Securitate victims in writing history, although she never goes into any detail about the kind of history-as-memory writing Poenaru discusses in his study. "Once a state opens the files, the reconstruction of the past belongs not only to historians but also to those who lived during times of repression" (Stan, 60).

39   Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 219.

40   Müller and others made the names of informers public in various interviews. Achim Reinhardt, "Der Spitzel und die Nobelpreisträgerin" (The Snitch and the Nobel Prize Laureate, 2010); Werner Kremm, "Mayer, Gruia, Voicu, Barbu und Marin," *Banater Zeitung* (2011); "Herta Müller fordert Verfolgung von Securitate-Spitzeln in Deutschland" (Herta Müller Calls for the Prosecution of Securitate Informers in Germany), *Die Zeit* (2010); and Wolf-Günther Gerlach, "Neue Vorwürfe gegen Securitate-Spitzel Peter Grosz: Literaturnobelpreisträgerin Herta Müller kritisiert mangelnde Reue der Täter" (New Allegations against the Securitate Source Peter Grosz: Nobel Prize Winner for Literature Herta Müller Criticizes the Perpetrators' Lack of Remorse, 2010).

41   Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*, 77. For a discussion of vigilante initiatives by individual justice seekers in former Eastern bloc countries, see Stan, "Vigilante Justice and Unofficial Truth Projects" in *Post-Communist Transitional Justice*, 276–95.

of the surveilled than because it provided delayed vindication in the form of legitimate evidence found in their surveillance files. Reading the file documents forced the protagonists to revisit and confront their stories of a former intimate self in a period they had partly forgotten or chosen to repress. For many, an avalanche of memories flooded their present and generated bafflement, depression, and rage. Johann Lippet's first reaction after leafing through his file was one of nausea.[42] Others took to their own pen to redact and annotate the actual archived original files, to the consternation of the CNSAS employees.[43] Yet others, like Verdery, found their surveillance files to be in disarray; her first instinct was to rearrange the documents to conform to her own sense of order.

The fragmented and disjointed life stories chronicled in these dossiers compelled the surveilled to reflect on the very nature of files and to confront their own expectations regarding the files' content. Gerhardt Csejka, for example, after having read his 3,582-folio file, concluded that it did not encapsulate who he was, "what he wanted, and felt"; not even the wiretaps that had penetrated his private life could accomplish that.[44] His statement reflects the inability of a Securitate file to capture the essence of an individual—an expectation both ominous and unfeasible. The Securitate failed to live up to its reputation of capturing and recording one's every move in Müller's opinion as well: in Frauendorfer's documentary *An den Rand geschrieben*, she compares her file to a sieve. The sieve's holes refer, in Müller's words, to the omissions but also to her suspicion that the Securitate has censored its activities out of her file after 1989. In the same documentary, Richard Wagner also acknowledged the gaps in his file, though he was not expecting to be confronted with an accurate life story. He recognized instead the Securitate's pernicious strategies and tactics that are reflected in his file.

Still, what do targets recognize of their former selves in the caricatures captured in these files? "An enemy of the state looks at me in disbelief from my Securitate file," exclaimed Franz Hodjak, the long-term German Romanian editor of the Dacia Press in Cluj, Romania.[45] The US-based Romanian writer Dorin Tudoran felt that in the "poisonous ocean" that is his surveillance file, he had become somebody else, a person whom the Securitate had "illegally

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42   Johann Lippet, *Das Leben einer Akte* (The Life of a File), 7.

43   Verdery describes this episode that took place in the CNSAS reading room in "Romania's Securitate Archives and Its Fictions," NCEEER Paper, 2013.

44   Gerhardt Csejka, "Ich habe den Klassenfeind erkannt: Was meine Akte tatsächlich dokumentiert" (I Have Recognized the Class Enemy: What My File Really Documents) in *Vexierspiegel Securitate* (The Securitate's Distorted Mirror), 257–64, here 262.

45   "Ein Staatsfeind blickt mich ungläubig aus meiner Akte an." Quoted in Eduard Schneider, "Das Wort im Visier" (The Word as Target) in *Vexierspiegel Securitate*, 265–72.

adopted" and whose private life they kidnapped.[46] Verdery is faced with her portrayal as an American spy, which inspired her to write *My Life as a Spy*. All three see themselves, the targets in their own files, as doubles onto which the Securitate projected its own Cold War anxieties while zealously defending the legitimacy of a repressive regime.

The targets' initial impulse has been mostly to discourage any identification with their doubles of the past, which is often also deictically emphasized in the titles of their file-based texts: Csejka, for example, wants his readers to focus on what his file "really documents," as the subtitle of his essay indicates: "Was meine Akte tatsächlich dokumentiert" (What my file really documents). Müller, on the other hand, deflects attention from the controversial parts of her file by pointing out the gaps and silences inherent in any file. Her insistence on the gaps generates ambiguity, as she at once dismisses the file as pertaining to an other—a double—while also insisting on the importance of the missing information that would complement, explicate, and contextualize the portrait of that same double, which would turn it into a recognizable self.[47] The Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu offers a candid description of the young man captured in his file, his double from a different life, in his file-based autobiographical book *Dragul meu turnător* (My Dear Snitch).[48] In reading his file, Liiceanu is struck by the "image of surveillance," an all-encompassing surveillance that captured "the most hidden tremors of the soul."[49] This total exposure left him feeling like he had walked naked on life's stage behind a glass wall where no intimacy or privacy was possible.

Like targets, informers too had varied responses to reading their own files.[50] Some flat-out denied any collaboration and accused the Securitate of having fabricated their files, while others kept silent, hoping they could preserve their moral standing.[51] Still others died before they had to face their past

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46   Doru Tudoran, *Eu, fiul lor: Dosar de securitate* (I, Their Son: A Securitate File; 2010).

47   For a discussion of what Müller considered gaps and omissions in her file, see Valentina Glajar's "'Cristina' oder was in Herta Müllers Securitate Akte steht" ('Cristina' or What Is in Herta Müller's File), 189–201.

48   Gabriel Liiceanu, *Dragul meu turnător* (My Dear Snitch; 2013).

49   "Tresăririle cele mai ascunse ale sufletului" (Liiceanu, 45).

50   As we will see in chapter 3, informers had so-called network files (dosare de rețea) that included recruitment reports, evaluation reports of their activity, and at times, copies of their own reports. Many of them had surveillance files as well.

51   The most controversial recent case in Romanian politics is that of Traian Băsescu, Romania's two-term president from 2004 to 2014, who collaborated with the Securitate under the code name PETROV. The High Court of Cassation and Justice ruled on March 23, 2022, that Băsescu did collaborate with the Securitate. Andrea Pora, "ÎCCJ: Traian Băsescu a colaborat cu securitatea și pierde privilegiile de fost președinte" (The High Court of Cassation and Justice: Traian Băsescu Collaborated with the Securitate and Loses His Privileges as Former President).

spying activities for the Securitate. Very few in the German Romanian communities have accepted responsibility for their collaboration, as the late poet Werner Söllner (1951–2019) did in an open forum, yet only after his collaboration had been revealed.[52] Others have taken their targets to court on technicalities such as disseminating information about them as "collaborators" rather than "sources," as if a simple change in terminology would erase their past or make it appear more acceptable in the eyes of the public.[53]

Few officers have confessed either,[54] unless, like Radu Tinu, it was to further victimize his former targets in a language reminiscent of that in which the files had been written.[55] Others withheld the sensational details of the operations they had been involved in with the hope of landing book or film deals, as did Stelian Octavian Andronic, who represented the Securitate in the human ransoming operation between West Germany and communist Romania called RECUPERAREA (Retrieval).[56] As officer (cadre) files are only slowly trickling out of the SRI's custody and into that of CNSAS, very few studies examine these officer files and the varied roles officers played during their careers.[57]

Whether targets, informers, or officers, as Verdery and Poenaru highlight, the protagonists of these secret police files would much rather have their presence in these secret police files erased.[58] In the Romanian context, both "victims" and "perpetrators" feel they need to justify their presence in a Securitate file, "to give an account of this inclusion" (Poenaru, 200). Cristina Vatulescu and, more markedly, Cristian Tileaga point to the tension between the official textually mediated reality and the personal accounts of the file protagonists. While Tileaga focuses in his analysis predominantly on informer files, he interprets evidentiary documents not as simple memory props that would allow making a biography whole again, but, rather, he emphasizes the need to discuss how informers retroactively remember and attempt to interpret their

52   Valentina Glajar, "The Presence of the Unresolved Recent Past: Herta Müller and the Securitate," in *Herta Müller*, 49–63.

53   Claus Stephani sued Richard Wagner and won in a German court of law according to this technicality. "Der Fall Claus Stephani" (The Case of Claus Stephani; *NZZ* (2011). Stephani also sued the German literary journal *Sinn und Form*. See Anna Steinbauer's article, "Methoden der Securitate" (Methods of the Securitate); and Sabina Kienlechner's "Der arme Spitzel" (Poor Snitch).

54   Recently, Germina Nagâț of CNSAS reported on the first former Securitate officer who assumed responsibility for his past activities on ziare.com.

55   See more about Radu Tinu's attitude toward the communist past in the Epilogue.

56   Stelian Octavian Andronic, *36 de ani în serviciile secrete ale României* (36 Years in Romania's Secret Service Agencies, 2008).

57   See, for example, Glajar's "The Rise and Fall of a Securitate Officer" in *Cold War Spy Stories from Eastern Europe*, 29–69.

58   Verdery, "Romania's Securitate Archives and Its Fictions," NCEEER Paper, 2013.

past.[59] As Tileaga contends, recollecting in a space of public visibility is often also suffused with the words and experiences of others (204). Thus, layers of memories, recalled or appropriated, give way to new memories of memories.

In the case of Müller, a public figure, many details of her life have become known through her own articles, essays, and interviews in which she addresses aspects of life in Ceaușescu's Romania. Many of Müller's readers have grown to accept indiscriminately the author's self-described encounters with the Securitate, and, what is more, often equate the experiences of her fictional characters with those of the author herself. Rarely have others commented on the contradictions inherent in her recollections of experiences she shared with her writer friends. William Totok remarked in his review of Müller's autobiographical text *Mein Vaterland war ein Apfelkern*[60] that "the frontier between the autobiographic and the creative fantasy is fluid, they intersect and transform into an artistic text."[61] Without highlighting any specific inconsistencies in Müller's text, Totok alludes to their existence as due to the author's subjective memory—a filter that hinders an accurate reconstruction of the past. He reads *Apfelkern* as a collection of documents that a future biographer will need to approach critically by differentiating between the literary and the biographic aspects of this "profoundly autobiographical" text. One must remember, as Diana Schuster advises Müller's readers, that while her texts, particularly her essays, have attracted much attention to Eastern European contexts, they are not scholarly articles.[62] In fact, in a dialogue with Gabriel Liiceanu about *Atemschaukel* (*The Hunger Angel*), Müller's latest novel, the author herself clearly stated: "I write literature, not history."[63]

How are we then to reconcile Müller's ever-evolving memories of traumatic encounters with the Securitate under the communist regime with the predictably diverging and rather unexpected version of events collated in her file? Verdery cautions against seeking "truth" or "how it really happened" in surveillance files. She favors a close reading approach to her own file—one that would allow her to reconstruct the worldview of the officers and the informers, and the regime of truth or power that they served.[64] Yet if we treat the worldview of the "perpetrators" as true, as Verdery seems to suggest, then we would faultily assume that their dedication to the regime was unblemished and always

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59   Cristian Tileaga, "(Re)writing Biography," 197–215 (here 203).

60   Müller, *Mein Vaterland war ein Apfelkern* (My Fatherland Was an Apple Seed; 2014; hereafter *Apfelkern*).

61   "[F]rontiera între autobiografic și fantezie creatoare este fluidă, se intersectează și se transformă în text artistic." William Totok, "O carte explicit autobiografică" (An Explicitly Autobiographical Book).

62   Diana Schuster, *Die Banater Autorengruppe* (The Banat Writers' Group), 125.

63   Q&A session at the National Theater on September 26, 2010. The transcript of this one-hour discussion is available in *Dilema veche* "Herta Müller în dialog cu Gabriel Liiceanu" (Herta Müller in Dialogue with Gabriel Liiceanu; 2010).

64   Verdery, "Romania's Securitate Archives and Its Fictions."

sincere. Their stories and personal worldviews could reveal glitches, gaps, and silences that demand a differentiated approach, as do most Securitate files. Their files allow insight into fascinating lives—file stories that are as diverse and complex as those of the targets.

In this book I draw on extant literary and historical scholarship on file writing, most notably the work of Alison Lewis on East German Stasi files and Cristina Vatulescu's study on Romanian and Soviet files.[65] Lewis interprets the Stasi files as an unauthorized and illegitimate "hostile biography" of a person.[66] Her useful term points to questions such as who produced and commissioned these files, who wrote them, and toward what end. The purpose of these files was always hostile, and while not all informer reports had a distinctly damaging character, the officers in charge made sure they served the desired aim of incriminating the person under surveillance. The mechanism of gathering biographical data reflects, in Cristina Plamadeala's approach to examining secret police files, a life scrutiny "akin to a surgical mode of personality alteration" and aimed at discovering a person's vulnerable point.[67] In these files, the surveilled become targets, and the captured segments of their lives expose a "target identity" (Corina L. Petrescu) the Securitate attempted to create.[68]

While targets can recognize these snapshots and rearrange them in the context of their own remembered life stories, researchers approach them like pieces of an intricate puzzle for which one does not have the luxury of an already complete picture. The portrait one creates from these dispersed pieces is thus "necessarily disjointed and patchy."[69] In my approach, I read these files meticulously, taking also into consideration the intentional (often ideological) bias in these reports.[70] Various actors created and shaped the "reality" of these stories. Informers came from all walks of life; they were often family members and trusted friends who willingly or under duress and blackmail became denouncers and collaborators. The voices of the unsuspecting targets also emerge in transcripts of wiretapped conversations. The deictic gestures of officers, exemplified through red markings on the documents, reveal a third dimension to the stories that at times invoked the officers' attitudes toward the content or simply implied a general sense of urgency.

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65   Alison Lewis, "Reading and Writing the Stasi File," 377–97. Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics*. See also Fiona Capp's term "incriminating biography" in *Writers Defiled*.

66   Lewis, "Reading and Writing the Stasi File," 383.

67   Cristina Plamadeala, "The Securitate File as a Record of *Psuchegraphy*," 537.

68   Corina L. Petrescu, "Of Sources and Files," in *Cold War Spy Stories from Eastern Europe*, 138. Similarly, Vatulescu states that the Securitate did not passively describe its subjects "but rather attempted to rewrite them" (54).

69   Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics*, 246.

70   As Emily van der Meulen and Robert Heynen claim, working with surveillance documents one performs in a way the role of a detective, an "agent of surveillance" of sorts, using common surveillance techniques. Heynen and van der Meulen, "Unpacking Surveillance States" in *Making Surveillance States*, 9.

A "file story," as I define it, is a form of "remedial" life writing, one that unravels skewed life segments coded and recorded in secret police files and recovers them through a multilayered and polyphonic biographical act. Not unlike the work of a detective, one needs to follow the loquacious narrative of the Securitate, the officers' surgical scrutiny in creating their hostile targets, the brushes they used to paint the target's portrait, all the while attempting to un-code what has been coded, and get accustomed to the language of the files.[71] A file story is multilayered and polyphonic because it weaves into its narrative the multitude of informer voices, the incriminatory raised finger of the disciplining officers, as well as the words of the family and friends, whose voices contribute to the inventory network of intersecting and overlapping stories. A file story also follows the voices of the surveilled, abstracting their reaction to being surveilled from informer reports or the officers' comments in the margins. It takes into account the targets' agency, their strategies and the loopholes they seek to protect their basic human rights under Ceauşescu's repressive regime. In a country where the Securitate was rumored to be omniscient and omnipresent, a communist panopticon of sorts, instilling fear and allowing or encouraging such rumors to circulate was the mechanism that achieved compliance on one hand, and created a generalized state of suspicion on the other.[72]

To compose a file story, one has to interpret not only the often-disjointed pieces afforded in a file but also the biases, allusions, and lacunae.[73] Connecting the dots and bridging the various gaps also entails interpreting the attitudes, veiled hostilities, and ideological purposes of the various parties involved. The result is a capricious collage that represents a compelling life story. Angela Brintlinger uses the metaphor of quilt-making for the writing of history and that of a quilter for the historian, who stitches together pieces of material from incomplete archives and other sources in order to present a coherent and convincing historical narrative.[74] While the metaphor of a quilt resembles that of a collage or montage, it does not allow for the volatility that a file story implies, since any overlooked or missing detail has the potential to disturb or rearrange the life fragments present in the file story. Yet to allow for a more readily "stitchable" version of events, this book elucidates some incomplete and confusing aspects rendered in the files through some of the

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71 As Smaranda Vultur described it, this language makes everything fit incriminatory labels. Smaranda Vultur, "Daily Life and Surveillance in the 1970s and 1980s" in *Remembering Communism*, 419.

72 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. In Alison Lewis's interpretation of the Foucauldian model in the context of the East German Stasi, "the communist panopticon did not just reveal truth, it also created the truth about the object of surveillance" (Lewis, *A State of Secrecy*, xiv–xv).

73 See Igal Halfin's analysis of communist autobiographies and the politics of self-representation in *Red Autobiographies*.

74 Angela Brintlinger, *Writing a Usable Past*, 2.