MY LIFE AS A SPY

INVESTIGATIONS IN A

SECRET POLICE FILE

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Frontispiece: The anthropologist in the field, 1993. Author's photo.

Cover art: Surveillance photo of "VERA" in her hotel room, 1985.
Courtesy of the Archive of the Consiliul Naţional pentru Studierea
Arhivelor Securităţii, Fond Informativ.

*In memory of four beloved friends
and great anthropologists:*

*Gloria Jean Davis
Ernestine Friedl
Sidney W. Mintz
G. William Skinner*

In recent years, Iaşi has received ever more frequent visits by certain American grantees and doctoral students, for the purpose of specialization and documentation. Under this cover they had the goal of collecting information and data not intended for publicity, or of a secret character, from the socio-political domains of the Romanian S[ocialist] R[epublic]. In their activities they were supported directly by cadres and agents of the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest who function in R.S. Romania under diplomatic cover.

—ROMANIAN SECRET POLICE FILE ON U.S. RESEARCHERS

Unimaginable! I knew that I was followed on the street, that the telephone was bugged, correspondence opened, any word in public recorded by someone or other, but I did not realize the extent, diversity, complexity, the number of officers, of informers, of technical means, and the gigantic amount of work performed by this unseen army that worked for 28 years in the underground of conspiracy. Only the hand of a Dostoevsky could describe these subterranean people . . . moles, hidden in our houses, whom we could hear gnawing on our tranquility but could not see.

—WRITER BUJOR NEDELCOVICI ON READING
HIS SECRET POLICE FILE

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PREFACE

There's nothing like reading your secret police file to make you wonder who you really are. Page after page, all your activities, all your motives, are subjected to a reading from an alien position embodied in a logic different from anything you recognize. Events you remember as significant might appear without comment, while others you thought unimportant burgeon into grounds for your expulsion from the country.

Although questions of identity may trouble any researcher doing fieldwork, they are unavoidable for those working under surveillance. This is especially true in the Cold War context, and most especially when a change in that context releases the surveillance files into their targets' hands. I had gone to Romania's Transylvanian region in 1973, during the rule of communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, to conduct anthropological research on village life; I returned for further study several times in the 1970s and 1980s, totaling over three years. Then, several decades later, I discovered that Romania's secret police, the Securitate, had kept an enormous surveillance file on me: 2,781 pages. Reading it, I learned that I was "actually" a spy, a CIA agent, a Hungarian agitator, a friend of dissidents: in short, an enemy of Romania. As I read evidence of Securitate officers' view of me, I came to question my work, my intentions, and my very identity. I found in those pages a whole invisible world of events, relations, plans, and interpretations of which I had been largely unaware. They made me reconsider that entire period of my life, along with the many "selves" that emerged from it. Furthermore, the file made me contemplate what it means to be suspected of spying and to what extent ethnography, the research practice of anthropologists, necessarily makes one a kind of spy.

Discovering what it has meant to live under a rule of secrecy when one had thought oneself transparent can be disorienting and upsetting. This is the story I tell here. The book aims to create a feeling for what it was like to live as a guest in one of the most repressive countries of the Eastern bloc, as well as to show how the global superpower conflict was refracted in the experiences of a young woman trying to learn about life there. I use field notes, journal entries, and secret police reports to tell about being a researcher in Romania during the Cold War, with reference to the invisible secret police. Organized by the chronology of the research (which extended to conversations with police and informers up to 2016), this volume foregrounds the voices and work practices of the Securitate officers who were my constant hidden companions and of the informers who assisted them.

The book is a story of the effects of being under surveillance, an experience becoming familiar, albeit in different forms, to everyone. We are *all* under surveillance now, but most of us have scarcely any idea what that really means. What does it feel like to be spied upon, on the suspicion that you yourself are some kind of spy or traitor? What is it to be enveloped in secrets you find out about long after the fact—secrets that include the names of friends who reported on you to the secret police and the actions those police took to interfere in your life? What is the effect of this experience, once its extent becomes known, on your identity and the relationships of trust that you thought you had built? It is my hope that this book will render visible a certain set of surveillance practices and their effects, in a world in which new forms of surveillance proliferate every day.

A NOTE ON FONTS, PSEUDONYMS, AND PRONUNCIATION

This is a polyphonic work, incorporating the voices of Securitate officers and their informers, my field notes and field index written at the time of my various research stays in Romania, letters I wrote home, people I interviewed for this book after 2008, and my ruminations on this material as I read it in the present. To assist the reader, I have reduced the many voices to three different fonts for the main categories of participants:

1. my narrative voice in the present;

2. *letters sent from the field as well as my field index or field notes written at the time of my research trips to Romania, 1973–2016;*

3. the reports and notes of Securitate officers from the file located in the archive at CNSAS.

In addition, I adopt the following conventions concerning names. In the files, the names or pseudonyms of the persons being followed, and often of those they interact with, usually appear in quotation marks and often in capital letters (e.g., "VERA," "VANESSA"), and I will follow that practice. Likewise, officers invariably put the pseudonyms of informers in quotation marks (e.g., "Ovidiu"). This is so even when it is in fact the person's real name that is used, as sometimes happened. Although officers sometimes also write informers' names in capitals, I do not do so here. When I have interviewed someone who appears in the file as an informer, in an effort to protect these people I create my own pseudonym rather than using that of the officers. I also use pseudonyms (or in some cases simple initials) for some of my interviewees, indicated by an asterisk before the first use of the name. Names that

do not appear in capitals, with quotation marks, or with an asterisk are the real names of the persons in question (e.g., David Prodan); those still alive have agreed to this. I have not distinguished my own redactions from those of the archive. Finally, when I am reporting a conversation with someone, I often put my own questions in parentheses.

In my translations from the Securitate file, I have attempted to preserve something of the linguistic character of the originals, with formulaic phrases, an eccentric "lofty" style, use of passive constructions, and inversion of names (often using all names rather than just first or last—VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN instead of Katherine Verdery). I have also preserved spelling errors. When fidelity to the original creates excessive awkwardness in English—especially in the use of passives and noun clusters—I have preferred clarity. I rarely include underlining that was added by officers other than the one who drew up the document (usually his superior officers or the archivist). Sometimes I provide the notes of the officers, labeled "N.O." for "Note of the [Case] Officer" and "N.S." for "Note of the Superior Officer." Finally, I use the Romanian (European) style for dates (day, month, year) rather than the U.S. style. Hence, September 23, 1979, is 23.09.79. These documents contain many more markings than I have reproduced (registration number of the document, the number of copies, the typist's initials, etc.). To protect both my own privacy and that of others mentioned in the files, I do not indicate the file numbers in the CNSAS archive from which quotations come, although qualified researchers can discover them.

Except for the vowels â, ă, and î, Romanian is generally pronounced like Italian. Front vowels soften *c* and *g* (to *č* and *dj*); hard *c* or *g* before front vowels is spelled *ch* or *gh*; ş is *sh*, ţ is *ts*. To make the text more accessible, here are phonetic equivalents of some frequently used personal and place names:

Cluj = Kloozh
Cugir = Koo JEER
Geoagiu = jo AH joo
Hunedoara = hoo neh DWA ra
Iaşi = Yahsh
Moaşa = MWA sha
Moşu = MO shu
Orăştie = aw rush TEE yeh
Securitate = seh koo ree TAH tay
Vlaicu = VLY koo (vly—rhymes with *fly*)

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At Duke University Press, I am grateful for the warm encouragement of Ken Wissoker and the editorial work of Elizabeth Ault, Barbie Halaby, and Liz Smith, among many others.

Finally and most important of all are the Romanians whose willingness to trust me, despite the ambient atmosphere of suspicion, enabled my research from 1973 to 1989 and, in changed circumstances, to 2016. Just as officer "Blidaru" had hoped, I came to love Romania and its people and to find it an infinitely fascinating place, where I was able to live a life of intense work and pleasure time after time. I offer especially profound thanks to Meri and her family in Vlaicu, to "Beniamin" and Mariana, to Silvia Colfescu, and to the friends I call Ralf and Ana Bierman. To these people, as well as others mentioned throughout this book, I am bound for life.

Prologue

25 SEPTEMBER 1973: a lovely fall afternoon in Hunedoara County, in the Transylvanian region of Romania. Long hair flying out behind me, I am riding my new Mobra motorbike south from the capital, Deva, toward the mountainous commune of Lunca Cernei in the westernmost branch of the Southern Carpathian Alps. From the highway, the scenery is spectacular and will become more so once I head up into the hills on smaller roads, beginning at the village of Toplița. Light plays on the water that flows into the river Cerna, sparkling in the sun; flocks of sheep and goats forage on the stony hillsides. I have an unwarranted sense of well-being as I enjoy the air rushing past me. Well, not "rushing," exactly: at its fastest, the bike goes about fifty-five miles an hour, and I'm taking too much pleasure in my surroundings to push it.

Twenty-five years old and knowing practically nothing about Romania, I have come here from Stanford University to do research for my doctoral thesis in anthropology. The motorbike tour through the county is designed to help me choose a field site. I am to visit some thirty villages in this mountainous region and have so far been having a wonderful time, meeting and talking with people in my still-rudimentary Romanian. They are patient and try to help me express myself.

I've had the Mobra only a couple of weeks and am not used to it yet—nor to the trucks, belching foul exhaust, that repeatedly slow me down. Now the afternoon sky opens into dusk; I'm riding straight into the setting sun and find it hard to see. That is the only explanation I can offer for why I am unexpectedly stopped by a policeman for riding my Mobra into a restricted area, marked (he said) by a sign—I completely missed it—that prohibited entry to foreigners. My brilliant-red license plates brand me as precisely that.

Here is how one of the earliest documents in my Romanian secret police file reported the incident.

Military unit No. 01942 of Timisoara Region   TOP SECRET

Counterintelligence bureau   Copy 2

No. 0016102 of 03 October 1973

Report for the Record

On 29.09.1973 military expert USCATU GHEORGHE, officer on duty at Military Unit 01736 Hunedoara, discussing with some citizens from Lunca Cernei commune, learned from them that on 25 and 26 September 1973 there was an American citizen in the respective commune who was interested in their customs . . .

We specify that in the vicinity of Lunca Cernei commune is found Military Unit 01736 with a special profile. The access roads to the unit are marked with the indication "Entry prohibited to foreigners" . . . which the said VERGERY KATERYNE ignored.

"Special profile": in a word, I had ridden straight into a military base. Marginal comments confirmed that the report had gone from the military unit to the head of the county branch of the secret police, the Securitate, raising suspicion. Other documents revealed its upward path to headquarters in Bucharest.[1] I have been in the county barely four days and already it seems I am not who I think I am.

How had this happened, and what would be its consequences? The causes included the ignorance of a young woman hoping to learn something about life in a distant place, for which neither her training nor the atmosphere in which she was raised—those years we have labeled the "Cold War," with its associated conceptual blinders—had even remotely prepared her. Now here

I was, sitting bewildered and scared in a faraway police station up in the mountains of a communist country, while the policeman telephoned his boss for instructions. Why had my contacts in Deva given me an itinerary going right through a military base? Maybe that was what one of them was signaling with his cryptic advice to be careful when I got to Toplița. Or maybe even they themselves didn't know where the military bases were. How would I get out of this fix, with my barely adequate command of the language? Was my entire dissertation project already hopelessly compromised? (Would anyone care if it were?)

My field notes continue on from officer Uscatu's report:

Field notes, 24 Sept. 1973
The cop eventually put me in the hall, called his superiors in Deva, and asked what to do with me (he spoke so loudly I could hear every word). Suddenly—it seemed almost in mid-sentence—he shouted, "My respects!" and hung up. He now began to encourage me actively to go on, though I was disposed to give up the whole venture. He told me how interesting it was from an ethnographic point of view, while I continued to talk about whether I should stay or go home.

When the policeman returned with the happy news that I could continue my trip, I objected that this made no sense: How could I, a U.S. citizen, do research right on the edge of a military base in a Soviet satellite country? Since selecting a research site was the whole point of my tour through the county, I should simply go back down the mountain and look elsewhere. But now, more baffling still, the policeman became insistent, anxiously urging me to go on: it was beautiful up there, with very interesting folklore; the people were nice, they were expecting me; I should stick to my assigned program. . . . Unluckily, I let myself be persuaded—and as a result, military officer Uscatu heard of my visit to Lunca Cernei and wrote his report. It provided the wording a Securitate officer would later use in launching my surveillance file.

And so began my life as a spy. It contains several different threads, weaving together my experience of surveillance, the attempt to do anthropology in a communist setting permeated with secrets and fabrications, the work of Securitate officers and their informers, and lastly, serendipity, as officer Uscatu's memo blew up to take over my dissertation research because I had made a stupid mistake. It would not be the last time.

The Doppelganger

June 2008. I am perusing my secret police file in Bucharest and come upon the following document.

Ministry of the Interior   TOP SECRET
Cluj County Inspectorate   [5].xii.1984
Service III [counterespionage]

<center>Report with proposals for finalizing the case of "VERA."</center>

VERDERY KATHERINE, 36 years old, professor in the Department of Anthropology of "JOHN HOPKINS" University in Baltimore, U.S.A., benefiting from an I.R.E.X. grant, came to the Romanian S.R. in August 1984, settling in Cluj-Napoca.

From the complex informative-operative surveillance measures undertaken concerning her, it has resulted that her proposed research is merely a cover for unfolding an intense activity of collecting socio-political information that has no connection whatever with her research properly speaking. . . .

From photocopies [of her field notes] it results that the information obtained by "VERA" has a hostile character toward our country, as she constantly seeks to bring out the dissatisfactions and resistant attitudes toward the politics of our Party and state on the part of those she exploits for informative purposes. . . .

Bearing in mind that her presence in our country is aimed at collecting tendentious information of a socio-political character and is at the same time of a nature to stimulate the activity of hostile elements, we consider it necessary to put a stop to this activity and in this sense we propose . . . that her stay in this country be interrupted.

[signed by the heads of the Cluj County Inspectorate, Securitate, and Service 3 (counterespionage), and the heads of the counterespionage division for Bucharest and for all of Romania]

Reading this makes it suddenly clear: I have a secret double, a doppelganger—a being from folklore given this name in the late eighteenth century and often seen as an evil twin or challenger of the self's equilibrium. You can

see her traces in this report. She is a schemer who seeks to destabilize the regime. Her name is "VERA," which means "true" in Latin; hence, she competes for reality status with me, KATHERINE VERDERY (KV). Actually, my double is multiple; each "self" has a different name, but they are held together by a single alleged occupation: spying on Romania for the United States. Different names accompany the different time periods and the kinds of spy the Securitate—the creators of my doppelganger—believe me to be. For instance, I am "FOLCLORISTA" ("The Folklorist"), spying for the military (1973–74); I am "VERA," living in Cluj to spy for the Hungarian diaspora in the United States (1984–86); I am "VANESSA," spied on at home in Baltimore for associating with Romanian dissidents (1987–88).[2] Evidently, spying meant several different things, which it is my job to sort out. For the first offense the Securitate drew up a plan for my arrest, for the second I was to be expelled from the country, and for the third they were preparing a penal action against me.

To my family, friends, and colleagues, these possibilities may seem surprising. The Securitate, however, perceives my doppelganger (to them, my "real" self) differently—more daring, more secretive, more deceitful—from the self known to my associates at home. I strain to glimpse myself in her, somewhat embarrassed if I succeed. Because my life as "VERA" occupies more pages than my life as the other nine pseudonyms in this file, for simplicity I will refer to my doppelganger as "VERA"—the capitals and quotation marks indicating a pseudonym, in the Securitate's practice.

The acquisition of a double—of a new identity—will prove to be a central feature of what it's like to be under surveillance.[3] The customary Western self-concept would tell us that we have unique identities (though I will have reason to doubt that), which the states we live in stabilize and meticulously verify on paper. States we visit often do the same. In this light, "VERA" is nearly as real as KV: KV's entire published oeuvre in 2017 is just slightly larger than her file. At the time of our actual paper rivalry, however, "VERA" was much better documented than KV and hence even more real, from state-makers' point of view.

Was "VERA" a spy? I didn't think so—indeed, I initially had the word "spy" in quotation marks in this book's title but decided to leave things more fluid. When I first went to Romania in late July 1973, I imagined myself a nascent ethnographer, whose aim was to write about other societies and peoples—in this case, Romania. I was to spend seventeen months on a scholarly exchange grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), gathering data for my thesis.[4] In the proposal that the Romanian side had approved, I had presented a project I fully intended to do. That is, I did not

"Target 'VERA.'" Surveillance photo, 1984. Courtesy of the Archive of the Consiliul Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii, Fond Informativ (ACNSAS-FI).

misrepresent my plans, although it would later seem I had, for my project would turn out to be undoable and would have to be changed. Having always considered myself a person of integrity, I felt I had nothing to hide; I believed that if I worked aboveboard, I would have no problems. Thus, in 2008, when I read my Securitate file, I was shocked to discover that they believed otherwise, having uncovered various secret doubles who definitely intended harm to Romania and should be thrown out.

I borrow this image of the doppelganger from others who have written about their Securitate files. I first encountered it in a 2009 interview with Nobel Prize–winning writer Herta Müller, who was born in Romania but eventually emigrated to Germany when the Securitate pressure on her family became unbearable. Here is how she describes being doubled:

> In my file I am two different people. One is called "Cristina," who is being fought as an enemy of the state. To compromise this "Cristina" the falsification workshop of Branch "D" (disinformation) fabricated a doppelganger from all those ingredients that would harm me the most [in her new home in West Germany]—party-faithful communist, unscrupulous secret agent.

Wherever I went, I had to live with this doppelganger. It was not only sent after me wherever I went, it also hurried ahead. . . . It has taken on a life of its own.[5]

Our situations differ considerably, of course. Unlike me, Herta Müller is a world-renowned writer who was the direct target of Securitate harassment and persecution, meeting regularly with her oppressors face to face, as I did not. What joins us, however, is the experience of having been multiplied, turned into something we do not recognize as ourselves. We have been crafted, in a peculiar way, by an organization working presciently on the postmodern assumption that people's identities are unstable and do not unify us, but also on the modernist one that surface appearances are deceiving and reality must be sought beneath them. This combination gives the officers a number of powerful tools as they analyze the behavior of a target (their name for the people they follow) for signs of a hidden truth.

Another Securitate target, Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu, also has a doppelganger, an "evil twin." Asking himself why he should be so upset at finding in his file a copy of his life, he answers,

This cheap misrepresentation wasn't just bad and ugly. It was also dangerous, because—in the role of "target" that I had been assigned—it had been at the same time aimed *against* my life. It was my *Doppelgänger*, my double, ready to eliminate me. It was I, indeed, but an "I" that was negative, an "I-enemy," which in the end would *have to be* eliminated. . . . This Clone from the File recorded and reproduced the cells of the original, but commandeered them according to its own logic.[6]

In short, the clone worked much like a virus. Because the replica would resemble him, the Securitate could readily substitute its fabrication for his "real" self and change his destiny, making him appear guilty of things that might send him to languish in a Romanian labor camp.

My own reaction is less trenchant than Liiceanu's. Discovering that I have a doppelganger has left me befuddled. When I read their descriptions of myself as a spy, I begin to wonder whether I really *was* one. How much of the practice of anthropologists resembles spying? Then I ask myself whether the unattractive portrait they paint of me might actually be true, or at least have something to it. On the plus side, I find in the indomitable "VERA" some characteristics I would do well to incorporate into what I experience as my current, rather depressed and crotchety self; a bit of Lacanian "mirroring" of

the more striking "VERA" could do wonders for me. But, you see, the doppel-ganger is already having an effect: I had to rewrite that last sentence, adding "what I experience as." Far from being intriguing additions to my repertoire, my doubles have unmoored my self-perception.

The unmooring commenced in 2008—shortly after I first began to skim through my file—because of the way it is organized. The documents in each of its eleven volumes follow no chronological order at all, and sometimes the dates on successive pages go backward rather than forward. Whole clusters of types of documents appear together without respect to date—multiple reports of my being shadowed on various days, sheaves of transcriptions of my telephone conversations or translations of my correspondence, groups of "informative notes" by friends and acquaintances who reported on me, and sets of reports from case officers or their superiors on up the hierarchy. It was chaotic, mystifying.

As I read the file more closely, my head began to spin. I was encounter-ing something not written to be read by its subject (like many anthropology books, for that matter) and under no requirement to be intelligible to her. I could make no sense of the mishmash of times and places, the perplexing organization of the documents that made them usable to officers but impen-etrable to anyone else. Because I felt I could not work as I intended with the file that way, I copied it and reorganized the copy in chronological order—as have others who have published their files.[7] This helped to position me in time and space so I could better find myself and recognize my experience. Such self-assertion violated the Securitate's way of rendering me, of course, and may have had the salutary effect of giving me some distance from this alarming mountain of paper. Its organization made clear, though, that the file represented not a personal biography but, at best, an incitement to one.

> > >

How, after all, had I come into possession of my secret police file? This is not a normal feature of an anthropologist's research.[8] The answer has two parts and must be contextualized within the scrupulous and bafflingly prolific file-production characteristic of twentieth-century authoritarianisms. First, in 1999, a decade after the revolution that had executed communist dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu, who had ruled the country as a reluctant Soviet ally since 1965, the Romanian Parliament passed a law—as some other Eastern Euro-

pean countries had done earlier—granting people access to their surveillance files and providing for public identification of Securitate officers and informers who appeared there. After numerous and ongoing legal challenges, the law eventually began to be used in a process known throughout the region as "lustration" (purification), for vetting would-be politicians: their files would be checked for evidence of collaboration with the Securitate, in a startling parallel with the exposure rituals of the communist period. That process aimed to prevent beneficiaries of the communist system from holding power in the new one. Many countries chose not to open their secret police files in this way; some did so earlier, others later, others later still.[9] My ability to write this book comes partly from having worked in Romania (which allows full access to one's file), rather than elsewhere. The files have participated in lengthy attempts to revise the country's past and consolidate an anticommunist hegemony, a subject I unfortunately cannot further explore here.[10]

Lustration was only one of the uses to which the secret police files could be put. Anyone who simply wanted to know what had been going on around them during the communist period, and especially the names of those who had informed on them, could request their file. In addition, accredited researchers like me could request any number of files for scholarly purposes. I therefore approached my file already bearing two identities: I was a "victim" (the term Romanians use) of Securitate surveillance, and I was researching the surveillance of foreign scholars during the Cold War, using my own case as an example of how it worked.

The second answer to how I got my file is that shortly after the Securitate archive was opened, I had begun using it for a research project with UCLA sociologist Gail Kligman on how the communists had created Romania's collective farms. The research produced our book *Peasants under Siege*. We worked with the institution set up to administer public access to the archive, the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, widely referred to by its Romanian acronym CNSAS (cheh neh SASS). Because Gail and I found that the CNSAS archive held a lot of useful material, we spent two weeks or so there every summer for several years, getting to know the employees and copying documents for our book. During my 2006 visit, the by-now-familiar supervisor of the reading room asked me why I hadn't petitioned to see my own file. Since I had had no idea that non-Romanians could do so, it had never occurred to me to ask for it; now I learned that the law permitted file access to citizens of any NATO country. When I told her that I wasn't at all sure I wanted to know

Files in the CNSAS archive. Courtesy of Cristina Anisescu.

what was in it, she replied that if I requested it I might never get it, or finding it might take a long time. If it finally came, I could decide whether I wanted to read it or not.

So with some trepidation I applied for the file, and in late fall of 2007 (after, I assume, a close reading and possible culling of its contents) I was told that it was ready for me. The next May, I arrived in the reading room to see on a table three huge stacks of yellowing dossiers plus a fourth small one. There were eleven volumes in all. Each stack contained multiple volumes of 300–400 pages apiece, covered in cardboard and bound with string. I began to read, spending several hours going through them and completely forgetting about lunch. When I finally came up for air, I looked at the people around me and found myself thinking they were all secret police informers rather than objects of surveillance reading their files, like me. How seductive is this secret world of the file! How it sucks you in, quietly insinuating its categories into your thoughts! (A colleague told me then that she had stopped her research in the archive for a while because she was feeling poisoned.) Having seen enough of the file to be both intrigued and appalled, I ordered a copy of the whole thing—and had to buy an extra suitcase to take home its 2,781 pages, which filled my new brown carry-on entirely.

For the next two years the file sat menacingly in a box in the corner of my study while I finished another book. Then I dithered for some time about whether I really wanted to know what was in that box. Finally I read the file with care in the autumn of 2010. That reading aroused very complex feelings: outrage at seeing photos that a hidden camera had taken of me in my underwear; despair and anger at learning of people whom I had considered close friends yet who had given nasty informers' reports on me; terrible remorse at learning how I myself had delivered friends to the Securitate by being careless; amusement at how officers had garbled important facts; indignation at the ugly picture of me that surfaces in these pages (cold as ice, manipulative, scheming); and above all, like other readers of their files, astonishment at the remarkable extent of the surveillance—the sixteen- and eighteen-hour days of following me around, the intercepted correspondence, the eavesdropping and wiretaps. . . . My surveillance engaged the visual and the auditory almost equally, enriched by their interplay with the text and with my own sense-making efforts. I found the variety and force of the conflicting emotions all these aroused—along with the sensation that the Securitate knew absolutely *everything*, down to my most intimate thoughts—quite exhausting.

These emotions form one of the challenges to my telling this story of surveillance. I must try to sort them out, learn something from them, domesticate them, domesticate the file itself. I must move from rage and depression at what the officers did to fascination with how they did it. Another challenge concerns how much of my private life to reveal—a scruple my officers did not observe, as they festooned their pages about me with nearly-nude photographs, the names of lovers, and other intimate details, sending some upward for the delectation of their bosses. If the Securitate had no concept of privacy, what hope have I of retrieving any now? Yet other obstacles lie in whether to reveal the names of people who figure in my file, or rather to protect them in exchange for their willingness to speak with me about it (I chose this path), and whether to "correct" things in the file that are outright misrepresentations from my point of view (I mostly decided not to). These are all complex challenges.

> > >

Responding to my file engages me in a complexly layered chain of research. First, I conducted my fieldwork—participating, observing, and talking with people—and stored the results in field notes. These form the first layer of

My Securitate file. Courtesy of CNSAS staff.

the research chain. Alongside this, the Securitate conducted research on me conducting research, using their conversations with Romanian informers, my movements, my phone calls and correspondence, and my own field notes and intimate journals; they stored the results in dossiers of officers' and informers' reports. That is the second layer. Now I conduct research on their research on me conducting research; I use their notes and some conversations with their informers and even, as we will see, with some officers themselves. This is the third layer. And I have plenty of reason to think the successor organization to the Securitate, the SRI (Romanian Information Service), is laying down a fourth layer of research, as my writing offers them new "data" in the form of publications (such as my 2014 book *Secrets and Truths*),[11] as well as through talks and interviews in Romania that show them what I am up to. This time, however, I do not have access to their "research notes": my file access stops at 1989.

Characteristics of the Files

Between July 1973 and November 1988 I conducted forty months of research in Romania, staying for greater or lesser amounts of time in four places and thus posing problems of coordination for the Securitate. I spent the most

Map of Romania with locations mentioned.

time, during the 1970s, in the village of Aurel Vlaicu in the Transylvanian county of Hunedoara. Next were the cities of Cluj in Transylvania's northwest and, briefly, Iaşi, in Moldavia, in the northeast—both in the 1980s. Throughout these two decades I periodically went for my mail to Bucharest, in the south. Although there are some things I would have expected to find in the file and do not, on the whole it represents my life in Romania well, both spatially and temporally. Whether or not it has been "cleaned up," as some would claim, I cannot say.

Because the problems of particular concern to the top Securitate generals in Bucharest varied significantly by region and time period, the language and the issues addressed in the file vary as well. Each of its eleven volumes bears one of four identifying numbers and represents one or another of the places where I lived. The files for Cluj (the largest file by far) and for Vlaicu each have different numbers. A third number contains some duplicates from those two and also material from Bucharest and Iaşi. The fourth small volume (ninety-four pages) covers only 1987–89; it was created by the Foreign Intelligence Service (CIE)—Romania's CIA—rather than the domestic branch, source of the other volumes.

My CNSAS colleague Virgiliu gave me the following account of the archive and its files: "The CNSAS archive is not like a library, and the life of a dossier is not the same as that of a book between covers. It's constantly shifting; things are thrown out by the case officer or the person who puts it together, so no file has in it now everything that was ever destined for it. The officer has his own exigencies, related to justifying or legitimating himself and his activity, but he is also subject to other pressures from above." This means that reading one's file is a bit like an archeological excavation. One knows one will get only fragments of what was there and will have few clues concerning what is not. Moreover, files are shaped differently according to the officers who compiled them and the archivists who periodically culled them. A person's file, then, has considerable individuality—not just because it deals with an individual but because each of the several officers contributes differently to each case.

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One of the oddest features of the file is its proliferation of pseudonyms. This is a function of something all intelligence organizations do: compartmentalize their different tasks and services by walling off each sector of activity from the others, so as to protect their secrets. The people who shadow me use one pseudonym for me; the people censoring my correspondence use another—and different ones for the different places where I lived; the people eavesdropping on phone calls or conversations in restaurants may use yet another; and the various case officers who receive all these reports use still others. (Targets do sometimes appear in documents with their own names, especially in the early stages of an investigation.) Officers create a target's pseudonym based on something specific to the person (such as the occupation "Folklorist") or, very commonly, by taking a letter or syllable of their first or last name and creating a new name from it. Hence, I am "VERA," based on "VERdery" with an added *a*. I am also "VIKY," "VALY," "KORA," "KITTY," "KATY," or (for the Foreign Intelligence Service) "VANESSA," "VADU," or "VERONA": ten different characters. In Romania a person who baptizes another becomes their "godparent"; therefore, I am multiply blessed by having so many godparents to watch over me.

The people who informed on me, with a few exceptions, had pseudonyms as well, and so did many of the places in which they met their officers. Informers' pseudonyms are generally created in the same way as

the target's. An informer who is employed only on occasion for a specific problem, however, without being recruited and signing an oath of confidentiality that could entail more extensive reporting, might receive no pseudonym; rather, the officer would use the person's name (perhaps enclosing it in quotation marks, to indicate informer status). In general, the only people in a given set of files who do not have pseudonyms are the Securitate officers themselves (known popularly as *Secus* [SEH kooz] or *securişti* [*seh koo REESHT*, singular *seh koo REEST*]—terms I will use interchangeably). The files therefore create a world of their own, in which the officers are "natives" and thus require no new names, while everyone else has to be re-baptized.

Typical of this world is the use of an idiosyncratic language, including terms like "element" and "target" or "objective" (*obiectiv*) in the sense of a military objective—their words for the people they follow. Once a target becomes sufficiently suspect to have a full investigation, a specific kind of file is opened: a DUI (*dosar de urmărire informativă*) or "dossier of informative pursual." Eight of my eleven volumes form two DUIs, one each from Hunedoara County and the city of Cluj. Two more volumes fall into a different kind of file: those set up around certain "problems." The "problem" might be religious sects, or Romania's German or Hungarian minorities, or foreign students and researchers, by country. The "problem" file for "Lecturers, doctoral researchers, and students from the USA" consists of twenty-six weighty volumes including pretty much every U.S. scholar who ever went to communist Romania, sometimes with a few pages only, sometimes with several hundred. I occupy two enormous volumes of those twenty-six—more than any other U.S. scholar by far. We will see a number of reasons for this, among them the number of forms of spying of which I was suspected and the variety of places in which I spent time.

When I first read my huge file I felt very important, but I was chastened when I looked through that twenty-six-volume file. Nothing in my graduate school training had prepared me for this. Virtually every one of the scholars was assumed to be a spy; I was unique only in the number of pages I commanded. Many had been declared *personae non grata*, refused reentry, and/or tossed out of the country, as was recommended in my case too.[12] A former Secu officer explained it to me in 2014: "There were a lot of foreigners around in those years. We had to see what you were up to. It was, after all, the Cold War!" In these texts, I and other Americans are regularly referred to as "CIA agents." Therefore, in the Securitate's view, "spy" was the default identity for Western scholars.

For officers to assume that "VERA," my spy doppelganger, was my "true" self was, indeed, not far-fetched. Many embassy personnel, particularly the political attachés, likely had intelligence connections, which some of the scholars going to the Soviet bloc might have had as well (one of the Fulbright lecturers himself told me that he did). Recent research shows that numerous U.S. organizations, especially cultural ones, were CIA fronts. Most of the people involved in their activities had no idea that the CIA was their backer—that CIA funds supported work by USAID, and that the CIA regularly approached scholars preparing to go on the exchanges.[13] Although individual scholars protested this treatment, there was nothing like the backlash that arose in the early years of the twenty-first century, with the attempted integration of anthropologists into the Human Terrain System in Afghanistan, for instance. David Price discusses numerous anthropologists accused of being spies, as well as examples of intelligence officers using anthropological cover for their work.[14] These sorts of CIA connections were precisely what the communist secret police suspected. They noted time after time in the files relating to U.S. researchers something like, "We have data showing that Americans in the exchange programs are under the patronage of the CIA, and their research themes are part of a general plan to collect information about our country."

We should not be surprised by this: after all, our own intelligence services made exactly the same assumption about scholars coming from the Soviet bloc. In 1983, a Romanian returning from a trip to the United States informed his handler about an interview given by William Casey, then head of the CIA, in which (in the words of this informer)

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he called the public's attention to the danger represented by the scientific and technical specialists from socialist countries in programs of cultural and scientific exchange in universities, research institutes, and other American institutions. In the CIA's opinion the great majority of these specialists have technological and scientific espionage as their mission. Especially dangerous are the Fulbright grantees, who almost without exception have such missions. On behalf of the CIA, Dr. Casey . . . recommended avoiding close personal contacts with these specialists from socialist countries.[15]

Tit for tat. Indeed, the exchange-grant agency IREX, my sponsor, had itself been formed by scholars who wished to prevent the chairman of its precursor from using it to promote spying rather than scholarship.

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Reasons for my appearing to be a spy—that is, for my doppelganger to be not a double but my true self—are all over this file. To begin with, I came to Romania in 1973 claiming to be an ethnographer interested in folklore, a discipline familiar to any Romanian having a university degree (and most *securişi* hired after 1970 had one). For decades prior to the communist regime and to some degree after it began as well, Romanian ethnographers had done first-rate research in rural areas. They tended to do it in a particular way, however, which distinguished them from U.S. anthropologists: a team of scholars would descend on a village for a couple of weeks, each asking about specific things (customs, dress, folktales, rituals, dialect) and each usually concentrating on a small number of village "experts." After that they would pool their results and write them up, often collectively. No one came alone and settled in a single village for over a year, as I did. No one talked with many if not most people in the village, or asked all kinds of questions about everything, from village history under the Habsburg Empire to the way Germans and Romanians raised pigs and cows in the 1930s to intermarriage in the 1970s. The fact that I did so meant I must be going beyond the bounds of the project I had come with, and that made it even more likely that I was lying and spying rather than doing ethnography. In any case, what I was doing bore scant resemblance to anything *securişti* would have recognized as such. More pertinent, according to Romanian sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe, they didn't really see the difference between ethnography and espionage, something he spent countless hours trying unsuccessfully to explain to his Securitate handler.[16]

Second, the way I carried myself was suspect. At least, so it seemed to my friend Emilia, who told me that when she met me in 1990 she immediately thought I might be a spy: "You were dressed very modestly, you didn't hold yourself above us. Your style was to reduce the difference between yourself and Romanians, under-communicating it." In short, my manner of dress was a form of hiding. Eventually she came to see it as my way of trying to form good relations with villagers, but her first thought was, "Maybe she's a spy. Instead of seeming like someone from a totally different world, you seemed to be one of us"—that is, she thought I had been specifically trained to fit in.

I hid in other ways, too. Often when I took the train, I would not reveal my U.S. identity up front but would participate in the conversation as long as possible until someone would finally ask, "But where are you from *really*?" This sometimes enabled me to avoid tedious talk about life in America and to see what people had to say when my foreignness was not the focus of the conversation. Such hiding and listening, I now realize, made me a lot like a *securist*. Indeed, as we will see, the officers draw a parallel between my ethnographic practices and those of intelligence work. They recognize me as a spy because I do some of the things they do—I use code names and write of "informants," for instance, and both of us collect "socio-political information" of all kinds rather than just focusing on a specific issue. So what *are* the similarities and differences between these two different modalities of information gathering: spying and ethnography? When I read in the file that I "exploit people for informative purposes," can I deny that anthropologists often do just that, as Securitate officers do? Isn't this part of the critique of my discipline that likens it to a colonial practice?

In fact, as I read I begin to feel my doppelganger taking over: I find myself becoming a spy, or at least I see the reasons for the Securitate's pursuing me as one. Our aims and methods differ, of course. But reading the file does make me begin to wonder: Was I a spy, and in what ways? Can I get close enough to the Securitate now to find out?

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What benefit is there to reading one's file? It is a painful process, one that has ruined friendships and even marriages. Consonant with my initial hesitation, I asked for mine without having a specific agenda for it. I'd had a vague idea of writing something from it but no clear sense of what that would be. Once I started to read it, the numerous reactions that washed over me gradually coagulated into the idea of using the file as a way to understand both the communist regime and the experience of surveillance in it. My file would help me recapture my history in Romania; through that, I could approach these larger themes.

To describe being spied upon would also permit me to explore how surveillance affects the process of trying to learn about another way of life—of doing ethnography—in the face of efforts to prevent it. The question my file raises is, what does the presence and intervention of the secret police do to that process? How does one negotiate a relation with "another" in a Cold War cli-

mate? Even though I did not fully realize it at the time, constant surveillance substantially shifted the terrain of field research, which relies on that fragile relationship, trust. Although ethnography is possible in its absence, our best work rests upon it. In a context of surveillance, a constant current of mistrust and doubt eats away at trusting relations. Every conversation with someone becomes anchored by the presence of a third, often hidden—a third of whom I was at first largely unaware and with whom I could develop no relationship: the Securitate officer. That third affected all relationships, maintaining a continual drag on the growth of new ones, pulling each of them off center, just as an illicit affair decenters a person's marriage. Sometimes that hidden third was actually involved with my respondents; sometimes he (rarely she) was just a hidden possibility they might fear. He might be undermining the relations I could negotiate with others by spreading rumors that would affect people's vision of me or their sense of safety, and he did so under a regime of secrecy that I could not combat. By emphasizing this, I can use my file to bring global power relations into the intimacy of the field encounter, complicating a certain style of anthropology that focuses mainly on interpersonal negotiation and dialogue.[17]

Secrecy and States

Trying to grasp another way of life is always challenging, but especially so under conditions of secrecy. What is fieldwork like when done in the context of secrets and lies? How did the culture and apparatus of secrecy affect me, my research, my writing, my relationships?[18] In the United States, the concept of transparency has a fundamental place in ideas about personal behavior, as well as in notions of democratic practice (though not, unfortunately, in the practice itself). This made living in a forest of secrets especially fraught for someone like me, at the time an unreflective believer in "telling it like it is."

Secrecy was the essential medium of Securitate practices. It was also pervasive in all spheres of 1980s Romania, under the "wise guidance" of the Communist Party led by Nicolae Ceauşescu, whose rule had by then become an ugly dictatorship. Legislation governing the "state secret" prohibited revealing that secret but said almost nothing about its content. By making it an abstraction, in the words of philosopher István Király, the law "opened the way for a proliferation of the category of the secret unimaginable in other conditions."[19] In the Securitate specifically, both the identity and the work of many officers were secret except to those whom they recruited to inform—and those people were ordered not to reveal what they knew. Because the

Surveillance photo of "VERA" loaded down with sacks, 1985. Courtesy of ACNSAS-FI.

officers assumed that my true purposes were hidden, to discern my intentions they themselves must be hidden as well. They were obsessed with other hidden things too: for instance, my shadowers always mentioned in their reports the bags or sacks I was carrying, in which something could be hidden. They were dying to know what it was. In addition, they were distressed not to be able to get into my locked suitcase to discover its secret contents.

The fact of surveillance itself was not a secret: it was known to all, at least in theory. Cristina Vatulescu observes that secrecy in the Soviet Union became a spectacle, as the NKVD/KGB carefully orchestrated a public cult for itself. During show trials, one could see huge piles of police dossiers on the table, visibly representing the secrets buried within them.[20] Most of the documents in my file are classified TOP SECRET (STRICT SECRET) in the upper right-hand corner (the more lowly designation SECRET appears very seldom). Does this

STRICT SECRET

Nr.D-3/00148.932 din 5 ianuarie 1985

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C.N.S.A.S
11 JUN 2008
Direcția Arhivă Centrală

N O T A

VERDERY KATHARINE , în vîrstă de 36 de ani, profesor în cadrul Departamentului de antropologie al Universității "JOHN HOPKINS" din Baltimore - S.U.A., identificată a fi agentă a serviciului american de spionaj, este lucrată prin dosar de urmărire informativă,sub controlul Direcției a III-a,de către Serviciul III – Cluj.
A venit în R.S.România în luna august 1984,ca cercetătoare, pe o perioadă de 20 de luni, beneficiind de o bursă I.R.E.X., cu scopul declarat de a efectua un studiu sociologic în legătură cu modul în care se reflectă istoria națională în conștiința po-

"TOP SECRET" document recommending my expulsion, 1985. Courtesy of ACNSAS-FI.

represent the actual presence of a secret, or is it rather the spectacle of one? Or was putting it there like applying a stamp with the place and date, a routine symbol of their work?

The secrecy I will describe here permeated Romanian society, but it was rooted in a specific social location: that of the state apparatus, occupied by the Romanian Communist Party. To invoke "the state" is to enter a conceptual minefield, which I will not attempt to clear; I merely lay out some of my working assumptions. The term "state" refers to something that has organizational, territorial, and ideological aspects. On the one hand, it has a very material existence in buildings, in institutions such as legislatures, and in bureaucratic practices, all linked to specific territories. On the other, extensive ideological work by groups within it goes into creating the impression that a state is a real actor, which "does" things. A more useful approach would see it as a fiction, an imaginary, which presents the appearance of unitary action. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines states first by their possessing a monopoly on legitimate physical and symbolic violence, then as "a principle of orthodoxy, of consensus on the meaning of the world," "a collective fiction and well-founded illusion," one of whose basic functions is "to produce and canonize social classifications." People, he suggests, are coded by the state, which produces legitimate identities.[21] Sociologist Philip Abrams pursues a similar line, following Foucault, seeing the state as "an ideological power,"

"an imaginative construction." Because it does not exist, "our efforts to study it as a thing can only be contributing to the persistence of an illusion. . . . The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is."[22] If readers find themselves resisting these ideas, that testifies to the power of statist ideology.

Secrecy (which I have explored at greater length in *Secrets and Truths*) has been a fundamental ingredient of those masking processes. Its place in state practices has proliferated in Western countries with the appearance of security states and comprehensive electronic surveillance of citizens. Ethnographies of security in both historical and comparative dimensions have blossomed, joining earlier discussions of secrecy and a flourishing anthropology of the state, which began in the 1980s.[23] Abrams states the connection concisely: "The real official secret . . . is the secret of the non-existence of the state."[24] Secrecy therefore serves "the state" by helping to create its illusion. This aptly describes the Securitate's job, which thrived on masking the actual situation. The Securitate, while committed to assessing objective threats, often produced instead "highly speculative visions of covert dangers" that turned inconsequential persons into "powerful agents of global intrigue," both necessitating and empowering the existence of a secret police.[25]

If *secrecy* is easily made visible, it nonetheless works in tandem with the hiding of *secrets*, which often requires that those who work with secrets be invisible. The Securitate's job was to contain enemies, including us foreigners, by discovering our secrets but not being seen to do so. Toward this aim, they recruited informers, who might help them discover the target's basic secret: whether he or she was an "enemy" and how that enemy was doing his or her evil work. In practice, though, they *assumed* that foreign researchers were enemies, so it was no secret. For me, by contrast, followed by legions of informers and the multiple officers who handled my case, the paramount secret is the rudimentary one of my pursuers' identities—*Who were they?*—and, in the case of officers, their actual physical presence. What did they look like? How did they sound? Which of my friends might be reporting to the Securitate on my activities? Which of the people who sought me out did so from simple curiosity or liking, and which were tasked with doing so by their officer? During my fieldwork, especially in the 1970s, I tended to think about this rather seldom, for three reasons. First, constantly wondering who was trustworthy would make it impossible to work; second, I had a wholly inadequate concept of the magnitude of my surveillance; and third, I thought I

would win the Securitate's confidence by being transparent and aboveboard. What remarkable naiveté!—and what ethnocentrism, to imagine that "transparency" would be a value for a communist intelligence service! How little I knew.

I worked, then, surrounded by secrets, many of them contained in my file. The fate of the secret differs, however, in how one approaches it. Some people think secrets exist below the surface, to be unearthed through a dialectic of secrecy and revelation. These people will read the file—and this book—to uncover secrets and their content. For others, by contrast, there is no secret truth to be revealed under the surface, only a collection of fragments too disparate to be read for such a secret. Do I have a secret to reveal or merely the succession of small fragments in which (reflecting the composition of my file) I have composed this book?

Identities

Anthropologists in the field play a variant of the role of "foreign visitor." We go to some place, usually different from our home place, and hang out with the people we meet, trying to learn something of how they see and act in the world. In the process, we present them with the challenge of how to account for our presence, how to understand who we are and what we are doing. There is much room here for reciprocal identity-creation. Sometimes we are seen as missionaries trying to convert the locals, sometimes as poachers on their sacred knowledge. In many places, we have been viewed as spies and kept under surveillance for that reason.[26]

If my file indicates multiple identities, with "spy" among them, the Securitate is not their only source. Romanians I met created them for me as well. For example, one day I went to the university library in Bucharest to do some reading. The librarian filed a report indicating what I had checked out and in addition told the reporting officer that I am "from a family of Hungarian Jews" (surprising, to someone from a family of French and British Protestants). In a positive vein, whereas the Securitate elaborated my qualities as an enemy, many Romanians in the villages and towns where I lived came to regard me as a friend—or at least as someone who was relatively harmless, if not indeed a likable sort of person who might become a friend eventually. Some sought to make me a resource in local quarrels or perhaps saw me as a kind of trader, a possible source of foreign goods (high-quality coffee, blue jeans, Kent cigarettes, maybe even dollars). After I finished my PhD, still others saw me as simply "Mrs. Professor," holder of a respected title that

made me seem out of reach. And a few offered to accept me as a kind of kin, the most precious identity of all—the one that keeps me going back to Aurel Vlaicu even now, just to see "my family" there.

In a sense, we are *all* multiplied by those we meet, who create versions of us that may not much resemble our own versions. Although this process is universal, it is particularly intense when major cultural boundaries are crossed: when a person from one cultural tradition enters into a very different one—the common situation of anthropologists—and especially when those boundaries are significant politically. Why, then, am I making so much of my presumed identity as a spy?

The difference—and it was huge—between most anthropologists and those of us working behind the Iron Curtain between the 1960s and 1989 is the towering importance of the Cold War. The Cold War environment virtually required that people from the United States be anticommunist and be seen as such; it shaped the identities that anthropologists doing such work could try to assume; it plunked us down in the heart of the great superpower stand-off; and it made our possible spying a virtual certainty, from the viewpoint of intelligence services on both sides. The meaning of any behavior in this setting was not subject to the usual ways of interpreting behavior but became something quite different. Talal Asad has argued that because national security politics makes the entire range of social conduct potentially suspicious, all behavior becomes a possible sign. Thus, "ordinary life becomes the domain of a search for hidden meaning that then points to hidden danger."[27] I believe this was not true—or was less true—of anthropologists working in other places during the Cold War.

As a result, doing fieldwork in a communist country inserted the researcher directly into a global context, giving things a significance they might not have had elsewhere. An anthropologist in the field "behind the Iron Curtain" was a point at which global political forces intersected; anything she did could be interpreted in that light. To take a trivial example, in 1988 an officer in Bucharest, learning that I had made a phone call to the city of Cluj, assumed that it was to a woman named Doina Cornea, who was then among Romania's handful of well-known dissidents. For that officer, an American suspected of being a CIA agent would naturally want to make contact with Doina Cornea (whom I have never met), though I'd actually called a historian colleague for a chat. But the officer's assumption turned my friendly phone call into a politically suspicious act.

Aside from the Cold War context, there is another important difference between the kinds of identity accrued by the anthropologist working in Soviet bloc countries and those working elsewhere: the communist secret police themselves specialized in just such identity-creation to an unusual extent. The doppelgangers they fabricated acquired a consistency and a degree of elaboration, the product of intense labor, far greater than the identities created elsewhere for the researcher suspected of being a missionary or other sort of person. Thus, although all anthropologists are "produced" to some degree by the environments in which we work, those of us who worked in the Soviet bloc during those years were "produced" much more thoroughly than most.

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When a U.S. editor approached Freud about publishing his autobiography, Freud reportedly answered, "What makes all autobiographies worthless is, after all, their mendacity." Deceitfulness is definitely a trait of this book (though perhaps not entirely in the way Freud meant), for it is based on my file—a fiction generated by the Securitate. My challenge here is to create something partway between fiction and fact. One form of "mendacity" is that I often use quotation marks for people's speech that I did not in fact record (many people had bad feelings about being taped in that society of hyper-surveillance), so the version I provide is actually approximate, rather than exact.

A second form is that I have chosen not to reveal the identities of most of the people I write about—some at their express request, others because I think that is what they would want or because my professional ethics indicate it. Therefore, just like the Securitate, I am compelled to use pseudonyms for my friends, informers, and the officers I interviewed, and to disguise their biographies—particularly those of the people who informed on me. But if I am not to use their real names, I have the problem of making up pseudonyms for them. I cannot simply use the pseudonyms that are in my files, which are recognizable to at least some researchers and former officers. So I must create new ones. When I am dealing with informers or Secus themselves, my pseudonyms take the form used by the officers—surrounded by quotation marks. In other cases I indicate that it is a pseudonym by placing an asterisk before the name at its first use. With some of my friends, I use their own names without special punctuation, and I have their permission to

do so. Then there are the names of people who are mentioned in documents, for whom I make up initials. In a few cases my fabrications extend to facts of people's lives, making me every bit the demiurge my *securişti* were. I find this troubling but necessary.

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Identity enters into this story in another way as well, having to do with what field research is like. It often entails a kind of regression to childhood, especially at the beginning. Anthropologists going to an unknown place find themselves in the position of children who are learning to live in society: they may have imperfect command of speech, their control of the language of symbols is at best rudimentary, they don't know the rules of proper behavior or the important social players, and they have yet to establish the system of social alliances that will carry them through. This quasi-infantilization of adult anthropologists can make us vulnerable to forms of regression—certainly it did in my case—that shift "who we are."

Perhaps connected with that: although fieldwork was often difficult, I generally found it exhilarating, in part because I felt less constrained by my personality than I normally do. Not only was being in a different place exciting, but also, like so many other foreigners away from home, I did and felt things that I normally wouldn't. I could approach people with a child's heart, developing continuous crushes in a pattern of even weaker emotional boundaries than was usual for me. I developed a kind of "inner Romanian" (my very own doppelganger?) who enjoyed transgressing in ways I usually forbade myself. Something in the field situation made me more receptive to people than usual—as some of them apparently were to me. This partly reflected our reciprocal interests: each of us wanted things from the other (such as information, Western goods, connections), and liking one another would facilitate that.

The theme of multiple forms of identity, then, engaging me along with Securitate officers and other Romanians I encounter in a constant stream of refashioning, is an apt one. It continues in the form of my writing, as I double myself by sometimes separating a narrative voice in the present from the "Kathy" of my earlier research (usually when "she" is doing something "I" don't like). This profusion of characters suits the fiction of my file, in which officers use bits and pieces of evidence to put together a form of conscious-

ness that they attribute to me as their character. Will there be a "Pygmalion" moment when their creation meets them face to face?

If the identities created by the Securitate predominate in this story, that is because they affected many of my other identities, and because the Securitate left far richer evidence of theirs. Besides, it was their archive that challenged me to reconsider my entire history in Romania, and they gave me the basis for doing so: with a weak memory and no field diary, I have only this file, my field notes (which mainly tell whom I interviewed and what I read), and some correspondence to remind me of what I did in Romania and who I was. My file—and, thus, the angle of vision of the Securitate officers who compiled it—significantly grounds my recollections now. This is not really "my" book, then; it is *ours.* At times I even write about myself in the third person, so as to privilege the officers' angle of vision and their quality as "coauthor." In consequence, this is a many-voiced work that implicitly challenges both the notion of authorship and the idea of a memoir.

If identity is one theme, secrecy is another. It is the premise of the whole endeavor. Without secrecy there would be no file, no doppelgangers, no possibilities for betrayal, no prospect of revelations. What secrets govern this writing, and how will they be uncovered? Do they have to do with why I was not expelled, as several documents proposed I should be? With the reasons I was considered dangerous? With uncovering hidden *securişti?* Or with what unexpected things I find, when I finally get into the ethnography of my fieldwork experience?

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Among the U.S. researchers I know who have worked in Romania, nearly all have gotten their files—and are susceptible to jocular comparisons about size. Having a file confirms our sense of our own importance. But once the joking is over, we begin to contemplate the new and different selves that this file creates and with which we have to come to terms. Timothy Garton Ash, reading his East German secret police (Stasi) file, wonders whether he could really be that person they called "Romeo," with his fumblings, clumsiness, pretentiousness, and snobbery.[28] Having these data from the Securitate is a bit like entering into social media: the data swirl around me like a cloud, shaping images of me that have little to do with what I think of myself.

One task the file imposes on me is to understand better the person that reading it has made me, to befriend my doppelganger somehow, so it does not remain an evil twin. Another task is to use my encounter with the file to reveal more about the workings of the Securitate, about which we have had a fairly monochrome view, and of communism more generally. That goal, too, bends the genre of memoir. To be honest, I don't actually know what this book is. Being about parts of my life, it is a kind of memoir, but one that also contains the results of research—some of which is aimed at me myself, as I apply an ethnographer's methods to my own experience. Although this would make it a kind of "autoethnography," much of the research is also about other people, such as secret police officers and informers.[29] Because it tries to bring together two goals usually handled separately—an analysis of surveillance under socialism and a life story of the target of that surveillance—it is a hybrid sort of work. It approaches the secret police differently from my previous book, *Secrets and Truths*, with its extensive scholarly apparatus. This one is more experiential, though it too makes some claims to truth.

In the pages that follow, then, I go about my business as a researcher under surveillance, a process that fragments me into a series of doubles—some created by the secret police, some by my respondents and myself. At the time, I was not particularly aware of this: the last thing on my mind was "my identity" in relation to those I worked with. It was not customary in 1970s anthropology to think too much about that, and in any case, my scholarly sensibilities ran more to politics and the economy than to the fact that everyone was watching everyone else and creating hypotheses about who they were. I knew that in theory the Securitate was interested in me as well as in other people, but I initially had few clues as to the pervasiveness of the secrecy that was in fact my medium. Wedded as I was to the very American value of transparency, only gradually did I realize that my most vigorous efforts to be transparent were seen as hiding something.

The result is an account of how an untested young scholar first experienced communist Romania and attempted to do research in a place permeated with secrets and fabrications; how largely unbeknownst to her, her initial entanglement with the culture and apparatus of secrecy shaped the course of her work over the next sixteen years and beyond; and how her realization of that after the fact altered her sense of what she had accomplished and her assessment of her relations with people. She came to see herself not as a lone researcher but as always accompanied by a secret presence working in parallel with her, seeking to obstruct relations of trust she might try to build

and striving to uncover her secrets, just as she herself strove to uncover the secrets of life in communism.

At the same time, this is a story about how Securitate officers—the arm of the Romanian state charged with policing the line between inside and outside, between "friend" and "enemy"—both did their job and imagined the enemy they were policing. In the process of doing so, they carried out that state's work of creating human beings—of "making up people," as Ian Hacking puts it[30]—including people who are its enemies. The officers' imaginings are multiple; the organization does not work with a single master narrative but is itself fragmented across territory and time periods, as well as by its own practices of compartmentalization. Exploring these files helps to decompose the monolithic "totalitarian" identity of the Securitate and in the process to bring together the fragments that constitute my own.

NOTES

Prologue

1. Romania's Securitate was formed in 1948, with the help of the Soviet NKVD/KGB. It contained both foreign and domestic intelligence divisions, each of which—but especially the former—underwent massive restructuring after 1978, when the deputy head of foreign intelligence, Gen. Ion Mihai Pacepa, defected to the United States, the highest-ranking officer from the Eastern bloc ever to do so.

2. I do not know how widely it happens that intelligence organizations follow people back to their home country. Through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, I received sixteen pages from my FBI file. On one heavily redacted page there is a note: "It was ███'s opinion that several other agents of the RIS [Romania Intelligence Service] were also deployed in actions against Verdery."

3. Haggerty and Ericson refer to this same product of contemporary surveillance as a "data double." Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology* 51 (2000): 613.

4. This organization was formed in 1967 with a mix of government and private funding to sponsor scholarly exchanges with the Soviet bloc; it was an offshoot of a program started by the Ford Foundation in 1956 that sent scholars to the Soviet bloc on tourist visas. The idea was to have scholarly exchanges, but because of Senator McCarthy's actions, they could not be run through the government, as Fulbright grants were, without becoming so politicized as to render them useless for scholarly purposes. See David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

5. Herta Müller, "Securitate in All but Name" (interview), *Signandsight.com*, 31 August 2009, http://www.signandsight.com/features/1910.html.

6. Gabriel Liiceanu, *Dragul meu turnător* [My dear snitch] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 196.

7. For instance, Romanian writers Stelian Tănase, in *Acasă se vorbeşte în şoaptă: Dosar şi jurnal din anii tîrzii ai dictaturii* [At home they speak in whispers: File and journal from

the late years of the dictatorship] (Bucharest: Compania, 2002); and Dorin Tudoran, in *Eu, fiul lor: Dosar de Securitate* [I, their son: Securitate file] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2010).

8. A somewhat different form in which anthropologists might occasionally catch glimpses of themselves under surveillance is the files of the FBI. In his book *Glimpses into My Own Black Box: An Exercise in Self-Deconstruction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), George Stocking writes of the pages he was able to retrieve from that source.

9. In Poland, for example, where a lustration law was passed in 1997, only journalists, certified victims seeking exculpation, and researchers had access to the files: people accused of collaboration might or might not be allowed to see their files, and if so they could not make copies or notes, as is possible in Romania. In Hungary, following a period of partial access, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán proposed giving the files back to those on whom they had been kept—in other words, dismantling the secret police archive altogether. Files are particularly available in the former East Germany, for the public acted to prevent much of the destruction that occurred elsewhere (including Romania). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, citizens have access to their files, but many more were destroyed than in Germany.

10. See, e.g., Florin Poenaru, "Contesting Illusions: History and Intellectual Class Struggles in (Post)socialist Romania" (PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2013); and Lavinia Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London: Routledge, 2009).

11. That book differs from this one in several ways, including its more extensive scholarly apparatus, its discussions of secrecy and power and of compartmentalization in the work process, and its basis in archives and libraries rather than interviews and field research. The main substantive difference concerns its treatment of the secrecy of the secret police (see part II of this book).

12. For example, Steven Sampson and Sam Beck, among anthropologists, and a number of scholars from the Fulbright exchange. Beck, for instance, had been working on economic specializations, which included some fieldwork with Roma—a topic not welcomed by the authorities. This led to his being made *persona non grata*.

13. See, for instance, David Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999); and Engerman, *Know Your Enemy* (e.g., 91, 242–43). The existence of CIA connections, or suspicion of them, may have been truer of grantees who went to the Soviet Union than of those who went to Eastern Europe.

14. Price, *Cold War Anthropology*, ch. 8.

15. Archive of the Consiliul Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii (ACNSAS), Fond D, 12618/5, p. 23.

16. Information from Steven Sampson, email communication.

17. In his celebrated essay "On Ethnographic Authority," James Clifford writes of how we develop knowledge of other cultures, emphasizing a method that involves two or more conscious subjects negotiating a reality together. The result, he suggests, is not experience-based interpretation but a dialogic and polyphonic account. This view strikes me as wholly inadequate for the situations in which I found myself in the field.

James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21–54.

18. There is ample research on the phenomenon of secrecy in sociology, political science, and especially anthropology, which contains a large body of work on secret societies in places like New Guinea and Africa. See also Graham M. Jones, "Secrecy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 53–69. Because I report on some of this work in Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of the Romanian Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), my treatment of it here will be cursory.

19. István V. Király, *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului* [The existential phenomenology of the secret] (Bucharest: Editura Paralela 45, 2001), 84.

20. Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 4–5.

21. Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989–1992* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 3–10.

22. Quotes from Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1988): 68, 76, 69, 82.

23. For the former, see, e.g., Paul Amar, *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); David Lyon, ed., *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond* (Cullompton, UK: Willan, 2006); Mark Maguire, Catarina Frois, and Nils Zurawski, eds., *The Anthropology of Security: Perspectives from the Frontline of Policing, Counter-Terrorism, and Border Control* (London: Pluto, 2014); Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Verdery, *Secrets and Truths*. For the latter, see, for instance, John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

24. Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," 77.

25. John Borneman, Joseph Masco, and Katherine Verdery, "Espying Spies," *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33 (2015): 131.

26. See, for example, Steven C. Caton, *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005) (for Yemen); John Borneman, *Syrian Episodes: Sons, Fathers, and an Anthropologist in Aleppo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi, "Fieldwork Experience, Collaboration, and Interlocution: The 'Metaphysics of Presence' in Encounters with the Syrian Mukhabarat," in *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*, ed. John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 237–58 (for Syria); and some of the papers in Martin Sökefeld and Sabine Strasser, eds., "Under Suspicious Eyes: Surveillance States, Security Zones and Ethnographic Fieldwork," special issue of *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 141 (2016) (ranging across South Asia, Africa, and elsewhere). One did not have to work in Eastern Europe to be

suspected of spying. What distinguishes my case from those others is not just being under surveillance but having the officers' notes.

27. Talal Asad, "Thinking about Terrorism and Just War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23 (2010): 7.

28. Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 42.

29. I could extend it further than I do to show some effects on *Romanian* identity of being raised in an atmosphere of suspicion, but that would have required a different kind of fieldwork.

30. Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," *London Review of Books* 28 (17 August 2006): 23–26.

Chapter 1. The 1970s

1. Bill Skinner saved our 1973–74 correspondence until his death in 2008. I am grateful to his widow, Susan Mann, who was kind enough to send it to me, greatly enriching my recollection of that period.

2. Franz Boas, "Scientists as Spies," *The Nation* 109, no. 2842 (1919): 797.

3. See David H. Price's excellent books on this subject, particularly *Cold War Anthropology*. Among other cases that aroused anthropologists' ire were Project Camelot in Latin America, with its counterinsurgency goals, and the Human Terrain System in the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

4. Lily Tomlin, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, written by Jane Wagner (New Almaden, CA: Wolfe Video, 1992). Tomlin's word was not "paranoid" but "cynical."

5. "Moarte sigură cu cobră / Dar mai sigură cu Mobra."

6. This minority had been settled in Transylvania in two waves, during the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries, to guard the borders and improve agriculture. They were Romanian citizens but took their German identity very seriously.

7. In 2010 Romanian ethnographer Cosmin Budeanca carried out a few interviews in Aurel Vlaicu, asking what people thought of me, and was told, "They said she was a spy, they did. But after a while they got used to her. She stayed a long time, and they got used to her." Another response Budeanca received was more skeptical: "People said she was a spy, but if she was one they wouldn't have let her into the country. And she didn't have anything to spy *on*, 'cause we just talked about the collective farm. So if she has permission from Bucharest to be here, why would she be a spy? . . . What would she have wanted to do, overthrow our government?" My thanks to Dr. Budeanca for sharing his interviews with me.

8. Diana Georgescu, " 'Ceauşescu's Children': The Making and Unmaking of Romania's Last Socialist Generation (1965–2010)" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 2014).

9. To distinguish among people with the same name, like "Maria," Romanians often add a possessive with the person's spouse or parent. "Maria lu' Relu" was thus "Maria, Aurel's wife."

10. The film was arranged for by Dr. Cristina Anisescu, of the CNSAS, as part of the institution's youth outreach activities. Made by filmmaker Nicolae Mărgineanu, it included conversations with a number of my friends and colleagues in Cluj and Vlaicu, as well as a running interview with me about my earlier years in Romania.