CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Introduction: Visual Ethics after Communism
Authors	Crowley, David;Nicolescu, Gabriela;Kapaló, James A.
Publication date	2021-11-01
Original Citation	Crowley, D., Kapalo, J. A. and Nicolescu, G. (2021) 'Introduction: Visual Ethics after Communism', Martor: The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review, 26, pp. 7-22.
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-26-2021/
Rights	© 2021 Martor Journal. MARTOR applies to all published materials the Creative Commons Licence "Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives CC BY-NC-ND," allowing others to download the published works and share them with others as long as they credit the author, but they can't change them in any way, or use them commercially. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en
Download date	2026-11-07 03:00:50
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/12222

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Introduction. Visual Ethics after Communism

David Crowley
National College of Art and Design, Ireland
crowleyd@staff.ncad.ie

James Kapaló
University College Cork, Ireland

Gabriela Nicolescu
University of Oxford, United Kingdom

Crowley, David, James Kapaló, and Gabriela Nicolescu. 2021. "Introduction. Visual Ethics after Communism." Martor 26: 7-22.

In the summer of 1989 political scientist Francis Fukuyama wrote an essay with a question as its title, "The End of History?" (Fukuyama 1989). Three years later, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the question mark had disappeared and the title had been lent to a much-lauded book *The End of History and the Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992). In both, Fukujama's argued that the end of communist rule across Eastern Europe marked the opening of a new horizon where the dominant form of society would be Western style liberal democracy where the interests of capital would be kept in balance with the needs of the people: "The worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination and idealism will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands." Societies would "end their ideological pretensions of representing different and higher forms of human society" (Fukujama 1989: 13, 18). Fukujama did not mean that events would no longer occur in the "post-historical period" but that the ideological struggles which had shaped the twentieth century would be contained safely in the "museum of human history." While most in Eastern Europe at the time surely welcomed the prospect of joining this extending realm, few felt that history was over. They had just participated in the most dramatic events of their lifetimes, and the societies in which they lived were undergoing wholesale changes in economic, political and cultural life. And one of the signs of the times was, in fact, the massive production of history, in a literal sense, in the form of new publications, radio and television documentaries and exhibitions dedicated to the task of correcting the distortions and filling in "blank spots" which had blighted official historiography during the years of communist rule (Mark 2010). The recent past was a particularly combustible zone in which events in living memory and their material remains in the form of documents, objects and images had the capacity to stir deep feelings. In fact, this power seems undiminished: one of the most pronounced features of the post-communist societies today is the persistent surfacing of the past in public discourse. Museums and archives—Fukuyama's safe containers—are themselves the subject of considerable controversy.

This special issue of *Martor* was born out of conversations between the three editors within the framework of two European-funded projects. The COST Action Nep4dissent (project no. CA16213) (https://nep4dissent.eu), an interdisciplinary research network of scholars with an interest in resistance and dissent in former socialist Europe 1945-1989 and the Hidden Galleries ERC project (project no. 677355) (http://hiddengalleries.eu), which

focussed on visual and material aspects of religion in the archives of the secret police in Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. It was through the lively exchanges and discussions that took place between these groups of curators, historians, anthropologists and scholars of religions that the critical questions emerged that inspired this special issue. As scholars and practitioners, we share an interest in the afterlives of images, texts and objects created during the period of communist rule in Eastern Europe and the ways that they have since been used to narrate that history and mobilise memory since. In the extensive historiography of Eastern Europe under communist rule, images and things often seem incidental or marginal, at least when compared to the authority that written texts and accounts from the period seem to hold. This issue of *Martor* was conceived as an opportunity to continue our critical self-reflection and to further develop the ideas and conversations we had started on the subject of visual ethics of and after the end of communist rule in Eastern Europe. With this aim in mind, we invited contributions from scholars whose work engages the ethically complex terrain of visual and material cultures of and after communist rule to reflect on the following questions: when does an image or a museum display present itself as problematic and for whom? Under what circumstances is it ethically justifiable to exhibit or publish such images or, conversely, to put images aside, leaving them undisplayed? When do arguments based on "the public good" outweigh the right to personal privacy, individual integrity and cultural patrimony of source communities?

Museomania

A number of the contributions which resulted from this invitation which appear in this issue of *Martor* take the public setting of the museum as their focus (see Berezina, Cristache, Ciubotaru and Manolache). The reorganisation, reinvention and new creation of museums has been one of the most striking features of post-communist societies in the last thirty years. After years of being much promoted via compulsory visits organised for factory workers and school children and, at the same time, left to stagnate, museums were given a central place in what is called post-communist transition. In the early 1990s, many reoriented their displays to tell new narratives, with all museums dedicated to what was called socialist but might more accurately be called Soviet history either closing or undergoing a significant overhaul, many becoming national in their orientation. After thirty-five years of operation, for instance, Warsaw's *Muzeum Lenina* (Lenin Museum) became the polonocentric *Muzeum Niepodległości* (Museum of Independence) in January 1990; likewise, the *Lietuvos revoliucijos muziejus* (Lithuanian Museum of Revolutions) in the former Soviet Republic of Lithuania put its collection into storage in 1991 and its costly and handsome home overlooking the Neris river in Vilnius eventually reopened as the National Gallery of Art in 2009 (Rindzevičiūtė 2018, Dovydaityté 2010).

For some observers of the newly democratic societies of Eastern Europe, existing museums and their collections were poorly equipped to undertake the task of narrating the history of the recent past and, as a result, new institutions were needed. Most were initiated by private individuals and organisations, even if they drew upon the support and material resources of the state and local authorities. For instance, the *Okupatsioonide ja vabaduse muuseum Vabamu* (Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom, as it is known today) in Tallinn that opened in 2003 was created by the Kistler-Risto Foundation, an organisation founded by Olga Kistler-Risto, an Estonian with deep pockets who had migrated to the United States in 1949. The Foundation set itself the task of supporting research into Estonian history and in particular the effects of authoritarian rule on Estonian society in the period between 1940 and 1991 (Burch and Zander 2010). These years



Figure 1. The House of Terror Museum at 60 Andrássy út, Budapest remodelled by architect Attila F. Kovács. Photo credit: David Crowley, 2009.

had seen the occupation of the country by the Soviet Union and the Third Reich and then a long period as a Soviet Republic. With its open architectural structure in which tall glass walls containing the galleries frame a small grove of birch trees, the museum took a strikingly fresh approach to exhibition design in the territories of the former Soviet Union when it opened. Since then, its permanent displays have put a strong emphasis on representing the lives of ordinary citizens in cruel times, focusing on the experience of deportation and exile, as well as the mass resistance which broke out across the Baltic during the "Singing Revolution." Like a number of new museums in the region that set out to measure the combined effects of Fascism and Stalinism, a high premium is placed on individual testimony and memory, typically in audio and video displays in which people recount their own experiences but also in the form of personal objects like suitcases and small firearms (Mark 2008). Kistler-Risto's own history forms a direct and much invoked parallel with the museum's narrative themes.

One of the most influential and, at the same time, most controversial museums of the post-communist era, the *Terror Háza Múzeum*, or House of Terror, in central Budapest departs radically from the approach just outlined above (Figure 1). Located in a building used at different points in the previous century by both the Hungarian Arrow-Cross fascist party and the communist-era secret police, the museum appears to play on the horror and dread associated with the building's former uses, emphasizing the suffering of the victims of communist rule whilst downplaying the brutality of Hungary's fascist past and complicity in the Holocaust (see Rév 2005: 293-94); there are 22 rooms dedicated to the communist past whereas only two deal with Fascism. Through the use of highly emotive displays which appear more like brilliantly-lit stage sets dressed with dramatic "props" than the conventional museum gallery populated with vitrines and plinths for the safe display of unique or rare objects, the House of Terror is an instrument for the production of affect. Indeed, it has been accused of turning the exhibited material "into mere illustrative accessories of a dramatised story" (Horváth 2008: 270), decontextualising materials and images in such a way as to obscure the moral complexities of lives lived at the time in order to produce an image of the Hungarian nation as victim (Horváth 2008: 270). The museum in the case of the House of Terror, as historian Dan Stone affirms "is not a memory space, but a propaganda space, where victims are used as rhetorical devices" (Stone 2012: 273).

Figure 2. Cells in the KGB Headquarters at *Pagari tn 1*, Tallinn, Estonia photographed by Vladimir Varfolomeev in 2018. (Source Flickr - reproduced under CC BY-NC 2.0 licence).



The fact that so many museums across the former Eastern Bloc occupy former sites of state violence is noteworthy. They include *Sowjetisches Untersuchungsgefängnis Leistikowstraße Potsdam* (Soviet Remand Prison in Leistikow Strasse in Potsdam), the one-time KGB Headquarters at *Pagari tn 1* in Tallinn (a branch of the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom discussed above) (Figure 2), *Okupacijų ir laisvės kovų muziejus* (Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights) in Vilnius as well as the *Muzeul Memorial Sighet* (Sighet Memorial Museum) in Romania. Such museums are clearly intended as a measure of a victory over injustice. But with their decrepit, unfurnished cells, they are organised to trigger powerful emotional responses in their visitors. One cannot be unmoved by the knowledge that one is standing on an execution ground, even if the spaces seem spartan and distinctly undesigned in comparison with Budapest's spectacular House of Terror.

After the first flourish of new institutions in the early years of the new century, museum building continues at a pace in the region today with some countries embarking on ambitious state-led programmes of muzealisation usually with a strong emphasis on close historical events. Poland has the most extensive efforts underway, with many dozens of new institutions recently opened or in construction. They include a number of major museums such as Polin—Museum of the History of Polish-Jews, a public-private partnership, that opened in 2014, and the *Muzeum II Wojny Światowej* (Museum of the Second World War) in Gdańsk launched three years later. Both have faced considerable political pressure from the state since the nationalist-populist *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) party took power in 2015: talented directors have been purged from both. At the same time, the government has aggressively promoted a new "politics of history." Dubbing critical accounts of Polish actions in the past the "pedagogy of shame" and passing legislation prohibiting public expression or investigation into the complicity of "the Polish Nation" in the Holocaust, the state has promoted an image of a nation populated only by heroes and martyrs. When, for instance, "Estranged," a 2018 show at Polin exploring the effects of a campaign against Poland's remaining Jews led by a faction of the communist leadership in March 1968, asked questions about anti-semitism in the present, it drew the ire of conservatives (Gessen 2019).

A contrasting approach is represented by the various museums of everyday life which opened across the region to record a material culture and forms of social existence associated with life under communist rule that then were fast disappearing during the transition years. One of the earliest examples of this phenomenon was the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* (Document Centre of Everyday Life in the GDR) in Eisenhüttenstadt (formerly Stalinstadt) in the former East Germany which opened in 1993 to collect the quotidian material culture of a disappeared country (amassing 170,000 items and engaging in a lively exhibition programme) (Kuhn and Ludwig 1997). Today, combined with the Beeskow Art Archive, the Centre has become the *Museum Utopie und Alltag* (Museum of Utopia and Everyday Life) and operates from a former crèche in a model socialist housing development built in the early 1950s. Sometimes dismissed as vessels for the sentimentalism of *ostalgie*, such "socialist heritage" museums set themselves the task of understanding the experience of everyday life in societies under communist rule, treating all forms of mass culture as settings for the penetration of ideology into society (Bach 2017, chapter 2). This accusation of nostalgia is perhaps easily made because of the affinity of such museums with commercial "museum experiences" which present visitors—often tourists—with a brief and spectacular immersion in sights, sounds and even tastes of an exotic "lost world" such as the *Muzeum komunismu* (Museum of Communism) founded in Prague by American businessman Glenn Spicker at the beginning of the new century (Blaive 2020) (Figure 3), or the tours of the socialist new town of Nowa Huta, on the edge of Kraków in Poland, led by guides kitted out



Figure 3. Display in the Museum of Communism in Prague photographed by James G Milles in 2007. (Source Flickr - reproduced under a CC BY-NC 2.0 license).

as young pioneers in Trabant cars. At their worst, such institutions offer little more than a kitsch approach to history, trading clichés for the price of entry. At their best, museums of everyday life have undertaken important acts of collection and preservation of material objects which might otherwise escape the historical record and provided important fora for the validation of lives which have been dismissed as "worthless" in a system that has been judged by history as a "failure."

In their contributions to this issue of *Martor*, Cosmin Manolache and Maria Cristache contribute to our critical understanding of the representation of everyday life under communist rule in Romania. Cristache addresses the topic squarely by examining four different Romanian museums that each adopt domestic life as a museological framework. Outlining the different professional credentials of each institution and their diverse approaches to visitor engagement from the "look, don't touch" ethos of *Casa Ceaușescu* (The Ceaușescu Mansion) in the former luxurious residence of the president in Bucharest to the *Muzeul Traiului în Comunism* (The Museum of Living in Communism) in Brașov where visitors can stay overnight, she mounts a careful analysis of the ways in which reconstructions of homes from the communist era open highly current questions of consumerism and identity, as well as ethical concerns relating to the attempt to engage the human senses to secure historical understanding. In his two-part essay on "The Museum of the Unknown City," Manolache reports his own attempts, with architect Cosmin Pavel, to imagine a new museum for the ordinary town of Mizil in Muntenia, Romania. What could be more unremarkable than an "unknown" town? he asks. Manolache proposes a museum for the town that would offer the possibility of channelling all voices including those of authority, of citizens and of the ever-expanding media. His project seems well aligned with what Bakhtin described as heteroglossia. This is less a matter of testimony, the mode favoured by museums of victimhood, than one of polyphony with all the risks of dissonance that this entails. A thought-exercise and a generative method, Manolache presents his approach in the second part of the essay a catalogue of images with short texts relaying experience of various Mizil residents pasted on Facebook in 2018 and 2019.

In her contribution to this theme issue, Smaranda Ciubotaru explores another kind of museum which does not "fit" with either the totalitarian paradigm represented by the House of Terror or the emphasis on everyday life found in other institutions. She focuses on the *Muzeul de Artă Recentă* (Museum of Recent Art) that opened in Bucharest in 2018. Occupying a site which once was home to foreign minister Ana Pauker in the 1950s in a section of the city that was largely reserved for the Communist elite, the Museum of Recent Art takes the form of an early twentieth century villa which seems to be floating on a glass-walled box. Its brickwork is stained flat grey and the windows appear to be bricked over. A facsimile of Pauker's former home, the original structure (a villa that predates her residency there) was demolished to make way for the ghostly structure that is there now. Historic buildings, as noted above, can evoke the past in ways that can be powerfully affecting for post-communist societies. But, for Ciubotaru, demolition and reinvention—alongside the museum's exhibition programme

which seems to eschew political art from the communist era—make the new museum a space of forgetting rather than one of remembering.

Alongside museums, a host of other specialised institutions have been established such truth commissions, institutes of memory, and special archives, whose role has been to define the nature of communist regimes and determine how they should be remembered. The archives of the former secret police, in particular, have played a peculiarly powerful role in shaping how post-communist societies relate to the past. Vast swathes of records generated by conducting surveillance on millions of individuals and thousands of communities across the former Eastern Bloc formed new "public" archives. Some opened within months of the end of the old order and others many years later. Ukraine passed a law granting extensive access to KGB and its predecessor's archives in the country only in 2015. If secrecy was a sign of a bankrupt and paranoid ideology, then transparency, it is believed, is required to create and sustain robust democracy. In those states which had been most committed to the task of using surveillance to control behaviour like the GDR and Romania in the 1980s, the volume of the material was, and remains, daunting—the Stasi records form 111 km of linear archives and almost 1.95 million images and continues to grow as inventive ways are found to reconstitute the records that were torn-up and shredded by Stasi officers in the final days of communist rule in East Germany. The task of preserving such documents as well as of managing access has been laid down in legal frameworks articulated by acts of parliament or by presidential decree. In Germany the Stasi Files Act (*Stasi-Unterlagengesetz*) published in 1991 guided the activities of the Stasi Records Archive which operated in Berlin and a number of regional offices until 2021, its collections now absorbed into Germany's National Archives. In Poland, the *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej—Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu* (Institute of National Remembrance—Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation / IPN) was created by act of parliament in 1998. This arrangement puts the records of the *Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego* (Ministry of Public Security, 1945-1990) in a wider historical framework from 8 November 1917, the date of the Bolshevik Revolution, and throughout the Second World War to 31 July 1990. As one of the central platforms of transitional justice programmes that aimed at overcoming the legacy of the communist past and working towards justice and reconciliation in society, the opening of such archives generated numerous ethical controversies and epistemological debates. In several countries, perhaps most notably in Romania, this became a long, drawn out process of contestation between rival political forces that wished to deal with the past in radically opposing ways.

Based on the model of denazification after World War Two, secret police archives have been utilized, amongst other things, for the vetting of individuals seeking public office, known as lustration, and the public exposure of former agents and collaborators as well as the somewhat unique initiative to post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, of granting of free access by individuals to their own personal secret police files. This privilege awarded to "victims" as compensation in the form of information whilst contributing arguably to the democratisation of information has also become the cause of numerous political controversies as revelations from the archives have been continually "leaked" into the public domain, often as part of what Lavinia Stan refers to as "vigilante justice" initiatives (Stan 2011).

The numerous controversies that have arisen over their use highlight the paradoxical hold that the archives continue to have today, the result of an "enduring belief in the authority of their holdings" (Vatulescu 2010: 13) which persists despite the recognition that the materials they contain are the product of regimes whose methods have been condemned as illegal and immoral. Commentators have often asked: How complete are the records? What has been hidden or destroyed to preserve reputations or ongoing interests? What kind of trust can be placed in

records which were often solicited by means of coercion? Some individuals expressed genuine surprise at finding their names on lists of informants (particularly those who had strong opposition pedigrees), but were unable to prove that they had not provided the security services with information. The use of the archives in the search for justice and truth has also shown the inadequacy of the categories of "perpetrators" and "victims," "dissidents" and "collaborators," "informers" and so on (see Apor et al. 2017), which fail to capture the complexity of the moral choices and ethical dilemmas that large numbers of citizens faced in their everyday dealings with the state and with each other. In this context, historical memory and justice and truth seeking have become "shackled to the fate of and uses of the secret police archives" (Kapaló and Povedák 2021: 25).

Photo Ethics

Although the textual holdings of secret police archives have been the main focus of the search for truth and justice, increasingly the visual materials produced and collected by the secret police are being published, exhibited and publicly displayed, whether in museums and galleries or even in urban public spaces. The use of these diverse visual materials, which come in many forms as articles in this issue illustrate, including surveillance images (see Povedák), mugshots (see Vagramenko and Nicolescu) and crime scene photographs (see Bódi and Huhák), as well as confiscated photographs and possessions, all pose their own distinct ethical challenges both as objects of research and as aspects of lost cultural or religious patrimony. As a number of contributions in this special issue suggest, photography presents particular ethical concerns which, arguably, other kinds of exhibits in museums and temporary exhibitions relaying the history of the communist rule do not. While, for instance, a bleak cell in a former KGB prison converted into permanent museum might well function as a powerful measure of the violence and injustice done to those once incarcerated in the building, the experience is always marked by an absence, namely of those who once occupied or guarded such benighted places. Careful efforts to accurately reproduce the conditions of imprisonment or even to "fill in" experience with various forms of testimony are attempts to compensate for that lack. And that absence, of course, is a product of time. In this regard, photography possesses a particular relationship to time that other material records do not. Photographs of the conventional kind are, as many photo theorists have explained, "traces of the real." A photograph is not just a representation but an "event." Their force lies in the fact that what is depicted appears to be frozen in time at the moment of the shutter's click, yet this an illusion of the most poignant kind: time moves on. In his brilliant study of the medium, *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes, looking at a photograph of two girls taken many years earlier, writes "how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then already dead (yesterday)" (Barthes 1981: 96).

For many theorists of photography, the taking of an image of another person is itself an act of violence. Famously Susan Sontag in *On Photography* writes "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a subliminal murder—a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time" (Sontag 1977: 14). Ariella Azoulay in her book *The Civil Contract of Photography* observes that even when a subject consents to being photographed, injustice is perpetuated when their image (in the photograph) is understood to belong entirely to the photographer (Azoulay 2008). She "challenge(s) the assumption that the photographed individual has no right over the image made of him or her and that this right is 'naturally' given to the person holding the photograph's means of production" (94).

Ownership determines who has not only the rights to reproduce the image but often the generation of meaning too. Captions or voice overs in documentary film do much to fix the meaning of what might otherwise be illegible images. (In this issue, Cristea offers her own critical self-reflection on this matter as an anthropologist undertaking fieldwork in Cuba today).

There is no doubt that photographs taken by the secret police in Eastern Europe, whether surreptitiously on the street as part of their surveillance activities or during the process of arrest and imprisonment, were acts of violence in Sontag's terms. The subjects of these photographs were not given the opportunity to consent to being recorded in this way and it is evident that such images were taken against their will and intended as instruments of harm. These are by no means "innocent images." This raises considerable ethical questions for those who wish to reproduce them today, whether on the pages of scholarly journals, in the media or on the walls of the gallery. When consent was not given, what obligations accompany their reuse today? When these images are now published in the *open* context of a free press and uncensored media rather than the *closed* world of communist societies, do they constitute part of a new kind of "civil contract" in Azoulay's terms? Do any kind of authorial rights remain in the hands of the photographer after the apparatus for which they worked closes down? What right do the subjects have to the images in which they appear? And can they be transferred to others? Certainly, the archives in which they are preserved now exercise those rights "on behalf" of those subjects in some national settings extending extensive rights of access and reproduction (such as in the Ukraine since 2015) and in others, placing narrow limits. So although access to secret police archives has been granted in seemingly broad and inclusive terms in many countries, with access guaranteed to victims and, in a number of countries, their direct descendents, as well as to large numbers of researchers, ordinary citizens are often reluctant to seek access to their files for fear of what they might contain or are "locked out" due to economic or educational disadvantage. Archives tend to be located in capital cities, far away and expensive to reach for large portions of the population. Additionally, rights of access are based on the identity of individuals thus excluding the descendent communities from accessing and gaining control over materials that relate to their communal experience of repression. Publication or display of archival material risks being yet a further step in this process of alienation.

Such matters are somewhat easier to resolve when the subject of the secret police photograph is able to determine the circumstances of their mediation. American academic Katherine Verdery in her fascinating book, *My Life as a Spy. Investigations in a Secret Police File,* describes her responses to reading surveillance reports compiled by the Securitate during her time undertaking fieldwork as an anthropologist in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s (Verdery 2018). She was suspected of being a foreign spy engaged in elaborate acts of deception for her homeland. She *was* undertaking close observation of Romanian society; not as a spy but as an anthropologist (though she sometimes wonders what the difference was in her book). "Her" weighty file features surveillance reports and interviews with informants, some of whom she counted as friends and close colleagues during her time in Ceaușescu's Romania. Researched and written twenty years, and more, after the end of communist rule, *My Life as a Spy* records not only Verdery's reflections on these highly suspicious and often confused documents but also her attempts to meet and discuss the surveillance with her observers today (former secret police agents and their informants).

My Life as a Spy features on its cover one of the images which had been made by means of a hidden camera (using recording equipment that the agents called "Technica Operativa T.O. / Teo") in a hotel room (Figure 4). It shows Verdery in her underwear. Notes written in earliest phases of her research capture vividly

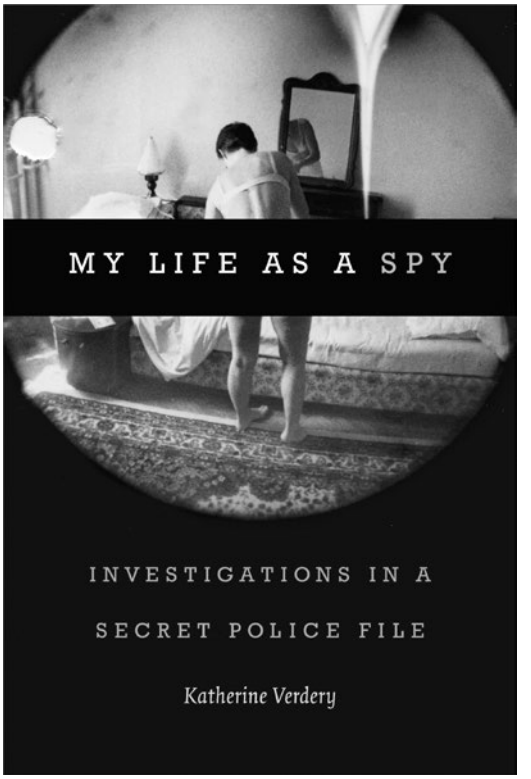


Figure 4. Cover of Katherine Verdery's 2018 book *My Life as a Spy. Investigations in a Secret Police File* featuring a Securitate image of the author in her hotel room in 1985 (Reproduced with permission of Katherine Verdery).

the emotional reaction she felt on seeing this image in the file for the first time:

> 19- 9-10. Reading my Cluj file makes me want to cry, for the various friends brought in on my case as either informers or themselves under surveillance. I come upon photos of myself from the "Teo" in my room at the Continental Hotel in Cluj. I am in my underwear, making my bed and then using the mirror above it to fix my hair. The outlines of my body are quite clear, though the photos are lousy. Later I have a mental image of myself in my underwear, pinned like a butterfly on a collector's table with spot-lights shining on me from several directions. Become embarrassed, then feel angry, then violated. Imagine if I had actually made love with someone in that bed… how appalling. These people are merciless (Verdery 2018: 183).

A second image appears in the book which was taken during a later surveillance operation. In 1988 she was photographed on the street while being accosted by a Securitate officer, Major "Dragomir." Both appear in the photograph, "Dragomir" somewhat more clearly than Verdery in the double portrait. Twenty-five years later she writes to "Dragomir" to ask him to meet and to discuss the long surveillance operation that he conducted of her. In the letter, she reports that she is "writing a book based on my file … and would like [it] to be as close as possible to the truth. You will appear in it in any case, with the photo; it would be great to be able to present your 'human face' and not only the propaganda of dissidents from those times" (Verdery 2018: 258). After meeting and sharing what Verdery admits to be a "good human connection," she is troubled, remorseful that a collection of essays under the title of *Secrets and Truths* is about to be published featuring the image and naming him. She knows from the contacts in the *Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* (National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives) that "Dragomir" has been able to obscure his past and even claim to have been a revolutionary. Nevertheless, she asks her editor not to remove the image but to take his "name out of the text."

Verdery is able to exercise rights to "her" image precisely because she is an author and, as such, in control of the context in which it will appear and also the interpretation that it is given (as she makes obvious to "Dragomir" when she writes to him). Moreover, she is able to exercise those rights because of the policies and legal frameworks that guide the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives in Romania. In this way, *My Life as a Spy* is, in part, a form of redress. But her mediation on the rights and wrongs of the double portrait makes clear, it is also a practical and self-reflexive exercise of the ethics of representation.

Such examples are rare, though by no means unique: artist Cornelia Schleime, who left the GDR in the mid 1980s, made artworks using her Stasi reports in 1993 in which she attempted to perform for the camera the descriptions which

had been generated by agents a few years earlier. The results are wilfully absurd (Krasznahorkai 2021, Blaylock 2021). But far more often those who reproduce the photographic images in secret police archives are not those who feature in them. (Or equally, in the case of the use of images confiscated as "evidence," they are not their photographers or owners). What then are the responsibilities of the researcher, curator or anyone else engaged in acts of historical representation to those who are not able to object to their appearance in images which were created in circumstances of coercion or violence? This is most evidently the case with regards to images of those who are no longer alive.

Famously, Claude Lanzmann decided against the use of "historic" images in his documentary film on the holocaust, *Shoah* (1985), because they had, in large number, been produced by photographers and film makers working in the service of Fascism and genocide (LaCapra 1997). Such images were corrupted by their original purpose as propaganda. Moreover, such material could only ever approach the topic obliquely, namely the murder of Europe's Jews, given the meagre images which depicted that precise and final event. Instead, Lanzmann turned to eyewitness accounts; testimonies of the living. One conclusion that might be drawn from this decision to forego historic images is that they are so tainted or incomplete that they are irredeemable or unusable. In 2008, Georges Didi-Huberman refused Lanzmann's version of the *bilderverbot* (prohibition on images) in his study of the tiny number of clandestine images taken at Auschwitz by a member of the *Sonderkommando* working in the gas chambers (Didi-Huberman 2008). For the French philosopher and art historian, they are "images in spite of all" and, as such, oblige us to look. No longer capable of functioning as pleas for aid, they act today as injunctions to remember. Didi-Huberman's arguments about the capacity of images to speak across irreversible time don't ultimately depend on the status of their makers as victims or oppressors. He writes: "in the face of every image we have to choose whether, or how, to make it participate in our knowledge and action. We can accept or reject this or that image; take it as a consoling object or as a worrying object; make it ask questions or use it as a ready-made response" (Didi-Huberman 2008: 180).

Vagramenko and Nicolescu grapple with similar concerns in regard to their use of images of violence perpetrated by the secret police during the very act of taking mugshot photographs for a file on a group of arrested religious believers in Soviet Ukraine. Whereas historians such as Susan Crane (2008) advocate reclassifying and contextualising photographs of the Holocaust in order to overcome the banal tendency to circulate images of violence in the expectation of shared human emotion and revulsion, Vagramenko and Nicolescu highlight how, through curatorial choices, it is possible to encourage audiences to look differently at images of violence in order to grasp their multivalency and historical agency regardless of the violent hand that produced them. Through an exploration of the complex layering and staging of a Soviet secret police file and the set of mugshots it contains, and their own curatorial practice of layering displays, they demonstrate how the encounter in the exhibition space can be used to peel back the strata of images to reveal presences that secret police manipulations attempted to conceal. Vagramenko and Nicolescu argue that despite the evidential power of the image shot by the secret police, they can be used to bring the archive alive as a site of the agency of resistance as opposed to a site solely defined by victimhood.

Surveillance images—taken against the will of the subjects—sometimes constitute the only record of acts of dissent or of resistance and the state's violent response to it. Displaying such materials in public exhibitions or making them available open-access online, in the way that both the Hidden Galleries project (http://hiddengalleries.eu) discussed by Povedák, Vagramenko and Nicolescu in this issue and in the COURAGE project (http://cultural-opposition.eu/) outlined by Bódi and Huhák, have done, highlight the complex ethical

issues related to historical contextualisation, patrimony and repatriation, the rights to privacy and to be forgotten and the implications of re-mediation of secret police materials. The sometimes paradoxical nature of secret police photography is also discussed by Bódi and Huhák. The account they give of the exhibition mounted by the *Inconnu* Group in a private apartment in Budapest in early 1987 and its closure by the Hungarian secret police, demonstrates another contested value of the archive in the post-communist era, namely the secret police as chroniclers or documenters of cultural heritage. The unintended act of preservation that resulted from the secret police operation in this case has, in post-communism, been transformed into valuable cultural heritage that challenges perceptions of the power of the state to control culture and suppress agency. As Bódi and Huhák explain, by providing open and free access to previously restricted secret images, the COURAGE project was able to subvert the secret police intention to eliminate dissent exposing the way that "the secret police itself created—in the frame of their destruction—the group of sources that today is the single visual trace" of the exhibition.

The late David King, the author of powerful photobooks on the histories of the Soviet Union, held a similar view to that of Didi-Huberman. A British designer, photographer, collector and committed supporter of Trotsky throughout his life, King set himself the task of discovering the revolutionary culture which had been extinguished so brutally during the Stalin years, often by working with visual materials in Soviet archives. His best-known book *The Commissar Vanishes* (1997) records the ways in which official images were subject to manipulation when leading figures associated with the regime became *persona non grata* during the Stalin years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, King went through the Central Archives of the former KGB researching the images which had been taken of its victims during the Great Terror. They included the portraits taken by the secret police on the day of the arrest, with the subject looking shell-shocked and dishevelled as

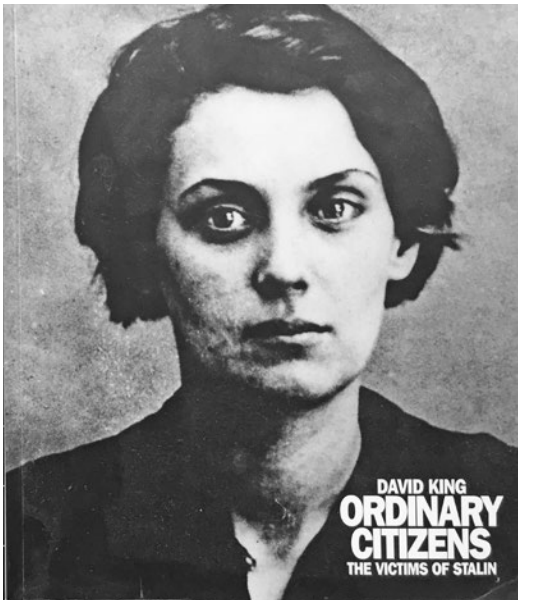


Figure 5. Cover of David King's 2003 book *Ordinary Citizens* featuring the arrest photograph of Tamara Litsinskaya. The file which accompanies this image in the Central Archives of the former KGB reports "Born 1910 in Moscow. Non-Party member. Student. Address unknown. Arrested on February 8, 1937. Sentenced to death on August 25, 1937. The charge: Unknown. Shot the same day."

they stood before the camera in the Lubyanka, the notorious headquarters of the NKVD (later KGB) in Moscow. Each passport size image was pasted into a grey folder with meagre biographical data and the "crime" for which they had been arrested recorded. In 2003 King reproduced a number of these small images as full-page portraits in a large-format book called *Ordinary Citizens—The Victims of Stalin* (Figure 5). Each was accompanied by a small biographical statement that museum curators like to call "tombstone" information—date of birth and of death, employment and marriage status. Accused of absurd crimes, these ordinary citizens were often executed within hours or sent into the vast penal system known as the Gulag where many perished. In publishing his book, King's act was a minor act of reinstatement of a person who had been effaced by state violence. The book contains very little text: the absurdity of the indictments and the scale of the injustice did not warrant further explanation. Instead, King makes his point with the invitation to look: "The reappearance of these ordinary people,

face-to-face with their accusers and close to death, serves as an indictment of Stalinism and the former Soviet Union" (cited by Moore 2017). Here, one is reminded of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' declaration of the ethical imperative that accompanies looking at the face of another. He describes it as a moment of moral obligation:

> There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure without defence. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill (Levinas 1985: 86).

The portraits of the arrested are not the only faces in the secret police archives across Eastern Europe that have been preserved. Others include the mugshots of the secret police agents themselves. What are the ethics of their reproduction today? Does Levinas moral obligation hold in this instance too? In 2005-07, IPN organised a series of street exhibitions in Polish cities featuring dozens of mugshot portraits of secret police agents who had been active in the Polish People's Republic. Known as *Twarze Bezpieki* (The Faces of the Security Services), these displays, using "a language of justice and transparency, … associated the faces with cruelty, treachery, and crime; not just any crime, but above all what is called 'communist crime' (zbrodnie komunistyczne)" (Gökariksel 2019: 112). Public exhibition here was a kind of indictment or trial, albeit one which did not extend the right of defence. The House of Terror does something similar when it lines up mugshots of perpetrators with terse summaries of their activities, particularly those engaged in the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956.

The question of who to show and how to name is not—or not only—an abstract or philosophical one: it is, like all ethical considerations of this kind, a practical one too which impacts on the authors contributing to this theme issue. Lacking an extant local museum or archive, or even a solid monograph about the history of life in Mizil, Cosmin Manolache and Cosmin Pavel had to seek out alternative images for their imagined museum. Some images were collected from flea markets and others donated by residents of the town who responded to their posts on social media (at www.miziliada.blogspot.com, or on Facebook #muzeulorasuluinecunoscut). In their article in this issue *Martor*, all of the images come from people who have given their consent to their reproduction and have agreed to share their names.

Where individuals cannot give consent, can society do so in their place? Povedák, in her account of bringing surveillance photography to the exhibition space, explores another strategy to potentially escape the lens of the secret police. The photographs that Povedák encountered in her research are from a secret surveillance operation that recorded, amongst other things, religious gatherings conducted in nature with the intention of avoiding the prying eye of the authorities. In questioning the ethical use of these images, Povedák describes the steps that she took including engaging the community in discussions on the presence of the images in the archive, their accessibility and potential use for research and the right of use as outlined in legislation. She also took the moral decision to explain to the community, once she understood that they did not wish to become the objects of academic research, how, even though they have no rights over the images contained in their file, they could nevertheless request a 50-year embargo on their use in accordance with the legal regulations of the archives. This question of control over the use of and reproduction of photographs taken of unwilling participants has been debated both in terms of the Holocaust, as discussed above, but also colonial-era images of indigenous people, especially those taken of restricted religious ceremonies and rituals.

There are some peculiar similarities between the experience of indigenous peoples and the surveilled group discussed by Povedák: in both cases the target of the intrusive lens was secret religious gatherings but another less obvious commonality is that images were not intended to find their way back to the communities they captured. In the case of indigenous peoples, they were for the consumption of white colonial anthropologists and publics distant from the remote peoples they depicted (Peterson 2003: 119) whereas the secret police never dreamt of a scenario in which their images would find their way back to their targets. The opening of secret police archives has resulted in a similar dynamic of the re-encounter with intrusive photographs experienced by indigenous peoples, only much closer to home. The publication of restricted Australian aboriginal rituals is today unthinkable (Peterson 2003: 119), should the reproduction of surveillance images require the same level of consent and control?

Remediation

The exhibition and publication of archival photographs is an act of remediation, a concept that has been developed and employed by media theorists to describe the way in which many kinds of images are transposed from one setting or medium to another (Bolter and Grusin 1999). In this process, distribution often involves the detachment of an image from its original context of use and the acquisition of new meanings unintended by its author. In this issue of *Martor*, Alexandra Bardan explores the *remediation* of socialist iconography as publicity for bars and nightclubs in the 2010, asking questions about the ethics of a phenomenon which seems to be as much about forgetting as remembering. Similarly, archival photographs are rarely encountered by their viewers in the "original" setting of the archive file but in the gallery or on the pages of a publication or a website. In the process of remediation by the gallery, for instance, photographic images are often blown up or appear on digital screens. These may be minor modifications designed to allow the "original" image to remain preserved in its archive setting but they are modifications nonetheless. As such, remediation raises ethical questions about aesthetic decisions: if enlarging an image is a reasonable action, is colourisation of a black and white image also acceptable? If presenting an image on screen, is it legitimate to give it a musical accompaniment or to use a "Ken Burns Effect" leading the eye with moving close ups? For exhibition curators and book designers aesthetic decisions need to be aligned with ethical ones. Facing the reluctance of the community to allow images of their coreligionists to be reproduced, the Hidden Galleries curators, as Povedák explains, chose to display a line-drawing tracing the outline of a possible spy (in his white summer shirt, fishing) with his "targets" sitting in the background in place of the original surveillance image. Drawing of this kind acts as a kind of sign "pointing" to the photographic image in the archive without detailing the events it records. In this way, the curators intended to challenge both the perceived incontrovertibility of the photograph as material evidence of a particular religious act whilst respecting the right to privacy and transferred "ownership" of the original image/artifact itself. Here, the remediated display image attempts to reconcile the competing moral imperatives to represent past injustice whilst also respecting the personal integrity and agency of the targets of repression.

In the boldest act of remediation examined in this issue of *Martor*, the authors of a new book called *How to Look Natural in Photographs* discuss their approach to images collected or taken by the Secret Police in the People's Republic of Poland and now in the archives of IPN. Beata Bartecka and Łukasz Rusznica's photobook features an unsettlingly diverse range of images, only some of which constitute the now familiar form of the secret police photograph, namely the mugshot and the surveillance image. Others include grim crime scene photos. A handful

remain entirely uncertain, eluding the efforts of the IPN archivists to make sense of them. Eschewing the task of stitching these images into a legible narrative with a synthesising accompanying text, *How to Look Natural in Photographs* combines unsettling combinations of images, often double page spreads, and unexplained loops of time where some figures and motifs recur pages apart. Spreads from the book appear like visual intertitles in this issue of *Martor*. Bartecka and Rusznica deploy a variant of the technique of incongruous juxtaposition that the surrealists invented almost a century ago in the hope of shaking these images out of the conventional frames into which the post-communist memory politics has screwed them so tightly. While historians and anthropologists might object to the seemingly irresponsible way in which they have approached their subject, their book demands that we look and look again at a class of images that we think we already know.

This theme issue of *Martor* is not offered to readers as the definitive answer to the many questions raised in this introduction. Any such claim would be self deceiving. Nor are they explored by the contributing authors of the essays in abstract or detached ways. In fact, a large part of the contributions are reflections on the ethical dimensions of practice whether conducted by photographers, anthropologists, artists, curators, archivists or historians. Ethical practice calls for an engagement with what is possible but also what is right. Their reflections are presented here as *attempts* to make responsible and fair engagements with the material and visual legacies of societies which were themselves blighted by injustice and inequity.

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No. 677355.

NEP4DISSENT is a COST Action (CA 16213) funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apor, Péter, Sándor Horváth, and James Mark. 2017. "Introduction: Collaboration, Cooperation and Political Participation in Communist Regimes." In *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe,* edited by Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth, and James Mark, 1-19. London and New York: Anthem Press.

Azoulay, Ariella. 2008. *The Civil Contract of. Photography.* New York: Zone Books

Bach, Jonathan. 2017. *What Remains. Everyday Encounters with the Socialist Past in Germany.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Barthes, Roland. 1981. *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography.* New York: Hill and Wang.

Blaive, Muriel. 2020. "The Czech Museum of Communism: What National Narrative for the Past?" in *Museums of Communism: New Memory Sites in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Stephen Norris, 219-45. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Blaylock, Sara. 2021. "Being the Woman They Wanted Her to Be." *Third Text* 35 (2): 227-47.

Bolter, J. David , and Grusin, Richard A.. 2000. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge MA: United Kingdom: MIT Press.

Burch Stuart, and Ulf Zander. 2008. "Preoccupied with the Past: The Case of Estonia's Museum of Occupation." *Scandia* 74 (2): 53-73.

Crane, Susan A. 2008. "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography." *History and Theory* 47 (3): 309-30.

Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008. *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dovydaityté, Linara. 2010. "Post-Soviet Writing of History: The Case of the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius." *Studies on Art and Architecture* 19 (3-4): 105-20.

Edwards, Elizabeth. 2001. *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Fukuyama, Francis. 1989. "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16: 3–18.

Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man.* New York: Free Press.

Gessen, Masha. 2019. "Poland's Ruling Party Puts an Extraordinary Museum of Polish-Jewish History into Limbo." *New Yorker* September 23rd. [Available online at: https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/polands-ruling-party-puts-an-extraordinary-museum-of-polish-jewish-history-into-limbo]

Gökariksel, Saygun. 2019. "Facing History: Sovereignty and the Spectacles of Justice and Violence in Poland's Capitalist Democracy." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61 (1): 111-44.

Horváth, Zsolt K. 2008. "The Redistribution of the memory of Socialism: Identity Formations of the 'Survivors' in Hungary after 1989." In *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, edited by Oksana Sarkisova, and Péter Apor, 147-73. Budapest and New York: CEU Press.

Kapaló, James A., and Kinga Povedák. 2021. "Introduction: Reframing the Religious Underground." In *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, edited by James A. Kapaló, and Kinga Povedák, 1-36. London and New York: Routledge.

King, David. 1999. *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia.* United Kingdom: Henry Holt and Company.

King, David. 2003. *Ordinary Citizens: The Victims of Stalin.* London: Francis Boutle Publishers.

Krasznahorkai, Kata. 2021. *Artists and Agents: Performance Art and Secret Services*. Germany: Dreen, Markus, Anne König u. Jan Wenzel. Spectormag GbR.

Kuhn, Gerd, and Andreas Ludwig. 1997. *Alltag und Soziales Gedächtnis. Die Objektkultur der DDR und ihre Musealisierung*. Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag.

LaCapra, Dominick. 1997. "Lanzmann's 'Shoah': 'Here There Is No Why'." *Critical Inquiry* 23 (2): 231-69.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1985. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press

Mark, James. 2008. "Containing Fascism: History in Post-Communist Baltic Occupation and Genocide Museums." In *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989,* edited by edited by Oksana Sarkisova, and Péter Apor, 335-69. Budapest and New York: CEU Press.

Mark, James. 2010. *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe.* London and New Haven: Yale University Press

Moore, Mick. 2017. "World-class collector David King talks work, life, and left-wing history." *1854* November 23rd [Available online at: https://www.1854.photography/2017/11/davidking/; accessed on Oct 2021].

Müller, Rolf. 2012. "A megtorlás fényképei" [Photographs of the Reprisal]. In *Nagy Testvér – Tanulmányok a Magyar Titkosszolgálatok 1945 Utáni Történetéből*, edited by György Gyarmati and Mária Palasik, 305-34. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Peterson, Nicolas. 2003. "The Changing Photographic Contract: Aborigines and Image Ethics." In *Photography's Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson, 119-45. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Pinney, Christopher. 2011. *Photography and Anthropology.* London: Reaktion Books.

Rév, István. 2005. *Retroactive justice: Prehistory of post-communism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rindzevičiūtė, Eglė. 2018. "Boundary Objects of Communism. Assembling the Soviet Past in Lithuanian Museums." *Ethnologie française* 48: 275-86.

Sontag, Susan. 1977. *On Photography*. New York: Dell Publishing Company.

Stan, Lavinia. 2011. "Vigilante Justice in Post-communist Europe." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44: 319-27.

Stone, Dan. 2012. "Memory Wars in the 'New Europe'." In *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History,* edited by Dan Stone, 714-33. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vatulescu, Cristina. 2010. *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Verdery, Katherine. 2014. *Secret and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police.* Budapest and New York: CEU Press.

Verdery, Katherine. 2018. *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

