Acta Poloniae Historica
115, 2017
PL ISSN 0001–6829

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THE RUBBER WAISTBAND AND THE RESISTOR: SOLIDARITY RADIO AND MEDIA FANTASIES OF EMANCIPATION UNDER LATE SOCIALISM IN POLAND

Abstract

The article presents the story of the underground Solidarity radio, a less known chapter of dissident media activism, whose emblematic form was the "extra-Gutenberg" phenomenon of underground print culture, or samizdat. It proposes an approach, influenced by media archeology, in which both can be studied as part and parcel of the same communication environment in order to better understand the particular articulation of dissent, media and modernity which both represented. It proposes that in addition to being a certain media form, samizdat was a "social media fantasy" – a shared cultural matrix which embodied political expectations and passions about liberating effects on horizontal communication, attainable here and now through means at disposal of an average person. Underground broadcasting developed in the shadow of the samizdat materialization of this emancipatory media fantasy, despite the fact that radio activists mastered a unique craft of intrusion into the public airwaves, which gave broadcasting an aura of spectacularity that underground publishing had lost as it expanded.

Key words: media fantasies, media archeology, media activism, radio broadcasting, samizdat

I
INTRODUCTION: THE RUBBER WAISTBAND PARADIGM

The underground Solidarity radio is a less known chapter in the cultural history of dissident media, whose impact was certainly weaker than *samizdat*, the emblematic print platform of unlicensed expression under late socialism. But why exactly? Why didn't it take root the way publishing did, even though the radio in general is a more modern and more effective means of political communication? What were the specific features of the underground radio with respect to print and

http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/APH.2017.115.07
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how can we think the two as part and parcel of the same media environment to understand better their affinities and differences, their relative weaknesses and strengths? How can both fit into a cultural history of late socialism in Poland that articulates together dissent, media and modernity?

Let us start with Mirosław Chojecki, the doyen of the Polish independent publishing movement of the 1970s and the 1980s, and his veteran story about "how we defeated communism with a rubber waistband". The story has been recounted so often during all kinds of dissident commemoration events that it has transformed into a stand-up act. In one written version, it goes like this:

> It all started in the late 1970s with the written word. Then came the spoken and sung word in the form of audio cassettes and ultimately, the word on display, or film. All these methods required specialized technical devices and so did the written, or printed word.
>
> The most popular printing device was the *ramka* – a frame with canvas moistened with an emulsion which anyone could prepare at home using widely available materials. This would be then exposed through a diapositive slide. In the transparent areas the emulsion would solidify and in the areas where light did not come through (letters, images) it would be washed away. This is how you made a matrix. Printing required three people: one operating the roller with printing ink, another to lift the *ramka* and a third to pull out the printed page. Once – nobody knew why exactly – one of the printers did not show up in the print shop. Still, the job needed to be done urgently. One of the printers was female – Basia Felicka. In a stroke of genius, Witek [Łuczywo] persuaded the skirted printer to … take the rubber waistband out of her pants. He took the waistband and fastened it into a chandelier hovering over the table. And this is how the AUTOMATED duplicator was born. The *ramka* would rebound all by itself. Somewhat later the rubber band would be fastened to the base on which the *ramka* was fixed. That made the duplicator operable by a single person. The best printers would make around 1,500 copies per hour!
>
> It was one of the main aims of the totalitarian state to keep us and our minds under full control and to make sure that our thoughts – in case the thoughts were dissident – remained unknown to the public. Once you could make the duplicator yourself at home, you could write, print and distribute whatever you wished … When the free word, printed, spoken and sung on tapes, and later the free word on display in film, became generally accessible – the totalitarian state had to collapse.[1]

[1] Mirosław Chojecki, 'Jak przy pomocy gumki od majtek obaliliśmy komunizm', http://publica.pl/teksty/jak-przy-pomocy-gumki-od-majtek-obalilismy-

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The story is notable for the strange way it brings together: dissident media, technological modernity and resistance to communism. Unlike in the more mainstream (and, well, more plausible) narratives which attribute the fall of communism to its inability to keep up in the technological race, from proliferation of nuclear arms, through modernization of industry, to provision of consumer goods, here the challenge to a modern apparatus of cultural surveillance is posed by a technology that is hardly modern. As we shall see below, this narrative is paradigmatic for the way dissidents related to their media.

That among the many nails driven into the communism's coffin, the samizdat one was especially rusty, was immediately recognized and endorsed by the emerging samizdat studies in the late 1970s and 1980s, which picked up on Anna Akhmatova's characterization of samizdat as 'pre-Gutenberg' phenomenon.[2] Ann Komaromi, in her in-depth examination of this theme, offered a penetrating revision of the way in which the first wave of samizdat research uncritically assimilated the equation of samizdat with political opposition to Communism and of resistance with truth-telling, while the modest pre-Gutenberg quality of their medium only highlighted the heroism of the unlicensed forms of expression.[3] The 'extra-Gutenberg' quality[4] of samizdat signified a more drastic departure, Komaromi argued, not only with respect to modern technology of print, but also the epistemic consequences of the Gutenberg's invention. These were defined by Elisabeth Eisenstein in her groundbreaking work on print culture: the reliance of modern knowledge practices on mass reproduction of exactly the same text, whose identity has been fixed and form standardized, regardless location and time, as the condition of its veracity and credibility.[5] According to Komaromi, the production and circulation of unlicensed printed matter in the Soviet Union resembled rather the situation described by Eisenstein's critics, in particular Adrian Johns, who

komunizm-3220.html [Accessed: 7 Jan. 2016]. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

[2] H. Gordon Skilling, 'Samizdat: A Return to the Pre-Gutenberg Era?', in *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke and London, 1989), 3–18.

[3] Ann Komaromi, 'Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon', *Poetics Today*, xxix, 4 (2008), 629–67.

[4] The term comes from Lev Rubinstein, cf. *ibidem*, 632.

[5] Elisabeth Eisenstein, *The printing press as an agent of change* (Cambridge, 1979).

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pointed out that in the early days of the printing press, in England as elsewhere, achieving fixity of texts, far from an automatic effect of a new technology, was a process that required much labor from authors, publishers, printers and readers.[6] Samizdat is characterized by similar ephemerality reflecting the precarious conditions of its production and reproduction, with abundant inconsistencies, flaws and mutations along the way from one version to the next. Its authorship was often undisclosed, unknown or dubious, and authorial control over its dissemination non-existent, not to mention that it circulated in an environment permeated by generalized mistrust towards printed word as a consequence of Communism's own techniques of propaganda and falsification. To present samizdat as evidence of truth about Soviet realities was much more complicated that dissidents' veterans were ready to admit. Most of all, it required a transnational network of intermediaries, relying on endorsement by both the reputed dissident groups at home and specialized Western research centers (such as Samizdat archives at Radio Free Europe or the Keston College) and human rights institutions (such as Amnesty International or Index on Censorship). It was within such networks, that samizdat versions of recent history, current affairs and societal values were negotiated, stabilized and validated as reliable and valuable knowledge, and invested with authority.

In other words, for Komaromi the extra-Gutenberg quality of samizdat precludes the epistemological fixity and certainty we attribute to truth transmitted by texts, while the narrative about truth-telling is an ideological layer superimposed on it during the Cold War, in other words, a political phantasy. In case of Chojecki's veteran story, this fantasy character is all the more glaring since Polish underground publishing movement abandoned the *ramka* and the rubber waist-band in favor of more sophisticated, sometimes industrial printing techniques even before the emergence of Solidarity in 1980, when supply chains of modern offset and other printing equipment were established by courtesy of trade unions, the Polish diaspora and other sympathetic organizations in the West, whose flow was more or less uninterrupted throughout the 1980s, in the later part of which the underground and overground unlicensed activities were increasingly

[6] Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London, 1998).

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hard to distinguish. Still, for Chojecki, it is the rubber waistband that should symbolize the dissident contribution to Communism's demise.

While Komaromi's intention to bracket off the Cold War context in favor of more nuanced cultural and transnational history approaches was refreshing and gave a new impulse to samizdat studies,[7] my impression is that she dismisses political fantasies all too easily. Without succumbing unreflexively to the inherited conceptual polarities, we should study carefully the way dissidents invested their political emotions and passions in media technology, since that holds some evidence about their times which historians should explore in their own right.

II
PROBLEMATIZING MEDIA MODERNITY

That media fantasies matter in this way has been one of the crucial assumptions of media archeology, a field of research which emerged out of dissatisfaction with how media history portrays technological development in terms of a succession from simple to complex, the new media making the old ones obsolete.[8] Indeed, one of the aims of this emerging orientation is to problematize the qualifications of old and new ascribed to media,[9] guided by the shared assumption that the technological processes of development of the modern (and non-modern) media should not be reduced to history of their instrumental use. In contrast, to account for its cultural use, i.e. how meanings and practices people attach to communication technologies intervene in its deployment, development and demise, requires a break

[7] Valentina Parisi (ed.), *Samizdat: Between Practices and Representations* (Budapest, 2015); Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov (eds.), *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (New York, 2013).

[8] For a useful primer, see 'Introduction' to Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications* (Berkeley, 2011), 1–24; also Simone Natale, 'Understanding Media Archaeology', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, xxxvii (2012), 523–7.

[9] Works, that had a special impact on media archaeology in this regard are: Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York and Oxford, 1988); Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

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from the modernist, linear and progressive temporality.[10] Media have parallel lives and multiple temporalities. Beyond the narratives of technological progress, there are stories to tell about various layers of accomplished or sidelined inventions and uses, and historians of media should pay equal attention to the successful and failed, the actually realized and the imaginary media, and indeed to the historical interplay between media fantasies and inventions.[11] While the Solidarity radio was not exactly a successful venture, it merits some attention with regards to emancipatory media passions.

If the rubber waistband paradigm, developed with unlicensed print in mind, constituted a shared cultural matrix also for the underground radio activists,[12] this is because both feed on similar desire for horizontal communication free from interference, attainable here and now through means at the disposal of an average person. In other words, the fantasies both excite are social media fantasies. What are the common traits of communication practices and artifacts that warrant the application of the concept of 'social media' in historical research? Tom Standage's book length argument for social media's *longue durée* defines it as "two-way, conversational environments in which information passes horizontally from one person to another along social networks, rather than being delivered vertically from an impersonal central source."[13] What makes communications social is a "decentralized, person-to-person media system" in which dissemination of information depends on "cumulative decisions made by individuals in social networks" to amplify the impact of a given message, i.e. on net outcome of discrete individual activities, rather than on a decision made by a single authorized source.

While the underpinning technologies changed throughout the ages, there are more similarities than differences when social media are

[10] See especially Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

[11] Simone Natale and Gabriele Balbi, 'Media and the Imaginary in History', *Media History*, xx, 2 (2014), 203–18; Eric Kluitenberg, 'On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media', in Huhtamo and Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology*, 48–9.

[12] I.e. a media topos, see Erkki Huhtamo, 'Dismantling the Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study', in Huhtamo and Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology*, 27–47.

[13] Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2000 Years* (New York, 2013), 3.

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all contrasted with mass media. Even though, historically, religious and secular authorities have been busy imposing media controls, mainly through prepublication licensing of printable matter, only with the mass media, the control became really efficient thanks to the mass media reliance on expensive, industrial-scale technological infrastructure, its concentrated ownership, professionalization of news gathering and editing, as well as the unprecedented efficiency and speed of the one-way broadcasting model.[14] While Standage has no affinity with media archeology[15] insofar as the historicity of his account has a rather straight line, his aim is to achieve a *Gestalt* switch which seems familiar: we perceive social media as something new, because the mass press, radio and television have imposed themselves on our imagination throughout the postwar period. However, if we pause to consider that mass media might be just a detour in history of communication, as Standage invites to do,[16] we should ponder the possibility that the contemporary social media is a return to a way of communicating which has been dominant in history, except for the scale made possible by the Internet infrastructure.

Historically, social media communication relied on non-professionals and newspapers in its pre-mass media phase consisted of a selection of speeches and pamphlets, letters from readers, reports taken from other papers, all that accompanied by a commentary from the editor who normally would be also the owner and the publisher as in case of first newspapers in Europe and the US. One of the key features of the social media that Standage considers stable over time concerns authorship: non-original content makes the bulk of what circulates around, and rather than authorial creation, the very act of sharing and commenting on an item previously publicized by others is the prevalent form of self-expression.[17] Even though there are authors and works that ‘go viral’, the impact of the social media on the public debate is due to its ability to ‘synchronize opinion,’ i.e. to reveal and to make suddenly visible and tangible the extent to which certain

[14] *Ibidem*, 4.

[15] Or history, for that matter. Standage is a science and technology journalist and writer, and currently Deputy Editor of *The Economist*. His book is however the first concentrated effort to understand social media historically.

[16] Standage, *Writing on the Wall*, 239.

[17] *Ibidem*, 123–46.

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views or ideas are shared, rather than to promote ground-breaking, original insights.[18]

In this sense, social media owns its dynamics to activism, rather than insightful journalism (even though journalists make use of social media), and social media fantasies are typically, even though as we shall see, not exclusively, the domain of activists who invest their passions in fostering communication networks building on user involvement.[19] This is the case, for example, of low-power FM (LPFM) radio activism described by Christina Dunbar-Hester. Her book is about Prometheus, a project growing out of the Philadelphia pirate radio and scene around the Millennium, which combined advocacy work towards granting slots in the FM spectrum for micro-broadcasters operating low-power transmitters for community use, with technical support for the grass-roots radio enthusiasts through hands-on tutorials in setting up LPFM transmitters. An important analytical dimension that Dunbar-Hester brings into relief is the role of tinkering in media activism. The do-it-yourself (DIY) features of radio activism not only integrated the participants of the movement around practical tasks, but constituted a significant source of self-empowerment. The Prometheus project understood "technical practice as the foundation of their vision of social change."[20] In principle (though the practical record was much more uneven) tinkering with hardware and more broadly, problematizing the issue of uneven expertise and lowering the barrier to make broadcasting technically accessible for all, was meant to enable recasting emancipatory politics as prefigurative politics, in which values of participation, accessibility and community self-determination are practiced here and now as a seed of the desired communication environment of the future. This is, amongst others, the reason why the LPFM activists turned to radio, rather than the new technology of the Internet and effectively transfigured the old

[18] *Ibidem*, 48–63.

[19] Needless to say, the connection between activism and social media is rather contingent. Some strands of media activism target mainstream media and focus on policy initiative rather than on fostering alternative communications, or pursue a mixed agenda. See Victor Pickard, *America's Battle for Media Democracy: The Triumph of Corporate Libertarianism and the Future of Media Reform* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

[20] Christina Dunbar-Hester, *Low Power to the People: Pirates, Protest and Politics in FM Radio Activism* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), XI.

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medium's dominant meaning. And this was also why Prometheus rarely invoked the concept of 'information' as their keyword. Beyond the widely held conception that communication technologies are about information and activism should aim at securing its free flow, fair access or even distribution, Prometheus, Dunbar-Hester observes, put to fore the affective dimension of relationship between people and machines and its community-building appeal: who is broadcasting and how broadcasting is made, the sense of self-reliance and community building that accompanies tinkering with lo-tech, accessible technologies, was as important as the message.

What makes Dunbar-Hester's approach especially pertinent for what follows is not only focus on tinkering, which is central to Chojecki's rubber-waistband paradigm and to the story of the underground radio that comes next. More generally, it is the way how her inquiry brings together technology and politics, questioning not so much how activism uses communication tools for organizing protest or pursuing an agenda, but rather how it articulates technology *as* politics, how it ascribes political meanings and emotions to technological artifacts and makes communication technology itself the object and goal of political activity. The topic of emancipatory fantasies fits squarely into such research agenda.

To sum up, social media activism often correlates with articulations of normative ideas, beliefs and passions about appropriate or desirable effects of media artifacts. Emancipatory fantasies are one possible instance of such articulations. In case of underground press and radio, the distinction between social and mass media translates into passion for an activist, accessible and horizontal communication model.

III
MASS MEDIA FANTASIES

In principle, there is not necessary affinity between emancipatory fantasies and social media. Individual passions for a freer flow of information need not be associated with horizontal communication, just like emancipation of labor does not necessarily entail that workers run factories: most of them are satisfied with having strong trade union defending their rights. Similarly, when it comes to media liberties, you can enjoy it more actively as a maker or author, or more passively, as reader, listener or watcher. Some (perhaps most) people

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are satisfied with a sense of being informed without systematic and deliberate distortions. To enjoy media freedom as citizen, you do not necessarily have to produce the news yourself with your own equipment. Mass media phantasies attach themselves to big technologies and large-scale processes they trigger which by and large are beyond control of an average greengrocer. Mass media fascinate as attributes of power, but are not necessarily empowering.

The difference between social media and mass media fantasies may be aptly illustrated with the example of satellite broadcasting, a case of communication technology which aroused fervent speculation about its possible geopolitical effects on both the Cold War divisions and on the Global South for more than a decade before it was actually disseminated at the end of the 1980s.

While this global media fantasy had some echoes in the official press of People's Poland, it is much more difficult to reconstruct the variety that invested hopes in liberalizing effect of the satellite on the communication apparatuses of the socialist state. These hopes were obviously not articulated in the licensed media, but neither did they capture the imagination of the dissident media activists, centered as we shall soon find out, on the social media at their disposal. To reconstruct the emancipatory emotions from behind the Iron Curtain invested in the satellite technology, I relied on second-hand accounts recorded in the Information Items produced by the Polish section of the Research and Analysis Department of Radio Free Europe (RFE) in the 1970s and 1980s.[21] From the very establishment of the radios in the early 1950s, the Information Items were at the heart of RFE's research activities aimed at gathering intelligence about the region for the sake of their own broadcasts, as well as for multiple other stakeholders, including academics and agencies of Western governments, not least the CIA. The program consisted in collecting interviews with both defectors from and travelers to the East of Iron Curtain, through

[21] A fairly detailed description of the research and evaluation units of RFE in 1950s can be found in Robert T. Holt, *Radio Free Europe* (Minneapolis, MN, 1958), 97–112. Another illuminative, if fragmentary source are the memoirs of the head of the Polish research section in 1952–79, Kazimierz Zamorski, *Pod anteną Radia Wolna Europa* (Poznań, 1995). For this section, I also rely on my experience as archivist. I curated the collection of Polish section of RFE Research and Analysis Department at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives in Budapest (Blinken OSA) in 2010–12.

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a network of RFE field offices spread along the various migration routes, from refugee camps in Austria and Germany, through major places of concentration of national diasporas such as London, Paris or Stockholm, big harbours such as Hamburg, to Istanbul and Thessaloniki (for those exiting Bulgaria). The interviews were prepared according to an elaborate questionnaire touching upon a plethora of aspects of life under communism, but especially geared to detecting cracks in the system – be it signs of civic unrest or conflicts within the party state apparatus – as well as to investigating the RFE audience and its listening habits. The reports from the field offices were delivered to Munich in unedited form. A separate section of the research unit existed to evaluate the credibility of the reports, chiefly checking its accuracy in terms of factual information about places, people and institutions against a vast archive of subject and card files collected from target country radio monitoring transcripts, target country and Western press clippings and news agencies' releases, as well as different kinds of reference material, such as gazetteers and yellow pages. The idea was rather straightforward – none of these sources alone was deemed reliable, not least the reports, whose potential bias might result from either awkward psychological circumstances in which the interview was conducted (such as detention in a refugee camp) or counterintelligence manipulation. But checked against each other, they were believed to supply data which, diligently interpreted, could provide an accurate insight into the social and political realities of the RFE broadcasting target countries. Now an "information item" was a news bureau report that had passed through evaluation procedure and was appended with an evaluation commentary about the importance and reliability of the contained bits of information.

The set of Information Items I used for inquiring into media phantasies are a poor relative of the above described program, which RFE American decision makers gradually phased out in the late 1960s and effectively terminated around the time the revelations about RFE covert CIA funding became of interest to Capitol Hill and hit the front pages in the West as well as in the East. The termination of the program was motivated not only by the vulnerability of RFE to the accusation of espionage, but also by the acknowledgement that the credibility of the official press in the satellite countries has improved (among others due to the external pressures of international broadcasting) to an extent that rendered the rationale of the program

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obsolete.[22] Nevertheless, old habits die hard and not everyone inside the Research and Analysis Department was sharing the detente assumptions behind the decision to cancel the program, including prominently Kazimierz Zamorski, the head of the Polish research unit until 1978. Those field offices that had not been closed – in particular the Paris bureau under Maciej Morawski– continued to send in the reports throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[23] In case of that late Information Items, the reporting lacked the procedures of the institutionalized program and relied on the skills and experience developed during its life cycle. But now the extensive questionnaires were gone (as were the DIP and the refugee camps whose residents could be counted on to answer all these questions), and instead of the extensive evaluation commentary the reports were simply graded A to D for reliability. Needless to say, given its unofficial character, these late information items were used for internal use only.

So murky sources, perhaps, but then adequately murky. Having dug through a healthy sample, my impression is that they represent a mezzo level of knowledge, e.g. neither very arcane – in comparison with the Józef Światło revelations[24] for example – nor pure gossip or something one could otherwise read in official newspapers (for a freelance correspondent, redundant news was the sure road to being crossed out from the RFE payroll), but rather a sort of a public secret, an issue of enough substance to become a matter of public interest, but for various reasons unsuitable for official coverage. The informant public, as we can learn from the anonymized descriptions of the informants, consisted mostly of professionally mobile socialist middle class – youth, academics, bureaucrats and professionals – opinionated, but as dissident-minded most of the time, as the sources from which I quote. What speaks in favor of the credibility of these reports is the experience of both the field offices stringers and the Munich

[22] The complete archive of the RFE Information Items was destroyed in the 1970s, however a set from the 1950s survived on microfilm and is available at the Blinken OSA Digital Repository, see http://www.osaarchivum.org/digital-repository/osa:484d852e-1334-4570-a2be-e41230b9e36a [Accessed: 1 March 2017]. Individual items survived interfiled in the Subject Files collection (fonds HU OSA 300-50-1 in case of Polish section).

[23] Fonds HU OSA 300-50-11.

[24] Andrzej Paczkowski, *Trzy twarze Józefa Światły: przyczynek do historii komunizmu w Polsce* (Warszawa, 2009).

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researchers acquired in the previous decades, but in the absence of robust evaluation procedures to make historian's life easier, they should be cross-examined with other types of reference for factual accuracy. But facts are facts and passions are passions. There is little in terms of other type of evidence about emancipatory media fantasies before the underground print culture arrives on the scene, for which, for all their imperfection, these field offices reports from the early 1970s provide an unequaled lead.

Now, seen through the lenses of the Information Items, the expansion of the underground print culture in Poland is not something the RFE informants saw coming, even when samizdat culture had already developed in the Soviet Union and was common knowledge across the Eastern Bloc. It was the radio technology and not the press that was expected to be the "blow of the coming times to censorship and communism."[25] Overcoming the official media surveillance was believed to be a question of the progress of telecommunications, rather than returning to Gutenberg, less still, pre-Gutenberg media.

> Near future – one RFE interviewee assessed in 1972 – can bring us a truly fantastic growth of technologies of diffusion of information and ideas. This is due to many factors, for instance the latest developments in the field of micro transmitters, the possibilities that the study and the conquest of space opens before radio and television, the proliferation or indeed massification of photocopy technologies and the like, the changes in the domain of communications (universalization of aerial communications in the next quarter of century) or better knowledge of foreign languages imposed by the economic changes, and so forth.[26]

This was promising especially when it came to jamming, which for the average greengrocer, was a particularly irritating fact of everyday life. Unlike censorship, which operated behind closed doors and in this sense was a more invisible and subtle means of exercising surveillance, the jamming buzz was an instant and omnipresent reminder of it.

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[25] Information Item R1187, HU OSA 300-50-11, box 17, 3 Sept. 1976. Since all Information Items belong to the same series and are described with the same metadata (code and year), hereafter the fonds identifier, date and document name are abbreviated following this pattern: II R1187, 300-50-11/17 (last digit standing for box number) 72-09-03 (yy-mm-dd).

[26] II R253, 300-50-11/13, 72-06-30; also II R344, 300-50-11/13, 72-11-03.

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> Jamming – a RFE listener deplored – is for many citizens an everyday slap in the face, an everyday evidence and reminder that the government is afraid of the people, that it does not trust them, that it does not treat them seriously as mature, responsible persons. The significant side effect of jamming of Radio Free Europe is the growing mistrust of Polish society towards its media.[27]

This slap in the face was all the more painful not least because it was widely believed that frequent power cuts in districts of many Polish cities are the hidden cost of the jamming operations. Jamming was irritating first and foremost because against the backdrop of Gierek's propaganda of liberalization, it was actually a backlash with respect to Gomułka's period when its operations were suspended.[28] Also the absence of jamming in Romania and Hungary was weakening Poland's position in the contest for being the merriest barrack in the camp.[29] Finally, it betrayed the party's own ideological inferiority complex against the West.[30]

When it comes to overcoming jamming, nothing sparked the imagination of news-thirsty Poles like the telecommunication sputnik. The sputniks – the satellite was the name that stuck even though the Soviets were first on the earth's orbit – corresponded to a geopolitical fantasy of communism losing the Cold War competition against the forces of technological globalization. The sputniks were hoped to "abolish the system of radio monopolies over Europe."[31] It was widely believed that the satellite signal could not be jammed and that the Western broadcasts from space would effectively shatter the communist monopoly of information. In the situation of free flow of information, the entire surveillance apparatus would have to liberalize or cease to exist. And even if they could be jammed "the exclusion of socialist countries from liberty to choose from the diversity of available programs will make the masses angry, especially when it comes to entertainment."[32]

These hopes would first materialize in the early 1970s, catalyzed as they were by the fears – well propagated by the communist official

[27] II R1282, 300-50-11/17, 77-01-06.
[28] II R344, *ibidem*.
[29] II R1955, 300-50-11/18, 76-09-03.
[30] II R1329, 300-50-11/17, 77-02-22.
[31] II R709, 300-50-11/16, 75-04-29.
[32] II R344, *ibidem*.

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media – of the imminent closure of RFE, whose position on the Cold War stage was deeply undermined by the disclosure of CIA financing, as well as in case of Poland, the Czechowicz case, a Polish secret service officer who was installed as a mole inside the radios' Munich headquarters and who – after his return to Poland – publicized the image of the RFE as both a seditious intelligence center of the CIA and as a decadent reservoir of the emigre life, inefficient and full of personal rivalries.[33]

However, back at home it was widely believed that "the offensive against RFE is doomed to failure, given that the modern world evolves in the direction of greater information exchange due to progress of radio technologies."[34]

> The technological progress, the automatized shirking of the world – *one RFE informant commented* – will yet destroy all artificial barriers and drive the socialist countries towards a perpetual ideological confrontation. For now, however, the naive representatives of the "old-party" school of thought stick to their antiquated tricks. For sure they will come up with new affairs and provocations *à la* Czechowicz or something like that![35]

The sputnik hopes were a sign that the popular consciousness of the "automated shrinking of the world" was by the 1970s itself already a global feeling, even if what we understand today as globalization was only starting to receive its comprehensive intellectual formulations, such as Marshall McLuchan's *Guttenberg Galaxy* (1962) or Daniel Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1974). And indeed, the sputnik fantasies were tapping into a more general theme of Cold War competition: communism fundamental inability to switch into post-industrial mechanisms of growth.[36] But it cut two ways and the dreams of technological redemption were associated with fears that satellite broadcasting can actually facilitate the spread, rather than the roll-back, of communist ideology.

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[33] Paweł Machcewicz, *'Monachijska Menażeria'. Walka z Radiem Wolna Europa 1950–1989* (Warszawa, 2007), 269–78; Eng. trans.: 'The Gierek Era, Détente and a Massive Attack on Radio Free Europe, 1971–1975', in *Poland's War with Radio Free Europe* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA, 2014), Chapt. 5.

[34] II R147, 300-50-11/13, 72-03-03.

[35] II R1329, 300–50–11/17, 77-02-22.

[36] II R2732, 300-50-11/20, 85-04-05.

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> It is obvious that the socialist bloc will take full advantage of the satellite television broadcasting. Sooner or later enormous, multilingual relay stations will be established and carefully fabricated propaganda will wrap the entire earth. These will substitute the inept foreign language programs of Radio Moscow or Radio Prague. The sly Gorbachev clan will surely find sophisticated enough collaborators among the Eurocommunists and other progressives.[37]

Indeed, it is useful to contrast the emancipatory expectations and prognostications connected to the observed shrinking of the world, with how official propaganda departments and the licensed press made sense of it. The question of the impact of satellite communications on mass media and the implications for exercising propaganda made it to the discussion guidelines of the sixth congress of the Polish United Workers' Party (Pol.: *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR) as early as 1971. In the age of nuclear deterrence – the official cultural doctrine had it – indirect forms of confrontation are at the forefront and culture, politics and ideology become ever tightly connected. In this context

> the technological progress enabling production, duplication and distribution of many kinds of cultural goods, information and alike, makes possible a rapid growth of interpersonal and international means of communication. These factors favor exchange and diffusion of the cultural heritage of nations, but at the same time result in an intensified ideological-political struggle with novel means and forms.[38]

The promise of the sputnik, as well as of other technical means making dissemination of culture and information ever faster and more direct, held under its spell also the licensed press commentators. This promise was translated most of the time into the mantra of peaceful coexistence.

> There has never been a greater breakthrough in culture than the possibility of direct contact with art and cultural tradition of all nations. No matter how far these are from each other on the map, this implies an abolition of barriers and obstacles as old as humanity itself, which have divided peoples,

[37] II R2842, 300-50-11/20, 85-12-25.

[38] Mieczysław Sorycz, 'Walka ideologiczna i polityczna w kulturze', *Nowe Drogi*, 4 (1987).

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holding them ignorant about one another. One turn of the knob and we can know everything. What and how much we learn, will depend only on us.[39]

On the other hand, some official commentators argued that the specifically democratic promise of the sputnik had been exaggerated.

> The increased ability to acquire and share information does not in itself contribute to strengthening or enhancing the democratic principle. Disclosing everything or speaking about everything to everyone does not create at all a democratic, equal for all, independent public opinion. Information overload equals lack of information … Next to the art of communicating and transmitting in such way that conveys no information, there flourishes today the art of communicating and transmitting such an excess of contradictory and mediocre news so as to render it meaningless, leaving the conscience of the inhabitant of the "planetary village" in a state of ignorance as immaculate as before.[40]

The imminent information overload, which would make public opinion paralyzed rather than better informed, justified, in turn, the interventionist role of the state in information management. However, information management itself in the era of the sputnik was seen as a challenge rather than opportunity. The propaganda departments of the socialist states had some success on this front as long as it was limited to transnational flow of printed matter and the conventional radio broadcasting. But they were rather helpless against the looming specter of direct-to-home satellite broadcasting, which would circumvent completely the state-controlled transmitters.[41]

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[39] Barbara Nawrocka, 'Kultura w erze telesatelitów', *Trybuna Ludu* (9 Oct. 1972).

[40] Kazimierz Młynarz, 'Funkcje Radia i Telewizji', *Nurt*, 19 (1971).

[41] The Direct Broadcasts Satellites controversy is a very interesting chapter of the Cold War rivalry, colliding arguments about free flow of information, state sovereignty and cultural anti-imperialism, arousing passions and interests not only in the East and West, but in the global South as well. Recounting this story however exceeds the limits of this paper. Useful introduction can be found in Sharon L. Fjordbak, 'The international Direct Broadcast Satellite Controversy', *Journal of Air Law and Commerce*, lv (1990), 903–38. For a contemporary Czechoslovak view, see 'Czechoslovak Legal Authority on the International Law Concerning Broadcasting', *RFE Background Report* (17 March 1977) [trans. of article by Jan Busak from *Právník*, 12 (Dec. 1976)], HU OSA 300-8-3 series, <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:d55ac0e7-25b6-4d6f-9691-eee2ca0b0a37> [Accessed: 7 Jan. 2016].

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IV
MODEST PRECEDENTS

In case of sputnik, the cause of liberation is entrusted to world-scale processes and great powers politics. But – as rubber waistband paradigm reveals – an equally powerful passion drives people to look for technologies with which they can help themselves to achieve cultural freedom. Contemporary to the sputnik fantasies, in the Information Items we can find traces of popular fascination with non-print horizontal communication that can be considered a prehistory of the Solidarity radio. Moreover, the Information Items provide ample evidence that such fascination was something dissident media activists shared with an average RFE informant.

These traces of passion for horizontal communication are rather faint and attach themselves to most modest means. They mostly concern small hacks that make the everyday life more livable. Awaiting the sputnik redemption, tweaking radio and television antennas was what the average greengrocer could do without much complication to overcome jamming of the uncensored news from beyond the Iron Curtain. For many students of technical universities educated in the field of telecommunications, fabricating or modifying the design of the antennas in order to reduce the effects of jamming and amplify the radio or television signal became both a passionate pastime and a serious source of additional income.

> On the whole our youth considers free access to foreign radio and television programs as something extremely important. The young think that soon they will be able to receive very attractive broadcasts from West Germany, France or even Great Britain! This hopes relate to the rumors spreading through Poland about the dawn of the satellite communication era. Even now people admire the communications professionals from the coast who are able to tweak their TVs and antennas to receive as much as five or six foreign signals from Denmark, Sweden, West Germany etc.[42]

It not always worked exactly the way you wanted. Reportedly the eminent writer Antoni Słonimski had his RFE signal amplified only to realize that as a result he was not able to listen, as he often had before, to his favorite foreign broadcasts of classical music.[43]

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[42] II R1955, 300-50-11/18, 79-03-07.
[43] II R353, 300-50-11/13, 72-11-20.

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One of the ways in which the shrinking of the world was becoming something close and tangible, something an average greengrocer could do herself, was the development of personal electronics, either ready-made or easy to assemble. Thus another technological trend that captivated the imagination of the youth was the amateur radio communication and the walkie-talkies. Rumor had it that the West was swamped with affordable Japanese shortwave transmitters which enabled uncontrolled communication in the range of 100 km. And that young Swedish tourists were bringing such walkie-talkies when traveling for vacation on the Polish coast to leave it with the girls they dated in order to be able to court them across the Baltics.[44]

Amateur radio communication was not an underground thing in itself. The Polish Amateur Radio Union (Pol.: *Polski Związek Krótkofalowców*) survived since its establishment in 1930 and in 1972 had around 6 thousand members and oversaw the use of over three thousand individual and around five hundred organizational amateur radio stations (at the time, the International Amateur Radio Union integrated about half a million users around the globe, mostly in the US). It was however very tightly controlled.[45] License for construction and operation of the amateur radio stations could be obtained only through passing a state exam and the radio activities were subordinated to official youth movement, scouting associations (Pol.: *Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego*, ZHP) or civil defense organizations (Pol.: *Liga Ochrony Kraju*, LOK). According to the official policy the amateur radio movement was considered a volunteer civil service, whose duties included in the first place the worldwide dissemination of the ideas of peaceful cooperation, civic support to relief activities in case of natural disasters and feeding the authorities with reports about the audible range of propagation of the airwaves. People attracted less to civil defense activities and more after the pleasure global horizontal communication were also part of the movement as long as they accepted the extent of surveillance it involved.[46]

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[44] II R1347, 300-50-11/17, 77-03-11.

[45] Surveillance of amateur radio activity was not exclusively a communist phenomenon, for US Cold War context, see Kristen Haring, *Ham Radio's Technical Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

[46] This paragraph is based on the fonds HU OSA 300-50-01, box 2200, in particular: '40 lat Polskiego Związku Krótkofalówkowców', *Trybuna Ludu* (26 Oct. 1970); 'SP nadaje …', *Słowo Powszechne* (22 Oct. 1970); '550 tys. radiostacji

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Even though construction or use of unlicensed transmitters was penalized up to three years of prison under Polish Criminal Code (Art. 287), there is some evidence that such pirate activity actually took place before organized opposition circles started to form and reportedly without explicit dissident agenda. It was rather a matter of showing one's technical skills and becoming a radio DJ for a day or two. The fact that some basic, vocational technical training was enough to assemble a transmitter from the available components made it especially attractive for young people.[47]

That some of the components would suddenly go out of stock, was, according to RFE Paris reporter Maciej Morawski, an evidence that the authorities preferred to play it safe (and a reason for RFE to keep this development off-record). Indeed, from such unlicensed activities without a reported emancipatory agenda there was only a small step towards full blown fantasies of social media – horizontal communication networks for sharing unlicensed thoughts and ideas beyond surveillance. These again would typically involve rumors about Western technological innovations, as in the case of the pirate radios, which were said to operate already in Switzerland or Italy. "Future freedom of communication based on private transmitters" Maciej Morawski observed, was something young people from the region were "quite obsessively fascinated with."[48] The pirate radio was attributed game-changing importance, since it was seen to open the airwaves to ordinary citizens and social movements. Unlicensed broadcasting would become easier, surveillance of information flows more difficult. As an effect, it was hoped, politics itself would become fine-tuned to genuine ideological debate and more responsive to the popular mood.[49]

> They claim – Morawski noted at another occasion – that in the West you can buy … lightweight, small suitcase transmitters which enable to broadcast communiques or even whole programs in the range of an entire district of Warsaw or that of a small town. Such transmitters – broadcasting on the official radio frequencies – are allegedly very hard to localize and it takes

na świecie. Krótkofalówkowcy "amatorską służbą łączności"', *Życie Warszawy* (25 May 1972).

[47] Zbigniew Szymański, 'Pirat w eterze', *Gazeta Poznańska* (12 March 1972).

[48] II R1187, 300-50-11/17, 76-09-03.

[49] II R1071, 300-50-11/17, 76-04-28.

www.rcin.org.pl

> time for the police to find them. Poland is full of rumors about experiments in these field conducted by some Extreme Left groups. And thus many of our young oppositionists entertain the idea of their own radio programs. No chance for that today but in a couple of years, with further technological progress, maybe such activities will become a part of everyday life?[50]

V
DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS OF SOLIDARITY RADIO

In fact, it would take only three years before the passion for the pirate radio would become reality. The imaginary prehistory of the Solidarity radio consists of the above layer of popular media fantasies, which seems both broad and difficult to document. Apart from that, there is some evidence that the idea of an independent radio was first mooted among the dissidents already in 1977, which is when the Western pirate radios are becoming news among the youth.[51] Solidarity, during its legal existence, controlled the wired radio factory networks and broadcasts recorded centrally in the Warsaw studio and distributed on cassettes make another important precedent.[52]

The radio was a particular passion of Zbigniew Romaszewski,[53] who notably held a PhD on microwave physics. An opposition veteran and one of its biggest authorities, Romaszewski evaded internment on December 13, 1981 and went into hiding. He soon learned about existence of a prototype wireless radio transmitter commissioned by Solidarity after March 1981 Bydgoszcz Crisis to connect local wired factory networks and enable interfactory communication between its local committees in the eventuality of a general strike.

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[50] II R2007, 300-50-11/18, 79-04-28.

[51] 'A Profile of Zbigniew Romaszewski', *RFE/RL Polish Situation Report*, 16 (15 Sept. 1982), 19 <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:6bde9446-a4de-4f14-b37e-f56ec25d001c> [Accessed: 7 Jan. 2016].

[52] The phenomenon of the wired broadcasts of material pre-recorded on cassettes is beyond the scope of this article, but general introduction to Solidarity's radio activities both before and after the Martial Law can be found in Grzegorz Majchrzak, 'Radio "Solidarność". Niezależna działalność radiowa pod szyldem "Solidarności" 1980–1989', in Łukasz Kamiński and Grzegorz Waligóra (ed.), *NSZZ Solidarność 1980–1989*, ii: *Ruch Społeczny* (Warszawa, 2010), 387–451.

[53] Abundant information about Romaszewski's carrier and worldview and about the Solidarity radio in Polish is to be found at www.romaszewski.pl [Accessed: 7 Jan. 2016].

www.rcin.org.pl

Further enhancement of the prototype designed by engineer Ryszard Kołyszko, together with the logistics took several months and finished in April 1982.

The jingle of Radio Solidarity first sounded on April 12, 1982, in Warsaw, on the VHF waves.[54] The jingle adapted *Siekiera, motyka …*, a popular melody from the times of anti-Nazi resistance. The underground broadcasters called it *fifulka* since it was played on a flute by Janusz Klekowski, a cellist employed at the National Theatre, who was also the radio's first broadcaster and – in tandem with Zofia Romaszewska – its first speaker.

The broadcasters asked the listeners to perform a blinking test – to turn off and on the lights in their apartments in order to check the audibility range (three times for good, two times for average and one time for low audibility). For Klekowski and Marek Rasiński, who set up the broadcast together, seeing the Warsaw downtown responding with a true lightshow was a most sublime moment of their lives. Due to simplicity as well as entertaining nature of this interactive feature, the blinking tests would become the hallmark of the Solidarity radio in the later years. "What a satisfaction to see thousands of friendly blinking windows – remarked one underground broadcaster in 1987 – that makes up for all the effort and risk of our work!"[55]

The first broadcast, as would become the rule, was pre-recorded on a cassette. In about 8 minutes a number of news items was transmitted – including one false about beating of the student Stanisław Matejczuk,[56] who was later shown on TV with no visible damage, as well as a song by Kelus about the Wujek miners' strike – leading to Kelus' search and internment.

The second broadcast on 5 May 1982 was even more spectacular due to the police operation that intended to prevent it.

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[54] The section on Solidarity Radio is based especially on fonds HU OSA 300-50-1, boxes 1479–1982 and HU OSA 300-55-10, box 25. The most valuable source on the beginnings of the Solidarity Radio is the publication based on the political trial of the Romaszewskis and their collaborators, *Proces Radia 'Solidarność'* ([Warszawa], 1983).

[55] '"Siekiera, Motyka …" podczas DTV', *Robotnik. Pismo Członków MRKS*, 119 (22 Feb. 1987).

[56] Matejczuk was held in custody, and later convicted in the famous case of murder of the militia officer Zdzisław Karos during an attempt to disarm him by a teenage underground organization.

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> Police action: two choppers with pelengator devices hover above the broadcasting zone around Osiedle za Żelazną Bramą. In twenty minutes the police and the ZOMO anti-riot units create a *cordon sanitaire* around the quarter of Świeczewskiego, Pereca, Marchlewskiego and Żelazna streets. Cars, houses and passersby are being searched for a couple of hours. To no avail – the broadcast is short and the VHF transmitter is difficult to detect. The waves bounce and interfere in the urban area, so you can only define a certain range. In reality, the transmitter was placed in the laundry room on top of a high raiser on the other side of Marchlewskiego street, corner with Świętokrzyska. The audio tape snaps and terminates the transmission adding even more thrill to the situation.[57]

The construction of the radio apparatus echoed the earlier pirate radio fantasies. It was a simple device which one could assemble from widely available materials at a low cost.

> Such device can be very simple, primitive – a forensic expert in the Frasyniuk trial assessed. In 1980 five boys from Legnica could start a radio network. All you need is an audio cassette recorder, dural pipes for the antenna, a shielded cable – all that you can buy in a store. There might be a problem with the transistor. But everything costs no more than a several dozen thousand złotys.[58]

To enable boys from Legnica to assemble their own radio, was the great asset of the design, something the underground broadcasters were particularly proud of.

> Our programs have been hitherto aired using devices designed and assembled by Solidarity engineers – Romaszewski boasted in the July 13, 1982 broadcast. – If we take into consideration that almost 90 per cent of the equipment in use by the official radio and television comes from abroad, you cannot but appreciate this fact as an especially valuable contribution of our technical intelligentsia to the cause of strengthening national bonds, the will to resist and to endure.[59]

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[57] 'Historia Radia Solidarność', *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, 53 [Paryż, 26 Jan. 1983], 3–7.

[58] 'Proces Radia "Solidarność"' [unidentified typescript consisting of 124 pages with handwritten editorial and proof-reading mark-up, HU OSA 300-50-1, box 1481; different from the eponymous work published by Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza in 1983], 65.

[59] *Ibidem*, 64.

www.rcin.org.pl

> The underground radio – Romaszewski's pride was echoed in a 1987 issue of the underground *Robotnik* – is a belated response to the catchphrase from the 1970s: "Poles can". This is what the secret police found out to their despair – the devices were of high quality even though not "made in USA", as they hoped, but a genuine product of Polish technical design. We are willing to distribute the license free of charge in all countries of popular democracy. We are waiting for orders.[60]

While the design and the assembly was purely local, some components were coming from abroad. Western trade unions – including the AFL-CIO and its anticommunist president, Lane Kirkland[61] – but also Polish emigre organizations would use the transports carrying relief for Poland under Martial Law to deliver both press and radio equipment for the Polish underground. The transports depended on voluntary commitment of many individual Europeans, from Sweden to Belgium, who drove such prohibited goods to their destination (official address would typically be a charity organization of the Polish Church) and risked being detained if these were disclosed. That was famously the case of Roger Noel, the Belgian activist of the organization Free the Airwaves who was arrested while delivering a radio transistor to Romaszewski's group and became a victim of a show trial preceding the trial of Solidarity radio.

Despite the spectacular beginnings, the broadcasters would soon realize that the underground radio was a rather risky business. The low cost and the simplicity of the design was an asset, but also a necessity – you had to keep it basic to be able to afford to lose it. The police would soon learn how to localize a transmitter and intercept it. That was fine as long as the conspirator would manage to get away after triggering the broadcast.

The early underground radio operated on the VHF frequencies. In addition to being receptive to both whether conditions and to interferences from other devices (in the Warsaw downtown you could not hear anything close to the Palace of Culture and Science where the radio and television antennas were installed), the VHF signal could be tracked in two minutes, which meant that the broadcasting time could be no more than ten minutes, given also and

[60] '"Siekiera, Motyka …" podczas DTV'.

[61] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, 'Solidarity Rides the Airwaves', *Washington Post* (24 April 1985).

www.rcin.org.pl

that the transmitter itself was a rather noticeable device to walk around with.[62] Moreover after the signal was tracked, it would instantly be jammed by loud music – "Kiszczak's disco" as it was immediately dubbed.[63]

Worst of all, in the early days Solidarity radio would announce its program – in addition to publicity in the underground press – through distributing leaflets in the audible range of the broadcasts. This was probably the biggest vulnerability of the entire enterprise, since this way the police knew in advance where to look for the transmitter. Once the area was demarcated with the additional help of pelengator antennas, it was an easy catch, especially that that there were not that many high raisers in the center of Warsaw at the time (transmissions occurred from laundry rooms, elevator shafts and similar spaces which you can find on top of an apartment building) and that the radio broadcasted in late hours (9.00–10.00 PM) when there wasn't much human traffic.

While the first and most spectacular raid on the Radio Solidarity failed, more throughout technique of observation of the demarcated area soon yielded results. As early as June 8, 1982, the radio operators Jacek Bąk and Dariusz Rutkowski were arrested while removing a transmitter and agreed to testify. The investigation would subsequently lead to arrests on 5 July during a meeting in which Noel was supposed to deliver a transistor, involving his detention as well as detention of some of the radio staff, including Zofia Romaszewska. The arrest of Zbigniew Romaszewski, who managed to escape on the previous occasion, came on 29 August 1982.

Starting on 24 January 1983, the trial of Solidarity Radio before the Warsaw District Military Court was one of the biggest Martial Law political trials involving Romaszewski, his wife and eight other people who served as speakers, technicians or suppliers of equipment or clandestine offices. The charges included the breach of the Martial Law (abstention from trade union activities), unlicensed possession of radio equipment and spreading false information on the

[62] 'Nie wszystko można mówić', in Grzegorz Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei* (Warszawa, 1988), 109.

[63] Włodzimierz Domagalski, 'Początki radia podziemnego w Warszawie', *Interia Nowa Historia* (4 Nov. 2014) <http://nowahistoria.interia.pl/prl/news-poczatki--radia-podziemnego-w-warszawie,nId,1542889> [Accessed: 7 Jan. 2016].

www.rcin.org.pl

socio-political situation which might have incited civic disturbance and anti-state activities. The independent broadcasters were defended by the elite of opposition lawyers, including Jan Olszewski, Władysław Siła-Nowicki, Jacek Taylor, Maciej Dubois, Krzysztof Piesiewicz and Stanisław Szczuka. The lawyers not only protested against the well-known socialist court practice of interpreting value judgements (that Martial Law was "a war of the government against the society", that internment "amounts to imprisonment", that "human rights are being trampled") as information, false and maliciously disseminated. They also argued in defense of the underground radio activities that these were broadening social access to mass media, as agreed upon with Solidarity in August 1980.

> It bears reminding that since August 1980 alongside the normal law the Gdańsk Accords were in force, which prescribed that radio, television and press activities should be brought under social control. Was this commitment undersigned by the authorities ever suspended? Not at all. In fact, this social control was never achieved, but the authorities still officially recognize the agreement as binding. Not a single letter has been changed. If so, radio should serve to express a plurality of thoughts. If these accords are still binding for both sides, Radio Solidarity should be understood in a completely different light.[64]

Taylor's argument, whose stake was to defend the status of the agreement between the authorities and the striking workers as a *de facto* source of law in socialist Poland,[65] made sense from the point of view of the oppositional jurisprudence. Nevertheless, elevating the underground radio to the status of mass media exaggerated the radio's capacity, making the offense resulting from its activities look more serious. Incidentally in drawing the continuity of the struggle for social access to mass media, Taylor admitted the validity of the charges of the military prosecutor: the involvement in Solidarity activities despite the ban in the Martial Law Decree. That was not a problem in case of Romaszewski who proudly assumed all the responsibility during the trial opening, but others (especially Rutkowski and Bąk) testified the opposite.[66] Sentences delivered on 17 February 1983 ranged

[64] 'Proces Radia "Solidarność"', 53.

[65] On the legal status of the Gdańsk Accords see Jarosław Kuisz, *Charakter prawny porozumień sierpniowych 1980–1981* (Warszawa, 2009).

[66] 'Proces Radia "Solidarność"', 4.

www.rcin.org.pl

from four and a half years for Romaszewski to 7 months for some *ad hoc* supporters. Most of the convicted were released in July 1983. Romaszewski was set free on 8 August 1984 due to an amnesty decree.

VI
THE REVIVAL

The trial was not the final blow for the underground radio. New initiatives started to mushroom both in Warsaw and the Warsaw area (Ursynów, Stegny, Pruszków, Piaseczno, Międzylesie) and throughout the country (Cracow, Gdańsk, Toruń, Bydgoszcz, Świdnik, Elbląg). It was a rather loosely connected network, with little coordination between broadcasting groups.

The underground broadcasters made sure their acts of defiance had a spectacular character. This was already the case with the 1982 New Year's Eve program for the detained in the Rakowiecka Street prison, where Romaszewski, his wife and other members of the group were awaiting trial. Before, the Solidarity Resistance Groups (Pol.: *Grupy Oporu 'Solidarni'*) placed the so-called *gadała* (car cassette player connected to a loud speaker and charged from a car battery) on the Powązki Cemetery on 1 August 1982, the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, to broadcast a speech by Zbigniew Bujak. In Toruń, a transmitter was carried over the city in a balloon to enable a broadcast which lasted an entire half an hour. On 13 December 1985, the fourth anniversary of the introduction of the Martial Law, dwellers of the Praga Południe district of Warsaw, who happened to be near the Supersam market on Rondo Wiatraczna at around 15.30, could hear the familiar Second World War resistance tune. The broadcast was coming from a metal crate soldered to a shopping cart and fixed to a concrete post. Reportedly it was quite a sight to watch policemen trying to stop the broadcast, kicking the crate and jumping on it. With help of crowbars they succeeded after 35 minutes of broadcast.[67]

Nevertheless, the formula in which the radio's popularity depended on creativity in defiance, where each act should be more spectacular than the previous one, could not hold for long. And after a couple of years it seemed as if the underground radio had run out of steam. "Radio Solidarity is not that much of a sensation as it used to be in the

[67] 'Łomy kontra Radio S', *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 152 (3 Jan. 1986).

www.rcin.org.pl

beginning – one of the activists deplored in 1984. – Back the situation was tense and the radio signal rang like a gunshot. Now everything faded. Zbyszek and Zosia are gone, and so the broadcasts slumped."[68]

And then in late 1985, the radio regained the momentum. Around the time of parliamentary elections on 13 October 1985, in different districts of Warsaw as well as in the Warsaw area towns of Legionowo, Pruszków and Wołomin, subtitles began to flash on the TV screens during prime time broadcasts. "Free the Political Prisoners!" "Solidarity is alive!" "Boycott the elections!" And, last but not least, "Turn on the radio on VHF." The VHF channel would carry speeches by Zbigniew Bujak and Wiktor Kulerski. Each Tuesday, during the conference of the universally abominated government spokesman Jerzy Urban, another message would flash: "Urban, you are lying again!"[69]

The breakthrough relied on a series of technical innovations. Tests for tapping into the official TV frequencies were done as early as Spring 1984,[70] and the technology developed in the following year. The new approach was basing on the fact that Polish TV broadcasted its soundtrack also in VHF. The so called "second audio channel" of the Channel One of Polish Television could be received on the radio. Tapping into the TV audio frequencies meant that the underground radio could not be jammed unless the authorities jammed their own show as well. Flashing the messages on screen was added as an alternative to distributing leaflets. Their less political and more practical function was to make the audience aware of the forthcoming program.[71]

From the arrests that followed this new mode of radio operations, we can learn that most talented telecommunications experts contributed to its invention. Jan Hanasz, the head of the Astrophysics Laboratory at the Copernicus Astronomy Center in Toruń, who had participated in the Soviet Intercosmos space program and who in 1981 had refused a Soviet academic award in protest against the Martial Law, was convicted in January 1986 of "television

[68] 'Nie wszystko można mówić', 110.

[69] Quoted in *Głos Solidarności*, 10 (21 Oct. 1988).

[70] 'Nie wszystko można mówić', 111.

[71] Organizatorzy i kierownictwo Radia Solidarność w Regionie Mazowsze, 'Materiały na zebranie tymczasowego zarządu Regionu Mazowsze', typescript dated 18 Feb. 1989, HU OSA 300–55–10, box 25. The typescript contains a detailed description of the underground broadcasting in its late phase.

www.rcin.org.pl

piracy with anti-state intent" for a suspended 18 months sentence of prison.[72]

By 1987 Radio Solidarity in Warsaw would broadcast 20 times weekly. Each week programs were prepared by two independent production studios and repeated throughout the week. The studios would edit program scripts out of available material. The scripts would then be recorded on a high quality master records (this is why scripts were preferred to pre-recorded broadcasts) in order to enable making many copies, which would be distributed among the broadcast teams.[73]

Each program took around 10 minutes (4 pages of typescript) and contained information on current events and anniversaries, statements by the underground leadership, as well as interviews with Solidarity activists. In the first half of 1988, 23 programs were recorded: 13 with current news and 10 with thematic focus, including Katyń, Jalta, political prisoners, price hikes, the Orange Alternative group, as well as a broadcast for children.

The blinking tests demonstrated that the audible range of the broadcast in this second period was between 1 and 5 kilometers. In case of Warsaw, that would give an estimated total outreach of some hundred thousand listeners for 20 broadcasts weekly.[74] The broadcasts always took place in prime time – after the main news or TV series, or during the break in a football match. "The better the TV program, the more listeners we have. We are waiting for another *Return to Eden*. This soap opera was for us like a true vein of gold."[75] After a few incidents, the broadcasters carefully avoided disruptions of the prime time programs, after all the sympathies of the listeners were not unconditional.

VII
BETWEEN MASS MEDIA FANTASIES AND SAMIZDAT REALITIES

During its lifecycle, the underground radio's place in the overall underground Solidarity media environment was rather undecided

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[72] 'Wyrok w sprawie piractwa telewizyjnego', *Życie Warszawy* (23 Jan. 1986). See also *Poland's Leading Space Scientist on Trial*, Reuters (20 Jan. 1986).

[73] 'Apel Radia Solidarność', *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 202 (11 March 1987).

[74] 'Tu Radio Solidarność', *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 198 (11 Jan. 1987).

[75] '"Siekiera, Motyka …" podczas DTV'.

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for both its makers and its patrons. Sometimes it was perceived as a compensatory form of mass media, a stronghold in the position struggle for access to radio and television Solidarity had been waging since 1980. As we have seen, this was the position of the independent lawyers during the Radio Solidarity trial, but also the line of the underground Solidarity leadership, as we can learn from the following note:

> Concerning the news item about use of the radio transmitting devices published in *Życie Warszawy* no 95 on 24 April 1987, the Regional Executive Committee of the Independent, Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" in the Mazowsze Region declares that Radio Solidarity has been working for five years to continue Solidarity's struggle for social access to mass media undertaken directly in the aftermath of August 1980. The specific mission of Radio Solidarity is to inform society about all modes of existence and activity of Solidarity as well as to make public all the information withheld by the authorities concerning the struggle for our civic and human rights. All persecution against Radio Solidarity is to be considered as persecution against trade union activity as such.[76]

And it was a compensatory form of mass media in the sense that it was much more closely subordinated to the Solidarity regional leaders, especially in Warsaw, where it operated under the patronage of Zbigniew Bujak, the leader of Mazowsze region. The patronage meant, on the one hand, financial support and on the other, subordination to the union's agenda in terms of both content and timing. Solidarity leadership statements and appeals would always have a priority over other news and the broadcasts would be scheduled with the intention to support popular mobilization in Solidarity's protest or boycott activities. There was no 'Liberal Democratic Party for Independence Radio' or 'Polish Socialist Party Radio' in the way that journals and publications – increasingly after the 1986 general amnesty – catered to all political tastes. The exception here was the Fighting Solidarity Radio which was subordinated to the eponymous Solidarity splinter group under the charismatic leadership of Kornel Morawiecki. However, the network of Fighting Solidarity radios was even more disciplined than the outlets of the mainstream Solidarity, where little coordination existed between initiatives in particular region.[77]

[76] 'Oświadczenie RKW', *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 212 (20 May 1985).

[77] Łukasz Kamiński and Grzegorz Waligóra, 'Solidarność Walcząca', in *iidem*, *NSZZ Solidarność*, ii, 478–80.

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But Solidarity radio was a *compensatory* form in the sense that it was not able to master the basic advantage of the mass media: the broadcast power and the speed with which the information travels from the source to the listener. Each informational program was transmitted throughout an entire week and hence it was not exactly the breaking news. This was due especially to the need to pre-record on cassettes, a security measure impossible to sidestep, even though in the last years before 1989 the speed of the Solidarity radio has improved and in case of especially important events, the underground production studio would prepare the news item ready for air in a matter of hours, and not days.

This testifies to the fact that the distinction between social and mass media was not part of the life-world of the Solidarity leadership. However, some underground radio makers understood their efforts much more in a vain of social media. For starters, this was a question the DIY character of the broadcasting devices regarded as a particular point of pride and a crucial feature of their activity.

> We receive many requests for support. Actually, what it takes is secondary technical education to be able to assemble the radio and start broadcasting. Teenage boys can do it. And that is the point, the more, the better. We want to socialize the airwaves, to contest their monopoly also there. That puts them in a very precarious situation once it is contested, in the event of a strike or something similar all kind of things can happen.[78]

More importantly it was samizdat which provided a cognitive frame for the broadcasters to understand their activity and the most important point of reference. Print was there first and the radio, as a newcomer, had yet to demonstrate its comparative advantages. The broadcasts were understood as an audible version of a underground bulletin at a much lower cost.

> One broadcast of a ten minute program costs currently around 500 złotys – one underground broadcaster assessed – which means that the cost per listener is around couple of groszys. That makes us the cheapest underground periodical. Your contributions to the Radio Solidarity fund will keep us in shape and allow us to develop![79]

[78] 'Nie wszystko można mówić', 110.
[79] 'Apel Radia Solidarność'.

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The radio was also meant to complement the underground press in terms of outreach.

> The channels of distributions have stabilized over the years and for that reason the underground press tends to reach the same limited audience which to some degree at least share the worldview of the authors. The basic ambition of Radio Solidarity is to reach out with the news suppressed or distorted by the official 'transmission belts' to those listeners who do not have access to our press and who are too lazy or to indifferent to tune in and listen to BBC or Radio Free Europe. We want to reach not only the members and supporters of the union, but also those people who see the reality the authorities' way.[80]

Outreach to people for whom the underground radio was the only form of contact with Solidarity soon became the main target of the radio activities. This implied the need to make the programs more diverse. The diversification of the program, in turn, translated into enhanced participatory features. Thus, an announcement in *Tygodnik Mazowsze* read:

> Radio Solidarity offers you broadcast time on the radio frequencies of Polish Television Channel one. We plan a series of programs presenting the real pluralism, not the pluralism of Urban and Miodowicz. Everyone who wants to present their activity, program, worldviews and authors can submit proposals for eight-nine minute long program.[81]

In practice, this offer was directed to the authors and editors of the underground journals, since before 1989 in most of the cases the principal mode of existence of political groups concentrated around publishing. That made the radio further dependent on the unlicensed press, in terms of the content itself and in terms of building on the pre-existing press distribution channels for its delivery.

The social media qualities of the Solidarity radio, derived from conceptual as well as practical reliance on the underground press, can be productively grasped in terms of remediation. Remediation, "representation of one medium in another"[82] as Bolter and Grusin define it, refers to the double cultural logic that accompanies the

[80] '"Siekiera, Motyka …" podczas DTV'.

[81] 'Apel Radia Solidarność'.

[82] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 45.

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arrival of a new medium, which presents itself, both obliterating the experience of the mediation through making itself familiar in terms of the established media (immediacy) and making itself visible as something novel (hypermediacy). The best measure of dominance of print culture within the broader underground media environment is that the Solidarity radio relied on print not only in terms of infrastructure, but also in terms of self-attributed meanings and values. However, one important respect the radio was able to harness the media passions in a way that print culture did not. It's hypermediacy resided in the spectacularity of the broadcasts.

VIII
CONCLUSION: THE RADIO AND ITS SHADOW

What comes across from almost every description of the underground broadcasting activities, not least the self-descriptions of the people involved, is its spectacularity. This is especially the case of Western journalists, whose accounts of the underground broadcasting often include following scenes:

> When the police arrive, the four minute broadcast has run its course, getting word through to perhaps tens of thousands or more that one of the world's most ruthless and proficient secret police is unable to silence public dissent. The police get the transmitter, but the conspirator moves on, unknown and unscarred.[83]

> Suddenly, 10 minutes into the broadcast, the announcer's words fade, drowned out by a second, disembodied voice delivering quite a different newscast – refutations of the 'official' versions of the day's events, along with spirited anti-government commentary, and news of Solidarity, the Polish trade union that was outlawed by martial law in 1981. The schoolteacher and his wife smile and nod knowingly at each other: the Polish underground has struck again, hijacking the evening news in a defiant act of 'television terrorism.'[84]

And if you remove quotation marks from "television terrorism", you get a sense of the reactions to the underground radio in the official media:

[83] Evans and Novak, 'Solidarity Rides the Airwaves'.

[84] Neil Hickey, 'TV is opening up the soviet bloc nations – whether they like it or not', *TV Guide*, 22 (28 Aug. 1987).

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> How many leaflets does the radio stand for? How many kilograms of ink and paper can be saved, sending into the airwaves even a shortest message? In conditions of conspiracy, the value of speed and relative safety of the transmission is matched by perhaps the most important spectacularity value. Spectacular, thrilling actions are the favorite methods of every conspiracy.[85]

Coming still from a different perspective, a RFE commentator would concur, with a genealogical footnote on underground broadcasting from the times of Nazi occupation:

> In the struggle against lie and brute force the truth have always prevailed. Radio Solidarity, despite operating in the most difficult conditions, has accomplished today a great part of its mission. The attempt at organizing a radio information network has succeeded. It has turned out that even in a country finding itself in an iron crunch of the secret police, it is possible to transmit the free word by radio, according to the best tradition of the Radio Lightening from the Warsaw Uprising.[86]

Now what is common to all these descriptions is the excess. In fact, as we have learned thus far, the Solidarity radio (or Radio Lightening for that matter) was not exactly a tool of mass propaganda: the network was rather loose and uncoordinated, the equipment primitive, the audibility vulnerable to both jamming and weather conditions, and the message rather unsophisticated.

And that is exactly the point. The very act of breaking into the airwaves was bringing about all the imaginary power of the radio, despite the fact that Solidarity radio was not exactly the same thing as the mass media from the handbooks of political propaganda. If it wasn't for the radio's spectacularity, its ability to captivate the media passions through casting the imaginary shadow of power of the radio propaganda which was bigger than the actual device, there would be no reason cordon off an entire quarter and send in choppers with hi-tech detectors in order to catch two men with a carry-on tape recorder and antenna on a rod connected to a makeshift transmitter. The ridicule was aptly captured by Władysław Siła-Nowicki (lawyer for Zofia Romaszewska) in his speech during the Radio Solidarity trial:

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[85] Ireneusz Czyżewski, 'Nielegalni Radiowcy', *Żołnierz Wolności*, 19 (20 Feb. 1983).

[86] Janusz Marchwiński, *Radio Solidarność Story*, transcript of RFE Polish Unit Special Program no. 8207, aired on 8 Aug. 1982, HU OSA 300–50–1, box 1480.

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> [Cyprian Kamil] Norwid has once remarked about the "rule of the pantheism of print". How minuscule and insignificant the pantheism of print was in Cyprian Norwid's times in comparison to contemporary media, its coverage, its power, its technical capacities to reach millions of people. Against the background of this power of the official mass media, the significance of Radio Solidarity could be only a moral significance. The radio could not impose anything on anybody. It was listened with difficulties by people already supporting its ideas. The radio was a sign that an idea is alive, that people, despite it being prohibited decide to undertake an activity which can bring them problems on legal and penal grounds, in order to convey a personal message to the society.[87]

Argument of Siła-Nowicki (somewhat contrary to Jacek Taylor's speech mentioned before) was putting things in perspective in order to appeal, in the courtroom where he was speaking, for a sentence commensurate to the deed. But indeed what is the appropriate measure? Can the actual impact of the underground radio be deduced from the act itself? Was it not amplified by its excessive spectacular halo?

This spectacularity was a product of a strange complicity in adversity. At the height of late 1980s, long gone were the times when readers would take samizdat journal as a thrill. Underground press culture was already a well rooted part of the late socialist society and while it was not exactly tolerated, it was not fiercely combated. In contrast, underground broadcasting was illegal in a much more direct way than print. Even in the West radio licensing was much more strictly controlled and pirate radios constituted a greater offense than 'pirate publishers'. That was even much more so in People's Poland where – as Solidarity had a chance to realize in 1981 – the official doctrine regarded radio and television as an integral part of the state apparatus and considered any assault in this domain an assault on the state itself, which gave way to disproportionate punishment on the one hand, and on the other, particular persistence and zeal in combatting the intrusions.

Just like the remote control is the attribute of oiko-despotism, the ability to control the airwaves is a singular token of political sovereignty, which the Party was not thinking to give up. Conversely, while the underground radio could neither compensate for the lack of access to mass media, nor create an alternative for the printed social

[87] 'Proces Radia "Solidarność"', 49.

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media, it had an extraordinary ability to harness media passions for contesting this sovereignty of the airwaves. Admittedly, RFE was in that business too, but operating since 1952 it was hardly perceived as something fresh and, more importantly, the gesture of disobedience embodied in the act of breaking into the airwaves was coming from close-by, rather than from Munich, while the lo-tech means through which underground broadcasters challenged the communist hi-tech only added to its charm. And in this sense the career of the Solidarity radio testifies to a remarkable persistence of the rubber waistband paradigm in the dissident-minded popular imagination.

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