Losing the War in the Ether:
Radio Free Europe's Defeat in the Cultural Cold War with Poland

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Jan Nowak Jezioriański's memoir *Wojna w Eterze* (War in the Ether) recounts his role in what he understood as a global war over hearts and minds. Jezioriański was a Polish émigré and the director of Radio Free Europe's (RFE) Polish desk. By many accounts, his position was akin to the point of the spear of Western counterpropaganda efforts in the Soviet Bloc. He retired and ended his diaries in 1976, while the war in the ether still hung in the balance. But he was convinced that the triumph of the West in what we now call the Cultural Cold War was assured, and 1989 seems to have vindicated his optimism. His fellow émigrés and former RFE executives have written the history of the Radio in such a way that their victory appears both decisive and predetermined. According to their account, the Radio transmitted the very substance of freedom into the Bloc via the voice of émigré broadcasters, simultaneously eroding the structure of totalitarian communism and breathing life into a courageous but misguided opposition movement. Yet their own archive tells a different story. The Polish desk struggled to develop a workable understanding of its own listeners, though it spent millions on covert research. As a result, the programmers were constantly scrambling to revise their broadcasting strategy and failed to win the loyalty of who they viewed to be their primary target audience: the student youth.

In what follows, I review the dominant narrative of RFE's war with the Polish People's Republic and briefly outline the ideological and strategic aspirations of RFE based on the memoirs and 'insider-histories' produced by its top bosses. I then turn to collections of the Polish Desk's internal memoranda and files produced by its Audience Research Division to draw out the tactical details of the Cultural Cold War; a feedback loop of information, communication, propaganda broadcasting and its reception. Based on these details, I argue that RFE's project in Poland was a dismal affair, and that its bosses have retroactively claimed a victory that did not really happen. This is not to say that the Polish propaganda mechanism defeated RFE. Instead, I propose that to view the Cultural Cold War as a straightforward bipolar affair between Western and Communist institutions is an oversimplification. The audience was a participant in the war over hearts and minds, not just the object to be won or lost. This paper asks chiefly about their perspective on the Cultural Cold War, how they viewed and evaluated the discourses of the world powers, and how these perspectives should inform new narratives of Cold War history.

The Insider-Histories and New Interpretations

The historiography of RFE is divided primarily where the notion of 'impact' is concerned. In other words, the problem of measuring how Radio broadcasts impacted their audience are treated in two ways by the existing literature on RFE. The first school can be dubbed the 'insider histories' - synthetic narratives produced by the Radio's highest executives which typically begin with the Radios' foundation in the 1950s and conclude with the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Monographs by Arch Puddington, Ross Johnson, and George Urban are the most frequently cited

texts.[1] Their notion of impact can already be detected in the titles: *War in The Ether, War of The Black Heavens, Sparks of Liberty, Broadcasting Freedom.* Their tone is triumphalist and they teleologically cite 1989 as the fulfilment of their original ideological aspiration to export democracy to the USSR and its satellites over the airwaves. For Ross Johnson, the impact of RFE and Radio Liberty's (RL) broadcasts was nothing less than to bring the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion.[2] How exactly? The memoir of Gene Sosin maintains that RL broke the Soviet regime's monopoly of information, accelerated the regime's demise, and to this day, 'contributes to the democratic education' of the successor states.[3] This idea of 'democratic education' is indispensable to the insiders' notion of impact. Ross Johnson retroactively summarizes RFE's role in Eastern Europe as that of a surrogate medium: 'external media can serve as a "free press" for unfree countries (...) Surrogate media must reflect universal values of freedom and tolerance symbolized by the United States at its best. Their purpose is to promote the freedom of others in the American interest.'[4] In his introduction to the bombastically titled *War of The Black Heavens,* Michael Nelson hazards a similar thesis:

> Why did the West win the Cold War? Not by use of arms. Weapons did not breach the iron curtain. The Western invasion was by radio, which was mightier than the sword. (...) Gorbachev told Margaret Thatcher that it was not the Strategic Defense Initiative that was the decisive factor. The first impulses for reform were in the Soviet Union itself, in a society which could no longer tolerate the lack of freedom, he told her. Whence came the knowledge of freedom? It came from the Radios.

Nelson's evocative language tempts us to ask: Did audiences on the other side of the Iron Curtain receive the broadcasts this way? How did they understand the global conflict? Is it permissible for insiders to announce that they won the cultural Cold War without consulting the testimony of those who lived in the crossfire?

The insiders finely document the institutional and technical aspects of the contest between Western and Soviet propaganda formations in the Outer Empire. Their characterizing gesture is to insist that RFE's impact should be gauged by the efforts taken by the Communist state apparatuses to suppress it. The audience's perspective, however, either lurks in the shadows or is distorted by an oversimplified archetype. That archetype is exemplified in Timothy Garton Ash's introduction to Johnson's '*Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.*' 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.'[5] 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

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[1] Puddington, Arch. *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph Of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.* University Press of Kentucky, 2000., Johnson, Ross. *Radio Free Europe and Radio liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond.* Stanford University Press, 2010., Urban, George. *Radio Free Europe and The Pursuit of Democracy.* Other insider histories include: Sig Mickelson, *America's Other Voice: The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); JamesCritchlow, *Radio Hole-in the-Head: An Insider's Story of Cold War Broadcasting* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1995); Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

[2] Ibid., 241.

[3] Sosin, Gene. *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, XIV.

[4] Johnson, 242.

[5] 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).

is nothing less than an earthly *Vox Dei*; the only source of truth. The rest of Johnson's collection focusses on the jamming efforts of central European regimes, their propaganda campaigns against RFE, and Western countermeasures. The listening public are essentially flattened into the passive field on which Western media dueled with repressive Communists.

The former RFE journalist and archivist Lechosław Gawlikowski contributed an analysis of the Polish audience around 1980 to Johnson and Parta's collection. He triangulates between RFE's surveys and those of the state apparatus to determine that about half the population were regular listeners, including significant numbers of the military. He concludes that the numbers 'demonstrate success,' and he attributes this success to RFE's 'vision of the world based not only on the outcome of the American Revolution, but also on the outcome of the French Revolution, on European traditions, and on the system of moral values of the Catholic Church with its charismatic Polish Pope.'[6] Gawlikowski's assumption that a large listener base equaled a 'successful' dissemination of ideology is a keystone of the insider's triumphalism. Simultaneously it offers crucial ground on which it can be seriously challenged. The fact that many listened to RFE does not necessarily mean they accepted its message.

Paul B. Henze, one of RFE's original managers, treads more carefully than his younger colleagues Johnson and Nelson. He suggests that a 'mythology had developed about RFE's effectiveness' since 1989.[7] Recently, a few studies have appeared which undermine that mythology. Alban Webb has analyzed RFE's coverage of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 and concluded that the Hungarian Desk's 'political message of liberation could not match the practical reality, thereby opening an unbridgeable credibility gap.'[8] For Christoph Classen, the impact of Western Radio on the GDR was not to constitute any political counter-public but to prepare the mindset of a consumer society before 1989. Other than in times of crisis, the Radio's ideological impact was negligible.[9] Patrick Major examines the GDR's relationship with Western Radio, specifically the BBC's East German Desk. By analyzing the discourse of a satirical program and the 'Letters without Signatures' feedback material, Major suggests the compelling revision that the Radio was impacted by the audience at least as much as vice versa.[10] Similar conclusions to those of Yurchak are drawn in Melissa Feinberg's study of RFE's coverage of the 1953 Slánský trials and the reception of that coverage in Czechoslovakia.[11] Feinberg looks into the KSC's secret police archives to develop a picture of Czechoslovak opinions on Slánský and contrasts them with the arguments made by the broadcasters. While both the Radio and the Party wanted to convince the public that they had the truth about Slánský and his crimes, Feinberg finds that "what a person publicly accepted as the truth might reflect their beliefs or it might not. But public acceptance was not itself an endpoint. It created a space in which individuals could negotiate meaning with the

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[6] Lechosław Gawlikowski with Yvette Neisser Moreno "The Audience to Western Broadcasts to Poland During the Cold War" in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: a Collection of Studies and Documents*. Ross Johnson and Eugene Parta eds. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2012), 141.

[7] Paul Henze, "RFE's Early Years: Evolution of Broadcast Policy and Evidence of Broadcast Impact" in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.* eds Ross Johnson and Eugene Parta. Budapest: CEU Press, 2010, 3.

[8] Alban Webb, "Cold War Radio and the Hungarian Uprising, 1956" in *Cold War History*, 2013 Vol. 13, No. 2, 221–238, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.746667, 19.

[9] Christoph Classen, "Captive audience? GDR radio in the mirror of listeners' mail" in *Cold War History*, 2013 Vol. 13, No. 2, 239–254, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.757136, 17.

[10] Patrick Major, "Listening behind the curtain: BBC broadcasting to East Germany and its Cold War echo" in *Cold War History*, 2013 Vol. 13, No. 2, 255–275, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.746840, 1.

[11] Feinberg, Melissa. "Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies: Radio Free Europe and the Response to the Slánský Trial in Czechoslovakia" in *Contemporary European History*, Volume 22 / Issue 01 / February 2013, 107-125.

regime, personalizing or even challenging its interpretation of events."[12] Her interpretation recasts the audience as active, reasoning, critical subjects who participated in the discursive battles between East and West instead of the passive terrain on which those battles occurred.

The main difference between these new notions of impact and the one advanced by the insiders is that they suggest forms of impact which were *unintended* by the programmers. The present analysis situates itself within the second approach. I maintain that any impact made on the audience that we can detect from their reactions was not in line with the Radio's stated ideological and strategic aspirations.

From Psychological Warfare to Cultural Infiltration

What precisely were Radio's ideological and strategic aspirations? RFE's original mission was defined by the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE, the Radio's original funding body in the US) in 1949.[13] The crusade to 'win hearts and minds' in Europe was originally led by the station Voice of America (VOA.) VOA was openly funded by the US government with American programmers and speakers, it had been broadcasting since 1940 to counter Nazi propaganda, but RFE was conceived with a somewhat more sophisticated function in mind. One of the earliest articulations of its strategic role in the psychological Cold War was voiced by Lucius Clay, a commander of the US occupation forces in Germany:

> When I left Germany, I came home with a very firm conviction that we needed in addition to the Voice of America a different, broader voice - a voice of the free people - a radio which would speak to each country behind the iron curtain in its own language and from the throats of its own leaders who fled for their lives because of their beliefs in freedom.[14]

At the same time, Frank Altschul, the NCFE's first director, maintained that RFE should 'provide a channel over which American citizens, not subject to the restrictions which hamper a government agency, could say things on their own responsibility which it was considered desirable to have said, but which the Voice of America, as an agency of government, was not in a position to say.' In addition to the military/secret service roots of the station's conception, the statements of Clay and Altschul reveal its intended ideological function. RFE and RL were planned as an ersatz VOA performed by the Soviet Bloc exiles. According to Nelson and Henze, large numbers of former East European government-in-exile leaders were loitering around Washington DC aimlessly in the late 40s and needed work.[15] A station run by émigrés was supposed to conceal its affiliation with Washington and increase its program's appeal in the Bloc by presenting itself as coming from within. It was for all intents and purposes created as a puppet into which the American ventriloquist could throw his voice. This was a strategy of psychological warfare to which George Kennan, Allan Dulles, and Lucius Clay believed the Soviet system was particularly vulnerable.[16] The rhetoric of liberation translated into Polish, Czech, German, Hungarian, Romanian, and

[12] Ibid., 109.
[13] Frederike Kind-Kovacs, "Voices, letters, and literature through the Iron Curtain: exiles and the (trans)mission of radio in the Cold War" *Cold War History*, 2013. Vol. 13, No. 2, 193-219, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.746666 pp. 197.
[14] Nelson, 39
[15] Henze, 4.
[16] Puddington, 8.

Russian would erode the structures of totalitarian communism like waves hitting a beach. The 'truth' about the Satellites' internal affairs would expose the regimes and encourage dissent.

In 1949, the NCFE (shortly renamed Free Europe Committee or FEC) hired over two-hundred hyper-educated Central European exiles and 153 Americans to train them in US democratic doctrine.[17] Initially their activity was limited to person-to-person contacts with dissidents in the Bloc and samizdat circulation. The FEC's initial efforts to organize the exiles into unitary 'national committees' of activists were frustrated by their disparate ideological agendas. Until 1950, it was not clear what they should actually do. North Korea's invasion of their Southern counterparts and Truman's espousal of the recommendations in NSC-68 meant that US foreign policy moved in the direction of containment in Asia and psychological warfare in Europe. They expanded their operations to broadcasting, made the move to Munich, and began round-the-clock broadcasts to Czechoslovakia and Hungary in 1951 and Poland and Romania in 1952.

The challenge which the programmers posed for themselves was a daunting one. Initially their objective was to speak to what they imagined were de-individualized, atomized, and terrorized subjects,[18] disrupt their patterns of conformity within the totalitarian regime, and transform those subjects into liberal ones (Altschul was known to speak of expanding 'the gospel of Twentieth Century liberalism.'[19]) Broadly speaking this was called 'psychological warfare.' RFE's directives from CIA in the Stalinist period were to focus on the Party regimes in the Bloc and 'point out lies, weaknesses, and repression, contrasting these actions with the moral, political, and economic superiority of the West.' [20]

According to Ann Krylova, in the late 60s and throughout the 70s, Western understandings of Communist subjectivity became more complex. They began to envision the average citizen of the Bloc as a 'semi-liberal,' or 'almost-dissident,' who was not de-individualized or submissive to communist doctrine, but 'still lacked moral indignation over its unfree existence and a willingness to undertake active resistance.'[21] Already in the mid-fifties, RFE was adjusting its broadcasting strategy to this understanding. The programmers were refining the paradigm of psychological warfare to transform it into 'cultural infiltration.' According to Hixson, cultural infiltration involved 'targeted programming for Eastern European youth groups, workers, and peasants (...) Avoiding political subjects, RFE appealed to Eastern European youth with programs on sports, entertainment, science and technology, and features on youth in the West.'[22] The logic behind cultural infiltration was to induce the young audience to become like Westerners, and thereby bifurcate socialist society along generational as well as state-society lines.

In the mid-1950s, an early attempt was made to gain a sense of the Radio's impact in Berkman and Kracauer's *Satellite Mentality* - a study of the political attitudes of refugees from the Bloc based on interviews conducted by the Columbia University Research Project on Hungary. Kracauer concluded that the Radio's broadcast was received by these audiences as a harbinger of Western intervention, and its primary function was to foster 'liberation hopes.' With those hopes comprehensively dashed by the crushing of Nagy's revolution in Budapest, the Radio's chiefs retreated even further from any incendiary rhetoric and continued to pursue cultural infiltration

[17] Kind-Kovacs., 200.
[18] Ann Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1.1 (2000) pp. 130.
[19] Hixson, 60.
[20] Hixson, 61.
[21] Krylova, 132.
[22] Hixson, 61.

and democratic education.[23] In 1963, the journalist George Urban (who would become RFE's executive Director in the '80s) articulated the Radio's mission as follows:

> Radio cannot, and should not attempt to teach skills and impart a specific body of knowledge. But it can support the habit of free thinking and, in Central and Eastern Europe, educate the temper of a public which has always been better known for its uncommon sensitivity than for its common sense.[24]

Urban was clearly imagining his audience as the semi-liberals described by Krylova; with the potential for free thinking and resistance in them, but in need of a push in the right direction. The Radio also announced the tactical shift to youth-focused cultural infiltration to their backers in America. In 1964, the Radio Free Europe Fund (formerly known as the Crusade for Freedom) released a film called *This is Radio Free Europe* in New York. It was a rather mundane tour through RFE's research facilities in Munich narrated by the exiled Polish journalist Andrzej Krzeczunowicz. In the culminating shot, American employees ate lunch with West and East European colleagues, and Krzeczunowicz proposed that this was a 'glimpse into a future when the world will not be divided by an iron curtain.' He moves on to spell the Radio's recent tactical shift: 'American radio programming techniques have been adopted to make RFE lively and interesting. Particular emphasis is given to programs that will appeal to young people who are bored by repetitious communist propaganda.'

For clues about the efficacy of 'cultural infiltration,' I have consulted an idiosyncratic set of documents called the 'Information Items.' It is a collection which their current custodian István Rév calls simply 'weird.'[25] They are indeed weird in their form, their content, and in how they were produced. Since the early '50s, Western radio stations were polling their audiences in the Bloc with unorthodox methods borrowed from the Columbia University Research Project on Hungary and the Harvard Soviet Refugee Interview Project. It was impossible to survey the audience directly, so the Radios' field agents met covertly with refugees, travelers, or exchange students/workers from the Bloc and conducted 'A-type' (formal, scripted) or 'B-Type' (informal, improvised) interviews at one of the field offices (usually a bar or cafe) in Paris, Vienna, London, Rome, or Munich.

In 1967, the Soviets learned that RFE was funded and directed by the CIA.[26] 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 open systematic surveying of refugees and travelers from the Bloc. Interviews conducted in the following period were limited to the B-Type, and the sources' identities were meticulously concealed. Tragically, most of the database produced in the '60s was secretly destroyed in 1971, and what remains are files produced after 1967.

The remaining 'Items' are mostly not full transcripts of the actual interviews. They are more like essays produced by the analyst describing her/his opinions on the internal situation in one of the Satellites that incorporate fragments of the interview to bolster this opinion.[27] There are

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[23] For the foundational role of Kracauer and other Frankfurt School theorists in American research and broadcasting in the Soviet Bloc, see Istvan Rev, 'The Unnoticed Continuity'
http://w3.osaarchivum.org/digitalarchive/blinken/The_Unnoticed_Continuity.pdf

[24] Urban, George. *Talking To Eastern Europe.* London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963.

[25] Rev, Istvan. *Retroactive Justice.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)

[26] Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* pp. 320

[27] Koscielny, Pawel. *Polish Youth in the Eyes of Radio Free Europe* (FINAL REPORT For the Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives June 2014). Pg. 3
http://w3.osaarchivum.org/images/stories/pdfs/visegrad/reports/KOSCIELNY-201410.pdf

also a select few letters to the editorial board written by sources themselves. Finally, there are several collections of jokes from Warsaw which speak to general moods, worldviews, and attitudes. While it is impossible to make a sweeping statement about an overarching 'public opinion' based on these documents, one can develop a sense of the spectrum of reactions to RFE broadcasting or a glimpse of the feedback they were receiving from the Items categorized 'Reaction to Western Broadcasts.' More specific insights on youth attitudes to RFE can be gleaned from the Items labelled simply 'Youth.'

The Items categorized 'Reaction to Western Broadcasts' do not bespeak the triumph of cultural infiltration. Instead, one can detect a complex feedback loop between the audience and the Radio, which was forced to change tactics and adjust its programming but never quite achieved the strategic goal of awakening the liberal subject. The majority of the Items do attest to the universal popularity of RFE, but what is popular and praised does not conform to the Radio's self-image. The program 'Fakty, Wydarzenia, Opinie' enjoyed the most positive feedback. Respondents appeared keen to hear about the inner conflicts, intrigues, and gossip acquired by RFE's sources in the Worker's Party Central Committee.[28] So the station appears to have been valued as a source of vulgar, voyeuristic entertainment, not as a voice of democratic liberation hope. Some of RFE's informants from the Paris field office[29] informed that RFE's popularity was waxing mainly because BBC, Radio Madrid, and Radio Paris were 'getting sterile.' Yet it would be inaccurate to say the audience had no praise for the programs. Highly appreciated was RFE's coverage of the 'December Events'[30]in 1970 and the 'calm and measured tone' with which it was delivered. This was seen as a great improvement from 'drifting into irresponsible adventures' inherent to the Radio's coverage of the 'March Events' in 1968.[31] Some respondents maintained that for people who could not witness the strikes in Pomerania, RFE was the only way to know what was happening there in 1970. Respondent St-10939 (Stockholm), however, complained that the Radio underestimated worker casualties during the strikes.[32]

The most frequent and telling line of critique from the audience is that the Radio failed to gain the loyalty of the youth. Many (supposedly) old or middle-aged respondents tell the analysts 'you should play better music, so the young start listening, they find your politics boring!' or 'the youth are agitated by your satirical treatment of our supposed poverty and backwardness'[33] or 'your analyses are just irritating my kids.' Furthermore, the reports with titles including 'youth' or 'students' contain some of the most vitriolic and intellectually developed critiques of the program. For the purposes of this analysis, it is useful to take the insiders' mission-statements seriously and place them in dialogue with the audience responses. It is interesting to remember Johnson's 'surrogate media' thesis and consider a fragment from Item 139/70 which contains a letter from a 'younger worker':

> "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

[28] "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.

[29] Item PA-546/70 July 1970, Item PA-761/70 December 1970 HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

[30] Item PA-783/71. 1971; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

[31] Item PA 15489 5 May 1971; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

[32] Item St. 10939 August 1971; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

[33] Item PA15482 26 May 1971; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

> 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"[34]

A similar critique is advanced in a letter contained in Item R-125: 'For Polish students with a functional brain, RFE represents the only way for the West to send its ideology into the Bloc. It is a weapon in the fight between the superpowers.' These respondents viewed RFE as precisely the opposite of a surrogate medium. It is simply a mirror-image of the Soviet propaganda formation to which it is supposedly opposed. Johnson claimed that the ultimately transmitted 'universal values of freedom and tolerance symbolized by the United States.' For the respondent in Item H-139 from the Munich field office, the United States symbolized something else entirely; they said: 'Do you really consider RFE to be the American Nation's gift to the Polish nation? If it weren't for your inane politics at Yalta, the RFE problem wouldn't even exist!.'[35] For this respondent, the US represents what Poles refer to as the Western Betrayal. It is not a line from Party propaganda, but a uniquely Polish-nationalist counter-narrative of history. This critique unveils the failure of Clay and Altschul's project to mask American liberation rhetoric within the exile voice. The historian Pawel Machcewicz proposes that 'the story of the fight against foreign subversion also has much to say about Poland's growing openness toward the West, and about the government's attempts to thwart this openness and create a closed system, one it could control completely."[36] Does it really have much to say about that? Was Poland 'opening' to the West? Respondent PA-12885 sees the malignity of US influence from a different angle. He urges the analysts 'to stick to the facts. We don't take your commentary or opinions seriously because we know they are dictated by your American financiers.' What is remarkable about these respondents is that apparently their anti-communism coexisted neatly with anti-capitalism. This source identifies himself as a 'convinced communist,' but his view cannot be reduced to that of an apparatchik-automaton. He is after all speaking to RFE. He touches on the peculiar phenomenon of distrust toward American capital which is not necessarily rooted in the success of Soviet propaganda but in the failure of the USSR's international economic system. Some Varsovian political humor about international economics is telling here:

> -Does the new Five-Year Plan foresee an increase in supply?
> -Yes, the new plan foresees a lot of new supply to the Egyptian communists.
>
> -How does our international trade with the USSR work?
> -We supply exactly what they want and they also pay exactly what they want.
>
> -How does Socialist aid to Africa work?
> -Simple. Brezhnev gives generously. Gomulka, Kadar, and Husak supply exactly.

The point is that Polish listeners in the '70s were not particularly excited by the idea of an 'international economy,' they were part of one. And it was clearly bleeding them dry. Respondent PA-12885 complains that Poles are stuck with driving Fiat because the PZPR was dedicated to supporting the Italian Communist Party. How in this case could for instance Milotworska's program, which spoke of the luxuries of life in an open international market be taken seriously?

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[34] Item 139/70 September 1970; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[35] Item H-139 August 1971 HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[36] Machcewicz, 2.

Urban refers to the audience briefly in his chapter on the 'Contest of Ideas.' For him, the men and women experiencing real socialism were 'most excited by comparisons in the standards of living and shopping baskets.'[37] Urban's generalization appears dubious when considered alongside a letter received by the Vienna field office from 'a 20-year-old student who moved to the West from Poland:'

> Almost everyone listens to RFE. Despite the high level of trust it enjoys, it has failed to become an authentic opposition party in Poland. (...) The fact that we are short on coffee and butter is not our biggest problem. But neither is the issue of Lwow or Wilno or your reminiscences about Monte Cassino and the war with the Bolsheviks. We usually turn the radio off when you start talking about these things. We just have no interest in them. What then do we care about? Imagine you have just come home from work in the office or shop. You have been fed propaganda all day, you are tired and worried about life problems, relations at work, and the impossibility of advance. In our language, you have been shat on. Since the practice of shitting on people is much more widespread in 1970 than it was a few years ago, the nerves of the ordinary Pole are also more strained these days. It is in this mood that we sit down to turn on the radio. Please, occupy our skin and imagine what we would like to hear. We need the facts and we need some reassurance. The latter is completely absent and the former is severely lacking in your program. You should inform us *why* we are short on meat, butter, and coffee. Don't play around with statistical data either, give us concrete reasons. Nobody has the time or patience to listen for hours and catch nuances.

The 'younger worker's' idea in Item 139/70 that RFE is just like Warsaw Radio is one of the most frequent criticisms. In the early '70s, many respondents expressed the concern that the two were on the path to converging as a result of the politics of détente. Most Items are inscribed with a brief 'evaluation comment' by the analyst. It usually contains their appraisal of the source's intelligence, experience, or reliability. The evaluation comments on 1062/70 and 1121/70 are unique. They are respectively 'criticism about our softness is a minority opinion' and 'the idea that we are getting soft is definitely a minority view.' What exactly are the analysts insecure about here? In the Items from the early '70s, one observes a festering anxiety about the imminent closure of RFE's Polish Desk among the respondents. Many interviewees voiced concern that Washington was in the process of fostering détente with the USSR, and the Radio is of no value to the architects of this project. They say the broadcasters are getting 'soft' on the communists, and believe this is due to directives from the White House.[38] The respondent in 1062/70 notices that during periods of economic liberalization, the discourse of psychological warfare seems to become less critical of the Polish state; it is losing its edge. These utterances become increasingly frequent in the series, they cease to appear as a minority view. The respondent in 1121/70 suggested that if this process continues, RFE might become 'Warsaw IV' (i.e. Warsaw's fourth radio station) in the future, and R-344 mused "people believe that the West and Russia need each other economically. For them to converge, the Euro-communists and RFE would help by getting even softer on our communists.'[39] Some feared that détente would undermine RFE and suspected that deep intrigue and bribery were involved; one said 'I wonder how much the commies paid Fulbright.'[40] This was in reference to Senator William J. Fulbright's campaign to have RFE decommissioned in 1970. One respondent claimed that Fulbright's attacks were 'shocking' while another asked if 'if known American anti-communists like Fulbright are attacking RFE, what does this say about RFE?' Still another

[37] Urban, George. *Talking To Eastern Europe.* London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963. p. 26.
[38] "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.
[39] R-344 20 Nov 1972 'Opinions on RFE Programs'; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[40] 'Two opinions on RFE' Item R-163; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

maintained that 'Fulbright's actions have shown that Western politics has much in common with totalitarian communism. His speech is enough to convince us that American Christian idealism is a myth.'[41] The 'miscellaneous' folder in the Items collection contains a letter to the Polish Combatants' Association in Germany from 'Morawski' forwarded to RFE on 16 August 1976. Morawski was not shocked or suspicious at all about the 'softening.' To him it would make no sense for the 'Americans to keep insulting their buddies in the Kremlin.' He foresees that 'RFE will be silenced gradually and politically through 'liberalization' of the broadcasts, eagles will be replaced by doves. (...) It is all because the Polish emigres failed to start their own station after the war.'

If RFE was 'going soft' on communism in the early '70s, Polish society was doing the opposite. Some of the Items on 'General Mood' described a brief yet momentous shift in the dynamics of terror following the December Events. Between '70 and '72, it seemed like the worker's state was terrified of anyone wearing steel-toed boots and a hard hat. The mood of apprehension found release in another round of jokes. Gierek joins the dock workers in Gdansk on a smoke-break and asks for a cigarette. The welder comes up with a pack of Marlboro's. Gierek says, 'you guys are smoking good cigarettes,' to which the welder answers, 'we earned 'em in December.' Gierek asks, 'what would you be smoking if I tightened the screw on you, then?' 'Probably Sports,' says the welder as he lights his own cigarette, and Gierek asks, 'well, what if I tightened it just a bit more, what would you be lighting right now?' and the welder says, 'who knows? maybe the Central Committee, maybe your house?'[42] In a similar vein: Two dockworkers in Gdansk are eating lunch and one says, 'hey look, a cop!' to which his coworker responds, 'no way, and he's alive?'[43]

As the workers in the North became less fearful of police repression, the Radio was incomprehensibly pulling back on its diatribes against the highest echelons of the Party leadership. From '71 to '73, Gierek quietly restored the normal balance of terror by doubling the UB's numbers and preparing a jamming campaign against RFE the likes of which Poland had not witnessed since the '50s. In the eyes of the public, RFE had been duped. Gierek's charm and false promises softened them while he strengthened his apparatus of repression. According to respondent PA-494/70, they even helped him intimidate the public by airing the program 'Rakowiecka 2' – Ignacy Tomaszewski's 'guide to the UB.' In the respondent's opinion, this broadcast was making the secret police appear omnipresent and hyper-efficient when they were in a state of disarray before Gierek's reform.[44] Commenting on this sequence of events, Respondent N-166/73 told the Radio, 'The Communists have outsmarted you yet again!'[45] R-160 added a note of biting irony: 'I was hoping Gierek would at least give our own media some leeway, but alas I am forced to keep listening to the jammed signal of RFE.'

The 'softness' of RFE in this period was accentuated by the overt turgidity of the Maoist Kazimierz Mijal's rhetoric. Mijal was the Polish voice of Radio Tirana, and his programs were cited as the major challenger to RFE's hold on Polish youth after 1968.[46] He introduced a new and uncompromising discourse on the geo-politics of Poland's situation. He eschewed the word 'communism' as a descriptor and rebranded the Soviet Union's hold on Eastern Europe 'socjal-imperializm' which was only a mask for Great Russian Nationalism. His radicalized worldview is

[41] 'Opinions on RFE' Item R-160 11 April 1972; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[42] 'Jokes' R-284; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[43] 'Jokes' R-236; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[44] Item 494/70; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[45] Item N-166/73 29 March, 1973; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[46] 'Opinia O Audycjach RWE' R-374 8/4/74, 391/70, 782/70 'Polish Maoists' June 23 1970

echoed in a student pamphlet from Lodz submitted to RFE in 1974: 'The New Czars are exacting a *haracz* from Poland to serve fascist Russian socjal-imperializm and thus fund their large armies on the borders with China and Western Europe.'[47]

This did not mean RFE gave up on the project announced by Krzeczunowicz in *This is Radio Free Europe.* A great number of Information Items were produced from interviews with the young audience during the 1970s in an effort to retain them. At face value, what we learn about Polish youth in the Items is very dark. People's Poland featured insincere communists, cynics, apathetics, hippies, technocrats, and 'every-day nightmares' (drug addicts, prostitutes, hooligans).[48] This is the 'language code' used by the programmers. In producing an item, the characterizing gesture of the analyst was 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.[49] Three types of person are identified: 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) the apathetic - people 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; and 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, and one also encounters taxonomies of revolutionary youth in Items R-305/73, N-236/71, N-360/75, and R-163/72 to name a few. Within these classifications I have observed something which may lead to a provocative thesis. Major literature about European Marxism generally identifies 1968 as the death knell of reform-communism, but in these documents one observes a veritable flowering. Groups of Trotskyites followed the theories of Kuron and Modzelewski; the social revolution was indeed over, but a political revolution was forthcoming to install workers in positions of authority at every level of the chain of command.[50] Maoists were instructed by Kazimierz Mijal from Radio Tirana, social democrats were enthralled with the Scandinavian model, and most surprisingly, revisionist communists believed in 'socialism with a human face' as late as 1975 (Item N-360/75.) The concluding sentence in 360/75 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.'[51] Similarly, in Unauthorized Item 983/70, we read that Polish youth fraternizing with Russian students in state-sponsored summer camps are scheming up a project for 'socialism with a human face.' 360/75 added more insight on the new worldviews that young Polish activists were developing:

> '68 is history now. The students are saying that if they want to achieve anything, they must align their movement with the workers. For their part working youth are becoming more refined by contact with the students. They don't want to hear anything about any revolutions. They are turning away from propaganda, including RFE's propaganda. Their fascination with the West is declining.

[47] Ulotka Polskiej Mlodziezy Komunistycznej' R-356 21/3/74; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[48] "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.
[49] "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.
[50] R-305 'Polscy mlodzi Rewolucjonisci i ich teorie.' September 17, 1973; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[51] Item N-360/75 25 November, 1975; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

> They think that all Western workers (*groszoroby*) do is strike and the students in the West are lazy, stupid Bolsheviks.[52]

How did this renaissance of revolutionary youth and the dangerously growing influence of the Stalinist Mijal from Tirana affect the radio's tactics? It appears they began to cover the Western left and exaggerated how much especially the French socialists had taken up the cause of the Polish working class. In Item R I.268, *Spontaneous Opinions on RFE Programs*, an interview with 'young travelers from the intellectual sphere' is representative of the response to RFE's move in 1976:

> RFE clearly knows everything about Varsovian liberals, but their information about the party-government circles is much worse, yet the latter is much more interesting! We already know what our liberals think. These communiques are interesting in that they concretize repression, but the various open letters containing noble but vacuous formulations are starting to bore us, there has been too much of this. People in Poland are moved by facts and original analyses of the situation. Also irritating are RFE's testimonies about the mobilization of the Western Left in defense of Polish workers and intellectuals. When one listens to a broadcast about a rally of Trotskyites in Paris, one gets the impression that the whole Western world is taking part en masse. But only when one arrives here (Paris) does one see that these events are very small. You should consider carefully how you present the proportions of these occurrences because sooner or later the cat will be let out of the bag.[53]

They did not buy the Radio's superficial reassurance that the West and the Western Left in particular 'supports Poland.' Their response is 'we know that the West does not care about us. Stop lying that you do.' PA-15300 complained: 'We are astonished at the ignorance of the French press toward the actual conditions of the Polish working class, and You (unclear if this means RFE) are ignorant of the syndicalist character of our ruling structures, and you don't know the climate of fear in our factories. You seem to think that only intellectuals and non-conformists are persecuted here.' PA-15257 had an issue with the terminology used by RFE's programmers when they criticized the Polish government: 'Do not use the word *communists*. What is going on here has nothing to do with communism. There is only the USSR and its satellites.'[54] One might call it a typical 'Mijalist' stance. A deep suspicion toward RFE's discourse on the Western Left is visible in 'Young Listeners' Opinions on RFE' (R-117):

> For the young, RFE is talking so much nonsense about some indecipherable political games in Ireland, FRG, or France which are discussed at length in our local press, and just like the Polish media, RFE silently passes over the declarations of Western Maoists, Trotskyites, and revolutionary teamsters. RFE blabs about the statements of Western communists, but never adds how for instance the French Communist Party evaluates the French revolutionary youth. Our young respondents add that they are not by any means enthusiasts of the Western revolutionary youth, but find their views at least equally interesting as those of the 'calcified pro-Soviet Western Communists' (...) RFE's ignoring of young Western and especially young French leftists' opinion on pro-Soviet Communism is a 'very typical scandal.' There isn't a word about these opinions in RFE's reviews of the press. Sometimes there is something in 'Facts' but it is far too rare.[55]

[52] 'Item 360/75 Opinions on RFE' 11 April 1975. .; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[53] Item R I.268 1976; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA
[54] Item PA-15257 March 1975; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA
[55] Item R-117 1975; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA

The key take-away here is that the audience did not trust RFE to opine with any authority about communism, the condition of the workers, their movement, or anything to do with real socialism. Their word on the theory and praxis which structured the Polish day-to-day lived reality was not trusted. In other words, the Radio *failed as a surrogate medium.* News from and comparison with the West were not producing liberal-minded subjects. In other words, the fundamental objective of cultural infiltration project was not being achieved. Why did it fail? One of the Polish youth's least favorite RFE announcers was Juliusz Mieroszewski, and his role may be the beginning of an answer.

'A '30s Warsaw Cafe Type'

Walter Hixson has suggested that the pre-WWII émigré voice was effective in speaking as 'Poles to Poles,' because it addressed them 'in their own idiom and with full knowledge of their psychology and background.'[56] In a similar vein, Kind-Kovacs claims that it was precisely the émigré staff which 'mediated between the radio and the audience' and thus constituted the Radio's strength.[57] This may have been true in the '50s, but after 1968 this voice seemed to become strange, disconnected and profoundly irritating to the target audience. One of the most frequent, jarring, and perplexing criticisms levelled at RFE's broadcasters comes from Item E-119 (Munich). The youth tell the Radio: 'we don't like the way you talk. The style of a '30s Warsaw cafe type for whom time stopped in WWII is fine for auntie or grandma (*dla ciocio-babci*), but it's wearing thin on us.'[58] In a similar vein, respondent N-173 voices his distaste for RFE's '*sanacyjne*' (referring to the era of Pilsudski's reforms in the '30s) political culture, and PA 494/70 suggests that Jadwiga Mieczkowska's programs would be more listenable if she used less Latin and '*staropolskie*' vocabulary. R-306 could not stand 'the old, affectatious voices.'[59] At first glance, these utterances about voice, vocabulary, and 'political culture' seem equally confounding and useless to the historian as they must have been for the analysts. But they hint at what may be the crucial issue driving RFE's failure to draw in the youth; that is, Clay and Altschul's original ideological aspiration to preach American liberalism to the Soviet subject through the émigré-voice.

We may be able to discern what the distaste for '30s cafe-types' meant by briefly recounting the late career of Juliusz Mieroszewski, who escaped Nazi-occupied Poland to Great Britain, where he edited the Polish Government in Exile's publications. After WWII he remained in London working simultaneously as an RFE field agent and collaborating with Jerzy Giedroyc on the editorial board of the *Parisian Kultura*. Two essays are germane to understanding how his 'time stopped in WWII': his 1969 *Conversations with Youth* and the 1974 *Russia's Polish Complex and the ULB Zone.* The former describes his conclusions from classified interviews with Polish exchange students for RFE in London. The latter is a geo-political treatise which revives Pilsudski's Promethean project. Mieroszewski and Giedroyc were men who thought through and spoke through the prism of the Second Commonwealth. Their time had indeed stopped at WWII.

Conversations with Youth offers insight into the mind of an RFE analyst. Mieroszewski found Polish students paradoxical. According to him, they all recognize that without significant reforms in the PRL, they have no future.[60] Yet they were brought up in a state without free press

[56] Hixson, Walter. *Parting The Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and The Cold War*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. pp. 62.
[57] Kovacs, 218
[58] Item E-119, Item R-136 November 1974; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[59] Item R-306 'O BBC i RWE' September 20, 1973.; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[60] Juliusz Meiroszewski, "Rozmowy Z Młodymi.in *Kultura* 1969/10/265.

or democratic institutions. Therefore, they had no conception of a democratic future and could not understand a publicist as anything other than a propagandist. In a sense, he was admitting failure. He conceded that RFE would be distrusted by their young audience, but not because of any flaw in the concept or practice of 'cultural infiltration'; he believed it was a function of the totalitarian state's triumph over the socialist subject. Above, I mentioned that Item N-142/72 was representative of the most common analyses made by the programmers. It is highly likely that Mieroszewski produced it, but I cannot say for sure. And it does not matter. What does matter is that the Item contains important clues about the nature of the misunderstanding between analysts like Mieroszewski and the youth audience.

All the Items are documents produced from casual conversations between an RFE analyst and 'the source' who 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 is more like an essay by the analyst that begins with the formulation '*nasz rozmówca 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 '*ogólnie się mówi w Polsce…*' ('generally, in Poland it is said/thought that…'). At this point, the reader encounters a weird 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 rozmówca 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.

To read the Items as evidence of the power dynamics between the analysts and their audience therefore poses similar difficulties that were faced by Carlo Ginzburg when he reconstructed the medieval occult from records of Friulian witch trials. Thankfully, Ginzburg has openly outlined his morphological method for gleaning hidden meanings in problematic texts. Starting from a meditation on Bakhtin's literary dialogic imaginary, Ginzburg claims that even within heavily controlled texts riddled by power dynamics, one can detect the process of translation.[61] 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 through which an alternative cultural reality may reveal itself. The cracks are traces of misunderstandings; the power-wielding subjects who produce the texts tend to unwittingly leave traces of misunderstandings between themselves and the weaker subjects who they analyze. And from the moment of misunderstanding we can glean clues about the reality that the text tries to distort.

With that in mind, here is the main passage in Item 142/72:

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

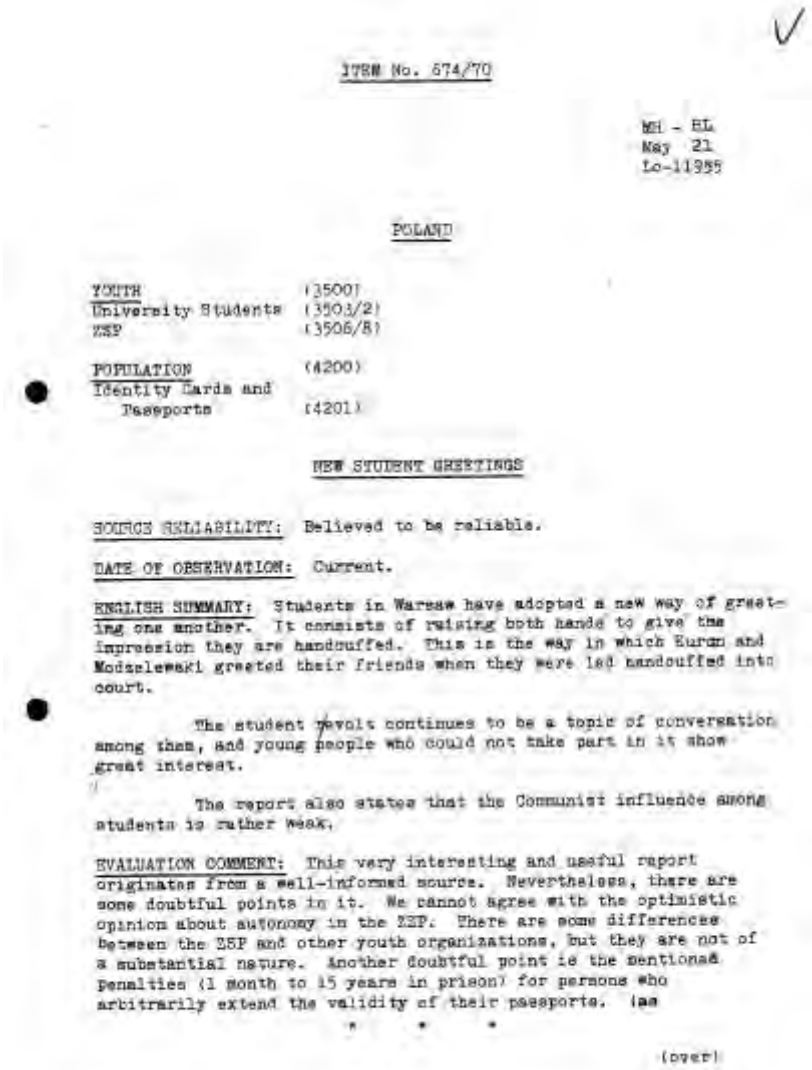
Our source says she is fascinated by England, but fails to understand many things. She cannot wrap her head around the fact that students in England receive scholarships automatically when accepted to university. For a long time, she could not believe that youth with communist or far-left tendencies also make use of these scholarships. She also could not understand that this same revolutionary youth rules the student unions and that the state tolerates the fact that the president of the National Students Union is a communist. Two female Polish students from London took part in the conversation. When they complained about the small English scholarships, on which one cannot afford leisure activities since they amount to little more than 400 pounds per year, the source began describing the conditions under which students in Poland vegetate. She spoke about the student neighborhood in Jelonki where disorder, congestion, filth, and protectionism (because not every student can find space there) are the order of the day. And starvation-level scholarships. Even the best ones, which sometimes amount to 700 Zloty per month, are not enough to support oneself. That which a student receives from the state is absolutely not enough to live on. One must have help from family, or work on the side (as she said to improvise [‘*dokombinowac*’]) with one’s own cunning. In Warsaw apparently this is easier, but in different cities the misery of students is well known.

The source complained most about the lack of freedom; about the political control over the worldviews of academic youth and the dependence of assessment on loyalty to the government. Even the value of stipends is not determined by the financial status of the student, but by the party’s evaluation of their political stance. Academic youth in Warsaw still cannot say what they think. Moreover they are subject to intense political indoctrination at special lectures which are mandatory for all students independent of their field of study. The foundations of the Marxist-Leninist theory, which no one cares about, need to be ‘drilled in’ (*wkuwane*) by students of philosophy and sociology as well as mechanical engineering and veterinary studies. She also underlined that it is impossible to get a diploma in any field without a good assessment of one’s political stance.

When asked how this shapes the consciousness of the academic youth, the source responds that hypocrisy has been sanctified as the foundational principle of Polish student life. Professors also practice hypocrisy. They know the realities, but officially none of them (even when Poland was boiling after “December”) came forward with a program to demystify the life of higher education. People are used to it now, that it has to be this way - she said - it doesn’t matter if Gomulka or Gierek or whoever is in power.
It is in these conditions - she stated - that a student in their second or first year of study chooses the course they will follow in life. He either becomes a cynic who cares about nothing other than finding a career at any cost or becomes closed in himself, resigns from all life ambitions, pretends for his surroundings that he does not care about public affairs and quietly gains a specialization so as to later give himself to his professional interests in a mid-range position. How many individuals belong to each group, no one can guess. Because with time it becomes apparent that not all of the cynics can make a career, even though they are all harmful, and those who close themselves in university do not always grow into humble, positive specialists. Because in the first group, those who are unsuccessful often become malcontents who criticize the regime purely from the perspective of their personal failure. As for the second group, when they inevitably break under the pressure of ordinary existence, especially after starting a family, they become ordinary opportunists. The influence of people from both of these formations on shaping social apathy is colossal because they - as our source was told by one of the doctoral students at the University of Warsaw - paralyze the healthy reactions of society to the status quo. There is of course a third group among the youth which has decided to substitute internal migration for the international variety. Students belonging to this group pretend to be submissive “supplicators” in order to gain the trust of the party and the secret police. Once they are able to get their passport they try to set themselves up overseas. There are however tiny groups of students who still do not give up on their own thoughts about the social and political situation, but they have no chance to have their voice heard in official student organization. These tiny groups are formed spontaneously based on personal ties of friendship, and they have no practical possibility to organize any action. They rather get their views out in closed discussions

limited to a small group. These groups, when they share a common career specialization, sometimes find patrons in the braver scientists.[62]

The 'crack' is to be found in the highlighted sentence, where the key term is '*wkuwac*' – a Polish colloquialism that can roughly be translated to 'cramming' – memorizing text mechanically to regurgitate at an exam and then promptly forget. Based on the argumentative bent of the rest of the Item, the analyst took this word to mean that the student was complaining that she had to learn the theory at all. But the claim that 'no one cares about theory' simply does not hold up when read next to other Items, especially one entitled 'New Student Greetings' produced by the London office in 1970 (see below).



ITEM No. 674/70

WH - EL
May 21
Lo-11955

POLAND

YOUTH (3500)
University Students (3503/2)
ZSP (3506/8)

POPULATION (4200)
Identity Cards and Passports (4201)

NEW STUDENT GREETINGS

SOURCE RELIABILITY: Believed to be reliable.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Current.

ENGLISH SUMMARY: Students in Warsaw have adopted a new way of greeting one another. It consists of raising both hands to give the impression they are handcuffed. This is the way in which Kuron and Modzelewski greeted their friends when they were led handcuffed into court.

The student revolt continues to be a topic of conversation among them, and young people who could not take part in it show great interest.

The report also states that the Communist influence among students is rather weak.

EVALUATION COMMENT: This very interesting and useful report originates from a well-informed source. Nevertheless, there are some doubtful points in it. We cannot agree with the optimistic opinion about autonomy in the ZSP. There are some differences between the ZSP and other youth organizations, but they are not of a substantial nature. Another doubtful point is the mentioned penalties (1 month to 15 years in prison) for persons who arbitrarily extend the validity of their passports. (as

* * *

(over)

The fact that Kuron and Modzelewski had achieved the status of youth icons in Warsaw is crucial. They were imprisoned for producing the Open Letter to the Party, which subjected PZPR's economic base and its ideology to a Marxist analysis. The central claim of the Letter was that under the Party, the state had taken over the old function of Capital in Poland. Instead of bringing workers into power, the state was accumulating the surplus value produced by its workers and investing it in the instrument of repression. For Kuron and Modzelewski, the next historical phase should witness the emergence of strong workers' councils in the factory in alliance with radically democratized students' organizations at the university. The army should be reformed as a flexible militia on the model of Tito's Partizani and the Viet Cong so that the link between profit and the standing army which characterized capitalist states would be nullified. Finally, the continuous and progressive education of workers and profit sharing should dissolve the barrier between state power and the working class.[63]

[62] Item N-142/72 HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[63] Barker, Colin. *Solidarnosc: The Missing Link? The Classic Open Letter to The Party By Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski.* (London: Bookmarks, 1982).

One may read it as an essentially liberal call for democratization, but the OLP was ultimately about reforming socialism in a revolutionary way; a theorization of what Rosa Luxemburg called the 'Mass Strike' with the aim of defeating the Leninist 'party of the new type' that ruled Poland. The Party was obviously scandalized but the student movement took the OLP very seriously. The discourse of pamphlets circulating Warsaw and Wroclaw during the March events was aimed squarely at forging the organic link between workers and students that Kuron and Modzelewski had theorized.[64] They were trying to realize the ideas for which their icons had gone to prison. In other words, young people cared about theory very much. Before he was purged by Moczar, Zygmunt Bauman witnessed the March events, and characterized them as follows:

> 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 is 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.[65]

The point is that the student movement was unacceptable to the Party, dangerous, and meaningful for history precisely because it followed (from their point of view) a heretical reading of the holy texts of Marx and proposed a revolutionary strategy that did not conform to the vision of Lenin. On the surface it may have appeared to Western observers like Mieroszewski as a liberal protest against the censorship of the student theatre, but as Bauman says, its true nature was the demand for real socialism. So, when the analyst claimed that his source was complaining that she had to read theory because no one cared about theory, he was missing her argument. In fact, she complained that she had to cram the sterile interpretation of theory peddled by the Party instead of the radical reading produced by Kuron and Modzelewski. I think this fundamental misunderstanding – the conflation of progressive radical-democratic Marxism (some have called this post-Marxism) with liberal aspirations is the reason why the Radio could never quite secure the trust of the Polish students. At the same time, it is the reason why they can write the history of their defeat in the cultural Cold War as a victory retroactively.

Conclusion

About a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the Slovene psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Žižek took up the problem of the voice's function in articulating ideology.[66] Two of his insights offer springboards for our conclusions about the impact of cultural infiltration on Polish youth after 1968. First, in *Voice and Gaze as Love Objects,* he theorizes that when one speaks ideology, one's voice becomes an appendage of the 'Big Other' - that is the fantasy which

[64] See: Anonymous. *Robotnicy!*; Anonymous. *Pierwszy Maja 1968*; Anonymous. *Deklaracja Ruchu Studenckiego*; Anonymous. *Studenci*! in *Wydarzenia Marcowe 1968 z przedmowa prof. Zygmunta Baumana*. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1969.

[65] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Dokumenty: Wydarzenia Marcowe 1968 z przedmowa prof. Zygmunta Baumana*. (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1969.) p. 10.

[66] Slavoj Žižek, "'I Hear You with My Eyes'; or, The Invisible Master," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, Durham, Duke University Press, 19.

necessarily underwrites a symbolic order from where symbolic authority springs. In 1967, the fantasy structuring the symbolic authority of RFE ceased to function. Psychological warfare and cultural infiltration were plans that depended on the illusion that the voice of the broadcasters came from 'Poles speaking to Poles'; that it was an independent station privately organized by concerned exiles longing for the freedom of their homelands consumed by totalitarian communism. Knowledge of the fact that the station was funded by CIA obliterated this illusion. RFE was exposed as nothing other than the propaganda arm of USA; their voice became the voice of the other major empire. It was the same as Radio Warsaw in that respect. It is difficult to say if this knowledge discredited the station in the eyes of Poles, because very few Items from before 67 have survived, there is no strong control. Nevertheless, the respondents' critiques frequently chastised the programmers for their transparent subservience to Washington directives and conformity with the politics of detente. Based on what we know, the dissolution of the fantasy of an independent émigré station was a major blow to the project of cultural infiltration.

But the project was ill-conceived. Žižek also notes that a profound affective response is generated when the subject encounters 'the neighbor's ugly voice.' When a subject from outside a community learns its language and speaks it to them, they hear in his voice a veritable theft of the substance of their own identity.[67] Does this not describe perfectly the reactions articulated by the Polish youth? For their listeners, Mieroszewski's generation at RFE represented more than an eccentric and unfashionable way of speaking. This was the speech of the generation that was responsible for the status quo. Worse still, as émigrés, they were not suffering life under real socialism together with their younger fellow Poles. For them to speak of the conditions of life in PRL and criticize the population or encourage them to be like the West was heard as a veritable theft of identity. Ponder once again the letter stating that the respondent switches off his radio when the broadcaster starts reminiscing about Monte Cassino. It is curious, because near-universal acclaim was given to RFE's broadcasts about history. Programs narrated by Zaremba, Nicewski, and Nowak were fan-favorites. Respondent R-202 said Nowak was becoming 'mythic.'[68] 'The fashion of comparing the Party to 17th century gentry is getting more popular' he wrote.[69] The audience believed that there were lessons to be drawn from history, and that the past can be glorious, but not the past of their parents' generation. For lack of a better term, it is a very *68er* approach. The generational divide which seems to have erupted globally in '68 occurred almost simultaneously with the uncovering of RFE's CIA affiliation. This may have buried the cultural infiltration project.

In the late 1970s, the émigré-voice began to fade out as the programmers at the Polish Desk began to amplify the voice of dissidents from within the Bloc and the USSR. Readings of Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and Kołakowski and conversations with Adam Michnik were beginning to take over prime airtime. It was a tactical retreat from Altschul's original battle-plan but simultaneously a generational advance. In 1981, this advance occurred at the highest level of leadership when Zdzisław Najder took over command of the Polish desk in Munich. He was the first director hired by RFE straight from the Bloc, and he was an entirely different breed of exile from the likes of Mieroszewski. Najder had lived in the PRL for most of his life (other than a decade spent at Oxford studying philosophy and Polish literature) and actually experienced real socialism. Furthermore, he knew the cultural and intellectual tendencies of anti-regime youth intimately. He knew them from his experience as a graduate student and a professor of literature

[67] Slavoj Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies*. (London: Verso, 1997), 88.
[68] Item R-202, January 1975. HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.
[69] 'Opinions on RFE' Item R-202 July 1973.; HU OSA 300-50-11; RFE/RLRI; HU OSA.

at the University of Warsaw. More importantly, he knew these tendencies because he was one of the prime movers in their formation. In 1976 Najder collaborated with the polymath Andrzej Kijowski to establish the *Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległosciowe* (Polish Independence Association, heretofore PPN,) one of the first underground organizations in the PRL. They clandestinely published samizdat produced by some of the most influential dissident minds in the country including Jan Józef Szczepanski, Jan Józef Lipski, Stanisław Lem, and Jerzy Holzer.[70] Their ideological project had not even a shred of affinity with RFE's liberation rhetoric. PPN appealed to an ancient Polish 'tradition of independence'[71] and married it to Vaclav Havel's concept of 'living in truth.' Their pamphlets advocated a radical renewal of language, social and family life, and self-development as forms of resistance to Gierek's consumer-communist regime. Taking a cue from Havel, they stressed that a rejection of consumerism was key to disrupting the PZPR's domination of inner life and the first step toward a vaguely imagined independence. Liberation hopes and praise for the Western model did not have a role to play in the program.

The PPN dissolved in 1981 when one of their distributors was apprehended by Polish secret police and Jaruzelski issued Najder's death warrant. Fortunately, Najder was visiting England when this happened, and he was able to avoid execution. He arranged for the reading of PPN pamphlets on-air[72] and initiated a new broadcast called 'Poland without Communism.' His reforms caused significant tensions with his émigré staff and American superiors. It is not clear if this was due to his infamously cantankerous personality or his departures from traditional RFE dogma. The painful and messy generational shift at RFE's Polish Desk in the '80s suggests that perhaps the audience's feedback had made an impact on the programmers. Though Najder pushed the speakers to be more critical of the PZPR, his tenure did not mark a return to the paradigm of psychological warfare. It was however an abandonment of cultural infiltration, which begs the question: did the dissident communities achieve a sort of cultural infiltration of the Polish Desk at RFE? Did critical feedback from youth gathered precisely for the purpose of streamlining cultural infiltration lead to an inversion of the process? These questions are still open, but it can be stated with confidence that the responses of the Polish youth-audience were weary of the tactics of cultural infiltration. Their feedback shows the inadequacies and ultimate failure of cultural infiltration. So, for Johnson, Puddington, and Jezioriański to suggest that RFE carried its mission out successfully in the Soviet Bloc is an oversimplification of the complex discursive interplay between the Radio and its listeners at best.

[70] Bertram, Łukasz *PPN 1976-1981 Jezyk Niepodleglosci.* Warsaw: Osrodek Karta, 2012, 18.
[71] Andrzej Kijowski, "The Tradition of Independence and Its Enemies" Radio Free Europe Special Program No. 6932. Translated by D.N. Democratic Opposition 1977 (3); Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Research Institute; Polish Underground Publications Unit: Democratic Opposition Related Files HU OSA 300-55-13 Box 5; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.
[72] Bertram, 4.