

*A Theatre for the Workers, Protest as Performance, and the
Political Police as (Art) Historian. A Plea for the Rediscovering
of Interwar Peripheries*

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Abstract: The article argues the importance of a renewed approach of the proletarian and Agit-prop theatre in interwar Romania, as well as forms of political proto-performances, as sociological and political phenomena, more than as aesthetical ones, based especially on the research of primary sources. Due to the specific political context of the period and the harsh censorship, these primary sources are mainly to be represented by the files of the political police of the time, Siguranța. Taken over by its communist successor, these files were manipulated and reinterpreted according to occasional political needs: any research of the original documents is an archaeological process dealing with both the analyzed activity per se and the politicization of archives during the 1948-1989 period.

Keywords: proletarian theatre; Agit-prop; interwar Romania; political performance; archives; Communist Party of Romania

For 50 years, proletarian and Agit-prop interwar theatre in Romania didn't leave any trace within the local tradition of this art. The impression of many theatre professionals that Romania never had a practice of theatrical events made by workers, for the workers and about the workers worth an artistic and research interest is fueled by the limited number of articles and books (all dating from before 1977) revisiting the so-called „tea parties”, poetry reciting, amateur or semi-professional performances, etc., but also, occasionally, respectable professional productions, which make the core of

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this practice². The existing bibliography is not only associated with a period of perceived artistic mediocrity and political indoctrination (the 1950s and the early 1960s), which might make readers suspect that even the facts themselves were invented, but it is also partially unreliable by itself because of historical alterations. For instance, it is not believable that an illegal communist party with around 1.000 members could have been responsible for all proletarian theatre events – as it appears in Margareta Andreescu's *Proletarian Theatre in Romania* (1977), the only synthesis on the subject –, and it is a historical fact that not all trade unions in Romania (the most constant producers of workers' theatre in the 1920s and 1930s) were associated with the communists (a large part of them were connected to the socialists, the mortal enemies of the communist parties in that period). In many situations, the past of the proletarian and Agit-prop theatre was yet another field for the post-1945 regime to build a legitimacy, to erase parts of history in order to emphasize its own position. And the moment when all these (few) publications appeared – some, at the peak of socialist realism, others, during the national communism – made politically undesirable, hence, absent, any reflection on the connections with and influences of the Soviet amateur/Agit-prop/proletarian theatre of the 1920s and 1930s.

The theatrical practice itself falls also prey to strong lack of cultural interest for amateur and politically engaged art and to the official narrative regarding the interwar period in general and the interwar performance art especially³. The focus on the model of actors-run private companies, on the one hand, and on the aesthetical phenomenon of the so-called „theatricalization” (the self-affirmation of theatre as an art autonomous from literature or visual arts and of the stage director as the actual author of the performance⁴) has left

2. Claudine Amiard-Chevrel, ed., *Le Théâtre D'agit-Prop - Vol. 3* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977); Margareta Andreescu, *Teatrul Proletar Din România [Proletarian Theatre in Romania]* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1977).

3. In the section of her book dedicated to the Romanian stage of the 1920s and 1930s, Miruna Runcan only mentions the only official – and subsidized – repertory workers's theatre, Work and Joy, saying that the trade union support for such proletarian theatres, common in US, the Soviet Union, and Western countries, was difficult to find in Romania. The aesthetical contribution of the Work and Joy Theatre is considered as non-existent. See Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea Și Reteatralizarea În România – 1920-1960 [Theatricalization and Re-Theatricalization in Romania – 1920-1960]*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2014), 22.

4. For more on this topic, see Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea Și Reteatralizarea În România – 1920-1960 [Theatricalization and Re-Theatricalization in Romania – 1920-1960]*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2014).

aside not only the struggles of the proletarian theatre or the more aesthetically appealing yet equally underdeveloped Futurist performance⁵, but also, for instance, the stronger vein of the interwar Expressionist theatre⁶. Not necessarily by accident, a number of stage directors interested in Expressionism were involved in left-wing movements, either as communist sympathizers, as socialists or members of Jewish leftist organizations, and some of them, such as Sandu Eliad or I. Ligeti, were also working in the proletarian theatre⁷. Paradoxically, it is little known how much all these directions, mainstream and underground, were actually interconnected at the time – with, for instance, a future supporter of the extreme right wing (director and writer Haig Acterian) writing in 1932 about the preeminence of directing and acting over the written play (the essence of „theatricalization”), and giving Soviet „revolutionary theatre” examples, in the first issue of a leftist review, which had the name of a well-known Agit-prop, Bolshevik, mass theatre movement (*Simyaya Bluza / Blue Blouse*)⁸.

The situation of leftist and human rights public interventions with both a political and a performative dimension (public actions that sometimes were to be institutionalized decades after under the – umbrella – term of performance art or political spectacle), which were, at first glance, marginal in the politically controlled context of the 1920s and 1930s, is even more dire in terms of knowledge about them. While the public actions – from the mass spectacle of the burial of their leaders or „martyrs” to semi-religious processions – of the far-right are well documented⁹ and recognized, including in their performative side, the public performative presence of the left, indeed, much less visible even at the time, is practically unknown. Which, in the end, makes it less possible to understand the complex nature of the

5. See Ion Cazaban, „Futurismul ca Model Teatral [Futurism as Theatrical Model],” *Studii Și Cercetări de Istoria Artei - Special issue "Futurism Today. One Hundred Years since the Futurist Manifesto,"* 2010.

6. See Ion Cazaban, *Scena Românească Și Expresionismul [The Romanian Stage and Expressionism]* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu / Teatrul Azi, 2010).

7. See Sandu Eliad, „Despre Teatrul Militant. Oameni Și Fapte Dintr-O Biografie Nescrisă a Teatrului Nostru [On the Engaged Theatre. People and Facts from an Unwritten Biography of Our Theatre],” *Teatrul*, March 1971.

8. See Haig Acterian, „Acterian, Haig (1932) „Teatrul Creator” [„Creative Theatre],” *Bluze Albastre. Revistă de Literatură Proletară [Blue Blouses. Proletarian Literature Review]*, May 5, 1932, 6.

9. See Roland Clark, *Sfântă Tinerețe Legionară. Activismul Fascist În România Interbelică [Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania]* (Iași: Polirom, 2015).

Romanian interwar period. Of course, one of the first questions to be dealt with is whether, taking into consideration their period and specific context, these performative events can be considered art (a traditional criterion for performance art to be „labeled” as such is for it to take place within an artistic context – a theatrical venue, a museum, a gallery, a festival, a biennial, etc.) and can be rightly and actually taken into account either as proto-manifestations of an art (performance art) that will develop as such much later, or in relationship with contemporary practices of political/social protests. It can be inferred that people involved in such actions did lack an artistic conscience: it is the case, for instance, for the three young Romanian-Hungarians who, in 1929, went to a costume ball in Târgu-Mureş demanding a general amnesty, dressed as guardian and convicts, referencing the Doftana prison (where many of those convicted for communist-related offences were kept) and a recent report, about the police abuses on prisoners, of the League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADO)¹⁰. But the performative dimension does exist, and it might be worth a deeper research into how the particular political conditions of interwar Romania were requiring for creative-performative forms of protest, what these forms and their recurrent patterns were, how they were initiated, who those involved were and what their motivations were.

Contemporary oppressive political contexts are leading to strikingly similar gestures: the members of the Pussy Riot group do have an artistic conscience, but their 2012 „punk prayer”¹¹ was never aimed at an artistic reception. It is the same with the actions of another Russian collective, Voina¹², and examples might follow, which makes it all more valuable to understand the long history of such practices in different moments and places, including in interwar Romania.

According to existing published materials and recollections, a proletarian, Agit-prop theatre did exist in interwar Romania – as the political performative interventions did also exist, not only on the far-right spectrum. More than that, the development of theatre forms addressing the less educated classes was a constant topic for the intellectuals and theatre professionals of the time.

10. ANIC, Fond 96, File 1074.

11. Jeffrey Tayler, “What Pussy Riot’s ‘Punk Prayer’ Really Said,” *The Atlantic*, November 8, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/what-pussy-riots-punk-prayer-really-said/264562/>.

12. Ellen Barry, “Artist Playing Cat-and-Mouse Faces Russia’s Claws,” *New York Times*, January 21, 2011.

The political and civic education of the masses was of stated importance for both the far-right and the supporters of the left, the conservatives and King Charles II (the head of the Kingdom of Romania between 8 June 1930 and 6 September 1940). Conservative nationalist historian and statesman Nicolae Iorga founded in Bucharest, through the League for the Cultural (later, Political) Unity of All Romanians, aka the Cultural League (Liga Culturală), a Popular Theatre (Teatrul Popular) as early as 1921. It was not at all intended as a proletarian theatre per se, but it did address a popular, non-elitist audience, with the aim of raising the level of both education and patriotic (to be understood as „national”) conscience of the „people”. During the 1920s, for the Popular Theatre worked artists who were not nationalists in Iorga’s and the Cultural League understanding of the term, nor interested in traditions and the traditional village life, such as Victor Ion Popa¹³ and Aurel Ion Maican¹⁴, later – two of the poster figures of „theatricalization”.

The Work and Joy Theatre (Teatrul Muncă și Voie Bună), run by the above-mentioned acclaimed playwright and director Victor Ion Popa, was founded in 1938 at the initiative of the then-Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Mihail Ralea, a leftist (the general term of the period was „democrat(ic)”¹⁵) sociologist, and Ralea was reacting to a much discussed public concern. Years before, in 1931, the playwright, director and theatre critic George Mihail Zamfirescu founded a company, called Masca (The Mask), meant to address its performances to industrial workers. (Just to prove how imbricated the theatrical worlds were back then, Zamfirescu was also the founder, in 1932, of the „13+1” Company, which produced several Expressionist performances, including one by I. Ligeti, one of the professional directors working in the proletarian theatre.) Masca was presenting its productions in various Bucharest neighborhoods, on the stages of the so-called popular athenaeums, established at the initiative of King Charles II as places for the

13. See G.M. Zamfirescu’s assessment of V.I.Popa’s work with the Popular Theatre, George Mihail Zamfirescu, *Mărturii În Contemporaneitate [Contemporary Testimonies]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974), 36–37.

14. See Vera Molea, “Aurel Ion Maican. Începuturile Carierei Artistice (I) [Aurel Ion Maican. The Beginning of the Artistic Career],” *SCIA, Theatre, Music and Cinema Series, New Series*, 2008. It is true that Maican worked at the Popular Theatre as an actor, at the beginning of his professional life.

15. Mihail Ralea was not affiliated to neither the communist or the socialist movement, he was connected to various centrist, then leftist peasant factions and parties and a declared opposant of the Iron Guard.

workers and „lower classes” to socialize, attend concerts and performances, etc., even participate in amateur events. Many articles written by G.M. Zamfirescu during the 1930s (and first published, in 1938, in a book titled *Mărturii în contemporaneitate / Contemporary Testimonies*¹⁶) deal with the topic of a workers’ theatre and how should it work, chastising, for instance, those who supported less aesthetically oriented forms and approaches (as the amateur theatre of the trade unions was) and the popular audience’s lack of taste for „avant-garde” theatre, which is another proof of the wide spreading of such discussions.

Basically, it is a case where the general focus on certain aspects of the interwar theatre alone – in fact, only on the *winners* of the competition on forms and ideas – has left aside the complexity of the artistic and political debates of the period, and the material conditions that prevented any real possibility for alternative theatrical languages to fully develop. But the peripheral character of certain forms of theatre didn’t make them less part of the general conversation of the moment. For instance, one has to take account of the difficulty to finance theatrical productions and the fact that performances were subject to state authorization and thorough censorship, aspects responsible for the fact that a lot of proletarian theatrical events took the disguised form of „tea parties”, and some of them were variants of apartment theatre, or for the fact that one of the very few amateur proletarian full-fledged productions of the era presented on a professional stage, the Jewish Barasheum, had only one performance¹⁷. Plus, the politically charged atmosphere, impacted by the shock of the Bolshevik Revolution, was making an enemy of the state out of everybody potentially contesting the status-quo from a non-conservative, non-nationalistic perspective: which made possible for Vasile Abrudean, for example, a worker-peasant in the Arad region, to be charged, in 1931, with a criminal offense („agitation”) for owning and sharing two brochures, one containing proletarian theatre plays¹⁸; or, for a trade union performance with Maksim Gorki’s *The Lower Depths* to be kept with armed policemen guarding the audience¹⁹.

16. George Mihail Zamfirescu, *Mărturii În Contemporaneitate [Contemporary Testimonies]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974).

17. See C. Z. Alexandru, *Teatru Între Baionete [Theatre Between Bayonets]* (Bucharest: Grafica Noua, 1970), 54–79.

18. ANIC, Fund 96, File 1442.

19. Alexandru, 107–11.

Theatrical futurism was also a victim of the local conditions, and so it was the local avant-garde: while their publications were extremely short-lived in Romania, due to both money and censorship, its representatives, some of them heavily surveyed by the Siguranță²⁰, found their artistic recognition and fulfilled their artistic trajectory mainly abroad. While the specific political context is at least of the reasons why the Soviet Agit-prop theatrical experiments from the 1920s and 1930s didn't find a field as fertile in Romania as in Germany, for instance, both the proletarian theatre as developed in USSR before the mid-1930s, and the avant-garde were collateral cultural victims of the Stalinist, hardline realist-socialist version of Soviet regime installed in Romania after 1948. Until recently, discussing the potential legacy of interwar proletarian theatre might have appeared as having no relevance for the contemporary Romanian stage; but the emergence of new forms sharing a common ethos with that theatre²¹ undeniable changes the stakes.

From this perspective, researching legal and illegal forms of proletarian and Agit-prop theatre is, in fact, a foray not into the aesthetics but into the complexity of a public professional and political debate at the time of conflicting narratives about the future of the theatre, the new Romanian state and the country in general, with the debate itself, the identity and biography of those involved as important as the *success* of the said debate.

Political police as archivist and art historian

For a variety of reasons, live performances (in the form of reciting poetry, staging of dramatic fragments, singing, public lectures, various actions in public space) played a more central social and cultural role for the legal or underground left movements during the interwar period than they did for the anticommunist opponents, dissidents and political prisoners after 1948. One of the reasons was the limited access of the left-wing parties to publication and distribution of books, and the very strict censorship of the period. So strict that in 1935, for instance, the political police started a whole nation-wide campaign to confiscate all existing copies of the Romanian translation of Andre

20. See Tănase, Stelian (ed.) (2008) *Avangarda română în dosarele Siguranței* [*The Romanian Avant-Garde in the Files of the Political Police*], Iași: Polirom.

21. The work of director David Schwartz and various collectives dealing with non-professional community groups.

Malraux's *Man's Fate* (*La Condition humaine*), for „promoting communism and terrorism”²², even if the preface to the novel was written by a very honorable, liberal literary critic (E. Lovinescu), who nobody would have ever suspected of communist leanings. Left-wing publications (newspapers, magazines, brochures, books) were also a common piece of evidence for indictment charges when they were found during police searches, while participation in artistic or cultural live events was much more difficult for the authorities to use as undisputable proof for illegal political activity. Also, communist political convicts had strictly controlled access to written material, especially political one, so theatre (for instance) was the available tool for them to promote their social ideas and for their group to bond (theatre, for example, was use as a means for political education, see Andreescu, 1977). But, above all, the intended audience for the communist and socialist parties was social groups with limited education and limited reading or cultural practices – which explains both the preference for live encounters or events and the non-standardly artistic form of these events (involving amateur performing, for instance). As put in Lynn Mally's terms, about the equal preference for the performing arts of the new Soviet state, until mid-1930s:

At a time when film equipment was scarce, and illiteracy was high, theatres spread the political message of the revolution. They were also evidence that the revolutionary state (in the Romanian case, the revolutionary party, n. I.P.) was committed to a mission of enlightenment.²³

Logocentric as the public space in Romania has ever been, and even more in a time when radio was a technological revolution and film – an exceptional event, the harsh definition of criminal political activity introduced by the so-called Mârzescu Law in 1924 had a huge impact on the press, especially after 1933, when first the Grivița strikes (in February), then the

22. See ANIC (National Central Historical Archives), Collection 50, file 155 (on „Communist intellectual sympathizers”). For the impact of Malraux' novel on young communist intellectuals in Romania, see Péter Várdy in dialogue with Imre Tóth (2014) *În viață sunt lucruri care nu se fac. Și totuși se fac...* [In Life There Are Things You Don't Do. Yet You Do Them...], București: Humanitas, p. 101.

23. Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

assassination of prime-minister I.G. Duca by a group of legionnaires²⁴ (in December), prompting King Charles II to instate an indefinite state of siege (it was replaced, in 1941, with the state of war).

Press distribution was difficult even for legal publications, and the lifespan of left-leaning newspapers and reviews was very short. The *Blue Blouse* review had only four issues. The *Working Life* (*Viața muncitoare*), the legal weekly of the Unitarian Trade Unions, appeared between 1925 and 1930, but only some of the issues could be traced at the level of the year 1963²⁵; for the others, no copy survived. While trade unions didn't understandably have an interest in documenting their (artistic) activity, and the socialist parties or other organizations had a limited practice of keeping records (especially for non-financial, non-organizational aspects), as an illegal organization, the Communist Party of Romania (the name used during the Third International) had a totally different problem: it didn't have the proper conditions to keep its own operational archive and it was risky to do it, not to mention keeping copies of the illegal publications it supported (for instance, the newspaper *Scântea/The Spark*). In 1943, the most famous communist „fall” (the discovering, by the Siguranță, of a clandestine house in Bucharest) led to the entire operational archive being confiscated; at some other moment, the archive buried by its keeper was dug up partially rotten.²⁶

The question then would be: how could all these performative actions, events, etc. be documented at the level of the year 2017? The thesis of this article is that the main historian of the leftist movement, including its artistic dimension, is the interwar political police, also known as Siguranța.

People might not keep copies of their sent letters – but in case of everybody associated with any form of governmental criticism, Siguranța took care about making copies of their correspondence. For instance, in 1938 (before his own second departure for France), the surrealist painter and poet Victor Brauner sent a letter to the well-known French communist writer Louis Aragon, in which he was pleading for a literary exchange between

24. Members of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, the fascist organization active in interwar Romania, including as a party, also known under the original name of its paramilitary branch, the Iron Guard.

25. Titu Georgescu and Mircea Ioanid, eds., *Presa PCR și a Organizațiilor Sale de Masă 1921-1944 (Prezentare Bibliografică) [RCP Press and That of Its Mass Organizations 1921-1944 (Bibliographic Presentation)]* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1963), 93–94.

26. See Cristina Diac, *Zorii Comunismului În România. Ștefan Foriș, Un Destin Neterminat [The Dawn of Communism in Romania. Ștefan Foriș, an Unfinished Destiny]* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de scaun, 2014).

„progressive” writers in the two countries. Siguranța intercepted the letter and made it part of Brauner’s personal file, alongside a report, signed by one of the Siguranța detectives: it concerns information about the relationships between Brauner and Aragon, and Brauner and another surrealist poet, Gherasim Luca, about surrealism in general, the splitting of the movement and the connections with the Communist Party.²⁷ (In this particular case, the political police act as both an archivist and an art historian.) One might learn a lot about how a review such as the *Blue Blouse* was distributed thanks to the documents in the file of a man trialed for giving away this publication and talking about Russia in a village bar in 1932.²⁸

B(ernard) Lebli, one of the theatre professionals most invested in the proletarian theatre, the director of the production with Gorki’s *Lower Depths* at the Barasheum and, after the war, the director of the Jewish State Theatre in Bucharest, died in 1966 without writing his memories, hence his contribution was left aside after the nationalistic turn of the Romanian Communist Party.²⁹ But (some of) his manuscripts are to be found in the Siguranța archives, giving testimony on his writing, his interests and his larger political and intellectual profile.³⁰ We shouldn’t forget that the excessive attention given by the Siguranța to those critical to the status-quo and the fact that they were seeing communists everywhere, even where there were only disgruntled citizens talking in a bar, helped the postwar Communist Party build an oversized image of itself, and falsify historical facts (Diac, 2014).

Of course, the Siguranța archives are not able to turn the interwar proletarian theatre into something it was not – an aesthetically highly valid set of productions with a lasting impact on the theatrical tradition. But a research into these archives – correlated to the existing published memories and other analysis – would clear why it was so: who were those involved in such practices, what the relationship with the mainstream theatre was, what were the challenges, who was the audience, what this theatre wanted to accomplish, etc.

Which doesn’t mean that such a research is not a complicated endeavor by itself.

27. ANIC, Fund 95, File 26251 (Victor Brauner).

28. ANIC, Fund 96, File 1646.

29. After 1944, Lebli was involved in the Democratic Jewish Committee (Comitetul Democratic Evreiesc/CDE), an organization controlled by the communists and used against the Zionist organizations in dealing with the „Jewish problem”.

30. ANIC, Fund 95, File 4589 (Bernard Lebli) and File 4591 (Ciubotaru Froim).

„The communist problem” – a short introduction into archival dynamics

During the communist regime, the former archives of the interwar political police and the judicial archives were selected according to the „subject” of the files: those dealing with the extreme right activists stayed with the new General Direction for People’s Security (Direcția Generală a Securității Poporului/DGSP – the first official name of the Securitate, the rightful successor of the Siguranță), and those related to the members and activists of the underground left went to the archive of the Communist Party (mainly, the Archive/Fund of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Romania, then the Romanian Communist Party, RCP). In fact, the whole Siguranța archive was taken over, initially, by the communist successor of the interwar political police, and several categories of files were transferred first to the Central Verifying Commission (1948-1950), then to the Party Control Commission (CCP³¹; after 1965, the Party Central College), to be further archived as part of the Central Committee Fund. Those transferred files were related to all pre-1944 members of the Communist Party and members of their families, supporters, other people involved in their activity, members and supporters of the Socialist Parties, Jewish organizations (other than the Zionist ones and Zionists in general³², including when they had acted as communist/socialist sympathizers or even party members), women’s organizations, and human rights groups (generally grouped under the term „the communist problem”). Basically, everybody who had been surveyed by the interwar political police for other reasons than fascism („the legionnaire problem”³³), Zionism, or irredentism entered in this category. The reason for this transfer was the big-scale verification process initiated by the Party in 1948³⁴: the smallest communist party in Europe in 1944, the Romanian Workers’ Party attracted a huge number of members after the war, mainly in order to legitimize itself, which ended up with a large number of opportunists, royalists, members of the former historical parties (liberals, etc.) and other persons with a politically or socially questionable past, including former members of the extreme-right

31. In Romanian, Comisia Controlului de Partid/Colegiul Central de Partid.

32. Those files were kept by Securitate as Zionists were part of the „nationalistic problem”. Members or organizations such as Hashomer Hatzair were subject to a full-fledged anti-Zionist campaign in the 1950s, ended with a series of very public (show) trials in 1953-1954.

33. The fascist organization active in interwar Romania, including as a party, was the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known under the original name of its paramilitary branch, the Iron Guard.

34. Case by case verifications started as early as 1945-1946.

Legion of the Archangel Michael. Since the communists were surveilled by both the central and local branches of the Siguranța (the files contain also the correspondence of various bureaus of the institution related to the local activity of one communist suspect or another), some files regarding communist and trade unions activities, which were not deemed essential for the verification of the party members, remained in local archives.

The role of the Central Verifying Commission was to re-confirm the party membership status of everybody, including based on their activity before and during WWII as it was reflected by the documents in the Siguranța archives (the verification was a sort of a cross-referenced process, in which the person's autobiography and self-presentation in front of the Commission were confirmed or invalidated by the archival material and/or references given by other party members or people they worked with). In 1950, after the verification process was completed, the Central Verifying Commission was disbanded, and CCP took over the mission of „vetting” party members, alongside dealing with violations of party discipline or ethics, thus creating its own archive of personal files (including the autobiographies, references, etc.), while the original archives from the interwar period were slowly moved into the Historical Archive of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (in the first half of the 1950s)³⁵. After 1960, when the party became more invested into the preservation (and the re-writing) of its own memory and history, many published materials confiscated by the Siguranța were taken from the original files and moved into the archive of the Institute for Historical and Social-Political Studies (ISISP³⁶). Also, at some moment in the 1960s, ISISP started a very ambitious project of oral history, collecting the memories of former fighters in the French Resistance and in the Spanish Civil War etc., and supporting the publication of memories related to various moments in the pre-1945 history of the communist movement. One of the books commissioned and published by ISISP, for instance, is *Theatre Between Bayonets* by C.Z. Alexandru, a carpenter heavily invested in the proletarian theatre supported by trade unions. His recollections are vital in terms of testimonies about the working process, the modes of production and the people involved in proletarian theatre events, but unless confronted

35. According to historian Ștefan Bosomitu, in a private communication, the periodical vetting of party members was a sort of a ritual, meant, among other things, to blame individual members for the errors of the party, which explain the proliferation of redundant information within the personal files at CCP.

36. In Romanian, Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social Politice.

with other documents, not entirely reliable in terms of the actual connections between the trade unions and the Communist Party (even if many people he worked with in the amateur proletarian theatre were members of the party – such as Ion Popescu-Puțuri, the ISISP director at the time of the publication of the book). One of the people giving testimony to ISISP about his participation in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War is Iso Schapira (1903-1981), after the war, the first (and last) director of the Jewish State Theatre in Iași. A former student of Piscator and, at the moment of his enrollment in the International Brigades, actor and stage director at the Pariser Idischer Arbeiter Theater (the Parisian Yiddish Workers' Theatre – PIAT), Schapira recounts for the ISISP archives his endeavors as the animator of Agit-prop musical and theatrical performances for soldiers on the Spanish front.³⁷ For all known accounts, this is the only source of information about leftist war theatre involving the Romanian members of the International Brigades and it gives precious details about the participants, the repertory, the sources of influence and the role of such actions.

After the 1989 Revolution, the whole Archive of the Central Committee was taken over by the Ministry of National Defense and moved outside of Bucharest (to Pitești). It began to be transferred to the Central National Historical Archives (ANIC) between 1993 and 1995, and most of it was open for researchers starting with 2000. The latest to be made available for researchers were the files in the CCP Fund: ANIC made the inventory in alphabetical order, and it ended up releasing some documents as late as 2014.

The part of the ISISP patrimony dealing with published materials (newspapers, reviews, books, brochures, posters, pamphlets, etc., dating from before and after 1945) – the library of the institution – was transferred to the Central University Library³⁸. The ISISP archive per se – the historical part (pamphlets, brochures, written documents, illegal press, posters, photographs, microfilms), and the current part – was transferred to the Library of the Romanian Academy (which had its own collection of interwar periodicals) and then, in 2000, to the National Archives; some funds became available for research in 2014. The local archives stayed put (the funds are preserved by the local branches of ANIC).

37. ANIC, Fund 60, File 95, p. 200 and following.

38. For the history and the content of this fund, see the official presentation of the Library: <http://www.bcub.ro/cataloge/unibib/memoria-comunismului-fondul-isisp-din-biblioteca-centrala-universitara-din-bucuresti>.

But knowing where the archives currently are and the fact that some funds were only recently made available for research are not the only problems. During the whole time they were kept by the communist authorities, basically, between 1948 and 1989, the original Siguranța archives were reorganized according to the needs of the party. For instance, the whole pre-1944 part of the Agit-Prop (Propaganda and Agitation) Fund was recreated from scratch – actually, from documents taken from other files –, since the party didn't have any trace of its own propaganda activities. The same happened to a special collection dedicated to the leader of the party in 1948-1965, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej³⁹, recreated from various files, and a similar process may be inferred even about the files dealing with the Central Committee and the General Secretariat of the party during its illegal existence (the Moscow archive of the Komintern also played an important role in this archival recreation⁴⁰). The confiscated material was moved from the original files – usually, personal and judicial ones –, into a fund that should, in the logic of things, belong to the ISISP archive; but if it's about newspapers, brochures, or letters by Romain Rolland, Panait Istrati and the likes, the documents are to be found in the Collection 190 of the Archive of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (CC of RCP), created in the year 1977.⁴¹ The same non-intuitive principles apply to transcripts, testimonies, notes, etc., about the activity of party members and other participants to events relevant for the party (reconstructed) history, such as the royal coup on 23 August 1944, but also the manuscripts of Constantin Argetoianu's diary⁴², which are part of Collection 60, „Recollections, memories and notes of personalities about the social-economic and political situation in Romania”. At the same time, another set of files, subtitled „The economic, social and politic situation of Romania” and including articles, memories, notes, but also original

39. I am grateful to historian Mihai Burcea for drawing my attention to this aspect. For more on the creation of this fund and the reconstitutive practice of the Communist Party in terms of its own archive, see Diac, Cristina, 2012.

40. In the 1970s, ISISP made a documentary trip to Moscow to retrieve materials in the Komintern archive, see Diac, 2012. Even previously, in 1968, during the rehabilitation of Romanian communists, victims of Stalinism, started by the new Ceaușescu regime, the Central Party College was in contact with the Komintern archives.

41. <https://www.scribd.com/document/241775224/Ziare-Brosuri-si-Documente-cu-Caracter-Politic-Cultural-Democratic-si-Antifascist-1875-1901-1905-1908-1910-1912-1914-1917-1920-1922-1939-1>.

42. Argetoianu was an anti-communist liberal politician and statesman, briefly the prime-minister of Romania in 1939, arrested by the communist regime in 1950 and dead in prison in 1955, without having stood a trial.

materials taken from pre-1945 files with no relation to the „communist problem” (such as an analysis about the political situation in Romania, with a focus on the Iron Guard, dating from September 1940⁴³), are archived within the multifarious ISISP Fund (Fund ISISP-XII). The difference between the two funds with so similar titles is that Collection 60 includes documents related to general subjects (some of them are extended autobiographies), while Fund ISISP-XII focuses on strikes, the economic and political situation in certain regions or villages, railroad workers, the oil industry and references to strictly economic aspects.

The description of the inventory of the Collection 60 says that the Historical Archive of the CC of RCP was, before 1989 (actually, since 1953), a part (a „sector”) of the ISISP, but the files within this fund bear the „affiliation” to the Chancellery of the CC of RCP (the Chancellery being the internal administration body of the Central Committee, in charge of redacting, keeping track and communicating to the lower echelons of decisions adopted by the party leadership); while the files belonging to the ISISP bear (now) only this denomination. The Chancellery was the keeper of other historical collections, also related to the National Democratic Block (Blocul Național Democrat), or, for instance, the Patriotic Defense (Apărarea Patriotică), while Fund ISISP-VII deals with „Trials filed against militants of the revolutionary and democratic workers’ movement in Romania”, which overlaps thematically with Fund 96 of the old Archive of the CC of RCP.

Fond 96 covers judicial – personal or group-related – files concerning trials for communist/antifascist-related offences, and in many situations it complements itself another fund, Fund 95, which includes all pre-1944 personal files of „antifascist fighters” (an umbrella term for communists, socialists, activists in Jewish organizations, and other leftists), including the criminal records originating in the judicial files in Fund 96 (at least, this superposition can be traced back to the original creator of these files, Siguranța). Again, since Fund 95 and Fund 96 were the basis for verifications operated by the Central Verifying Commission and continued by the Party Central Commission, copies and transcripts of documents in those Funds, or references to them, are also to be found in Fund CC of RCP – CCP.

Collection 50, „Documents elaborated by the repressive authorities on the activity of the Communist Party and the revolutionary mass organizations”, includes general documentation about the activity of various organizations,

43. ANIC, Fund ISISP-XII, File 47, vol. I-II.

distribution of manifestos, reports and correspondence of the authorities, many of them dating from before 1924, when the RCP became illegal. Fund 95, Fund 96, and Collection 50 are the only original sources of archival documents (excluding the materials elaborated by the Communist Party itself, largely retrieved from the Komintern), and the only ones where the files themselves were created by the pre-1944 authorities. A lot of documents were taken from the Collection 50 and moved to the Collection 60 or other funds, with or without copies kept in the original files. And so, the archival vicious circle is completed.

In fact, ANIC has been facing huge problems in making the inventory and organizing the archive initially belonging to ISISP because its organization and evidence didn't follow the archival normative of the period⁴⁴, while the inherent post-1990 conditions made its funds part of the general Archive of the CC of RCP, blurring the original differences between the „historical” and the „current” (i.e. post-1944) archive. Most likely, the borderline chaotic structure of the ISISP funds and their overlapping with other funds and collections are the result of the institute's efforts on creating its archive according to the momentary discursive needs of the party, and the constant rewriting of the party history (the post-1965 rehabilitation of the Romanian victims of the Great Purges, the role of each participant to the events on 23 August 1944, the emphasizing or downplaying of the Soviets' involvement in different moments, the artificial „Romanization” of the party etc.).

The tormented history of the pre-1944 archives not only makes the process of looking for the traces of the interwar proletarian theatre and political performative actions a very complex mission, but it is also the mirrored image of how this theatre was itself manipulated to serve the legitimacy of the party, at one moment or another. Unlike the impression given by books such as Margareta Andreescu's, the Communist Party was not the only „producer” of proletarian and Agit-prop theatre, and the example of the three men in Târgu-Mureş protesting against the police abuses is not related to RCP⁴⁵. But only a thorough research into the archival labyrinth might shed a real light on what the interwar workers' theatre, legal and illegal, in theory and practice, really was.

44. See <http://www.arhive.nationale.ro/index.php?lan=0&page=122>.

45. Even if the League for the Defense of Human Rights was treated after 1944 as being on the orbit of the Communist Party, Siguranța didn't consider it as such, and its founder, lawyer and journalist C.G. Costa-Foru, was himself a non-communist democrat. See ANIC, Collection 50, Files 1177 and 1178.

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