**COVER PAGE**
**TITLE:**
**Pursuing intimacy in a surveillance regime: Fieldwork in communist Romania.**
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**Abstract:** Field research in politically authoritarian contexts poses special problems for the ethnographic project of pursuing intimacy and trust. During my fieldwork in communist Romania, both up to my denial of entry and during my subsequent public activities dealing with Romania up to 1989, I was subject to continuing surveillance by the Romanian security organs, who also interrogated and harassed several Romanian informants and friends. Ethnographic fieldwork is supposed to be about becoming involved in the lives of the people we study. But in this particular context, I argue that the single-minded pursuit of intimacy needs to be balanced by the need for distance and detachment.

KEYWORDS: Detachment, Espionage, Intimacy, Romania, Surveillance, AUTHOR INFO:

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**NOTE TO REVIEWER.** Prior to review, this article has been anonymized with XXXXXXXXXXX as a cover for author's references, author's personal identification information, and certain key locations in the fieldwork. These can be added later.

## Introduction: the pursuit of intimacy

The ethnographic project relies on the pursuit of some kind of intimacy with the people we study. A state of intimacy is achieved when we get to know our interlocutors not just as sources of ethnographic data, but as persons, close friends or confidantes. We pursue relations of trust and intimacy because we use our very self, our person, as the primary tool for understanding how people live their lives. Emotions, intimacy, empathy, and bringing ourselves into the ethnographic picture are prominent themes in numerous studies of both intimate relationships, and in reflections on the challenges of intimacy in fieldwork (Besnier 2015, Sertaç and Zingin 2015, Alexy and Cook 2019). Successful analysis, in fact, depends on 'building intimacies and then leveraging such intimacies into analysis' (Alexy and Cook 2019:236).

The single-minded pursuit of intimacy, however, can have negative consequences, as I discovered when I carried out research in an authoritarian state, Romania, during the years before 1989. I was the subject of intense surveillance by the state security organs, as were several Romanian informants and friends. The surveillance was based on a suspicion that I was some kind

of spy, and that my Romanian interlocutors were either unwitting agents or collaborators in my 'mission'. This paper explores the dark side of intimacy.

Ethnographic fieldwork is an effort to understand the life of others. From the first day of graduate school, we are encouraged to view ethnographic fieldwork as an intimacy project. The great monographs we read are those that reveal, if not revel in, this intimacy. This intimacy also includes moments of reflection and self-doubt, what Hume and Mulcock (2004) term 'awkwardness', as we try to balance our roles as individuals and ethnographers all while studying the lives of others. We anthropologists distinguish ourselves from the other social sciences, whose methodologies tend to rely on macro-level surveys, statistics or helicopter-style visits. In contrast, our work involves getting close. For us, intimacy is good, detachment is bad.

My own intimacy efforts during periods of fieldwork in communist Romania (1974-1984) were severely disrupted by the state surveillance regime. As a grad student doing dissertation research and subsequently as a post-doctoral researcher, my goal, like most ethnographers, was to learn as much as I possibly could in the shortest time possible. However, as strangers seeking to understand others, we invariably become objects of surveillance: both informal, community surveillance in the communities or organizations we study, and frequently by state security organs who are suspicious of foreigners and protective of what they consider to be secrets. These challenges confronted me in Romania, whose regime required its citizens to report any contact with a foreign citizen and prohibited foreigners from staying overnight in a Romanian home without special permission. Despite these and other obstacles, over a period of a decade, combining officially sponsored fieldwork and several private visits, I was able to develop reasonably close relations with several Romanian informants from a variety of settings. Some of these relationships reached the level that I would call 'friendship' or even intimacy. We shared gossip, political opinions, hopes for the future, we exchanged covert gifts and discussed whether they should file papers to emigrate. I also sought to sustain these relationships while I was living outside the country, through letters, phone calls, and when meeting Romanians who were traveling abroad privately or at conferences.

The Romanian authorities' suspicions of my relationships had harmful consequences for several of those I knew. Some of these negative consequences are due to my own naiveté about the regime and its secret police. Other consequences are the result of the paranoia and brutality of the Ceausescu security apparatus and their constant search for subversion. However, there was another factor that caused harm to my informants: my own anthropological emphasis on pursuing intimacy as the cardinal strategy of fieldwork. What I realized, only too late, was my own failure to consider the necessity for and perhaps the value of detachment (on detachment see especially Yarrow et al. 2015). To put it simply: getting close has consequences.

**Fieldwork in a surveillance regime**

In pursuing ethnographic fieldwork, we are invariably watched by those whom we study and often by the authorities. We thus try to curate the watching of others so as to ensure that the inevitable surveillance does not impede our research objectives. Nevertheless, as Sökefeld and Strasser note, 'surveillance has strong disciplining effects on fieldworkers, because knowing that we are watched, we become very careful about where we go, whom we meet, which topics we address and what to ask' (2016:165). Ethnographers who did research in Eastern Europe during the socialist period, nearly all working under the official American exchange programs (IREX and Fulbright) were often reminded that we would be under surveillance, regardless of our actual research topic My IREX orientation handbook reminded me to be cautious about Romanians who might be informers, not to provoke hazardous political discussions, not to exchange money illegally, not to smuggle suspect items into or out of the country, not to say overnight in a Romanian home, etc. As ethnographers

from the West, our goal was to show to the authorities and to ordinary Romanians that our participant-observation in the daily lives of others and our overall motives were not malevolent; that we did not have some kind of secret project; that we were not spies.

Demonstrating that you are not who people might think you are is difficult for ethnographers. As we gather initial data and acquire some local knowledge, we often end up changing our fieldwork focus. We enter a field site thinking that X is important, but we soon discover that people are actually preoccupied with Y and Z. We react by changing our focus. I know I did.

This kind of improvisation becomes that much harder to manage if ordinary people and the state security organs see ethnographers only as folklorists, or when foreigners in a cold war setting are suspected of being agents of hostile powers, or when a state security bureaucracy must prove their worth by searching out spies or subversives. In such cases, the ethnographer's effort to find out what's going on becomes evidence of a more subversive agenda. Moreover, research in authoritarian societies may ignore the political aspect of even basic everyday practices. In Romania, for example, heat, electricity and food were rationed, abortions were illegal, peasants were hoarding for fear of confiscation, black markets were rampant, and local elites were often bribed for services or to look the other way. Any cursory mention of such topics could become sensitive, or even dangerous. With citizens lacking even basic information and with a profound mistrust of the authorities, they looked for hidden clues or signs of what was really going on. This was my experience in Romania in the 1970s and mid-1980s, and the experience of other ethnographers in other socialist countries. For various reasons, we could be viewed as suspect.

For fieldworkers, intimacy is both emotionally rewarding and a means by which we end up getting more complete data about how people experience their lives. However, surveillance regimes impede this intimacy project (Sökefeld and Strasser 2016). Here I will discuss three kinds of surveillance and how they affected my own ability to establish, sustain and manage intimacy: 1) the state surveillance carried out by secret police against me and my Romanian interlocutors and friends; 2) the peer-to-peer surveillance experienced by all ethnographers who immerse themselves in small communities, where people want to everything about you and you about them; and 3) the self-surveillance as we tried to figure out what was going on, whom to trust, and guilt that we felt when innocent citizens got into trouble. These three kinds of surveillance are not unique to Romania, but they take on a special character due to the decades of state repression over people's everyday lives. Moreover, the three kinds of surveillance melted into each other. My pursuit of intimacy was also a source of personal risk to others (this dual role of intimacy is hardly unique, being the stuff of countless novels and films, as well as anthropological studies (Sertaç and Ash 2015; Alexy and Cook 2019).

**Surveillance Romanian Style**

The role and function of surveillance and secret police organs in the former communist states has been well described by among others, Timothy Garton Ash for East Germany (1997), by Katherine Verdery (2018) in Romania, and by the Romanian political scientist and dissident Stelian Tănase, who wrote a diary of his own everyday activities over several years and compared them with the observations of the state security organs, called Securitatea (2002). The insights of these and many other studies reveal the secret police as a typical communist era bureaucracy, with its own inflated plan, its own pressures to fulfill this plan (in this case by identifying troublemakers, agents or spies) and its brutal but also haphazard surveillance of ordinary citizens in even the most mundane aspects of their everyday lives. Supplementing the secret police apparatus in the East European states was an extensive network of part-time informers who were recruited, rewarded or threatened by the secret police to provide information about their fellow citizens or suspicious foreigners.

In my case, as is true for Ash and Verdery and so many others, informers giving evidence to the secret police organs did so under various circumstances. Some were party or bureaucratic functionaries fulfilling obligations, others sought to obtain/retain certain privileges or benefits, but most were (or felt) compelled to provide a statement. All those working for the Romanian surveillance regime, both those employed directly and the voluntary or forced informers, had to produce something in order to avoid suspicion. My file is therefore a sort of written performance, a kind of protocol, often filled with trivia, speculation and exaggeration. To put it in today's jargon, the Securitate demanded 'content'. This demand for content was emphasized to me when I met some of these same informants after 1989, as they described their meetings with or interrogations by the Securitate officers and the tedium of having to write something, anything, to satisfy the investigators.

As anthropologists, we are professional observers. But we, too, are watched by the people we study, and often by those officials or elites who can control our access to a field site, be it a country, a community or an organization (Sökefeld and Strasser 2016). Although we try to be open and transparent, we can quickly become objects of rumour, gossip, informal or official surveillance, and accusations that we are not who we say we are; that we are spies of some kind.

I undertook fieldwork in socialist Romania in the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s. Initially, I was in a village studying urbanization processes. Upon completing my dissertation, I returned to Romania to study local village leaders, where I spent time at the Communist Party training schools in Bucharest and the provinces and visited various villages around the country. During this decade, I returned to Romania annually for periods of 1-3 weeks. In 1985, entering Romania as a tourist, I was detained at the Bucharest airport and informed that I was persona non grata. I had been under surveillance for over a decade, and the Romanian state security organs had finally decided that I was a sufficient threat that I should be prohibited from entering the country. This was not the end of my surveillance story, however. The Securitate had been monitoring my activities while I was outside the country during these years, and their surveillance continued until 1989, with information provided by Romanian informers whom I met at international conferences or in more informal settings, including people who were guests in my home; and by Romanian embassy officials abroad who also filed reports about me with the Securitate.

I was watched by the Romanian Securitate for a specific reason. They suspected that my activities and my relations with other Romanians made me into a spy (as they suspected Katherine Verdery, and certainly other foreign scholars). I know this because several years after the fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania, I was able to obtain a copy of my Securitate dossier, 700 pages (although there might certainly be more). The file, with my code name 'XXXXXXXX' on the front page, contained informers' reports, interrogation protocols from people who had met me during my research in the village, in Romanian institutions, in various personal settings, as well as Securitate officers' first hand observations, analyses and interpretations of my activities, photographs, tapes, entry and exit data, copies of letters to and from my family and academic colleagues, speculations about the ostensible purpose of my activities and whether I could be used as an 'agent of influence'. Hence, my story here is a combination of both surveillance of me, of my relations with others, and an effort by the state organs to connect the dots and make me into some kind of spy. It is also a story of how naive I was to think that I could conduct normal fieldwork in a politically repressive state. My naiveté lay in the fact that I assumed that there were spheres of social life in Romania where politics did not matter. As I came to realize, Romania in the late communist period, was a place where citizens simply could not retreat from state pressures and state surveillance. I, on the other hand, was a U.S. passport holder on a research grant, I might be expelled, and I could always leave.

Reflecting on my file and in subsequent conversations with Romanians whom I knew, I came to realize that in a perverse way, the Securitate's suspicion about me was true. I was indeed a spy -- in their understanding. I was a spy without knowing it. This paper is therefore a mea culpa. I confess that I was ridiculously naïve to think that I could conduct fieldwork without fully understanding the nature of an authoritarian regime, a regime that placed surveillance at the center of its activity. This surveillance focused on the suspected threats posed by foreigners but also included extensive surveillance of Romanian citizens, encouraging and threatening them to report on each other. If we define espionage as the pursuit of information that the state deems of strategic importance and passing this on to others, I must confess that yes, I was a spy. The problem is that anthropology, in so far as it reveals how people live their everyday lives, often highlights precisely those aspects that the state wants to keep silent, if not secret. In an authoritarian setting, there is a classic 'blurred boundary' between ethnography and espionage.

In the remainder of this paper, I will describe how my own activities played into building me up as an inadvertent spy and as political threat. The word 'inadvertent' connotes a kind of accidental, wrong-time/wrong place context. I had no mission, no 'handlers', no case officer. My inadvertent spy persona was a composite of my own activities in Romania interacting with Romanian citizens, and the attempts by the secret police bureaucrats to draw up a picture of me as having some kind of insidious plan ostensibly connected to American intelligence agencies. My inadvertent spy persona had serious consequences for Romanian informants and friends, several of whom were compelled to become informers and at times harrassed.

There is a further factor, however, which 'aggravates' the espionage activities which I was assumed to have. It is the ethnographic mission of pursuing intimacy and trust that is so much at the core of our training and our very identity as fieldworkers. In the pursuit of intimacy, there is always the risk of vulnerability. In a repressive regime, however, this vulnerability may not only cause hurt, it can also lead to political harrassment or worse. Ethnography is about getting close, but in repressive situations we may need to pull back. I would go so far as to argue that in addition to the training in rapport-building or trust-building, we also need more training in distance and detachment, a kind of 'distance learning' if you will. I believe that this need to learn how to detach will become more pertinent in the future, especially because modern surveillance regimes are becoming more pervasive and potentially more repressive. As surveillance of us and the people we study expands, our projects of pursuing intimacy and trust will need to be complemented by efforts to keep a distance and identify domains of distrust. This is my own 'lesson learned' after doing research in communist Romania.

**We all have a file**

The account that follows is partly based on my own file, compiled by the Romanian secret police, the Securitate. Like any Romanian, I, too, could walk into the Archives of the Securitate in Bucharest, and inquire whether they had a dossier on me and then be permitted to read and copy it. The file, totalling 700 pages, is more than just a 'gaze'. Considerable energy, planning and organization went into compiling my dossier over a decade and a half, including the years when I never set foot in the country. In fact, my naiveté about the state security organs was matched by their exaggerated paranoia about me as a researcher.

As an artefact of the Romanian surveillance regime, my file is based on the assumption that my real mission in Romania was not the same as my officially approved research mission of studying village planning and later on, researching the role of local leaders. My file is full of speculations by officials as to what I am really doing. Several reports attempt to 'connect the dots' of my activities, but never quite reach a conclusion. Near the end of the file, in the margin of yet another observation report, a senior Securitate officer writes an exasperated note to his

subordinates: 'Is he a spy or isn't he?' Since surveillance is invariably secretive, I was never able to explain myself to the security organs. On a couple of occasions, I I observed them following me in a car, and Romanian friends told me that they had been visited by officers asking about me. But I could not sit down with them and clarify things. Hence, they obtained their information about me through covert observations, reading my academic texts, interrogating people who had met me, rifling through my possessions, copying letters that I sent/received, and receiving reports from informers. My only recourse was to act in such a way that they could conclude that my mission was indeed benign; that I was doing what my official research permission documents said I was supposed to be doing. It was a test of my ability to project myself as 'innocent' to others.

I failed this test. On December 15, 1984, according to my secret police file, it was concluded that I was 'conducting activities hostile to the interests of the country' and that I should not be allowed to enter Romania for a period of five years, to December 31, 1989 (which ended up being five days after Ceausescu's execution). I never knew about this prohibition, nor did the Romanian embassy in XXXXXXX when I obtained the standard tourist visa in connection with a vacation visit to Romania in August 1985. But on landing at Bucharest airport with my wife and two young children, we were detained in the transit hall. After an hour's wait, a border control officer, part of the state security apparatus, finally approached me. I prepared for some kind of 'interrogation'. However, the officer casually informed me that I was prohibited from entry into the country. I asked why. 'You know why,' he said curtly. And so ended my interrogation. After an uncomfortable hot night in the Bucharest airport transit hall, we left on the morning plane out of the country, back to my home in XXXX.

My surveillance did not end here, however. Years earlier, in XXXXX where I studied, and later in XXXXXXXX where I settled, Romanians filed reports about me to the Securitate. The reports were filed by Romanian scholars who visited my university, by those whom I met at international conferences in Budapest, Uppsala, Vienna and many other places, and by Romanians who stayed in my home as guests. Officials at the Romanian embassy in XXXXXXX also filed reports about me, since I attended meetings of the XXXXXXX Romanian Friendship Society, met Romanian citizens and exiles in various forums and venues, and also wrote articles about Romanian affairs for the XXXXXX press. In the mid-1980s until the fall of Ceausescu, I was periodically interviewed on the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and in local XXXXX media. In addition, several of my publications (including a paper about the anthropology of the Romanian secret police) were found in the suitcases of other foreign scholars visiting Romania and photocopied. The Romanian regime's interest in my activities continued right up until March 1989, when in the hope of returning to Romania, my wife and I took a chance and applied for a tourist visa. Our applications were rejected, with a report by a Romanian embassy official in my file that I was probably using my wife, a XXXXXX citizen, as a surrogate to carry out my secret mission. My file is thus a construction of me based on a combination of my fieldwork and visits to Romania and my activities outside.

Perusing my file and discussing my activities with Romanian friends later on, the major question for me is why exactly were they so interested in me and my activities? Why did they apparently think that my activities as an ethnographer – hanging around a village, talking to local leaders at the party school, obtaining documents and demographic statistics, taking photos of people harvesting potatoes or attending meetings – were so important as to constitute a security threat? A threat that caused them to spend inordinate amount of resources over several years tracking my movements and contacts, opening my mail, calling in friends for interrogation, etc.

**Discovering 'secrets'**

Authoritarian regimes and paranoid leaders (of which Ceausescu's Romania was an example) see themselves surrounded by perceived enemies or potentially disloyal populations. The perceived enemies of Romania were the Soviet Union, Hungary and various Western agencies. The potentially disloyal populations were ethnic Hungarians, ethnic Germans, dissatisfied workers and peasants experiencing brutal rationing of basic goods, and a large portion of Romania's Western-oriented intelligentsia. In so far as I moved in several of these circles, my very presence served to connect them to me, as if they were some kind of network.

Authoritarian regimes, I would argue, have a more flexible relationship to what we would call secrets. In their view, a secret is any kind of knowledge that might threaten a regime's stability. In the course of research, I discovered several such 'secrets': I discovered that the planning system was chaotic, that the bureaucracy was inept and/or corrupt, that the informal/underground economy was thriving, that the most outlandish rumours about the leadership were diffused and believed, that living standards were harsh or even dropping, that people made everyday decisions based on evading bureaucratic regulations and that ordinary people and even party members had little confidence in the regime's ideology or promises of progress (XXXX19xx). These findings were hardly a secret to my informants. They were the stuff of everyday life, the kind of life we ethnographers describe. Yet in the Securitate's view, discovering these 'secrets' was tantamount to espionage. Hence, my inadvertent spying.

Moreover, I disseminated my findings in forums that the Romanian regime could not control. Western academic books, papers, and conference presentations, and later on, in various media forums of Western press and radio. I was revealing what the regime considered secrets to those who were not supposed to know: the Western public and Western decision makers. I was effectively disseminating the message of Romanian opposition dissidents (considered traitors) through foreign media channels. From the Romanian state's point of view, I was serving an enemy. I was the inadvertent spy.

While I had no covert agenda, I could also be a 'source' for others. On one occasion, for example, while living in the village where I did fieldwork, I was invited for lunch by the US Embassy 'science advisor', whose (real) name was Mr. Smith. Since embassy personnel were restricted in their movements and under heavy surveillance, Mr. Smith was curious to ask me how my village fieldwork was going, about living standards in the countryside, and the like. Ever the cooperative grad student, flattered that I was in the office of an embassy official, I dropped the comment that the village had a lot of migrant workers because it had a uranium processing plant nearby. Access to this facility, called 'Factory R', was restricted, and I told Mr. Smith that I kept my distance from the area, never straying from the road and not inquiring what went on there. Mr. Smith became very interested. He suggested that I ask informants whether it was uranium mining or uranium enrichment, and a few other details. I said I would think about it. I never got back to him. Obviously, Mr. Smith, science advisor or not, was out to get some local knowledge from me. Maybe he had a mission. That's his job. But I was just an ethnography student living in a village, suddenly having a nice lunch with the embassy science officer. If I was a spy, or a source, it was inadvertent.

These kinds of inadvertent espionage events took place throughout my time in Romania. The embassy political officer stopped by the village one day. The U.S. ambassador visited me in his limousine, flags flying. My role as a 'source' also served certain Romanians, both villagers and scholars. They would ask me about protests taking place elsewhere in Eastern Europe, which they had heard about on Radio Free Europe (which was jammed by the Romanian regime), and I would respond with my own opinions, some innocuous, others apparently provocative. I can see several of my responses recorded in the secret police file, especially those conversations with Romanian scholars and local officials, who were always obliged to file reports with the Securitate. Sometimes

I was an interesting discussion partner (most had never encountered a Romanian-speaking American willing to discuss politics). For other acquaintances, I was such a potential threat that my attempts at conversation would be cut short.

My role as source and threat also continued when I returned to my home in XXXXXX, where I interacted with Romanian diplomats both before and even after I had been expelled from the country. I met them at the meetings of the XXXXXX Romanian Friendship Society, and during conversations when I applied for a visa at the embassy. We met for coffee in town, at cultural events, and one night the embassy's political officer stopped by my home with a gift of two football tickets to the XXXXXXXXXXXXX match. I discussed with the embassy's cultural attaché about the local XXXXX political landscape, with its many left-wing parties (some hard-line communist, others not), and which ones I though could be considered most friendly toward Romania. As one of the documents showed, I was in good standing partly because of an article I had co-authored with colleagues about the Romanian-Hungarian ethnic question (XXXXXXXXX). For them we were part of the Romanian campaign to fight Hungarian irredentism. One of the embassy officials had some concrete plans for me. He asked me if I could make a list of all the Romanians living in the country XXXXXXXx (a few hundred at most). The attaché explained that he wanted to invite them to attend a visiting Romanian folk music troupe. Of course, most of the Romanians living in XXXXXX at that time had defected, having received political asylum as refugees from communism XXXXXXXX; many were living under secret addresses, some were active in anti-regime activities, and the vast majority wanted nothing to do with the Romanian embassy, which they assumed was full of Securitate officers.

Compared to the other foreigners visiting Romania during the communist period, e.g. tourists, diplomats, and other researchers on official exchanges, we anthropologists were considered dangerous because we lived outside major cities, we lived there for a long time, we could establish personal relations with Romanians, and we could speak the language. We could thus acquire information or distribute ideas beyond the urban enclaves where other foreigners lived and could be more easily monitored. In addition, we were a threat because we were from the West. In a cold war setting, we were assumed to carry with us certain ideas, what the regime called 'moral pollution', which might include anti-regime political beliefs or alternative views of the world (e.g., a Romanian Transcendental Meditation group that had been raided by the police). As emissaries from the West, with privileges of movement, we were also attractive to Romanians who wanted to acquire Western ideas, Western books, bibles, and Western goods (Kent cigarettes, birth control pills, blue jeans, pop music). We were also sought out by people hungry for Western cultural tastes, information about world events, and by those wanted to contact relatives abroad or information on political asylum.

Unlike Katherine Verdery and other researchers in Romania I did not have any sort of American institutional backup after 1976. My post-doctoral research, while financed by XXXXXX research money, was organized by me alone, Romanian style. At a conference in Uppsala, I had met some Romanian sociologists, and I invited them to stop off in XXXX on their way home. One of them stayed with me in my apartment for several days; I helped him buy blue jeans for his young son. The sociologists repaid their favour by allowing me to enter the communist party training academy as a researcher. While they were informal sponsors of my research, several of them also ended up writing reports about me in my file, some critical enough that I was to be prohibited entry into Romania..

Similar to Katherine Verdery (2018), who describes her life in Romania through the prism of her own Securitate file, I also had a range of social contacts, including ordinary villagers, Romanian professionals and intellectuals, and a number of friends and acquaintances in Bucharest who had applied to emigrate and who were waiting for months or years for their exit visa. Speaking

the language and moving around, the Romanian apparatus realized that I could discover information beyond formal, official channels. I could talk to ordinary people in a bar, in their home. I could take information with me abroad. Since I had this varied network of social contacts and the ability to come in and out of the country at will, I was assumed to have some kind of larger mission. The secrets that I ended up revealing in my publications (covering topics such as XXXXXXXXXX[i]) describe harsh realities and how people cope with these. They are the kind of secrets the regime wanted suppressed from any kind of uncontrolled public discussion, both at home or abroad. In Romania of the 1980s, all typewriters were registered with the authorities, conversations with foreigners had to be approved and reported, and even the bridge clubs were closed by orders of Mrs. Ceausescu in 1983[ii] (bridge club members travelled around the country for tournaments, but invariably exchanged information and opinions). Seen from the regime's authoritarian optic, anyone who revealed the harsh realities of everyday life under socialism, and people's attempts to cope, was a potential trouble-maker or foreign agent. Hence the need for control over the foreign researcher, which ultimately led to difficulties in obtaining research permission, harassment of researchers and interlocutors, and in my case, a prohibition on entry. This is why I 'deserved' a 700-page file of observations, reports and interpretations.

Some of my Romanian informants, close friends and acquaintances were crudely harassed, being made to come to Securitate headquarters and write a declaration. Others cooperated with the authorities in order to maintain their privileges, which included valuable contacts with foreigners or permission to go abroad for conferences or private visits. Still others found ways to avoid, evade or resist intimidation by the security organs.

At one point, I thought that perhaps if the security organs understood what ethnography was, they might view the anthropological mission more benignly. One of my good friends, the late Romanian sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe, actually wrote an essay for his Securitate interrogation officer, attempting to explain the difference between ethnographic fieldwork and espionage. He, too, failed, and Gheorghe was harassed constantly for his relations with foreign scholars until December 1989. In another instance, I had a long lunch with a Romanian literary critic, the late Andre Brezianu, who had stayed in my apartment during a visit to Scandinavia. Compelled to write a report of our lunch meeting, Brezianu authored a long essay on American and Romanian literature, stating that this was a part of our discussions. As these examples show, some Romanians were not so intimidated by the Securitate surveillance regime. Others played along and provided 'content' to avoid trouble, while still others warned me not to contact them. Making such decisions could be painful. Let me provide an example.

**'You'll only make trouble for us'**

After a few years visiting Romania, for fieldwork and subsequent visits, I had become close friends with 'Andrei' and 'Maria' (pseudonyms). Having resided in the home of Andre's uncle, we met each other at family gatherings. Andrei and Maria lived in the city of XXXXXXX, some 20 km away, in an eighth floor apartment, with their baby daughter. Andrei was an engineer in the XXXXXX factory, and Maria worked in a planning office. They were my age and very personable, and whenever my wife and I went to XXXXX, we invited them out for dinner or visited them in their apartment. With Andrei and Maria, we could relax, gossip about people in the village or talk about conditions in Romania (in a low voice). I would bring along some Johnny Walker Scotch whiskey, Kent cigarettes or Toblerone chocolate, available only in the 'dollar shop', where Romanians could not enter. Maria would serve us sweet pancakes. Later on, when I visited on short vacations, I would bring baby clothes for their daughter or cosmetics for Maria. Over the years, we exchanged brief letters and phone calls, and I visited them whenever I came to Romania. At times they even allowed me to stay overnight in their home, although illegal according to the Romanian

law on ‘contact with foreigners’. Eventually, we decided that I should send them a formal invitation to visit me in XXXXX. This meant that they would have to apply for a passport. I was optimistic, since some years earlier, I had invited the mother of my ‘host’ family in the village, a retired collective farm worker, to visit me in XXXXXX for a week. She visited and returned to Romania. Andrei and Maria submitted their application and waited.

By the mid-1980s, my visits to Romania had become more stressful. I could not obtain a research permission, so I would visit on a tourist visa for a week or two, sometimes with a XXXXXX charter group, going with the group to the nearby mountain resort near Brasov or to the Black Sea beaches, and then went off on my own. I tried to remain inconspicuous, traveling light, with an old coat, and speaking as a Romanian. Visiting Andrei and Maria in their apartment at night, we talked softly. We did not go out anymore.

With my invitation and their application for a passport, Andrei and Maria were now called in for interviews with the passport bureau and security organs. Since I was not a relative, and since my name was already in their files, my invitation to them was suspicious. How did they know me? What had I asked them about the uranium factory in the village and the factory XXXXXXX where Andrei worked? Did they know that I was a spy? Did not Andrei, an engineer in a strategic factory, understand that he was being used by me? Didn’t he understand that I had invited him to XXXXXX in order extract secrets from him? After several weeks, their application was rejected. Moreover, they were instructed not to correspond with me or meet with me if I came to Romania.

In the summer of 1984, I returned to Romania for a brief visit with my wife and baby daughter, having written to Andrei and Maria beforehand. I landed in Bucharest, rented a car and made my way to their apartmentXXXXXXX. But they were never at home. I spent some days in the village, 20 km away, with my former host family. Whenever I went to their apartment, there was no one home, and their phone did not answer. I figured that they must be on vacation, probably on the Black Sea coast. Some years later, they explained to me that they were terrified of meeting me for fear of the police. Every day for that week I was inXXXXXXXX, they had gone out into the forest for a picnic, simply in order to avoid seeing me, remaining all day and into the evening, hoping that I would not show up on their return.

I spent the days in the village, where people were more accommodating. I stayed with my former host family. I had brought a gift package for Andrei and Maria, some chocolates, toys and children’s clothes. Andrei’s mother lived in the village, so in order not to create suspicion, I asked the young grandson where I was living to walk around the corner and Andrei’s mother the package with my greetings. The mother should tell Andrei and Maria that I was here in the village, and that they could come around the corner to where I was staying. I heard nothing.

The next day, however, I ran into Andrei on the street. He was visiting his mother. He spoke to me briefly and coldly: ‘Thank you for the package. No, we cannot meet. Please do not visit us. Don’t visit anybody, you’ll only make trouble for them. Good-bye’. Then he walked away. Here was someone whom I had known for 10 years, having spent hours, days and nights in their apartment, attending their child’s baptism, and now he just walks away. While there was a law compelling any Romanian who spoke to a foreigner to file a report with the police, and where others could inform on them for not doing so, I also met dozens of people who did not care about the foreigner law. The family with whom I was staying, for example, just scoffed at the local policeman. So I could never be sure who felt intimidated by these laws and who did not. I was busy -- pursuing and managing my intimacy.

I later found out that Andrei and Maria, even though their request to visit XXXXXXXXX had been rejected, continued to be called in for interrogation, clearly because of their connection with me. Their situation was so serious, they explained later, that they contemplated suicide. Their relationship with me had made their life unbearable. Andrei, he explained later on, had been

threatened that he would not be promoted to chief engineer in the factory. Even worse, their daughter would not be allowed to enter gymnasium. Because of me, their life was falling apart.

Following my discouraging encounter with Andrei, I returned homeXXXXXXXXX, depressed and paranoid. Perhaps I could do something to alleviate the situation. Ever the American optimist, I visited the Romanian embassy in an effort to try and renew my invitation to Andrei and Maria. I appealed to an embassy attaché I had met before, hoping that he could intervene. I explained that perhaps there had been a mistake with the invitation refusal. I talked about my fieldwork. It turned out that this particular diplomat happened to come from the same village where Andrei had been born. He was impressed that I knew so much about his home district. I asked him if he could help with the invitation so that they could visit me XXXXXXXx. The attaché said he would look into the case. Of course, nothing came of it. Instead, he also wrote a report about me in my file, saying that I was suspicious. How naïve was I. After he retired, he actually wrote several books about his life as a secret police operative. A couple years went by and in early 1989, my wife and I again applied for a tourist visa. This, too was rejected, with a note in my file that my wife was probably my collaborator in espionage.

In December 1989, the Ceausescu regime fell, and he and his wife Elena were summarily executed on Christmas day. A week later I received a warm letter from Andrei and Maria saying that they hoped I could visit. In March 1990 I visited them, and some months afterwards, they spent a week with their daughter at my home in XXXXXX. In several subsequent meetings over the years, they invariably bring up this period of harassment by the secret police. As a result of their intimate relationship with me, they have been marked for life. I would venture to say that for an entire generation of Romanians, those now over fifty, the decades of repression under the Ceausescu regime, the fear of informers, and the interactions with the Securitate remain a vital part of their lives.[iii]

My story here is one where I succeed in achieving the kind of intimacy and trust that makes for successful fieldwork, but where a lot of things also go terribly wrong. It is a story that many anthropologists or journalists could tell in various nuances. It reveals the dark side of intimacy, in an environment where states carry out surveillance in order to uncover suspected subversive elements and to control the exchange of knowledge, including knowledge that we might consider simple coping with everyday life. Our intimacy project becomes risky when we carry it out under a regime that is suspicious not just of outsiders but of its own population. In such a context, the closer you get to the people you study, the more dangerous it is for them.

**Peer surveillance and self-surveillance**

Being watched was not just a one-way street. Villagers also watched each other, especially those who had contact with me, and rumours about me could lead to a police investigation (as when the police came searching for a golden pistol that I had supposedly left behind in the house where I had lived). Other Romanians in sensitive positions developed their own strategies. Party cadre in the village, and those in the party school found me an interesting discussion partner about U.S. politics or world affairs, and sometimes a useful resource for buying cigarettes or whiskey, or in my case, a Swiss army knife and a Samsonite attaché case. The line between intimacy and me obtaining useful data was always unclear, and these unclear lines could always be exploited by informers or the surveillance bureaucracy.

Looking back on the surveillance regime to which I was subjected, we might distinguish between two kinds of state surveillance. First, there was the more overt surveillance of the population, restrictive, controlling, intimidating and threatening. This is the kind of surveillance that Romanians understood when they demurred having close relations with a foreigner at a meeting or on a train.

There is a second kind of state surveillance, more subtle, what Foucault calls 'discipline', which operates at the more individual level, making people feel that they are constantly watched even when they are not. It is this feeling of being watched that can alter subjectivity. 'Discipline' alters people's everyday life in terms of who they will talk to, what kind of trust they will pursue, and what kind of intimacy they will tolerate. Commenting on Zadrożna's fieldwork (2016) Sökefeld and Strasser conclude that 'disciplining effects extend to the whole social field in which we work, our interlocutors included, because even though they may not harbour the suspicion that we might be spies, knowing that we are under observation forces them to be equally careful and reserved' (2016:165). Both the overt and covert kinds of state surveillance were present in Romania during my fieldwork. Foucault's 'discipline' reached down into the very essence of Romanians' everyday lives and practices. Everyone made choices, however difficult. There were limits to trust, limits on intimacy. Andrei and Maria, for example, had reached their limit.

Ultimately, this kind of state-based surveillance produced a self-surveillance where those being watched would watch the watchers and perform accordingly, as Gallinat (2016) describes for East Germany and the Stasi. This self-surveillance becomes Deleuze's 'societies of control' (1992). Hagerty and Ericson (2000) inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, speak of a 'surveillance assemblage', which in Romania comprised the state security organs and their 'collaborators' (be they voluntary or intimidated). Because of its complexity and its inherently chaotic character, ordinary Romanians and visiting anthropologists found the system difficult to comprehend. We never knew what was tolerated and what could pass. The organs could suddenly crack down at any time.

**Conclusion: a plea for passionate detachment**

Ethnographic fieldwork is considered successful when we can show that we have established relations of trust and intimacy with the people we study. Trust and intimacy are good. Isolation and detachment are bad. Recent anthropological studies have called into question this emphasis on relationality. Matei Candea and colleagues (2015) and Marilyn Strathern (1996) have emphasized that detachment and distancing, cutting off or refusal to form ties are as essential to social life as the formation of relationships. If fieldwork is also a kind of relationality, then perhaps detachment should enter into the equation.

The problem of involvement and detachment (Elias 1956) is not new. Detachment is both a state (one is not related/never related) and a process (one 'de-taches' or separates from another). However, detachment need not be a synonym for isolation. Donna Haraway (1988) has made a plea for a 'passionate detachment' in which we continually seek out solutions and linkages without falling back on the 'God trick' of false, depersonalized objectivity. Perhaps this passionate detachment could be a compromise solution in doing research in situations or states where surveillance regimes directly impact our efforts to achieve intimacy. Passionate detachment will not prevent us from being considered spies, but it may provide a tool for preventing accusations of crude espionage, and it may help shield our informants from harassment.

Perhaps in our research in socialist Eastern Europe, and in present-day societies with repressive regimes, we might temper our urge to intimacy with a good portion of measured detachment. With less intimacy, we might not obtain all the juicy ethnographic data that we want. On the other hand, our informants might be spared being threatened by the police organs, harrassed by the local politician, or accused by local village gossip. If detachment is just as important as engagement, then we need to rethink some of the conventional premises of ethnographic fieldwork by which our success is measured by the amount of intimacy and involvement we have with our research population. We certainly need and should do fieldwork in repressive regimes or milieus. Ethnography needs this kind of research. But finding out how people live might get these same people in a lot of trouble.

The first rule of any humanitarian intervention is ‘do no harm’. This applies to ethnography as well. I think some of us did more harm than we realize when we did our research. Some people got in trouble because of us. Our pursuit of intimacy had a dark side. We need to have a better balance between intimacy and detachment in our fieldwork. When teaching and pursuing fieldwork, we need to supplement our rapport-building efforts and apply some ‘distance learning’. Perhaps intimacy has been overrated and detachment has been overlooked.

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[i] Due to difficulties of access to these journals, the articles have been uploaded to xxxxxxx.
[ii] https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=37132536
[iii] As Holquist (1997:415) writes about the Soviet Union, 'the surveillance project encompasses both the attempt to gather information on popular moods and the measures intended to transform them.'