

PÉTER APOR – SAULIUS GRYBKKAUSKAS  
– SÁNDOR HORVÁTH – HELÉNA HUHÁK

## Surveillance and Memory: Repositories of Cultural Opposition

Some of the most important research into the cultural opposition of former socialist countries takes place in archives of the former secret services. There are two main reasons why knowledge of the East-Central European cultural sphere is so closely tied to the investigative work of secret agents. First, the authorities in these states deliberately oppressed certain forms of culture in the countries they ruled. Therefore, they were deeply interested in identifying and monitoring potential subversive groups and individuals, which resulted in a gargantuan amount of material on cultural forms and expressions that the party-states considered hostile to their regimes. Second, in their quest to discover these hostile groups and individuals, the secret services actively produced categories and interpretations of what oppositional culture might mean. This legacy of the former secret services, carried over by their vast archives, continues to shape contemporary understandings of cultural opposition even today.

Since the collapse of the party-states in Eastern Europe, secret service archives have swelled to crucial, almost mythical positions as the alleged “repositories of truth,” which finally are able to reveal the true history of the socialist dictatorships. The categories of dissent culture and opposition recorded by the secret police appear as the genuinely core forms of cultural resistance. Accordingly, the preference towards a specific focus in the various national police reports resulted in different histories of cultural opposition in different national contexts. But what the various secret services share is a one-sided limited perspective on their subjects, selecting a few, forgetting others—and thus they are far from being the balanced holdings of knowledge on socialist societies.

The categories used by the secret police for classifying non-conformist cultural activities shed light not only on the different types of activities, but on the perception and viewpoint of the authorities. Researchers always should try to overcome that very special perspective of the secret police which is demonstrated in the files.<sup>1</sup> This will be pertinently illustrated by two brief case studies in this chapter. In Lithuania, cultural opposition was largely un-

---

<sup>1</sup> Because of the one-sided perspective of the secret police files, there exist archives of former dissidents which offer another perspective (e.g., Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft in Berlin,

derstood as national resistance, as a movement of intellectuals to protect the autonomy of national cultural heritage against an aggressive Sovietization and often Russification. In Hungary, by contrast, cultural opposition was mostly associated with the activities of independent intellectuals, artists, and students who struggled for more open space for creative cultural expression, including forms of national heritage, but embracing also broadly international forms of contemporary art, literature, and civic ethos.

This chapter seeks to probe the ways in which post-socialist cultures produce knowledge about the “cultural opposition” of the communist past. It examines the functions, social representation, and history of those national institutions, secret police archives, and institutes of national memory that played key roles in the production and promotion of the idea of cultural opposition (such as the BStU in Germany, the Institute of National Remembrance—Instytut Pamięci Narodowej in Poland, or the secret police archives in other East-Central European countries). The chapter also provides a study of how these archives produce social categories (and categories of cultural opposition) and how they create a classification for dissent with which to make sense of the communist past.

### Archives of Surveillance and the Heritage of Cultural Opposition

Although the idea of establishing official state-supported processes to address the legacies of a dictatorial past was common to many so-called “third wave” democratizations, in East-Central Europe this took a very particular form: institutions such as the BStU in Germany, the Institute of National Remembrance in Poland, the Nation’s Memory Institute in Slovakia, the Historical Office in Hungary, or the CNSAS in Romania were founded only in order to safeguard the documents of the state security services, or in some cases also to publicize the crimes of the past or pursue lustration. These institutions that made claims about their capacity to reveal the truth about the past based on its custody of vast amounts of material produced by the communist regime’s security forces were the product of a set of specific historical circumstances. Furthermore, the nation-specific context visible in the making of these institutions was conducive to breeding national varieties of the meaning of cultural opposition.

The decision-makers in most East European countries referred to the German BStU as the model on which the institutions in their countries were to be based. What was not reproduceable was a particular concept of cultural opposition emerging out of the East German context, particularly the role of the dissident tradition in the creation of the archives itself as well as the ways

---

COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Archive of the GDR-Opposition at the Robert Havemann Society”, by Uwe Sonnenberg, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.)

in which the Stasi surveilled the opposition. Moreover, the fact that the processing of the secret police files occurred in a unifying Germany, led by West German intellectuals and politicians of strong anti-communist persuasion, had a crucial impact. Undoubtedly, the process of making the documents of the secret service organs of the East German socialist dictatorship accessible for research occurred much earlier than similar measures taken in the other post-socialist countries. The BStU, the institute responsible for preserving the files of the Stasi and making them accessible to the public, was opened in 1992 and occupies a position that differs from that of archives of East-Central European nations in many respects. The opening of the files at the BStU was hailed both by the German media and many from the German political elite as a success story and a significant step towards an effective confrontation with the dictatorial past (notable exceptions to this view were Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Wolfgang Schäuble, then the minister of interior). At the same time, the success of the institution concealed the fact that the circumstances of its creation and the image it presented of GDR history was closely tied to the East German dissident tradition and a West German view of the GDR. From many perspectives, the archive monopolized the construction of the image of the agent and, through this, the "true nature" of the socialist dictatorship. The influence of the dissident tradition and post-socialist public opinion resulted primarily in the disclosure of examples of unofficial collaboration by informers who provided information about their social networks but were not registered as official members of the secret services, for instance, representatives of the Church or those who had infiltrated dissident circles. This populist pressure worked to obscure far more general and widespread forms of collaboration with the party and other official organs of state. It was only after some ten years had passed that such initial simplifications could be set aside, placing the secret service files into the mainstream currents of social history writing. Another important aspect of the BStU was that it had no legal competence to investigate the crimes of the former East German political regime.

The sheer survival of the records of the State Security Service makes the Stasi Archives a unique institution. To be sure, the collection contains records that were already archived during the existence of the GDR. And yet most of the records, probably 90 percent of the entirety of files, were preserved by the "civil committees" of the civil rights movement of 1989/90 at numerous disparate locations. These civil committees were groups of individuals who illegally occupied offices of the State Security Service and seized documents found inside. Thanks to their efforts in December 1989, the removal and subsequent destruction of Stasi documentation was prevented. The civil committees played a major role in the dismantling of the Ministry of State Security, influenced the debate concerning the fate of its documents, and pushed for the creation of a Special Commissioner for the evaluation of Stasi Records following German unification as well as the passing of the Law on Stasi Records by the German Parliament on November 14, 1991.

The records of the BStU provide glimpses into the perceived opposition in all of its manifestations: from alternative lifestyles and artistic expression anathema to the proscribed societal norms of the state, to religious and social movements and their activities throughout the existence of the GDR. They demonstrate clearly how the opposition was frequently misunderstood and its actions misinterpreted. It is perhaps ironic that the secret police, owing to their activities, preserved for posterity the history of the cultural opposition that they strove to undermine or wipe out. The level of detail in their documentation is unparalleled, often because it included records of phone conversations from bugged telephone calls. Cultural gems such as rehearsals or recitations of unpublished poems from artists, who even years after the system change could not recall a specific work, are invaluable albeit uncommon highlights of the collection.<sup>2</sup>

It should be pointed out that BStU is, like the Historical Archive of the Hungarian State Security, first and foremost an archive with only a small research department and limited competences in contrast to the Polish IPN, the Czech ÚPN, or the Romanian CNSAS. In the case of post-socialist Hungary, the archiving process is interesting in part because for a long time—at least in comparison with the Polish, Czech, and Slovak cases—the question of the secret service documents seemed to remain independent of any direct political machinations. The Hungarian Historical Office and its successor, the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára—ÁBTL), strove first and foremost to provide open access to information and support for historical research. Until the formation of the Committee of National Remembrance (NEB) in 2013, there was no institution in Hungary specialized in connecting secret service documents with the practice of dispensing justice retroactively. This was not the sequence of events in regard to the creation of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in Poland in 1998, and which was seen as an example to be followed, first in the Czech Republic, and later in Slovakia. From the very beginning, the IPN was closely tied to questions of political legitimacy and the identification of perpetrators, not to mention the idea of national martyrdom. However, many hundreds of young historians working at the institute over the years have advanced the scholarly and professional reputation of the IPN and moved it towards more nuanced studies of recent history that yield measured interpretations. Like the Polish institution, the original mission of the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute, which opened in 2003, and the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, which has been in operation since 2007, was not only the preservation of documents of the secret services, but also a kind of investigative role. Today, while the Czech institute is closely tied to a right-wing

---

<sup>2</sup> COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Stasi records", by Uwe Sonnenberg, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.

anti-communist subculture,<sup>3</sup> the Slovak institute enjoys more significant esteem among historians.

In spite of the violent collapse of Romanian socialism, there was a significant continuity between the leading elite under Ceausescu and the governing elite of the 1990s, a context which provided a delayed but eventually stronger demand for a confrontation with the recent past of the communist secret service—certainly to a greater extent than in the Visegrád countries, where the secret services had not played quite as prominent a role. After a decade of a political and social strategy of forgetting,<sup>4</sup> the creation of the Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS) in 1999 constituted a radical step. Although the CNSAS had an investigative function from the outset, the slow transfer of the documents of the former state secret services at first encumbered the work of the institution. The establishment of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in 2006 constituted a genuine shift. With a mission from the outset to examine the crimes of the communist system, the Commission interpreted collaboration in the context of discrediting post-communist socialists.<sup>5</sup> Although the CNSAS has begun to function increasingly as a specialized archive, identifying and revealing criminals of the past remains a palpable element of its politics of history.

The CNSAS archives contain material primarily on the activities of those intellectuals who began to oppose the regime in the 1980s. They often illustrate how the Securitate crucially isolated intellectuals critical of the regime and created islands of dissent. Nonetheless, these archives also show the multifaceted attempts of dissidents to establish a secondary public space through alternative forms of mostly private communication like personal correspondence or interviews. Doina Cornea, for instance, managed to send messages to the conference organized by Solidarity in 1988 in Cracow, to which she had been invited by Lech Wałęsa, but not allowed to attend by her government. Her text, written on cigarette paper and hidden in the head of a handcrafted doll, was smuggled out of Romania by the Belgian journalist Josy Dubié, whom she met first by chance in Cluj. He not only assumed the trouble of carrying the message across the border, but later also managed to double-cross the police in order to interview Cornea again for his highly critical documentary of Ceaușescu's communism, entitled *Red Disaster*.

In Bulgaria, one of the central questions of the communist regime's transition to democracy—what should be done with the archives of communist state security—remained unanswered. In contrast to the countries of East-Central Europe, the initial impulse to come to terms with the communist period was insufficient to bring about the opening of archives. Though this question disappeared from the political agenda in the 1990s, the quest to open the ar-

3 On Czech political history see Kopeček, "Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung."

4 Cioflâncă, "Politics of Oblivion."

5 Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, "Raising the Cross."

chives did not disappear completely, as it was supported by non-governmental organizations, historians, and journalists. Eventually, public pressure, reinforced by the demands of the EU in the accession negotiations, led to the adoption of a new law in 2006 on the use of archival materials, pertaining also to the files of the interior ministry. In 2007, the “Commission for the disclosure of documents and announcing affiliation of Bulgarian citizens with the State Security and the intelligence services of the Bulgarian National Army”<sup>6</sup> was established.

A centralized archival collection on the Bulgarian intelligentsia and its surveillance by the State Security was created in 2007. The Commission created (and curated) a selection of documents and published a 2015 book that details the observation and persecution of the Bulgarian intelligentsia. The State Security was one of the main instruments of the communist regime to maintain control over the intellectuals, who were always suspected of being potential critics of the government. Similarly to the other collections, the Bulgarian archives also demonstrate how vital State Security was in generating categories, types, and thus histories of cultural opposition in their country. A greater part of the documents in the collection are reports or summaries of assessments that reveal the main tasks and measures of the State Security: the timely exposure and suppression of so-called “hostile elements”; prevention of activities by dissidents and other groups and individuals critical of socialism; the “protection of socialist society”; the fight against the ideological influence of the West; the struggle against so-called “negative phenomena”; and the prevention of the spread of “alien” ideas by intellectuals and scientists who had been abroad.<sup>7</sup>

### KGB Counter-Ideological Surveillance and Cultural Opposition in Baltic Republics

The Soviet state security service (KGB) was one of main actors of the Soviet system directed to identify, recognize, follow, and destroy deviations from Soviet ideological line. The documents of the KGB are relevant to the theme of cultural opposition for two reasons. First of all, they reveal the notions and terms of what was understood by the regime as cultural opposition. Second, the KGB collections are the main “repositories” of evidence on the activities of the cultural opposition. Many members of non-Soviet informal networks could prove the existence of their past opposition and support their oral histories by referring to KGB reports that are now available to the public. This brief case study of the Baltics will analyze and compare the background of the

---

6 Official acronym: CRDOPBGDSRSBNA.

7 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “State Security and the Bulgarian Intelligentsia”, by Anelia Kasabova, Dr., 2017. Accessed: October 05, 2018.



following collections: various documents of Lithuanian KGB departments;<sup>8</sup> the Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB;<sup>9</sup> the KGB Documents Online Collection,<sup>10</sup> and the Romas Kalanta Collection.<sup>11</sup>

Soviet KGB documents left in the Baltic States are among the most important sources for studying the Soviet regime and its repressive operations. Whereas in Russia and in other former Soviet republics KGB material is still kept secret and out of bounds for researchers, historians from many countries are making wide use of documents found in the Baltic States, especially the Soviet Lithuanian KGB collection, many copies of which are also kept in foreign archives.<sup>12</sup>

The cultural opposition concept offers an effective approach that allows us not only to understand the situation in which the intelligentsia found itself in the Soviet Baltic republics, but also contributes, in terms of modern international law, to justifying the reinstatement of statehood in the Baltic States. Unlike the majority of the East-Central European countries discussed in the Courage project, countries that were part of the socialist camp but nevertheless maintained their statehood, the Baltic countries were occupied and annexed in 1940–41, and were incorporated into the USSR from 1944–90. This factor explains why Baltic dissent cultures focused on national sovereignty and were nationalist in language. There was a broad social resentment (especially among the intelligentsia) in these countries with the regime, perceived by many to be illegitimate and imposed from above, which led to a search for various means of independent political expression and cultural self-expression.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the shaping of cultural opposition in Lithuania was also one of the legacies of the Soviet secret police. Established in 1954 and continuing with the activities of the former NKVD and MGB, the KGB devoted a lot of attention to campaigns against nationalism, especially the forms of nationalism expressed in higher education and secondary schools. According to the KGB of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), in the period 1961–65 alone there were 795 acts of nationalism, 17 anti-Soviet groups were uncovered, as well as 41 groups whose members admitted being ideologically harmful, 105 cases of distribution of anti-Soviet leaflets, 74 assaults of Soviet

8 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Various documents of Lithuanian KGB departments", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2017. Accessed: October 05, 2018.

9 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)

10 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "KGB Documents Online Collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.

11 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Romas Kalanta collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)

12 See the inventory of the *Lietuvos TSR Valstybės Saugumo Komitetas* (Lithuanian KGB) selected records. Accessed: October 05, 2018. [http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt2n39r888/entire\\_text/](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt2n39r888/entire_text/)

13 See Žalimas, *Lietuvos Respublikos nepriklausomybės atkūrimo 1990 m. kovo 11 d.*

and collective farm activists, and 215 threats of assault. The scale of anti-Soviet and non-Soviet acts did not subside later on either. In 1978, the KGB of the LSSR carried out “preventive treatment” (so called “prophylactica”) on 227 individuals, of whom 112 were accused of making anti-Soviet declarations, 83 had written and distributed letters or leaflets against the Soviet government, 14 had maintained undesirable connections with foreigners, and 16 had engaged in undesirable activities regarding another Soviet state. Almost half (109) of all these individuals persecuted by the KGB were young people under the age of 25. In 1979, the majority of people arrested based on KGB material were also accused of anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation. Of the four people arrested, two were held for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. The Courage Collection of the Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB also gives an excellent illustration of just what operational measures were used against the intelligentsia and young people. As an outcome of their implementation, the lecturers Irena Kostkevičiūtė, Meilutė Lukšienė, and Vanda Zaborskaitė of Vilnius University’s Department of the Lithuanian Language and Literature were dismissed from their positions (see the Meilutė Lukšienė Collection<sup>14</sup> and the Vanda Zaborskaitė Collection)<sup>15</sup>. Thus, in light of these collections, the activities of the cultural opposition can be recalled not only in personal narratives, but also tied to specific KGB documents.

Aside from the persecution of Meilė Lukšienė and Vanda Zaborskaitė, the KGB material also offers an in-depth reflection on the surveillance of Antanas Miškinis (see Antanas Miškinis collection)<sup>16</sup> and especially the Soviet security persecution of the Catholic Church and Catholics (see Catholic Press in Soviet Lithuania.)<sup>17</sup> The KGB surveilled, persecuted, arrested, and repressed active priests and members of the faithful community, and also documented the “criminal” activities of the “nationalists.” With its close-knit network of religious and secular organizations, the Catholic Church offered an autonomous social communication system outside of the regime, making the Church a powerful opponent of the regime. The KGB operational research files reveal that anti-Soviet group identity and the concentration of activists was greatest in activities associated with the Catholic underground.<sup>18</sup>

The surviving KGB documents are vital not only for revealing how cultural figures opposed the regime or society disapproved of Soviet policies, but also for research of the Soviet system itself through examining the potential

14 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Meilutė Lukšienė collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)

15 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Vanda Zaborskaitė Collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)

16 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Antanas Miškinis Collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.

17 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Catholic Press in Soviet Lithuania”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)

18 Grybkauskas, “Antisovietiniai protestai”; Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios*, 8.



and limit of the regime's control over society. It is very important to understand what measures were employed to prevent anti-Soviet and non-Soviet activities. The ways in which security personnel grouped activities they attributed to anti-Soviet and nationalist events, as well as how the persecution of individuals responsible for or suspected of organizing and realizing these events was executed, demonstrate not only the scale of anti-Soviet expression but also indicates the Soviet regime's understanding and assessment of these events. The Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB was responsible for fighting the anti-Soviet armed resistance from the very inception of the KGB in 1954. It carried out ideological counter-surveillance aimed mostly at the anti-Soviet activities of cultural workers and young people. The KGB was restructured in 1960. The main function of the Second Directorate became operational work among the intelligentsia and youth. The Directorate's activities continued until the spring of 1967 when a new counter-ideological surveillance branch was formed. KGB documents about the "fight" against nationalism and anti-Soviet activities shows that the prevention of anti-Soviet deviations was assigned to the Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB and the Fifth Department of the KGB founded in 1967, which later, in 1979, grew into a separate directorate with its own three departments.

The fact that Lithuania was a "nationalist" republic was a thesis repeated in KGB textbooks. It was a testimony to the recognition of the exclusive nature of the republic's situation in a union-wide context. Nevertheless, local KGB officers did not have any special flexible structures suited to the local situations. In the fight against "nationalism," they were forced to operate based on lines of activity that existed across the entire Soviet Union, the most commonly used being the so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> Direction, which aimed to protect the Soviet state from spying and the leak of state secrets. There was also the 5<sup>th</sup> Direction, its direct aim being specifically ideological counter-surveillance. Even though these lines sometimes crossed, there were certain assigned areas: the Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB that was responsible for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Direction "covered" industrial enterprises and scientific research organizations, while the 5<sup>th</sup> Direction dealt with the intelligentsia: education organizations, higher education institutions, and creative associations. This kind of allocation appears to suggest that in an ideological sense, anti-Soviet expressions could only occur among the intelligentsia and within the science and education systems, but not in the industrial sector. A different type of logic applied here: anti-Soviet or nationalist expressions were not understood as, or at least were not treated as events in themselves, or as separate cases in the Chekist sense, but as the placing of the secrecy of an enterprise's or organization's activities under threat. In order to prevent expressions of nationalism and anti-Soviet moods in industrial institutions, security personnel had to operate in an indirect way, using the secret objectives system and seek to expand the number of controlled enterprises as much as possible. They had to prove to Moscow why a civil manufacturing plant which had few or no orders from

the USSR Ministry of Defense had to be categorized as one of the regime's enterprises. Understandably, this kind of system only inflated the costs involved in maintaining the KGB's activities, reduced its effectiveness, and simply allowed the system to become overinflated.

The fact that the KGB's activities are important to historical memory is also evident in the institutionalization of the protection and storage of KGB archival material today. A certain degree of development and dynamics is noticeable, along with the changing attitudes of state government and institutions towards sources left by the KGB. In this sense, the most important is the Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA), founded for the purpose of administrating KGB documents, which was combined with the former Lithuanian Public Organizations Archive that kept the collections of the Soviet Lithuanian party apparatus. The efforts of the Lithuanian Special Archives to collect KGB related material are accompanied by the publicizing activities of the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (GRRCL). It is interesting that these two institutions met over the history of the KGB, despite each having their own different backgrounds. The LSA, as an organization under the jurisdiction of the state's archive system, affected state and professional attitudes towards the logic and structure of archives. The establishment of the GRRCL did not eventuate so much as a result of the government's political will, but rather civil initiatives, from the people's desire to register the crimes of communism of the later Soviet period, thereby contributing to the disclosure of pages in history that were once hidden. Even though this initiative eventually received government support and came under its jurisdiction with the founding of the GRRCL in 1997, even today their fields of activity do overlap. The mentioned three Courage collections demonstrate this overlap very well. Various documents of Lithuanian KGB departments and the Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB are kept at the LSA, though the archive itself does not engage in spreading, publicizing, or presenting their contents to the public. This is the domain of the GRRCL, conducted via its internet sites [www.kgbveikla.lt](http://www.kgbveikla.lt) and [www.kgbdocuments.eu](http://www.kgbdocuments.eu), which make up the Courage project's KGB Documents Online Collection.

### Archiving Cultural Opposition in the Archives of the Hungarian State Security

Although the archives of the former secret services in Hungary never was a manifest political and criminal institution like its Polish, Czech, Slovak or Romanian counterparts, its origin was firmly linked with the idea of lustration, thus, underscoring a difference between collaboration and opposition. The Hungarian debate has centered on the question of access to the files and is shaped by the stance that the full transparency of the records will disclose collaborators and prevent further political wrongdoing and abuse of informa-

tion. Such concerns led to the establishment of the Historical Office in 1997 and subsequently to the foundation of the Historical Archives of the State Security in 2003. None of these institutions intended to openly shape the politics of memory or had the duty to perform criminal investigations. On the contrary, the Hungarian institution was quickly integrated into the academic network of the country and used intensively as a valuable asset of professional research. An important outcome of this status was that debates on dissent culture were soon embedded into the study of broader cultural and social factors. The social and cultural history focus is, in many ways, also linked to the legacy of archiving cultural opposition in the state security offices. The secret police in Hungary centered on culture in many ways. Surveillance targeted religion, art, youth subcultures, and creative intellectuals throughout the four decades of socialist statehood in the country.

Three different collections that stand at the intersection of Hungarian counterculture and the communist political police—a theater studio, a fine art group, and a university club in Budapest—represent types of cultural dissent activities as well as their archiving. The reports on the Orfeo group reveal how the state security officials and agents depicted an alternative theater company in Hungary. Accordingly, the political police created an image of “hostile” artists and conceived of them as dangerous for “the existing social order.”<sup>19</sup> The second case focuses on the representation of a banned 1986 exhibition in the state security files, which had the title “A harcoló város” (The Fighting City). The exhibition was organized by the amateur artist group *Inconnu* for the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.<sup>20</sup> The third case study sheds light on how some debates of university students could be represented as oppositional by the secret police, namely, the files on the alternative student organization “Közgáz” club.<sup>21</sup>

The Orfeo group was established in 1969 and it united a puppet theater, a theater studio, a music band, a fine arts and a photography circle. The members criticized the communist system by following the idea of the student movement of 1968 and the new left-winger ideological trends. Orfeo was attacked by the party leadership as an uncontrollable, hostile group that opposed the legitimate societal norms.<sup>22</sup> It was seen not only as a community that spread an oppositional, hostile Western ideology, but they were accused of taking part in an immoral lifestyle because of their commune. Orfeo became an “issue”: attacking articles in the press, surveillance, police investiga-

---

19 Numerous studies have been made about the activity of Orfeo, among these: Ring, “A színjátszás harmadik útja és a hatalom,” 233–57; Szarvas, “Orfeo’s Maoist Utopia. The Emergence of the Cultural Critique of Existing Socialism.”

20 The story of *Inconnu* was researched by Sümegi: “*Inconnu: A harcoló város*,” 169–211.

21 Historical studies have not yet been written about the operation of the club, so the importance of oral history interviews is essential.

22 Sándor L., “Megváltoztatni a világot.”

tion, and interrogation all followed. Finally, in the mid-1970s the group dissolved and broke up.

The Inconnu art group originally came from Szolnok, but from the early 1980s it operated in Budapest. The group became famous for their alternative, oppositional artistic and political actions. Their performances with obvious and direct political meaning were unveiled from the mid-1980s parallel to the acts of the democratic opposition.<sup>23</sup> In 1986 Inconnu announced an international fine art tender to organize an exhibition on the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The idea of 1956 played a central role in Inconnu's mindset, in their artistic expression, and in their attitude to the Kádár regime.<sup>24</sup> The group was not unknown in 1986 to the secret police; the members were already observed intensely before.

The student movements of 1968 in Paris, the new left-winger trends, and the alternative genres/forms in the art world had an effect on the students at universities too. Lively political discussions unfolded at the Club of the Karl Marx University of Economic Sciences (Marx Károly Közgazdaságtudományi Egyetem/MKKE). The organizers were young active and former undergraduates who wanted to create an opportunity for free expression of different views in the age of soft dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, they experimented in creating an independent organization, as an alternative to the "KISZ" Hungarian Young Communist League.

Although Orfeo and Inconnu were similar art groups, information on them was created and preserved in different ways. The name "Orfeo" emerged in numerous work files sent by the agents to the Office Division III of the Ministry of the Interior. "Emese Kárpáti" cover-name agent wrote the largest number of reports (150 pages) about Orfeo between 1971 and 1975. She got in contact with the group as a cultural organizer. Her duty was to infiltrate the group and visit their performances and their commune in Pilisborosjenő (a village near to Budapest) as often as possible. On these occasions, she got the opportunity to watch the actors and artists profoundly. According to her work method, she visited the same programs again and again because she had to make accounts most of all about the discussions and debates following the performances.<sup>25</sup>

The material on Inconnu was generated mostly by one spectacular event, their 1986 initiative for an international exhibition commemorating the 1956 revolution. The foreign pieces sent to Inconnu for the exhibition were mostly copies, reproductions, and mailed in art works. Because these items were sent by the postal service, they had to undergo the censoring of the political police. The biggest number of items arrived from Ágnes Háty. The artist lived in Lon-

23 Sümegei, "Inconnu: A harcoló város," 170.

24 Csizmadia, "Interjú Bokros Péterrel," 369.

25 ÁBTL-3.1.2 M-38310/1 Reports of "Kárpáti Emese."

don and copied drawings from her drawing booklet.<sup>26</sup> The political police continuously delayed the preparatory work, but the exhibited items were finally transferred from Tibor Philipp's flat some hours before the opening ceremony on 30 January 1987. According to the police report, the exhibition was "counter-revolutionary": 43 items—photos, graphics, paintings, other artifacts—and illegal press issues (a further 39 items) were confiscated and later destroyed.<sup>27</sup>

Although the original catalog included data on the artists and their work, the artifacts themselves—as a collection which was curated as an exhibition conception—only remained "thanks" to the photo documentation of the secret police. According to a report, these photos had already been taken at the beginning of January by "Frederich" cover-name agent who gave further the copies to his case officer. Thereby, the secret police itself created—in the frame of their destruction—the group of sources that today is the single visual trace which totally represents the exhibition.<sup>28</sup>

In Tibor Philipp's case, the records of the police were put on the wall in the place of the exhibited artworks creating a "very visual absurd." As an art historian, György Sümegi wrote in his study that "The Fighting City" was simultaneously a political act and a brave artistic action. This exhibition is undoubtedly unique due to several more aspects. First of all, in 1986 this was the only international exhibition on the topic of 1956 in Hungary. Obviously, numerous artifacts were created to commemorate the revolution, but none of the artists or groups undertook to organize a public presentation from these materials. Secondly, we cannot find any other examples that ban and at the same time demolish a full exhibition either. According to Sümegi, the officers did not consider the collection of artworks a real exhibition because of the unusual installation format—the pictures sent in were on paper matboard instead of in frames. So perhaps they made this irreversible decision more easily. We can read about this fact in the police documentation, but indeed, the appearance of the artworks was not the real problem; the goal was to threaten the oppositional groups and the artists.<sup>29</sup>

The secret police records on the Karl Marx University student club shows how the authorities produced "cultural opposition" out of students' self-organization. The club life at MKKE was informed on by agents with cover-name "Lantos" and "Csikós" between 1973–85.<sup>30</sup> By following the secret police's directions, they focused on two processes: how discussed issues turned from university topics to political questions and what kind of ideological thoughts stood behind this; how serious the organizational work inside the university

26 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Háy, Ágnes", by Zoltán Pál, 2017. Accessed: October 05, 2018.

27 Sümegi, "Egy kiállítás utolsó felvonása," 175.

28 ÁBTL 4.1.-A-2020 Photos of Inconnu exhibition.

29 Sümegi, "Egy kiállítás utolsó felvonása"

30 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-41071 Reports of "Lantos" and ÁBTL-3.1.-2.-M-37605 Reports of "Csikós"

was and if there were intentions to create an association among several universities.

The active period began in 1976 when the young teacher Gyula Jobbágy acquired the leadership position in the “Közgáz-club.” The most important events were the political debates, the so-called Polvax that operated between 1976 and 1984. It landed great interest as more and more young people listened to the lectures, coming from other universities in Budapest too. According to “Csikós,” some sensitive issues emerged, but initially the debate was formed in a proper way thanks to the fact that the invited guests were official party or state leaders, which meant an assurance of the politically correct interpretation. However, the speakers were also chosen from a group of opposition politicians and communist reformist party cadres, for example, the intellectuals Imre Pozsgay and Rezső Nyers as “communist reformist cadres,” Ágnes Heller as oppositional philosopher, and the poet Sándor Csoóri.<sup>31</sup>

In 1980 “Lantos” reported already on the danger and the negative effects of Polvax for the students’ mindset. He wrote that even though this is a very good opportunity to speak about social problems, these were discussed one-sidedly, which meant that the event caused more damage than benefit. He held that the organizers manipulated how the topics were interpreted by the speakers, which had a great impact on the audience. According to his judgment, these discussions showed a false picture of the society.<sup>32</sup> The communist leadership of the university regarded the Polvax as the meeting place of the dissenting students and tied it to the debate circles of the revolution of 1956. It was banned twice.<sup>33</sup>

In the spring of 1981, the “Meeting of Students of Universities and Colleges in Budapest” (“Budapesti Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Találkozója/Befőt”) stood in the main focus of university students and staff, and the political police’s attention as well. The aim of the discussion initiated by Gyula Jobbágy was to create a genuine advocacy forum that could provide the freer expression of opinions. His idea of “Befőt” meant a danger in the secret police’s opinion because they thought dissident university members’ unified actions would result from this process and they were afraid that these groups would become institutionalized. Finally, the political leadership of the MKKE prevented the meeting successfully thanks to its threatening of the members and controlling of commentary. At the Befőt meeting of 20 March 1981, the idea of an independent students’ forum just faintly appeared, but the project immediately failed to realize. Many students were disappointed because of the powerlessness of its initiation.

The files on the student club indicate that it was the subtle combination of grassroots autonomous organization and the rationale of any secret police op-

31 About the programs of Polvax: “Klub Közlöny,” MKKE

32 ÁBTL-3.1.-2.-M-41071, 40–44. Reports of “Lantos,” 10. March 1980.

33 Pünkösti, “Szeplőtelen fogantatás.”



eration, the disclosing of clandestine activism, that co-produced cultural opposition in the political police archives. In other instances, like the Fighting City exhibition that meant to openly provoke the regime, the role of the secret police was also enormous in collecting what they understood to be evidence of cultural opposition. In Hungary, where since 1956 the authorities had feared of undetected intellectuals undermining the political rule of the party by means of culture, the political police maniacally sought for and discovered the deeds of a subversive culture.

### Bibliography

- Cioflâncă, Adrian. "Politics of Oblivion in Postcommunist Romania." *The Romanian Journal of Political Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2002): 85–93.
- Cristea, Gabriela, and Simina Radu-Bucurenci. "Raising the Cross: Exorcising Romania's Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments." In *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, edited by Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor, 275–305. Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2008.
- Csizmadia, Ervin. "Interjú Bokros Péterrel" [Interview with Péter Bokros]. In *A Magyar Demokratikus Ellenzék (1968–1988). Interjúk* [The Hungarian democratic opposition (1968–1988). Interviews], edited by Ervin Csizmadia, 360–372. Budapest: T-Twins, 1995.
- Grybkauskas, Saulius. "Antisovietiniai protestai ir nomenklatūros partikuliarizmas. Sąveikos poveikis lietuviško nacionalizmo kaitai" [Antisoviet protests and particularism of nomenklatura. Impact of interaction for changes in Lithuanian nationalism]. In *Epochas jungiantis nacionalizmas: tautos (de)konstravimas tarpukario, sovietmečio ir posovietmečio Lietuvoje* [Nationalism connecting the epochs: (De)construction of the nation during the times between World Wars, Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania], edited by Česlovas Laurinavičius, 227–268. Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2013.
- Kopeček, Michal. "Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung als politischer Sprache: Der tschechische Umgang mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit nach 1989" [From politics of history to memory as a political language: Dealing with the communist past in Czechia after 1989]. In *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich* [The politics of history in Europe after 1989. Germany, France, and Poland in international comparison], edited by Etienne François, Kornelia Kończal, Robert Traba, and Stefan Troebst, 356–395. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013.
- Lau, Carola. *Erinnerungsverwaltung, Vergangenheitspolitik und Erinnerungskultur nach 1989. Institute für nationales Gedenken im östlichen Europa im Vergleich* [Dealing with memory, politics of history, and memory culture af-

- ter 1989: Institutes of national remembrance in East Europe in comparison]. Göttingen: V et R Unipress, 2017.
- Pünkösti, Árpád: “Szeplőtelen fogantatás” [Immaculate Conception]. *Népszabadság*, November 5, 2004. Accessed March 15, 2018. <http://nol.hu/archivum/archiv-336714-154332>
- Ring, Orsolya. “Alternatív művészeti mozgalmak az 1970-es években: az Orfeo-ügy” [Alternative art movements in the 1970s: The Orfeo case]. *ArchívNET*, no. 2 (2008). Accessed March 15, 2018. [http://www.archivnet.hu/politika/alternativ\\_muveszeti\\_mozgalmak\\_az\\_1970es\\_evekben\\_az\\_orfeougy.html?oldal=4](http://www.archivnet.hu/politika/alternativ_muveszeti_mozgalmak_az_1970es_evekben_az_orfeougy.html?oldal=4)
- . “A színhátság harmadik útja és a hatalom. Az alternatív Orfeo Együttes kálváriája az 1970-es években” [The third path of the dramatics and the power. Calvary of the alternative Orfeo group in the 1970s.]. *Múltunk*, no. 3 (2008): 233–257.
- Sándor L., István. “Megváltoztatni a világot. Az Orfeo, az Orfeo Stúdió és az Etoile” [To change the World. Orfeo, Orfeo Studio, and Etoile]. *Ellenfény*, no. 2 (2016). Accessed March 15, 2018. <http://www.ellenfeny.hu/index.php/archivum/2016/2016-02/4506-orfeo-studi-k-fodor-tamas-etoile?layout=offline>.
- Sümegei, György. “Egy kiállítás utolsó felvonása” [The last act of an exhibition]. *Betekintő*, no. 2 (2011). Accessed March 15, 2018. [http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2011\\_2\\_sumegi\\_0.pdf](http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2011_2_sumegi_0.pdf)
- . “Inconnu: A harcoló város/The Fighting City, 1986. Kísérlet egy elmaradt kiállítás rekonstrukciójára” [Inconnu: The Fighting City, 1986. Experiment to reconstruct a canceled exhibition]. In *Állambiztonság és rendszerváltás* [State security and regime change], edited by Imre Okváth, 169–211. Budapest: Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2010.
- Streikus, Arūnas. *Sovietų valdžios antibažnytinė politika Lietuvoje 1944–1990* [Soviet Anti Church Policy in Lithuania in 1944–1990]. Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2002.
- Szarvas, Márton. “Orfeo’s Maoist Utopia. The Emergence of the Cultural Critique of Existing Socialism.” Master’s Thesis, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, CEU, Budapest, 2016.
- Žalimas, Dainius. *Lietuvos Respublikos nepriklausomybės atkūrimo 1990 m. kovo 11 d. tarptautiniai teisiniai pagrindai ir pasekmės* [International Law Grounding and Consequences of Lithuania’s Statehood Restoration on 11 March 1990]. Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005.

## COURAGE Registry

- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Antanas Miškinis Collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Archive of the GDR-Opposition at the Robert Havemann Society", by Uwe Sonnenberg, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Catholic Press in Soviet Lithuania", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Háy, Ágnes", by Zoltán Pál, 2017. Accessed: October 05, 2018.
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "KGB Documents Online Collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Meilutė Lukšienė collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Romas Kalanta collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Stasi records", by Uwe Sonnenberg, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018.
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "State Security and the Bulgarian Intelligentsia", by Anelia Kasabova, Dr., 2017. Accessed: October 05, 2018.
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Vanda Zaborskaitė Collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 05, 2018. (forthcoming)
- COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Various documents of Lithuanian KGB departments", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2017. Accessed: October 05, 2018.