Introduction

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Writing once again about "collaboration" in former communist states might seem inopportune. However, in December 2016, the Romanian parliamentary elections were won by a party that had a blatant campaign against civil society organizations, accusing them of being infiltrated by agents. The theme of "infiltration" has yet again pervaded transitional debates in a society where the secret services are still looming in the background as a dark force. It is no wonder that the attention was piqued of the predominantly non-cosmopolitan members of both urban and rural milieus, the victims of liberalization who could never really enjoy the benefits of intellectual free circulation and trade. One could say that a political fight has been unleashed not just between some grossly defined Left and Right, but between immobility versus mobility. The latter would include the urban middle class, professionals working in the entrepreneurial sector, intellectuals traveling abroad, and, according to media manipulations, agents of foreign NGOs. Questioning again the moral contours of cultural figures would therefore inadvertently endorse current and past media lynchings of intellectuals and civil society, at a time when autocratism, manipulation, and corruption are again the ingredients of power.

A few clarifications are thus needed. By analyzing a few cases of "go-betweens" in this issue of *East Central Europe*, it is our hope to highlight a *transactional* symptom prevalent in the lower echelons of the cultural and bureaucratic fields under communism. We do not focus only on the "collaboration" with the various secret police agencies, but with other social circles or organizations, and in so doing would like to decentralize the issue of police infiltration towards multiple dependence, mediation, and the self-instrumentalization of certain political and professional actors who thought—naively or otherwise—that they could shape circumstances. This does not amount to diminishing the pervasive role the secret police had during communism, nor the different responsibilities of those coming into contact with it. It rather reinforces the idea that one's possibilities for action were slim in a world in

which surveillance was not only real, but also internalized, and in which networking was a substitute for economic and professional autonomy. It also pinpoints the different strategies some of the versatile or fearful members of society chose out of a sense of survival, the internalized idea of widespread "collaborating" with the state in one form or another, or, last but not least, cultural diplomacy (understood here as lobbying or mediating between the state and institutions/organizations). So, even if the unity of analysis will be mainly that of personal life histories, we will try to shift the focus from the subject to that of the overall system which privileged a very personalist mode of functioning through connections, loyalties, clientelism, blackmailing, and a transgressive mode of communication/information through mediators, leaks, and reporting. Histories of personal compromise thus can become histories of the search for better life, accommodation to local patterns of living, and reflexive-ironic exercises in all kinds of "reporting."

The systemic and the individual perspectives cohere within each of the articles, but also across them. There are three case studies of individual collaborators plus two transversal studies of certain social categories defined by their ethnic mediation (e.g., between Hungarians and Romanians) or institutional position. The two essays written by Gábor Egry and Anca Șincan contextually supplement the individual idiosyncratic contributions by offering a broader view of the discursive and interpersonal issues involved in collaborating. They also function as methodological proposals for circumscribing the phenomenon of collaboration within that of institutional mediation and policy reinterpretation. Egry's article is showing the larger conceptual work invested in re-forging ethnic issues into policing activities. He also draws his examples from the archives of the interwar security organ Siguranța, thus further displacing the topic in time and place. Anca Șincan performs another realignment by presenting the intricacies of mediating between State and Church. She discusses not the thorny issue of the priests' collaboration with the secret police, but that of the religious inspectors. Rather than a moralizing and self-limiting account on the "devil's confessors" (e.g., Stan and Turcescu 2005), Anca Șincan asks broader questions about the collaboration between state and church. Her intercessors can be read as interpreters of a religious world to a secular one (and vice versa), thus introducing the larger idea of connecting adversarial orthodoxies (out of which a sub-genre could be that of interpreting propaganda and counter-propaganda, as in the article by Ioana Macrea-Toma). In other words, the articles of this issue proceed by placing collaboration with repressive institutions into family resemblance patterns: the cases share some commonalities for which variables are gradually replaced. They move from single Hungarian cases to societal implementation of irredentism, from anonymous

persons to intellectuals, from the Orthodox Church to the orthodoxies of the regime and its institutions. We the authors do not intend to classify the informers or to find certain models; nor do we proceed as an ad hoc grouping. Instead, we discuss a few cases which highlight each other by their contiguous resemblances. The morphological affinities will not, however, relativize "collaboration" as a phenomenon stretching indistinctly from the interwar up to the communist period. We take into account the differences between Stalinism, liberalization, and national communism with regards to repression and—hence—different internalized pressures to engage with the regime. As a matter of fact, by following some people across their life trajectory, we show the stratified nature of perceptions and, ultimately, actions that might be labeled as pragmatism or opportunism in late socialism.

From a certain perspective, we place our studies in the reactive category of countering a tabloid revelatory mode of dealing with the secret police files. The discussion about the ambiguities of "collaboration" was triggered by denunciatory media campaigns targeting prominent cultural figures. One could say that the insidious violent thrill of the documents infused journalism and certain types of research with a dichotomist propensity for mapping the omnipotent evil contra its targets. One usually invokes at this stage the persistence of the totalitarian paradigm, framed by Hannah Arendt and Carl Friedrich, according to which Communism and Nazism were regimes of total domination. However, such perspective is not just a matter of lingering episteme and lack of historical imagination in countries where liberal elites had a moral intake on communism. The archival legacy of the political police played a central role in maintaining a grim look at the past: The documents contain not only traces of surveillance operations for informational purposes. They also are the written evidence of direct repression through psychological means and political designation of enemies. They produced their real life effects through labeling of persons, intruding on their lives, and especially their social and professional circles. It is no wonder that their designating power is still strong within post-communism. Lumped together with agents in the category of perpetrators during transition, collaborators with the secret police underwent public trials akin to a media lynching within the context of lustration, intellectual battles, and the lingering denunciatory power of the files. It is an irony that the fields of arts and letters registered the most scandalous assaults after 1989, despite the different forms of opposition articulated against the various regimes. In the former GDR, the "outing" of people like Manfred Stole, Christa Wolf, Hermann Kant, Wolfgang Schnur, and prominent artists like Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski eventually conveyed the idea that the Stasi controlled the alternative spheres of culture and even helped in building them.

Such allegations that almost undermine any status of the alternative culture have been challenged by analyses showing the paradoxical intrusion and yet relative operative effectiveness of the Stasi in dealing with the opposition, as well as the opposition's different strategies to cope with it, sometimes even benefiting from the fragmentation and internal dissension produced by the informers. Such analyses insistently caution one's reading of files as well as understanding the process of institutional documentation. Paul Cooke and Nicholas Hubble warn against a unilateral reading of informers' files, which might prove indeed that the unofficial agents acted according to orders and that some of the alternative actions were a Stasi construction (1997: 123). They cite the case of a researcher who endorsed the Big Brother view of Stasi by reading only the file of Rainer Schedlinski and his mission to engage artists into a debate that would have prevented them from engaging in more confrontational action. The conclusion was that the *Ariadnefabrik*, the magazine in question which was supposed to bear the debate, was a Stasi concoction. Cooke and Hubble argue that Schedlinski had indeed an atomizing effect on the alternative circles, but this was actually beneficial to the existence of a guerilla type of opposition. Moreover, the Stasi actions were in fact *responses* to an already existing oppositional ferment and that *Ariadnefabrik* also contributed to the visibility of some of the artists abroad. Even if the Stasi orders have been carried out, their unintended consequences actually helped in the articulation of the ideas of the opposition. Other studies inquire into the very nature of the archival documents together with the inner motivations of the alleged collaborators. Muriel Blaive chose the case of Milan Kundera in order to argue in favor of methodological caution, privileging comparison, contextualization, and examination of plausibility over the search for the mere authenticity of a document/fact. According to her, it is not enough to state that Kundera reported on a deserter involved in economic espionage, but to analyze the context of fear, the extraordinary occurrence of such a deed, and the role of other agents and officers in revealing the actions of the spy (2009: 219). In Romania the former dissident Gabriel Andreescu turned into a fierce defender of those intellectuals accused of having been informers by analyzing how archives have been manipulated in literary battles and journalistic campaigns of defamation. In the case of Adrian Marino, the outcast and misanthropic literary theorist who had been persecuted in the 1950s and never held any university position, Andreescu pinpoints the implied compromises a person traveling abroad was supposed to make for the sake of Romanian culture (2013: 19–54). Nothing, however, indicates malicious reporting besides the neutral narration of cultural networking. Either way it is impossible to tell with certainty, since the voice of the intellectual and that of the officer summarizing meetings are hard

to disentangle and one would need extensive knowledge of discursive police tropes and information from other files to examine any allegation. Confronted with the unjust posthumous symbolic trials concerning victims of the regime (in comparison with the silence surrounding those belonging to the core of the repressive apparatus), Andreescu's choice is radical: he considers that both Securitate and post-communist journalism mistreated facts (the former even invented "informers" and the second hungrily exploited the information). The virulence of the rigged exposures proves the distressing reproduction of the "truth-effect" of files even after 1989. Writing again about forms of collaboration is partly a result of the incriminatory power of the files and of the classificatory schemes they contain.

It is no wonder that work on the Securitate files was understood as merely their publication. The self-revelatory dimension of such a corpus produced a genre of historical research: the documentary volume prefaced by the historian or the curator of such files. In Romania, this practice reproduced the bureaucratic organization of files that were created to surveil a person (the file for operative surveillance), to exploit an informer (network file), or to monitor a "problem." In the former GDR such classifications were reinforced legally in defining access to the files: they maintained the moral antagonism of those who inflicted pain versus those who endured it by considering *public* all the files of those producing events (agents and informers) and considering *personal* (and therefore non-disclosable) all the files of those succumbing to them (Markovits 2001). Even if the opening of the archives of the former secret police in the ex-communist states differed in terms of access and provisions regarding privacy, such a distinction still hovered over the pan-Eastern European historiographic field as a combined result of a complex moral-cognitive response to a repressive past and the performative value of the files, along the binomial of loyalty/enmity to the regime. For a while, Inga Markovits's warnings with regards to the records of the communist past seemed true: the classification of former secret police files as belonging to either perpetrators (to which also collaborators belonged) or victims made research into the grey zones of collaboration and victimhood a distant prospect.

In Romania as well as in Germany such distinctions not only fed the media campaigns with readymade topics (especially informers' files and names), but also engendered methodological guides written by those in charge of the Securitate files, who, despite the good intentions, reiterated categories as *archetypes*.[1] The *Informer* acquired a sort of a morphological consistency,

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1   In Romania the curatorial institution in charge of the former Securitate files is the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS). Created in 2000, CNSAS was also

being the person who signed a "Faustian pact" with the Securitate (Albu 2008: 11) and for whom psychological analyses could find fertile ground. Independent of the context, the informer embraced duplicity out of a defensive attitude towards the officer and an offensive one towards the victim (Anisescu 2007: 34). Case studies were typecast, running along a quantitative spectrum of duplicity, from the most blatant forms of collaboration to resistance at being recruited. Such an understanding along the thread of inner resistance and vulnerabilities of the soul dominated the analyses concerned with the relationship between society and political police. One of the early books dedicated to *informers as such*, Barbara Miller's *The Stasi Files Unveiled: Guilt and Compliance in a Unified Germany*, originated as a PhD dissertation about the "unofficial collaborator" in the GDR. The persons randomly interviewed were presented by way of high speed biographies against the background of the "archetypical remorseless informer" (Miller 2004: 26). In a somewhat similar way, Sonia Combe (1999) produced miniature typecast portraits, pinning down intellectual figures from the GDR with labels, like for an insectarium: "untouchable mandarin," "wavering psychologist," "cautious Romanist," and "historian apparatchik." Unlike other approaches, she nevertheless restricted the topic of collaboration to the academic field, giving it a comparative and context-sensitive perspective, where choices were not just psychologically driven impulses, but social and professional strategies within limited fields of possibility. This combination of reading files along the archival grain together with a comprehensive and transversal field analysis of options and relevant cases is rare. The handiest approach is still an ad hoc grouping of persons from the same professional category, thus giving the impression of covering the subject by only covering a spectrum. This is the case, for example, with the recent scholarship of Caterina Preda in an issue of *Hungarian Historical Review* dedicated to "collaboration." By presenting "opposing cases" and by diluting the sense of collaboration into all kinds of fields, the researcher claims to bring new insights into the relationship between the state and artists (Preda 2005). Nevertheless, a better mapping of the informers' *habitus* is making its way through "collaboration studies." Alison Lewis chooses three unrelated cases, but tries for each of them to delineate choices as being structured by personal as well as professional factors. Paradoxes arise, like for example that of the underground leader Sascha

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invested with the mission for revealing past collaborations of those running for political and public office. This legal investment was highly controversial, the law was changed several times, and CNSAS was ultimately forbidden to issue judicial verdicts. Its selective and problematic outings of "collaborators" were also subjected to debates. Researchers of the institution wrote methodological guides on "informers."

Anderson, who radicalized his artistic stance after becoming an informer, thus proving that complicitous and dissident attitudes are not just simultaneous, but somehow mutually enriching (Lewis 2016: 27–55).

Our attempt in this issue of *ECE* is to keep the focus on *milieu-dependent position taking* and to transgress the classificatory power of files despite the limits in the genre of life history study. Our persons of interest are protagonists of liminal spaces, pendulating between fields of action—not only secret police collaborators, but political mediators at large. Such methodological choices are more than a historiographic distancing from the epistemic categories contained in the archival sources. They are also an ethical distancing from strictly procedural types of lustrations which maintained the label "collaborator" for persons having had contact with the political police while removing from the vetting process former representatives of the nomenklatura (Andreescu 2013: 150–151). Given the fact that it would be odd to define malevolent influence with the help of a repressive institution, we try to consider "collaboration" as a wider phenomenon without diluting it under the more general rubric of "collaboration with the regime." We take into account specific forms of mediation between different institutions and communities by persons performing different roles in different circumstances (that they tried to change). Collaboration with thesecret police is neither a singular event nor unidirectional (in reporting on others), but embedded within a network of relationships, among which communication was deemed to be bilateral (one could seek to influence by sending a message *to* the secret police, and not only *from*, as with a command). Rather than seeking compromises, we look at both agency and exploitation within the same person in times when repression was deemed unavoidable, circumventable, and even potentially amenable to reason. Instead of focusing on the existence, or absence, of an "engagement to collaborate," we analyze the ways professional and personal competence was deemed useful and transferable, thus highlighting the nexus of systemic interactions and the real workings of power through certain key persons as carriers of symbolic or social capital. In doing so we go beyond the strict paradigm of "social control" exerted through collaboration and also the reverse one of "personal gain." Instead, we argue for a combination of submission, pragmatism, and voluntarism deployed at different times with the confidence of being an interlocutor of the state. Among the studies dedicated to collaborators, we find affinities with Sándor Horváth's analysis of the case of a miner who "began to use the reports as a forum with which to take steps to improve his life and the lives of those around him." "Like a king in disguise, he sought to dispense justice," comments Horváth, "or at least this is the portrait he paints of himself in the reports" (2015: 74); or Alison Lewis's study on the (mis)interpretation of Sascha Anderson's role with

the Stasi: he took it as "an opportunity to profile himself and his generation, a generation of poets and artists who had been excluded from membership in official guilds and hence denied of making a living as writers or artists" (2016: 39). The female collaborators analyzed by the same researcher further challenged the black-and-white narratives of the transition period by highlighting either the genuine idealism of those hoping to effect reforms through a dialogue with authorities or a kind of conservative-disciplinary ethos non-ideologically aligned with socialism, but prompting patriarchal figures to "use" the coercive arm of the police (Lewis 2002). When not coerced or blackmailed, some collaborators amplified either their voluntarism or domestic authoritarianism in addressing the regime. For Romania an interesting analogy is the figure of the philosopher Constantin Noica, carrying his interwar conservative agenda as both a liability and a cultural stimulant under communism. Being imprisoned under Stalinism, he was rehabilitated and cooperated with the authorities out of a sense of cultural-pedagogical mission, strangely converging with the national and xenophobic campaigns of the regime.

Due to attitudinal paradoxes, what we aim at is not necessarily to find a coherent narrative over the splintered fragments of a life history, but to disaggregate the unitary logic of personal trajectory, as is preserved by the very logic of archival documents (one subject—one file) and as is reinforced by the dichotomist tendencies of the totalitarian paradigm (where one can be only a victim or perpetrator). From this perspective we also go against the tendency of transforming files into reference points in need of being corrected or complemented. As the insightful analysis of Cornelia Vismann proves with regards to the secret police archives of the GDR, the truth-value assigned to the documents as containers of life histories caused a profusion in the file-based autobiographical genre, conceived of as a straightening or filling in the gaps of the pervasive police narrative (2008: 156–157). Even if we embrace the life history approach (with the exception of Egry's and Şincan's articles), we do it in order to highlight personality fractures and complex role-playing. We would like to highlight the complexities of the category of "collaborator" or "informer," very often discarded as an immoral one and, therefore, being assigned a linear analysis. In doing so we do not necessarily want to go beyond a moral consideration of the documents, as was frequently invoked by those contesting the totalitarian paradigm, but to understand the workings of the communist system by investigating the role played by those mediating between different state apparatuses/institutions and communities. What we are interested in is less an absolution of guilt by seeking the plethora of reasons behind one's actions, but rather the (self-)instrumentalization of an interplay of personal complexes within codependent social subsystems. The difficult choices of

those formerly imprisoned and then recruited for collaboration (analyzed by Jánosi and Bottoni) are further complicated not only by stressful family situations, but also by being ethnic minorities in times of war, regime change, and revolution (we refer to the Hungarian uprising from '56). Submission to authority is part of a confusing political game, whereby multiple past identities might or might not fit the shifting categories of being policed (as a Hungarian "irredentist," a Hungarian "counter-revolutionary," or simply as a recalcitrant laborer), making a vulnerable person self-incriminate (or self-rehabilitate) out of a sense of anticipation of constant reprisal. As a social outcast oscillating between different countries during the installation of the communist regime, Jánosi's "faceless" informer had already undergone an exhausting series of hide-and-seek incidents with police and an imprisonment based on fictionalized self-accusation before being recruited for collaboration. As a member of the "ill-fated" Hungarian minority, Stefano Bottoni's person of interest is also a liminal one, with the notable difference of belonging to an intellectual milieu. If Jánosi's simple informer wants to salvage his ethnic vulnerability by mimicking political scenarios (either as a fictionalized counter-revolutionary Hungarian or as a tamed collaborator willing to disclose foreign conspiracies), Bottoni's conservative-minded politician understands collaboration as a space for political subaltern maneuvering, typical of a Central European collaborative stance. Macrea Toma's go-between is Romanian, his liminality is given by his gravitation around nomenklatura, artistic circles, and foreign anti-propaganda radio signals; not sharing any prominent intellectual or political position, he is nevertheless a collector of relationships and a smuggler engaged in cultural exchanges (of works of art as well as of information). His case is an example of how petty corruption, intelligence work, and voluntarism go hand in hand with collaboration within a system of bartering and negotiation that made people feel at the same time empowered as nexus points and vulnerable as surreptitious traders. Instead of mimicking political scenarios, such a trickster sells them to both the secret police and its enemy, the broadcasting network Radio Free Europe.

In order to capture versatility within single persons we position our protagonists along the archetype of the cultural and political *broker*, thus finding more appealing approaches within transnational studies, social history, and history of science. From the former ones we retain the importance of focusing on real contact persons when dealing with opposing systems of representations, in order to highlight an embodied zone of contact between different worlds (David-Fox 2011), and to see how ideology and practice reconciled through appropriation of discourses. The cleavages between official regulations during communism and the underground social milieu fostered regardless the

figure of the cultural broker, the one who bypassed norms in order to insure the appropriation of equipment and goods by the clandestine communities of artists (Szemere 2001: 46). Ideological dichotomies as well as rigid systems of allocation of resources needed informal political entrepreneurs who could bring together parallel or adversarial fields of action. We rather place the informers along these convoluted and generalized networks of informality out of which collaboration with the secret police is only a part. An inspiring insight is Katherine Verdery's category of *network-embedded actors*, understood as persons who are not the equivalent of autonomous individuals, but whose existence is defined by a series of relational dependencies. Verdery considered that the property system under socialism deprived persons working in the state sector of a fully fledged personhood due to a non-palpable relation to owned things. Shortages increased even more the interdependence of people within a binding "gift economy" defined by mutual obligations. Such a system stretched beyond the confines of economic production to a wider social landscape of "reciprocal and nonmonetized exchanges" (2000: 187–188). Verdery uses again the term in relation with the informers' relative agency in her book about the Securitate, but stresses that the contacts they had with the officers did not fit either the model of patronage or that of friendship (2014: 196).

Verdery did not dwell further on the exchanges that took place between the Securitate and the informers except in the emphasis on the category of networking, defined as working through an informer's entourage with the aim of changing the social condition of a target. We do not really know to what extent the Securitate's endeavors were successful in reforging persons through a change in their milieu and we risk—again—taking the Securitate's own objectives as an explanation for its workings. For a more in-depth view of informers' "trades," we also place them in the family of "go-betweens," whom historians of knowledge, commodities, and techniques deem important for the analysis of empire and commerce and the reversal of the paradigm of concentric diffusion of Western modernization. Such actors enjoying "somehow uncertain social standing and mastering a range of different skills, languages and disciplines" had an impact on both sides of the exchange, not only on the colonized/dominated partner (Schaffer et al. 2009: xiii). We borrow from such studies the ideas of mobility (and improvised existence) of the intermediaries, and the bilateral effect of their action. We even go so far in delimiting ourselves, like the above-mentioned historians, from travel literature concerned with a mere going out and reporting on "the Other." What interests us is *the interaction* between such mobile figures and the worlds they visit, and the displacement in knowledge practices that they helped produce in both directions. The case of the double informer who reported both to Radio Free Europe and the secret

police is perhaps relevant for such exchanges. His messages for the foreign radios mattered for the construction of visual representations of Romania's grim realities and for the decryption of hostility at Ceaușescu's rallies (that he could view closely). Interactions were possible, as Egry points out, in the very implementation of the "security culture," as concepts and orders were reinterpreted according to one's perceptions of surveillance and according to envisaged expectations on the part of the surveilling apparatus. Denunciation as a form of trading information influenced both the person appropriating certain concepts (like for example those of "ethnicity" superimposed onto that of "irredentism") as well as the institution in question. Stefano Bottoni complements such a double performative approach in regard to ethnicity by showing the twofold action of a mediator who used collaboration as an instrument of moral suasion, hoping to pass messages to the higher echelons, but also to change views among the opponents of the regime. From this perspective, our go-betweens share another interesting feature with that of mediators at large: they not only connected worlds, but helped define and objectify their boundaries by "influencing the power dynamics at play and sometimes exploiting their position for their own benefit" (Schaffer et al. 2009: xv). One would argue that in our case boundaries are institutionally created through the creation of the secret police, and that adversariality was a given thing. Even if dichotomies are indeed sharper due to policing activities, the apparatus could not have existed without the surveilling and conceptual work of its contact persons, who had to identify and assign "hostility," itself a very broad concept, to a large pool of practices. Appeasing, exaggerating, or deflecting attention from certain actions created and articulated "opposition" within an ongoing interactive process. Monitoring subversiveness meant at the same time creating it through antagonization or even domestication. It also meant the ritualization itself of the operation of monitoring, when detection of cases was replaced by mere bureaucratic production and reproduction of topoi which paradoxically made vigilantism less productive and epistemically blind. Intermediaries were persons who internalized such a game both for personal and collective gain by filling in the blanks of the system which they deemed to be expected of them. The "productive" work of informers has to be understood as a multifold process which was *mobilizatory* (because of the institutional needs of reporting certain enemy quotas periodically) as well as *discursive*, in the sense that, through conceptual work, the phantom of opposition was given a reference and a body in reality.

Analogies have their limits. We should keep in mind that interaction was not the result of a voluntary action for the purpose of imparting useful information to trading partners. Fear, exploitation, and hierarchy should not be forgotten

as preconditions for accepting a collaboration with a repressive apparatus or a state apparatus which was never on equal terms with its contact persons. Still, some sort of interaction existed and our target is the investigation of relationships that such pressured mediators articulate in connecting and translating one world to another. Dealing with religion, minorities, or foreign propaganda could not have happened without practicing inside knowledge. Confronted with realities on the ground, monitors turned into mediators, and this is what brings together the case of the religious inspector (analyzed by Șincan) to those of informers. The sense of importance both acquired in the act of duty is a consequence of the recognition of the transformative and delicate role they played. *The work in the field* needed more than application of central directives. If the double informer to the Securitate and Radio Free Europe eventually became a jolly gambler able to hide his double game, state mediators were eventually invested with authority rather than transmitting it. The local negotiator did not only lubricate adjoining pieces within the machinery of power, he even realigned some of the mechanisms by reversing dynamisms. Proximity in the sense of cultural and geographic closeness counted perhaps more than personal ties. Paradoxically, interaction and oppressive rigidity are not exclusive. The analysis of the "local" or the "marginal" thus proves its methodological effectiveness: besides a mere concern with the voiceless, anonymous strata of society, it is especially useful for uncovering those grey zones within which power was negotiated and redefined. Feedback has long been a difficult topic for the study of communist systems. Investigations into perceived deficiencies of the regime (damaged loyalties included) usually stopped at listing requests and detecting social mechanisms for reporting on the other (Davis 1997; Corner 2009). The convoluted paths of bureaucracy and the secrecy surrounding the trajectory of files made the analyses of regime's responses very difficult. A research genre was born which, like in the case of informers' files, contented itself with ready-made topics along the pre-arranged archival trails of "complaint letters." Sarah Davies recognized that this type of investigation of certain archival sources taken along their grain might be problematic for the investigation of the "wholeness" of a historical phenomenon, but she proceeded by analyzing the "recurrent" themes. In our studies we offer glimpses into feedback processes through following the interactive path of certain "issues" signaled by the in-betweeners. We offer therefore methodological samples of how to go beyond bureaucratically inspired research through the investigation of liminal cases and the combination of archival threads. The analysis of the double informer to Radio Free Europe and the secret police was inspired particularly by zooming into the cracks of serial—and seemingly repetitive—trails of listener's mail addressed to Radio Free Europe. Letters addressed to Radio Free

Europe have been a rich source for mapping people's criticism of the communist regime or their doleances (Marin 2014). We go further by identifying the author of some of the letters and the exchanges in which he was engaged. What is thus highlighted is not only an anecdotal story obtained from perusing the archives against their grain. Finding the author of such criticisms in the person of a double informer raises new questions about the very nature of a mutually demonizing *informative* game in which opposing agencies actually relied on the interpretive skills of the same informants. What does information really mean if having the same provenance?

The authors' concern with interfaces and archival granularity ultimately make the following articles investigations into phenomena of information processing: on the one hand they seek to unveil the ways in which the repressive apparatuses collected and managed information, labeled issues as well as persons and, on the other, they try to examine how people understood collaboration through appropriation of the state syntagms and how this affected their circles and peers. Usually collaboration studies limit themselves to disclosing informers and their reasons for action, implicitly arguing for smooth processes of message transmissions. They operate not only with a reduced category of "informer", but also of "informing" and "information," considering the latter as a unit of facts passing from one agency to another. It is no wonder that for a long time such secret police corpuses have been mined only as passive repositories of factual information (at best seen as "biased") instead of being reflected upon as specific archival bodies, distinct from the paper trails of other institutions. One could say that for a long time the documents of the secret police archives have been treated with a sort of double-bind: viewed as emanations of violent regimes, they still retained the evidentiary status of bureaucratic forms of registering reality. From this perspective, what we bring again into discussion is a redefinition of the epistemic span of the repressive apparatus. Our work is no different in this sense from ethnography-inspired analyses of archives as sites of knowledge production, such as Verdery's inquiry into "what regime of truth or knowledge the files assume and attempt to serve and how this is connected to power" (2014: 40). It only differs in considering both documents and specific actors within a documentary chain of constant adapting imperatives and practices. The mediator is an entry point into the knowledge processing network encompassing persons and institutions in a time in which work ethic and ideology both encouraged and hindered oppression. Andreas Glaeser fruitfully pointed out for the Stasi how the uses of fuzzy and limited tropes ("anti-fascism," moral depravity, expertise) actually weakened the surveillance operations. Another hindrance came from the very action of antagonizing. The monolithic intentionality attributed to Western

institutions and the transformation of the police itself into a counter-propa-
ganda station made operative proximity problematic. According to Glaeser,
the imagined zero sum game between East and West made any contact with
the West "a deal with the mortal enemy (unless specifically licensed by the Par-
ty)" (2011: 305). Collaborators were needed not only to surreptitiously infiltrate
"enemy circles," but to actually overcome ideological boundaries comprised
in the very lingering assumptions of the secret police. A contact zone him-
self, the informer established contact tropes and problems. We therefore see
the collaborator as a go-between linking professional and political fields, thus
insuring a communicative process which did not consist only in passing a spe-
cific, valuable type of information, but in ritually maintaining contact and also
in constructing, homogenizing, and establishing common "issues" of interest.
The pointillistic reconstruction of networks of shared assumptions (Schaffer
et al. 2009: xxiv) or topoi among adversarial fields during the Cold War remains
a fruitful and under-researched field of study. The confrontational stance has
rather bestowed upon exchanges and interactions a readymade agenda of con-
cepts and it addressed repressive apparatuses as unflinching, violent discourse
creators to which "opposition" only reacted. We attempt to uncover the impor-
tant role mediators played in setting up the frameworks along which action
and reaction took place. For the facts to circulate, one still had to establish
which facts mattered for reporting and how to report. Our examinations there-
fore unfold on three levels: grasping life histories, reflection on the informative
work of their performers, and, last but not least, meta-analysis of the docu-
mentary processing of the informers' actions. We not only extract information
from the archives, but also try to offer insights about archival construction and
representations of issues. Using sources from different archives is not merely
an act of fact checking, but is part of a larger concern with how facts are born
through the mediation of people convinced about the auratic dimensions of
information.

It is in the nature of the history of science to obscure the mediators that
helped the very consolidation of systems of knowledge. Abstract and univer-
sal principles owe their atemporality to a (self-)representation usually de-
void of the networked dynamic of people and things. Historians in this field
therefore have made a mission out of retrieving such transient lives from the
background of seemingly stable and given scientific fields. The historiciza-
tion of the disciplines needed the foregrounding of the mundane workings of
power and knowledge. For the communist regimes we face somehow a reverse
paradox: it was the very largely shared and simplified narrative on mediators
which eclipsed research into the epistemes of the regime. Seen as extensions
of the repressive apparatus or as malevolent figures joggling with Securitate

for personal gains, the collaborators endorsed the malefic fact-hungry omnipotence of state institutions. They are still phantoms of a manipulated paranoia about occult, undisruptable forces. It is also our duty to add complexity to their stories in order to banalize the systems they served and to make them less amenable to political fantasizing.

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