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TAME OR BE TAMED. REACTIONS TO ARCHIVES FROM A DARK PAST

Abstract: The totalitarian states from the former east side of the Iron Curtain used the archives as a weapon of mass submission. By employing a huge network of formal and informal agents to spy on their own citizens, to prevent any unsettlement of the political status quo, and keeping records on anyone who had a certain level of social clout or institutional role in the society, those in power installed fear on all the levels of the society. Knowing that a certain kind of document about some possible crime against the regime is kept somewhere was most of the time a powerful detriment into trying to change one's assigned role. The political influence on the society of the archives is a bit older, and can be found both in ancient Greece, but also in the times after the Bonaparte reign. This article explores reactions to the archives of the former totalitarian regimes in Romania, Germany and Hungary.

Keywords: dark archives, post-socialist studies, CNSAS, STASI, Open Archives Budapest, totalitarian regimes, kaleidoskopanopticon.

Archives and the public

If it were to retrace an initial starting point for the history of the archives, that will be in the citadels of the Ancient Greece, when, according to Derrida, the archeon, the supreme authority in justice, was keeping the official documents, aiding him in offering the correct sentences. The house of the High Magistrate, the place where those valuable documents were kept was named arkheion, a place from

where the power and justice was exercised (Derrida, 2010). Among the documents from the arkheion, one could count the records of slave ownership, the documents attesting the rights of the privileged ones over the poor, or, how they were called later on by Jules Michelet, the *miserabiles personae*. Carolyn Steedman (Steedman, 2007: 10) identifies Michelet as the pioneer of the modern archives: in his research for the “voice of the people” he explores in the 1820s the catacombs of the National Library from Paris (Steedman, 2007: 11). The connection that Michelet established with those forgotten miserales is an almost mystical one: he becomes the carrier of this legacy by inhaling the dust gathered over the centuries on the parchments and papers long neglected:

“these papers and parchments, so long deserted, desired no better than to be restored to the light of day . . . as I breathed in their dust, I saw them rise up.” (Steedman, 2007: 10)

Rolands Barthes will later call him Michelet Mangeur d'Histoire (Barthes 1954: 19), pointing to those explorations the reason for his headaches, possibly due to a meningitis caught from the old manuscripts destroyed by bacterias, some of them containing the anthrax type.

The archives were gaining more public traction during the 19th century in France, where the large swings on the politics scene needed the intervention of an objective authority, which was found in the documents from the past attesting the continuity of certain rights. We can observe that using the archive as ammo is an old tactic that was used also in the 20th century, when, the totalitarian political systems were consolidating their power by keeping and using records for political pressures. The case of archives publicity during the time of Napoleon the Third in France is relevant for putting a spotlight on the duplicity of the public authorities in relationship with the citizens through the archives. In his desire to legitimate his political power in front of the French people, Louis Napoleon mandates the chief of the Imperial Archives, Leon de Laborde, to make the archives public. Trying to avoid the accusations of censoring the historians' writings who were contesting the legit right of the imperials to rule the country, Laborde decides that is better to give to the historians the necessary documents for publishing “good books”:

“Government,” Laborde opined, “has no better means to prevent the writing of bad books than to provide scholars with the means to write good ones.” By opening the “arcane, impenetrable Archives,” Laborde explained, the “light of history” could once again shine from its true source. Creating the conditions for men to write imperial histories meant inviting scholars to the Archives to aid them in their search for historical truth, and for Laborde (among others) that truth was the voice of the official record.” (Miligan 2007: 20)

Publicity is understood not only as a mean of promotion, an exercise of public relations, but a way of imprinting a public dimension to the “arcane, impenetrable Archives”. To achieve this some practical decisions were made through official decrees: the Imperial Archives were defined as being of public interest, spaces for accessing the documents were created and the archivists compiled indexes for easing the search of the documents, thus realizing a first modernization of those archives:

“Publicité meant much more than “renown,” or publicity’s current connotation of advertising. Publicité implied a publicness that both invited the public into the physical space of the Archives and bound the public interest to the contents and workings of the institution—and thus to the government that guaranteed the institution. Decrees defined the Archives as the depository of papers of public interest. Inventories were published to guide the scholars through the vast archival past. Administrative protocols governed the movement of documents. Systems of classification organised the morass of papers into discrete and accessible sections. The public reading room required space, furniture, heating, and surveillance. Archivists negotiated these texts, spaces, and procedures in order to serve the public and the government that employed them.” (Miligan 2007: 21)

This openness had a surprising result. Although the access of the historians interested in the recent history, willing to help at constructing the cult of Napoleon Bonaparte and, indirectly, to strengthen the power of his descendant, Napoleon the

Third, was theoretically unrestricted, the Imperial Archives were in possession of personal documents who were casting a not positive light on the image of the Great Napoleon:

“The volatile mixture of interests represented in the contents and function of the Archives mirrored those that threatened to divide France under the Second Empire. The Archives contained Bonaparte family secrets, evidence of manoeuvrings of statesmen as public figures and private citizens, hard fact, and salacious gossip.”
(Miligan 2007: 21)

The history about to be delivered to the public by the historians based on the documents from the archives wasn't the most glorious and the political implication of such a coup d' image determined the creation of restricted and secret collections. The Napoleon image was attentively painted based on his correspondence, guarded by a commission whose members were the director of the Imperial Archives, The War Field Marshal and renown historians. This commission intended to publish the whole correspondence, without any modification added to the thousands of letters, for bringing an homage to the “one of a kind genius”:

“The only homage worthy of the " incomparable genius " of first emperor of the French would be the restoration of the "complete, total" Napoleon to his people, and thus the Commission claimed to forbid any modification of the text of the letters.” (Miligan 2007: 23)

When the cousin of Napoleon the third, the Prince Napoleon Charles Joseph Paul Bonaparte, is delegated as the on to supervise the process of research and publication of the Correspondence, the problem of publicity becomes obviously more complicated. The relationship of the Prince with the documents is ambiguous: is he doing a research as an historian, does he represent the interest of the public or should he be regarded as a simple member of the family that is searching his family history?

“Confusion reigned, however, over the question of the prince's place in the regime of publicity that negotiated between nation and state. It

was unclear whether the prince should be considered a citizen-historian, an official on government business, or a member of the Bonaparte dynasty in search of family history (a history that just happened to coincide with that of the French nation)." (Miligan 2007: 24)

By restricting the access of the prince to certain documents reveals even deeper the real openness of the institution, showing a less friendly access than previously presented. Even if later on the prince was allowed to access the Correspondence, he himself becomes an adept of those shadowy practices due to the critics to the history of the First Empire published based on those archive documents:

"The prince's change of heart was perhaps motivated by what he saw as an unprecedented explosion of "hostile works," histories critical of the Empire, based on archival documents. His list included a work that reproduced papers of foreign affairs; an article on the Pope's captivity by Pere Augustin Theiner (who was apparently granted access to papers in the Archives that were in an envelope marked "not to be communicated to anyone without special order"), the case of the Prussian scholar Sybel, who was allowed to "leaf through documents at his leisure"; and a work by the historian Joseph Bernard-Othenin d'Haussonville on the Empire and the Church." (Miligan 2007: 23)

On the problem of archives and the testimonial value of the documents talks Paul Ricoeur as well:

"the archive breaks from the hearsay of oral testimony. What first stands out is the initiative of a person or legal entity intending to preserve the traces of his or its activity. This initiative inaugurates the act of doing history. Next comes the more or less systematic organization of the material thus set aside. It consists in physical measures of preservation and in logical operations of classification stemming from the needs of a highly developed technique at the level

of the archivist. All these procedures are in service of a third moment, that of consulting the materials within the limits of the rules governing access to them.” (Ricoeur 2004: 168)

Although the archived document is the opposite of living memory, playing the role of an aid to memory, it becomes the supreme authority in the positivist historical research. Ricoeur cites Plato to paint a more precise role of the documents from the archives:

“When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls everything about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn’t know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father’s support; alone it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support.” (Plato, 275e)

Further, Ricoeur defines the document from the perspective of the intention of the historian who interrogates. We could see the restriction of the access to the archives as a protective gesture of forbidding to ask questions to a silent witness. A mark becomes a document when it is interrogated by an historian as a tool for formulating a working hypothesis:

“Nothing as such is a document, even if every residue of the past is potentially a trace. [...] For a historian, everything can become a document, including the debris coming from archeological excavations and other such vestiges, but in a more striking way kinds of information as diverse and mercurial as price curves, parish registers, wills, databases of statistics, and so on. Having become a document in this way, everything can be interrogated by a historian with the idea of finding there some information about the past.” (Ricoeur 2004: 178)

Getting back after this detour about the nature of the archived documents

to the publicity of the archives, we can assume that the relationship between the archives and the public becomes more sensitive due to conflict between the public interests and the interest of the Prince and those involved politically:

“The Archives were a crucial institution because, as he put it simply, "History will search the Archives for its documents." Rather than the historian discovering the historical truth in documents found in the Archives, history preceded and determined this truth and searched only for evidence that made sense to it, rather than of it.” (Miligan 2007: 25)

The archived documents are nothing more than bells and bristles to a pre-made history, but they have this hidden ability of detouring the official history:

“Centralization, and the imperial push for public access, threatened to expose these secrets. Despite the need to welcome scholars into the institution, the potential of handing over government documents to actively hostile forces was a ridiculous risk. As the prince noted, "even the best of all governments could be dragged before posterity and discredited by history if it revealed its secrets.” (Miligan 2007: 26)

I will try to have a deeper look at how the archived continued to play an important role in the post-communist societies by looking at three case studies from Romania, Germany and Hungary.

Romania - CNSAS

The first case study that we are going to focus on is a very controversial archive, the one of the former political police entity from the communist Romania. Those archives became partially public after a long struggle. Even if one of the requests from the 1989 Romanian revolution was the ejection of all those who were part of the former regime from the political life, the famous point 8 from the Timișoara proclamation, a real lustration law was never applied in Romania. Late after the Revolution there was an official rejection of the communist regime: 10 years after the revolution the law that changed the custody of certain documents

from the former Securitate to CNSAS (The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives) was voted by the Parliament. Even so, the institution became truly functional years later. For example in 2006 CNSAS gave more verdicts of political police collaborators than in all the previous years, and that number wasn't even that high (270 cases) (Gândul 2007).

The Archive in custody of CNSAS contains documents and papers on those who were considered dangerous by the totalitarian regimes that ruled Romania for more than four decades (1945-1989). The political police has a longer history, the roots could be found on the time of Carol the Second and the continued to grow during the reign of Ion Antonescu, but we can find a continuity between the two historical periods. There are numerous cases of people convicted under Antonescu that remained imprisoned during the communist regime, among the most famous being Dinu Pillat, Vasile Voiculescu, Valeriu Gafencu, Ioan Ianolide and many others who are revered as martyrs (Ianolide 2006). This continuity between two opposed regimes is not a case particular to Romania, The Terror House from Budapest standing as an example: in the same building the institution of political police from the government of extreme right, before 1940, and the communist political police, after the Second World War, functioned undisturbed:

“During the months of the reign of the Arrowcross, the cellar at Andrásy Boulevard 60 became notorious throughout the city. The people rounded up by the Arrowcross party, the majority of whom were Jewish and thus considered open prey, were hauled off to the headquarter cellars and were brutally mistreated and tortured. Their victims, most of whom never left the building alive, were kept for shorter or longer periods in former coal cellars. The Communist political police, the PRO, ÁVO and ÁVH, moved into the dreadful Arrowcross headquarters in January 1945. To deter enemies, the Arrowcross “House of Faith” was intentionally turned into the “House of Horrors.” (Terror House Museum 2015)

The continuity between the two totalitarian regimes might seem surprising, but, the ideological roots of the two systems are not that different (Wolton 2001). The techniques of installing terror at the whole levels of the society is also similar.

After the initial slaughter of the opposition, the terror continued a bit softer by using compromising documents. As Tsvetan Teodorov (Teodorov 1999) observes, in this paraphrased paragraph by Spiridon Raluca Nicoleta:

“For the totalitarian regimes, the erase of memory, the official one of the previous political status quo, but also the parallel social memory, was just a matter of time. It was, also, a process that took place on several layers: first, by physically removing the disturbing elements in the new rebuild version of the past and implicitly by not perpetuating what Pierre Nora called „lieux de memoire"; second, the current events of that time was either selected and distorted according to the propaganda needs, or there was taking a particular care for covering the numerous shameful actions taken in the effort of capturing the power and neutralizing the real or possible opponents.” (Spiridon 2008: 221, my translation)

The intention to offer a version of history controlled by the totalitarian power is directly acknowledged by one of the participants to the eradication of any memory prior to the new political system:

“You will only die when we please. First, we will turn you into monsters.... Then we will force you, - we have our own methods - , to confess only what we want. Those confessions taken with the red iron will be kept as testimonies, as documents for the archive, and we will write the history upon them. We will keep the dossiers till you will perish. We will die as well. The history for the future generation will be written based on those documents. Thus the researchers will write according to our will, not to the reality. We create the history to our liking. As it suits us.” (Anisescu, Moldovan and CNSAS 2007: 123 quoted in Spiridon 2008: 222, my translation)

Those confessions were used later in juridical fake trials in which the main arguments used by the prosecutors were exactly those testimonies:

“The Securitate, through coercive methods applied to torture physically and psychologically the arrested, was managing to obtain false confessions of self-conviction who were written in the interrogation statements, then turning them into the main proofs during the trial.” (Spiridon 2008: 226, my translation)

Even though during the multiple interrogations, the soon to be accused would give declarations that might cast a shadow of a doubt about being guilty, those are carefully removed:

“We asked questions, we discuss answers and if those are satisfactory, we write them on paper. We do not allow the accused to write what he wants and during the discussion the answer is fixed and it is written down upon dictation. The answer should have a form as closely as possible to what we are aiming. The interrogated should feel all the time the superiority of the interrogator. [...] Not all the confessions are added to the dossier, just the ones that interest us.” (Spiridon 2008: 229, my translation)

All those documents resulting upon the atrocious examinations are meant from the very beginning to be used as weapons with the sole purpose of accusing and imprisonment of the accused. Not only they are falsified from the start by censoring any confession that might come in the aid of the defense, but they are carefully selected in such a way that the voice of the accused to be, as much as possible, eliminated.

One of the methods of proving that behind the individuals are huge organized groups was the one of the detailed diagrams describing the so called “subversion networks”, a technique borrowed from Ochrana, the secret service of the Russian Tzar, and described by Hannah Arendt in the following terms:

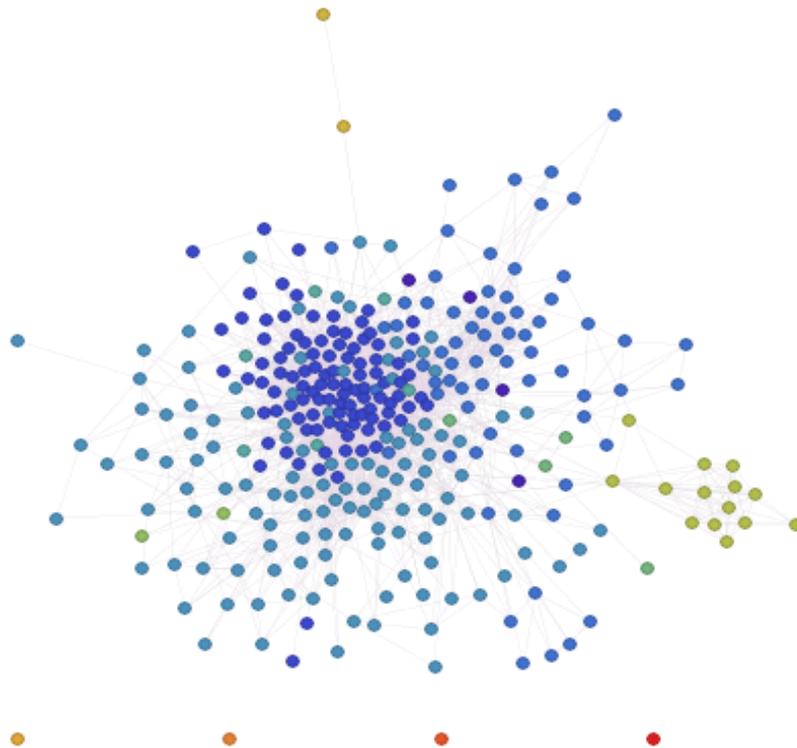
“The Okhrana, the Czarist predecessor of the GPU, is reported to have invented a filing system in which every suspect was noted on a large card in the center of which his name was surrounded by a red circle; his political friends were designated by smaller red circles and his

nonpolitical acquaintances by green ones; brown circles indicated persons in contact with friends of the suspect but not known to him personally; cross-relationships between the suspect's friends, political and nonpolitical, and the friends of his friends were indicated by lines between the respective circles.” (Arendt 1951: 433)

It is amazing how this description is prescient to the visualization methods used today in analyzing the online social networks. The schemes in the past were used very often just to add more weight on the prosecutor side as he was trying to paint the indicted as playing a part in a bigger subversive organization (Spiridon 2008: 230).

Friend network:

All friends ▼



🖱️ *mouseover for friend details*

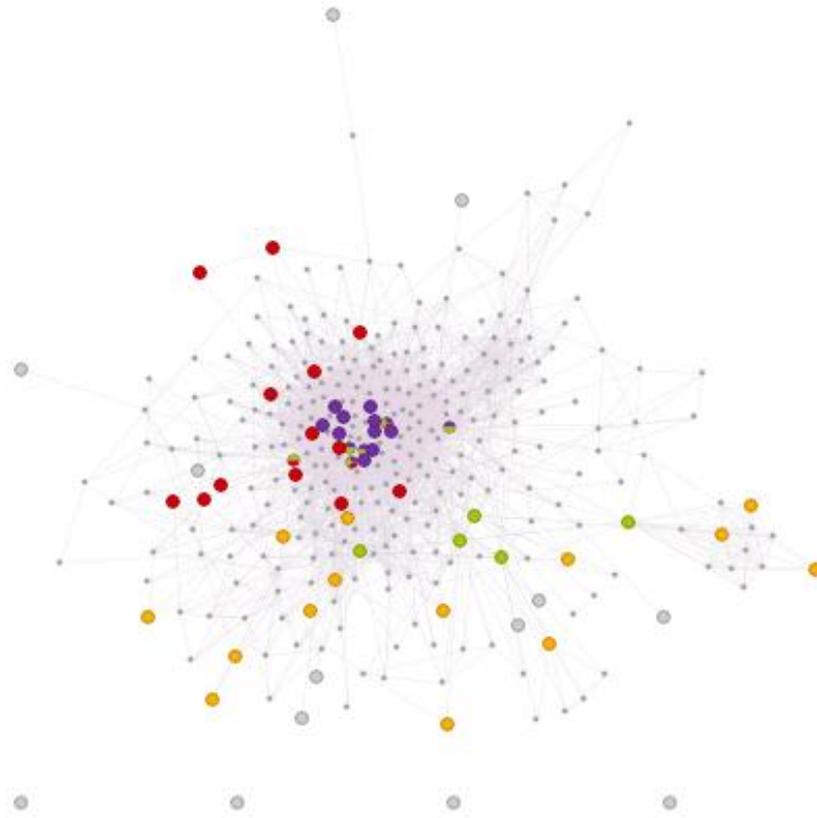
(based on data from 331 of 342 friends)

My network of friend from Facebook, analyzed with Wolfram Alpha tools on January 25, 2015
(<http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=facebook+report> 2015)

Color-coded friend network:

All friends ▼

Highlight notable friends ▼



The friends from my Facebook network who are nodes to other groups analyzed with Wolfram Alpha tools on January 25, 2015
([http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=facebook+report 2015](http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=facebook+report+2015)).

If in the dark decade of the 1950s the documents were falsified for public mocking trials, helping accusing the enemies of the people, but also in attempts to eliminate any resistance to re-education. One can only imagine the devastating effect of a false testimony presented as a betrayal from someone close. After 1964, the year when the political prisoners were set free from their imprisonment, the individual dossiers are spreading on all the layers of the society, fixing on a social grill the individual. It was often that the individuals who didn't have a healthy social origin (for examples the children of those identified as enemies of the working class:

partizans, intellectuals from the interwar period, bourgeois, wealthy peasants or those who in the slightest way opposed the socialist system) were marginalized, denied the access to higher education or to a job according to their qualifications.

The social dynamic was carefully monitored by the political police, The State Security (Securitatea), the tool through which the results of the abominations from the political prisons was applied on a larger scale. The model of reeducation came from damned places such as the prison from Pitești, where the most bestial tortures were used as a mean of reformatting and annihilating personalities, to install new mental models, to obtain obeying citizens. By applying methods of torture among peers, the detainees started to suspect each other, to hunt and punish among them, under the always present eye of the guardian tormentors. Outside the prisons, in the “multidimensional developed society”, the whole Romania turned into a “kaleidoskopanopticon”: everybody was surveilling and suspecting everybody. This state large scale panopticon was achieved by inducing to everybody the idea that they are under a constant surveillance and that somewhere there is a dossier where all their mistakes against the regime are recorded and could be used against them. At school, at work, even at home, the constant fear that someone is watching you was so intense and so deeply rooted that the self censorship became preventive to be safe.

After 1989 a slow process of deconstructing the repressive system used by the communists in the previous period started. The lack of a real lustration made the public access to the archive of the former Securitate highly restricted. The institution mandated with the research and publication of this archive was created only in 2000, more than ten years later, while in other countries (Germany, Poland or Hungary), this was seen as a national priority and took place much earlier. The law that institutes CNSAS, 187/1999 gave a “dual character, as an institution that administrates the archive of the Securitatea, but also for research and detailed study of those archives” (Banu 2008: 124, my translation) to the institution. According to Banu, one of the collections of great historical importance, attesting how harmful the documents could turn in the attempt to restrain the freedom of an individual, is the Informative collection. This contains:

“characterizations made by individuals, transcription of the talks that followed, information notes on the chased opinions, excerpts from

their works, various critical acclaim, official photographs or those taken during a stakeout.” (Banu 2008: 127, my translation)

If we take a look at the themes categories that the researchers declared that they are interested in when they asked access to different files, we could guess the groups targeted by the political police and that turned into victims. From the 16 different research themes, three of them cover most than half of the request for access:

“The Romanian intellectuals and cultural life - 22%, Religious life, cults and spiritual associations - 20% and The Anticomunist Armed Resistance - 14%.” (Banu 2008: 129, my translation)

The CNSAS Archive is surely one of the most challenging and a very challenged one and it is interesting to see what will happen in the following years. One of the possible directions is turning it into an inspiration corpus for future artistic and literal works. Geanina Cărbunaru is one of the most promising Romanian theater director and she got inspired by the files on Dorin Tudoran, an important Romanian writer. Based on those files she wrote x milimeters from y kilometers. This play theater is a reinterpretation of:

“the discussion that took place in 1985 at the headquarters of the Municipal Committee of the Communist Party from Bucharest is part of the surveillance of the dissident writer Dorin Tudoran” (Colectiv A 2013)

The same actor is playing different parts, sometimes the play stops and they change place just to show how difficult it is to find the right voice beneath the text. Behind the slightly ironic and funny interpretation, the hysterical or the emotionally numb one, a dark atmosphere is emerging from the hole charade written down in the file. Geanina Cărbunariu explains her intentions:

“There were a lot of snitching that were actually body language interpretations. Some had the talent of replaying a scene like a video

camera, very objective, all that they were seeing - vocational, professional snitches. On the other hand, others, more zealous, they were interpreting what they were seeing, turning scenes into incredible fictions. We can see how, in the files, the line between reality and fiction is very fragile. It is what we aimed to illustrate in the show as well.” (Weident 2013, my translation)

Although this artistic approach is very good at exorcising the dark past of the Romanian archives, it should be doubled by a continuous effort of making the archive as widely and easily accessible to the great public. There are good examples of how this can be achieved and I’m going to give two of them: the reconstruction of files from the former STASI Archives from Eastern Germany and the Open Society Archives from Budapest, Hungary.

Case study: STASI Archives, Germany

The archive of the former repressive political police from Eastern Germany was one of the cornerstones for the ideological reconstruction of Germany. All the surveillance files were made accessible to the public and everyone could go and ask to see if they were the target of the STASI and what was recorded about them. In 1992 a decision was made by Joachim Gauck and the documents from the STASI archives moved to the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi-files and become public. (BStU 2015) We are talking about the biggest German archive:

“At the heart of the agency are the archives that hold the legacy of the Ministry of State Security. They document the methods and the knowledge of those in power in the SED, the Communist state party of the GDR and its secret police through files, index cards, films, audio documents, micro fiches. With a total of 111 kilometres (ca. 50 miles) of files, over 1.4 million photos, numerous video and audio tapes from the many eavesdropping endeavours of the MfS it is one of the largest archives in Germany.” (BStU 2015)

The importance of this archive to the German people can be seen by the efforts and the resources invested into making them available to everyone: in the

1990s the Federal Commissioner employed up to 3.000 persons to help deliver the files to those who were asking them, and the number to this day is still high, 1.600 employes continue to work for the archive. Given the sheer quantity of documents, this is no surprise. Part of the efforts are focused on a huge puzzle consisting of over 15.000 bags of documents ripped to pieces on the eve of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

Over the past 18 years, with the patience and meticulousity that became the hallmark of the German spirit, teams of researchers are trying to finish one of the most difficult puzzles up to date: the remaining of the documents that were hastily destroyed by the STASI just before the fall of the wall. Those documents attest the dimension of the spying activities in Eastern Germany during the communist times:

“As the enforcement arm of the German Democratic Republic's Communist Party, the Stasi at its height in 1989 employed 91,000 people to watch a country of 16.4 million. A sprawling bureaucracy almost three times the size of Hitler's Gestapo was spying on a population a quarter that of Nazi Germany.” (Curry 2008)

Millions of Germans were spied, recorded, surveilled and kept under terror and now the Referat AR 4 Projektgruppe Manuelle Rekonstruktion main purpose is to reconstruct the evidences that they were trying to destroy on the last minute. Making those archives public is absolutely necessary for “political hygiene” argues Roland Jahn:

“We can't let people who worked for the Stasi keep quiet and get top jobs while their victims suffer. [...] I simply won't let it be the case that lying pays.” (Pidd 2011)

The ten members of the team managed to reconstruct approximately 500 of the 15.500 bags of documents in the past 18 years (Pidd 2011). Each bag contains between 50.000 and 80.000 fragments of documents (Reeves 2011). Part of the documents were destroyed by using steam machines called Reisswolfs, but due to overworking they broke, so the started to rip the papers by hand:

“When it became clear that the iron curtain was being torn aside, the Stasi tried to destroy its files. Initially, they used a particularly fiendish kind of shredder that used steam to turn shreds into unreadable mush. But when the shredders broke, the officers used their bare hands to rip up the files they had spent so many years painstakingly compiling.” (Pidd 2011)

Thousands of documents were ripped apart during approximately 3 months. With all their efforts, the STASI personnel managed to destroy only around 5% of the archive (Pidd 2011).

David Gill, a protester that was 23 at that time, recounts how those documents were saved. He decided to retrieve all the documents from the country in the STASI Headquarters from Berlin and he kept the bags with destroyed documents, even though he had no idea what to do with them:

“Gill and his crew of volunteers preserved whatever they could, commandeering trucks and borrowing cars to collect files from Stasi safe houses and storage facilities all over Berlin. Most of it was still intact. Some of it was shredded, unrecoverable. They threw that away. But then there were also bags and piles of hand-torn stuff, which they saved without knowing what to do with it. “We didn't have time to look at it all,” Gill says. “We had no idea what it would mean.” (Curry 2008)

The interest for the documents is huge, since 2011 to present over 2,75 million citizens requested to see the files containing their name, and this continues at a rate of 5.000 requests per month, the waiting being sometimes stretched for over two years (Pidd 2011). In order to gain steam at recreating the puzzle, the Germans automatized the process of reconstruction of the documents by using computer. The system, called E-puzzler, works in the following manner: two photo cameras take pictures of all the pieces of paper added unsorted on its surface. Some selection is done manually according to the previous information about the pieces of paper:

“As Schneider pulled down menus and clicked through a series of descriptive choices, fragments disappeared from the screen. “Basically, we need to reduce the search space,” he says. White paper or blue — or pink or green or multicolored? Plain, lined, or graph? Typewriting, handwriting, or both? Eventually, only a handful of similar-looking pieces remained. Once matched, the pieces get transferred to another processor. These popped up as a reconstructed page on the left-hand screen, rips still visible but essentially whole.” (Curry 2008)

Then a software tries to match different pieces of paper that are part of the same document:

“It matches up the pieces using color, paper texture, fonts, tear lines and other details.” (Reeves 2011)

The software was developed by the famous Fraunhofer IPK research center. The overall process is described on their webpage dedicated to the project:

“The ePuzzler is structured in three key components: feature extractor, search area reducer, and matcher. As no two scraps of torn paper exactly match, it cannot be predicted how often, or in what sequence, the three modules will interact with one another during a reconstruction operation. This is why they are embedded in a complex software framework in a non-deterministic adaptive workflow. The methodology of virtual reconstruction is similar to that used by a person working out a jigsaw puzzle who will compare a number of features to decide whether or not two pieces fit together. Similar to the human way, the ePuzzler first computes the various features of the paper scraps like shape, paper color, fonts, writing, and line ruling which are then used to reduce the number of possible combinations for the puzzle – and this is especially important when it comes to dealing with large volumes of data.” (Fraunhofer IPK 2015)

This huge effort of reconstructing even a small amount of the archives is a proof that the public interest in Germany to face their past is huge. This interest is not singular, but the efforts of the State to accommodate the citizens' demand is quite unique.

Case study: Open Society Archives, Hungary

If the access to some of the archives from the second half of the 20th century is still restricted, there are some archives that can be used as good practice examples for openness and care for the documents they hold. One such case is the the Open Society Archives Budapest - OSA, containing an impressive documents from the 1940-1990 from the Eastern Europe.

The Open Society Archives Budapest was born out of the collections of the Institute for the Research of the Radio Free Europe from the Cold War period and other documents related to human rights, Cold War and the communism regimes from the eastern-european block. In the report with the activity of the Archives between 1995-2000, the amount of documents is evaluated to 3341 linear meters (OSA Budapest 2000: 3). The reports from the following years details the evolution of the collections, the equipment acquired for managing those collections, the residencies and scholarships offered to students and researchers from outside Hungary, the exhibitions that tried to make the Arhives more public friendly.

One such exhibition captured my attention in particular and it is worth paying attention to it. During the summer school Policies and Practices in Access to Digital Archives: Towards a New Research and Policy Agenda, organized by the Central European University, in July 2012, the professor István Rev presented one of the projects from 2008, Concrete - books bound in concrete (Konkrétum 2008). In the CEU tens of thousands of volumes were discovered, dating back to the communist times. Many of them were already registered in the CEU Library and there were just reclaiming valuable space. In the first stage, the volumes were offered for free to anyone who wanted to take them home. This "self-service" was on for several months, but even after that there were thousands of books left. So they made a call for proposals for artists for creative solutions for those books.

Professor Rev mentioned one of the proposal, that was not chosen, an installation that would scan each page, then burn it and use the energy to scan the

next page, and so on, some kind of perpetuum mobile that would save and destroy, in the same time, the books. The winning project, Konkrétum, was submitted by two students from the Academy of Arts from Budapest, János Hübler și Nemere Kerezsi (Konkrétum 2008), who came up with an installation created from 2 cube meters of concrete and 18 cube meters of books. The final result was a carpet of books caught in the concrete, on the floor of the exhibition space, a huge lobby from a former “super-store” from the beginning of the 20th century. An interesting reaction to this installation was that the people, as professor Rev recounts, were very hesitant to walk over the books, although those were books unwanted by everybody and sacrificed without remorse.





Images from the opening of the Konkrétum exhibition, June 2008, OSA , Main Gallery

As a follow up to Konkrétum, in 2012 the Dead Library (Dead Library - Books Unread 2012) questioned the role of the unwanted books further. The project tried to revive the interest towards some of the 5.000 books from the University Library Eötvös Loránd. What those book had in common is that none had any request starting from 1989 or even earlier. This project casts light on an attitude that should be emulated by the administrators of both archives and libraries: taking care and showing love not only to the “stars” of their collection, but also to the “Cinderallas”, the sections and items that remain untouched and unseen by the public. The creativity of those two projects are proofing that the archive administrators have a really open-mind and they tried to find solutions even outside their comfort zones. This is even more impressive as OSA owns documents with a strong political character, quite sensitives, but this didn't stop them to open them to the public and treat the documents less as ammo and more like fertilizers for an open society.

Archives used as political weapons is a trend that did not diminish along the 20th century, but on the contrary. In order to tame them we should apply the

same solution: making them more transparent and increasing the public access to them.

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