

**‘A recognised trouble-maker wherever he goes’:
Narrated Surveillance, Redacted Recognition and the
International Reach of ASIO’s Cultural Cold War**

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‘Lilley is a Communist of many years standing and a recognised trouble-maker wherever he goes.’ So begins the dossier opening the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) file on Australian writer and union organiser Merv Lilley. He was later to become the third husband of the more prominent writer Dorothy Hewett, but in 1950 when his file was opened he was working as a miner, labourer and ship’s crew out of the small coal and sugar ports of northern Queensland.¹ ASIO’s descriptor serves as a useful title for this essay, which is more closely about Hewett and Australia’s best-known Communist writer, Frank Hardy, because it concentrates the three tropes of recognition (figured as deliberated and yet suspicious observation), ‘trouble’, and travel, that come together in thinking about ASIO’s surveillance of Australian writers internationally, beyond Australian borders, during the Cold War.

Hardy’s publications and travel in Europe, in the Eastern Bloc and in the USSR were closely followed by ASIO in the 1950s and 1960s, in an endeavour parallel and yet opposite to the kind of surveillance exercised over his notional enemies (as well as Hardy and his wife Rosslyn) by the Stasi or Soviet agencies in those countries. We could expect Hewett’s publications and travel, in her case also to Eastern Europe and the USSR in the early 1950s, and further to Communist China, to be similarly scrutinised – and they were and yet were not, for reasons that are revealing. Both writers’ ASIO files give us insight into the means by which state security secretly documented, and also shaped and to some extent directed, the lives and work of key Australian

¹ ‘Mervyn John Lilley’, ASIO personal file. National Archives of Australia, Series A6119, Item 2495, Vol. 1.

cultural figures, including their engagement with the world at large. But what do we make of these files now – made in secret, kept secret, aiming to silence, yet available at least partially as powerful forms of counter-history?

In the contemporary security state, where ‘warrantless mass surveillance’ has been exposed as a global norm, we are required to consider that our everyday activities are potentially and forever the concern of its agencies. When we compare this ‘permanent state of exception’ (via Giorgio Agamben) to surveillance at the height of the Cold War, we see more than its historical echo or precedent, and more than instances of the exception that has become the rule. Contemporary mass surveillance is anonymous and subjectless, automated and indiscriminate; mid-century intelligence gathering relied on individual reporting from embedded agents, using close observation and personalised tracking, as well as deceitful familiarity and role playing. Insofar as these surveillance activities were then secret but are no longer, and insofar as contemporary surveillance is secret and protects this secrecy diligently, records of this history offer us some of the little evidence we may glean of the rationale, practice and effect of surveillance in action.

Attention to recently-released records of FBI and CIB activities on the cultural front, to MI5 surveillance of British writers, and to Stasi and Soviet records of the cultural Cold War, throw the international dimensions of this kind of state control into some new relief.² It remains difficult to track Cold-War surveillance across national borders, despite the drawing of the iron curtain. But the work of Andrew Rubin, Hugh Wilford and others examines the ways in which CIA files on writers expanded internationally, and also covered over political and labour-based links, including into the Asia Pacific, that would otherwise have been more apparent. As a domestic agency, ASIO’s security targets have not been limited to Australian affairs, while the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), the equivalent international agency, was established in 1952, only after the first ventures behind the iron curtain of the writers discussed here. The traces that remain in ASIO’s subject files of international sources and reporting from international operatives, of embassy co-operation with security agencies, and of inter-agency collaboration, are tantalising shadows of the cold-war strategic networks and

2 Besides the influential work of Frances Stoner Saunders, Hugh Wilford and David Caute, recent American and British scholarship in this field includes Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia, 2015); Greg Barnhisel and Cathy Turner, ed., *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda and the Cold War* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2010); Rubin, *Archives of Authority*; Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1920–1960*, as well as further attention to surveillance of individual writers such as Doris Lessing (Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘MI5 Spied on Doris Lessing for 25 Years,’ *Guardian* 21 Aug. 2015 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/21/mi5-spied-on-doris-lessing-for-20-years-declassified-documents-reveal>>. Accessed 16 April 2016) and James Baldwin (Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

covert apparatus that produced them. Clues to the identities of these sources remain the most severely redacted content in files released publicly, however, and excisions and blankings-out repeatedly interrupt any file's narrative of surveilled international travel.

A number of researchers have found it useful to conceive of personal secret security files as forms of biography – political or 'bureaucratic biographies', as Fiona Capp couched them, in her 1993 work on Australian writers' files – which are written not after the fact but in parallel with 'the person's life as it is lived' (Capp 4). Framed or motivated by suspicion, moreover, a file's construction of a life becomes 'incriminating biography', as Capp notes, or hostile ('feindlich') biography, as Alison Lewis describes the genre of the Stasi file. 'The files can be read as a form of hostile, unauthorised biography whose banality in no way detracts from their harmful and aggressive intentions', she suggests (Lewis 383).³ As we read them now, the formal logic of the files (neither narrative nor biography, yet both) manifests a bureaucratic charge of crime or transgression, and we are confronted with, as well as implicated in, what we can identify as a hermeneutics of suspicion – reading for guilt, reading to find guilt, reading to have guilt confirmed. Paul Ricoeur's formulation of 'the school of suspicion' in 1970 referred to the work of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche as a triumvirate of thinkers who 'taught us to regard with suspicion our conscious understandings and experience' (Leiter 74), and modelled a broad form of interpretive critique that has informed much of the literary humanities.⁴ The reading work of surveillance, in its exacting yet hidden observation, situated and silent listening, and detailed, anonymous reporting, can perhaps be seen as an inversion of this postulated and ironised 'hermeneutics of suspicion', in ways somewhat analogous to Lee Edelman's redeployment of the phrase to describe a queered history of reading. Surveillance files enact or even literalise this hermeneutics in a positivist and empirical frame that relies on a necessary logic of distrust.

A focus on the record of international surveillance and the tracking of travel in these files adds another dimension to what is otherwise well-traversed terrain in Australian cultural history. More than this, such a focus dramatically highlights the pervasive redaction of sources and the formalised encoding of witnessed reportage characteristic of these records, as well as, in turn, their complex epistemological status as textual evidence. While ASIO is exempt from the Australian Freedom of Information Act 1982, the organisation is subject to the Archives Act 1983, which requires the release of records more than twenty years old, and this means more substantial material is regularly released than by equivalent agencies in the United States and United

3 See also Cristina Vatulescu, 'Arresting Biographies: The Secret Police File in the Soviet Union and Romania', *Comparative Literature* 56.3 (2004): 243–61.

4 See also Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015).

Kingdom. These records, however, are vetted for the protection of ‘national security’, and it is this interest that sees the removal of folios and the excision or blanking out of words and sentences from released copies of files. It is not that redacted meaning is deleted, gone or unknown; it remains knowable and known, but only to government and its delegated authorities. The public record is redacted; the full ‘facts’ are secret. History is left a supplicant to the institutions in this process, dependent on political interests as expressed in law, and retrospectively interpreted by the sovereign actors in the events at issue.

Redaction is a little theorised concept outside biblical and Torahnic scholarship, though Jonathan Abel’s recent work on Japanese *fuseji* (the redaction marks used to delete words and sentences from publications under Japan’s early twentieth-century imperial censorship regime) describes it as a ‘linguistic chiasmus performed by the mark of censorship at each moment of its manifestation’. Interested in its function as a trace or marker of the action of censorship, Abel suggests that redaction’s role is effectively to archive loss: we do not know exactly what we are banned from knowing, but ‘the surplus of meaning that X-ing creates cannot be erased or banned, nor can it be adequately or fully named’ (Abel 146).

It is clear, though, from the patterns of redaction and the stated intentions of ASIO that most of what has been excised is information that may identify or ‘compromise’ sources or methods by which its surveillance was and is conducted. This redaction seeks to minimise identification and recognition, especially of people whose work as agents entailed duplicity and disguise; the recognition of people who are/were able to be recognised but not for whom they are/were. For our retrospective reading, looking at these files as textual forms of cultural history, such redaction negates a crucial dimension of the intersubjective sociality being observed. This is, moreover, the exact dimension through which surveillance occurs, is reported, and becomes historical. What may be seen to be at stake is what we might posit as the ‘redacted affect’ evident in these files – the suppressed traces of emotional or connective recognition still identifiable in their formally neutral, yet accusatory narratives. Reading the genres of surveillance against the grain, we can open up space to recognise the powerful forces of feeling encoded and also redacted in the records, and to expose these forces as vectors of political interest that are as much intersubjective and affective as they are material or historical, entangling regulatory ideological statecraft with individualised performances of betrayal and guilt, loyalty and obeisance. These traces of affect are partial, tangled and contradictory, moreover, in as much as conventions require they be actively repressed and edited out, and often appear as misrecognition, disconnection, disaffection and frustrated misunderstanding. In that misfiring – witnessing the affective aporia of bureaucratic redaction – we find evidence of the profound epistemological

uncertainty that Timothy Melley argues, in his work on its fictional archive, underpins the covert operations of the secret security state.

The inglorious history of Australian surveillance of writers, as well as cultural producers such as journalists and film-makers, has been well-documented in Australian cultural and literary histories of the Cold War and earlier.⁵ Yet, as David Horner's recent official history of ASIO finds, 'despite this, it was a relatively small part of ASIO's activities' (Horner xv). To a large extent, debate about this history has been dominated on the one hand by ASIO's subjects and their heirs, often their children, seeking to defend the actions of their parents for history, or at least to refute ASIO's ownership over the narrative of their lives. As the contemporary expansion of ASIO's powers fuels interest in its past, two recent collections bring these perspectives to vivid life. *Dirty Secrets*, edited by former New South Wales Labour Member of Parliament and ASIO subject Meredith Burgmann, allows activists and writers to examine their own files from relatively recent decades, and includes two chapters by writer Frank Hardy's son Alan: the first about Frank's very large file and the second about his own. *What Did You Do in the Cold War Daddy?*, edited by historians and ASIO subjects Ann Curthoys and Joy Damousi, reaches back to ASIO's early, mid-century history, with a greater representation from the point of view of the children.⁶

On the other hand, the history of ASIO's surveillance of Australians has been told by defence historians, especially Horner and his colleague Desmond Ball at the Australian National University. Since the release of the Venona files in the 1980s, and with exclusive sanctioned access to ASIO records, Ball and Horner have worked to establish the identities of what appears to be perhaps a dozen Australians (including the Communist Party of Australia's most revered writer, Katharine Susannah Prichard) who were passing information to the Soviets in the late 1940s, and whose activities prompted the establishment of ASIO.⁷ In this post-Cold-War polarised narrative of intrigue and espionage, exposing the Canberra 'spy ring', there has been

5 Fiona Capp's *Writers Defiled* is the most detailed analysis.

6 Meredith Burgmann, ed., *Dirty Secrets: Our ASIO Files* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014), and Ann Curthoys and Joy Damousi, ed., *What Did You Do in the Cold War Daddy? Personal Stories from a Troubled Time* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014). See also Ric Throssell, *My Father's Son* (Richmond: Heinemann, 1989); Mona Brand 'Open Letter to ASIO', *Overland* 171 (2003): 85–87; Mark Aarons, *The Family File* (Melbourne: Black Ink, 2010); Kate Lilley, 'In the Hewett Archive'; Frank Moorhouse, *Australia under Surveillance* (Sydney: Random House, 2014) and 'The Dark Condundrum'.

7 Ball and Horner's *Breaking the Codes: Australia's KGB Network, 1944–1950* details the evidence from the Venona files, drawing also on MI5 files to establish the identity of key informants. It presented evidence to argue that Prichard consciously provided some limited Australian security information to Soviet agencies under the code name of 'Academician', as part of a group of CPA members working with key figure Wally Clayton, code name 'Klod', who later admitted to his role.

much emphasis on justifying ASIO's focus on the threat of Communism, but insufficient attention to the effects of what these historians acknowledge as the broadly excessive surveillance of legal political activities, ill-defined as 'subversion'. In extrapolation from these positions sits a relatively small body of cultural history and political analysis that has sought to bring together the fields of intelligence history and literary history, to some extent in the ways that James Smith seeks and models in his book on the very laggardly-released MI5 files on British writers (Smith xii).

Writers Defiled, Fiona Capp's thoughtful literary study of a selection of files on writers and intellectuals from 1993, has been the key Australian work, though it takes for granted that ASIO's obsession with Communism and in turn with left-wing writers was 'ludicrous', even as it was also 'awesome' (Capp xiv). Despite the role of Prichard and the spy ring's close connections to other intellectual figures, such as Marxist anthropologist Frederick Rose and Australian National University Professor of History Manning Clark (Monteath and Munt), Horner's expansive official history also acknowledges that 'ASIO's surveillance of academics, intellectuals, writers and artists ... was a massive waste of time and resources', with ultimately a 'corrosive effect within ASIO, whose officers came to believe that leftist dissent – and the advocacy of what would become relatively mainstream ideas about feminism, social welfare and Indigenous Australians – indicated potential disloyalty'.⁸ Frank Cain and others have elaborated the point emphasised by then opposition leader Herb Evatt (in what now appears to be paranoid detail) that since in the main ASIO's role was to counter domestic subversion and dissent rather than solely investigating espionage (even though the Communist Party of Australia [CPA] through the 1950s and 1960s sought no other means of establishing an alternative form of government than electoral platforms), through those decades ASIO was effectively serving as a political tool for the long-serving conservative government. This charge was sustained by two separate Royal Commissions headed by Justice Robert Wood in the 1980s. Other scholars such as David McKnight have criticised left historians for pointing to the political gains to be made from the Petrov Royal Commission and for 'pretending' that there was no Communist espionage, seeking more 'empathy' towards the anti-Communist position in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and further insights into Eastern Bloc repression.⁹

It was Australia's most notorious spy scandal that provoked ASIO's interest in Dorothy Hewett. She was among those called before the Royal

8 In a review of Horner's book, Jeff Sparrow emphasises that the point here is focused on the effect on ASIO, while the question of the larger effect on Australian society is not posed.

9 David McKnight, 'Rethinking Cold War History', *Labour History* 95 (2008): 185–96. See also McKnight, *Australian Spies and Their Secrets* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994).

Commission on Espionage in 1954–55, along with Nina Christesen, founding head of the Russian Department at Melbourne University, and her husband Clem Christesen, editor of the prominent literary journal *Meanjin*, after being named as potential contacts in Soviet documents provided by defector Vladimir Petrov. Petrov and his wife Evdokia both testified that no contact was ever made. Continuing attempts to establish that Prichard’s son Ric Throssell, who was also named by Petrov and featured in the Venona intercepts under the code name ‘Ferro’, consciously passed information to the Soviet ‘spy ring’ damaged Throssell’s public service career irreparably, while he and his family consistently denied all such claims. In 1952, in a now infamous marginal note, Prime Minister Menzies directed ASIO to open files on any Australian writer who applied for a grant from the Commonwealth Literary Fund, and on any referee, after discovering that funding had been granted to active Communist writer Judah Waten. The contemporary Australian writer Frank Moorhouse, in a recent essay on ASIO that draws from his own file, has some grounds to declare that consequently, in Australia’s small literary world, ‘nearly all the Australian literary community was being spied on and considered as suspect’ (‘The Dark Conundrum’).

The debate about the legitimacy of ASIO’s activities has also been focalised – and Mieke Bal’s narratological term is precisely useful here – through recent history provided in the form of documentary television. *I Spy*, a documentary by Anna Grieve and Peter Butt about the long-serving Cold War director of ASIO, Charles Spry, aired on ABC television in November 2010, and revisited these questions via interviews with former agents and embedded ASIO surveillance footage, provoking defence of Spry from conservative commentators in a number of news forums.¹⁰ The four-part documentary series *Persons of Interest*, by writer director Haydyn Keenan, which premiered at the Melbourne film festival and screened on SBS through early 2014, also includes surveillance footage and a number of interviews with former agents – profoundly disturbed by their time as agents in some instances. It has as its primary emphasis the disproportionately detrimental impact of ASIO’s covert activities on those whose actions should not have

10 For conservative journalistic reaction, see ‘Aunty’s sneering aside, ASIO effectively kept Communists in check’, *Australian* 13 Nov. 2010: <www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/auntys-sneering-aside-asio-effectively-kept-communists-in-check/story-e6frg6z6-1225952473981>; ‘ABC denigrates former ASIO director-general’, *News Weekly* 27 Nov. 2010: <www.newsweekly.com.au/articles/2010nov27_m.html>; Anthony McAdam, ‘Why does the ABC treat Charles Spry so shabbily?’ *Spectator Australia* 13 Nov. 2010: <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2010/11/why-does-the-abc-treat-charles-spry-so-shabbily/>>; Gerard Henderson, ‘Scott needs to take control to ensure ABC represents diverse views’, *Sydney Morning Herald* 2 Nov. 2010: <<http://www.smh.com.au/it-pro/scott-needs-to-take-control-to-ensure-abc-represents-diverse-views-20101101-17abn>>. All accessed 16 April 2016.

placed them in jeopardy.¹¹ In these documentaries, the affective register of the history of surveillance is conveyed through an emphasis on the familial, individualised and personal, embodied in interviews with subjects and their families, and with agents, but perhaps paradoxically this affect is introduced most tellingly through ASIO's own historical surveillance footage, depicting its unaware subjects. The footage, embedded in critical accounts of its impact, provides a strikingly literal visualisation of the covert view of power. Its point of view is restaged in our living rooms, refracted through that domestic frame, as the secret, specular gaze of the voyeur, purveying the 'drama of inspection's unreturned look', as Garrett Stewart characterises surveillance's narrative function in film thrillers. In these montaged shots, the shock of that transgression of privacy, otherwise absent from ameliorative historical accounts such as Homer's, is powerfully encoded, even as we participate in the ingress. The secretly recorded surveillance footage, giving us the view of the case officer conducting an operation, works in each episode as a visual analogue of the point of view of the files. So we are offered the chance to occupy, through our televisions, the clandestine, scrutinising gaze of the surveillance officer himself: the chance to spy, and to sense what that feels like.

The connection between subject and officer in surveillance, mediated as we watch through our own observation – our own (re)placement in the relay between watcher and watched – is what is brought into history by this visualisation of covert operations, and thus so too are the unequal, non-synchronous forms of recognition at work in that connection. The quest to identify the subject, *in flagrante*, as it were, incriminating him or herself, becoming illegal before an invisible observer's eyes, is also a process of recognition, of identifying a *person*, in their singularity and physical embodiment, *doing wrong*. And most personal surveillance files begin with the process of identification, by which the agency confirms this unitary subject to its satisfaction – sometimes quite a lengthy or mistake-ridden process, as Hewett's file demonstrates. The functions of 'identification' in surveillance, particularly in so far as they are embedded within and dependent on narrative structures, parallel its literary functions in fictional characterisation: John Frow's recent re-investigation of the work of character outlines the dual role of identification – *of* a character and *with* a character. As in a surveillance file, '[i]dentification "of" is generated by triggers such as a name or a personal pronoun, and it has to do with the separation of a character from all others in the storyworld and with the sense that the character is self-identical over time' (361–62). Identification 'with' is an affective relation, which may be empathetic or inimical, vicarious or hostile: in surveillance, a suspicious, pre-emptive and grounding hostility structures this relation, bureaucratically as

11 See also Phillip Deery, 'Remembering ASIO', *Overland* 203 (2011): 51–58.

it does generically. Frow clarifies: ‘But these are not two separate moments: the act of recognition that identifies a figure in a text is at the same time a way of relating to that figure’ (362). As encoded by the genre conventions of surveillance reporting, which are licenced to suspect, this act of recognition by the agency is already an indictment.

A telling feature of secret security files on writers in this regard is the agencies’ exclusionary interest in the ‘person’, as an observable individual agent of history, at the expense of their writing, as James Smith’s recent book clarifies (156). MI5 agents were not ‘literary critics’ – they did not read their subjects’ work and the files exhibit little interest in their content. At issue is the observable nature of subversion – how does it manifest under surveillance? How can it be seen? ASIO’s focus similarly exhibits perhaps an ontological, at least a categorical, mismatch between the writer as private individual and her or his impact as a political agent or subject, where one is misrecognised as the other, and the latter thus discounted – personhood over agency, or the ontic triumphing over the transcendental, as Slavoj Žižek might couch it. This can be seen as a structuring misrecognition, moreover, produced by the mechanics and conventions of observation. We know, as readers of these files, even as we follow the agents following the writers, writing up their actions in reports, that it is neither where they go nor whom they talk to that finally matters. Prichard’s writing, widely published throughout the Eastern Bloc, can be argued to have had much greater impact on the Cold War than her actions as an informant.¹²

Hardy’s is one of the biggest files of any Australian writer, if not the biggest, with fifteen volumes available currently, and more still inaccessible because they lie outside the limits of the Archives Act. It begins in mid-1950, only months after ASIO was first established, but includes material from the Investigations Branch of the Attorney General’s office, responsible for intelligence before World War II, ASIO’s immediate predecessor the Commonwealth Investigation Service, and Military Intelligence, reaching back to Hardy’s service in World War II (as does Lilley’s file). Most of Hardy’s volumes have been redacted in some measure – in the first, which encompasses the explosive years of the *Power without Glory* prosecution through 1950 and 1951, four pages are withheld and eighty-four redacted of a total of one hundred and ninety seven, for example. Because Hardy and his wife Rosslyn left immediately after the jury’s not-guilty verdict on the politically-motivated charge of criminal libel against his book, and because of the then heat of the Cold War, their travel behind the iron curtain in 1951 attracted significant security attention and resources, including the involvement of the Department of Foreign Affairs, embassies, international agencies, including

12 Jeff Sparrow makes a similar point in regard to Katharine Susannah Prichard.

American intelligence in West Berlin, and other non-Australian sources. These sources are still subject to redaction in many instances, especially regarding the identity of operatives and clues to the source of information on the Hardys' travel in the United Kingdom in particular. Frank and Rosslyn were Australian delegates to the 1951 Berlin Youth Peace Conference and made their way there on the *Oronsay* via England. They travelled first to the Netherlands, then into Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, then to Berlin, and finally on to Moscow as guests of the Soviets. On their return to Australia in early 1952, their passports were confiscated, as were those of the entire delegation to the Berlin conference, because travel behind the iron curtain was still prohibited to Australian citizens.

The Hardys' Eastern Bloc travels have been discussed elsewhere, in the context of the translation and publication of *Power without Glory* in East Germany (Moore). Published by Volk und Welt as *Macht Ohne Ruhm* in 1952, it was the first Australian fiction title released there and attracted substantial interest, in the wake of international attention to the book's Australian trial. Hardy's presence in East Berlin proved a great asset to Volk und Welt – press attention was extensive and the Australian Communist's showmanship a boon in capitalising on interest in the scandal. Like other Australian writers visiting the Eastern Bloc, Hardy sought to spend his soft currency royalties before leaving, and his attempt to ship home an East German binder and print machine attracted concern from a number of security agencies in West Berlin, including the American ones. ASIO's file includes copies of intercepted letters sent by Hardy to East Berlin in early 1952, which were forwarded by the Australian Military Mission in Berlin to the Department of External Affairs and from that Department to ASIO. The documents are sophisticated photographic copies, produced by a complex of transnational intelligence surveillance: the Australian Military Mission explained that the letters had been picked up first by American Army Intelligence in Berlin 'during the course of that department's normal security checking of inwards mail'.¹³

Hardy's ASIO file also holds a representative selection of his international publications from this trip, in Soviet, Polish, German, Czech and British journals, sourced by the Australian Embassy in Moscow and in some cases translated back into English by the Joint Press Reading Service, among others. This kind of material evidences not only directed international security co-operation across the Eastern Bloc (notably with the Australian Embassy in Moscow, where Ric Throssell had earlier been posted), but a perhaps exceptional interest from these authorities in reading Hardy's work and in his international readership. There are also two separate reports in his

13 'Frank Joseph Hardy', ASIO personal file. National Archives of Australia, Series A6119, Item 286, Vol. 1.

file on the inaugural meeting of the Australian/New Zealand Civil Liberties Association in the United Kingdom, at the Conway Hall in London on 20 November 1951, at which Frank Hardy was a speaker, on his and Rosslyn’s return from the USSR. Dymphna Cusack, then in London, was elected president and expatriate Christina Stead listed as one of the vice-presidents. The cover letter to the first report is heavily redacted, blanking out not merely details of any agency, report’s author, address, salutation and signature, but any details that might establish the relationship between the source and ASIO. The report did not merely send information, but sought particulars too: ‘Most of the names mentioned will be familiar to you ... [redacted]’ but

... With regard to Miss Christina Stead it is just possible that she may be identical with a woman of that name who is the alleged wife of William James BLAKE @ [or] BLECH [blacked out]. This woman was born on 17/7/1902 at Rochdale [*sic*], Sydney and describes herself as an authoress. She has a flat in 27 Charcot Square, London, N.W.1. [Blacked out] Christina Stead might be related to a known New Zealand communist in the U.K. names Arthur Robert Stead. [Blacked out] I should be grateful for any traces you may have of Christina Stead, the authoress mentioned in Para. 4 above.¹⁴

This report seems to have allowed ASIO in Canberra and Sydney to open a proper file on Stead, who had been out of the country for more than twenty years, and to identify her with the activities of her father David and Communist brother Gilbert, both with files already open, and her sister Catherine, a typist at the GPO.¹⁵ Stead’s earlier friendship with the writer Ralph Fox, who as a Communist Party leader in Britain was closely followed by MI5 before his death in the Spanish Civil War, could have brought her to that agency’s attention too (Smith 161). As a document of interlinked sociality, this report evidences a closely networked community of expatriates under close surveillance, in which ‘most of the names will be familiar’, already identified to Australian intelligence and recognised as suspect. Networked surveillance of the Hardys’ international travel also enabled the widening of ASIO’s web to expatriate Australians in London and elsewhere; this kind of incrimination by association was a key method by which ASIO garnered new information and new subjects for observation. In 1992, prompted by questions from Capp, Hardy declared that he had been unaware of any surveillance while travelling in Europe, and that he was only just realising ‘how wet behind the ears I was about ASIO’ (Hardy 5).

While the Hardys’ travel through Communist Europe in 1951 was closely tracked, Hewett’s and Les Flood’s travel, only a year later, through

14 ‘Frank Joseph Hardy’, ASIO personal file. National Archives of Australia, Series A6119, Item 286, Vol. 1

15 ‘Christina Ellen Stead’, ASIO personal file. National Archives of Australia, Series A6119, Item 231.

some of the same countries and then on to Communist China, was missed completely, only examined retrospectively after Hewett's visit to Moscow was exposed in the letters stolen by Vladimir Petrov. So Hewett's file, in contrast, is retrospective in the main and, as it currently stands, quite slim, dating only from 1949 to 1954. It seems to have been activated at the 1954 moment of her identification in Petrov's letters as a person of interest to the Soviets, rather than at a more logical earlier point, prompted by her high profile activities in the West Australian branch of the CPA in the late 1940s, for example. Via information provided after the fact from other Australian agencies, especially Immigration, and other ASIO material, the file tracks her departure, with her second husband and fellow Communist Les Flood, to the International Convention for the Protection of Children in Vienna, held from 12–16 April 1952. There is no evidence of the use of resources from international agencies, clearly because of the file's belated collation. But this is not the only reason for its limitations – it is also because, as a woman, her surveillance identity proves very difficult to establish, and that is mostly because of the requirement that she be known by her husbands' names.¹⁶ The title of Hewett's ASIO file exemplifies this identity confusion – if you search for Hewett and ASIO as keywords in the National Archives of Australia database, there is no result, because her file is titled 'Dorothy Coade DAVIES (aka Dorothy Coade FLOOD and Dorothy Hewitt [*sic*]')'.

In the file, details of Hewett's travel – and identity – are gleaned mostly from information collected in passport applications. Les Flood's passport application records them 'wishing to proceed to England, France and Italy departing from Australia per the S.S. 'Toscana' from Melbourne, on 13th February, 1952, and expect[ing] to be absent for approximately nine months'. (Like the Hardys, they could not declare an intention to travel to Soviet-controlled destinations.¹⁷) Les was required to testify to a name-change from Blood to Flood, in 1927, when he was 'about eight', while Hewett had to provide a statutory declaration about her marital status in order to establish her identity. She was applying for a passport as Dorothy Flood even though she and Les were not married, because she had been living under that name

16 It is worth noting that the Vienna conference, as a conference for children, was attended mainly by women and was clearly a 'women's conference'. The only male delegate identified in ASIO's records is Les Flood. Hewett's circumstances in the late 1940s and early 1950s also made her a difficult subject for ASIO to track – after moving to Sydney from Perth with Flood, Hewett moved frequently between rented residences in this period, besides travelling backwards and forwards to Melbourne where her young son from her first marriage was dying of leukaemia. Tracking her identity required three different state jurisdictions and ASIO branches.

17 Letter from Commonwealth Migration Officer B.C. Wall, 22 Jan. 1952, to Director of ASIO, 'Dorothy Coade DAVIES', ASIO personal file. National Archives of Australia, Series A6119, Item 282.

while her divorce from her first husband Lloyd Davies was finalised. As ‘Dorothy Coade Davies’ she could ‘solemnly and sincerely declare’ that a decree nisi from Western Australia was due to become absolute ‘in or about March, 1952’. ‘I am at the present time and have been for the past three (3) years known as Dorothy Coade Flood and I intend to marry one Les Flood as soon as the said Decree Nisi becomes absolute.’ Records of exchange between the New South Wales and Western Australian branches document failed attempts to confirm her divorce until the regional director from Western Australia finally wrote to the New South Wales regional director to inform him that Davis was granted the decree nisi on 8 December 1951, ‘on the grounds of the subject’s adultery with Les Flood’.

A further key aspect of the misrecognition, or belaboured (mis) identification, in Hewett’s file is the agents’ mistake in confusing her with her sister-in-law, Dorothy Clare Williams [nee Flood], Les’s sister, who travelled with them to the Vienna conference. Fiona Capp’s account of Hewett’s surveillance begins by replaying a narrative vignette from ASIO’s report of Hewett’s arrival into Melbourne, on the *Orvades* at 8 a.m. on 2 September 1952.

Although she remained for some time leaning over the rails as if expecting to be met on arrival no-one was observed to contact her. According to [blanked out] subject behaved in a quiet unobtrusive manner during the voyage and there appeared to be no undue association between subject and John and Minnie IRVING, also of security interest.¹⁸

As Capp notes, despite ASIO’s ‘identikit’ descriptions of Hewett as ‘five feet three or four, of medium to stocky build with blonde wavy hair, fair complexion, blue eyes and thick legs and ankles’, with a ‘big mouth’ and a ‘curvy chin’ (Capp 145), the agency had not identified her correctly in this observation. Hewett returned from the European trip by plane, after a long visit to China. ASIO had instead been observing Dorothy Williams, who was on her way home to Sydney directly from Vienna. This particular confusion, which was repeated and ongoing, provided great amusement to Hewett and her family, reading her file after it was copied by Capp in the early 1990s, as Hewett’s daughter Kate Lilley recounts. It provoked

a store of comic anecdotes of bumbling agents accidentally following Hewett’s much more respectable sister-in-law (also named Dorothy) going about her daily business in Sydney while Mum was travelling in the Soviet Union and China as part of a Communist delegation. (Lilley 1)

This goes some way to explaining why ASIO did not track Hewett’s travels behind the iron curtain and into China – and this mistake is held up as

18 Letter from ‘Field Officer’, ‘Dorothy Coade DAVIES’, ASIO personal file, National Archives of Australia, Series A6119, Item 282.

exemplary by Capp, illuminating the epistemology of surveillance itself. She describes it as ‘a very literal example of the file’s pursuit of the illusory subversive – of surveillance creating its own reality according to a set of pre-existing assumptions about what was occurring’ (146). Published in 1993, Capp’s account carries with it a late poststructuralist interest in the files’ narrative ability to ‘create their own reality’. That is one compelling effect through which we come to the files now: the generic conventions of secrecy and covert observation can act to ‘construct ... the world they observe’, as Henderson and Winter suggest in their discussion of the Queensland Police Special Branch file of feminist socialist literary scholar Carole Ferrier (360). The affective codes of suspicion, distrust and yet contiguous familiarity that convey the relation between agent and subject are key to this closed circuit of paranoid logic: it is the perplexed hermeneutics of (mis)recognition that propels surveillance.

Hewett’s file concentrates on a crucially ambiguous piece of stolen evidence: a mention of what might be her name, as well as that of her fellow delegate Mary Lewis, in letters given to Australian security authorities by Vladimir Petrov from the Australian Soviet Embassy, and subsequently interrogated in the ensuing Royal Commission on Espionage. A 24 July 1952 letter from Moscow identifies ‘Flood and Lewis’ as potential contacts to be pursued: ‘Both of them, in our opinion, could be used for the fulfilment of tasks which are provided for in the plan of work of the Australian M.V.D. section’.¹⁹ Petrov’s statement to the Commission records, however, that he and his subordinate Antonov were ‘unable to produce any information’ about either of them.²⁰ Whether it was the Soviets who were ‘bumbling’ in this instance, unable to identify or locate or make themselves known to Hewett, or whether the same identity confusion was at play for them as it was for ASIO, is a provoking question here. Confusion first with Les Flood (did Moscow necessarily mean Dorothy?) and then with Dorothy Clare Williams is possible, and both confusions are also possible defences against the Commission’s charges. So the pervasive epistemological uncertainty pertaining to Hewett’s surveillance identity was also a factor in distancing her from the Canberra ‘spy ring’, as well as from ASIO’s counter-espionage. The narrative we reconstruct from Hewett’s file is principally about (mis)recognition and (mis)identification, about exactly who she might or might not be, and we can recognise this as a key mode or formal process, broadly, in

19 *Report of the Royal Commission on Espionage 1954–55*, copied and extracted in Hewett’s ASIO file. The other person mentioned in the letter is ‘Mary Ellen Casper LEWIS’, identified by ASIO as a barmaid from the Elizabeth Hotel in Elizabeth Street, Sydney, and a representative of the Liquor Workers’ Union. The Petrovs again testified that the M.V.D. Centre ‘did not obtain any information regarding that person’ through them.

20 Transcript of testimony from V.M. Petrov to interrogators, signed by him, copied for Hewett’s ASIO file, 13/1/55.

the hermeneutics of surveillance, dogged by the epistemological uncertainty that perpetually undermines the covert sphere's efforts towards certainty.

Through the processes of redaction and using the tonal conventions of disinterest and impersonality, this mode also writes over, refuses, or disallows any reciprocal forms of identification or recognition directed from the target to the source. Highly revealing in this regard is the remarkable account in her file of a visit from the Assistant Director of the Commonwealth Investigations Service, with another ASIO officer, unidentified, to the Floods' house in Rockdale in Sydney at 8.55 p.m. on Tuesday 11 January 1955, to inform Hewett of her summons to attend the Royal Commission. The visit first seeks, again, to establish Hewett's identity, in order to serve her summons, and the officers use her retrospectively tracked travel as a key indictment, informed by the then secret fact that it was her visit to Moscow that prompted suggestions of contact to the Soviet Embassy in Canberra. Despite the formal register and disengaged tone of the secret security file as a genre, the first-person report of the visit provides a striking instance of a 'redacted' affective relationship between officer and target, this time in the affront manifested by the ASIO staff member (whose name, despite being revealed to Hewett at the time, has been sliced out of the copied file) and the antagonism witnessed in Hewett and Flood.

At 8.55pm on Tuesday the 11th January, 1955 with [blanked/cut out] I saw a woman (now known to me as Mrs Dorothy Coade FLOOD) at No. 3 Alexandra Parade, Rockdale.

I said to her, 'My name is [lengthy cut out]. We are making enquiries on behalf of Counsel assisting the Royal Commission on Espionage. Are you Mrs. Dorothy Coade FLOOD?' She said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Is your husband named Les FLOOD?' She said, 'Yes'. I said, 'Did you formerly reside at 38 Mentmore Avenue, Rosebery?' She said, 'Yes'.

I said, 'I have a summons here for service on you to attend the Royal Commission on Espionage as a witness.' I then served her a copy of the summons and showed her the original. I said, 'Is your husband in?' She said, 'Yes'. A man who stated he was Les FLOOD came to the front door. He said, 'What is the strength of this?' I explained the matter to him. He adopted an antagonistic and offensive attitude and it was obvious no cooperation was to be expected from him or his wife.

However, I said to his wife, 'We are in a position to tell you the nature of the matter with respect to which you have been subpoenaed if you are interested.' She said, 'I would like to know something about it.' I said, 'The name of FLOOD together with the name of HEWITT [*sic*], which I understand is your maiden name, were mentioned in documents handed over by Petrov to the Security Officers. The reference made to FLOOD relates to a visit made to an International Conference for the Protection of Children held at Vienna in 1952. Did you attend there?' She said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Did you also travel to

Russia and later China?’ She said, ‘Yes’. I said, ‘If you can give us some light here on the verandah or allow us to come in we can give you details of the reference in the documents.’

He said, ‘That doesn’t matter. It is not important what I can see of it.’ She said, ‘No, it doesn’t matter. I will find out soon enough, I suppose.’

We then left.

...

It was claimed by Les FLOOD that his wife (?) [*sic*] was eight months pregnant and this would appear to be correct. He went on to make a lot of comments about who was going to look after the kiddies, etc. but he was informed that she should obey the summons.

[signature blacked out]²¹

The report testifies to an ‘antagonistic and offensive attitude’ on the part of Hewett and Flood to the action of being served the summons. Flood’s ‘That doesn’t matter’ and Hewett’s ‘I’ll find out soon enough’ dismiss the officer’s offer to read the details of the summons for them – to detail what they do not know about what the state knows about them. But the greatest affront for the officer can seem to be their refusal to offer hospitality – their refusal to turn on the porch light or to invite him in – and his affront is evident in the report despite the genre conventions. Misrecognition is again at work in this act of regulatory surveillance: the agent miscasts the encounter as one that should be ruled by the ethics of hospitality, as a stranger calling at a house in the evening, being introduced, requiring welcome, while Flood and Hewett refuse to play along with the falsity of such an ethic. As Hewett’s very different reconstruction of this encounter in her memoir *Wild Card* reveals (Les was ‘determined to give them as much cheek as he could get away with’), this was not an encounter of equals ruled by etiquette, but the state’s heavy hand knocking at their door, knowing it could break it down (Hewett 228).²²

The interaction is further redacted again through gendered conventions of (mis)recognition, about who is the subject of the narrative – the moment Flood appears in the narrative, the agent begins calling Hewett ‘his wife’, even though Dorothy and not Les is the subject of the investigation and the agent later questions Hewett’s marital status. And the report excises Flood’s protests about Hewett’s pregnancy and child-care responsibilities from the to-and-fro reconstruction of their dialogue or exchange, leaving an account of this until the end, as an aside. We read only that ‘this would appear to be correct’, as an acknowledgement of Les’s insistence, or his feeling, that he has to tell them how pregnant Dorothy is and remind them of her responsibilities as the mother of two boys, while she stands there next to both her husband

21 Hewett ASIO file.

22 This encounter is also summarised by Capp in *Writers Defiled* (147–48).

and the ASIO agents, with her late-term belly and her summons, recorded as speaking of neither.

We can read this as part of surveillance's refusal, or rather its truncation (not on the part of the Floods but by surveillance itself) of the ethical process of engagement with an other in her/his alterity. And this is in so far as that process has been so influentially described by Emmanuel Levinas, in which self and other, subject and subject, face and recognise each other as different but seen, distinctive but proximate, acknowledging in that difference the demand of the other for recognition, and at once meeting that demand and returning it. Covert surveillance is the state-sanctioned truncation of this process; a one-sided procedure, or narration, of identification, rather than an exchange of recognition, in which suspicion is its own telos, able to nominate rather than merely detect guilt and to arrive at its own conclusions. When we read the files, the one-sidedness of this constitutionally intersubjective process is profoundly apparent; we have the other, the 'subject', seen through the eyes or the often-mistaken words of the state, which has been broken down into a series of individual agents and bureaucrats whose identities are, for contemporary readers, exactly what are now most secret and remain most assiduously withheld – as the key target of redaction. It is not merely Stewart's 'unreturned look' that is evident; state surveillance proceeds on a suspension of the social contract, a denial of the sovereign rights by which liberal states are notionally defined. The personal files of writers narrate the paradoxical intimacy through which that breach has occurred; the textual forms of sociality through which the state personalises dissent and then redacts recognition of that personal dimension. In that redaction is enacted a complex of epistemological and affective uncertainties about where, for whom and how cultural subversion manifests political threat.

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