

CHAPTER III

Public programs

The series of historical exhibitions

Although it may seem quite unusual that an archives would invest so much energy into organizing and presenting historical exhibitions for the broader public, the Open Society Archives (OSA) believes that its exhibition series is not just an ephemeral luxury. On the contrary: these exhibitions are inherently part of OSA's archival work. The preliminary idea behind such efforts, which are not reckoned among the classical duties of an archives, is closely related to the Archives' origins and holdings. The Cold War period involved a harsh struggle to cover, distort, manipulate and communicate information. The mission and activities of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Munich were primarily focused on this battlefield: breaking the information monopoly of the Soviet-type regimes and conveying alternative information to the people. The records of RFE/RL, including the samizdat collections and the records of its human rights related materials, are all products and documents of that struggle. Becoming familiar with these, analyzing them, and interpreting them is not the exclusive right of privileged professionals just as the existence and collapse of the communist regimes was not the private business of some particular group but was the business of everyone who lived in those countries. It is both a moral and historical demand that all have equal access to this past, and the OSA's exhibition series attempts to serve that demand.

OSA's historical exhibitions aim to bring the contemporary past as close as possible to those to whom it belongs: the people who live in this region, the people whose lives these documents are partly about. This past is close to them – it is a part of their lives. It remained, however unfinished: OSA functions in an environment shaped and marked by the unavoidable heritage of communism. Thus, the structure and ambitions of its exhibitions are somewhat unusual. The Archives does not try only to commemorate events and demonstrate the confirmed and established results of scholarly contemplation – it also tries to present historical problems, questions that have not yet been raised, and problems that look different now that communism has collapsed. The exhibits try to articulate problems which once seemed so evident that, in many cases, it was difficult to identify and dissect them.

Since OSA is above all an archives, its exhibitions mainly present printed and audio-visual documents from its holdings and from the holdings of partner institutions in Hungary and abroad. However, the conceptual basis behind the exhibitions is often hidden. What the Archives hopes and expects from visitors is that they will make the same efforts as a historian must make when exploring an archives. The exhibitions are more than mere shows: they are open invitations, to laymen as well as to scholars to analyze the sources and documents, to make judgments and to come to conclusions. The exhibitions call for visitors to do exactly what the people of this region had been prevented

from doing for many decades. In this sense, the historical exhibits are not solely representative events; they are – like an archives in the original sense – venues for collective historical recognition and reconstruction.

The first OSA exhibition opened on 15 March 1996, on the occasion of the Archives' opening. Although it was small, in Hungary it was a pioneering exhibition of its genre – a comparative exhibit of samizdat publications from all over the region. Since OSA holdings already included some major samizdat series from the former Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia and in light of Gábor Demszky's recent donation also from Hungary – it provided an opportunity to show the hidden and rather unintentional, instinctive and non-coordinated cooperation between the various Central and Eastern European opposition movements. By presenting parallel activities and productions, the exhibition made it apparent that the separate movements profoundly influenced each other, and often coincidentally focused on the very same issues.

The Representation of the Counter-revolution opened on 4 November 1996, on the 40th anniversary of the invasion of Budapest by Soviet troops to suppress the 1956 Revolution. This was the Archives' first attempt at organizing an archival exhibition that targeted an important but poorly discussed, or even neglected problem of the contemporary past: how the oppressive regime tried to handle the embarrassing circumstances of its origin. The exhibit had a double ambition: it aimed to reconstruct how the post-1956 regime tried to communicate the official version of “counter-revolution”, while keeping the memory of 1956 under control; and to show how and why the regime failed to establish its version of the events, which forced it to choose silence and oblivion instead of cultivating and propagating “heroic” party mythology. The starting element of this historical reconstruction was the restoration of the official traveling propaganda exhibits which were put together at the instruction of the Party's Politburo in the spring of 1957.

Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union brought together – for the first time in history – the two biggest collections of Soviet underground art produced in the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s. The show, which was staged in the Palace of Arts in Budapest featured over 300 paintings, drawings, collages, and sculptures which refused to follow the Communist regime's prescribed aesthetics of social-realism. One part of the exhibited works, acquired and taken out of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, came from the private collection of Norton Dodge, who donated the works to the Zimmerli Art Museum at the Rutgers State University of New Jersey. The other part of the artworks came from the National Tsaritsyno Museum of Moscow, the biggest Russian repository of Soviet non-conformist art.

The Art of the Unofficial was a smaller document exhibit in Galeria Centralis which complemented the nonconformist art show by presenting the political and historical background of the artists and their artwork. Contemporary photos, documents and

newswires from the Archives holdings and from other sources illustrated the troublesome lives of the artists, their “illegal” exhibits, and the sometimes tragic, sometimes comic episodes in their continuous battle with the authorities.

These exhibits were accompanied by the colloquium *Politics as Art / Art as Politics*, hosted by OSA on 11 and 12 October 1997. The panelists and moderators were prominent art historians, art critics and philosophers whose work concentrates on the oppressed art of the former Soviet Union. The American collector Norton Dodge and Andrei Erofeev, curator of the Contemporary Art Collection of the National Tsaritsyno Museum in Moscow, were among the speakers.

50 Years Ago It Was 100 Years Ago was a multimedia exhibition revealing the various ways in which the 1848 Hungarian revolution and war of independence has been remembered, celebrated, interpreted, and represented in Hungary over the last 50 years.

The exhibition’s narrative started with the year 1948, when the Hungarian Communist Party seized power. The centennial festivities of that year – directed by the Party – transformed the memory of 1848 into an early, heroic manifestation of communist ideals. The 1956 uprising denied that image by holding up the events of 1848 as the shining example of Hungary’s fight against foreign and domestic oppression, and the legendary motivation and courage of the “March Youth” to defy authority. In the years following the failure of the 1956 uprising, the celebration of 1848 became a delicate and potentially dangerous issue – the spontaneous, unofficial commemorative events which stressed national freedom and independence from the Soviet Union were often brutally suppressed by the police. After the fall of the communist regime, “15 March” again rose to the rank of the officially cherished, majestic national holiday. Additionally, the newly-arisen right wing groups created another image of the 1848 revolution and its leaders by arguing that the great poet Petőfi did not die, but was captured by the Russian Czar’s troops and taken to Siberia. They associate his figure with those thousands of martyrs who were tortured and worked to death by the Soviet state in its Gulag system. Thus, the poet of the 1848 revolution is linked to the tradition of anti-communist resistance.

The exhibition demonstrated the main stages of this process with the help of contemporary paintings, statues, drawings, monument plans and models, newsreels, short films, press articles, political speech transcripts, and other commemorative paraphernalia in the most surprising shapes and forms.

OSA also organized a *Revolutionary Film Festival* related to the topic of this exhibition. Hungarian military propaganda films exploiting the legacy of 1848 were screened along with feature films reenacting the events of the revolution.

Legends in Life and Art: The Portrait Photography of Rolloff Beny from the National Archives of Canada was organized by the Open Society Archives with the financial assistance of the Ford Motor Company, which paid for the transportation of the photos.

The late Canadian photographer Roloff Beny (1924 – 1984) achieved an international reputation for his lavishly produced photo-illustrated books. His photographic and manuscript archives were donated to the National Archives of Canada by his estate. Within the collection, there was a virtually unknown group of approximately 500 portrait sittings taken between 1956 and 1983. The Canadian National Archives created a travelling exhibition from these photographs, which portray the leading figures in the world of dance, opera, music, literature, cinema, theatre, fashion, and politics. Because of an invitation from OSA, Budapest was one of the major European cities to receive the exhibition.

On 14 April in connection with the exhibition, there was an English language presentation by Lilly Koltun of National Archives of Canada entitled *Facing the Past: The Historic Importance of Portrait Photography*.

23 Years of the International Helsinki Human Rights Movement was an exhibition which the Open Society Archives organized when the International Helsinki Federation (IHF) donated its most important records to OSA. The documents, dating from 1983 to 1996, amount to some 22 linear meters and include administrative files, files on the activities in each of the countries where Helsinki Committees have been established, and documents regarding the IHF's monitoring of the work of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and its successor, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The purpose of the exhibition was to present the history of the Helsinki movement from the signing of the Helsinki Accords to the present, and to showcase the newly acquired documents.

On 27 June OSA and the International Helsinki Federation held a joint press conference entitled *23 Years of the Helsinki Human Rights Movement – Human Rights Violations Today*. IHF released its *1998 Annual Report* during this event, and representatives from the national Helsinki Committees of Belarus, Russia, Kosovo, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Bosnia, the US, and Canada answered journalists' questions about human rights.

Prague Spring /Prague Fall – 1968 was staged to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the suppression of the Prague Spring. It presented the story of the reforms in Prague – this last attempt to create a socialist utopia in Europe – in the context of the events that took place worldwide in 1968. The lost world of the Prague Spring was brought to life against the backdrop of the barricades in Paris' Latin Quarter, the Polish police forces' brutally crushing of student demonstrations in Poland, and the battles fought in Vietnam and elsewhere in the Third World. In addition, by exposing newly released interviews with the main figures of the Prague Spring, the exhibition refuted the fable that János Kádár was unwilling to take part in the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. Photos and documents revealed that the Soviet incursion involved casualties and brutality, a fact that had previously been denied.

In connection with the exhibition Örökmozgó held a filmfestival in 11–15 September.

Freeze Frames of Communism was an exhibition devoted to exploring the propaganda use of a special communist genre of visual communication, the film strip “*diafilm*”, in Hungarian.

The *diafilm* prospered in the former communist countries in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to catering to the “natural” audience for this medium with adventure stories exalting Pioneer morality and animal fables symbolically addressing issues of “socialism”, the golden age of *diafilm* produced a mass of silly tales about the emancipated communist woman working in the factory, the tricks and glorious successes of hog-breeding on socialist cooperative farms, heroic Hungarian sailors revealing a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, and the wise peasant and his son battling potato beetles, the “secret agents of imperialism”. Stretching the possibilities of the *diafilm* resulted in such comic attempts as presenting soccer games or ice-skating championships with a medium that cannot represent movement.

Originally the *diafilm* – a shiny black-and-white celluloid strip with a 20- to 40-frame story – was projected on the wall of a darkened room with the help of a primitive-



The invitation card designed by Zsuzsa Medve for the exhibit *Freeze Frames of Communism* (October–December 1998). The same design was used for the poster of the exhibition.

Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.

looking instrument that squeaks every time one turns the knob to advance the film, and smells horribly when the strong bulb inside heats up. The audience – children, workers, students or peasants, depending on the topic of the film – sat in the back of the room and looked at each image as it came wobbling into view, and listened as the person “operating” the projector read out the short text underneath the picture: “The Zrínyi Pioneers were marching toward their summer camp through beautiful landscapes in merry mood.” or “Jani grabs the spade when henbane and nightshade show up, for those provide food and ground for the potato bug.”

In the OSA exhibition several dozens *diafilms* could be viewed in their original form. In a curtained corner of Galeria Centralis visitors could project the filmstrips of their choice with the squeaky, smelly projectors, while other filmstrips were presented on CD-ROM. Additionally, OSA borrowed the original artwork for some of the filmstrips from the National Széchenyi Library.

The exhibited filmstrips were categorized according to topic and the audience targeted: Pioneer tales, odes to the emancipated woman, life on the cooperative farm, the heroic stories of soldiers etc. and the attempted propaganda mechanisms through which the makers of filmstrips wanted to reach their audience became apparent.

The Commissar Vanishes – Falsified Photographs of the Stalin Era was another traveling exhibition which OSA invited for a guest appearance at Galeria Centralis. The show, which was previously on view in Berlin and in Milan, enjoyed a great success in Budapest as well.

A special bookmark designed by Zsuzsa Medve for the exhibition *The Commissar Vanishes* (March–April 1999). By pulling on the insert leaf, the face of Stalin changes to that of Beriya.

Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.



The exhibition consisted of photographs about Soviet Russian politicians and public personalities presented in both their original and retouched versions. The majority of the material came from the collection of David King, who started to amass the photos about 20 years ago. Initially the British art historian simply wanted to compile a photographic history of the Soviet Union. Later, after he noticed the difference between the original and later versions of certain photos, he began to seek out series of photos from which people were retouched after they had fallen out of Stalin's grace or had been executed. The falsification of photographs speak volumes about the diabolic cynicism of the regime.

OSA complemented the photos from King's collection with a few retouched photos from Hungary which followed the Soviet pattern. With the help of the Hungarian Film Archives, the motion picture equivalent of falsified photos, Soviet propaganda and pseudo-documentary films, were also presented in video installations.

Ten Years of Freedom – 1956 in Hungarian Historical Thought, was an unusual exhibition in that, instead of exploring a historical event of 1956, it presented the findings of the exploration of the researchers without any commentary or interpretation.

Categorized on the basis of the most commonly occurring topics in the research of this era, the exhibition featured all 1956-related scientific research work, monographs, studies, bibliographies and source listings by Hungarian authors that were published after 1989. The activities and histories of individual research centers were also presented.

During this exhibition Galeria Centralis functioned as a reading and research room where visitors were able to study printed and electronic literature about the Revolution. The computer database, digitized photo collection, and Oral History Archives database created by the *1956 Institute* were available for use on the spot, as well as the Internet-based educational materials, and the forthcoming CD-ROM produced by the Institute. Perusal of these materials was aided by documentaries made in 1956 as well as segments of films made after 1989 about the historiography of 1956. A few of the most important items in the Oral History Archives were also be available for reading. Additionally, the exhibit featured a computer database of sound documents and programs about 1956 from the Archives of Hungarian Radio. Segments from these broadcasts – including the broadcast of Radio Free Europe during the Revolution, which are currently being processed – could be listened to in the exhibition hall.

The exhibit was opened by Domokos Kosáry, a historian and former President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Árpád Göncz, President of the Hungarian Republic, also graced the event with his presence.

Gulag, an exhibition about the past and present of Soviet labor camps, was not staged in Galeria Centralis, but in the abandoned and decrepit industrial hall of the Zrínyi Press, a token of the past regime soon to be turned into a five-star hotel by a foreign

investor. Placed in this surrealistically decayed environment, the photos and archival documents telling the story of life in the camps provided the visitors with a unique visual experience.

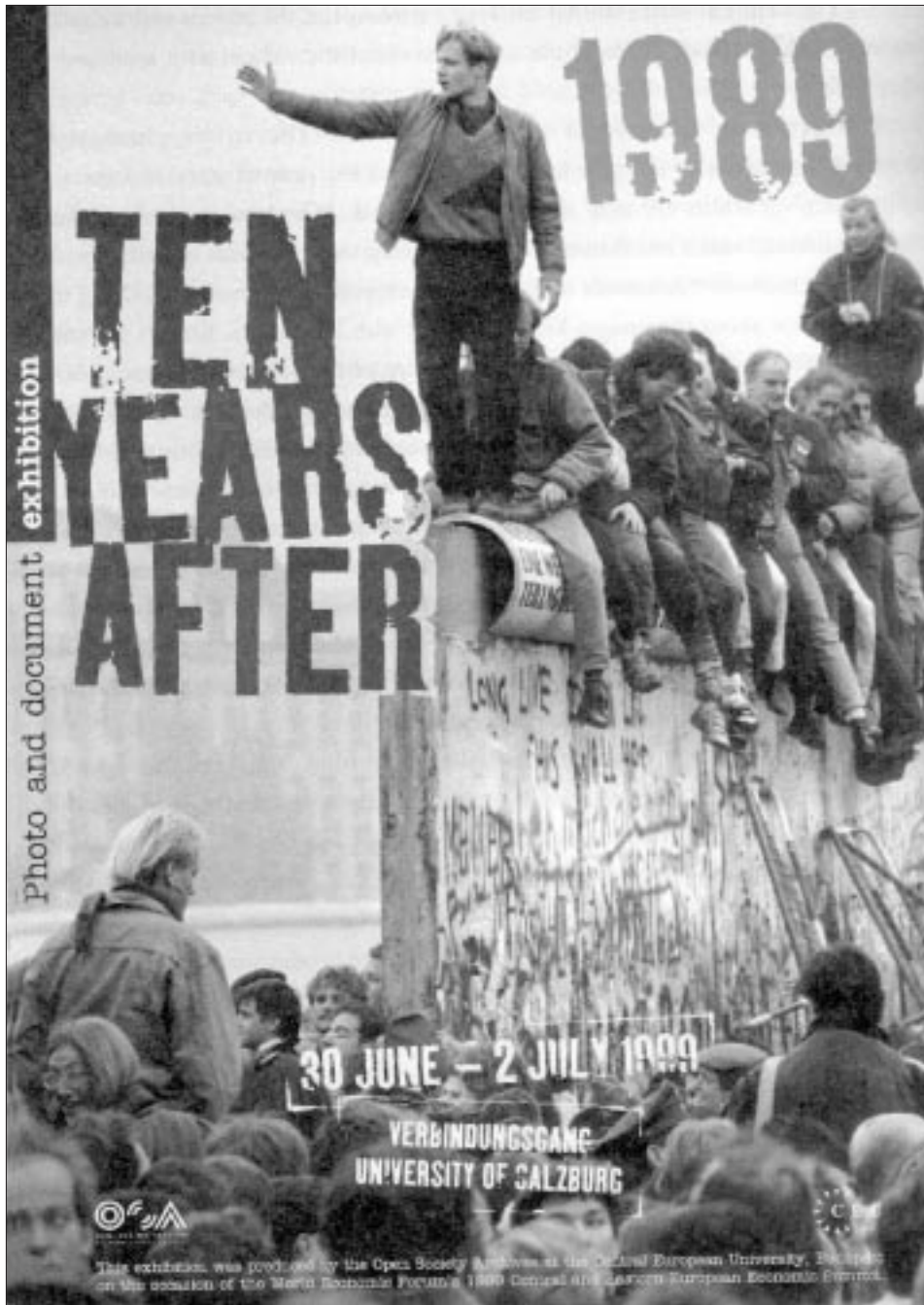
This exhibition consisted of several components. The artistic photographs of Tomasz Kizny, taken in the past few years, showed the present state of former labor camps, many of which are now desolate and ruined. “Overgrown canals, unfinished roads, abandoned mines and factories, barracks falling to ruin, mazes of barbed wire, the stubs of watchtowers: “Remnants of a great slave empire” – writes former Gulag inmate Sergey Kovaliov about the images Kizny captured with his camera. Kizny’s photos were juxtaposed with archival pictures from the holdings of the Moscow Memorial Archives which depicted life in the camps when they were operating. The pictures from the two sources were selected and organized into an exhibition by the Karta Center in Warsaw.

As usual, the Open Society Archives compiled some supplemental “background” material from its own holdings and other sources. These documents described how the East and the West dealt with the topic of labor camps: how the official Soviet media shrouded the forced labor camps with silence, how publications and films propounding state propaganda tried to blur the differences between plain criminals and political prisoners, and how truthful information was “smuggled out” of labor camps, later to be distributed in the West, and domestically in samizdat.

Cirkogejzír Cinema hosted a film festival related to the exhibition. Propaganda and feature films about the Gulag, selected by the staff of the Open Society Archives and the Hungarian Film Archives, were shown on 6–12 May.

From the beginning of 1999, the staff of the Archives was preoccupied with the production of an exhibition commemorating the 10th anniversary of the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe. Many different ideas were brought up and discussed, and although it was agreed that the exhibition somehow had to shed light on the contrast between the hopes of 1989 and the reality of the past decade, it was difficult to come up with a concrete concept that would communicate this. In the end, the solution came from outside: a beautiful photo collection documenting the past decade, assembled by *Transitions* magazine in Prague, needed a new home, because the journal’s funding had been cut. OSA acquired the photos which became the first part of the exhibition *Ten Years After*.

The pictures, taken by 27 artists from 15 different countries, provided an objective view of the past ten years in the countries of the region. Among the topics presented were unemployment, prostitution, abandoned street children, homeless people, drugs, and wars arising from resurrected nationalism, as well as the influx of American culture, the revival of religion, the development of private enterprises, and the newly acquired freedom of expression.



Poster of the photo and document exhibit *Ten Years After*. The exhibit was organized by OSA on the occasion of the World Economic Forum's 1999 *Central and Eastern European Economies Summit*, 30 June – 2 July 1999, Salzburg.

Designed by Attila Nagy. Collection of Posters, Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.

The other half of the exhibition, recalling the events of 1989, was put together by the Archives using documents from its holdings and photos from various sources. The texts and images narrated the most important euphoric or solemn, or even bloody moments of that year in each country: the first free elections in the Soviet Union, the reburial of Imre Nagy in Hungary, the victory of Solidarity in Poland, the general strike in Czechoslovakia, the demonstrations in Bulgaria and Albania, the revolt and the execution of the Ceaușecus in Romania. This part of the show was invited to the World Economic Forum's Central and Eastern European Economic Summit, which took place in Salzburg from 30 June to 2 July 1999.

Academic programs

The Open Society Archives has concentrated not only on archival projects, but on academic projects as well. In May 1995, the academic programs of OSA were launched with two remarkable and related events. In cooperation with Collegium Budapest (Institute for Advanced Studies), OSA organized a standing seminar of six lectures called *Construction of Memory Under Historical Contingency*. The lecturers were prominent scholars from the fields of philosophy and the theory of history, among others Frederick Ankersmit, Thomas Laqueur, Joan W. Scott and Geoffrey Hartmann, whose presentations were discussed and challenged by the permanent members of the seminar. At the end of May 1995, parallel to the standing seminar, OSA invited to Budapest five outstanding historians of the contemporary academic world – Thomas Laqueur, Steven Greenblatt, Carla Hesse, Reinhard Koselleck, and Nathalie Z. Davis – for an open discussion about the “millennial perspectives”, the future orientations and moral implications of historical scholarship. The event took place in Budapest City Hall in front of a large audience. Professors Gábor Klaniczay and István Rév of Central European University moderated the discussion.

In the following years OSA actively took part in organizing and hosting international conferences closely related to its profile and holdings. In 1996, the Archives contributed to *New Archival Evidence*, an international conference on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution organized by the Hungarian 1956 Institute and the National Security Archives (Washington, DC). The conference attempted to evaluate the status and results of research on the Hungarian Revolution throughout the world from China to the Soviet region and the United States. A special session was devoted to the role of Radio Free Europe in events during the days of the uprising. During 1996, OSA also held an international conference on the handling of highly sensitive documents relating to war crimes. Many experts, legal scholars, and historians participated in the event: Cherif Bassiouni

(head of the UN Commission for Human Rights) from De Paul University, Chicago, Aryeh Neier, President of the Open Society Institute and former President of International Human Rights Watch, and representatives from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Paris, among others.

The last major international event organized by the Open Society Archives was the conference and colloquium of the International Helsinki Federation held in Budapest. The Federation played a major role in international human rights protection, and its activities in the region before 1989 largely contributed to the shattering of the Central and Eastern European dictatorial regimes. The occasion of the colloquium was the 23rd anniversary of the Federation's foundation. At this time, the IHF also deposited its records at OSA.

OSA has played an important role in promoting and improving the professional quality of archival management and historical research in the region. The Archives gives financial support to projects in these areas, and also offers research grants for young scholars – those from the region are especially favored – who work on the history of communism and the Cold War.

The Archives' CEU Summer University courses and its public lecture series both also serve this end. OSA regularly invites highly esteemed international scholars, archivists and historians from the fields of archival management and contemporary history to give public lectures in Budapest, usually at CEU. In the last few years, lecturers have included Lilly Koltun, National Archives of Canada; Anna K. Nelson, American University; Vladimir Lapin, Director of the Russian Central State Historical Archives; Richard Crampton, University of Oxford; John Lewis Gaddis, Yale University; and Klaus Oldenhage, Bundesarchiv, Germany.

Professors Crampton and Gaddis, well-known experts on postwar Central and Eastern European history, spoke about special aspects of the history of the Bulgarian and Polish communist regimes. Other lectures dealt with current issues in the development of archival management and records management (Oldenhage) and the special problems and difficulties of archives in a post-dictatorial situation (Lapin). Not surprisingly, the greatest interest was raised by the lecture of Anna K. Nelson, who is on the Clinton administration's John Kennedy Assassination Records Board. The Board has been assigned to scrutinize and declassify the records of the investigations and hearings on the Kennedy assassination, including background materials of the famous and often questioned Warren Commission report. Nelson's presentation covered the legal and archival issues relevant to the process of declassifying such extremely sensitive materials. She also confirmed the conclusion of the Commission and reassured the audience that Lee Harvey Oswald was the single perpetrator, despite the recurring rumors and legends about political conspiracies, and mafia and CIA involvement.

Open House

The Open Society Archives (OSA) has a three-year tradition of organizing open house events for archival professionals from the region. The idea behind the open house program is to put forward new and interesting topics in the archival and information management sciences. Being in a more favorable financial position than many other archives in the region, OSA can afford its staff members to subscription to Western professional literature, internet access and websites, and participation in conferences and training seminars. Part of the Archives' mission is to serve as a gateway – an open archives – where ideas and opinions can be exchanged, and where archivists can reinterpret their challenging role in managing information societies. OSA staff members work on establishing contacts with other archives, disseminating the information they gather during their professional training, and providing other archives from the region with the infrastructure to make their holdings accessible for researchers. Being the only regional archives, OSA can be the place where archivists from the private and state archives of different countries can discuss the problems they face in the new electronic age.

The first open house was organized at OSA's initial location in February 1997. Almost every Hungarian county archives sent representatives to the event, and national institutions participated as well. Among many other programs, the agenda focused on two main topics: the role of information technology at archives in general, and educational possibilities sponsored by OSA. The latter issue was raised at a round-table discussion during which archivists could share their experiences with archival education. OSA staff members also distributed a questionnaire to the participants in order to find out more about topics which would stimulate their interest in the Archives' future CEU Summer University courses.

The second open house was held at the new building in April 1998, attended by archivists from Hungarian institutions and from neighboring countries. The programs on the agenda were very popular with these professionals: Trudy Peterson's opening speech about the Internet and archives, a tour of the Archives' modern facilities, and discussions on fundraising and records management.

A fortunate coincidence allowed the Archives to profit from the presence of the international archival community in Budapest on the occasion of the annual meeting of the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) on 6–9 October 1999. On 6 October 1999, OSA opened the exhibition *The Past in the Present for the Future* in Galeria Centralis, in cooperation with the Hungarian National Archives, the official organizer of the conference. The opening of this exhibition provide OSA with the opportunity to introduce itself to the archival world and to start a constructive dialogue about common archival problems. Thus, this year's open house will take place in a broader international context.