

FINAL REPORT

For the Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives

Between March 1st and May 1st of 2015, I worked as a research fellow of the Open Society Archivum with a Visegrad Scholarship. I focussed on the series HU OSA 300-50-11: Information Items and Correspondence from RFE Field Offices, 1970-1971 which contain ‘Information Items’, situation reports, internal memos and letters from the Radio Free Europe Polish Desk’s Research and Analysis Division dated 1968 to roughly 1978. It constitutes the first step in developing a future doctoral dissertation project at UC Berkeley.

Research Questions

My two-month research period unfolded over roughly three phases; three iterations of reformulating my questions and redesigning the inquiry. My initial research design addressed a question of epistemic rupture. I was searching for a visible break in the nature of RFE’s knowledge about Poland around 1968. This search was prompted by a passage in Ross Johnson’s insider history *Radio Free Europe: The CIA Years and Beyond*. In 1967, it became public knowledge that RFE was funded and directed by the CIA. Due to the international controversy and personal security concerns created by the leak, RFE was forced to sever ties with its secret contacts and ceased systematic surveying of refugees and travelers from the Bloc. Most of the archive containing the ‘information items’ produced from the surveys and secret reports were destroyed in 1971. Johnson reports that RFE resorted to gathering information from what he vaguely calls ‘other sources.’ He suggests that their main source became members of Central European democratic opposition groups.¹

After looking through the series, I gave up the rupture hypothesis. The documents from the 1970s revealed the same general spectrum of information as those from the 50s. Within this spectrum, I was most captivated by the items categorized ‘Reaction To Western Broadcasts.’ This series revealed multiple insights which clash with the Radio’s self-image brought forth in the insider histories² and Siegfried Kracauer’s theses in *Satellite Mentality*.³ Kracauer’s analysis of public opinion based on the items produced in the 50s concludes that the internalization of RFE’s program by their audience in the Soviet satellites was generally tied to the listeners’ ‘liberation hopes.’ In other words, RFE discourse represented a prelude to Western intervention in the Bloc aimed at ‘freeing’ the satellite states, it was the voice of hope. A similar articulation

¹ Johnson, Ross. *Radio Free Europe and Radio liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond*. Stanford University Press, 2010. pp. 12

² Ibid., Puddington, Arch. *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph Of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. University Press of Kentucky, 2000.

³ Siegfried Kracauer, Paul L. Berkman. *Satellite Mentality: Political Attitudes and Propaganda Susceptibilities of Non-Communists in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia* New York: F.A. Praeger, 1956.

of this self-image can be read in Timothy Garton Ash's introduction to 'Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.' Garton Ash relates the experience of listening to RFE with a Polish farmer in the Tatra mountains during Martial Law. The farmer's shortwave radio was 'the only item that could not have been in the room a hundred years ago.'⁴ He had purchased it specifically to listen to RFE because there was no trustworthy alternative way to be informed about events in Poland and the world. For him RFE is nothing less than the voice of God; the only source of truth. Puddington and Johnson's insider histories follow this line and advance the contrived thesis that RFE was 'broadcasting freedom' and shaping the kind of open discussion which was being suppressed by the communist system. The Items reveal a conflicting picture of RFE's reception in Poland. A letter to the programmers contained in Item 139/70 represents a common mindset:

"Occasionally, we get the impression that Rfe treats its listeners in Poland in a manner identical to that of Radio Warsaw, the only difference between these stations being the fact that they are controversial. This is already something, but should not Rfe try to do more than just oppose the regime's propaganda, and offer a purely negative criticism? Some of the RFE listeners are rather irritated when RFE trumpets democracy 'made in the USA' or suggests that Poland would be an El Dorado if it imitated England."

The letter suggests that by 1970, RFE was received as simply a second fountainhead of foreign propaganda whose essential nature was the same as the Soviet ideological edifice even if the two systems were officially opposed. Notwithstanding, the majority of items attest to the universal popularity of RFE, but what is popular and praised does not conform to the Radio's self-image either. The program *Fakty, Wydarzenia, Opinie* enjoys the most positive feedback. Respondents appear very keen on hearing about the inner conflicts, intrigues, and gossips acquired by RFE's sources in the Worker's Party Central Committee.⁵ Essentially, RFE appears valued as a source of vulgar, voyeuristic entertainment, not as a voice of democratic liberation hope. Moving on to the negative feedback, one observes a lingering anxiety about the imminent closure of RFE's Polish desk. Many interviewees voice concern that Washington is in the process of fostering detente with the USSR, and the radio has no value for the architects of this project. They respond that the broadcasters are getting 'soft' on the communists, and believe this is due to directives from the White House.⁶ Finally, the most common criticism encountered in the Items is that the Radio failed to capture the youth as a listener base after 1968. At this point, a new thread of inquiry was opened. I returned to the first box of the series and began reading

⁴ Timothy Garton Ash. "Introduction" in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe - a Collection of Studies and Documents*. Ross Johnson ed. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2012)

⁵ "Appraisals & Critics of RFE" December 1, 1970, Item VI-15708., "Adam Kornecki's RFE Broadcasting and The Polish Reaction" 9 March 1970, Item VI-15345., "Listener From Poland in Defense of RFE" 1 March 1972, Item N-140/72. HU OSA 300-50-11; Information Resources Department: East European Archives: Polish Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Research Institute; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁶ "On RFE's Future", 10 September 1970. Item PA-15161, "Concern About RFE's Fate", 31 August 1970. Item PA-15153; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

Items labeled ‘Youth Attitudes’, ‘Student Attitudes’ and the like in order to gain insight on the Polish programmers knowledge about their least receptive demographic. I became interested in how the youth was perceived by the analysts, and how this perception may have been internalized by the broadcasters. In other words, was the information about youth in the Items put to use for some kind of rejuvenation project in the broadcast discourse? Pursuit of this question requires an analysis of the 70s era broadcast transcripts, which I will access at the Hoover Archives in Stanford when I begin doctoral studies this fall.

For the time being, I have focussed on how the radio’s researchers built an image of the Polish youth after 1968, and pondered the nature of the apparently irreconcilable generation gap between the Polish emigres manning the research desk and the young people who they were clearly failing to reach. This has been an arduous task due to the nature of the series, the overarching logic of the archive, and the highly distorted polyphony in the Items themselves.

The Source and its Other: Polyphony and Dialogics of Information Items

What is meant by *distorted polyphony* precisely? The Items are documents produced from casual conversations between an RFE analyst and ‘the source.’ The source is often enigmatic; sometimes it is an unidentified respondent who claims to know the attitudes of youth, but more often it is a student from the University of Warsaw on exchange in a Western city where RFE’s field offices are located. Direct letters from students to the editors such as the one in Item 139/70 are few and far between in the series. The typical Item begins with the formulation *nasz rozmowca twierdzi* (‘the source tells us...’) followed by a statement about their specific experience as a student in Poland, or their impressions from the West, their political views, etc. Often, this precedes a variant of the formulation ‘ogolnie sie mowi w Polsce’ (generally, in Poland it is said/thought that...) At this point, the reader encounters polyphony. It becomes less clear whether the interviewer or the subject (source) is speaking. In most cases, neither is presumably qualified enough in sociology to make a sweeping statement about youth opinions across the country. Is the analyst speaking *through* or *for* the source? Is the source speaking *to* the analyst? Often, the generalized statements about public opinion are backed by a second iteration of ‘nasz rozmowca twierdzi,’ in which case it appears that the source speaks *with* the analyst unwittingly. The syntax of the finished item makes it impossible to answer the question one way or the other definitively and the reader is stuck as to whether s/he is reading the testimony of the respondent or the stereotypes of the analyst, or the latter loosely supported by the former, or a fusion of the two. It is as if they are yelling over each other, but due to the nature of the conversation and its inscription, the analyst’s voice is much louder. This is the effect of distorted polyphony, a frustrating instance of what Derrida calls ‘archival violence’ or the silencing of the subject.⁷

⁷ Derrida, Jacques. “Archive Fever: A Freudian impression.” Trans. Eric Prenowitz. *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 963

Fortunately, there is a way out; we simply have to change the way we read. In writing the history of the Medieval occult based on Friulian witch trials, Carlo Ginzburg also encountered the problem of texts distorted by the stereotypes of their writers. Ginzburg breaks through the distortion by applying Bakhtin's literary dialogic imaginary, and suggests that even within heavily controlled texts, one can detect the process of translation.⁸ The writers always translate foreign 'mythologies' into their own codes of meaning. When documents such as witchcraft trials or the Items are read as sites of conflictual *dialogue* between author (analyst) and object (the source,) it becomes possible to find 'cracks' in the text from which an alternative cultural reality may reveal itself.

Further Research; Looking Into Generation Gaps; Initial Findings as A Starting Point

What this means for the project at hand is that I am once again returning to the first document in the series and re-reading the Items about youth attitudes. I am reading with a greater sensitivity to Ginzburg's 'cracks,' that is anomalous moments or statements, vulgarities, rare syntaxes and surprises which evidence the codes being spoken by the source and their transformation into the codes of the analyst. My hope is that I will be able to detect the fundamental points of misunderstanding between the radio and the students. In more general terms, this will be an attempt to look inside the 'generation gap' between the 68ers and their elders (both in the RFE offices and the Workers Party Central Committee.) This gap is a space which is both momentous for history and mystical to historians. Zygmunt Bauman witnessed the student protests in Warsaw and had a keen appreciation for the gap's very special nature:

Two or three years ago the term 'generation conflict' became popular in Poland. The authorities protested irritably -- there is no generational conflict, only the conflict between socialism and its enemies. They were probably right. The authorities should not be misguided and think that this about biological rotation and the fleeting rebelliousness of young minds. This is real socialism paving its way through police barriers toward its fulfilment in a free democratic incarnation. This is a fight between socialism and the gangrenous, parasitic regime; a fight between progress and conservatism, between modern educated thought and backwardness; between freedom and police state bureaucracy. The youth have not entered the Polish political arena as representatives of their age group. They have arrived as representatives of the future. They arrived in order to remain.⁹

Following Bauman, I am convinced that the generational disconnect which erupted in 1968 was absolutely unique, and in a sense, the original theme of rupture becomes salient in my research again. The 68ers did remain and they *do* remain. To understand the phenomenon of transformation which took Poland from 1968 through 1989 and into the radically nebulous 'post-

⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, "The Inquisitor as Anthropologist" in Ginzburg, Carlo. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.)

⁹ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Dokumenty: Wydarzenia Marcowe 1968 z przedmowa prof. Zygmunta Baumana*. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1969. p. 10.

soviet' period, one must understand this very problematic generation and its movements more fully.

For now, the fundamental question is: can I produce a picture of RFE's failure to reach this audience by understanding more fully the analysts' perception of them? At face value, (without reading dialogically) what we learn about the Polish youth in the Polish Unit's Items is a very dark reality. We have insincere communists, cynics, apathetics, hippies, technocrats, and 'every-day nightmares'(drug addicts, prostitutes, hooligans.)¹⁰ This is the 'language code' used by the programmers. In producing an item, the characterizing gesture of the analyst is to establish an ethnographic taxonomy of the student population based on information gained from the source in a casual conversation. Variants of the ethnographic code found in Item N-142/72 are recurring.¹¹ Three types of person are identified by the programmer; 1. cynics; those who simply don't care about the wider ideological / political context of their surroundings and are just trying to get to a career, even if this means joining the party. 2. apathetics - those who pretend not to care about politics in public, and generally resign from larger ambitions in order to secure an easy position so as to pursue some sort of professional interests. and finally 3. escapers: those who are just looking to emigrate, and are willing to be supplicant to the communists in exchange for this opportunity.

Of course, this does not cover everybody, so we also encounter taxonomies of revolutionary youth in Items R-305/73, N-236/71, N-360/75, and R-163/72. Within these classifications I've observed something which may lead to a provocative thesis. Major literature about European Marxism generally identifies 1968 as the death knell of this phenomenon, but in these documents we observe a veritable flowering. There are groups of Trotskyites who follow the theories of Kuron and Modzelewski that the social revolution is indeed over, but a political revolution is forthcoming to install workers in positions of authority at every level of the chain of command. There are maoists who are instructed by Kazimierz Mijal from Radio Tirana, social democrats who are enthralled with the Scandinavian model, and most surprisingly, revisionist communists who believe in 'socialism with a human face' as late as 1975, (Item N-360/75.) The concluding sentence reads 'among the youth there is a conviction that soon, Moscow will have more trouble with Polish representatives of socialism with a human face than they ever did with Dubcek's regime.' Similarly, in Unauthorized Item 983/70, we read that Polish youth fraternising with Russian students in state-sponsored summer camps are scheming up a project for socialism with a human face. So this trail may occupy a lot of my attention in the future. But, since I mentioned fraternising with Soviet students, another potentially fruitful branch of this series is the body of documents describing relations between Polish youth and foreigners, especially Russians, and we learn about a very complex relation. In R-131/73 and R-380/72, we

¹⁰ "Polish Hippies" March 11, 1970. Item 416/70., "Narcotics among Polish Youth" 26 March 1974, Item R-350. "Young Technocrats Against Old Apparatchiks" 21 June 1973, Item R-221. HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

¹¹ "University Youth Attitudes" 1 March, 1972, Item N-142/72., "Youth Attitudes" 5 April 1972, Item N-153/72., "Students & Worker Moods" 22 August 1972, Item N-239/72. HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

learn that there is a new way of speaking about geo-politics. The word *socjalimperializm* emerges very poignantly, and it is often articulated to ‘Great Russian’ nationalism, suggesting young Poles felt exploited not by their native ruling apparatus or the ‘Soviet’ system at large but by the specifically Russian metropole. On the other hand there is a great fascination with Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, coupled with a feeling of brotherhood to the Russian dissidents.

The second major problem with this body of documents as an archive of the young is that the overwhelming majority of items are produced from conversations with denizens of Warsaw, Gdansk, and Szczecin. Major urban loci such as Lodz and Poznan appear very sporadically, and Silesia, the East, and the South are largely silent. I would say that the majority of the country is not accounted for. The regional disparity (compounded with the issue of polyphony) makes it absolutely necessary for me to re-approach the series through the type of reading proposed by Ginzburg. It will surely yield deeper and more expansive insights than these initial observations.