

LICENSE:

THE PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS OF POLISH DISSIDENT SOCIAL MEDIA  
ACTIVISM, 1976-1990

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of dissident print culture in the People's Democracies of Central Europe and in the Soviet Union is arguably one of the most extraordinary chapters of the postwar cultural, intellectual and political history. In Poland, for more than a decade activists, in numbers increasing from hundreds to tens of thousands, would meet, in secrecy, using codenames and passwords, to edit, print and distribute books and periodicals on every subject and catering to all tastes, building extensive networks of horizontal communication sustained by voluntary involvement and accessible technologies, the existence of which was of vital importance at critical turning points in history of the democratic opposition under late socialism.

An iconic manifestation of civic disobedience, Polish dissident media activism as a cultural, intellectual and political phenomenon should not be reduced, however, to its instrumental purpose of overcoming state surveillance of ideas and their flow. Unlicensed publishing brought together actors, their practices and ideas, with technologies and things, to form a complex web, which was both a horizontal communication network that sustained the flow of dissident ideas, and the corresponding web of meanings. Within that broad web of meanings articulated around social media practices, this study explores the political instances of meaning-making, representing an approach which fuses insights from the second wave of samizdat studies, media history, and intellectual history of dissident political thought.

Proposing an alternative to narratives organized around the Cold War conceptual polarities, but without surrendering to a de-politicized cultural history perspective, this study puts in the spotlight the correspondence between a certain set of political ideas and beliefs, and a certain form of media practices. Networks of unlicensed social media

gave shape and meaning to the prefigurative variant of the dissident political philosophy, resting on the conviction that organizational forms a collective action employs to achieve social and political change predetermine, or ‘prefigure,’ the kind of polity it aims at instituting. The prefigurative principle provided the framework in which the unlicensed social media activists made sense of what they were doing as a form of practicing democracy. It was a way of affirming that small collective forms of democratic agency are possible even under repressive conditions, as well as asserting their transformative effect on public life. But also conversely, for the oppositional political thinkers, the unlicensed print culture gave the prefigurative idea a strong resonance in the lived experience.

If the vision of prefigurative democracy permeated the imaginary of dissident social media activism, it was not always the guiding philosophy of action of the broader oppositional movement. Thus, while a significant purpose of this work is to examine the distinctive features of the unlicensed social media politics, another, no less important aim is to understand its place and significance in the broader intellectual history of oppositional politics in Poland. From the perspective of that entanglement, the history of underground print culture that this study narrates is the history of the rise and eclipse of the dissident prefigurative vision.

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## INTRODUCTION |

### THE DISSIDENT IMAGINARY OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

That this work has become what it set out to be, a work in dissident political thought, comes as a surprise to its author. At various stages of its gestation it did not seem that way. The reader, if she is an academic, should know that more often than not, accounting for our work – for instance in the introduction to a doctoral dissertation – we tend to assume that such a report should present a linear trajectory leading from posing the research question, through how we went about solving it, to our discovery. We put aside the moments of hesitation and indecision, all the traces that led us astray, but also all the worldly influences on our work that do not add up to a coherent whole that our work is supposed to be. Yet to account for how we actually did construct our inquiry and what its object is really made up of, might actually add, rather than subtract, the reality to our statements turned into facts, it might turn matters of fact into matters of concern.<sup>1</sup>

### LOOKING BACK

Many years ago (which now seem like it was last Friday) I set out to write a work on dissident political thought entitled *Democratic Politics in Times of Solidarity: An Intellectual History*. Judging from the earliest records, such as my dissertation prospectus from 2010, I was not motivated by a strong conviction about its historical significance. Rather, this was the matter I was trying to sort out. And the key to

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<sup>1</sup> See Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225-248. Even though I do not employ the conceptual apparatus of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in this study, my intellectual debt to Latour as philosopher and scholar is considerable.

understand the issue of historical significance of dissident political thought seemed to be the rather complex relationship between the polity anticipated in the dissident vision before 1989 and the post-1989 realities. In the remarkable corpus of scholarship that emerged around dissident political thought, the differences in treating this subject reflected the larger controversy about the meaning of 1989 and its outcomes. Amidst the transitional 1990s the dominant tone was strongly affirmative of the changes and the dominant answer to our question was that the dissidents did get what they were fighting for and that thing was liberal democracy and market economy. As 1989 happened, the tone was set by Timothy Garton Ash, for whom “the time of the new ideas has passed.”<sup>2</sup> The historical significance of dissident political thought resided in their refusal to produce a new utopia and their endorsement of the “old, familiar and well-tested.”<sup>3</sup> Not long after, Jerzy Szacki would dub dissident political thought “proto-liberal,” and the teleological vector of that denomination was quite expressive of the liberal consensus of the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Equally revealing of that *zeitgeist* was Barbara Falk’s monumental study *Dilemmas of Dissidence*. Falk observed that dissident political thinking was a contribution primarily to democratic theory rather than liberalism, and that what she defined as dissident theory of civil society proposed an expanded and thicker notion of the political with respect to the latter.<sup>5</sup> Still, her aim was to claim a proper place for the dissident master thinkers in the legacy of Western political modernity (and thus to contextualize dissident canon against the canon of Western

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 154; idem, “The Year of Truth” in *The Revolutions of 1989*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (London: Routledge, 1999), 108-125.

<sup>3</sup> Similar conclusion was reached by Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Warsaw, 1990* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) and Jürgen Habermas, “What does socialism mean today? The rectifying revolution and the need for new thinking on the left,” *New Left Review* 183, no.1 (1990): 3-21.

<sup>4</sup> Jerzy Szacki, *Liberalism After Communism* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1995), 73-118.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest : CEU Press, 2002), 334-348.

political theory) and from this perspective dissident political thought was a “reconstructed liberalism” nevertheless. Inserting the oppositional *oeuvre* into a liberal(-plus) frame reaffirmed this proximity between the pre-1989 vision and the post-1989 reality, albeit in terms of terms intellectual communion with political principles sustaining the common European home to which former socialist countries were returning, the principles, the continued relevance of which seemed for the moment no longer contested.<sup>6</sup>

The liberal consensus of the long 1990s, which now seem a galaxy away, and in the future might even become the object of nostalgia for a golden age, was not something to be uncritically accepted by a young scholar. I expressed my bewilderment as follows:

Everything seems as if, after almost a half-century long experience of resistance to repressive regimes in Central Europe, we have not learned anything about democratic politics. The significance of this experience may appear negligible for all those – let us call them the ‘mandarins’—who share the certainty that liberal democracy in its present political form has everything it needs for self-renewal. There are, however, other voices—let us call them the ‘critics’—for whom the very capability of making new beginnings depends on constant work of rethinking anew the history of the democratic adventure. Joining the company of critics, I propose to revisit the intellectual history of democratic politics in times of Solidarity. For if the intellectual roots of our liberal-democratic present have been already elucidated, perhaps the time has come, after 20 years, to search for other usable pasts, that could still surprise us and reinvigorate our understanding of the political.

It is important to specify which company of critics I decided to join, since the challenge to the liberal consensus came from many sides.<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Isaac’s critique of the

<sup>6</sup> Falk, *Dilemmas of Dissidence*, 334-348.

<sup>7</sup> We describe these variations in Michal Kopeček and Piotr Weislik “Introduction: Towards an Intellectual History of Post-Socialism” in *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and Intellectual History in Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 1-37.



“Whiggish reading of liberal democratization as a fulfillment of the democratic opposition” was inspiring. Writing still in the 1990s, Isaac acknowledged that

It is understandable why people like Kis, Konrád, and Michnik would gravitate toward liberalism, both because its rights-based philosophy offers a powerful antidote to the kind of collectivism long enforced by Communism, and because it is the only feasible macropolitical alternative to right-wing populism. The practice of antipolitical politics under the conditions of postcommunism has great risks, for it is an unsettling politics, and the conditions of postcommunism seem to demand settlement and order; and it is an ethically exacting politics at a time when most people seem to want normality.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the liberal interpretation of 1989 was essentially flawed. “It is politically flawed – Isaac argued – because it marginalizes and/or ignores important forms of politics that were practiced by the Central European democratic oppositions, forms not adequately covered by liberalism. It is morally flawed because, in doing so, it prematurely forecloses some very complex questions about the meanings and legacies of 1989, thereby precluding certain important avenues of political action.”<sup>9</sup> The liberal consensus not only obscured the meaning of the non-liberal – although not illiberal – repertoire of democratic action, such as various forms of collective protest, civic disobedience, illegal social networks and countercultural spaces, not to mention instances of workers’ self-organization, as if the protest against the infringement of Helsinki agreement was all the dissidents ever did. It created a false dichotomy between liberalism on the one hand, and grand schemes of total social transformation on the other, as if there was nothing intellectually and politically important in between. And yet, in Isaac’s opinion, a close examination of the views of the democratic opposition revealed that prior to 1989 anti-politics was directed not only against dictatorial encroachments on civic liberties, but also against the growing entropy of civility as

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, “The Meanings of 1989” in *Revolutions of 1989*, 140.

<sup>9</sup> Isaac, 127.

such, which was identified not only with the local circumstance, but also with the global post-political trend to be observed in the East and in the West alike.

What emerges clearly from the Chartist literature, and from the literature of Central European dissent more generally, is the belief that the impersonality and consumerism of modern society, the bureaucratization of political agencies, and the debasement of political communication through the cynical manipulation of language and images produce a shallow politics, a disengaged citizenry, and the domination of well-organized, entrenched corporate interests...Because the Central European democrats operated with a highly critical understanding of the actual functioning of liberal democratic politics, they saw such civic initiatives as being significant not only as a way of opposing communism, but as a way of sustaining individual freedom and empowerment in a modern mass society.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed when Bruce Ackerman chided Vaclav Havel that his “Heideggerian contempt for the Enlightenment in general and Western consumerism in particular has an authoritarian ring,”<sup>11</sup> it only served to lay bare the contradictions of post-1989 liberal triumphalism, between its claims to provide a historical interpretation of the experience of resistance to Communism, according to which 1989 was the outcome of a struggle in the name of liberalism and by liberal means, and the indictment of incompatibility of critical civic commitment with the post-1989 political order.

Liberal consensus, and its discontents, was of course not an isolated feature of intellectual landscape of Central Europe in transition. Around the time when this work was being conceptualized, various political theorists and intellectual historians set out to map the vast gray zone between liberal proceduralism and revolutionary eschaton. The books that had a lasting effect on conceptualizing this work were, in particular, Pierre Rosanvallon’s *Counter-Democracy*, Andreas Kalyvas’ *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*. Both authors interrogated democracy’s capacity for self-

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<sup>10</sup> Isaac, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce A. Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 32-33; see also Avezier Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidents from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

renewal, which in the aftermath of the Cold War seemed to both confirmed and put in doubt. Kalyvas conceptualized the instituting momentum of democratic politics, which in his view was missing from democratic theory that either derived its insights from observations of established, or instituted regime forms (and elided the question of collective foundings and constituent power, appealing instead to mythical lawgivers or to the counterfactual moment of political contract), or its imagination was being captivated by Jacobin-Leninist vision of the revolution, in which the extraordinary moment was obliterated by the non-democratic attributes of dictatorship, state of exception, lawless violence and eschatological elimination of the political as such. Yet, Kalyvas posits, democracy's capacity of continuous "self-institution" implies that between politics as usual and revolutionary politics there exists a third moment, whereby within a constituted regime the political legitimacy is not fully absorbed by the legal procedures and mechanisms of representation, but continues to be generated by the instituting power of the people, in the form of informal public assemblies and self-governing social movements, rather than simply the crowd erupting *ex nihilo* and capable only of acclamation. That third moment of democracy implies a "series of self-constituted and self-formed networks and discourses that exist alongside instituted politics and representative forms" that, operating on the margins of the political system, but without necessarily going over the edge of the constitutional framework, "testify to the creative capacity of collective actors to develop spontaneous self-organized counter-institutions apart from the juridical system and the constituted order of the state machine."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 298.

Under the term ‘counter-democracy,’ Rosanvallon revisited the question of democratic sovereignty not so much as a constituent moment, but rather from the perspective of complexities of persistent, albeit indirect, social appropriation of power. Counter-democracy does not stand for ‘contrary-to-democracy,’ but rather captures the instances of intellectual and institutional invention which aimed to remedy deficiencies of representative democratic regimes resulting from what Rosanvallon considered a constitutive gap between procedural legitimacy and civic trust, through the institutionalization of political forms of oversight, prevention and judgment, in one word, the powers of organized mistrust. From Rosanvallon’s historical perspective, in the actually existing democracies, “the idea of basing the legitimacy of government on election has nearly always gone hand-in-hand with citizen mistrust of the powers-that-be.”<sup>13</sup> In order to compensate for the erosion of confidence and bridge the gap between legitimacy and trust, in the historical development of Western democracies there evolved a “complex assortment of practical measures, checks and balances, and informal as well as institutional social counter-powers”<sup>14</sup> in two main forms: liberal and democratic. While the former – the idea of limiting not only the arbitrary, but also the legitimate self-government – was frequently reflected upon in historical thought from Montesquieu and the Federalists to Benjamin Constant, and institutionalized in various forms of constitutional checks and balances aiming at protecting the negative freedom of the individual, the latter has seldom captivated the attention of historians and theorists. In case of the democratic forms of mistrust, Rosanvallon argued,

Sovereignty has thus come to be exercised indirectly, in ways not specified by constitutional rules. The sovereignty of which I speak is indirect in the sense that it manifests itself as a series of *effects*; it does not arise out of any formal

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in the Age of Distrust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Rosanvallon, 4.

authority, nor is it expressed through explicit decisions that might be characterized as political. If we are to understand the social appropriation of power in all its complexity, we must look at both electoral-representative democracy and the counter-democracy of indirect powers.<sup>15</sup>

As Rosanvallon himself suggests, “counter-democracy” defined political forms that were at the same time “pre- and post- democratic”: indirect powers of organized mistrust both emerged before the foundation of modern Western polities and constituted an instrument of improvement of their deficiencies. That was for me an invitation to explore counter-democracy in the late-socialist context.

My working hypothesis was that dissident political thought moved in the similar intellectual realm Kalyvas and Rosanvallon were exploring. Rather than inserting it into a chain of modern political theory in the West, I viewed dissident political thought as something specifically localized in time and space, first and foremost a form of post-totalitarian political thought which, to put it in Kosseleckian terms, was constituted by a creative tension between the horizon of expectations and the space of experience. The horizon of expectations was constituted, rather by any particular utopia, by the actually existing Western polities, but it was enough to turn from the post-1989 accounts to dissident source materials to see that, unlike their contemporary and the posthumous Cold Warriors, the dissident master thinkers had actually very little enthusiasm for that other pole of the overriding Cold War systemic alternative. They were convinced that the Western democratic fatigue and Eastern passivity of late-socialist subjects have something in common (post-totalitarianism, Havel wrote, should be understood as the “historical encounter between dictatorship and consumer society”).<sup>16</sup> At the same time (and the liberal reading got that part essentially right), they were very cautious of not

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<sup>15</sup> Rosanvallon, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Václav Havel, “Power of the Powerless” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 38.

overstepping the limits of the political, which for them was constituted by the totalitarian experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its utopian flights, revolutionary zeal and organized insurgent minorities executing a ruthless experiment on society. Thus, Western democratic fatigue on the one hand, and legacy of totalitarianism on the other, configured the possibilities and constraints of both political thinking and action.

After 1989 – I wrote at the time – some well-known oppositionists presented themselves as the “moderates” in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century staging of the classical revolutionary drama. Their dilemma would be that of the Thermidorians.<sup>17</sup> While that might be true of our own post-revolutionary period, I contend that in no way the moderate interpretation can illuminate the totality of the oppositional political experience in its historical unfolding, and that, actually, the constitutive dilemma of the dissident imagination was exactly the opposite. While the Thermidorians’ challenge was to put an end to the excesses of people’s power during the Jacobin Terror and to consolidate the achievements of the French Revolution, but without unleashing a sequence of counter-revolution and revolutionary radicalization,<sup>18</sup> the dissidents’ problem was to awake the slumbering citizens and bring about a political change, but without developing a Jacobin mindset themselves, and without unleashing popular anger, typical for the revolutionary cycles. I submit that, in most general terms, the dissident *oeuvre* might be considered as a series of intellectual and practical answers given to this dilemma.

Thus reading the dissident *oeuvre* against the grain, the plan was to explore it in its historical unfolding, as it was forged, debated and reinterpreted, as well as to investigate why and how it folded back into oblivion, through careful study of a corpus of texts of dissident master thinkers and the documentary record of Solidarity and other institutionalized manifestations of the democratic opposition under communism, extended to include the responses and readings of that *oeuvre* as they appeared within the international community of dissent and in the West.

As the tentative title suggested, that was not going to be an intellectual history of Solidarity as a social movement, but rather of the political thought emerging under

<sup>17</sup> See Adam Michnik, “Velvet Restoration” in *The Revolutions of 1989*, 239-246.

<sup>18</sup> Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

its spell. Nor it was going to be an intellectual history of *anti-politics*, due to my deep conviction, that as eponym of the dissident political thinking, the term accounted only for the half of the riddle, the post-totalitarian refusal to disconnect politics from ethics, but failed to signify the positive dimension of the dissident democratic invention. Ultimately neither “politics of the extraordinary” nor “counter-democracy” were analytical tools I end up relying to articulate the nature of that democratic invention. That was however the smallest of the transformations, that this project has underwent.

## CONTEXT, CORPUS, CANON

While my dissertation was still at an early stage, I was encouraged by István Rév, my mentor at the Central European University, to help cataloguing the collection the papers of the Underground Press Unit of the Polish Section of the Research and Analysis Department of Radio Free Europe at the Blinken Open Society Archives. What was supposed to be a summer assignment, turned out to be an extraordinary adventure, not least because many times I used the employment relationship to abuse the patience of my director asking for his insight on all sorts of matters. More importantly, I discovered not only a documentary vocation, but also that there was a difference of perspective to archiving.

The first surprise was to see dissident political thought in its natural environment. Contemporary intellectual history is not something you necessarily do in an archive. Before joining OSA, my own basic corpus of sources consisted of books and collected volumes related to democratic opposition that were published abroad or reprinted after 1989 and that did not substantially differ from editions intellectual historians working on similar subjects usually deal with. Yet, the same prison essays of

Adam Michnik read very differently in the issues of the underground weekly *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, than in the book version. You would read it alongside other authors appearing in the adjacent issues that inspired, debated or supported Michnik's arguments. You would read it alongside news items which showed you the fine details that sometimes did not fully transpire from the political texts and reference literature. In other words, you would discover a new context for your interpretations, different from the context made up of other works that made it into the canon. When you are a researcher, but devote part of your time to archiving, you cannot help browsing through other unlicensed publications you initially have not planned to look into and to ask yourself questions about the communication environment that made the free flow of political ideas viable and the people who made that sustainable.

During cataloguing, not only did I randomly meditate over the printed matter, but also I often consulted the online bibliography of underground prints published by Polish National Library. Browsing through the bibliographical metadata in its bulk (meaning the 6513 monograph editions and the 5957 press titles recorded) is another good way to start pondering the ephemeral nature of the samizdat medium. The bibliographers recorded with monkish dedication every minute change in every journal's career: the composition of editorial boards, contributors and publishers, the techniques of print and formats, print runs (whenever these were declared and no matter if the information was true), subtitles, titles and mottos, issues unpublished or published with irregular numeration. And behind every change, there could be a history, testifying to the trials and tribulations of samizdat makers: mergers and splits between political groups (some I was hearing about for the very first time), the ups and downs in development of publishing firms, the technical innovations and their diffusion, and, last but not least, the police raids. The samizdat networks revealed a surprising geography,



which in its own way was a map of a post-industrial graveyard, with so many titles produced by employees of factories that no longer existed!

As I would soon realize, taken together, these histories and their actors, their practices and ideas, technologies and things, formed a complex web, which was both a horizontal communication network that sustained the flow of unlicensed ideas, and that other web, the web of meanings that Clifford Geertz called culture,<sup>19</sup> in short, a dissident print culture.

The reader is probably aware of the potentially disastrous consequences the attraction of the dissident print culture could have had on my doctoral research. For an intellectual historian, the context is there to provide reference to enable you to understand your corpus better. The very moment when I made the discovery, my corpus started to dilute in the context. At that very moment, I should have got back to my senses and take to heart the advice given by Jan-Werner Müller in his masterful *Contesting Democracy*, namely, that intellectual historian's business is with "political thought that matters politically." Muller had in mind both a particular kind of intellectual history writing, and a specific sort of thinkers. A history that would understand political concepts in a more problem-driven way, that would focus more on the interaction between intellectual and institutional invention, and hence, on the in-between figures and actors whose thinking, perhaps less sophisticated, can be said to have had some impact on the political praxis: technocrats with intellectual inclinations, philosopher-

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<sup>19</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

statesmen, influential policymakers and social theorists, eminent individuals who contributed in a decisive way to the shape of our political communities.<sup>20</sup>

I should have, except that I haven't. In its own right, this work was shaped by that basic indecision in addition to the decisions I have made on the way. My dissident master thinkers surely fit Müller's profile better. But then what exactly does it mean that "political thought matters politically?" Wasn't that precisely the question I should have asked in the first place? Whose political thought mattered and how? Women, Solidarity's secret weapon mattered politically. The recent scholarship<sup>21</sup> leaves no doubt as for the distinguished role of female activists in the political opposition, both in its anonymous, collective and everyday dimension of e.g. sustaining underground press distribution networks, and in its illustrious individual instances. In case of dissident print culture, women who wielded immense influence included Barbara Toruńczyk, editor of Poland's first unlicensed literary journal *Zapis* and the *eminence gris* of the early dissent; Helena Łuczywo, the managing editor of three of the most important publishing initiatives, *Robotnik*, Solidarity press agency *AS*, and *Tygodnik Mazowsze* (and later the founder of *Gazeta Wyborcza*), and Ewa Milewicz, the mother of Solidarity's patronage program in the realm of independent culture. But at the same time, even Łuczywo, Toruńczyk or Milewicz would rarely reflect politically on their

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<sup>20</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting democracy: political ideas in twentieth-century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Ewa Kondratowicz, *Szminka na sztandarze. Kobiety Solidarności 1980-1989* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2001); Marta Dzido, *Kobiety Solidarności* (Warszawa: Świat Książki 2016); *Płeć buntu: kobiety w oporze społecznym i opozycji w Polsce w latach 1944-1989 na tle porównawczym*, ed. Natalia Jarska i Jan Olszsek (Warszawa: IPN, 2014).

activity *as women*, let alone in feminist key. Women mattered politically, but their political thought yet remains to be discovered and conceptualized.<sup>22</sup>

What about the dissident print culture? The dissident print culture mattered politically in the sense that it was the principal modality of existence of dissident groups, the principal way in which ‘living in truth’ was realized on the ground. It was what made the oppositional counterculture last. Without the networks of unlicensed communication established by the dissident media activists in the late 1970s, against which the media blackout by the ruling Party was helpless, the dispersed worker strikes in the summer of 1980 might have never transformed into a wave that give birth to the Interfactory Strike Committee and Solidarity. Without the trade union press, which operated under conditions of full openness, Solidarity, lacking access to the public media, would not have been able ‘speak its own voice’ (as Lech Wałęsa put it) to its multimillion membership. Without trade union press, which trained thousands of activists, there would be no publishing underground, which is to say, no Solidarity, given that between the imposition of the Martial Law and the General Amnesty of 1986, Solidarity’s ‘underground society’ mostly materialized as a horizontal network of underground press.

However, next to political thought published *in* samizdat, was there a political thought *of* samizdat activists? To dub Quentin Skinner, what was that the dissident media activists were thinking they were doing politically? What was dissent about, seen their way? Were dissident political ideas, when invoked by media activists, publishers,

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<sup>22</sup> Zsófia Lóránd’s work has been trailblazing the path. See Zsófia Lóránd, “Learning a Feminist Language: The Intellectual History of Feminism in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s,” (PhD diss., Central European University, 2015).

editors, printers and distributors, turning into something meaningfully distinctive, or they were merely a reflection of what the master thinkers had to say?

Answering that questions was quite a conundrum. The basic thing you learn as intellectual historian – I owe my basic and more advanced training to Balázs Trencsényi, his seminars, and the international network of scholars he gathered around the *Negotiating Modernities* project<sup>23</sup> – is that regardless whether we are studying political concepts, languages, discourses or ideologies, what we do is we interpret a corpus against a context, since it is only in a particular context that we can reconstruct and interpret the full meaning of the ideas we study, regardless what we decide the context is made up of: events, social, political and cultural practices and processes, or of other texts and their socio-cultural semantics. In my case, as I said, the context existed in abundance. As gradually I started shifting the perspective away from the canon of political writings of dissident master thinkers, and the documentary legacy of oppositional movements, towards the way it informed the media activism, from the idea of “living in truth” to how that truth was lived and elaborated on the ground, the canon would now become part of the context too.

On the other hand, a new corpus was much more difficult to assemble. Intellectual history of dissident print culture is not easily locked into a body of documents resembling what intellectual historian usually deals with. It is very fragmented and dispersed. The source basis for intellectual history of the dissident print culture consists mainly of self-referential interviews and short items published in the

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<sup>23</sup> I am very proud of having been a fellow traveler of this project and its ‘flying seminars’ which shape my scholarship greatly, thanks to Trencsényi’s team members and other fellow travelers, in particular: Maria Falina, Maciej Górny, Maciej Janowski, Michal Kopeček, Ferenc Laczo, Luka Lisjak, Zsófia Lóránd. See Balázs Trencsényi et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

unlicensed press, anonymous in its bulk, some of which fit a page, or even a column of an A5 sheet. There are of course exceptions. *Struktury nadziei* (Structures of Hope), a volume of collected interviews with underground media activists, prepared by Grzegorz Nawrocki,<sup>24</sup> is the only source material in which unlicensed publishing as a politically meaningful activity is discussed at length. Then I could also follow the paper trail of some outspoken personalities of the publishing movement including Czesław Bielecki, leader of *CDN*, one of the biggest publishing initiatives of the 1980s and the co-author of *Little Conspirator*,<sup>25</sup> whose genre is nevertheless a guide to underground publishing, rather than political treatise on media; Jan Walc, the notorious dissident pundit who also was a seasoned printer, or the editors of *KOS* (Konstanty Gebert in particular) and *Wola*. And finally, a documentary legacy of the various institutions which were established by the unlicensed publishing movement – especially the trade union press committees operating in 1981 and the Fund for Independent Publications established in mid-1980 – provide an important insight.

On the other hand, the analytical effects police surveillance of the dissident print culture were not quite useful for my approach. There is a wealth of information that can be found in reports of police operations, especially when it comes to evidence of activities which were purposefully undocumented by the activists themselves. But when it comes to writing intellectual history, what one gets from the more analytical takes on the underground press is something much in the image of the communist party's own propaganda apparatus, which clearly does not do justice to the complexities of the

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<sup>24</sup> Grzegorz Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei* (Warszawa: Pokolenie, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> [C. Bielecki, J.K. Kelus, U. Sikorska], *Mały Konspirator* [Warszawa: s.n. 1983]. English version (not used in this work): "The Little Conspirator," *Conflict Quarterly: The Journal of Conflict Studies* 6, no. 4 (1986): 27-64.

dissident print culture. After all, doing justice was not the point of the surveillance of culture.

For a different reason I avoided, whenever I could, oral histories, interviews and other type of evidence that was produced in hindsight. Again, for purposes other than intellectual history, these manifestations of memory work can be a prime source (for the same reasons surveillance reports are) and the contextual layer of this work has greatly benefited from the untiring work of samizdat scholars did base part of their findings on oral testimonies.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the rigors of historicizing makes me well aware of the various superimposed layers of historical memory, which are especially difficult to disentangle when it comes to reconstructing political ideas, rather than facts.

In any case, the character of my corpus testifies to the fact that, in the epistemic sense, the political thinking of media activists is a different object of study, as compared with the dissident master thinkers: instead of a detached and meditated political reflection with some discernible *longue durée* patterns which connect in a dialogical way with texts of other political thinkers, we have a form of dispersed and fragmentary collective knowledge, which consists of sometimes frugal and hasty reflection on the ongoing practice. In this sense, this is not a traditional history of political thought, but

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<sup>26</sup> Out of the industrial output of Polish samizdat studies one should mention especially: Justyna Błazejowska, *Papierowa rewolucja. Z dziejów drugiego obiegu wydawniczego w Polsce 1976-1989/1990* (Warszawa: IPN, 2010); Jan Olszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy: Niezależny ruch wydawniczy w Polsce 1976-1989* (Warszawa: trzecia strona, 2015). P. Sowiński, *Zakazana książka. Uczestnicy drugiego obiegu 1977-1989* (Warszawa: ISP PAN 2011); *Solidarność podziemna 1982-1989*, ed. A. Friszke, (Warszawa: ISP PAN 2006); *Opozycja i opór społeczny w Polsce po 1956 roku*, red. T. Kozłowski and J. Olszek (Warszawa: IPN 2011); Mateusz Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny. Historia Wydawnictwa CDN* (Warszawa-Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2011); A. Mielczarek et al., *Śpiący Rycerze. Szeregowi działacze warszawskiego podziemia wydawniczego lat osiemdziesiątych* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Wolnego Słowa, 2006); *Drugi obieg w PRL na tle samizdatu w państwach Bloku Sowieckiego po 1956 roku*, ed. Przemysław Gasztold-Seń, Natalia Jarska, Jan Olszek (Warszawa: IPN, 2016).

rather a history of the social imaginary, the way that category has been deployed by Cornelius Castoradis, Claude Lefort, or later by Rosanvallon, and recently reconstructed by Samuel Moyn.<sup>27</sup> The importance of the social imaginary to intellectual history resides in that it allows us to study concepts in close relationship with practices without collapsing one into another, working from the assumption that every social order is meaningfully constituted, that there can be no social practice unless it is made intelligible, and thus that intellectual history should expand its subject matter to include how the political is sustained in practice, i.e. in the process of making practices intelligible and debatable.

To study the social imaginary does not mean that intellectual history should dissolve into cultural history. Rather than proposing an overall thick description of meanings permeating a certain domain of the social, intellectual history should focus on specific instances of meaning-making, that in which practices are made meaningful through appeal to the very same principles and frames of justification which, perhaps in a condensed and sublimated way, are the subject matter of the traditional stuff of history of political thought. In particular, practices, not only ideas, are disputable and disputes on practices are solved intellectually, not only practically. The social imaginary is a “controversial version of the concept of culture,” Moyn observes, based on the premise that “no way to study representations as culture without taking into account the concepts that make up culture, which is not simply a system of thick meaning but also one in which principled rationales for and justifications of the social order always matter and indeed inhabit social practice to the core.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Samuel Moyn, “Imaginary Intellectual History” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112-130.

<sup>28</sup> Moyn, 121.

But it does mean that makers, not only thinkers are intellectual history's actors, and asking "what were they thinking they were doing politically" we should explore not only the performative power of texts vis-à-vis other texts, but also the meaning-making practices that sustain, transform or defeat particular political visions. We cannot abstract from the question of how the concepts thinkers theorize are made sustainable by the practices that constitute a given social realm. In this sense, the dissident print culture, which was both a web of practices and things, and a web of meanings, some of which are interwoven with principles and frames of justification the dissident master thinkers invoked, corresponds to a specific social imaginary. This study is about how dissident political ideas worked on the ground, about how dissident truths were lived.

## HISTORICAL CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES

Going about exploring the social imaginary of the dissident print culture, I quickly realized that most of the innovative approaches, which came with the second wave of samizdat studies, were founded on evading my questions. The first wave of interest in samizdat emerged in the Cold War political context, and treated samizdat as both evidence of existence of an uncaptive society under communist rule, and its true voice, as opposed to the distorted image from the official propaganda. Both the scholarship and the collecting practices of Cold War institutions such as the RFE, leaned toward highlighting its contentious and political aspects, to the detriment of independent cultural and literary life.<sup>29</sup> The second wave of samizdat studies, triggered by Ann Komaromi's seminal essays,<sup>30</sup> set out to study samizdat as a print culture, *in its own*

<sup>29</sup> Olga Zaslavskaya, "From Dispersed to Distributed Archives: The Past and the Present of Samizdat Material" *Poetics Today* 29 (2008): 704.

<sup>30</sup> In particular, Ann Komaromi, "Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon," *Poetics Today*, 29 (2008): 629-667.



*right*, in a turn similar to the Sheila Fitzpatrick's revisionist turn in studying official Soviet culture. The new scholarship vindicated the unlicensed cultural and literary journals, and related closely samizdat's cultural representations with their ephemeral materiality and the extra-Gutenberg publishing practices. It explored how their uncertain meaning and authorship was stabilized to become a "truth" and how this work involved a myriad of intermediaries, forming transnational networks along which the unlicensed texts traveled across the Cold War borders, which now seemed more permeable than the Cold War narratives had it. Finally, it extended the scope of the concept to the broader alternative culture, and the plethora of other platforms of unlicensed expression in music, visual and performative arts.<sup>31</sup>

I certainly wanted to build on these novel insights, especially that in the vibrant intellectual community formed around OSA, I had the chance to meet some of the most prolific authors and animators of that second wave, including Frederike Kind-Kovács, Jessie Labov, Valentina Parisi, Gábor Danyi and Paweł Sowiński, not to mention OSA's own seasoned samizdat archivists and researchers, Olga Zaslavskaya and Andras Mink. But at the same time, in order to find my answers, I wanted to bring the political back in, albeit in a way in which contrasting canvas of the Cold War did not provide the dominant context. Rather than a politicized view of samizdat, what I intended to produce was a perspective on samizdat as politics, rather than a tool of resistance. Without a doubt, the aim of breaking the monopoly of information was an important motive of unlicensed publishing. But was that the only available frame? Where there other frameworks of meaning, irreducible to the polarized concepts of society versus

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<sup>31</sup> S.A. Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," *Public Culture* 13 (2001): 191-214; *Samizdat: Between Practices and Representations*, ed. Valentina Parisi (Budapest: Central European University, Institute for Advanced Study, 2015); *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism*, ed. Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

the state, the truth against lies? I even dare to think that bringing the political back in, the materialist turn in samizdat studies becomes enriched, and not diluted, if only we realize the many ways in which not only the articulations of unlicensed expression, but also their material platforms – artifacts of samizdat technology and the technological practice – were invested with political meanings.

In conceptualizing how underground print culture could be seen as a form of politics, Christina Dunbar-Hester's *Low Power to the People*, was a well of inspiration. Even though her book is an ethnography of low power radio activism at the turn of the millennium Philadelphia, the aim of the book, to investigate how emancipatory politics is imputed to an old medium, sounds rather familiar to a scholar of the “extra-Gutenberg” galaxy, in particular the idea, shared by the Prometheus movement, that politics can be built around communication technologies, that media practices can be, more than means of politics, an embodiment of a political vision of community empowerment. In a significant way, my work, just like her book, “examines the construction and implementation of specific beliefs about what technology can do, what technology should do, or what artifact is most appropriate to enact a set of politics.”<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, the problem of appropriateness between a certain set of political ideas and beliefs, and a certain form of media practices, makes the study of the social imaginary of the dissident media activism somewhat more focused. Conceptualizing both ends of the equation resulted to be quite a challenge. Especially difficult to sort out was the entanglement between historical concepts and analytical categories which is so endemic for investigating history of contemporary politics. Take scholarship which applies to the study of unlicensed publishing the analytical apparatus of the social

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<sup>32</sup> Christina Dunbar-Hester, *Low Power to the People: Pirates, Protest and Politics in FM Radio Activism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), xvi.

movements theory. The fact that “social movement” is both historical concept well rooted in the dissident vocabulary and the eponymous field of study, have led to some confusion in terms of mixing the quite formalized analytical apparatus that social movement theorists use to explain political action, and the place that concept had in the dissident political thought. Jacek Kuroń spoke about “Third Poland of social movements” (in an ironic reference to the “second Poland” that First Secretary Edward Gierek had promised to build) already in 1976.<sup>33</sup> But clearly, he did not think about the publishing movement as a resource to be mobilized given a certain political opportunity structure, or a “repertoire of contention.” Kuroń used the concept in plural to refer to different initiatives whose common denominator was that they overstepped the rigidities of the official political culture, but which needed not to be openly dissenting (or even aware of its oppositional character). There was the Workers Defense Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników, KOR), the Student Solidarity Committees (Studenckie Komitety Solidarności, SKS) and a publishing movement, rather than a single “opposition movement” with wings. Most importantly, however, the relationship between these initiatives was self-supportive, rather than functional or hierarchical. Solidarity used the notion to signify that it was something more than a trade union, both due to its contentious relationship with the state and because it protected under its umbrella a myriad of independent initiatives. But again, Solidarity leaders were acutely aware of their limited leverage over the social effervescence.

Martial Law, in this respect, was a return to pre-Solidarity times. Solidarity was an imagined community, a form of identification that was rather generally embraced, however that this identification was consequential in terms of obligations and loyalties,

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<sup>33</sup> Jacek Kuroń, “Myśli o programie działania,” *Aneks* 13-14 (1977): 32.

is often tacitly assumed, rather than openly problematized. Now, applying the historical concept as an analytical category within the broader social movements theory feels seamless because of that semantic proximity, but leads to forsaking this work of problematization of mutual relationships between different oppositional initiatives operating under one symbolic umbrella, as well as their unique traits. First, the focus is on contention and protest against the state, whereas internal frictions as well as political meanings which are neutral with respect to the main cleavage of the day become underscored. Second, the functional view according to which unlicensed publishing is a “repertoire of action” of the larger social movement, presupposes a fixed distribution of “superstructural” and “infrastructural” roles, with leaders of the social movement setting the political agenda and that agenda being executed by the activists. For instance, Adam Mielczarek, in his well-informed analysis of the demise of underground publishing in 1989, recognizes that the dissident media activism of the 1980s was the principal mode of existence of the “underground society,” but at the same time, assumes that the activists could only be carriers of one of the established oppositional political traditions: either the anti-political and independentist variants of pre-Solidarity dissident political thought, or the republican tradition of Solidarity, whereas the question of a genuine social imaginary of media activism (influenced by either of the above, for sure) is not even asked. Also, his argument is framed on larger canvas of the disbandment of the army of Solidarity rank-and-file by its elite, as if there existed some clear relationship of command, entailing a set of obligations of the generals towards their soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Adam Mielczarek, “Drugi obieg wydawniczy lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych jako element ruchu społecznego. Zastosowanie socjologicznej teorii ruchów społecznych do analizy opozycji w Polsce” in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 61-75; cf. Marianne Osa, *Solidarity and Contention: Networks of Polish opposition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

With respect to the functionalist perspective implied in the social movements theory, a very different image of media activism soon started to emerge from my research, an image of a publishing movement which had a separate identity and politics of its own build around unlicensed communication, which guarded its relative autonomy with respect to oppositional leaders, despite various dependencies, and which articulated a distinctive social imaginary. Even though the philosophy of action that animated it had a common root in the dissident political thought and could be understood as its creative mutation or adaptation, this work aims at demonstrating that it yielded political ideas which were irreducible to the dissident intellectual canon and not always were in sync.

In rethinking the functionalist perspective, Victor Pickard's research on media reform in the 1940 USA provided a useful example of how to conceptualize media activism as a distinctive realm of political activity.<sup>35</sup> Pickard analyzed the case of the US radio reform movement of the 1940s, consisting of a coalition of labor organizations, African-American activists, educators, religious groups and progressive intellectuals, whose quest addressed cross-cutting themes of concentration of radio ownership, unequal employment conditions, commercialization, unfair representation of labor and racial issues on air. Drawing from the history of this diverse coalition's ultimately failed efforts to remake the self-regulation and corporate ownership model of American media, Picard defined media activism in terms overlapping ideas and strategies of counterbalancing the negative effects of advertisement-driven funding structure of the radio on the quality of broadcasts, correcting the anti-worker and anti-minority biases, organizing against exploitation in the media corporations, and

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<sup>35</sup> Victor Pickard, *America's Battle for Media Democracy: The Triumph of Corporate Libertarianism and the Future of Media Reform* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

intervening in the policymaking processes. Now, in pursuing these strategies, establishment of alternative radio outlets played a significant role, however of equal importance were the policy-oriented initiatives: advocacy of public interest media regulation by the Federal Communications Commission or establishment of listener councils to monitor and lobby for desirable content of programming. Direct interventions in the mainstream media to criticize its commercialization and inject a measure of labor and minority friendly content played some part as well.

Importantly, Pickard achieves a *gestalt* switch with respect to the functionalist view: media activism, a domain of politics, and not the social movement, a collective actor, constitutes the main analytical frame. It is media activism that disposes of a “repertoire of action” specific to that domain, rather than being an element of the paraphernalia of the larger social movement. Things seen this way, I was in a better position to describe in a meaningful way the evolving pattern of mutual influences and dependencies between media activism and the political opposition in terms of strategies and policies that were sometimes convergent and sometimes divergent. Such an approach resulted especially productive with regards to media activism during Solidarity’s carnival, which involved, on the one hand, the proliferation of the trade union press and, on the other, the struggle for access to state-controlled mass media and related policy interventions in the realms of censorship and public communication. At first these two vectors of media activism were complementary but turned contentious once the second of these fronts face the stalemate. The trade union press resisted the shift of Solidarity leadership towards less deliberative and more tactical use of communication in the name of political principles that were shared, but differently translated into the realm of political action.

Similar case of entanglement of historical concepts and analytical categories concerns the above mentioned dissident keyword ‘anti-politics.’ The historical concept cultivated in the eponymous essay by György Konrád and to some extent by Václav Havel, has been deployed metonymically as an analytical category to designate dissident political thought as such.<sup>36</sup> Yet, historically, it was just one variant of the dissident understanding of the political. As I argued elsewhere,<sup>37</sup> the common denominator of dissident political thought consisted in rejection of a vision of politics as a realm of purely instrumental reason, in the name of “sovereignty of moral sentiment,” as Jan Patočka put it.<sup>38</sup>

That notwithstanding, Konrád’s conviction that all power is dehumanizing, arbitrary and irresponsible, and that “democracy” can only be a democracy of self-defense from politics, was rather a minority view. Many dissident master thinkers did believe that different kind of politics was possible, and developed diverse philosophies of political action, which defined the limits of the political under the adverse conditions (“totalitarian” or “post-totalitarian”, as some of them would have it) in a different way, especially when it came to achieving public resonance, bearing pressure on the institutionalized politics, adoption of individual and collective strategies, or the role of the parallel institutions vis-à-vis the established ones.

This work focuses on one such variant of the dissident philosophy of political action, which I consider fundamental for the social imaginary of unlicensed media

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<sup>36</sup> Alan Renwick, “Anti-Political or Just Anti-Communist? Varieties of Dissidence in East-Central Europe and Their Implications for the Development of Political Society,” *East European Politics and Societies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 286-318.

<sup>37</sup> Piotr Wciślik, “‘Totalitarianism’ and the Limits of Dissident Political Thought: Late Socialism and After” in *Thinking Through Transition*, 76-80.

<sup>38</sup> Jan Patočka, “What Charter 77 Is and What It Is Not,” *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 341.

activism. To describe the various strands of political thought that bring that variant about and impregnate the political thinking of the independent editors, publishers, printers and distributors, I use the category of ‘prefigurative politics.’ Prefigurative philosophy of political action corresponds to the principle that forms a politics employs to achieve social change predetermine its outcomes and therefore these forms should reflect and embody, ‘prefigure,’ the kind of polity they aim at instituting. The form, is at the same time, the interpretative frame which projects meaning and justification of political activity. Prefigurative politics, I believe, is what best describes the shared philosophy of political action that motivated the collective effort sustained over more than a decade to build the horizontal networks of undistorted communication.

The choice of this analytical category is not uncontroversial. I am not the first to use it. David Ost coined the term “anticipatory democracy” to refer to the similar set of beliefs professed by the pre-Solidarity democratic opposition in Poland, which he summarized as follows:

This is anticipatory democracy, behaving in the present the way one would like to be able to behave in the future; acting today as if the desired tomorrow were already a reality. As Michnik puts it, concisely capturing the essence of the anticipatory project, the task of the opposition is "to create political facts through collective action." Political life becomes more democratic (in the sense of expanding citizenship opportunities) when people act as if it were already more democratic, when they act as members of the revitalized civil society they hope will be legalized in the future.<sup>39</sup>

Not incidentally, Ost observed that this transformative strategy of democratic *faits accomplis* mainly revolved around “recreating the classic institutions of the modern public sphere,”<sup>40</sup> sustained by platforms of unlicensed expression. More recently Mateusz Fałkowski argued that prefigurative politics was the overall logic or a common

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<sup>39</sup> David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ost, 69.



core of oppositional activities, including Solidarity and the “underground society” of the 1980s, and proposed that understanding of the unlicensed publishing as a “market” had a similarly transformative dimension in terms of intellectual rapprochement with free market.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike ‘social movement’ or ‘anti-politics,’ ‘prefigurative politics’ is not an analytical category derived from the dissident vocabulary. It is a notion contemporary to emergence of the organized opposition under late socialism, but actually coined to describe the social movements of the New Left in Europe and the USA.<sup>42</sup> That genealogical detail would be uninteresting if it wasn’t for the conviction held by many scholars of dissent about the apparently irreconcilable differences between the New Left and the dissidents emerging out of the experience of 1968, in particular the endorsement of universal human rights in the East versus the long farewell to Marxism in the West.<sup>43</sup> Prefigurative politics is an instance of a commonality that the above argument glosses over. First, as a philosophy of political action, prefigurative politics stood for refusal to embrace either of the terms of the perennial alternative of reform and revolution, based, on the one hand, on the critique of the Jacobin strategy of seizing the apparatus of the state to transform the society in the desired direction, and, on the other, on the conviction that Michels’ iron law of oligarchy is the inevitable destiny of the attempts at transforming established institutions from within. That Carl Boggs, who seems to be the first scholar to apply the term, reasoned from within the radical left-wing political

<sup>41</sup> Mateusz Fałkowski, “Ruch społeczny i ‘podziemny rynek.’ O logikach funkcjonowania niezależnego ruchu wydawniczego w PRL (1976-1989)” in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 76-101.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Boggs, Jr., “Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and the Dilemma of Power,” *Theory and Society* 4, no. 3 (1977): 359-393; Wini Breines, “Community and Organization: The New Left and Michels’ ‘Iron Law,’” *Social Problems* 27, no. 4 (1980): 419-429. See also, Dracy K. Leach, “Prefigurative Politics” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David A. Snow et al. (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Introduction to *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 18.

tradition, and Adam Michnik preferred to appeal to more vernacular terms of the debate (uprising versus revisionism), does not change the fact that *new evolutionism* as a strategy was built on identical evasion and the similar predilection for political activity that can be said to have an immediate transformative effects on the present.

Neither it is a coincidence that scholars who were taking prefigurative politics seriously (albeit *not* uncritically) felt compelled to defend it against criticism of its alleged anti-political bias. For sure, prefigurative politics was antonym of *instrumental* (Boggs) or *strategic* (Breines) politics, but it was coined to describe a politics after all. In Wini Breines's view, Students for Democratic Society (SDS) did not so much reject institutionalized politics altogether (the anti-organizational bias of anti-politics), but rather strove to propose counter-institutions whose political effectiveness was a matter of concern, however the measure of that effectiveness was the immediate transformative effect on the present, and not the accumulation of power in the name of creating a better society in the future. In other words, while prefigurative politics was founded on the principle of means-ends consistency, still it championed a consequentialist ethics interested in its political effects, rather than absolutist ethics of holding high moral ground (anti-politics' ethical bias).

Yet, most scholarship on the subject concludes, the tension between strategic and prefigurative philosophies of political action is unsurmountable, and the former predominates mostly as extraordinary political events gain momentum, only to be repressed or subjugated by an organized minority, co-opted and assimilated into the established institutions once ordinary politics returns, or to collapse under the weight of the excessive spontaneity. Dissident media activism was in fact a quite sustainable phenomenon, with the 15 years of uninterrupted publishing activities, its resilience

despite Martial Law and its breathtaking scope. But in the final analysis its fortunes were always entangled with the fortunes of the broader organized opposition forces, for which prefigurative politics did constitute the original impulse, but which as a whole resulted much more adaptive to the circumstances.

If the persistence of that prefigurative impulse in the social imaginary of dissident media activism animated the resilience of unlicensed communication networks, the resilience of the broader opposition movement was rather founded upon the reliance on a *spectrum* of political ideas and positions from which it could draw depending on the specific conjuncture.<sup>44</sup> Which in turn means, from the intellectual history point of view, that at times (especially in the late 1970s and in the aftermath of the Martial Law), the respective philosophies of political action of dissident media activism and the organized opposition were largely coextensive, while at other times (in particular on the eve of the Martial Law and on the eve of 1989) they were deeply out of sync. In the final analysis, dissident media activism, despite being the principal modality of existence of the “underground society” of the 1980s, was not capable of adapting to the ordinary democratic politics that the post-communist transition brought about. I hope the focus on the dynamics of entanglement between social imaginary of media activists and the way political activists thought about the media, substantiates my corrective to the functionalist optics of the social movement theory. In any case, if every historical narrative needs a drama, here the drama is first and foremost provided by the story of that entanglement.

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<sup>44</sup> Krzysztof Brzechczyn, “Program i myśl polityczna NSZZ ‘Solidarność,’” in *NSZZ “Solidarność” 1980-1989*, Vol 2: *Ruch Społeczny*, ed. Łukasz Kamiński and Grzegorz Waligóra (Warszawa: IPN, 2010), 72-74.

But let us return to the problem of appropriateness of ideas and media. What about the other end of the equation? What kind of media were appropriate to enact prefigurative politics? As I hope to demonstrate, the tension between prefigurative and instrumental politics often translated into and can be meaningfully transposed as a tension between social media and mass media models of public communication. To introduce the category of ‘social media’ was probably the most risky decision I have taken while working on my subject. Intellectual historians are especially alert to the fallacy of presentism and can harbor suspicion that what I am writing is a Whig history of an essentially *new* medium. Clearly, during the writing of this work, social media activism went big, including Obama’s first presidential campaign, the anti-ACTA protests in Poland and the Tahrir square in Egypt. In all these cases, what I found very puzzling, social media activism created public effervescence that had substantial impact on the course of events, yet remained unintegrated into the political process that followed the crucible. Also, more or less informed analogies between samizdat and digital social media are present in the public debate, especially in the context of possibilities and constraints on free speech in the digital era,<sup>45</sup> however pointing out to the fact that both enabled uncensored communication (the analog predecessor did that on an infinitely smaller scale, but then again it did not have that central switch) is not enough to validate the use of the term as an analytical category in historical analysis.

Can ‘social media’ be deployed as a historical category at all? Our imagination seems to be captured by the popular social media platforms of the digital age and we tend to take for granted that these are essentially new media, coming after the old media

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<sup>45</sup> Miklos Sukosd, “Underground print culture and independent political communication in communist regimes: samizdat as typoshpere in Central and Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the 1980s,” *Korean Journal of Communication Studies* 20, no. 5 (2012): 61-86; Cf. Gal Beckerman, “Forget Facebook, Bring Back Samizdat,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 2014.

of mass communication, such as the radio, television and large print-run newspapers. It took a prolific media and technology writer Tom Standage<sup>46</sup> to turn my attention to the fact that “writing on the wall,” is not necessarily a new media habit, and that horizontal networks of communication, facilitated by accessible technologies, in which the flow information depends on the cumulative effect of individual decisions, has been with us all along. And conversely, that the communication model of transmission from a single source to a mass, but passive audience, based on technologies beyond the outreach of an average person, is in many ways a historical detour.

In this work ‘social media’ stands first and foremost for a set of practices sustaining a specific model of communication. More than corroborating Standage’s thesis about the *longue durée* of the social media with a more contemporary example, my intention is to build on the distinction between mass media and social media in order to elucidate better the interpretative frameworks within which the political meaning of unlicensed publishing was debated. Clearly the notion of “social media” was not a self-description that the unlicensed media activists had at hand, and in a way this intellectual history is precisely a history of a concept that never came to be, or better to say, that in its own time was never conceptualized consistently and precisely enough to understand its proper place in the dissident political vision. Instead, we have several concepts which were used to grasp the nature of this media model and its political meaning: “independent publishing movement,” “trade union press” or “firm” and “publishing market.” In different proportions, each of these concepts mapped some of the basic features of a social medium: horizontal, decentered communication flow, reliance on

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<sup>46</sup> Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2000 Years* (New York: Bloomsbury: 2013), epub.

voluntary involvement, blurring of the usual division of labor in media production, diffusion and reception, or the role of accessible technologies of communication.

Above all else, the dissident media activists did think they were doing something different with respect to established patterns of public communication. In particular, the “party organ” type of press was their anti-model and they resisted the efforts at transforming independent media into a surrogate mass media, even in the face of the escalation of the conflict between party state and Solidarity, whose leaders, not being able to control the image of the Union in the public media, were determined to use the instruments at hand to counteract the official propaganda. The fact that Solidarity developed two different sets of media policies, a strategy of access to the state-owned public media and a different set of policies concerning the trade union press, and that mass media issues and trade union press issues were treated separately in Solidarity’s official record (the bylaws and the program), further testifies to the awareness of the novelty of the communication model which emerged within the broader dissident political culture. And the substantial reason why the social media communication model was sustained in the underground between the imposition of the Martial Law and 1989, is because of the shared conviction that it provides the best – and at times, the only – avenue for prefigurative politics, an avenue for democratic initiatives that can have a transformative effect on the present and thus bring closer the desired polity of the future.

It is very hard to tell whether and in what way it mattered for the eventual collapse of communism and the quality of the post-socialist public life. 1989 was not at all a victory of prefigurative politics. In the 1980s the underground Solidarity evolved from a revolutionary mass movement rich in effervescence of civic initiatives into an elite reform movement, which employed rather conventional tactics of interest-based

negotiations in order to achieve a breakthrough in the political impasse that lasted for years and to set the country on track of recovery from an economic catastrophe. The dissident media activists, weighted down by the underground fatigue, were rather reluctant to become part of that process, especially since the memory of the backlash against the trade union press in the course of the Martial Law was still fresh. But also, they did not really fit the transitional scenario that the reform movement acted upon. Indeed, the pace at which that new horizon of expectations came to dominate over the space of experience, was remarkable, and the swift disappearance of independent publishers was very illustrative of that process. The very idea of how politics is supposed to have a transformative effect that the independent publishing movement cherished was very different from that championed by the reformers. On the one end, a set of emergent, grass-roots institutions radiating new principles throughout the public life and in this way creating pressure towards renewal of the institutions of the state. On the other end, top-down structural reform in the name of a future that was literally around the corner, since it was enough to cross one's (culturally) Western border to get the sense of it. Across the border demarcating that future, there was no such thing as a public sphere organized around social media networks, and neither politicians, nor the emerging media players were interested in somehow integrating the dissident social media into the tried and tested models.

The refusal to experiment was once taken to be Transition's greatest virtue. However the anti-utopian *zeitgeist* of 1989 left overboard an important domain of initiatives which constituted a significant element of the space of democratic experience of dissent for the bigger part of its history. The prefigurative politics that informed dissident social media imaginary, was part and parcel of the same post-totalitarian thought which informed the human rights discourse. It was not utopian the way say the

Bolshevik revolution was, yet it had no natural place in the order of post-1989 vision of politics-as-usual. We can only guess whether, if the effort was made to find that place, the democratic foundation of Poland's post-communist polity, at least in terms of civic oversight of governance, would have been healthier.



## CHAPTER ONE |

### INTRODUCING SAMIZDAT SOCIAL MEDIA: FANTASIES AND REALITIES

The aim of this chapter is to present a basic ethnography of dissident print culture as social media communication environment. That presupposes, that “social media” can be used as a category of historical interpretation. Since perhaps that assumption is not immediately intuitive, we should start with clarifying why and how “social media” as an analytical category can apply to samizdat.

The term ‘social media’ is coetaneous with the Internet and in most of its definitions focus on communication enabled by web services. They are commonly referred to as new media, and their novelty is articulated in distinction with respect to mass media. The mass-circulation press, radio and television are traditional (in a very twenty-first century understanding of the word ‘tradition’) in the sense that as far as our (short) cultural memory can recall, the dominant model of mass circulation of news, culture and ideas consisted of a one-way, centralized broadcast pattern, relying on expensive, industrial-scale technological infrastructure, whose ownership was centralized in a few hands due to its high costs, and on professionalization of news gathering, editing and content production. Then came Internet and everything changed. We all started to tweet, post and chat along the social networks, rather than just read, listen or watch. The means of generating and sharing information became accessible at little expense and its abundance is unprecedented. In terms of control of the information flow, the user and the algorithm displaced the journalist and the editor with their professional skills and ethics, and the public sphere both expanded to include hitherto unheard of views and opinions, and fragmented into a myriad of filter bubbles. We have

all started – as never before - to inhabit echo chambers, where most of what we interact with is generated or recommended by our fellow users, i.e. people we know, but increasingly also those strangers, whose profile, according to an algorithm out there, is similar to our own.

At the same time vague analogies between social media and samizdat abound. When centered on technology, rather than the social aspect they serve more to misrecognize our current predicament with Internet freedom, than to illuminate the historical experience. This is certainly the case of the “net delusion” debunked by Evgeny Morozov, a technological variant of post-1989 liberal triumphalism, which emerged as a result of the strange encounter of cyber-utopianism invested in the new media, and the US Cold War foreign policy doctrine of free flow of information. According to that doctrine investing in communication technologies aimed at breaking the monopoly of information of a dictatorial regime produces more informed civil societies which, exposed to truth about the regime, as well as libertarian values and images of prosperity of the West, exert pressure on dictatorships towards peaceful social change.<sup>1</sup>

In Morozov’s sobering perspective, Internet resulted to be a double-edged sword and Washington policymakers proved short-sighted in underestimating the capacity of contemporary dictatorships to master its use. The web was appropriated for both Huxleyan purposes, offering a sedative pill of Western entertainment to depoliticize subjects of repressive regimes, and for Orwellian purposes, to boost the authoritarians’ apparatuses of propaganda, surveillance and censorship.<sup>2</sup> While samizdat (and Cold

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<sup>1</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca MacKinnon, *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom* (New York: Basic Books 2013).

War radio broadcasting) was monitored with equal attention, it offered less possibilities to be turned against freedom. Samizdat attracted people who were unambiguously dissident-minded and risked their safety to disseminate predominantly unlicensed political content. It saw no mercenary armies of pro-government trolls or lolcats for that matter. It was more opaque to the investigator's eye, given that precautions against police surveillance were inscribed in the practice from the very start. Perhaps equally importantly, it had no central switch.

Morozov's argument about the fallacy of historical analogy in today's Western, media-based policies of democracy promotion is highly persuasive, and recent cases of interference in grand political processes in Europe (US and French elections, the Brexit referendum) makes the gravity of the situation especially appalling (the cyber-surveillance apparatus of the US government being no less troubling). Nowadays, the analogy is used in reverse: "Forget Facebook, Bring Back Samizdat" an op-ed in *New York Times* read in 2014.<sup>3</sup>

But if the technological variant of the post-1989 liberal triumphalism misguides us about the possibilities and constraints of Internet freedom, it also distorts our understanding of the nature of emancipatory fantasies attached to samizdat as a medium by the samizdat makers themselves in their days. *Nota bene*, I am using the notion of "media fantasy," to abstract from the question of the actual impact of media technology –hi- or low-tech – on the fall of communism. Fantasies can exaggerate the question of impact, but still harbor truths about political meanings that permeated the use of these technologies.

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<sup>3</sup> Gal Beckerman, "Forget Facebook, Bring Back Samizdat," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2004.

Admittedly, the hopes that Washington Cold Warriors invested in technological globalization's automated liberalizing effect on closed societies were indeed shared behind the Iron Curtain, but, as I argued elsewhere, these would typically target the media hi-tech of the day, in particular the direct-to-home broadcasting satellites. These were mass media fantasies, invested in big technologies and large-scale processes the automated shrinking of the world was believed to trigger, which were by and large beyond control of the average greengrocer. Mass media fascinated as attributes of power, an arena where state sovereignty over ether was contested, but were not necessarily empowering.<sup>4</sup>

The emancipatory fantasy, which animated samizdat makers was of a different kind and hi-tech was not part of it. According to Benjamin B. Fischer, former Chief Historian of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), crucial to the survival of underground Solidarity and its presses was the secret program undertaken by the CIA under Reagan's presidency, to furnish the resistance with the contemporary hi-tech, including among others photocopiers, fax machines, walkie-talkies radio transmitters and the like. The strategy of using "cutting edge technologies to incite political revolt" was apparently already working perfectly in Poland of the 1980s "before the era of Internet, Facebook and Twitter,"<sup>5</sup> and from his perspective the smuggle of faxes and photocopiers for dissidents might seem as an equivalent to the smuggle of Stinger missiles to the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. Now, the problem is not only that Fischer was not able to corroborate the existence of this secret program beyond the witness accounts of contemporary Cold Warriors (but then again, perhaps he knows better). The

<sup>4</sup> See Piotr Wciślik, "The Rubber Waistband and the Resistor: Solidarity Radio and Media Fantasies of Emancipation under Late Socialism in Poland," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 115 (2017): 183-192.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin B. Fischer, "Przed erą Internetu, Facebooka i Twittera: CIA, 'Solidarność' i drugi obieg wydawniczy" in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 540-561.

fact is that neither faxes nor Xerox machines – as we shall learn – were of primary importance for sustaining the publishing underground or used on a massive scale.

In this regard, it is very illustrative that first stencil duplicators used by NOWA publishers were discretely acquired in 1977 at a yard sale at the US Embassy in Warsaw. No secret program was involved at that point. The reason why US Embassy was offering the duplicators, was simply because it was switching to the photocopy technology for office use.<sup>6</sup> Later on, Marian Kaleta, who organized the smuggle of printing infrastructure to Poland from Sweden, also relied on used and discarded office equipment.<sup>7</sup> And even if he had shipped a fax machine or a photocopier to Poland, it would have been of little use. After all landlines were surveilled and clandestine places where the duplicating was being done were not fit for electronic equipment sensitive to dust. Thus, if hi-tech played a role in emergence of the dissident print culture, that role did not reside in building up a technological competitive advantage vis-à-vis the adversary. Rather the impact was indirect and counter-intuitive. If the dissident revolution was definitely not a xeroxed one, Xerox machines still mattered, since the switch to photocopy technology in the West suddenly made available considerable quantities of discarded office printing machines, offset and stencil duplicators, that could be acquired at affordable prices and actually put to work in the East. And once US government established its covert and overt operations to support Polish dissident print culture, it was that outdated equipment that made the difference, constituting the bulk of acquisitions made in the West on behalf of Solidarity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, ed. Łukasz Bertram (Warszawa: IPN, 2013), 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> On US support for the underground see Patryk Pleskot, “Dolary na bibułę. Amerykańska pomoc finansowa dla drugiego obiegu wydawniczego w Polsce w latach 1982-1989” in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 527-538.

More importantly for our argument, the media fantasy which informed the dissident print culture was actually *the reverse* of hi-tech optimism. Perhaps the paradigmatic version of that fantasy is the veteran story about “how we defeated communism with a rubber waistband” that Mirosław Chojecki, the doyen of the Polish independent publishing movement of the 1970s and the 1980s, often recounts during dissident commemoration events. In one written version, its lore goes like this:

It all started in the late 1970s with the written word. Then came the spoken and sung word in the form of audio cassettes and ultimately, the word on display, or film. All these methods required specialized technical devices and so did the written, or printed word.

The most popular printing device was the *ramka* - a frame with canvas moistened with an emulsion which anyone could prepare at home using widely available materials. This would be then exposed through a diapositive slide. In the transparent areas the emulsion would solidify and in the areas where light did not come through (letters, images) it would be washed away. This is how you made a stencil. Printing required three people: one operating the roller with printing ink, another to lift the *ramka* and a third to pull out the printed page. Once – nobody knew why exactly - one of the printers did not show up in the print shop. Still, the job needed to be done urgently. One of the printers was female - Basia Felicka. In a stroke of genius, Witek [Łuczywo] persuaded the skirted printer to... take the rubber waistband out of her pants. He took the waistband and fastened it into a chandelier hovering over the table. And this is how the AUTOMATED duplicator was born. The *ramka* would rebound all by itself. Somewhat later the rubber band would be fastened to the base on which the *ramka* was fixed. That made the duplicator operable by a single person. The best printers would make around 1500 copies per hour!

It was one of the main aims of the totalitarian state to keep us and our minds under full control and to make sure that our thoughts - in case the thoughts were dissident - remained unknown to the public. Once you could make the duplicator yourself at home, you could write, print and distribute whatever you wished...When the free word, printed, spoken and sung on tapes, and later the free word on display in film, became generally accessible - the totalitarian state had to collapse.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mirosław Chojecki, “Jak przy pomocy gumki od majtek obaliliśmy komunizm,” *Respublica*, October 18, 2010, accessed November 26, 2017, <http://publica.pl/teksty/jak-przy-pomocy-gumki-od-majtek-obalilismy-komunizm-3220.html>.

The story is notable for the strange way it brings together, dissident media, technological modernity and resistance to communism. Unlike in the mass media fantasy, which attributes the fall of communism to its inability to keep up in the technological race, from proliferation of nuclear arms, through modernization of industry, to provision of consumer goods, here the challenge to a modern apparatus of cultural surveillance is posed by a technology that is hardly modern. It is a David-and-Goliath contest, in which the underdog sling, made of a rubber waistband, pierces its free word projectiles through the more technologically advanced shield of monopoly of information with which the adversary protects his rule.

Nota bene, that among the many nails driven into the communism's coffin, the samizdat one was especially rusty, was immediately recognized and endorsed by the emerging samizdat studies in the late 1970s and 1980s, which picked up on the Anna Akhmatova's characterization of samizdat as "pre-Gutenberg" phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> The "pre-Gutenberg" or "extra-Gutenberg" nature of unlicensed publishing applies to the Polish context with many qualifications – after all, as we mentioned, stencil and offset duplicators were also widely employed. But "pre-Gutenberg" or not, the rubber waistband paradigm still holds, as it articulated first and foremost a passion for horizontal communication free from interference, attainable here and now through means at the disposal of an average person. In other words, it was a social media fantasy.

Thus, if I want to apply the term "social media" as a category of historical interpretation to analyze the print culture, it is not because to draw distorting analogies with the present, but to address the issue of appropriateness of certain media environment, enabling undistorted horizontal communication through accessible

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<sup>10</sup> H. Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989).

means, to certain form of politics, the dissident politics, which had many more meanings than contesting the state monopoly of information.<sup>11</sup>

To build such historical approach to social media as a form of communication environment, it is useful to start with a *gestalt switch*. We perceive social media as something new, because the mass circulation press, radio and television have imposed themselves on our imagination as the previous step in technological progress. However, if we try to understand media history in a less linear way, we should pause to consider that mass media might be just a detour in history of communication, while the social media is a return to a way of communicating which has been dominant in history, except for the scale made possible by the Internet infrastructure. This is what Tom Standage invites us to do in his book-length argument for social media's *longue durée*, informed by many canonical works from media and book history. Standage defines social media as “two-way, conversational environments in which information passes horizontally from one person to another along social networks, rather than being delivered vertically from an impersonal central source.”<sup>12</sup> What makes communications social is a “decentralized, person-to-person media system” in which dissemination of information depends on “cumulative decisions made by individuals in social networks” to amplify the impact of a given message, i.e. on net outcome of discrete individual activities, rather than on a decision made by a limited number of authorized sources. Such communication environments have been with us all along, Standage, argues, from circulation of *acta diurna populi Romani* along correspondence networks which mixed

<sup>11</sup> Without developing a full argument, and leaving the dissident politics out of the picture, Komaromi uses the analogy of samizdat as social media to refer to the decentered, fragmentary anonymous and non-professional character of the unlicensed print culture. See “Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon,” 662-663. Cf. Section IV in *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond*, 221-314.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2000 Years* (New York: Bloomsbury: 2013), 3.



impersonal news with personal commentaries, through the viral spread of Luther's teachings thanks to invention of the printing press, to Enlightenment news sheets and pamphlets circulating through coffee houses of Europe and the Americas, to ham radio and finally the Internet.

There are various traits of the communication environment built on social media that persist over time. User-generated content and its nature is one. Historically, social media communication relied on non-professionals and even newspapers in its pre-mass media phase consisted of a selection of speeches and pamphlets, letters from readers, reports taken from other papers, all that accompanied by a commentary from the editor who normally would be also the owner and the publisher as in case of first newspapers in Europe and the US. Non-original content made the bulk of what circulated around, and rather than authorial creation, the very act of sharing and commenting on an item previously publicized by others was the prevalent form of self-expression.<sup>13</sup> Even though there were authors and works that went 'viral,' the impact of the social media on the public debate was due to its ability to "synchronize opinion," i.e. to reveal and to make suddenly visible and tangible the extent to which certain views or ideas were shared (as it happened, historically, with Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* in support of American independence), rather than to promote ground-breaking, original insights. That distributed decisions of individuals, rather a single source, determined the information flow along the social networks, does not make the communication process necessarily more democratic or egalitarian, Standage observes. As it usually happens in a network of distributed decision-making, some actors, by virtue of their skills, entrepreneurship or access to strategic resources, occupy nodal positions and wield

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<sup>13</sup> Standage, 123-146.

disproportionate influence on what messages are amplified. Beginning with Luther's printing-propelled religious upheaval, that has been the case with printers.<sup>14</sup>

Historically, many of the arguments that inform the canon of our thinking about press freedom were developed in support of the press in its pre-mass media period, such as John Milton's *Areopagitica* (a 1643 address to English parliament attacking the licensing system) Condorcet's endorsement of freedom of information in the *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Kind*, or American debates on the First Amendment. However, very early on – in particular with the excesses of the French Revolution – it became clear that this type of media environment was equally propitious for amplifying adversarial, often anonymous or unreliable views, or just trivia and gossip. Indeed, according to Standage, what supports his hypothesis about the *longue durée* of the social media is the *longue durée* of certain critical topoi about distraction from useful occupations and confusion of societal values that social media seem to bring along.<sup>15</sup> The same applies to the fear that a social media environment makes surveillance and tracking of dissident opinion easier (in today's China as in case of pre-revolutionary France described by Robert Darton),<sup>16</sup> and propaganda manipulation more covert.

## THE GREY ARMY: VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

There are various features of the underground print culture that warrant considering samizdat as a chapter in the social media's *longue durée*. The basic ethnography presented below intends to these bring forth these features, building on Standage's

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<sup>14</sup> Standage, 48-63.

<sup>15</sup> Standage 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Darton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

insights. Breaking with the chronological order of the overall argument, I will focus on its most developed form that took shape in the years following the imposition of the Martial Law. In its most developed form, the dissident press culture constituted a networked media environment, e.g. complex social assemblage needed to sustain horizontal communication free from state interference, composed of people, devices and meanings that together shaped the flow of information.<sup>17</sup> While ideas will be in focus of most of the following chapters, this one is devoted to people and things primarily.

The most visible elements of the networks, its nodal points were the journals and the “firms” – the independent publishing houses. Since most the editorial boards and the authors were anonymous throughout most of the 1980s, the reading public identified the underground print culture with the newspapers *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, *Wola*, *KOS*, *Solidarność Walcząca*, *Z dnia na dzień*, journals such as *Krytyka*, *Kultura Niezależna*, *Arka*, or *Vacat*, and the logos of publishers such as NOWA, CDN, Krąg or Oficyna Literacka. However, the visible and tangible outlets depended on the vast invisible – clandestine – circuits of distribution and on the untiring labour of printers and their presses. The biggest publishers produced and disseminated both books and some of the newspapers and journals, while other periodicals were self-sufficient in that regard, in particular titles with smaller print runs, but also some of the most widely circulated newspapers such as *KOS*. It is noteworthy to observe from the start, that publishing “firms” were useful abstractions. The networks of distribution and clandestine printing teams thrived thanks to the need to regularly produce many

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<sup>17</sup> In the analytical sense, my use of the term “network” is heavily indebted to Bruno Latour, especially when it comes to importance of non-human agency, the assumption of a relational ontology of social life, and the analytical requirement to unpack the “black boxes” of actors and to reveal the assemblages which sustain them.

thousand copies of the major newspapers, but they were independent in the organizational sense (printers and distributors worked for several underground companies) and more ideologically ecumenical. While editors and some of the publishers were more serious about ideologies, print and distribution technicians were more indiscriminate – sustaining the unlicensed flow of ideas was the value that came on top.<sup>18</sup>

Around 1986 the editors of the underground publishing house Kąg estimated that circa 1500-2000 people were involved in the publishing process thus far: around a hundred editors, proofreaders, types and designers; four hundred printers, binders, and carriers, and at least a thousand distributors.<sup>19</sup> And it is to all these silent actors that we will now turn.

Printing was at the same time the most clandestine, most dangerous and most undeserving part of the process. But also one of the few regularly paid occupations. A good printer needed to be a “careful man of action”<sup>20</sup> (it was one of the exclusively male occupations), able to disappear for how many days it took to print a run of a journal issue or a book in often hardly bearable conditions, such as unheated houses under construction, stuffy cellars, or attics, sultry hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter, or at his own risk, behind a wardrobe in his own apartment.<sup>21</sup> And the risk was considerable, since in the event of a swoop, a printer was always arrested together with the *corpus delicti*.<sup>22</sup> A good printer needed to know his craft, but should not be too

<sup>18</sup> Mielczarek, *Śpiący Rycerze*, 56-57. Only 7 per cent of distributors interviewed by Mielczarek worked exclusively for one company.

<sup>19</sup> “Trwale wartości kultury: rozmowa z przedstawicielami wydawnictwa Kąg” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> “Niezależni: Drukarz,” *KOS* no. 57, June 1984. „Z szefem drukarzy MKK” *Wola* 200, 27.10.1986.

<sup>21</sup> “Tylko Fizyczny. Rozmowa z drukarzem Terenowego Komitetu Oporu Solidarności,” in *Struktury nadziei*, 150-154

<sup>22</sup> About the printers’ craft, see: “Sprawa dokładności i doświadczenia: wywiad z drukarzem Tygodnika Mazowsze,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 162, 13.03.1986.

popular, otherwise the traffic generated by his service could cost the whole enterprise dearly. Being a printer demanded skills, persistence and a lot of nerve.<sup>23</sup>

The distributors (*kolporterzy*), the “the grey army”<sup>24</sup> of dedicated, anonymous people thanks to whom the press and the publications would reach the readership, composed the vast circulatory system of the underground press culture: the outgoing flow of “free word,” but also the incoming flow of money from the readership, from the membership dues of the underground structures and groups, and from voluntary donations, private messages and communication between organizations, as well as the flow of raw information to be later transformed into news items. The big publishers and newspapers sustained a network of permanent collaborators and made space for the smaller initiatives, even though in many cases a publication was not intended to have a larger scope than a factory, a workplace or a neighborhood and relied mostly on informal ties. Some distributors, rather than committing to one of the networks, traded with a variety of different titles, depending on the tastes of their audience.

To enable printers to produce and distributors to disseminate, paper and ink had to be organized, stencils prepared for duplication, both blank and printed pages needed storage, books had to be bound somewhere, and editorial and proof-reading work done. Most of the time, that was the responsibility of the editors and publishers, and for those with an overground publishing experience this complicated logistics made the real difference. The leaders of the publishing initiatives of considerable scope not only had to coordinate the entire workflow, but also, for security reasons, make sure that they are the only ones who knew the entire web of connections. Aptly, in addition to *spotkaniówki* (meeting places) and *skrzynki* (storage places), there were *śluzy* (lit. lock

<sup>23</sup> “Trwałe wartości kultury,” 0-29.

<sup>24</sup> “Rozmowa z kolporterem,” *Z dnia na dzień* 399, 9-19.03.1986.

chambers), whose sole purpose was, paradoxically, to interrupt direct contact between people executing various phases of the publishing process (e.g. between acquiring rams of paper and moving it to the print shop) in order to make the entire network more robust and accident-proof. By the same token, housing provided for meetings, printing and storage (as well as safe places for the activists who went into hiding) needed to be changed every couple of weeks, and thus, while printers and distributors were more or less regular collaborators, the networks of underground print culture involved individuals who performed their roles more episodically.

Underground print culture was a network of networks, its strength derived from the ability to tap into other webs of associations whose natural purpose was not conspiratorial. Without help of railways employees there would probably be no underground newspapers national in scope (and in the first days of the Martial Law, when the telephone network was inactive, news would not have spread that quickly).<sup>25</sup> The Warsaw-based journal *Wola* relied for many of its operations on the services of the clandestinely unionized taxi drivers which were active in the Interenterprise Coordinating Committee (Międzyzakładowy Komitet Koordynacyjny, MKK) that published the journal.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps more curiously, in the first weeks of the Martial Law, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* gathered information about the repressions and protests thanks to a group of...astronomers, whose professional association was very well communicated.<sup>27</sup> A special place in this network of networks was reserved for charity associations affiliated to catholic churches, which was were much of the smuggled

<sup>25</sup> Olaszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 151.

<sup>26</sup> Olaszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 251. On MKK see Paweł Sowiński, “‘Wola’ czyli wolność: Międzyzakładowy Komitet Koordynacyjny NSZZ ‘Solidarność,’ tygodnik, Grupa Polityczna” in *Solidarność podziemna 1981-1989*, 531-547; Krystyna Zalewska, *Będzie strajk* (Warszawa: Tres Piedras, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Andrzej Friszke, “Regionalny Komitet Wykonawczy Mazowsze. Powstanie, struktura działalności (1981-1986)” in *Solidarność podziemna 1981-1989*, 443-444.

equipment and printing materials, that came together with convoys of humanitarian aid from abroad, was shipped.

Last but not least, the secret police was the actor that contributed decisively to giving the underground print culture its networky shape. That impact was sometimes very tangible, as in case of raids, which, in addition to direct persecution of those captured, were heavily mediatized events serving to represent the activists of the underground print culture as terrorists and criminals (in Białystok it was once reported that during a raid on a clandestine printshop, in addition to copies of the local Solidarity newsletter and printing materials, the officers found “moonshine, two flame throwers, a gas mask and two poached deer”).<sup>28</sup> Secret police operated also through infiltration of the underground networks, both to uncover the underground structures, with notable success e.g. in case of the Interfactory Workers’ Committee of Solidarity (Międzyzakładowy Robotniczy Komitet “Solidarność”, MRKS),<sup>29</sup> but also to influence the shape of the publishing underground, as in case of three of the biggest underground publishing houses, Myśl and Rytm from Warsaw, and Oficyna Literacka from Kraków, whose leaders resulted to be secret police collaborators. Being a recognized publisher meant access to confidential information and funds, which in turn allowed to intercept equipment and print runs. Notably that strategy of containment implied a tacit recognition that roll-back or outright eradication of dissident print culture was impossible.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> “Wykrycie nielegalnej drukarni w Białymstoku,” *Gazeta współczesna*, December 13, 1983.

<sup>29</sup> Bartosz Kaliski, “Meandry radykalizmu. Międzyzakładowy Robotniczy Komitet Solidarności” in *Solidarność podziemna 1981-1989*, 489-530.

<sup>30</sup> Cecylia Kuta, “Niezależny ruch wydawniczy 1980-1989” in *NSZZ Solidarność 1980-1989*, 301-313; Olszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 286-289.

But perhaps the greatest impact of the secret police were not its operations per se, but their panoptical halo, whose reverse manifestation was the omnipresent idea of security measures or the conspiratorial BHP (the acronym standing for the occupational safety and health procedures in workplaces). As we shall see next, it were the different BHP measures devised by the activists publishing movement that made the networky organization of their activities indispensable.

## A DIY CULTURE

It was not only the grey army, the careful men of action, and the police that made the flow of free word viable. Things are as much heroes of this story, things that volunteered to be drafted by the underground media activists for their emancipatory designs, sometimes in surprising ways.

Looking back from the Internet era, we tend to underestimate the importance of accessibility of means of communication for social media. The many ways we can communicate with the world today makes opaque that horizontal communication requires technologies which are at hand's reach. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, both East and West, media ownership was concentrated and the few means of communication at average person's disposal were either very local – such as community radios and newspapers – or tightly surveilled, as in case of the ham radio (two-way, amateur wireless communication over the radio waves).<sup>31</sup> Under socialism, state apparatus of cultural surveillance operated not only through censorship of creative works and press contents, but remarkably also through regulating access to communication infrastructures. That included state ownership of the printing presses and publishing

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<sup>31</sup> Kristen Haring, *Ham Radio's Technical Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007).



companies, licensing and control exercised through social organizations, and tight regulations on ownership of typewriters and duplicating machines. But there were also constraints of economic nature. One of the prime expression of the imbalances of the socialist economy in the People's Republic of Poland was the permanent publishing crisis, which primarily was the result of the underdevelopment of paper industry,<sup>32</sup> but also shortage of other products such as ink or spare parts for printing equipment. The “paper apocalypse” triggered a black market for paper, practices of informal circulation of publishing goods, but also, importantly, a do-it-yourself (DIY) culture of tinkering and hacking.

From this perspective the invention of the *ramka* technique mentioned above was crucial. *Ramka* adapted screen printing from graphic art for the purposes of publishing. Canvas coated with a photo-active emulsion and exposed to diapositive slide served as a stencil. Underneath the *ramka* the printer would put a blank page, pass the hand roller with ink and remove the printed copy. Attaching a rubber band between the *ramka* and an object on the ceiling would make it rebound and speeded up the process. This way of duplicating had many, more or less primitive variants. E.g. everything thick enough and elastic enough to get the text punched through a typewriter would do as stencil. Then ink would go underneath it, and clean paper on top. What mattered, was that the stencil and the ink, and everything else needed for duplication, could be assembled from available materials. There were various recipes for preparing ink, the most popular one employing a detergent called *Komfort* used to cleansing hands from industrial type of dirt. There was a real alchemy to it and not by coincidence the doyens of underground print culture, Mirosław Chojecki and Witold Łuczywo (who

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<sup>32</sup> About the crisis of paper industry in Poland, see Maciej Szymczyk, *Polski przemysł papierniczy 1945-1989* (Duszniki Zdrój: Muzeum Papiernictwa w Dusznikach Zdroju, 2007).

perfected the Komfort recipe) were both chemists. But for more incidental purposes really anything would do, including chocolate pudding squeezed through tin-foil.<sup>33</sup>

The invention of the *ramka* was of paramount strategic importance. Security measures came first. *Ramka* allowed to increase the print runs tenfold with respect to the samizdat proper, i.e. carbon-copy duplication through a typewriter, but at the same time the process was safer than using more advanced duplication equipment, mimeos and offset printers, which were both noisier and more smelly, and thus required additional security measures. In densely populated areas, according to some estimates, printing more than ten thousand copies was unlikely to go unnoticed (and the *skrzynki* were safest when not storing more than one thousand copies). *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, the most widely read underground newspaper, whose print run ranged between five and eighty thousand copies (thirty thousand on average) was able to overcome this BHP problem by distributing various copies of stencils and diapositive slides of an issue between many printing teams. This distributed system was designed by Witold Łuczywo.<sup>34</sup>

A bigger amount of printed matter could be produced in a properly isolated place for printing, a cellar in an abandoned house or a dacha in the woods. But the more distant the place, the more vulnerable the entire process. Twenty books up to ten thousand copies made 1250 reams of paper, i.e. around two tones or two full lorries.<sup>35</sup> Around 1987, NOWA was using around 6 tons of paper monthly.<sup>36</sup> Paper was acquired on the black market and once you found yourself transporting all that contraband, you

<sup>33</sup> Justyna Błażejowska, “‘Chciałem mieć w ręku broń’ – zadrukowane kartki papieru. Pisma pozacenzuralne 1980-1989/1990” in *NSZZ Solidarność 1980-1989*, 242.

<sup>34</sup> Olszák, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 227.

<sup>35</sup> “Trwałe wartości kultury...”

<sup>36</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 56.

preferred to spend as little time moving it around as possible (that is why *śluzy* were important).<sup>37</sup>

Usability mattered. In case of *ramka*, there was not much to break. The offset printer was the most efficient, but also the noisiest and the most defective. Offset printers employed in the underground were for office use, not for industrial purposes: to print out a single page memo once a week in ten thousand copies, not thirty thousand copies of an eight-pages newsletter. Also the places where the machines were at work did not resemble office conditions. Most of the replacement parts could not be bought, and not all of them could be hacked. A new offset was an equivalent of a Renault 5 car, and as for the used ones, since they came smuggled in parts, you often had to piece together one functioning out of three that had arrived, and manuals were often not included, or written in Swedish (the biggest channel of printing contraband went through Sweden).<sup>38</sup> 97 per cent of products of Polish paper industry did not meet the industry standards, so in case of advanced duplicators using automated feeders, you had to make sure that your source of paper trades with evenly cut merchandise which would not jam your presses. All in all, operating more sophisticated equipment required considerable know-how, and underground publishing experts at home cautioned their contraband experts abroad against sending advanced technologies, since these might result to be a deterrent on publishing activities, if put in the hands of amateurs.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps more importantly still, *ramka*, as a DIY technique, was decisive for the publishing underground's resilience capacity. In case of a police raid, those publishing initiatives which relied on the *ramka*, could restart the operations as soon as the

<sup>37</sup> About problems with ink and paper, see: "Sprawa dokładności i doświadczenia...".

<sup>38</sup> About different printing techniques and their underground usage, see: "Sprawa dokładności i doświadczenia..", "Trwałe wartości kultury."

<sup>39</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 112-113.

circumstances of a raid were clarified, and security assured. Those which relied on more advanced techniques could be paralyzed for months. That was the case with offset printers, whose provision depended the vagaries of incoming shipments from abroad and whose distribution was tightly managed by a small number of veteran representatives of the underground publishing movement and Solidarity underground leaders, who organized the trans-border flow of publishing equipment and materials.<sup>40</sup> But it was also the case of those publishers that used *dojścia*, or contacts.<sup>41</sup> These were most of the time not the central, state-run print works, but rather small institutions and enterprises which had disposed of some internal printing capacity. Printing on *dojścia* was not exclusive for dissidents, but rather an extensive part of the grey economy, whose services were mostly used for profit, rather than politics. Publications printed on *dojścia* had big print runs and quality which was far superior to the *ramka*, the simple duplicators, or even offset presses.<sup>42</sup>

## A SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONEMENT

People, things and ideas worked together to produce a networked communication environment which had further various other characteristics which Standage associates with social media as a historical phenomenon. The reliance on the “cumulative effect of individual decisions” to amplify a given message was underground print culture’s basic and constitutive feature. “Its driving force – Adam Mielczarek observes – was the rebellious energy of rank-and-file activists searching for opportunities of political

<sup>40</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 105-112.

<sup>41</sup> “Nowa czy Stara? Rozmowa z szefem Niezależnej Oficyny Wydawniczej” in *Struktury nadziei*, 167; Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 69-70.

<sup>42</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 174-182.

engagement. Each of them, at every level of the organizational structure, was managing the investment of their energies and balancing satisfaction against the risks involved.”<sup>43</sup>

Rather than transmission belts, the underground journals were webs of mutual dependence, first of all due to the limited circulation an individual outlet could achieve. Fifty thousand copies of a single issue were estimated to be the limit of technical and organizational capacities of a publishing initiative and the average for the largest newspapers was around twenty to thirty thousand. Even the print run of *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, which in key moments achieved the record 80 thousand copies, was in itself too small to give proper circulation to the statements of the Solidarity leaders that were published there first, and had to rely on smaller newsletters and bulletins to amplify it, and on the readers who were encouraged to pass it on (its further amplification by Radio Free Europe is a separate issue). At the same time, the bulk of news from the underground appearing in that newspaper derived from monitoring of the underground factory bulletins and other unlicensed publications.

Perhaps equally notably, as we will learn in detail further on, not only the editors had the influence on what and how far news travels. Printers corrected not only typos, but actually sometimes edited news contents, or even refused to print controversial content. The journals that relied on factory networks for distribution had to count with the disgust of the workers with the political manifestos detached from reality and distributors would organize themselves into associations in order to lobby for a given shape of the communication sphere. Equally illustrative was the sense of surprise of the

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<sup>43</sup> Mielczarek, *Drugi obieg wydawniczy*, 73.

editors of *Tygodnik Wojenny* when they found out that their journal had mutations in several smaller localities they never heard of.<sup>44</sup>

Political thinkers Jakub Karpiński, Czesław Bielecki or Adam Michnik, historians Jan Józef Lipski or Krystyna Kersten, poet Stanisław Barańczak and Wiktor Woroszyński, writers Tadeusz Konwicki or Marian Brandys, were underground print culture's own eminent authors, but works comparable in significance to a *Gulag Archipelago* are not part of that legacy. In comparison with its quantitative output, underground print culture produced surprisingly little in terms of original works of lasting importance, or perhaps these just drowned in the sea of the printed matter and wait to be discovered. If judged by the number of reprints, it was the contemporary émigré authors (Miłosz, Kołakowski, Gombrowicz) and the international classics of anti-totalitarianism (Solzhenitsyn, Orwell) that circulated most widely.<sup>45</sup> One sixth of the entire corpus of non-periodical works are translations, bulk of it Czechoslovak and Russian dissident authors. Singular virality was achieved by the sensational interview with Ryszard Kukliński, high-ranking military defector and CIA secret agent, who revealed to the Paris *Kultura* the details of the preparation of the Martial Law. The interview was reprinted as a separate publication 26 times in 1987.<sup>46</sup> More generally, as Jan Olszek observed, the underground print culture was not self-sufficient and often relied on reproduction of émigré contents (not to mention that it coexisted with the so called tamizdat publications, printed abroad and smuggled behind the Iron Curtain) and depended on Radio Free Europe for amplification of its messages.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Błażej Brzostek, "Tygodnik wojenny" in *Solidarność podziemna 1981-1989*, 629.

<sup>45</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 98.

<sup>46</sup> Natalia Jarska, Jan Olszek, "Co czytała opozycja? Książki drugiego obiegu jako wyraz tożsamości politycznej, ideowej i kulturowej opozycji w PRL (1976-1989)" in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 159.

<sup>47</sup> Olszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 26.

More than half of the total periodical production of the underground print culture (circa 1800 out of 3000) was ephemeral, meaning 2-3 issues published in less than two years. Deploring its non-professional character, repetitive and predictable themes, as well as the low quality of editorial work and journalism, was a constant theme of unlicensed essays. One author would mock the content of a typical first issue as follows: “a commentary about elections to the *Sejm* (slightly outdated), the editorial titled ‘New Publication,’ a reprint from another samizdat journal (why not Kołakowski), translation of a fragment of some famous work (Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* will do, however intensely abbreviated – the translator omitted the parts he did not understand). In addition, of course, a couple of poems, a short story and some reviews signed (just for laughs) with different pseudonyms. The publication ceases to exist after third issue, but one cannot exclude that it will resurrect under a different title.”<sup>48</sup>

The predilection for trivia was another important target of criticism. This manifested mostly in all kinds of occasional prints, from underground postage stamps, holiday postcards and calendars to fake banknotes with the images of Jaruzelski or Bujak. But it also materialized in satirical cartoons that illustrated many press issues, including the famous case of the bear resembling Leonid Brezhnev, which would achieve national notoriety in the last months of 1981 due to the persecution of its publisher.

But if quality and originality of perhaps most of the underground journals was low, we also need to recognize that their undeniable value was to sustain horizontal communication on a massive scale (according to some surveys, around 10 per cent of the adult population of Poland had regular contact with products of unlicensed

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<sup>48</sup> Błażejowska, “Chciałem mieć w ręku broń,” 229.

publishing and 20 per cent read it irregularly).<sup>49</sup> In this sense, they resembled more blogs or social media accounts of today, than contemporary newspapers. “I think that reading political texts in itself was not fundamental.” – the writer and editor Maciej Zalewski would later recall, not without pride. “The newspaper was the material evidence that the world was not as homogenous as it seemed. We wrote news from factories. We collected information. For this, what you needed was [communication] structure, not inspiration.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, if it wasn’t for the circulation of not so original content on regular basis, the few important messages (say, programmatic statements of Solidarity leadership or John Paul II speeches) would find themselves without a network to circulate. The existence of regularly published newspaper and bulletins, whatever their quality, is what enabled circulation of irregular or non-periodical publications.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS A HISTORICAL REALITY

Writing this introductory ethnography of dissident print culture, I wanted to remain on the illustrative level, however avoiding the flight into the anecdotal, which is a constant danger given such charming subject matter. My aim was to capture those features that warrant the application of the concept of “social media” to that historical reality, again “social media” standing for a networked and horizontal communication environment based on accessible means, as a historical media model with both historical precedents and antecedents, rather than just an analogue predecessor of Facebook and Twitter. More importantly, in this work I am not interested in samizdat social media history per se. The dissident print culture was both a web of people, practices and things, and a web of meanings, and the following chapters will be concerned with the social imaginary of

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<sup>49</sup> Mielczarek, “Drugi obieg wydawniczy,” 71.

<sup>50</sup> Zalewska, 106.



the dissident social media activism, e.g. the political meanings independent journalists, publishers, editors, printers and distributors ascribed to the practice of unlicensed publishing. That social imaginary grows out of the common root of the dissident political thinking and the next chapter will revisit the moment of its genesis.

## CHAPTER TWO |

### *THE FATE OF FREE WORD DEPENDS ON OURSELVES:*

#### THE ORIGINS OF DISSIDENT SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

Until recently dissent seemed to belong to a closed chapter of history. That resulted to be a quite refreshing perspective for samizdat studies. Underground print cultures which flourished in Poland and various other countries of the Soviet Bloc used to be examined in their Cold War context primarily as an instrument of dissident politics of speaking truth to a (post-)totalitarian power, both a political act of breaking the communication monopoly of a socialist regime and a source of reliable and undistorted facts about current affairs East of the of Iron Curtain. The first decade of the second millennium seemed to be the appropriate moment to lighten the burden of the Cold War context, and the second wave of samizdat studies, animated especially by the breakthrough writings of Ann Komaromi, made exciting inroads into book history, examining of the materiality of samizdat print and its qualities as a medium, as well as transnational history, exploring the networks of circulation of unlicensed prints and how they were overcoming the borders of the Cold War geography. In the effort to sever the relationship between political opposition and dissident print culture, eponymous for the first wave of samizdat studies, Komaromi repeated, albeit in reverse, the revisionist gesture of Sheila Fitzpatrick and the cohort of the social historians of the Soviet Revolution and Stalinism, who claimed the liberty to study cultural history of the Soviet Union with politics left out. In particular, the dissident rhetoric of truth-telling, Komaromi observed, was difficult to reconcile with ephemeral nature of the samizdat medium, as long as we consider textual and authorial fixity and stability as a

precondition of a truthful evidence. Due to its ephemerality, which manifested the precarious condition of its production, samizdat was a surprisingly weak carrier of strong truth claims and if that condition was not patent in the dissident times, it was because of a network of intermediaries, including documentation centers in the West and oppositionists with authority to discriminate reliable from not reliable knowledge circulating anonymously and in many parallel versions.

The second decade of our millennium saw a remarkable return of dissident rhetoric. The current roll-back of the achievements of the post-communist transitions in Poland and Hungary was preceded by the narratives of unfinished revolutions of 1989 presented by the conservative challengers to the liberal consensus with an anti-communist pedigree,<sup>1</sup> and after their trump, opposed by the liberal camp with which many of the former oppositionists tied their fortunes, through articulations of resistance against curtailment of civic freedoms in the similar dissident key. To consider samizdat as a lesson on tyranny to be learned by heart seems more visceral today than it was yesterday, and yet to revert to Cold War optics will not afford us any lessons beyond what we already know. Historian's business, as Claude Lefort said, should be with complications.<sup>2</sup>

Taking off with the work in complications, this chapter proposes to explore how dissident print culture becomes a politics in a double sense. First, as what Lefort would call a "political form," i.e. a substantial way in which dissent as such was made intelligible (*mise-en-sens*) and staged (*mise-en-scène*)<sup>3</sup> or represented in both material

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<sup>1</sup> James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven, Conn., London: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Claude Lefort, *Complications: Communism and the Dilemmas of Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1988), 9-20.

and visual way. If samizdat matters politically, it is because, far from being just a set of media institutions operating under specific adverse conditions, it presents itself as a privileged site where Vaclav Havel's imperative of 'living in truth' was realized on the ground.<sup>4</sup> The divorce between dissident politics and samizdat postulated by the second wave of samizdat studies does not sufficiently acknowledge that in its original intention, Havel's imperative was as much about 'living' as it was about the 'truth' itself. It was about the virtue of standing up for what one believes, and the political community established by such act, rather than a pastoral presumption of moral integrity. 'Living in truth' meant living in a democratic way. Democracy, understood as a political community based on deliberation, publicity and legalism was central to political vision of Havel and other Central European dissidents of the 1970s. A significant variant of that vision was, as we shall see, the prefigurative philosophy of political action, a politics that vowed to embody the political principles it stood by in everyday action, in order to prefigure, or perform, a political community governed by these principles. If samizdat matters politically, it is precisely because it was the principal avenue of dissident prefigurative politics, and samizdat media activism was one of important ways of acting on the ground upon its principles. Second, even though unlicensed *media activism* developed a social imaginary which grew out of prefigurative philosophy of political action, it is not reducible too *oppositional activism*. What I want to examine is how it articulated social media practices *as* politics, how it ascribed political meanings to communication networks based on user involvement and accessible technologies,

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<sup>4</sup> Havel's "Power of the powerless" was as much a part of the dissident canon in Poland, as it was in Czechoslovakia, which warrants the reference in an argument which is mostly about the Polish context. About the canonical character.

and how it made that networks the object and goal of political activity, establishing an autonomy with regards to other oppositional initiatives.

The process of how the dissident political thinking was translated into a social imaginary of dissident media activism, how, in other words, it played itself out in that specific setting, with repertoires of action and dilemmas of its own, last but not least, with the technical objects it related to, is the central subject matter of this chapter.

### ANTI-POLITICS OR PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS?

The abundance of scholarship on dissident political thought, including my own modest contributions, warrants only a summary, model-typical overview. The dissidents of the 1970s, claimed that not only they were fighting for democracy, but also that they were doing it in a democratic way, and that way, in variable configurations depending on an author, can be captured by three key-concepts: deliberation, publicity and legalism.<sup>5</sup> Dissident activists formed assemblies in which decision-making was consensual and deliberative and acted openly, under one's own name, making sure that action one undertakes falls within of the legal framework of people's democracy steaming from the constitution and the international agreements such as the Helsinki Final Act. Publicity was justified through both strategic and moral arguments. First, it was a matter of building trust vis-à-vis the “silent minority” whose support required an institution that commands authority to verify information, activities and public statements of the larger movement. At the same time, it was a moral example that dissident activity was a possible and non-eradicable phenomenon of post-Stalinism.

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<sup>5</sup> See Wciślik, “Totalitarianism,” 73-107.

Practicing publicity was meant to radiate over entire public life and, importantly for media activism, one of the important aims of the early dissident movement was to combat secrecy as means of exercising rule in socialist democracies, mainly by releasing accounts of infringements of human rights, which was the initial purpose of the KOR communiques and the subject matter of the activities of its Intervention Bureau, which culminated in preparing the report to the Madrid round of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in November 1980.<sup>6</sup> Another instance of practicing publicity was leaking insider information from the state, whose momentous instance was the publication of the *Black Book on Censorship*.<sup>7</sup>

KOR communiques were sometimes drafted and always ratified in deliberative assemblies (if it was impossible to arrange a gathering, drafts would follow various cycles of circulation before they were released as official documents). Even though the assemblies were not democratic in the procedural sense (there were no procedural rules of representation to of KOR “steering committee” that spoke for the movement consisting of hundreds of collaborators), they were deeply democratic in the deliberative sense that even within the narrower decision-making circle a plurality of worldviews had to be reconciled in order to produce a collective statement.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, legalism was based on the rejection of violence as well as the conviction that practicing democracy involves submitting oneself and inducing the state to adhere to the rule of law, as well as represented the biggest strategic shield against the government propaganda portraying the dissidents, much in the image of its own

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<sup>6</sup> *Violations of human rights in Poland: a report*, Komitet Helsiński w Polsce (New York: Committee in Support of Solidarity, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> *The Black Book of Polish Censorship*, ed. Jane Leftwich Curry (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR* (Warszawa: IPN, 2006), 145-147.

communist past, as a marginal group of political extremists destabilizing the state.<sup>9</sup> But legalism, importantly, was also a certain style of political action, in which demands that a movement puts forward are both informed by knowledge of legal regulations and targeted these regulations, thus a consequential choice of political arena.<sup>10</sup>

All this amounted to a style or a philosophy of public action known as ‘anti-politics,’ which became eponymous with dissent as such. Yet, there are important reasons why the concept of ‘prefigurative politics’ describes that style much better. First, ‘anti-politics’ carries a load of semantic negativity that fits only some of the variants of dissident understanding of the political. In its more liberal moments anti-politics was associated with the conviction that politics could not be other than a Machiavellian realm of instrumental reason and thus possibility of ethical life and associational autonomy was predicated upon the possibility of withdrawal of state from the life of individuals. Especially for György Konrád, with whom the notion originated as applied to dissent, anti-politics was eponymous with negative freedom (even the exercise of self-government was for him principally a means of self-defense).<sup>11</sup>

Anti-politics is much less useful as a notion for describing the transformative dimension of dissident political thinking. In its more optimistic and radical moments dissent was infused with belief that another politics was possible, one that allowed for harmonization personal and associational autonomy and for articulating a political vision in collective terms. Correspondingly, dissidents should be seen not only as individual master thinkers (intellectual history singularly contributed to imposing such a perspective), but also as institution makers. Dissent was not only individual names,

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<sup>9</sup> Lipski, *KOR*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> Michal Kopeček, “Dissident Legalism: Socialist Legality, Human Rights and the Birth of Legal Resistance in the 1970s Democratic Opposition in Czechoslovakia and Poland,” unpublished manuscript.

<sup>11</sup> György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987), 231.

but also civic initiatives and social movements. And the transformative effect that the dissidents wanted to arrive at by setting up these institutions was understood not only in instrumental terms, but also in prefigurative terms. The dissident movements would incorporate into groups, movements and committees around a particular cause, such as (most popularly) defense of human rights, labor rights, relief to the politically persecuted, independent education, or indeed publishing. But at the same time, the significance of these incorporations went beyond their strategic aim, for their organizational form was meant to both reflect and enable practice here and now of the political principles that sustained the vision of the desired polity of the future.

Jacek Kuroń, the doyen and one of the most important strategists of the democratic opposition in Poland, was at the same time a fervent advocate of prefigurative philosophy of political action. For Kuroń, the associational form that the dissident movement should take was not irrelevant for the kind of goals it set out to achieve.

If we take a social initiative against totalitarianism, we must be believing that the society can to an extent influence its own situation, i.e. to shape consciously its institutions. It is thus worth bearing in mind that the way we act will determine the product of our actions, the social order we want to create. The bigger the part of the society that consciously acts in concert to constrain totalitarianism, the greater the probability that we shall create a truly democratic order. In some circumstances broad social support for a small group of determined political activists is an option, however if the program of such [anti-totalitarian] movement is created exclusively by a small group of politicians in command, the social order constituted in effect will not be democratic.<sup>12</sup>

The structure of a democratic movement, meaning a movement that not only raises the banner of democracy, but also embodies a democratic social order, should be both massive and decentered enough to produce civic empowerment.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacek Kuroń, “Uwagi o strukturze ruchu demokratycznego” in *Opozycja. Pisma Polityczne 1969-1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2010), 99.



I call a social movement the collective action of great multitudes, in which every participant accomplishes his aims acting in a small, autonomous group. These small, autonomous groups become a social movement if they are brought together in a community by a shared general purpose...The common action of such multitude constitutes a social movement only if the small groups command autonomous initiative. They can subordinate to various committees or boards, but only when they see it fit, i.e. when they regard subordination as an effective mean to accomplish their goals. Therefore, the committee does not manage, only appeals, and orchestrates the action of the social movement through these appeals. In other words, the social movement, unlike the organization (a state, a company or an army), even if it forms a hierarchical structure, relies on bottom-up initiative in its activities.<sup>13</sup>

The democratic movement should be thus a mass movement of autonomous groups organized around concrete issues, rather than a unified political organization of the entire opposition. Not incidentally, that was an accurate description of KOR, which despite performing an elevated role in the overall oppositional landscape, a role sometimes resented, was far from espousing monopolistic tendencies. On the contrary, Jan Józef Lipski, the doyen as well as the first chronicler of the movement, affirmed that the guiding principle that KOR leadership endorsed was the “authentic autonomy principle” according to which “the long term goal of KOR is to animate in different domains and social circles a new initiative groups, independent of KOR. It is not that KOR consented to their independence, the point is that KOR postulated it.”<sup>14</sup>

Autonomous, or self-managed institutions were the cornerstone of Kuroń’s political thinking precisely because of that double, instrumental and prefigurative dimension. Kuroń defined them as organizations set up to achieve the kind of aims which satisfy individual needs but can only be pursued through collective action, in which the realm of goal-setting is not divorced from the realm of execution. It was that second criterion, the empowerment criterion which made prefigurative politics possible,

<sup>13</sup> Kuroń, “Myśli o programie działania,” 86-87.

<sup>14</sup> Lipski, *KOR*, 151.

and which distinguished autonomous institutions from traditional organizations build around clear hierarchy of command.

The essence of cooperatives, associations, clubs is not only to facilitate provision of goods, construct housing, protect monuments and offer daycare, but also for us to be self-governed, to autonomously create our lives. Anyone who cultivates a plot, tinkers, or writes a poem, an essay or a memoir in free time, or paints on Sundays – does it among other reasons in order to redeem in her life at least a fraction for autonomous creation. And that is a good no less valuable than housing, clothing or food. When we come together, in order to collectively organize provision, housing or daycare we achieve at least two goals at the same time: the one that corresponds to the direct purpose of our action, and the sense of autonomous creation.<sup>15</sup>

The example that Kuroń chooses to articulate the relationship between empowerment and the more general philosophy of political action is all the more meaningful since it describes activities that are in principle not political. That encapsulates the postulated transformative effect of prefigurative politics. Practicing the desired forms of civility here and now, in his view, should not only empower the participants of the movement, but also radiate throughout public life in ever larger circles. Dissent, practiced openly and publicly, was articulating political meaning of hidden forms of resistance, which according to Kuroń, were, given the totalitarian nature of the system, a mass phenomenon. As he wrote jokingly, „The very fact of existence in our social life a movement of political opposition, its repertoire of action, and to some extent, its membership, are well known to the rulers of PRL. I am afraid however, that many participants of this movement are not aware of the meaning of their actions, the scope, the impact, the possibilities of the movement, in which they participate.”<sup>16</sup> Hidden resistance becomes political opposition once people become aware of the political dimension of their activities. That means both that the hidden resistance pre-exists and

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<sup>15</sup> Kuroń, „Uwagi o strukturze,” 97.

<sup>16</sup> Kuroń, „Opozycja polityczna w Polsce,” 40.

creates conditions for expansion of dissent, and that dissent should take such organizational forms which reduce the distance between the openly political and the overtly non-political, so that the oppositional frame for non-oppositional activities becomes acceptable to those who remain under the radar of the state.

*Nota bene*, a strikingly similar idea can be found in Havel, who, notwithstanding his critique of the late-socialist political culture of complicity, immortalized in the figure of the greengrocer, nevertheless believed that the green grocer was, at the bottom of her heart, a member of dissident fifth column. In Havel's understanding, between the official and the private realm an extensive grey zone existed in which people were able to 'live in truth:' to resist manipulation and to take small steps (or do the Masarykian small-scale work) towards both self-fulfillment and positive impact on the public affairs. They could take active part in the independent life of the society, the parallel polis, whose many initiatives were less spectacular, but no less important, than the dissident public protest, but only as long as they remained below the radar.<sup>17</sup> This hidden sphere, remaining under the Party's radar, where "real political ferment" took place, was the main strategic resource of the opposition and the entire dissident activity made sense as long as it fed into it. Conversely, dissidents wanted to represent the society not in virtue of being the greengrocer's bad conscience, but in virtue of being a visible and vocal extension of what was hidden.

Thus, what will later be referred to as 'citizens' initiatives,' 'dissident movements' or even 'oppositions,' emerge, like the proverbial one-tenth of the iceberg visible above the water, from that area, from the independent life of society. In other words, just as the independent life of society develops out of living within the truth in the widest sense of the word, as the distinct, articulated expression of that life, so 'dissent' gradually emerges from the 'independent life of society.' Yet there is a marked difference: if the independent life of society,

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<sup>17</sup> Havel, "Power of the Powerless," 59-65. In fact, ambiguity of small-scale work and its limitations was a constant theme also of Kuroń's writings (organic work in Polish is the equivalent of the Czechoslovak term), see *ibidem*, 45-47.

externally at least, can be understood as a higher form of living within the truth, it is far less certain that ‘dissident movements’ are necessarily a higher form of the ‘independent life of society.’ They are simply one manifestation of it and though they may be the most visible and, at first glance, the most political (and most clearly articulated) expression of it, they are far from necessarily being the most mature or even the most important, not only in the general social sense but even in terms of direct political influence.<sup>18</sup>

Havel’s iceberg theory of political representation, as well as Kuroń’s reflections on hidden resistance aptly illustrate that, not quite anti-political moralists, the dissidents were quite interested in the transformative effect of their action on the silent – which does not mean passive – majority. And they considered their own activities as a stage on which any, not necessarily political, grassroots initiatives can be made intelligible as well as dramatized as a form of politics, furthering the cause of democracy through self-reliance. Cultivation of the desired form of civility here and now was hoped to radiate throughout public life in ever larger circles.

### SAMIZDAT AS PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Right from the start of the independent publishing in Poland, the prefigurative aim of establishing a community of dissent around practicing free speech was as important as the strategic aim of breaking state monopoly on information and circulation of culture. In fact in the early post-Stalinist Poland leaking news to Radio Free Europe in Munich or smuggling back in the *tamizdat* literature, was far more effective and safer, and the existence of unfettered flow of ideas across the Iron Curtain was often seen as the reason why independent-minded Poles didn’t follow in the footsteps of the Soviet dissidents. This was Kuroń’s own line of reasoning until as late as 1974 (he would add that the licensed public sphere in Poland accommodated considerably more critical thought than

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<sup>18</sup> Havel, “Power of the Powerless,” 65-66; a strikingly similar understanding of dissident spokespersonship is the main theme of Kuroń’s “Opozycja polityczna w Polsce,” 40-42.

Soviet samizdat as long as it circulated among experts).<sup>19</sup> But already in 1972, Józef Czapski of the Paris *Kultura*, the biggest producer of *tamizdat* literature and at the same time the biggest promoter of Soviet samizdat practices, insisted on the importance of the community dimension. “Somebody said that there is no need for samizdat in Poland as long as *Kultura* and its publishing series exists. We deem this position erroneous. *Kultura* wishes to become the support base for Polish domestic *samizdat*. Even the frugal *Chronicle of the Current Affairs*, not going beyond objective information about facts, but published systematically in the Soviet Union...creates valuable ties among ever larger circles of Soviet citizens.”<sup>20</sup>

And as Konstanty Gebert would recall much later, the community-building dimension was indeed the principal source of samizdat’s appeal. The act of passing along a typescript to be retyped and circulated further, making people invest their time, energy and nerve, was a way of shaping a social movement. In the early days of samizdat proper its political significance was not only in speaking truth to power. Through the very act of copying, the copyist was declaring his or her independence, not only spreading the free word but also, through the risk involved, taking responsibility for both the word and him or herself. Finally, through the act of copying, the copyist would enter a community of likely-minded autonomous persons. Free speech and autonomy at large were indivisible.<sup>21</sup>

*Biuletyn Infomacyjny*, one of the first Polish samizdat newspapers, which emerged from the KOR circles inspired by the *Chronicle of Current Affairs*, was first

<sup>19</sup> Kuroń, “Opozycja polityczna w Polsce,” 48.

<sup>20</sup> Józef Czapski, “Dwadzieścia pięć lat,” *Kultura* (Paris) 298-299 (1972): 8.

<sup>21</sup> “Drugi Obieg - rozmowa z Dawidem Warszawskim,” *Vacat* 46 (1989): 114-122.

released in September 1976 with the following statement of purpose which would be reproduced in the following issues:

The bulletin aims at breaking the state monopoly on information determined by the existence of censorship in our country. The news it includes serve publicity [jawność życia publicznego] and consist of a chronicle of repression aimed at both the citizens and the national culture. Dissemination of the newsletter is an act of defense of civic rights, an act of exercise of these rights. Read, copy and pass it on to others. Make instance of civic rights infringement public. Remember! Destroying the bulletin, you muzzle yourself and others!

That signature declaration – expressing endorsement of publicity as a principle of social order, giving meaning to publishing activities as an instance of defense of civic rights through its active exercise, and emphasizing the social character of its circulation, its dependence on decisions of individuals that came into contact with the newsletter – points out that in the early days, the dissident political thinking and the social imaginary of unlicensed media activism were largely coextensive. Importantly, it is also quite illustrative of the way in which the two were interconnected: the medium having the same order of importance as the message. To disclose misdeeds of the apparatuses of the state was instrumental, but the same it referred to the very fact of connecting individuals into a communication network build on informal ties, thus establishing a space for exercise of rights here and now, and a community of dissent to inhabit that place.

The idea that publishing activity is an important avenue of prefigurative politics, that it can be imagined as a sphere where civic rights can be not only preached but actually practiced, was acknowledged also by oppositionists who otherwise represented divergent political options. In the first issue of *Opinia*, the periodical of the rival Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights (Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela, ROPCiO), its editors declared that the journal was neither “samizdat or

underground,” meaning that it did not wish act in conspiracy, but rather openly exercise the civic rights guaranteed by the constitution and international human rights conventions. It also suggested that subordination to the Censor’s Office was not a legal obligation, but a choice conditioned by the existence of state monopoly on print, paper and distribution, a choice that licensed journalists failed to recognize as such, but a choice nevertheless. Opting for “typewriter publishing technique” instead of licensed circulation, made the exercise of the freedom of speech independent of censorship.

For some of the members of KOR, this democratic-civic aspect of the publishing activity was an absolute priority – even vis-à-vis the efficacy of the enterprise. At first, the prefigurative value was invested in the samizdat technique *sensu stricto*, i.e. in creating a network of typewriter copyists. As Jan Józef Lipski recalled, at the threshold of entering the age of the free word’s mechanical reproduction, there were serious doubts whether duplicators were allies of democracy.<sup>22</sup> It was feared that once the participatory element of individual commitment involved in typewriting a copy was taken away, also the communitarian aspect would vanish.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, another important caveat was about remaining on the right side of the law: 1965 Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski political trial featured charges incriminating the intended use of duplicators for disseminating the *Letter to the Party* (a samizdat publication in its own right), and similar charges concerning leaflets produced during the 1968 protests were brought against prosecuted students.<sup>24</sup> The same reservations were held by *Kultura*’s editor-in-chief Jerzy Giedroyc and Jan Nowak Jeziorański, the director of the Polish Section of RFE, when approached by a student of Lublin Catholic University, Piotr

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<sup>22</sup> Lipski, *KOR*, 198-202.

<sup>23</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Andrzej Friszke, “Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR i KSS KOR (1976-1980)” in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 231. “Nowa czy Stara? Rozmowa z szefem Niezależnej Oficyny Wydawniczej” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 166-175.

Jegliński who in 1974 received a scholarship and was living in Paris.<sup>25</sup> Jegliński, and his colleagues, Janusz Krupski and Bohdan Borusewicz, inspired by Władysław Bartoszewski's lectures on the underground press under Nazi occupation, decided to smuggle in a Roneo spirit duplicator nevertheless, without émigré assistance. In spring 1976 the Roneo was already in Lublin, but the group had to yet clarify how to employ it. Borusewicz, who came into contact with the KOR circles during the relief action for repressed Radom workers, offered the capacities to Jacek Kuroń, who at first declined. However, in the meantime the first duplicated issue of *U Progu* appeared in Autumn 1976, edited in the competing dissident circle of Benedykt Czuma, who was released from prison in 1974 having been sentenced for the intended arson of Lenin's Museum in Poronin together with other members of Ruch organization. At the end of 1976, Janusz Krupski contacted Antoni Macierewicz, who was the principal supporter of the duplicator technique inside KOR and who authorized printing of issue no. 5 of KOR's *Komunikat* in Lublin. *Biuletyn Informacyjny* would follow suit and duplicators, despite the reservations of senior KOR members, propagated fast in the oppositional milieu.<sup>26</sup> Their proliferation not only contributed to reconfiguring dissident legalism in Poland towards more assertive approach, probing the legal constraints through politics of *fait accompli*, but also constituted the first gesture of emancipation of the publishing movement with respect to the dissident movement, with epochal consequences.

The measure of this gesture might be found in comparison with the Czechoslovak unlicensed press, where for most of its history the samizdat technique prevailed, and that technological constraint on growth was due largely to constraining

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<sup>25</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Olszék, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 17-24; Jan Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych. Historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2012), 141-142.



interpretation of legalism by the leading Czechoslovak dissidents, who felt on the right side of the law claiming that as long as mass duplication is not involved, a text would remain a manuscript (which one could share without authorization) and not a publication (a potential *corpus delicti*). The skeptics in the KOR circles also translated the legal argument into an argument about technology, however on balance there was also the argument about the integrative character of samizdat proper, and in this case practice in Poland showed that printing and distributing larger amounts of machine-duplicated copies brings in more organizational skills and involves more people. That of course was not the rule, e.g. in Hungary the unlicensed press generally employed duplicating techniques (and produced books of highest quality in the region), but that was not correlated with emergence of a *publishing movement* as an autonomous and recognizable element of oppositional landscape.<sup>27</sup>

## A COLLECTIVE ORGANIZER IN SEARCH OF MEDIA MODEL

The recognition that press has a fundamental role in integrating a social movement does not in itself explain why the dissident print culture took the networked form of social media. “A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer” - everyone socialized into postwar political cultures of Eastern Bloc knew this line from Lenin’s *What is to be done*. Lenin’s argument was that in order to launch an All-Russia newspaper which would come out frequently and regularly in big print runs defying the Czarist police, one needs a strong revolutionary organization and at the same time, launching such a newspaper is a concrete task around which such organization could be built. But he meant a central party organ whose

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<sup>27</sup> Jan Olszek, “Drugi obieg wydawniczy w PRL i samizdat w innych państwach bloku sowieckiego: podobieństwa, różnice, wzajemne wpływy” in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 15-59.

growth would reflect the growth of the organization, one all-Russia newspaper, not one hundred small bulletins published by armchair revolutionaries – this is precisely the criticism that he was rebuking in *What is to be done*. Similarly, from reading *Bibula*, Józef Piłsudski's recollections about his tenure, at the turn of the 20th century, as the editor of the underground Polish Socialist Party's organ *Robotnik* (a source of knowledge about underground press which the dissidents were more eager to acknowledge as their inspiration) the young adepts of unlicensed publishing would bring home a similar idea: the press is not only propaganda, it is also crucial for building you organizational capacity. At the same time, in Piłsudski's writings, that the press had no autonomous value beyond the service it could render to the cause of the revolutionary movement; in itself it was neither a movement, nor a cause, and the allegiances of people who made the socialist underground press work were largely unequivocal.

So, the question is, why instead of a single or in any case a limited number of organs of dissident groups, what emerged was an underground print culture? Why something like “independent publishing movement” became recognized as an autonomous entity within the broader dissident milieu? Why publishing was given a political meaning not reducible to the service it could render to the dissident activists?

It was by no means a conscious decision. At first, the driving force was increasing pluralization of the dissident groups. ROPCiO, which emerged at the same time as KOR, started to publish *Opinia*. ROPCiO quickly disintegrated into various fractions, and around 1979 there were no less than 16 periodicals which grew out of its root. *Głos* was supposed to be the political opinion journal of KOR, yet before its first issue had been published, its editors led by Antoni Macierewicz, formed a fraction which combated what they perceived as hegemony of the post-revisionists. After that

split, the *Komunikat* for a time remained the common publication of the KOR movement, about content of which everyone had to agree, but at the same time *Robotnik* and later *Krytyka* began to voice the opinion of the dissident left. When ROPCiO launched *Gospodarz*, KOR decided they need to have a publication addressed to the farmers as well. Another factor of pluralization were the animosities between Warsaw-based groups and off-center circles. Thus, the literary journal *Puls* began to be published in Łódź to balance the influence upon the hearts and minds of independent-minded Poles of the (dissident, but still) literary establishment from the capital-based *Zapis*. In the launching of the journal *Bratniak* by the conservatives from the Young Poland Movement, which was based in Gdańsk and Łódź, these localized animosities were as pronounced as ideological differences. And so around one hundred press titles were published before August 1980.

Most of these groups wanted to have not only its own periodicals, but also printing capacities at free disposal, and before Solidarity's carnival at least 35 succeeded. Stencil and spirit duplicators were pride of each newly established printshop, because it allowed to expand that capacities greatly, but also because it defied more directly the existing regulations and thus brought the whole enterprise to a new level. These were either smuggled from abroad or "organized" unofficially at in cooperation with employees of state institutions. Despite the initial hesitation of Jacek Kuroń, Jan Józef Lipski, or Jerzy Giedroyc, for that matter, at the end of 1977 both KOR and *Kultura* established dedicated funds for development of unlicensed press.<sup>28</sup> Again, the *ramka* screen-printing technique, being more accessible and safer, probably contributed more, albeit more quietly to the growth of publishing initiatives. And then, contacts

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<sup>28</sup> Fałkowski, "Ruch społeczny," 85.

with copyshops in state institutions were also established very early on. The first non-samizdat (not retyped, but printed) issue of *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (no. 8, 1977) was produced on an offset printer by an apprentice at the Warsaw print technicians' school. In the same period, part of the print run of *Kompleks Polski* by Tadeusz Konwicki, Poland's first uncensored novel (published as the third, monograph issue of the literary journal *Zapis*) was printed with the offset machine in the copyshop used by a Baptist church in Wrocław.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, leaders of KOR, the largest of the democratic opposition groups, were actually in favor of a more centralized model and saw the proliferation of unlicensed titles as a weakness, a sign of imminent vulnerability of the movement, which the secret police would take advantage of, sowing divisions.<sup>30</sup> But at the same time, they were not able to oppose the centrifugal tendencies on strong grounds. First of all, proponents of centralization were easily disarmed by admonitions against internal "totalitarian leanings," which was one of the more abused tropes of the oppositional pamphleteering, used with special predilection towards people with revisionist past. But undoubtedly, against the background of the philosophy of action professed in KOR circles, the polyphony (cacophony) of a vibrant public sphere fitted the image of authentic life of civic disobedience much better than anything reminding a transmission belt.

For effective operations of the diverse institutions of the democratic movement – Kuroń explained – solidarity action of the entire movement and its supporters against state repression is necessary. Solidarity actions require that information is efficiently disseminated by a trusted source. KOR wants to perform that role. The problem is, however that when in an informal social movement some agency monopolizes information, it becomes a center of command insofar as disseminating information has a concrete effect on the movements activities.

<sup>29</sup> Olszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Fałkowski, *ibidem*, 83-84. Andrzej Friszke, *Czas KOR-u. Jacek Kuroń, a geneza Solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, 2011), 308.

This is why I am against information monopoly and in favor of diversity of publications, discussion clubs, nuclei of independent culture etc.<sup>31</sup>

After KOR, which had been set up as a relief action, transformed itself into an all-purpose and permanent Committee for Social Self-Defense (Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej, but keeping the acronym KOR), the representatives of *Biuletyn Informacyjny* and the newly founded *Robotnik* became its members. At the same time, the editors of the former resisted the efforts to substitute it by *Głos*, which initially was thought as the official organ of the movement, but never played that role due to personal rivalry between the editor of *Głos*, Antoni Macierewicz, and Adam Michnik. Even though *Biuletyn Informacyjny* and *Komunikat*, presenting authorized record of KOR would merge starting with issue no. 18 (March 1978), thus giving the former an organ-type features, still each was edited and signed by separate entities, KOR and the editors who claimed exclusive responsibility for the contents of the newspaper.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, the reverse scenario was feared more. That merger was controversial, not least for the *Głos* group who was slowly drifting away. *Komunikat*'s editor Anka Kowalska and Henryk Wujec argued that the merger blurred the identity of the movement, since the reading public treated *Biuletyn Informacyjny* as KOR's organ, whereas, unlike *Komunikat*, its contents were not collectively authorized. Finally, as Lipski recalled in 1981, what prevailed was the understanding that KOR's mission was to enable the initiatives that had originated within its milieu to reach self-sustainability and independence, and thus that instead of a single organ of the movement, there should exist a number of KOR-affiliated journals with independent editors (in addition to *Robotnik* and *Głos*, *Krytyka* would join the fray in 1978).<sup>33</sup> Certainly, such pluralist media model chosen by the

<sup>31</sup> Kuroń, "Uwagi o strukturze," 101.

<sup>32</sup> Friszke, "Biuletyn Informacyjny," 241.

<sup>33</sup> *Niepokorni. Rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski (Kraków: Znak, 2008), 103-104.

biggest oppositional milieu had consequences for shaping the dissident print culture as a whole.

If the competition between the emerging dissident groups, enabled by the accessibility of means of communication, as well as boldness in its employment, was the driving force behind the proliferation of unlicensed publications, the sort of public sphere these established was something more than a plurality of small transmission belts for dissident political groupings fighting for hegemony. If it is true that it was an arena for political polemics which had an instrumental role in shaping the political identities of these groups (the witty and sharp *feuilletons* by Jan Walc, Piotr Wierzbicki or Stanisław Barańczak were true gems of speaking truth to power), that spectacular manifestations of underground print culture's early history cast a shadow larger than life. Ordinary existence of the unlicensed press was much more about the persistence in sustaining a steady flow of unlicensed news, and much of that happened through repetition of statements and accounts, with or without commentary, rather than original and sensational reporting. *Biuletyn Informacyjny* was a model newsletter in this regard and a nodal institution of the underground press culture. Run by KOR, in addition to publishing its own *Komunikat*, it would include the "chronicle of repression" which was not limited to KOR's own activities, but equally often amplified news about other oppositional groups and summaries of their publishing initiatives, as well as information about other dissident movements around the Bloc. Reporting about public statements of important figures and summarizing international press items that were omitted from the official circulation was another form of media activism in which sustaining the flow of unlicensed news was more important than authorial creativity. Seweryn Blumsztajn, one of the editors of *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, would later recall that in the early stage his task consisted mostly in abridging the accounts that found its way to Jacek Kuroń's desk

(Kuroń's home was another node in the network of dissident media, as among the oppositionists that decided to operate publicly his name, telephone number and address were the most known, and many dissident activists would memorize it in case of arrest). From that point of view the dissident print culture taken together was a *sui generis* human rights archive, whose mode of preservation was dissemination of the copy rather than conservation of the original, and that archive of the copy required a vast, and densely connected communication network, in order to achieve its purpose of amplifying the chronicle of repression despite vulnerability of particular nodes. Such resilience would not be achieved if the independent public sphere consisted of a small number of competing transmission belts whose dissemination channel was limited to supporters of a given group. That testimonial-archival function of the dissident press culture could be only put in practice through a social media type of horizontal communication, and the practice of sharing each other trials and tribulations was a significant momentum of its growth.

The publication of KOR's *Robotnik*, edited by Helena Łuczywo and Ludwika Wujec, added another innovation. *Robotnik* (the Worker) grew out of the human misery and social atomization that KOR activists saw in Radom during the relief action in the aftermath of the 1976 protests: poverty was everywhere, yet bringing relief was made difficult by the fact that people approached with assistance were ignorant about other people in need. It was that reality, more than the political myth of the proletariat (or the legend of the eponymous publication of the Polish Socialist Party, described in Piłsudski's *Bibula*), and the conviction that something can be done about it that determined the character of the fortnightly.<sup>34</sup> The factory self-management was a left-

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<sup>34</sup> *Niepokorni*, 384.

wing tradition especially cherished among those KOR activists who were close to Jacek Kuroń. Kuroń went to jail for the first time for preaching that very idea together with Karol Modzelewski, in their famous *Letter to the Party*. But the same Radom experience has shown that preaching self-management to atomized working poor simply would not work. The worker elites, let alone worker traditions of self-organization seemed to be in extinction.<sup>35</sup> Before any ideas of workers' self-organization could be preached (the independent trade unions and the Workers Rights' Charter would slowly make its way to occupy a prominent place in *Robotnik's* columns after a year from releasing the first issue in September 1977), a communication space had to exist that would serve to rebuild the social ties and make the isolated experiences of exploitation common. And that space had to be appropriated through active involvement. *Robotnik* relied on its audience, consisting mostly of employees of large industrial facilities, for distribution and collection of information, whose plain language had to be carefully edited not to estrange the intended reader. That space was something considerably more difficult to achieve than in case of intelligentsia, the constituency of most of the dissident press, who might have been uneasy about open dissent, but for whom communicative agency was just part of the life-world. In case of workers, agency in communication had to be created before other forms of agency could (and would) follow. Again, technological dimension was crucial. Samizdat *sensu stricto* was limited to intelligentsia circles for the very simple reason that workers would not typically own typewriters. However, they could be relied upon for distributing (and in some cases, printing) substantial amounts of copies speaking to their consciences. The measure of success of *Robotnik* in empowering workers through social media type of communication was the fact that

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<sup>35</sup> *Niepokorni*, 285.



before August 1980 it was the only periodical to achieve a print run of twenty thousand copies, when couple of hundreds was the norm.

## PUBLISHING AS A MOVEMENT

If networked, horizontal communication model was largely a not orchestrated, emergent phenomenon that was shaped by both ideas of prefigurative politics, the mix of internal rivalry and solidarity between dissident initiatives, and concrete tasks these initiatives set for themselves, the independent publishing movement, as a separate political identity of the parallel polis, was a matter of assertive individualities. Leaders of the publishing initiatives were far from perceiving their activities in terms of service to dissident groups of different persuasions. They were developing their printing capacities quite independently of the needs of the opposition activists and established their own publishing programs.

Just like the oppositional activists, but unlike their predecessors from recent past, the editors acted publicly under their own name, which in itself was a status recognition. Mirosław Chojecki, the founder of NOWA, signed his first article, summarizing the relief action for the victims of June 1976 protests in Radom, in that first printed issue no. 8 of *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, dated February 1977. In the next issue the editorial committee – Joanna Szczęsna, Jan Lityński and Seweryn Blumsztajn – would reveal their names, in the aftermath of a police raid busting into the editorial meeting.<sup>36</sup> The first issue of *Opinia*, coming out soon after that, made known to the public not only the composition of the editorial board, but also its address. Jan Walc, literary scholar and a veteran printer, writing under his own name, immortalized an

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<sup>36</sup> Friszke, “Biuletyn Informacyjny,” 237.

episode in everyday functioning of the dissident print culture with unequalled literary skill.<sup>37</sup>

Another important dimension of that drive towards autonomy was financial independence. While the KOR's communiques were disseminated free of charge, very early on, NOWA made the precedent of selling its publications. The decision was not uncontroversial, prominently due to the fact that in general perception profit did square well with the civic nature of activism and made the publishing firms vulnerable to accusations of unclear intentions. But rather than profit, it was the anxiety of dependence on funding distributed by oppositional activists, that constituted the primary motive behind introduction of prices, which also made the test of the reader demand more measurable and in this sense, endowed unlicensed publishing with attributes of real life enterprise.<sup>38</sup>

NOWA emphasized its neutrality with respect to oppositional politics. It is true that it printed mainly publications of the KOR movement, but it was much more ecumenical when it comes to distribution of publications of other dissident groups, including the adversarial ROPCiO, through the channels NOWA has established.<sup>39</sup> Usually unlicensed printed matter was accessible for sale in private apartments. Typically, that would involve several people: the seller and her or his neighbors, where the books were held for security reasons. But also, there were pop-up sales in student dorms and during meetings of officially accredited civic organizations, such as Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs.

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<sup>37</sup> Jan Walc, "My, Wolna Wałkowa," *Biuletyn Informacyjny* 4 (1980).

<sup>38</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 61.

Readers of publications produced by NOWA, would often find on the back the signature announcement, which read that the independent publishing house “wishes to break the state monopoly on information and publishing,” “does not represent any political tendency, but wishes to serve diverse creative initiatives,” and that “it will fulfill its tasks if the society will offer its support, its success depends on submission of texts, on assistance in distribution, acquisition of equipment and materials and on financial support.” “The fate of free word in Poland – NOWA appealed – depends on ourselves!” The notion of “free word” (*wolne słowo*) was used interchangeably with that of “freedom of speech” (*wolność słowa*), but that small semantic shift made a big difference: freedom of speech was a human right, abstract in its universality. Free word was meaning something much more tangible and concrete, thingy, something you could actually take into your own hands.

One of the ways in which one could read the above principle was that the free word depended on those willing to take the risk for it. That was certainly Chojecki’s reading, for whom cultural freedom had an important participatory dimension. Chojecki insisted, in line with Kuroń’s ideas of prefigurative politics and the logic of social media, that NOWA’s publishing program should be decided by those who take part in every phase of publishing activities. Indeed, behind establishment of some smaller unlicensed publishing initiatives the main motive was to actively shape independent culture according to one’s taste – not only to read authors on the index of censorship, but to make possible for others to read it too.<sup>40</sup> Involvement in printing or distribution was often decided with that activist understanding of cultural freedom in mind, and it was point of pride that leading personalities of dissident media activism, writers such

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, 94.

as Jan Walc, or editors such as Seweryn Blumsztajn, also get their hands dirty with ink.<sup>41</sup> In NOWA, the exception was made for Adam Michnik, who took part in editorial decisions despite the fact that he was not allowed anywhere near a duplicator.<sup>42</sup> But even Michnik had to fight his way through the reluctance of printers to risk for a volume of poetry with far from unequivocal political meaning, as it was the case with poetry of Czesław Miłosz, of course until it turned out that NOWA was the only publisher of the Noble Prize laureate in Poland and footage from an underground printshop, produced by a Swedish TV crew, hit the headlines around the world.<sup>43</sup>

If the participatory dimension of cultural freedom was important, cultural pluralism was another crucial aspect of social media activism. Tadeusz Konwicki, who authored one of the first novels written exclusively for unlicensed publication, *Mala Apocalipsa* (again, a work with no immediate propaganda value) argued at the time that strategic anti-communist considerations, often put forward by the samizdat makers, should not be the final argument in shaping the dissident publishing programs. If books in unlicensed circulation should prefigure true cultural freedom, they should reflect the entire spectrum of literary genres, including the non-politically charged and the middle-brow ones. “We need full literature. And full literature means also nihilistic, decadent or even pornographic works. Also literature for young ladies: light, comforting, entertaining... This society like a wedding cake consists of one hundred fifty layers and each of them needs to be soaked.”<sup>44</sup> Looking back from the early 1990s, Jan Walc observed that the kind of community that the early dissident print culture prefigured was indeed pretty queer, giving voice not only to people from different social classes,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, 74

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, 29-30

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, 73, 122.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, 73.

but also disparate tastes. The unlicensed literary journal *Puls* was for Walc exemplary in this regard, its pages serving as a space of an unlikely encounter between cultural mandarins such as philosopher Stanisław Ossowski or Simone Weil, with the countercultural iconoclasts like Allen Ginsberg and provocative poet Antoni Pawlak, who under normal circumstances would circulate in separate publications targeting different cultural tastes. Their unlikely encounter on the pages of *Puls* stood for the equally unlikely, but then very real alliance between the “Buddenbrooks and Hippies.” The dissident master thinkers would feel embarrassed with some instances of taboo breaking and the hippies (Chojecki among them) would sometimes fall asleep during the KOR assemblies. Still they were producing *Puls* collectively and hence had equal right to have their tastes represented. This was a strange reconciliation between the mandarin and the counter-cultural fractions of the global 1968 generation, in conflict with power albeit for different reasons, and united in the name of the “liberty to constitute communities,” no matter whether these were communities of the cultivated or the iconoclasts. The queer character of the alliance was, according to Walc, its greatest strength, however prefiguring the culture that never came to be.<sup>45</sup>

## FREE WORD ON TRIAL

All the complexities of the dissident media activism came together in the political trial of Mirosław Chojecki and Bogdan Grzesiak, NOWA’s printer. On the eve of the March 23, 1980 national elections, the authorities made a preemptive move to put the leading figures of KOR in custody after KOR’s call for electoral boycott in February of the same year. Chojecki and Grzesiak, in freedom, organized a leaflet action in their defense

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<sup>45</sup> Jan Walc, „Buddenbrookowie i hippisi (O pewnym spotkaniu w drugim obiegu),” *Puls* 59 (1992), [www.janwalc.pl](http://www.janwalc.pl), accessed November 27, 2017.

and ultimately were put under arrest themselves. Chojecki held a hunger strike in protest against being held in custody without charges brought against him. After 33 days of hunger strike, including forced feeding, he was released due to the massive wave of protests, which included KOR, the Catholic Church, as well as NOWA's published authors (Günter Grass among many) and the Polish Writers' Association. In solidarity with Chojecki and another political prisoner, Dariusz Kobzdej from Gdańsk, a ten-day hunger strike was organized in Saint Martin Church in Podkowa Leśna (Warsaw area), which gathered together activists from different independent organizations, most of them meeting for the first time, and transformed into a manifestation of strength of the dissident movement. Grzesiak, however, remained in custody. Subsequently, Chojecki and Grzesiak were not tried for sedition, or any other political act, but for theft of a stencil duplicator, a criminal act. The *corpus delicti* was a machine that was discarded from a printshop at an official trade agency in January 1980, destined to be scrapped, which Grzesiak acquired informally from the printshop personnel, as in case with most of the equipment of the publishing underground.

That the entire repression apparatus of the state should be mobilized against individuals appropriating scrapped equipment in order to print publications which constituted only a drop in the sea of licensed printed matter, already gave the trial the aura of David versus Goliath contest which would become the permanent feature of the social media activism in the years to come. Nota bene, the fake criminal charges amounted to a tacit recognition that unlicensed publishing was in fact not easy to penalize under existing law.

More importantly, the testimonies of Chojecki and Grzesiak before the court were a manifesto of cultural freedom, the understanding of which, widely shared among

the dissident media activists, was grounded in the contraposition of the *pays légal* of the licensed culture and the *pays réel* of the unlicensed counter-culture, the latter endowed with a prefigurative meaning. A few years back, in a seminal essay prepared for the 1977 Venice Biennale Stanisław Barańczak wrote about the backhouse of unofficial, authentic and diverse culture outgrowing the uniform and fake, official façade. “Censorship pushes everything authentic into unofficialdom, but at the same time – and that is a novelty of the recent times – everything unofficial is driven towards public exposure and articulation of its reasons. Why culture should forsake this chance?” In Barańczak’s view, the existence of an independent flow of cultural goods alongside the licensed circulation has an immediate transformative effect on cultural life, expressed fundamentally in reconfiguration of choices available to the creative professions. “Long time ago we have forsaken the idea of pleasing the Leviathan. Rather it is him, who, terrified by the turn of the events, attempts to tame the unofficial culture...But it is all too late. A new alternative has just emerged. Instead of ‘compromise or silence’ we say today ‘compromise or independence,’ ‘compromise or authenticity,’ ‘compromise or freedom.’ And we choose the latter.”<sup>46</sup>

Barańczak’s perspective was largely shared by Chojecki. In his testimony, he deplored the state of double life and double morality. “On the one hand, fake life, fake press failing to inform accurately about social and political affairs, fake radio and television, eluding fundamental problems, fake art, detached from reality...On the other hand, underneath the party-state mock-up, social and cultural life is blooming, life ignored by the officialdom, which act as if it did not exist.” According to Chojecki, the trial was illustrative of that duplicity. The fake charges brought against him and

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<sup>46</sup> Stanisław Barańczak, “Fasada i tyły,” *Puls* 2 (1978): 46-50.

Grzesiak constituted at the same time a recognition and a denial of the transformative effect of dissident social media on the licensed culture. “In this courtroom what is at stake is not us, the accused, but free word and thought, Polish culture and societal dignity.” In his testimony, Grzesiak conveyed the sense of cultural communion with the censored writers that dissident print culture produced. “I am a simple man, and yet I think and feel the same way, as they do. They are very dear to me not only as prominent creators of national culture, but also as righteous and brave individuals.” “I am a printer by training – Grzesiak continued - and I did my best to make possible that the society may receive the free word in its pure, unaltered form.”<sup>47</sup>

Notably, the trial of Chojecki and Grzesiak was the first notable episode in history of resistance in People’s Republic of Poland when a member of the intellectual elite (Chojecki was the son of a legendary courier of the Home Army Maria Stypułkowska, and son-in-law of prominent writer Jacek Bocheński) and a skilled printer acted in concert and were sentenced together as members of the same dissident organization, giving a premonition of what was to come only a couple of months later.

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<sup>47</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 109-110.



## CHAPTER THREE |

### *WE WANT TO SPEAK ABOUT OUR MATTERS WITH OUR OWN VOICE:*

#### SOLIDARITY MASS MEDIA ACTIVISM 1980-1981

Freedom of expression ranked very high on Solidarity's agenda. Coming just after the right to form independent trade unions, and the right to strike, the third of the original twenty-one demands of the Interfactory Strike Committee (Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy, MKS) read "to abide by the freedom of speech, press and publication guaranteed by the constitution of the People's Republic of Poland, and thus not to persecute independent publishers and to enable access to mass media for representatives of all faiths."

The Gdańsk Accords instituted a legal framework that served as the foundation of Solidarity's self-limited revolution and was interpreted as a source of legal regulations on par with the socialist Constitution,<sup>1</sup> which read that "Republic of People's Poland guarantees for its citizens the freedom of speech, print, assembly, rally, procession and manifestation (article 83.1)" and that "to realize that freedom print houses, paper stock, public offices, means of communication, radio and other indispensable material means, are put at the service of the toiling people (article 83.2)."

The Accords honored MKS' demands by a number of governmental pledges. The first one was to introduce a legal act on censorship, hitherto unregulated, defining its key notions such as "state security" and "national interest," "protection of sensibilities" of believers as well as unbelievers, "protection of moral order," and

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<sup>11</sup> Jarosław Kuisz, *Charakter prawny porozumień sierpniowych* (Warszawa: TRIO 2009).

introducing right to appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court against the censor's decisions. Secondly, the state authorities vowed to work with the Episcopate and other religious communities towards providing confessional associations with access to mass media for religious purposes (including transmitting the Sunday mass). That was accompanied by a transparency pledge to provide open access to public records, documents and legal acts, as well as information about the state of the economy and strategies and initiatives of the government. Importantly, a declaration of a more general nature followed, to the effect that "radio and television broadcasting as well as press and book publishing should serve to express the diversity of thoughts, views and opinions and should be brought under social control." In addition, in the section dealing with the first and principal demand of establishment of the autonomous and self-governing trade unions, the authorities pledged that "the new trade unions shall have their own publications."<sup>2</sup>

The Gdańsk Accords defined the main vectors of Solidarity mass media activism. In the following months the National Coordinating Commission (Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza, KKP), the leadership of Solidarity, would undertake a series of negotiations in order to make the best out of the provisions of the Accords, defending a very broad interpretation of access to and social control of the mass media. To be able to "speak our own voice," Solidarity struggled for control over its media image in public radio and television broadcasting, as well as targeted the overall regulatory framework in order to bring the licensed mass media under its oversight. The issues of social control and access to mass media became one of the principal fault lines

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<sup>2</sup> *Protokół ustaleń MKS z komisją rządową w Gdańsku*, August 31, 1981. [https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Protok%C3%B3%C5%82\\_ustale%C5%84\\_MKS\\_z\\_komisj%C4%85\\_rz%C4%85dow%C4%85\\_w\\_Gda%C5%84sku\\_\(1980\)](https://pl.wikisource.org/wiki/Protok%C3%B3%C5%82_ustale%C5%84_MKS_z_komisj%C4%85_rz%C4%85dow%C4%85_w_Gda%C5%84sku_(1980)) (last accessed October 19, 2017)

of friction, which remained unresolved despite many rounds of talks and amidst dramatic gestures which itself staged and embodied the conflict between Solidarity and the Party-State.

If radio and television were a fortress that Solidarity could not conquer despite protracted siege, and that siege occupied the public spotlight right until the tragic finale in December 1981, the instantaneous proliferation of the trade union press happened in its shadow and both Solidarity leadership and the party was very slow at realizing the size and importance of the emerging sphere of social communication. Yet, Poland's Carnival of Freedom was the pivotal moment in the history of dissident social media.

The trade union press operated basically unhampered, creating *fait accompli* out of the right of social organizations to have their internal communications operating without the censor's license. At first, it was a matter of individual agreements between the workers and the factory management, and soon after became institutionalized as the article 36 of Solidarity's articles of incorporation, registered after turbulent negotiations by the Supreme Court on November 10, 1980. That *fait accompli* sets this period apart in the history of underground print culture in Poland, which most of the time was constrained by the informal or underground nature of the publishing networks. While before the August Accords, the circulation of unlicensed prints consisted of around 100 titles and around 720 issues, around two thousand titles circulated in 1980-1981.<sup>3</sup>

But at the same time, the same circumstances that enabled that *fait accompli* allowed for intellectual consolidation of the publishing movement. In particular, the debated concept of 'trade union press' was as close as dissident media activism got to articulate a vision of prefigurative politics based on a distinctive understanding of the

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<sup>3</sup> Błażejowska, 238.

social media. Importantly, that distinctive political imaginary was forged not only vis-à-vis the licensed press, but also vis-à-vis the overall media policy the Solidarity leadership.

The main contribution of this and the following two chapters is to look beyond the Solidarity versus the state cleavage and into the Union's internal debates on the principles that should govern social communication. In that debates, the distinction between the mass media and the trade union press – Solidarity's social media – was of paramount importance. The trade union press activists believed that what embodied best Solidarity's values was a horizontal sphere of communication, which not only should be free from interference by Solidarity leadership, but also make possible the exercise of oversight with respect to the Union's elected representatives. Solidarity, they argued, should not shy away from embodying the values of deliberation and publicity it proposed as a norm of social and political life in its internal operations. Solidarity leadership, in turn, increasingly perceived that in order to promote and protect these same values, Solidarity's own media must develop capacity to compete with the licensed mass media, and that in order to do so, the trade union press itself must be harnessed to resemble more the media of mass transmission model. In terms translating Solidarity's values into principles governing communication, it was the stalemate in negotiations with the authorities on the issue of access to the public radio and television that catalyzed the process of the Union's leadership and its press drifting apart.

Exploring the plurality of Solidarity media activism and its internal dynamics, I want to reconstruct and bring into focus the internal tension between the social media and the mass media activism, the proportions and importance have not been hitherto properly scrutinized. Since the trade union press operated under Solidarity's umbrella,

samizdat studies scholarship (let alone scholarship on Solidarity) tended to overlook the intellectual significance of that process, presenting Solidarity media activism as a relatively uniform phenomenon, aligned with the overall thrust of the self-limited revolution, downplaying the internal frictions in the light of the overreaching conflict with the State.<sup>4</sup> Yet internal tension in Solidarity media policies had some relevance for shaping the dissident imaginary of social media activism in the 1980s. If the distinct profile of social media activism with respect to mass media as a communication model was not sharply delineated for the participants of the independent publishing movement, the difference became acute in the course of the debates about the role of trade union press. The practical terms of the debate quickly became immaterial with the imposition of the Martial Law and delegalization of Solidarity, but its broader intellectual impact, if judged by the shape that the underground publishing movement took in the 1980s, was considerable.

## STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS TO MASS MEDIA

In hindsight the contrast between the instantaneous spread of unlicensed newsletters for internal use and the embattled controversy over the access to mass media is surprising in its own right. Why the authorities decided to abide by the legal regulations which enabled social organizations keep their internal communications outside the reach of censorship, while affirming their indivisible sovereignty over mass media despite mounting pressure? Why, in other words, the laxity on social media end and assertiveness on the mass media end? Conversely, why Solidarity's position regarding

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<sup>4</sup> Błażejowska, 198-99.

access to mass media came to be so entrenched despite the unbelievable expansion of its social media, which was hardly something to be taken for granted?

One simple but rather speculative answer would be to present this issue in terms of complicity in adversity embedded in a shared media culture. In a historical context of media environment dominated by radio, television and mass circulation press, the conviction about its greater impact comes only naturally, while stretching the limits of imagination to realize the full potential of horizontal networks of communication comes harder. That probably included the dissident media activists of the 1970s, who could not have imagined the level of scalability that unlicensed press actually achieved under the aegis of the Union.

Moreover, the media culture of the day conveyed a notion of relationship between mass media and political power that made more likely for mass media, rather than social media to become an arena of political contestation. In the 1980s, not only in the socialist countries, but in most of Europe, public broadcasting was still the prevalent model, radio and television were either state-owned or tightly regulated. The control over the ether and the wired infrastructure of mass communication, in other words, was a token of state sovereignty, and hence a space in which to contest it. That was even more so in case of the transmission-belt media doctrine of the socialist states, in which not only the broad regulatory framework, but also the media content was regarded as a matter of state security and instrument of socialism-building. That had an important legal dimension. As we shall see, Poland's communist officials often pointed out to the distinct legal status of radio and television which, as opposed to the press, were part of the apparatus of the state and - more importantly still - part of the Warsaw pact communication infrastructure. Finally, probably the biggest area of contention was the

way of how the authorities took advantage of their sovereignty over public sound and vision to shape the image of the unfolding political process and in particular to fabricate the media representation of Solidarity.

The first months after the Union's registration were largely a time of propaganda disorientation. "There is no way back to the propaganda of success" – read the report of the Politburo presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the PUWP CC in March 1981, criticizing Gierek's information policy. "However, one cannot redeem old mistakes with new errors, the black propaganda of total negation, extracting from the present and the past only the negative phenomena, in tone of cheap sensationalism and demagoguery... That is why we are in favor of dissemination of accurate information indispensable for the society as a whole to reach informed judgements and conclusions."<sup>5</sup> To make matters worse, the Association of Polish Journalists (Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich, SDP) entered a state of open rebellion under charismatic leadership of Stefan Bratkowski, one of the animators of the Experience and Future Seminar (Konwersatorium "Doświadczenie i Przyszłość," DiP), whose proceedings were published in unlicensed press and broadcasted by RFE. SDP pressed for renewal in domain of information policy, supporting Solidarity in negotiations of the new censorship law and demanding a new press law, giving more autonomy to the journalist profession.<sup>6</sup>

Despite considerable procrastination from the authorities, negotiations concerning Solidarity's access to mass media progressed. The conclusive part of the talks was supposed to take place in May 1981. In April, the KKP announced its position,

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<sup>5</sup> *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej w Polsce*. Sierpień 1980-13 grudnia 1981, ed. Walery Pisarek (Kraków: UNIVERSITAS, 2007), 303.

<sup>6</sup> *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, 176-182.

consisting of fourteen points, which are quite illustrative of how Solidarity wished to translate the principles of social access and social control over mass media into concrete demands. Highest on the list was the right to designate trade union representatives to the Committee on Radio and Television Affairs (*Komitet do Spraw Radia i Telewizji*, hereafter *Radiokomitet*), Poland's national broadcasting council with extensive powers encompassing programming, infrastructure and regulatory framework. Solidarity demanded the establishment - on both national and regional level - of autonomous editorial boards for trade union issues with mandate to produce or commission its own programs, and which in terms of programming would be accountable to Solidarity and the Censor's Office alone, bypassing the authority of the *Radiokomitet* except for technical and financial matters. As a corollary to this, Solidarity requested airtime to broadcast its own programs on radio and TV on a regular basis as well as access to production studios. As for coverage of Solidarity affairs in other broadcasts, the negotiators demanded the public newscasts to include information about official Solidarity statements and documents, and that this information be either authorized or indicating where the coverage was declined authorization. Furthermore, the negotiators demanded a right to reply with an immediate effect. Finally, the document called upon *Radiokomitet* authorities to animate genuine public debate about key policy matters and government decisions, in which Solidarity representatives could participate.<sup>7</sup>

The trade union press was hardly present in the KKP position on mass media. It included a number of demands concerning Solidarity publications and columns in the licensed circulation, among them to increase print run of *Tygodnik Solidarność*, the union's national weekly, to establish licensed press organs of Solidarity's regional

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<sup>7</sup> "Stanowisko KKP do rokowań z rządem," AS 11 (1981): 202.



leadership and to provide access to columns of regional journals (excluding press organs of political parties), as well as right to establish its own presses and to enable accessibility of printing materials for administrative use. KKP did demand that non-Solidarity factory bulletins and wired radio should be brought under control of the trade unions (as opposed to the factory party organizations) and, in the future, autonomous worker self-management councils.

In the May sessions some alignment of positions was reached mainly in matters that were easy to translate into figures and thus more negotiable, such as scheduling and airtime of weekly regular broadcasts on radio and television, establishment of Solidarity's own radio and television studios to operate under state regulations, or distribution of paper for Solidarity publishing and office use (the allotment offered at 6 thousand tons was half of the amount requested). However, while the party negotiators adamantly declared that constitutional principle of "mass media belong to the people" had been already enshrined in the *Radiokomitet* and that social control over public broadcasting would continue to be its exclusive mandate, impossible to reconcile with granting an official status to Solidarity appointed editors. The party negotiators proposed instead to appoint liaison officers that would negotiate the content of the Solidarity programming, but reserving the right to authorize its production and broadcasting with by *Radiokomitet*. Similarly, while Solidarity requested to be able to exercise a right to reply immediately, the authorities offered 48 hours lag, except for political speeches and foreign commentary, and an arbitration procedure overseen by the *Radiokomitet*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Rozmowy ws. dostępu do środków masowego przekazu," AS 17 (1981): 001.

## TOWARDS CONFRONTATION

The May negotiating sessions turned out to be ineffective, as realignment of the party propaganda departments in an effort to reestablish control over mass media was under way. While the first signs of policy shift were noticeable already in May 1981, the clarion call was launched by the letter from the Soviet Politburo to the Polish comrades published on June 11, 1981, which alarmed that “the enemy has in fact overtaken the media of mass information, which overwhelmingly became a tool of antisocialist activities exploited to subvert socialism and trigger decomposition of the party.”<sup>9</sup> Mobilization of the propaganda apparatus was a prominent task of the 9th Extraordinary Congress of the PUWP (July 14-20, 1981). That was followed by personal changes in the key propaganda positions, including the appointment of Jerzy Urban, hitherto a liberal *Polityka* journalist turned hardliner, as press spokesman, notorious for his style in the years to come. The propaganda offensive included reinvigoration of censorship, increased harassment of the Solidarity press and smear campaigns that continued throughout the summer.

The judicial persecution in particular announced a shift in the party policy towards the trade union press. What was hitherto permitted or tolerated in limited circulation for internal use, now became a target of harassment. Illustrative of that shift, the Prosecutor’s Office re-opened old cases such as the case of the January 1981 printer strike, when posters in defense of political prisoners were printed with the internal use clause. In May 1981 the Prosecutor filed charges, now arguing that the posters were not printed for internal purposes.<sup>10</sup> The attempts to distribute the trade union press outside

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<sup>9</sup> *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, 250.

<sup>10</sup> *Głos Szczeciński* 5 X 1981.

workplaces were now met with arrests. One such incident in Katowice ended with demolition of the police van and due to intervention of the Union representatives, was stopped short of storming the local police headquarters.<sup>11</sup> Official seizures of printing facilities, as well as acts of harassment by ‘unknown perpetrators’ also intensified.

In particular two cases of judicial harassment hit the headlines. First involved a Solidarity newsletter *Solidarność Ziemi Puławskiej*, known for its biting satirical cartoons, which on June 11, 1981 published a cartoon representing a sleeping bear with a face of Leonid Brezhnev with a circle of people around him. The caption of the cartoon on the first page read “when he wakes up, he will eat us” (words of a rhyme from popular playground game “The Old Bear is Fast Asleep”), while the one on the last page read “when he wakes up...he will come with brotherly help.” Investigation started in July and in October 1981 the local prosecutor filed charges against the journal’s editor Ireneusz Ostrokólski for defamation of a head of state.

The veteran journal *Biuletyn Dolnośląski* was even more defiant, publishing items such as alleged plans of Soviet intervention in Poland, the appeal of the Free Trade Unions of the Soviet Union to the Polish Workers, or the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists’<sup>12</sup> call for disobedience directed to Soviet Soldiers. Its editor-in-chief, and the future leader of the radical group Fighting Solidarity, Kornel Morawiecki, was briefly put under custody and charged with incitement against Poland’s international alliances.<sup>13</sup> According to official counts, in November 1981 there were 198 cases under

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<sup>11</sup> Błażejowska, 209.

<sup>12</sup> An anticommunist émigré organization with roots in the interwar white Russian exile and a corporativist ideology.

<sup>13</sup> “Stanowisko prokuratury wobec publikacji w Biuletynie Dolnośląskim,” *Trybuna Ludu*, September 19-20, 1981.

investigation for print and distribution of illegal publications undermining the state, defaming its organs or contesting the international alliances of People's Poland.<sup>14</sup>

The judicial harassment was a part of the larger anti-Solidarity smear campaign, geared to shifting the burden of responsibility for the shortages and daily hardships of the intensifying economic crisis, accusing Solidarity of provoking social unrest and disorder, while the Party was working towards renewal and restoration of normalcy. The propaganda intended to drive a wedge between the Union leaders and the healthy, proletarian rank-and-file, and between Solidarity and the society as a whole. The black propaganda was accompanied by a generalized media blackout on everything presenting the Union as popular and self-limited in its demands, and even more dangerously, every instance of social unrest was ascribed to Solidarity, overblowing its actual capacity to control or steer the increasingly and genuinely tense social relations, as if illustrating the need of Solidarity to speak its own voice, and justifying its demands put on the negotiating table. Journalists intending to exercise balance reporting were either sidelined or put under pressure as Solidarity sympathizers, but also, increasingly, Solidarity would refuse to work with journalists from official media, restricting access to the proceedings of Solidarity governing bodies. The middle ground was visibly shrinking, a fact that was deplored in the open letter by SDP leadership, which called for de-escalation of conflict between Solidarity and the state, starting with responsible use of news.<sup>15</sup>

Another highlight of the anti-Solidarity propaganda effort was a strategy of mimicry that can be interpreted as a sort of crooked mirror of the dissident legalism.

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<sup>14</sup> Błażejowska, 212.

<sup>15</sup> „Najsilniejsza od Sierpnia kampania dezinformacji,” *Tygodnik Solidarność* 20 (1981): 4; *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, 258-259.

Just like the democratic opposition adopted a politics of holding the legal ground and making the authorities deliver on the rights and liberties that it nominally pledged to secure through lawmaking and subscribing to international agreements (Solidarity's politics was in that sense the embodiment of dissident legalism), now the party adopted a politics of reducing Solidarity's mandate to its nominal trade union character. "The State authorities consider with utmost gravity the article 3 of the Gdańsk Accords that foresees the access of the trade union to mass media, without however defining its scope or form. In particular, it did not determine the number and the printruns of the trade union press, or the creation of an independent...editorial board in public Radio and Television, setting up alternative radio and television broadcasting capacities, a national daily etc...It was not foreseen that our country from the Baltics to the Tatra mountains shall be flooded with thousands of trade union newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets and posters with contents which are utterly at odds with the Gdańsk Accords." The balance sheet was indeed impressive: "The access of Solidarity to mass media is already considerable, in fact it is impossible to provide full statistical picture. The national *Solidarity Weekly* has half-million print run...more than any political periodical in PRL...In total, the printrun of all periodicals and newsletters licensed by the Censor's Office exceeds by far one million copies. Solidarity publishes nine newspapers. Apart from that, there are hundreds of thousands of copies of the so-called trade union press in circulation.... In 45 factory publications (weeklies, fortnightlies, quarterlies) Solidarity has its columns. Their total printrun exceeds 230 thousand copies. Solidarity has its columns in two national dailies...These columns are fully autonomous, edited by Solidarity. In these newspapers, as Lech Wałęsa put it, Solidarity speaks its own voice about its matters." "Access to public Radio and Television broadcasting is a separate matter" – the report continued. "Nowhere and never did the government agreed

to create an independent editorial board of Solidarity, which would constitute a television inside a television, a state within a state. That would amount to partitions in the realm of broadcasting.” Still “an impartial observer is bound to admit that Solidarity already enjoys an access to mass media to greater degree than any other social organization in Poland, and proportionally, greater than any other trade union in the world.”<sup>16</sup>

In the realm of public communications, at stake was not only to constraint Solidarity’s media presence to labor and economic issues but a more general matter of whether and to what extent a trade union should be in the business of regulating media. Indeed, there was a point to the assertion that it was unprecedented for a trade union in any media system in any country to have such vast competences over the content of broadcasting. Media ethics is a domain usually reserved for state regulatory bodies, which not necessarily include a representation of social organizations, to say nothing of direct social participation in public programming. While the right to reply was institutionalized as such in many countries and extended to radio and television (Fairness Doctrine in the US was a comparable instrument to introduce balanced coverage), the notion of parity was something that commonly applied to political parties, which was precisely what Solidarity was claiming not to be. And rarely regulations existed to empower social organizations with a right of prior vetting of media content or to airtime allotment by public broadcasters. Needless to say, socialist media doctrine did not honor the principle of balanced reporting widely applied in the West and in reality Solidarity was no ordinary trade union, bringing a vast variety of non-labor organizations and agendas under its umbrella. But nominally, the party was

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<sup>16</sup> *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, 340-341.

in a position to present every concession as something extraordinary “for a trade union,” emphasizing the party’s good will and hidden political interest of its adversary.

## DAYS WITHOUT PRESS

In response to the propaganda campaign, and to stalemate in the negotiations on access to mass media that persisted after the plenary talks between Lech Wałęsa and Mieczysław Rakowski in August 1981, the KKP, supported by all regional leaders, announced the Days Without Press to take place on 19 and 20 of August. *Z dnia na dzień*, the newspaper of the Lower Silesia region of Solidarity, explained the rationale of the strike as follows: “Access to mass media is for us of paramount importance, because ability to react instantaneously and with universal outreach will prevent the authorities from lying to the nation. We undertake the strike action in the name of truth today, in order to defend the country against the threat of confrontation and to shield everyone of us against the specter of hunger. A disoriented society can be divided, and civil strife can serve as pretext for the use of force.<sup>17</sup>”

The strike of the daily press in licensed circulation was organized by the Solidarity branch section of printers, and joined by workers employed in public companies dealing with distribution of the printed matter. Readers were called upon to boycott the press during these days. In many regions, printers appealed to the management to employ their productive forces - released by the strike - into catching up with production of publications of schoolbooks and other publications more in tune with the pressing social needs. Solidarity committees in public Television and Radio declared, that in case the Days without Press fail to make impact on the government,

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<sup>17</sup> “Prawda i Chleb,” *Z dnia na dzień*, August 20, 1981.

they would follow suit. Support was also expressed by Solidarity members and sympathizers working in licensed newspapers.

Strike committees were set up in print works all over Poland and strike alerts and occupations of print shops started as early as August 17 in Olsztyn, Gdańsk, Szczecin and Kraków, in order to shield the strike from preemptive measures undertaken by the party organizations of the press industry, as well as police harassment. The workers of Olsztyn Printing Works vowed to continue striking until complete cessation of the anti-Solidarity propaganda (including distortion of the media representation of their own activities) and until the access to mass media would be provided, and were persistent even in the face of appeals of the KKP to call it off, delivered in person by Kuroń and Lis.<sup>18</sup>

Nowhere the efforts to thwart the Days Without Press were fully successful, even though in many places the authorities managed to mobilize members of the official trade unions and took advantage of the internal printing offices of the police and military establishments as well as their transport units to distribute skeleton versions of licensed newspapers in minimal print run. Still, out of circa one hundred newspapers in the licensed distribution, only four appeared in unaltered print run and format, while those that actually were distributed, resembled leaflets rather than periodicals.<sup>19</sup> In the Gdańsk area the local party secretaries managed to release a joint issue of the three local dailies, consisting of four A3 pages of anonymous articles and PAP releases. Similar case took place in Poznań. In Katowice, *Gazeta Robotnicza* was published in a half-million print run thanks to militarization of the printing houses. In Rzeszów, party authorities tricked the local printers into preparing stencils of the local daily *Nowiny* except for the title

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<sup>18</sup> "Prezydium KKP," *AS* 33 (1981): 101-102.

<sup>19</sup> "Dni bez prasy," *AS* 32 (1981): 202.



page and then printed it outside its regular place of production. The Rzeszów Solidarity committee protested against what it presented as a samizdat party publication: “it appears that a daily of the PUWP can be published without authorization of the Censors’ Office, without having its price accepted by the National Commission on Prices and containing 90 per cent of re-printed information.” On the other hand, in smaller towns such as Tarnów, Myślenice or Nowy Sącz, no newspapers were available at the kiosks.

## TOWARDS NATIONAL CONGRESS

Days Without Press were followed by Solidarity’s last effort impose initiative in negotiations. KKP called upon *Radiokomitet* authorities to provide coverage of the First National Congress in a manner compliant with the earlier demands and thus to tip the balance of the negotiations through *fait accompli*.<sup>20</sup> Solidarity proposed to have two separate editorial teams covering the Congress, one for Solidarity and one for the official television crew. Solidarity, this way, would have a right to reply with its own materials. In addition, the question of access to mass media was put in context of the escalating crisis.

In the situation of growing social tension and the necessity of conducting wide consultation on the direction of the economic reform, self-management and changes in the social-political structure of the country, access to radio and television becomes a burning question not only for our members, but also for the entire society. If Solidarity was allowed to dialogue with society through mass media, economic reforms would be easier to introduce, and many strikes averted.<sup>21</sup>

No less dramatic was the call of Lech Wałęsa.

We want to speak about our matters with our own voice. In ten days we start the Congress of our Union. We appeal to Polish journalists and to the employees of

<sup>20</sup> “Oświadczenie szefa Biura Prasowego I KZD nt. konieczności zapewnienia transmisji o przebiegu obrad Zjazdu w TV,” *AS* 32 (1981): 302.

<sup>21</sup> “Oświadczenie Biura Informacji-BIPS ws. dostępu do środków masowego przekazu,” *AS* 32 (1981): 302.

Radio and Television. We need truth as much as we need coal. Help us propagate it. If you meet repressions, we shall defend you. Remember, you serve us all. Your honesty and resolution might redeem Poland from strikes to follow.<sup>22</sup>

In the background, the possibility of the strike of radio and television broadcasting workers loomed large. KKP never adopted this measure as part of its ultimatum, however the measure was discussed during its meetings and was vigorously pressed for by the employees of Radio and Television themselves.

The government's offer was much more modest. It planned to cover the Congress only in the Second Channel of the Television (which could be received only in the bigger agglomerations and had mostly urban middle-class audience), preceded by a series of 30-minute programs in which Solidarity could explain its agenda (two of them, a speech by Wałęsa and a press conference of the KKP, were in fact broadcasted). It was prepared to grant Solidarity veto power over broadcasted material (contested coverage would not be screened at all), but rejected the possibility of two alternative editorial teams.

At the same time, the authorities manifested their determination to bring the media back under government control. First Secretary Kania, in a speech televised right after conclusion of a KKP meeting, declared that in a popular democracy mass media cannot be apolitical, but to serve the aims of socialism, that the party was determined to play a leading role in mass media and that it would not allow any attempts to paralyze the communication or contest its control. That was followed by a warning against strikes in Radio and Television or the *Radiokomitet*. The government spokesman reminded that the mass media in a socialist country are an “institution of higher public utility” (i.e. a part of the party-state apparatus) and “exclusiveness of the state in the field of

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<sup>22</sup> “Apel Lecha Wałęsy do dziennikarzy,” *Tygodnik Solidarność* 22 (1981): 1.

telecommunication network and facilities” is part of Polish legal system. Apart from that, the opportunity was not spared to remind that Polish media “constitute part of the general system of allied communication of the Warsaw Pact Countries.”<sup>23</sup>

This message was echoed by the chairman of the *Radiokomitet*, Loranc, who reminded that public broadcasting in any country serve to maintain public order, security and calm and as such should be regarded as an exclusive attribute of state power, that “normalcy of Radio and Television broadcasting informs the popular perception of normalcy,” disruption of which would excite social unrest.<sup>24</sup> A decree of the Council of Ministers translated this doctrine into law, suspending - despite protests - the right of the Radio and Television employees to strike. *Radiokomitet* authorized the reinforcement of police and military guards’ patrols around Radio and Television installations. In case the strike would actually happen, the military was supposed to step in to secure the continuous functioning of the communications infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> The doctrine, as Solidarity did not fail to observe, was incompatible with the Gdańsk Accords, as it made social control of mass media impracticable.<sup>26</sup>

The government, as declared by its spokesperson Urban, refused to negotiate under threat of strike and called upon Solidarity leadership to call them off (that was in principle possible only in case of the 6 Days without Press. Solidarity in Radio and Television, despite its national impact, was technically speaking a local workplace committee, and the KKP had no mandate over its activities). More broadly, Urban declared that the main issue was Solidarity’s capacity for “self-limitation in the spirit of the Accords.” That was, in his view, certainly not the case of anti-Soviet propaganda in

<sup>23</sup> *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, 336-337.

<sup>24</sup> “Oświadczenie przewodniczącego Radiokomitetu” *AS* 35 (1981): 210.

<sup>25</sup> “O dostęp do środków masowego przekazu,” *AS* 37 (1981): 209-2011.

<sup>26</sup> “Uchwała KKP w sprawie dostępu do środków masowego przekazu,” *AS* 35 (1981): 302.

the trade union press. As for public broadcasting, readiness to comply with the censorship regulations was not enough, since censorship was helpless against live performance in radio and television broadcasts. That expectation was confirmed by the reservations of *Radiokomitet* chairman Loranc who remarked (probably having in mind the broadcasts from party congresses), that in public broadcasting it would be an unprecedented practice to cover unorchestrated events without knowing anything about their course up until the last moment. In other words, the authorities expected Solidarity to play by the established rules, which were something quite different than laws and regulations. Rather these expectations were rooted in practices and standards of the licensed media with their capacity to orchestrate information and opinion, which excluded any uncoordinated, spontaneous expression. Thus, the expected “self-limitation” was an impossible condition to be met unless Solidarity transformed its media along the lines of the governmental model.<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately the journalists working for the official media and press agency were denied accreditation for National Congress, which however did not translate into informational blackout. Some delegates did report on the congress over the phone to local radio and TV stations and the licensed mass media made widespread use of the foreign media and press agencies materials through the agreements with the Eurovision network and the BBC.

The failure to secure access to mass media tipped the balance towards the idea of building Solidarity’s own radio and television network. First step in this direction was the donation from the Austrian trade unions - a professional TV camera which arrived during the first round of the National Congress and reportedly was greeted with

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<sup>27</sup> “Rozmowy z Komitetem d/s Radia i Telewizji oraz rzecznikiem rządu,” *AS* 34 (1981): 001-002.

applause worthy of a distinguished guest. Soon after, Lech Wałęsa announced in Gniezno during the ingress ceremony of Józef Glemp as new Primate of Poland, that Solidarity will build its own transmitters and production studios. That however did not progress very far before the imposition of the Martial Law.<sup>28</sup> And neither did the efforts of building transmitters interconnecting Solidarity-controlled wired radio factory networks - although experiences in that regard would be utilized by the Solidarity underground radio.<sup>29</sup> There was however a parallel strategy that Solidarity leadership pursued as the tension in the media realm was mounting: the effort to convert the extended network of Solidarity's trade union press into a form of surrogate mass media. And to these efforts, and their outcomes, we will now turn.

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<sup>28</sup> "Wałęsa: stworzymy własną TV," *Dziennik Polski* September 14, 1981.

<sup>29</sup> Grzegorz Majchrzak, "Radio Solidarność. Niezależna działalność radiowa pod szyldem Solidarności 1980-1989" in *Solidarność Podziemna 1981-1989*, 387-340.

## CHAPTER FOUR | SOLIDARITY AND ITS PRESS:

### BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND SURROGATE MASS MEDIA

The conviction that the trade union press was the only viable instrument Solidarity leadership had at hand to counter the government propaganda consolidated with the protracted stalemate over access to mass media. Gradually, that conviction was accompanied by the realization that in the networked and horizontal form that the trade union press developed, it was not up for the task. The proliferation of Solidarity press was generally an emergent and effervescent process beyond anyone's control. That was true for the authorities, who tried to discipline and deter the independent editors and journalists through punctual repression to no avail, and who neither would be successful in the massive, orchestrated military operation to crack down on the publishing movement through arrests and internment of the most renown activists during the first weeks of the Martial Law. But that was true for Solidarity leadership as well. The ability of the Union to speak its own voice and to control its own media image was, in the view of the KKP, predicated upon the capacity to effectively counter anti-Solidarity propaganda in the licensed press, as well as present the position of the Union in a clear and unequivocal way. Both implied a necessity to work towards a surrogate mass media model, to orchestrate communications more tightly and enable top-down transmission. However, that strategic goal of remaking social media into a surrogate mass media was contested by the trade union press activists, as they began to organize bottom-up and to develop a political imaginary that largely built on the prefigurative philosophy of political action inherited from the 1970s. Even though Solidarity also declared

prefigurative politics as its political style, the way how that principle should be realized on the ground became the bone of contention.

## DISSIDENT MEDIA ACTIVISTS AND SOLIDARITY PRESS

Dissident media activism had considerable impact when it comes to giving shape and tone to the trade union press activism. First, thanks to the collective intelligence of the networks of unlicensed press information traveled fast and, unlike in December 1970 and June 1976, the media blackout the Party strived to impose after the establishment of the MKS with Wałęsa at the helm, resulted impossible. Jacek Kuroń's flat in the Warsaw neighborhood of Żoliborz transformed into a relay station for Radio Free Europe and other Western media, and continued to operate even once Kuroń himself was detained. Not only KOR and the Free Trade Unions activists, but also Young Poland movement, would put all their resources at the service of the common cause. Second, *Robotnik*, having gained the trust of the workers in the previous years, was now in a position to shape the course of the events. The guidelines presented in the widely circulated leaflet *Jak strajkować?* [How to strike?], appealed to the workers to keep away from the streets, to form representative bodies inside the workplaces, to secure the safety of the striking crews and to put forward demands (a similar leaflet was distributed by ROPCiO on a smaller scale). The demands themselves, prominently the right to form autonomous trade unions, echoed the *Charter of Workers Rights* prepared and publicized by *Robotnik* at the end of 1979.<sup>1</sup>

Third, the August strikes found some of the most prominent dissident media activists vacationing at the seaside. Since activism is not something you can easily take

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<sup>1</sup> Olszsek, *Rewolucja powielaczy*, 125-154.

a leave from, Ewa Milewicz and Konrad Bieliński arranged a meeting with a group from Sweden which smuggled in a spirit duplicator and headed to the Dębki summer resort to meet with Mirosław Chojewski and his family. After RFE broke the news about the strike in Gdańsk Shipyard Milewicz and Bieliński used their new acquisition to print from August 23, 1980 onwards the 14 issues of the *Strajkowy Biuletyn Informacyjny Solidarność* (Solidarity Strike Newsletter), using the notion – as suggested by Krzysztof Wyszowski – to underline the support of the striking crews all over country to the MKS and its 21 demands. More indirectly, the example set by the *Robotnik Wybrzeża* (Worker of the Coast) certainly made strikers aware of the importance of securing independent flow of information. While in Gdańsk initially the *ramka* technique was used and only later access to the internal printshop established, the Gdynia shipyard seized the in-house printing infrastructure by force and Szczecin's *Jedność* [Unity] relied on the capacities of the state facilities, the Skolwin paper mill and Szczecin Print Works.<sup>2</sup> Finally, KOR activists were quite conscious very early on, that workplace publishing capacities would in the future play an enormous role in asserting independence of the organized employees. “Plenty of so-called small-printrun newsletters exist in workplaces all over Poland with developed printing capacities. It is instrumental, that these become independent bulletins of the worker movement” – argued Jacek Kuroń in August 1980.<sup>3</sup>

After the August Accords, the veteran dissident journalists would be substantially involved in creating the networks of Solidarity social media. The most important national and regional newspapers were staffed with activists of pre-Solidarity independent press, including Solidarity's two press agencies, *AS* (staffed by activists

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<sup>2</sup> Błażejowska, 195.

<sup>3</sup> Kuroń, “Ostry Zakręt,” 208.



from *Robotnik* and *Biuletyn Informacyjny* led by Helena Łuczywo) and BIPS (edited by Arkadiusz Rybicki from Young Poland Movement), Mazowsze's *Wiadomości Dnia* (staffed by Antoni Macierewicz's group from *Głos*), *Niezależność* (edited by Bieliński), and Gdańsk's *Solidarność* (the continuation of the strike newsletter edited by Mariusz Wilk, and two activists of the Free Trade Unions, Joanna Duda-Gwiazda and Joanna Wojciechowicz) and Wrocław's *Z dnia na dzień* (edited by Zenon Pałka, KOR's veteran printer).

At the same time 1980-1981 was a very active period for independent publishers, who considerably expanded their audience thanks to the ability to distribute books through Solidarity structures. Chojecki, hopeful at reconvening with his academic career as chemist, soon became sucked in to the vortex of organizing Mazowsze region printing infrastructure. NOWA, now under leadership of Grzegorz Boguta, was cooperating with Solidarity in the realm of infrastructure, setting up shared printshops in the Ursus Tractor Factory, Kraków and Katowice Foundries, and establishing joint publishing series under its auspices. For the first time, NOWA had a regular office in the seat of the Mazowsze Region Solidarity in Warsaw.

At the same time, NOWA vigorously asserted its independence vis-à-vis the Union and its policies. While in the Gdańsk Accords the signatories agreed to regulate censorship, but not to abolish it, NOWA explicitly refused to subordinate to the new law. "As long as paper and printing equipment remains strictly rationed, the society will continue being deprived of most basic guarantees of its liberties and the national culture will remain to be shaped by the Censor's pencil. We shall never come to terms with that." – read the publisher's statement in October 1980. "We have no intention to terminate our operations. NOWA will cease to exist only once its social

purpose is accomplished, once all books which we have published become available in bookstores from licensed publishers.”<sup>4</sup> As Boguta later recalled, “We wanted to remain autonomous with respect to the State, the Church and the Union. Our basic *non possumus* was the realm of editorial decisions. We were open to collaboration on technical and organizational level, but we refused to shape Solidarity’s publishing program or let its activists influence ours.”<sup>5</sup> However, even the cooperation in the realm of infrastructure was regarded as a hazard by NOWA’s printers, who protested Boguta’s disclosure and strived to maintain their network as opaque as possible and prepare for the eventual crack down.<sup>6</sup> Notably, while Solidarity’s internal presses operated basically unhampered until the summer of 1981, the secret police operations against the non-affiliated independent publishers continued, e.g. in February 1981 the entire print run of issue 9/10 of *Puls* was seized.<sup>7</sup> More careful were the *Krag* publishers, who preferred not to give into the mood of the Carnival and perceived with anxiety the patterns of sociability which prevailed in NOWA, who’s key personnel mingled with Solidarity activists beyond any prudence that security measures required. *Krag* decided not to tap into Solidarity’s distribution networks or printing infrastructure in order to stay below the radar of state cultural surveillance. More broadly, Czesław Bielecki, who in the 1970s was responsible for the clandestine print of the reports of the Polish Compact for Independence (Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe, PPN), a group of prominent political commentators who operated without disclosing their identity, and who would become the leader of CDN, one of the biggest publishing enterprises of the 1980s, advocated not to give in to the triumphalism of the “social accord,” and to think

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<sup>4</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 124.

<sup>6</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 131-134.

<sup>7</sup> Błażejowska, 216.

towards a “social conspiracy,” i.e. to create clandestine structures of command to prepare for the eventuality of a domestic backlash or the Soviet intervention.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the veteran dissident media activists began training a legion of newcomers to the trade, which had the short-term effect of, as Konstanty Gebert put it, effectively breaking the print monopoly of the state and the long term effect of making possible the resilience of the underground press after the imposition of the Martial Law.<sup>9</sup> Notably, providing that massive transfer of expertise could not happen without uncovering of the expert base for the secret police, the vulnerability which would result in massive arrests of media activists in December 1981. On the whole, judging from the post-1981 proliferation of underground social media, the trade-off worked, as we will learn further on.

## DEBATING THE ROLE OF TRADE UNION PRESS

A privileged site to explore the development of the political imaginary of Solidarity social media activism are the congresses of the trade union press, which were the basic form of self-organization of the media activists. The first one took place in January 1981 on the premises of the Katowice Foundry. Among its principal resolutions was to support internal circulation of information between Solidarity publications through creating the press agency *AS* and an eponymous bulletin providing a biweekly digest of the trade union’s internal affairs and publishing full texts of statements, documents and other official Solidarity press releases without commentary, as well as publishing reprints from local Solidarity publications. The task of setting up the newsletter was

<sup>8</sup> Maciej Poleski [Czesław Bielecki], “Umowa i zмова społeczna,” *Kultura* 400-401 (1981): 73-81.

<sup>9</sup> “Drugi Obieg. Rozmowa Krzysztofa Czabańskiego z Dawidem Warszawskim.” *Vacat* 46 (1989): 115.

entrusted to Helena Łuczywo and other veteran editors of *Robotnik* (Worker), a signature publication of KSS KOR.<sup>10</sup>

The Second Congress gathered together 107 representatives of Solidarity affiliated journals on the grounds of the Ursus tractor factory on May 9-10, 1981. During the Congress, the role of trade union press was articulated more precisely in its main resolution. “In the multimillion community which forms our union - the resolution of the congress read - the independent press offers the basic guarantee of democracy. It is the responsibility of the Solidarity press to report about the situation in the trade union, inform about the policies of the leadership and to present critique of its instances. The Solidarity press ought to be first and foremost an instrument of social control.”<sup>11</sup>

The idea that independent oversight of the trade union’s executive instances is a precondition of internal democracy required in turn drawing a clear demarcation line between Solidarity officials and Solidarity media. Such demarcation was articulated in the Charter of the Trade Union Press, which was another important resolution of the Congress. The Charter endorsed full editorial independence of the press vis-a-vis trade union functionaries. It stipulated that the trade union affiliation could be withdrawn only by a general assembly of Solidarity members of a given level, but interference in editorial or personal matters of a newspaper was considered an inadmissible instance of censorship. At the same time, the Charter assumed that the status of a trade union publication entailed the obligation to present Solidarity’s official record of documents and statements, even in case this record was at odds with the editors’ better judgement. Furthermore, trade union journalists pledged to put their papers at full disposal of the

<sup>10</sup> Łuczywo would later become editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, underground Solidarity most influential newspaper and further on, founder of *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

<sup>11</sup> “Uchwała II Zjazdu Prasy Związkowej,” *Solidarność* (Gdańsk), May 13, 1981.

leadership in case of strike or strike alerts. Finally, the postulated corollary of the press independence was its financial self-sufficiency, even though at the same time the Charter expressed reliance on the trade union in terms of providing basic print infrastructure (the apparent contradiction was due to the fact that both paper and printing equipment was centrally distributed and hence the domain of negotiations with the authorities on the national level).<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the Congress established an Interim Commission with the aim, among other things, to represent Solidarity press vis-a-vis its leadership and to intervene in cases of overreach of trade union power. At the same time, however, the idea of forming a professional association in the vain of the licensed SDP was rejected, on the grounds that independent journalism was still an emergent phenomenon and to endow it with a professional status would be out of proportion. Notably, the consciousness of non-professional character of Solidarity media activism - also reflected in opinions of the fellow travelers from the SDP<sup>13</sup> – was a significant dimension of the media profile of trade union press, further confirming its social media nature.

## DEMOCRACY AS OVERSIGHT

Understanding publicity in the exercise of power in terms of independent oversight, both internally and vis-à-vis the state, was instrumental for Solidarity's own vision of democracy, mirroring quite closely the dissident ethos. Solidarity, to borrow Pierre Rosanvallon's concept, was a champion of counter-democracy. By counter-democracy Rosanvallon understands "a complex assortment of practical measures, checks and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> "Zjazd rzeczników prasowych," *AS* 16 (1981): 202.

balances, and informal as well as institutional social counter-powers”<sup>14</sup> which has evolved in the history of democracy to make sure that constituted powers do not stray away from their mandate, complementing the institutions that endow that mandate with procedural legitimacy in a more substantial way. Legitimacy and trust, in Rosanvallon’s view stand for, respectively, the formal and the substantive aspect of exercise of democratic representation primarily, but notably, counter-democracy as a political form is at once pre- and post-democratic, i.e. historically its exercise could either precede the constitution of a democratic regime or arise to response to its unkept promises.<sup>15</sup> Now while interpreting Solidarity self-limited revolution in terms of exercise of counter-power (rather than a revolutionary constitutive power) would not contribute anything substantially new to our understanding, it seems more productive to have closer look into the role of publicity and exercise of oversight over delegated power in the internal constitution of the movement. From the perspective of prefigurative politics, the immediate transformative effect that Solidarity’s internal principles of organization were supposed to radiate over public life, publicity and oversight were of paramount importance.

In most important programmatic statements ahead of the First National Congress, both ideas, democracy-as-oversight and prefigurative politics, are prominent. In the strategy prepared by the KKP think-tank, the Center for Social and Labor Research (Ośrodek Prac Społeczno-Zawodowych, OPSZ), titled modestly *Directions of the Union’s Actions under Current Circumstances* (Kierunki działania związku w obecnej sytuacji kraju),<sup>16</sup> the principle of publicity (jawność życia publicznego), the

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<sup>14</sup> Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Rosanvallon, 24.

<sup>16</sup> “Kierunki działania związku w obecnej sytuacji kraju,” supplement to *Tygodnik Solidarność* 3 (1981).

corollary of oversight, is presented as key to democratic reform. The concept of publicity had several meanings: open debate, accountability of those in office, and unconstrained access to public record. Lack of transparency and accountability was understood as synonymous with bureaucratic methods of rule that constituted the political source of the Polish crisis. Making public oversight impossible, stifling public debate and censoring independent expertise, that model was devoid of mechanisms of self-correction. In turn, publicity was seen as the “foundation of democratic decision making,” counteracting its negative effects. Even if in abstract term Solidarity endorsed the principle of “authentic participation of working people in the social and public life,” and vowed to “extend its different forms,” in practice that forms had to do more with oversight and ensuring accountability than with direct decision making.

At the same time, in the prefigurative idea of democracy that Solidarity itself wanted to embody and “radiate in the public life throughout the country,” publicity again was key:

Equality and public service character of the delegated power inside the Union can be meaningfully realized if all its functionaries at every level abide by the principle of publicity. That applies in particular to all negotiations with the Government and the representatives of the employer. All record of the Union leadership and its organs must be open to scrutiny of its members. Those institutions in turn are obliged to inform as broadly as possible and through all possible means the greatest possible membership multitudes about current problems and actions to be undertaken.

The strategy endowed the trade union press with a fundamental role in sustaining publicity by enabling a persistent and instantaneous flow accurate information between the membership and its delegates as well as horizontally between factories and regions, with the emphasis that this flow should be “multidirectional,” thus highlighting the participatory character of communications. Further the trade union press was supposed

to be an instrument of critique and pressure for self-correction and as such it “should not be censored in what regards Union’s affairs by the leadership.”

Similar ideas transpire from the Action Program adopted by the General Assembly of Delegates of Solidarity of the Mazowsze region.<sup>17</sup> Its preamble declares that due to the economic and political crisis “striking at the foundation of the national being,” the trade union had to expand its role of protector of employees towards a “mass movement of social self-defense” and a “civic movement for renewal.” However, “performing this expanded role, the Union cannot substitute the State, since it is neither prepared nor equipped for that, and moreover that would entail a grave risk of blurring [the Union’s] identity. The Union cannot draw policies, methods of their execution or assume responsibility for their outcome. It can and should, however, articulate social expectations, present its judgement on the situation, define directions of change and evaluate the emerging policies, their implementations and outcomes. To this end, the Union must strive to present its assessments, analyses and reports, its own projects and action plans, it must work out its own hierarchy of needs and possibilities.”

In other words, Mazowsze delegates articulated the tripolar political identity of Solidarity as a labor organization, as heir to the pre-August democratic opposition, and as agent of change in the midst of a complex crisis, in terms of exercising of active oversight vis-à-vis the public officials, while at the same time rejecting the direct exercise of political power and political responsibility as boundary it should not cross. The Action Plan clearly recognized that without consolidation of a democratic reform of the state, self-governance on factory level would soon become unsustainable. Still,

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<sup>17</sup> “Program NSZZ Solidarność Regionu Mazowsze,” *AS* 20 (1981): 202.



to demand reforms was one thing, and to assume a political mandate to spearhead democratization was quite another.

Publicity emerges again as a key concept. The Action Program defines an indissoluble link between publicity and rule of law (*praworządność*) and declares both as the key condition of both self-defense and consolidation of national renewal. While the rule of law should become a target of “universal citizen oversight,” this oversight is impossible to exercise without publicity and freedom of speech.

Truth in public life will protect us against the spurious democracy and rule of law which conceal the rule of force and lawlessness. Indispensable for self-defense against the breach of democracy and rule of law, is publicity and freedom of speech, as well as respect for plurality of worldviews and unconstrained access to multiplicity of independent sources of information that follow from these principles.

While The Mazowsze Action Program saw the trade union press as the “principal instrument of disseminating truth in public life,” it also echoed Solidarity mass media policy in vindicating ability to present its voice on public matters in the licensed radio, television and press, the right to reply against disinformation in the public media, it authentic oversight, as well as in demanding legal regulations of the restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly and advocating transparency of state administration in terms of access to public record, free inquiry into the workings of state officials and openness of proceedings of representative bodies.

The prefigurative dimension of Solidarity’s politics is highly visible in the Action Program as well. Publicity is not only a postulated norm regulating relationship between the State and the society, but also an important principle of internal self-organization. The Mazowsze general assembly, in this respect, pledged to enable every member to have insight into the activities of the leadership, which should be open to scrutiny in all matters of significant interest, as well as to secure the right to unhampered

critique. As a corollary, it vowed to create an “efficient and multidirectional information flow between the members and the leadership and between different structures and organs of governance.” On the practical level, this translated to creating a network of institutions, including an Information Center, the Center for Social Research (a think-tank kind of body), Workers’ University and a Trade Union publishing house. The trade union press, with its network of field correspondents had the key role in keeping this multidirectional flow going, amplifying public critique and shaping the public opinion.

## CONTESTING PRESS INDEPENDENCE

The ideas of democracy as independent oversight and its transformative effect on public life were central to Solidarity’s political philosophy of action, and in that framework social media, and their independence vis-à-vis the Union’s delegated powers, were ascribed a pivotal role. But on the ground, the trade union press activists would soon find out that translating these ideas into practice would become a rather contested process, as the idea of surrogate mass media would find ever greater echo among the Solidarity leadership.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the direct factor that contributed to the resolutions adopted during the Second Congress asserting the independence of Solidarity media activism, were reports about tendencies within KKP, expressed by Lech Wałęsa and Andrzej Słowik among others during a KKP Presidium meeting on May 8, 1981 (a day before the congress), to strengthen the control over the publications. These tendencies were already present during the stormy sessions of the KKP in the aftermath of the Bydgoszcz Crisis in March 1981 when the Union, in the aftermath of a police

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<sup>18</sup> Błażejowska, 206-207.

provocation involving the beating of Jan Rulewski, was on the brink of a general strike and the circumstances leading to its cancellation gave rise to a serious controversy among the Solidarity leadership, which part of the KKP preferred not to amplify publicly.<sup>19</sup>

The indirect factor might have been the establishment, a month earlier, of Solidarity Press Information Bureau (Biuro Informacji Prasowej “Solidarności,” BIPS) together with Janusz Onyszkiewicz’s appointment to head the office of the KKP press spokesman, on direct initiative of Wałęsa, who was adamant in declaring that since KKP resided in Gdańsk, this was where the press services should be located as well. Directly subordinated to Onyszkiewicz, BIPS had a mandate to gather and publish Solidarity’s records and to administer accreditation to the meetings of the Solidarity leadership.<sup>20</sup> The BIPS weekly newsletter was set up in direct competition to *AS*, a newsletter with similar function but receiving its mandate from the Congress and edited by KOR veterans who had already a rough record of polemics with the Young Poland Movement, based in Gdańsk, whose prominent member, Arkadiusz “Aram” Rybicki became BIPS’s director.

During the Second Congress, Rybicki showed no apparent intention of smoothing up the mounting tension, when he put in doubt the representative character both of the press with respect to the membership and of the Congress with respect to unlicensed press as a whole, while requesting the benefit of doubt for the Solidarity leadership, which, as he reminded, had not pronounced its position on that matter officially, and admonishing against seeding discord inside the Union. Seweryn Blumsztajn, former editor of *Biuletyn Informacyjny* now working in *AS*, expressed

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<sup>19</sup> Błażejowska, 208.

<sup>20</sup> “Uchwała KKP w/s Biura Informacji Prasowej,” *AS* 11 (1981): 202

anxiety about Solidarity leadership's position vis-à-vis its press, which was shared by other veteran media activists. Blumsztajn declared that in a 10-million community voting is not enough to secure democracy if it is not accompanied by media that genuinely exercise spokespersonship on behalf of the membership.<sup>21</sup> A similar thought was put in perspective by Włodzimierz Zbiniewicz, a trade union press activist from Puławy. "Solidarity, counting ten million members, is a social organism of the size of a European country and the role of the trade union press is similar to the role of the press in such countries, i.e. the exercise of democratic control. In our Union this is all the more important since the democratic mechanisms are weak and most of the members - passive." The freedom of critique was distinguishing the trade union press from the party organs which Zbiniewicz considered the anti-model. The trade union press should be accountable only to its constituent community, whose will it expresses.<sup>22</sup>

The mounting tension was acknowledged rather reluctantly by the KKP. Janusz Onyszkiewicz, who participated in the Congress in capacity of the KKP press spokesman but offered his remarks on the resolutions as private opinion, observed that the national leadership was aware that the trade union press affiliation had become a delicate and complicated matter and was willing to establish a taskforce to deal with it. In private capacity he asserted that a journal accredited as an official organ of a regional or national Solidarity leadership should be bound by guidances and accountable to that instance. Journals with Solidarity affiliation which were not accredited as official organs, should be more independent, but still loyal. Loyalty, as Onyszkiewicz understood it, was first an emotional condition, but translated into the minimal material

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<sup>21</sup> "Zjazd Prasy Związkowej," *AS* 15 (1981): 209-210.

<sup>22</sup> Włodzimierz Zbiniewicz, "Kto się boi prasy związkowej," *Solidarność Ziemi Puławskiej* 29, May 14, 1981.

requirement of not being affiliated with a rival trade union. But loyalty also touched upon critical capacity of the independent journalism. Loyalty as respect for decisions of the leadership meant that a periodical could express criticism but should not express or incite disobedience (e.g. call to boycott an officially declared strike). Finally, Onyszkiewicz argued against the idea of setting up a professional organization of Solidarity newspapers. His worry was not so much the lack of professionalism (a judgement that he otherwise shared), but the difficulty to handle the consequences of forming a substantial counterweight with respect to the delegated powers, which such an association would constitute.<sup>23</sup>

Now, while Onyszkiewicz's main reservations were met with acknowledgement in the Congress resolutions and decisions (professional association was not formed, and the principle of loyalty clearly articulated), tensions would soon reveal itself in multiple arenas. The Interim Commission of the trade union press would intervene in a number of conflicts between editors of trade union newspapers and local and regional Solidarity leadership. Some of these interventions concerned cases when local editors stood up against the Solidarity Committees' executive boards in defense of the Charter of Trade Union Press, in particular over the issue of accountability. While according to the Charter, editors should be accountable to the general assemblies of Solidarity members of a given structure, the Union executives wanted to have significantly more leverage over what they regarded their press organs. And in most of the cases the Boards would have the upper hand.

In May 1981, the general assembly of Solidarity delegates of the Lublin area did vote on the model of accountability of its trade union press but decided to entrust the

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<sup>23</sup> "Głos w dyskusji." *Solidarność* (Gdańsk), May 13, 1981.

mandate of appointing editors to its regional board nevertheless. In effect, the editors of the regional Solidarity newsletter announced strike alert protesting what they viewed as a constraint on their independence and complaining that the model of accountability stipulated by the charter was not given enough publicity during the assembly.<sup>24</sup> The assembly responded with authorizing the board to suspend the publication, a legitimate decision that the Interim Commission had to respect. A similar case took place in Kielce, where the Świętokrzyskie region assembly transferred the control over both the editorial policy and the print infrastructure to its Executive Board, declaring that while the suspicion that the democratically elected leadership would censor critical voices was unfounded, there was real danger in the absolute emancipation of the press with respect of the leadership.<sup>25</sup> Notably, even the progressive Mazowsze General Assembly authorized its board to appoint the press editors, even though it explicitly committed them to securing their independence.<sup>26</sup>

Other cases concerned direct personal or content-related intrusions. The Katowice Solidarity board decided to dissolve the journal *Pełnym Głosem* dismissing its editors, and to suspend the issue no. 8 of *Wprost* due to objections to one of its articles. Andrzej Rozpłochowski, one of the most radical Solidarity leaders of the day, in the meeting with the Interim Commission, argued for the subordination of the trade union press to the political line of the Executive Board as well as assessed the proliferation of Solidarity bulletins in the Katowice area as excessive.<sup>27</sup> Similarly the editorial board of *Wolne Słowo* from Toruń was suspended for falling out of line with the regional executive board, however this time the decision was revoked by the

<sup>24</sup> "Strajk redakcji pisma związkowego," AS 17 (1981): 208.

<sup>25</sup> "O niezależność prasy związkowej," AS 18 (1981): 210.

<sup>26</sup> "Program NSZZ Solidarność Regionu Mazowsze," AS 20 (1981): 306-308.

<sup>27</sup> "O niezależność prasy związkowej," AS 18 (1981): 210.

assembly of Toruń delegates. While neither of the above cases - as the report of the Interim Commission would later assess<sup>28</sup> - was a clear-cut example of internal censorship (in many cases, internal infighting between Solidarity activists was the true reason of controversy), probably the most grave example of infringement of journalist independence happened at the Kraków Politechnical School, where the local committee board suspended the editors of the university's newsletter *Dziś dla jutra* for what it seemed excessive investigation into internal scandals, without however demonstrating a single instance of false information being published or breach of ethics of journalism.<sup>29</sup>

All these conflicts were closely followed in the trade union press and especially publications run by pre-Solidarity social media veterans sounded the alarm. Warsaw's *Niezależność* and *Wiadomości Dnia* for all their competition (their editors, Konrad Bieliński and Antoni Macierewicz, belong to two distinct groups in KOR which were in open conflict), were unanimous about the need to defend the trade union press from its leadership.

## UNRULY PRINTERS

The Interim Commission intervened mainly of behalf of trade union press editors and journalists, however, in the Solidarity social media network, just like in case of other social media, the flow of communication depended on the accumulation of individual activities of all actors involved in sustaining it. In case of printed media, in addition to journalists and editors, printers occupied a nodal position. The Solidarity printers represented a strength to reckon with, not only vis-à-vis the elected executives, but also

<sup>28</sup> "O niezależność prasy związkowej," AS 30 (1981): 206.

<sup>29</sup> "O niezależność prasy związkowej," AS 22 (1981): 210.

vis-à-vis the licensed press. In fact, Solidarity-affiliated printers employed in state-run printing houses would often demonstrate an activist attitude towards socialist mass media, leading to inevitable clash of the two logics. Such cases included Zielona Góra, where the unionized printers demanded dismissal of Olas, the editor in chief of the licensed *Gazeta Lubuska* and requested a column in that newspaper to be put on Solidarity's disposal. An entire issue of *Kurier Lubelski* would be blocked due to its editors refusing to publish a Solidarity communique on jamming. In a local Poznań newspaper printers included a statement in defense of its dismissed colleagues against the decision of the paper's editors. In Gdańsk, printers effectively blocked, in an issue of *Wieczór Wybrzeża*, an item that carried summary of an article from the soviet *Pravda* on the situation in Poland. The printers demanded that a commentary correcting its false statements be published alongside, whose content was to be vetted by the local Solidarity cell. J. Waczyński, the editor in chief of *Wieczór Wybrzeża* in an open letter to Stefan Bratkowski, the rebel SDP chairman, would not miss that opportunity to publicize what he saw as an instance of trade union censorship.<sup>30</sup>

All this was happening under the *eagis* of the National Coordinating Committee of the Print Workers, an industrial sector organization of Solidarity, which in general was organized territorially. In contrast to the territorial Solidarity institutions, the sectorial organizations were not authorized, according to the Union's by-laws, to undertake protest activities without consent of the KKP. However, belligerent and defiant, their direct leverage over production of printed matter was something to reckon with. While coordinated protest actions such as the Days without Press were an expression Solidarity's strength, the uncoordinated instances, such as the strike of the

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<sup>30</sup> "Solidarność a środki masowego przekazu," AS 16 (1981): 207.



Olsztyn printers in reaction to slanderous TV news coverage of the protest, that continued for several weeks despite appeals of the KKP and mediation of the Church, were rather signs of its weakness in terms of internal governability, even though in public the Union representatives would still defend these acts of defiance as an expression of exasperation with the authorities' enable Solidarity to speak its own voice.<sup>31</sup>

## PRINTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Another arena where the shape of Solidarity social media was forged were its different agencies, whose task was to develop Solidarity printing infrastructure.<sup>32</sup> The debate over technicalities of distribution of printing equipment appealed to the underlying political principles of the Union's internal constitution. A reunion of Solidarity print technicians took place in Wrocław on April 3, 1981, which triggered the initiative of providing Solidarity with a comprehensive strategy. The plan included setting up a committee which would be responsible for creating an inventory of printing equipment already in operation among the Solidarity units, for facilitating technology transfer through donations from the West and for acquiring discarded equipment from state institutions, as well as for distribution of the devices and paper among the regions. In addition, the convention agreed that setting up a network of factory libraries would be the best model for distributing low-circulation, non-periodical independent publications. Prominently, the plan included setting up Solidarity's own printing industry, in the form of a network of ten central printing facilities, affiliated to the biggest Solidarity regions, which would provide services to local cells without access

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<sup>31</sup> "Apel KKP do poligrafów," AS 16 (1981): 209.

<sup>32</sup> Błażejowska, 203-205.

to printing equipment. The operation was coordinated by the Swedish trade unions and funded by the International Federation of Free Trade Unions in Brussels.<sup>33</sup>

This action plan was soon adopted by the KKP, which set up the Print and Publishing Commission led by Andrzej Słowik, a prominent activist from Łódź to create the infrastructure inventory and to coordinate the acquisition of the industrial printing equipment. At the same time, the concession for setting up Solidarity print works as well as allotment of paper was put on the agenda of the mass-media access negotiations with the authorities.

Soon it transpired that the Commission would face obstacles on many fronts. On the one hand, the regional leaders were rather reluctant to reveal the size of the printing infrastructure under their command, including the Western donations some bigger regions managed to secure independently. More importantly, the regional leaders participating in the KKP proceedings would use this forum to contest the very idea of unifying the print infrastructure around a small number of big printing facilities, proposing instead that a bigger number of smaller units would fit the local needs better. Chaos would follow suit. First industrial set arrived incomplete and was stuck at the Customs Office, just like a number of other shipments. That was not a matter of official obstruction. Rather the regions, in dispute with The Słowik commission over his right to audit the local infrastructure, would not claim authorizations from the KKP needed to clear the equipment they had requested with the customs officers.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it transpired that it would take the Swedish trade union half a year to assemble each of the dozen industrial print sets.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Zjazd Poligrafii Związkowej,” *AS* 10 (1981): 103.

<sup>34</sup> “Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza” *AS* 18 (1981): 104.

<sup>35</sup> “Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza” *AS* 26 (1981): 105.

Finally, the KKP decided to withdraw Słowik mandate and to reconsider its print infrastructure policy with more attention to the needs of the regional committees. Members of the new Print and Publishing Commission set up May 27, 1981, especially Andrzej Karczewski and Lech Dymarski, favored decentralization of the infrastructure, incremental but even upgrades of equipment across all regions, and welcomed individual entrepreneurship of the local leaderships in this regard.<sup>36</sup> Without discontinuing the import of the large print works, they additionally commissioned large quantities of smaller units to fill in for the local “blank spots” of the trade union’s infrastructural map. However, their activities were obstructed by the issue of overlapping competences between Solidarity’s various executive bodies. The commission was appointed to create the inventory of the Union’s infrastructure, but this supposed the auditing powers, which were reserved for the Union’s Review Board. When it came to coordinating distribution of printing equipment from foreign donations, Solidarity foreign bureau was empowered to act independently of the Commission, and its head Ryszard Kalinowski was giving a clear priority to commissioning infrastructure needed for the professional coverage of the National Congress over the basic needs of the regional offices.<sup>37</sup> T

he indecision regarding which road to take in development of Solidarity printing facilities was quite illustrative of the birth pangs in which Solidarity policy with respect to its own media developed.

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<sup>36</sup> “Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza” *AS* 19 (1981): 102.

<sup>37</sup> “Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza” *AS* 35 (1981): 104.

## THE EXPERTS' VIEW

The policies of the Solidarity leadership vis-a-vis Solidarity social media were also shaped by expert opinion coming from the social research centers (ośrodki badań społecznych), think-tank type of entities established in major regional offices, to support the work of the leadership with research-informed reports and analyses. One such survey of the social reception of trade union publications – based on data drawn from several pools - endorsed the central importance of the trade union press. “Trade union press is the basic and fundamental means of political and organizational integration of the Union; in the perception of its members, the tendencies shaping information and opinion-making activities of the trade union press beyond factory level are identified with the political and social directions of the statutory bodies as such.” A rather sobering addendum was that this role was performed mainly with respect to the activists, but had limited validity for the rank-and-file members, for whom radio and television remained the principal source of information about Solidarity’s aims and actions. This conclusion supported both the view that struggle for access to the public media remains the main front line, and the opinion against leaving the Solidarity social media to themselves, further reinforced by the finding that 59 percent of the informants were in favor of the subordination of the press to the statutory leadership.<sup>38</sup>

The same survey recommended that press control should be exercised by committees consisting of neither non-elected experts, or members of the leadership of the statutory bodies, but by members with non-executive delegated powers, in order to avoid conflict of interest. Other recommendations included separation of spokespersonship and opinion-making, which in practice translated into a press

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<sup>38</sup> Ludwik Dorn, “Prasa i wydawnictwa związkowe w odbiorze społecznym,” *AS* 33 (1981): 403-404.

division of labor between newsletters presenting the official record of the authorized statements and documents issued by Solidarity national regional leaders, and the opinion making daily press and periodicals. Needless to say, that implied quite developed media capacities, a condition which at the time the report was written, could be met only by Mazowsze and couple of other regions.

Notably, the Solidarity experts were not quite neutral observers of the development of Solidarity social media, but rather competitors when it came to shaping the trade union opinion and providing a communication channel between the rank-and-file and the statutory bodies. Thus another report on communication between factory committees and regional boards reached similar findings - that once a committee is established the routine contact with the regional leadership is largely mediated by and amounted to the reception of trade union press, with exception of specific situations when local bodies are solicited to perform a protest action or respond to an internal survey. There existed no routine protocols established to reach out to the rank-and-file and many factory committee members were not able to identify whom to turn to in need of help or guidance.

In two domains we are facing an atrophy of organizational and opinion-making role of the [Regional] Executive Board: when it comes to shaping and working out the trade union opinion, and when it comes to establishing and executing policies in substantial matters of social life...There is a vicious circle at work. Namely, in a given matter, factory units and its members wait for a position statement on behalf of the board and tend to formulate their opinion with that position in mind, while the Board expects the local units to show initiative communicating their feedback and voicing their expectations, before it pronounces a position. Due to the vicious circle, there is a danger that important matters of the Union concern /wage policy for example/ will be eliminated from the flow of information and organizational activities. Also the information blackout resulting from diverging expectations of the statutory bodies on different levels of the Union structure may disable the Union agencies from

realizing its social, wage, cultural and other policies in a way informed by real demands and desires of its members.<sup>39</sup>

In the report's conclusion the reinvigoration of the press in its role of transmitting the demands and desires of the rank and file was glaringly absent. In contrast, the recommendations of the report called upon the regional leadership to take more active part in shaping the organizational life of the local units through introducing reporting procedures meant to create feedback loops through "top down organization of collecting bottom-up opinion." Presumably, the prominent organizational role in this regard would be played by the experts themselves, thus intercepting the pivotal function in mediating communication between the ordinary Solidarity members and their delegates. That, according to the Solidarity experts, was not at odds with principles of democratic self-governance, since to lead democratically was to lead in the first place. Now, that in the postulated feedback loop no specific role was attributed to the publications, can be interpreted an informed recognition of the uneasy relationship between the Union leadership and its press, but also as a proposition to imagine the Union's key communications based on alternative channels.

## CENSORSHIP AND PROGRAM COUNCIL

While the idea of surrogate mass media developed largely in response to the stalemate over the access to public media, it further crystalized as KKP negotiated the bill on regulating censorship, the negotiations which, unlike the former, were brought to a conclusion shortly before the imposition of the Martial Law, when the new regulations were revoked.<sup>40</sup> One of the crucial points in the social draft of the Censorship Act

<sup>39</sup> Michał Strzeszewski, "Kontakty Komisji Zakładowych z Zarządem Regionu – próba analizy," AS 28 (1981): 401-402.

<sup>40</sup> Tomasz Mielczarek, "Uwarunkowania prawne funkcjonowania cenzury w PRL," *Rocznik Prasoznawczy* 4 (2010): 29-49.

(prepared by a group of journalists and lawyers related to the Union, but following broad consultations) that Solidarity negotiators tabled in the talks with the authorities was the issue of the exemption of internal bulletins of social organizations from preventive censorship. The aim of the proposed arrangement was to legalize the *fait accompli* of the unlicensed circulation of Solidarity social media as publications for internal use.

The social version of the draft bill, presented in January 1981 stipulated that all the newsletters of trade unions and other social and political associations, distributed internally for the use of their members and clearly marked as such, should be free from pre-publication vetting, regardless whether they contain information or opinions. The negotiators argued that the unlicensed circulation of trade union press has been one of the most important gains of the Gdańsk Accords and that free flow of information is indispensable for the Union's proper operations. They also observed that their subordination to censorship would cause moral outrage among its multi-million readership who identifies profoundly with their newspapers and is ready to defend it.

The authorities at first conceded, but by July 31, 1981, when the Censorship Act was enacted by Sejm, the article on exemption of internal newsletters from censorship was modified, introducing conditional vetting, in case the specifically listed constraints on freedom of expression (especially "contesting the international alliances") were not observed. In addition, the law stipulated financial penalties for refusing to subordinate publications to control at a threshold which under contemporary Polish law would put the culprit on the list of lawfully convicted (a clause that was finally withdrawn). In introducing these modifications, the party negotiators pointed out to notorious instances of the trade union press publishing overtly political contents, especially the ones with an anti-Soviet edge.

Even though the Solidarity delegation opposed these insertions, Jan Józef Lipski, the doyen of the democratic opposition who had been leading the negotiations on behalf of Solidarity, was compelled to concede that the contested publications were indeed overstepping the boundary of political prudence.<sup>41</sup> Reporting back to the KKP, he insisted that trade union press was increasingly getting out of control and proposed to create advisory councils on local and regional levels to make possible quality review of the controversial content in order to preempt legal actions of the Censor's Office.<sup>42</sup>

Lipski's idea was accepted after considerable debate in the KKP presidium in late July 1981, in which the issue of trade union press was presented in the larger canvas of the communication policy and the ability and desirability of control over representation of Solidarity in the Union's own media. On the one hand, Presidium members such as Andrzej Rozpłochowski, Andrzej Gwiazda or KKP secretary Andrzej Celiński worried that such "internal censorship" mechanism would be misused on the regional level and that this amounted to a self-muzzle which goes against the spirit of the Gdańsk Agreements. On the other hand, Onyszkiewicz emphasized that Solidarity movement as a whole was being made accountable for the partisan content of the each of its newsletters due to lack of a clear definition of what counted as an expression trade union opinion, a problem that separate columns for authorized messages of Solidarity governing bodies would solve. Also, Lipski and Celiński saw the danger that political groups with a partisan agenda of their own would use the trade union press status as a shield for their own purposes, especially since there was no register or any other institutionalized way to regulate what counted as a trade union publication. Finally, Karol Modzelewski reminded that the Gdańsk Agreements foresaw regulating

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<sup>41</sup> Błażejowska, 211-212.

<sup>42</sup> "Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza" *AS* 26 (1981): 103-104.



censorship, but not abolishing it. The latter would require rolling out the cannons of national strike action which was unlikely to receive sufficient support given more pressing and palpable grievances such as shortage of food, pharmaceuticals or cigarettes.

In the end KKP decided to establish the Program Council with the aim of mediating relationships between the Censors' Office and the trade union press editors. The Council was not to be empowered to impose sanctions, but it would offer guidance to regional and national leadership, who could then consider suspending the trade union status of a publication.<sup>43</sup>

The negotiations over censorship act were vividly discussed in the trade union press. In an interesting debate published in *Niezależność*, the official newspaper of the Mazowsze region, Adam Michnik raised suspicion that the strategy of the government was to offer Solidarity a number of licensed, censored publications in order to press the union to forsake the unlicensed ones, which would eventually lead to muzzling independent opinion. He also warned against dictatorial leanings of Solidarity regional leaders, if internal censorship mechanisms were to be introduced.<sup>44</sup> Onyszkiewicz rebuked that even if that was the intention, the whole gambit was badly planned, since the carrot to pair with the stick (press in official circulation) still remained to be delivered. The real issue for him was the broader trade-union press culture, its immaturity and lack of professionalism, which often reached out for caricatures and vulgar bickering in place of accurate press reports to account for the situation. While that diagnosis was in principle shared by both Solidarity's activists themselves and their professional colleagues from the SDP, Krzysztof Wolicki remarked that it was naive to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> "Żeby związek nie był niemy," *Niezależność*, August 26, 1981.

seriously contemplate that Leonid Brezhnev actually cared about what some factory newsletter in Puławy thought about him and that the whole issue of unprofessionalism of trade union press was rather a smokescreen than the spring of the party's political intentions.<sup>45</sup>

The Interim Commission of the Trade Union Press expressed its discontent with the modifications introduced into the Censorship Act as “infringing upon substantial interests of the Union,” however it declared that it had no intention to push towards internal confrontation. What is more, assuming a position in favor of “responsible use of free speech” it came out with support for the idea of establishing a review body on trade union press, with the triple aim of probing the complaints filed by the state officials, mediating in case of conflict and formulating the press policy. Such body, the Commission proposed, should be composed of individuals with professional authority as well as representatives of the press, and should act upon a dual assumption that it was the “right and duty” of the Union leadership to both freely shape its press policies and to protect the independence and internal autonomy of its presses.<sup>46</sup>

This declaration was basically confirmed by the Third Congress of the Trade Union Press, which took place in Puławy on August 15-16, 1981. The Congress was called in order to formulate a position of the Solidarity social media on the Censorship Act. The place was not accidental. It was an act of support for the local newspaper *Solidarność Ziemi Puławskiej*, which was under investigation for printing caricatures of Brezhnev. The Congress issued an appeal to the forthcoming First National Congress of Solidarity for protecting its journalists against censor's interferences largely restating the earlier declaration of the Interim Commission. However, a counter-resolution was

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<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> “W sprawie cenzury” AS 22 (1981): 211.

filed on the congressional record, articulating a minority position that rejected the idea of the Program Council as an excessive expansion of the mandate of the KKP and a first step towards internal censorship. The minority report proposed, as a counter-measure to safeguard the independence of Solidarity social media, to form a federation of trade union press, which would have a status of a self-governing section comparable to the industrial sector committees, and which would integrate both the regulatory functions of the Program Council and the infrastructure and paper distribution mandate of the Press and Publication Commission. The minority position revealed a high level of anxiety among the Solidarity media activists over transferring all the regulatory powers to the trade union leadership and in a more nuanced way, its main ideas were articulated in three other resolutions of the Congress.

On the institutional level, without challenging the of the KKP directly, Solidarity social media activists responded with setting up self-governance bodies whose mandate was parallel to those established top-down by the national leadership. First, the Third Congress decided to transform the Interim Commission into a permanent and formal self-governance body of Solidarity media activists, representing the trade-union press vis-a-vis the leadership. The established Trade Union Press Commission was to constitute the Solidarity social media counterpart for the Program Council and the Press and Publication Commission, with the right to delegate its members to both of these institutions. Furthermore, the Congress proposed a Register of Solidarity Journalists to be established by the Office of the KKP Spokesperson to manage affiliations upon the Trade Union Press Commission recommendation. Finally, the Congress established a collegial court to review complaints against the trade union press editors and journalists, with the mandate to discontinue press affiliations. In principle, it was unclear what would be relationship of this collegial court to the similar competences of the Program

Council or who would have a final say on the matter of the affiliations.<sup>47</sup> In practice, however, the Program Council never took off with the operations and the Trade Union Press Commission cooperated without friction with the Press Bureau of the First Congress in distributing accreditations.

In comparison to the trade union press activists, the response of independent publishers to the Censorship Act was much more unequivocal. “Censorship has deformed and continues deforming our traditions, the sphere of ideology, national culture and history. The new bill does not offer guarantees of constraining Censor’s frenzy, what it does offer are new instruments to repress independent publishers. It would be a paradox if at this stage – in the glare of democratization and renewal - the authorities succeeded to muzzle culture... The position of NOWA, not unlike other publishers, is as follows: the only measure of worth of a work should be its literary, artistic or scientific value. Considering the need to protect the good of culture and the universal social mandate for its operations, NOWA refuses to subordinate to the new law on censorship.”<sup>48</sup> In hindsight it is not easy to phantom the consequences of NOWA’s defiance, given its close cooperation with Solidarity, which accepted the new legal framework, even though it fell short of its expectations. We will never find out, since the Censorship Act, which came in to force on October 1, 1981, was suspended with the coming of the Martial Law and never reenacted.

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<sup>47</sup> “III Zjazd Prasy Związkowej” AS 30 (1981): 205.

<sup>48</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 136.

## CHAPTER FIVE |

### *INDIVISIBLE ARE THE PRINCIPLES WHICH ORIENT OUR ACTIONS:*

#### MEDIA ISSUES DURING SOLIDARITY'S FIRST NATIONAL CONGRESS

The First National Congress of Delegates of The Independent, Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” assembled in its birthplace, Gdańsk, and conferred in two rounds, between September 5-10 and September 26 - October 7, 1981. 898 delegates, each representing around ten thousand Union’s members and altogether around four dozen regions, gathered to debate and adopt Solidarity’s Charter, its Action Program, as well as tens of other resolutions. These documents undoubtedly constitute the zenith of Solidarity’s intellectual and political heritage and had been often interpreted as a constitution of sorts, a declaration of principles of self-governance which, in the spirit of prefigurative politics, were meant to radiate over public life as a whole. As the symbolic manifestation of that intent, the proceedings in the Olivia arena were amplified through loudspeakers mounted outside the assembly and all documents adopted by the Congress, as well as abridged transcripts of each session, were immediately printed and widely circulated. Also, as a historical event, with its never-ending sessions which rarely seemed to lose momentum, with the sudden twists of political sentiment, the parade of avid speakers, with its chattering corridors, fractions and political pamphleteering, the First Congress resembled the finest constituent moments of modern history. But these documents were also interpreted as Solidarity’s testament, a notion

that implies both proximity of the Martial Law and insinuates that what happened after its imposition is a different chapter of history.<sup>1</sup>

The discussions about the role of the trade union press, accompanying the adoption of the Union's two most important programmatic documents, the *Charter* and the *Action Program*, restaged the debate that had been ongoing in the preceding months. While it brought in little new in terms of arguments, due to the momentous character of the Congress, the decisions of Solidarity constituent assembly can be interpreted as conclusive, in the sense institutional design and underlying political principles, that would have hold, had the Union been allowed to operate legally.

## SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOLIDARITY'S CHARTER

The most dramatic episode of the debate on Solidarity's social media took place during the discussion and voting of the amendments to the *Charter*. The initial version of its article 36, worded "The Union shall have its own press. Trade union press is independent. Trade union materials have a priority in publishing," was contested by many delegates. The idea of editorial independence was not challenged explicitly, as far as interventions in the media content or any other form of internal censorship were concerned, even though a delegate from Pomorze Zachodnie vindicated leadership's right to reply to possible press critique. Most of the delegates feared, however, that the strong wording of the article 36 might in principle make executing any information policy of the Union impossible. A delegate from Śląsk Opolski argued that instead of regulating the relationship between the Union's delegated powers and its press,

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<sup>1</sup> Bartosz Kaliski, "Zjazd Solidarności – fakty i konteksty," *I Krajowy Zjazd Delegatów NSZZ Solidarność. Stenogramy*, t. 1 – I tura, ed. Grzegorz Majchrzak, Jan Marek Owsinski (Warszawa: IPN, 2011), 11-51.

diversification of Solidarity publishing should be sought to secure pluralism of ideas. Perhaps not without importance was the fact that most of the Congress participants were also members of the regional statutory bodies of the Union, independence from whom was postulated by the article. Also, in the background lurked the idea of developing surrogate mass media in order to build capacities to respond to government propaganda in a concentrated and timely way. In the final count an alternative version of article 36 prevailed, worded “The Union shall have its own means of information transmission. The Union authorities of a given level decide about their status,” supporting the view that trade union affiliation should translate into subordination to the leadership of a given statutory unit.

The amendment of article 36 was immediately protested by Solidarity social media activists who apparently did not expect such a turn of events. During an emergency meeting with Onyszkiewicz, AS’s Seweryn Blumsztajn among others expressed his “utmost surprise” and declared that the amendment was expressive of lack of a clear concept of press freedom among the delegates. In addition, the trade union press journalists accredited at the First Congress issued a statement, expressing their concern with the amendment which in their judgement did not offer “any guarantee that the cardinal principle regulating the existence of the press in democratic communities - the independence of press from direct censorship of both the State and the executive bodies of the Union - be observed.” According to Solidarity social media activists, the amendment left an impression of double standards. The Union, which stood firmly by the principle of exemption from censorship of its internal bulletins, should not shy away from this principle in its internal operations. “From more than 35 years of experience with censored press we learned what social consequences any attempts at constraining freedom of speech entail. If the Union wants its press to be good, it must respect a broad

measure of its independence,” the statement concluded, demanding that the mandate of the leadership with respect to its press and its status should be further clarified through a separate resolution during the second round of the Congress.<sup>2</sup>

## THE INTERIM SESSIONS

The work of creating a normative framework for Solidarity media policy took place during the drafting of Solidarity’s *Action Program*. This process consisted in drafting program proposals by several working groups devoted to specific thematic areas in between the two rounds of the Congress. Based on the proposals, a consolidated draft was created by the Program Committee led by Bronisław Geremek and submitted for plenary debate and amendments during the second round, when the definitive version was adopted.<sup>3</sup>

The composition of the Working groups was in itself expressive of the distinction between mass media and social media. While Group no. 13 on Mass Media debated Solidarity’s position with respect to the licensed means of communication, the trade union press was the focus of Working Group no. 3 on Information, Training, Opinion-Making and Expert Work. Also, it was no coincidence that the role of Solidarity social media was a matter substantial to the proceedings Working Group no. 1 on Democracy and Forms of Trade Union Action, which, in addition to its program proposals, submitted several recommendations for consideration of Working Group no. 3. That was due to the fact that in the program proposal of Working Group no. 1 both

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<sup>2</sup> “Oświadczenie dziennikarzy pism związkowych,” *AS* 36 (1981): 609.

<sup>3</sup> Kaliski, “Zjazd Solidarności,” 32.



the idea of democracy as oversight and the idea of prefigurative politics, reached a prominent articulation.<sup>4</sup>

While admitting with caution forms of direct democracy such as the referenda, the program proposal of Working Group no. 1 asserted representative democracy to be the foundation of the Union's internal organization. The independence of trade union press was in turn considered as the guarantee of its proper functioning. The exercise of political representation had to observe double principle of publicity, articulated largely in terms of right to unconstrained public critique of the delegated powers provided with the right to reply. Notably, while this concept saw an indispensable role of the press as an element of internal checks and balances, it underrated its opinion-making functions. Working from the assumption that in democratic conditions the acumen of the representatives should be informed by proper orientation in the opinions of the Union's rank-and-file, the program proposal of the Workgroup no. 1 included a quite detailed concept of how program work should be conducted to include bottom-up input, but from this scheme the trade union press was rather absent. The Working Group proposed instead to set up program teams to support the work of the Union's statutory bodies, whose task would include inquiries about the position of the Union members on different matters of concern, consultation of proposed solutions, specific policy recommendations, as well as issuing guidance in the domain of press policy and propaganda. In all these areas, the program teams were supposed to rely upon public opinion research, rather than take stock of public deliberation in the media, largely along the lines of the idea of "top-down organization of bottom-up opinion" we have seen in the expert reports. That proposed solution was grounded in the conviction that the

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<sup>4</sup> Documentation of the proceedings of the working groups see *AS* 38 (1981).

intellectual capacities of the trade union press for shaping public opinion were in a germinal phase, but inevitably it also served to consolidate, rather than change the state of the art, empowering expert bodies to mediate the communication between the delegates and their constituencies.

This understanding of the role of the trade union press principally as a watchdog reinforcing checks and balances, but not quite as an opinion-maker, translated into the specific emphasis in the recommendations submitted to Work Group no. 3. These acknowledged the mandate of the Union's statutory bodies to shape the editorial lines of the affiliated publications (without however interfering directly with content), as long as it did not lead to "constraining the Union's internal democracy, e.g. the critique of the delegated powers and their politics," and in particular prescribing direct interference into the content of news and opinion items. The "right and obligation" of the trade union press to articulate all spectrum of positions held by the Union members was affirmed.

The program proposal of Working Group 13 on Mass Media restated in essence the position of Solidarity's negotiators about the need to reform the *Radiokomitet* so that it enabled genuine social control of public media, at the same time expressing the disapproval and frustration about the little progress of the negotiations with the government and demanding immediate execution of its agreed upon outputs. It also pledged to expand its regulatory initiatives by working with the Polish Journalists' Association on a draft of a new, comprehensive Press Act. But at the same time, the proposal testified to a tactical turn in Solidarity's media policy from broadening access to public media towards media self-reliance. This was, on the one hand, a matter of development of Solidarity's radio and television broadcasting infrastructure, press agencies and publishing houses, the demand for creating a daily newspaper with

national circulation, all that driven by the need to counteract official propaganda. On the other hand, the program proposals - especially the project put forward by Mazowsze region delegates- put emphasis on improvement of internal communications to prepare for the event of a licensed media blackout. That last tendency dovetailed the efforts to transform Solidarity social media into surrogate mass media.

The proceedings of the Working Group no. 3 inserted the issue of the trade union press within the broader framework of communication flow encompassing news and opinion making, education, as well as policy work. The overall aim was to design a system that would assure internal pluralism, maintaining a two-way information flow between the leadership and the rank and file, while building capacity to act with unity, efficacy and speed.

Our program will be implemented efficiently and without delay only if every member of our Union is fully aware of its main theses and underlying justifications, and to ensure that decisions are informed and timely, the opinion of the rank-and-file must effectively reach the leadership bodies of every level. To work out a feedback system between the members and the officials of the Union, which guarantees observance of the principles of decentralization and pluralism, while maintaining unity of action, is the principal task of informational, educational and opinion making activities.

For the trade union press, this translated into striking a balance between respecting autonomy of the press and the need to build capacity of the social media to become surrogate mass media, competitive with the licensed means of communication despite the technological advantage of the latter.

Working Group no. 3 endorsed the press as an independent social initiative, whose proliferation run parallel to the emergence of Solidarity's structures. It was not the Union's statutory bodies who decreed its press organs into existence, but an effect of "enormous commitment and organizational effort of hundreds of individuals who

decided to stand against the propaganda machine of the party-state apparatus.” In other words, by virtue of its genealogy Solidarity’s social media had a special entitlement to autonomy.

Furthermore, Group no. 3 declared that expansion of free speech was one of Solidarity’s greatest achievements and a foundation of its normative vision of social order, in which social initiatives are nurtured by confrontation of ideas. The group proposed to endorse the value of free speech through a separate resolution on the status of trade union press, whose preamble would read as follows:

Free word is among Solidarity’s greatest conquests. It is a constitutive element and a guarantee of the social order we are fighting for. The tasks ahead of our Union require mechanisms facilitating social initiative and confrontation of ideas. A pluralist media system, unsubordinated to preemptive censorship, is a tried and tested solution the world over, of significant importance for our Union. Indivisible are the principles that orient the Union’s actions. Contesting state censorship, we shall not consent to internal censorship.

While the final sentence was a symbolic confirmation of the principle of prefigurative politics that Solidarity social media activists strongly supported, in practice the concrete solutions put forward in the resolution differed only slightly from what has been worked out already between the KKP and the Trade Union Press Commission. The issue of subordination of editors and the criteria trade union affiliation was resolved in favor of the Solidarity leadership, however, that was balanced by editors’ right to appeal to its Review Commission for reconsideration of leadership’s decisions. The idea of direct subordination to the general assemblies was rejected as impracticable, since these gathered rarely and in most of the regions delegated its powers to the executive boards. However, the Review Commission could transmit the case to the assembly when justified. The obligation to publish the Union’s official record and subordination in case

of strike readiness were included without modification. The resolution bundled together the right to critique and the right to reply.

In addition to formalizing the relations between Solidarity's statutory bodies and its press, Working Group no. 3 also proposed that decisions on appointments and affiliations should be based on quality assessment. The Group saw considerable space for improvement of the press standards, with the hope that competition between an increasing number of titles would do the job, especially since the publications were supposed to be self-sustainable financially (with the important exception of the investments in infrastructure which were mostly coordinated by the Union given reliance on the state resources and centrally managed foreign donations in this regard). However, equally important was the postulate that the principle of quality assessment should guide the decisions of Solidarity's delegated powers, and that the assessment should be conducted by a separate committee working on national level, and informed by independent expertise and opinion of the readers alone.

### SOLIDARITY'S MEDIA IN THE *ACTION PROGRAM*

During the second round of the First National Congress, the delegates adopted the *Action Program*, as well as a number of resolutions, which included prominently the *Resolution on Trade Union Press* largely in the form proposed by the Working Group no. 3, including the preamble about the indivisibility of the principle of free speech quoted above. That was accompanied by a strong statement calling upon the Union leadership to take both legal and protest action to defend the press from the escalating harassment - the adverse government propaganda, prosecutions, confiscations as well as restraining access to printing facilities. Importantly, the *Resolution on Defense of the*

*Trade Union and Independent Press and Publishers against Repression* expanded Solidarity's defensive umbrella towards the non-affiliated publications, demanding that the Union counteracts the constraining interpretation of the new act on censorship, provides circulation to those publications which have been censored illicitly, and proposes legal regulations that permit the independent publishers to operate without a state license. Finally, it recommended to set up an agency dealing with defense of the press under the Mazowsze Intervention Bureau (itself a continuation of KOR's Intervention Bureau in terms of personnel).

Adopted by the delegates on October 7, 1981, Solidarity's *Action Program*, better known under the name of its sixth chapter, the *Self-Governing Republic*, is probably the essential document to understand the intellectual and political trajectory of Solidarity as a social movement. Its thirty-seven theses, arranged into eight chapters, constitute a combination of political principles, policy declarations, and policy recommendations on the Union's activities in the increasingly unforeseeable future, marked by both economic and political crisis. In other words, *Self-Governing Republic* has a character of a program defining guidelines for future action, an internal Constitution encapsulating the normative underpinning of the Solidarity Charter, and a declaration of principles that underlie Solidarity's normative vision of a social order.<sup>5</sup>

The mass media and social media aspects of Solidarity's agenda are described in two separate chapters. The former is included in the mentioned sixth chapter, the *Self-Governing Republic*, which lays down the constituent vision of a democratic polity, that including the principles of the rule of law, of ideological, cultural and institutional pluralism, the principles of self-governance on factory and local level, as well as the

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<sup>5</sup> I was using the following version: *Statut. Uchwała Programowa z Anekssem. Dokumenty Zjazdu* (Gdańsk: BIPS, 1981).

postulate of representation of social institutions and local governments in the Sejm in order to make its representative function more authentic. In the sixth chapter Solidarity pledges to work towards making education and culture accessible for all, especially for sake of development of the youth, and to protect independent initiatives in these domains. Finally, in that chapter, the Union demands justice for the victims of state repression and accountability for putting the country on the brink of collapse.

In that constituent vision, there is no place for censorship, and in the Thesis No. 31 Solidarity declares the society's right to "live in truth" and pledges to fight mendacity. "We consider censorship in the mass media as an evil which we accept only temporarily and out of necessity. We do not accept censorship in arts and sciences. Censorship cannot strike at the right of the nation to its history and literature. The Union will counteract every single abuse of censorship." The trade union press as well as other unlicensed publications and educational initiatives are principal means of realization of the living in truth so defined.

Thesis no. 32 on mass media brings in an important conceptual innovation. The term "mass media" (pl. *środki masowego przekazu*, whose literal translation is "media of mass transmission") is substituted with the concept of "media of social communication" (pl. *środki społecznego komunikowania*) to highlight that the media "belong to the people, must serve the entire society and be under social control." Notably, this new concept rarely appears in the official record of the Union preceding the congress. It is however a key-concept in the discourse on renewal of the licensed journalism, promoted by the leadership of the Polish Journalists' Association (SDP), which among the licensed professional organizations is Solidarity's significant ally, and that alliance translates into SDP's support of Solidarity's struggle for access to mass

media, joint initiatives towards reforming the media system as well as training offered to Solidarity's social media activists.

The concept of “social communication” appears prominently in the report *On the State of Social Communication in Poland*, commissioned by the SDP in November 1980, prepared by the Center for Press Studies in Kraków and released in March 1982. Notably, the report was understood as a follow-up on the report *Mass Communication in Poland: A balance sheet of the 1970s*.<sup>6</sup> Explaining the change of conceptual framework, the authors affirmed that “mass communication is commonly understood as institutionalized transmission of messages among heterogeneous and anonymous public with use of mass media (press, radio, television)... Mass communication such conceived is only an element of social communication, which consists of the social circulation of all kinds of socially relevant contents in a given group.”<sup>7</sup> While the report did not propose anything like a theory of social media, it did conceptualize a model of communication that was radically different from the mass media model. “Social communication” implied audience-centered analysis that ascribed agency to the media user, acknowledge different communication needs of various social groups, recognized a variety of formal and informal channels of communication at their disposal, and stressed the significance of variety of long term and short term social determinants beyond control of the policymaker. Taking all these factors into consideration, the report concluded, the impact of top-down transmission of centrally planned information policy on public mood and opinion was at best uneven, and most of the time a self-delusion of official propagandists. While that conceptual change had deeper roots, it

<sup>6</sup> “Komunikowanie masowe w Polsce, próba bilansu lat siedemdziesiątych,” *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 1 (1981). Quoted in *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, VIII.

<sup>7</sup> *Raport o stanie komunikacji społecznej*, 1-2.



was fully corroborated during Solidarity's Carnival. "Between August 1980 and December 1981, the role of information channels different that the mass press, radio and television increased, while at the same time, the impact of the centrally managed information and propaganda policy on the scope and degree of social diffusion of various types of content decreased."<sup>8</sup>

Now, the appropriation of the analytical category of "media of social communication" as a political concept enabled Solidarity to universalize its agenda. First, pointing to the existence of the multiple social agency in the communication process, on behalf of which Solidarity was speaking, it allowed to redefine the terms of the debate presented in the licensed media as competition for control of the transmission belt between the unionized workers, a particular organization, and the Party speaking in the higher interest of the state. It was a way to highlight that "the Union's struggle for access to mass media is a struggle in the interest of social groups, a struggle for rights of the entire society." At the same time this concept conveyed the alternative idea of communication in which public media was normatively on the same level with means of communication available to social organizations, and thus irreconcilable with stated monopoly of the media. Where once there was a single originator of the communication act, who disposed massive means to transmit the message to a receiver, now stood a deliberating public, composed of interlocutors with footing proportional to its social importance (however that could be defined).

This in turn enabled a new reading of the "access-to-mass media" clause of the Gdańsk Accords and the article 83 of the Constitution on the freedom of speech and assembly, which stipulated that the material means shall be put at the disposal of the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 2.

“toiling masses and its organizations” to effectively exercise those freedoms. This new reading was in open defiance to the state doctrine that regarded radio and television as “institutions of higher utility,” i.e. entailing exclusiveness of the Party in exercise of “social control” and constraints on unionization and self-governance inside the public media institutions.

In policy terms, enabling access to media of social communication implied a demand for deep change rather than just for an independent niche in the otherwise unreformed system based on transmission-belt model. Solidarity declared the laws regulating the operations of *Radiokomitet* as “unconstitutional,” and demanded greater accountability of programming to social, professional and religious associations as well as self-governance bodies in the Radio and Television. The policy further combined the oversight of the content with the principle of social control over infrastructure, paper and airtime, and other scarce resources in the realm of the public media, equitable access to which should be guaranteed, the *Action Program* clarified, proportionally to “size and real social significance” of the organization. Finally, social communication stood also for the idea of “social ownership” of media, which apart from the access to public communications, translated into the demand for abolition of constraints on establishment of publishing and broadcasting initiatives regardless of the medium.

In addition, in thesis no. 32 Solidarity pledged protection to all employees of the public media as well as journalists who abide professional ethics (code of conduct to be defined by the SDP). In a curious contrast to its own internal policies, Solidarity supported the postulate of autonomy of editorial teams put forward by SPD, manifested chiefly in the right to participate in decisions on appointment and dismissal of editors-

in-chief (implicitly regardless the character of the organization to which given publication was affiliated).

In comparison with the agenda presented in the talks with the government, the *Action Program* presented a sort of escape forward, radicalizing many of the original demands. At the same time, however there was a significant new strategic direction (emerging from the proceedings of the Work Groups) in how the *Action Program* interpreted the idea of “access to mass media.” It was no longer only a struggle for presence and ability to control its image in the licensed communication channels, but increasingly also for achieving a media *self-reliance*, the ability to produce and publish its own media content through its own outlets, from newspapers, books and press releases to audio and video tapes.

## TRADE UNION PRESS AT THE CROSSROADS

Solidarity’s social media are addressed in the seventh chapter of the *Action Program*, titled “Our Union,” which lays out the internal constitution of Solidarity, complementing in that regard the *Solidarity Charter*. Unlike in the case of mass media, the social media issues are not collected in a separate thesis, but scattered throughout, which itself is expressive of the importance attributed to the trade union press for Solidarity’s prefigurative democracy. This is most patent in Thesis no. 33, with the header “Members of our Union enjoy the right to unconstrained expression of opinion and will, and freedom to organize for realization of collective goals.” The Thesis first lists various types of assemblies (regions, branch sections and ad hoc committees among others) which members of Solidarity factory committees can establish to act in concert and declares that “effectiveness of the Union’s operations depends on diversity of bonds

uniting its members.” This diversity “augments the pool of means and forms of action,” “ensures the authenticity of our movement” and “contributes to achieving [the desired] social order.” The diversity of social bonds requires in turn the “ability to freely exchange opinions and accord positions.” To elaborate a system which enables creation of social bonds through free flow of ideas is declared to be the principal task of informational, educational, opinion and analytical activities of the Union’s agencies. Here, the *Action Program* vindicates respect for the principle of freedom of expression with regards to its internal communications, to the effect that the trade union press, while subordinated to statutory bodies, should be free from interference in its ordinary operations, except for states of emergency (protest actions, strike alerts and strikes).

This rather elevated role of trade union press is however somewhat diluted further on. Thus Thesis no. 33 conjures up the idea of surrogate mass media, mirroring the turn towards self-reliance of the Solidarity mass media policy. In contrast to notion of the press as vehicle for free flow of ideas, here is a vision of infrastructure of “information services” the Union should nurture and develop so that “the Union’s information system becomes competitive in its scope with respect to the media monopolized by the party-state apparatus.” The section contains a roadmap towards creating such infrastructure, which includes dailies and weeklies both in the licensed and in the internal circulation on national and regional levels, a national news and opinion digest, improvement of distribution and communication facilities, as well as establishment of factory and regional libraries. This vision of trade union press as “information service” and its principal aim takes Solidarity’s social media in a rather divergent direction. In both cases the underlying idea is that communication should integrate the Union’s members, but the very principle of integration is different: in the first case, it is a deliberative principle of creating a forum for exchanging and according

a diversity of voices; in the second case the media policy is driven by the aim to speak one voice effectively through different channels.

Similarly, it is useful to compare the two Theses that refer to the principle of publicity of trade union life: Thesis 34 (with the header “Decisions and activities of statutory bodies should be informed by reliable knowledge about opinions and will of the members of the Union”) and Thesis 36 (“Oversight and critique of statutory bodies is a right and an obligation of every member of Solidarity”). The latter institutionalizes mistrust as an element of internal checks and balances and defines the trade union press as a key forum - next to the assemblies - to exercise oversight and critique, guaranteeing at the same time the right to reply. On the other hand, despite the opening declaration that “shaping informed opinions requires a free flow of information and publicity,” there is no specific role attributed to trade union press in Thesis 34. Instead the already mentioned idea of top-down organization of bottom-up opinion seems to prevail. The framework for program and policy-making laid down in the *Action Program* largely relies on work of expert bodies, rather than public deliberation. It entrusts the mandate to both mediate access to and shape trade union opinion to Program Councils and policy workgroups composed of delegates, public authorities and experts. Their work is to be informed by feedback of the factory committees, but also by analytical work of the Union’s think tanks, the Centers for Social Research, whose task is to produce background materials and policy solutions taking into account the opinion of the unionized workers, as it can be known through surveys and pools. Based on these two sources (but not on the press) the program and policy agencies speak on behalf of the trade union opinion, formulating for the delegated powers guidelines for information and propaganda policies as well as policy and program proposals.

In other words, publicity forks here into two different concepts. In the first case, it refers to the idea that exercise of oversight and mistrust should not be limited to casting the vote, but a permanent feature of the Union's associational life, a process that should be publicly staged both in the deliberative fora and in the press. In the second case, it refers to a mechanism which guarantees that the leadership's decisions are informed by opinion and will of the public, rather than made arbitrarily in the backroom, however the access to that opinion and will and its recasting is a process which does not require public deliberation and is mediated by expert agencies.

In sum, the role of Solidarity social media as it transpires from the *Action Program*, is rather unclear. On the one hand trade union press is designated as a pillar of internal democracy, insofar as Solidarity's prefigurative politics rests upon free flow of ideas, their diversity and accord in public deliberation, that bonds the members together and enables them to act in concert. Trade union press is also vital for exercise oversight and critique of the delegated powers. On the other hand, the mandate to represent the opinion and will of the public, otherwise a crucial attribute of any Fourth Estate, is displaced in favor of the expert bodies, to which the Action Program assigns a pivotal role in shaping informed decisions of the leadership of the statutory bodies. In other words, in Solidarity's prefigurative vision, the press has an unquestionable community-building value, as it integrates the social movement through communication and reduces distance between the leadership and the rank and file. What is questioned, however is its ability to represent the public and generate consequential public debate. Furthermore, this vision interferes with the alternative idea of surrogate mass media, with its rationale of reshaping the social media polyphony into one voice coming from a central place.

## TOWARDS MARTIAL LAW

If Solidarity's social media found themselves at the crossroads after the First National Congress, it is quite hard to deduce from the couple of months that followed before the imposition of the Martial Law on December 13, 1981, which of the alternative roads the Solidarity policy towards its press would take.

The issue of increasing harassment of Solidarity publications featured prominently on the agenda of Solidarity's newly constituted National Commission (Komisja Krajowa, KK). The repression which intensified after the Ninth Congress of the PUWP, included seizure of periodicals but also posters and board bulletins, prosecution of editors and distributors, and importantly, a range of cases where the internal circulation bulletins were summoned before the censor under the new regulations. The charges brought against Solidarity editors most frequently included "vilification of the nation and its form of government," "contestation of international alliances" and "slander of foreign head of state." Zbigniew Romaszewski, the head of the Mazowsze Intervention Bureau, who was entrusted with investigating the cases of harassment, assessed that the aim was to intimidate media activists, as charges rarely concluded actual court sentences. Abuses more frequently involved those journals, which were not organs of Solidarity's statutory bodies, a fact which brought to the fore the question of how the trade union affiliation should be defined.<sup>9</sup>

While the KK would protest these abuses, at the same time among the leadership of the Union there was increasing sentiment that Solidarity's communications were dangerously beyond control. Both Onyszkiewicz and

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<sup>9</sup> "Posiedzenie Komisji Pism Związkowych" AS 51 (1981): 205.

Romaszewski concurred that the trade union press often acts irresponsibly, distributing materials “for internal use” outside factories and producing patently anti-Soviet materials. Not only did it was an easy prey for the governmental propaganda, but also made the defense of the social media more difficult. Solidarity’s negotiating position could be only as strong as the credibility that it was able to exert influence over its ranks - a principle that applied not only to publications but perhaps more importantly to wild strikes.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Solidarity’s social media were a symptom, rather than a cause of the Union’s ability to exercise self-restraint, which was an important source of its strength vis-a-vis both the authorities and the society.<sup>11</sup>

Also, the struggle for access to mass media and the social media matters became more and more entangled. In one of its first resolutions protesting the harassment of the social media, the KK called to ban TV crews from factories and to boycott requests for interviews. At the same time, in the light of the stalemate in the negotiations and mounting anti-Solidarity propaganda, it announced its plan to organize an “alternative circuit of information” based on the newspapers, as well as production of audio and VHS cassettes.<sup>12</sup>

The resolution of the KK titled *Tasks of the Union in the Nearest Future*, its last programmatic statement before the Martial Law declares that “in the struggle of Solidarity for the access to mass media all accessible methods of information and propaganda must be used: posters, writing on the wall, leaflets, mobile loudspeakers. When the day comes, all the streets and walls of workplaces in Poland should speak up

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<sup>10</sup> “Posiedzenie Komisji Krajowej,” AS 46 (1981): 102.

<sup>11</sup> “Wezwanie Prezydium KK do członków NSZZ Solidarność” AS 48 (1981): 301.

<sup>12</sup> “Posiedzenie Komisji Krajowej,” AS 46 (1981): 102.



together in support of this cause. Chanting “We will leave the walls when we are allowed on air” we will last until the we succeed.”<sup>13</sup>

In the proposed form of protest action, the idea of “surrogate mass media” received an interesting twist. On the one hand, the protest was meant to demonstrate Solidarity’s capacity to compete with government propaganda in a massive, concentrated campaign. On the other hand, it was the street and that became its principal arena and the trade union press was not summoned to join it, not even put in the state of emergency provided for by the newly adopted Charter. In that decision, there was a tacit recognition of the limited outreach of the Solidarity social media among the general public, but also a rather desperate manifestation that the stage has been reached in which all Solidarity could do was to address the society with clear and simple words, which could be written on the wall or shouted from a mobile loudspeaker.

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<sup>13</sup> “Uchwała o zadaniach związku w najbliższym okresie,” AS 49 (1981): 302.

## CHAPTER SIX |

### DISSIDENT SOCIAL MEDIA DURING AND AFTER THE MARTIAL LAW<sup>1</sup>

It's late December 1981. Solidarity is crushed by the military arm of People's Poland, its leaders interned or gone underground, its offices taken by force, and its property seized, including tons of printing equipment generously donated by the Western trade unions. The first spontaneous reactions of self-defense, strikes, street protests and clashes with the police are chaotic and ineffective. There are hopes for a concentrated response, the specter of the general strike looms large. Already in the first days and weeks of the Martial Law, publications start to resurface – in the striking factories and in the internment camps – at first mostly in the form of the so called '*informatory*,' newsletters strengthening the will to resist and providing information about state repression, victims, political prisoners, strikes and protests. Soon after, the veteran publishers regain their productive capacities and are followed by a legion of newcomers to the trade. In early 1982 NOWA, decimated by arrests, releases Karl Jaspers' essay *The Question of German Guilt* – a fact illustrative of the chaos of the early days of the Martial Law. Rather than a programmatic statement, it was a manifestation of resilience: the stencils with Jaspers just happened to be ready for print.<sup>2</sup>

Article 48 of The Martial Law Decree, which stipulates up to 10 years of prison for disseminating, by any public means, information resulting in undermining “defensive readiness of the country,” or inciting public unrest or disturbance, enacted

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the argument in this chapter derive from Piotr Wciślik, “Demokracja sieciowa? Szkic na temat myśli politycznej niezależnego ruchu wydawniczego w Polsce po wprowadzeniu stanu wojennego” in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 123-143.

<sup>2</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 146.

with vigor, has considerable, but ultimately insufficient chilling effect.<sup>3</sup> Already during the first two months of the Martial Law, there are about a dozen journals circulating, including *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, edited by Helena Łuczywo and her team of *Robotnik* and *AS*, which will become the signature publication of the underground and the unofficial organ of the Solidarity leadership. In Małopolska (the Kraków region) there are around 80 titles and 800 issues published during the first year of the Martial Law.<sup>4</sup> Until the end of 1989 over 3000 titles of unlicensed journals would appear in Poland altogether, out of which about 40 percent survived more than two years. Warsaw was in the lead, followed by Wrocław, Kraków, Gdańsk, Poznań, Łódź and Szczecin.<sup>5</sup>

The resilience of the publishing movement was due to several factors. First, some publishers were more careful than others. While NOWA operated under considerable disclosure, Krąg publishers preferred to leave some of their infrastructure hidden and identities undisclosed. Those Solidarity regional leaders who had seen it coming, for example Kornel Morawiecki, managed to stock some of the equipment of the Wrocław Solidarity in safe places. Second, the operations of the military and police forces were equally chaotic. Solidarity offices had been raided, plundered and demolished at unequal pace, in some cases part of the equipment was left behind and whoever had the courage to approach Solidarity offices could salvage the remains (most of the equipment from the Warsaw offices was hidden around the Warsaw Technical University, but reactivating the equipment took time due to interrupted communication flows). Most importantly however, during 1980-1981 legions had been trained in printing techniques, and that included the dissident DIY techniques such as the *ramka*, the knowledge of which resulted instrumental once the more modern offset printers had

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<sup>3</sup> Błażejewska, 218.

<sup>4</sup> Błażejewska, 216-222.

<sup>5</sup> Błażejewska, 238-239.

been seized. Thanks to the massive training in DIY techniques underground communications could be quickly reestablished.<sup>6</sup> Not that more sophisticated equipment stopped flowing in. Counts based on the notes of Konrad Bieliński, responsible for the printing infrastructure of the underground Mazowsze region leadership, which survived due to their seizure by the secret police, established that around 36 offset printers and 99 duplicators reached Poland through Sweden until mid-1980s.<sup>7</sup>

## PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS GOES UNDERGROUND

Unlike before, underground print culture operated under full conspiracy. The Martial Law drastically reconfigured the terms of debate on the shape of the independent communications. The policy dilemmas that in the previous months had oscillated between the prefigurative politics of the social media, and the self-defensive effectiveness of surrogate mass media, were now set against the more general debate on the strategy of the underground resistance.

The terms of the debate were configured by competing strategies of general strike and ‘underground society,’ which encapsulated dilemmas concerning both the structure of resistance (centralized versus decentralized) and its postulated dynamics (great leap versus the long march scenarios). In the first months in of the Martial Law, the horizon of expectations of proponents of both strategies was the same, as Władysław Frasyniuk, the prominent Solidarity leader of Wrocław put it, to “force the powers to compromise,”<sup>8</sup> i.e. not quite to enact the regime change (even if the military rule of general Wojciech Jaruzelski should go), but to restore ‘social accords’ (as opposed to

<sup>6</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Friszke, “Regionalny Komitet Wykonawczy,” 455.

<sup>8</sup> “Zmusić władzę do porozumienia,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 11 (1982): 2.

use of force) as the way of doing politics in Poland: to stop the wave of repressions, release political prisoners including Lech Wałęsa and to negotiate a new compromise with the statutory powers of the Union. Clearly, the militarized party state shown itself to be averse to negotiations except from a position of strength, and the question of the day was how to restore the balance of powers. Early on, Frasyniuk himself was inclined to accept the position, propagated by the clandestine leaders of Ogólnopolski Komitet Oporu (National Resistance Committee, OKO), Eugeniusz Szumiejko and Andrzej Konarski, according to whom the position of strength should be built through spectacular street protests leading to a general strike. At the same time, he was aware that trade union structures outside Wrocław were unprepared for triggering Solidarity's ultimate argument and thus a centralized organization built in conspiracy was needed to orchestrate it, when popular outrage against Martial Law would reach its apex. Similar positions were held by other prominent National Commission members in liberty, Bohdan Lis<sup>9</sup> and Zbigniew Romaszewski.<sup>10</sup>

Arguments in support of the general strike strategy found its clearest articulation in Jacek Kuroń's article written in the internment camp, titled *Theses on the way out of a situation without a way out*.<sup>11</sup> According to Kuroń, the resistance against Martial Law could not possibly mean a straight return to pre-Solidarity dissident tactics of decentralized grassroots initiatives, of which he had been the prime doctrinaire. The situation in Poland had all characteristics of a military occupation and Poland's military

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Zbigniew Romaszewski, "Rozpocząć przygotowania do strajku powszechnego," *Tygodnik Mazowski* 16 (1982): 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Kuroń, "Tezy o wyjściu z sytuacji bez wyjścia," 332-335. Plausible source of the title is the Radio Yerevan joke referenced in the already mentioned essay on the August Accords by Czesław Bielecki (see Chapter 4, footnote 8). Radio Yerevan was asked: "Is there a way out of a situation without a way out?" Radio Yerevan answered: "We are not commenting on the Polish issue." In that essay written in the middle of Solidarity's Carnival, Bielecki was appealing to form conspiratorial structure in case of a domestic backlash or a Soviet intervention, an appeal which Kuroń seemed to be reappraising *post facto*.

rulers would not hesitate to unleash terror upon fragmented instances of public protest. “The social dispersal and the capacity to swiftly move around a small number of pacification forces is the strength of the occupier. Therefore now, unlike before August 1980, we must organize around a center of command and pledge full discipline.” Furthermore, when rulers are not able to secure either personal safety or material subsistence for the ruled (“if the whole brawl of war was to save the economy – as those in command assure – the treatment was successful except that the patient had died”), they cannot count in the long term on extraordinary discipline of the society that hitherto evaded violent responses. The explosion of social anger was near and, for Kuroń, the only way to avert the danger of spiraling into terrorism,<sup>12</sup> was to channel the anger into more disciplined, collective forms of organization. In other words, Kuroń’s aim was to shift the terms of the debate. The real alternative was not revolution or reform, but compromise with organized social forces or blind violence. For anybody familiar with Kuroń’s intellectual trajectory, the conclusion might have been extreme, but the argument was quite familiar, as the alternative of social self-organization or explosion of public anger was the same prognosis that Kuroń was offering on the eve of the August 1980 strikes, with the crucial difference: “For many years of oppositional activity I preached the principle of non-violence. I feel obliged to declare that today I consider the preparations for the collective uprising to abolish the occupation as the lesser of evils.” Not only because non-violent protest action would now be ruthlessly crushed, but also because it was not enough to channel the mounting social anger. Nothing short of a general strike, “the ultimate instrument of pressure and the absolutely ultimate chance for compromise” could sublimate the temptation of terror.

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<sup>12</sup> Notably, “terrorism” in both government and oppositional media connotes violent act of internal strife (well publicized attacks of Italian or West German radical, predominantly far-left groups), whereas the connotation of an external threat to a population are rather absent.

This is why the leadership of the resistance movement must prepare Polish society to liquidate the occupation in a collective, organized act, and at the same time it must be ready for the furthest reaching compromise with the power. I assume such uprising should target all centers of command and information in the entire country. It is instrumental that the ruling camp knows that they have a clear deadline to come forward with a compromise proposal.<sup>13</sup>

Surrogate mass media were obviously a correlate of the strategy of the general strike.

Kuroń appealed for “organizing the center of the movement and an efficient network of information. That will not constrain in any way the independence of its particular bodies – this has to be clearly declared. But it will decrease the risk of provocations and imprudent statements. A certain kind of statements has to be equally clearly reserved for the center.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the center of command should dispose of a mass-media form of communications, to be built alongside the social media, as well some sort of monopoly of spokespersonship on behalf of the Union. Some steps in this direction were actually taken. Zbigniew Romaszewski, another supporter of the idea of general strike, started in early 1982 to develop the underground radio system with precisely this aim in mind.<sup>15</sup>

While in the early days the arguments in debate on the strategy of resistance circulated through correspondence networks of Solidarity leadership, the publication of Kuroń’s theses brought that debate into the public spotlight of *Tygodnik Mazowsze* and pushed the uncaptured Solidarity leaders to clarify their positions in public. The strategy of “underground society,” exposed in polemics with Kuroń by the leaders of the Mazowsze region, Zbigniew Bujak and Wiktor Kulski (who coined the term) understood the balance of forces differently: rather than countering the strength of the bayonets with the general strike, it rather assumed that once Jaruzelski would discover

<sup>13</sup> Jacek Kuroń, “Tezy o wyjściu z sytuacji bez wyjścia,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 8 (1982): 3.

<sup>14</sup> Kuroń, “Macie teraz złoty róg,” 336-340.

<sup>15</sup> Majchrzak, “Radio Solidarność,” 401-407.

he could not sit on them and realized his weakness, the underground society, would take over the initiative and spearhead a radical reform. The strength in this case was the strength of a self-organized social forces, which derived its empowerment from independence from the state and rootedness in the society, that come into balance with the weakness of the party-state that did not master enough social support to set the country on the road of recovery from economic collapse.

Such movement – Kulerski argued - should aim at arriving at a situation where the rulers control empty stores, but not the market, the employment, but not the means of subsistence of the employees, state publishing, but not the flow of information, printing houses, but not the publishing movement, post and telephones, but not communication, schools, but not education. Such autonomization of the society should ultimately leave at the disposal of the rulers only the police and the convinced collaborators. In such situation, there is no third solution. Either downfall or not quite a spectacular compromise, but a steady shattering of barriers holding the society away from power, a steady severing of bondage. A gradual restoration of civic rights, self-management and finally participation in decisions concerning especially economic, cultural and social life. The scope of the restoration should balance the risks of living within the Underground Society. Only in this way the force of attraction of the latter can diminish to the extent that makes possible restoring control over social life as such. Gradual liberalization and democratization would be the price of regaining influence over society.”<sup>16</sup>

The vision of independent initiatives gradually radiating through the public life and ultimately rolling-back the party-state influence was reactivating the idea of prefigurative politics under new, adverse circumstances. At the same time Kulerski and Bujak presented two mayor arguments against the general strike and establishing resistance structures with a “central command” that this plan would require. Kuroń’s *si vis pacem, para bellum* overestimated the threat of explosion of social anger and, even if that was the case, the solution was counterproductive. First, the uncontrolled spiral of violence was far from inevitable. Self-discipline in that regard was built on the awareness of both internal and external risks which were rather constant factor

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<sup>16</sup> Wiktor Kulerski, “Trzecia możliwość,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 8 (1982): 4.



weighting over questionable benefits. Second, hierarchically organized, clandestine structures carried a substantial risk of secret police infiltration (the more centralized, the easier to work out), while its cadres, frustrated over whatever reason conspiracy could bring, would be likely to decide to act prematurely on its own, and that would be no different than terrorism (and organized terrorism spiraling out of control was a greater contingency than punctual acts of violence). In this sense, by counterpoising the idea of “underground society” to the Underground State of the 1940, the Mazowsze leaders referred not only to the experience of the Warsaw Uprising (popular pressure to take up arms was said to weigh heavily on the decisions of Home Army commanders, and neither Bujak nor Kulerski wanted step in their role), but perhaps more importantly to the liquidation of the early postwar anti-communist resistance led by the Home Army, having in mind that one thing the communist state had perfected over time was its surveillance apparatus. In contrast, Bujak affirmed: “I support a strongly decentralized movement, employing a variety of forms of action. Only such movement, undetermined and diverse, will be unfathomable and difficult to conquer.”<sup>17</sup>

“Therefore – Kulerski expanded – instead of central command mastering full discipline, a polycentric movement, dispersed, informal, consisting of autonomous and loosely connected groups, circles, committees etc., with a large degree of self-reliance and liberty of action. Such movement should secure persistent and effective relief to everyone politically persecuted; develop a flow of independent information and free thought; create a network of social communication and provide possibilities of self-education; offer moral and psychological support”.

Notably, neither Bujak nor Kulerski went as far as rejecting the idea of a general strike altogether. Rather, both saw it as the Union’s nuclear option, which could be triggered only once the conventional weapons had proven ineffective.

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<sup>17</sup> Zbigniew Bujak, “Wojna pozycyjna,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 8 (1982): 4.

Not exposed in this debate, but present in the correspondence between OKO and other uncaptured Solidarity leaders, was the issue of legitimacy. Building centralized resistance factory structures in conspiracy required establishing a new, self-appointed leadership of the Union. For Bujak, that meant eroding the Union's strong democratic mandate as a party to negotiations with the State powers, which in his view was the foundation of any future compromise. While Wałęsa and many members of the National Commission were imprisoned, new governing bodies should not form. Solidarity leaders taking initiative in organizing resistance should act under an interim mandate towards putting an end to the circumstance that made it necessary. From this perspective, a body politics without a head, a network of self-reliant bottom-up initiatives, connected informally by shared values and goals, was preferable to a structure of formal hierarchies with a central command, whose relation to the Union's statutory powers would remain unclear. The underground society should basically govern itself without executive bodies. The Solidarity leaders in liberty should only offer guidance and support, representing, rather than a head to a body politics, the tip giving visibility to the underground iceberg.<sup>18</sup>

Kuroń, in his reprise, was far from convinced. The strategy of underground society seemed to him a return to the pre-Solidarity model of prefigurative politics, which, he repeated, was impossible to reenact under current conjuncture. Unlike Gierek, who was constrained by his deference to internal and international public opinion, the military rule was built on brute force. Unlike in August 1980, there were no reserves in the economy that could be put on the negotiating table to satisfy social demands. Furthermore, the unprecedented economic meltdown made strong conviction about the society's patience questionable. Most of all, argued Kuroń, "emergence of mass social

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<sup>18</sup> Brzechczyn, 50.

movement always corresponds to important goals, which one can achieve only through orchestrated action and in no other way. Self-education can get by without such movement. Publishing as an end in itself involves only a fraction of the society. Street protests cannot bring any expedient victories. They serve to animate the spirit of the movement when they demonstrate its power. But they demonstrate powerlessness, if their principal aim is to hearten.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, without a definite horizon of the general strike (and central command its organization would entail), popular resistance would dissipate or fracture into small groups, competing for leadership and making it easier for the secret police to divide and conquer.

In his contemporary letters from prison, Adam Michnik advanced, in support of Bujak and Kulerski, a more general argument against conspiracy, which represented perhaps the clearest affirmation of prefigurative politics in the context of the Martial Law. Michnik’s point of departure was the “psychology of slavery,” a mentality typical of captive societies such as the society Communism created, which manifested itself in cycles of social anomy and explosions of social anger. The latter however never issued in a real social change. “The revolt of the slaves does not have much to do with a movement for social or political change, a rebel slave becomes unbound momentarily desiring vengeance most of all, which is not very constructive. A rebel slave – in the best case – yearns a new master, but is unable to achieve agency.”<sup>20</sup> Agency here is understood as civility build on a republican, Tocquevillian concept of human rights. The exercise of human rights is what makes possible to distinguish consent of the governed from tyranny and liberty from license. But at the same time “never a nation had its human rights granted, human rights need to be won”.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, in

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<sup>19</sup> Kuroń, “Macie teraz złoty róg,” 337

<sup>20</sup> Adam Michnik, “O oporze,” *Krytyka* 13-14 (1984): 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, 9.

captive societies the spectacular, revolutionary moment of abolition of the powers that be must be preceded by a long process of learning in which the slave wins civility by exercising rights. If the rights are granted – be it by the most democratically-minded elite – rights-based polity will never take root.

This is another way of saying that in captive societies only prefigurative politics can provide a foundation for a real social change. Importantly, prefigurative politics manifests a new epochal name, it becomes defined as “movement towards reconstruction of civil society”<sup>22</sup> that must proceed regime change. That aim, according to Michnik, can be achieved through different tactics. In the times of KOR and pre-Solidarity opposition, publicity was key. “Publicity was the way of raising the threshold of collective courage, widening the grey zone between the censor’s scissors and the penal code, breaking the personal barrier of inertia and fear. It was publicity, not conspiracy that made success possible.”<sup>23</sup> Solidarity was the success story. Even though the heritage of the psychology of slavery remained and made itself felt through pettiness and demagoguery “the August rebellion of workers and Solidarity’s activities put an end to that psychology. For these fifteen months people discovered the taste of freedom, became aware of their solidarity and strength, and came to perceive each other again as civic and national community.” The imposition of the Martial Law demanded the change of tactics, making public exercise of civility impossible. However, the underground resistance should continue the task of reconstruction of civil society. “The resistance movement must be a school of freedom and democracy, its shape will be the

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<sup>22</sup> This is probably the first time that in the Polish case the concept becomes a keyword of dissident political thinking and acquires a precise correlate in political praxis.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

shape of future Poland.” Now, centralized conspiracy was not the best way to achieve this aim.<sup>24</sup>

Every underground is haunted by Dostoyevsky’s *Devils*. Every conspiracy demoralizes, sectarianism flourishes in its obscurity, with its distinct codes, its different circles of insiders, its tactics to which everything is subordinated, its instrumental attitude to truth and disregard for values neutral to politics. Conspiracy forms a particular type of activist-conspirator, a sort of professional endowed with qualities as useful in the underground, as dangerous later on, with a penchant for arbitrary decisions and mistrust towards outsiders. Democratic virtues are not something a conspiracy requires. Pluralism is not a style conspiracy favors. Underground activities isolate from the taste and the smell of everyday normalcy, they crook the perspective, breed dangerous maximalism and intolerance, lead to fanaticism and particularism. Conspiracy requires disobedience towards the enemy, but obedience towards the underground command; it preaches equality, but demands hierarchical subordination.<sup>25</sup>

Michnik’s argument illustrates well the centrality of prefigurative politics for dissident political thought, which, as I argued elsewhere, should be understood substantially as post-totalitarian political thought.<sup>26</sup> Prefigurative politics, which articulates the idea of anticipation of the shape and quality of the future polity in the present day forms of the opposition to the status quo, and thus postulates close connectedness of aims and means in political practice, rests upon a double principle: a positive proposition, that one becomes a subject of civic rights through its conspicuous exercise, that such winning of civic rights should precede regime change or else the change will lack solid foundations, and that therefore, the organizational forms of the underground should make possible radiating civic virtues throughout public life; followed by a proscription of hierarchical and disciplined forms of resistance, which may be more efficient in the struggle against the status quo, but which themselves carry a substantial repressive potential, which can only have negative effects once freedom is won.

<sup>24</sup> Adam Michnik, “Rozmowa w Cytadeli,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* 64 (1983): 3-56.

<sup>25</sup> Michnik, “O oporze,” 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> Wciślik, “Totalitarianism,” 73-76.

In its first programmatic statement aptly titled *Underground Society*, issued in July 1982, the Interim Coordinating Commission (*Tymczasowa Komisja Koordynacyjna*, TKK) formed in April 1982 to provide political representation for underground Solidarity declared that it stands by the *Action Program* and its ultimate aim of building the Self-Governing Republic. However, as long the state power rejected compromise, the intermediate goal was to build the “movement for underground society” founded on “universal participation of the society aware of its inalienable rights and organized for long-term effort.” For the emerging underground society, prefigurative politics was the main philosophy of action. The movement, the statement declared, should be decentered, while the principal tasks of Solidarity underground structures on the local level was to inspire and support independent activities. Importantly, unlike in 1980-1981 workplaces were not necessarily their principal arena, while informal – friend, family or neighborhood – ties gain in importance. The clandestine leadership of each region, as well as TKK should assist those activities with coordination and guidance. “Underground society – we further read – should principally: (a) neutralize the efforts of the state power aimed at atomizing the society; (b) foster capacities for self-organization and self-defense, (c) work towards advancement of political culture and towards preparing the society to live in democratic Poland”.<sup>27</sup> The networks of underground print culture were embraced by the TKK as one of the principal modes of existence of Solidarity and other oppositional groups, next to street protest, boycott, organizing relief for casualties of both political repression and economic depression, independent education, and independent economic activities.

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<sup>27</sup> “Społeczeństwo podziemne. Wstępne założenia deklaracji programowej TKK NSZZ Solidarność,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 22 (1982): 1-2.

The basic principles guiding the *Underground Society* manifesto were restated in the program declaration *Solidarity Today*, issued in January 1983, even though the latter was much more belligerent in tone and focused on contention against what was now called a “totalitarian dictatorship” in the make, in four major areas of action: the “front of refusal” (boycott of state-sponsored institutions established to endow the dictatorship with a measure of legitimacy); economic struggle (from conspicuous adherence to the Labor Code, through publicizing cases of mismanagement, to economic strike); the struggle for the independent thought (immunizing the society against ideological manipulation and divisive propaganda through developing institutions of independent culture); and last but not least the general strike. Not incidentally, only when discussing the third of those four fronts did the manifesto go beyond the framework of immediate contention, defining the long-term value of building institutions of independent thought in terms of prefigurative politics: “Independent institutions and initiatives such as publishing and artistic market, press and radio, and independent education are our common good, worthy of support and protection. Existence and expansion of this current [of activities] contributes to making the society independent and prepared for living in a democratic and self-governing Republic.”

## RECONCILING DEMOCRACY AND CONSPIRACY

Out of these principal arenas of resistance, underground social media would soon emerge as the most widespread and persistent manifestation of the underground society.<sup>28</sup> Partially, this prominence came by force of facts. Even though the general

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<sup>28</sup> With the possible exception of so called second economy, which however preceded the emergence of the organized opposition, developed quite independently from relief, publishing or self-education activities, which were intentionally undertaken as a manifestation the “underground society.” Second

strike remained on Solidarity's agenda as the nuclear option in its repertoire, the half-hearted attempts at organizing a nation-wide strike in response to general Jaruzelski's move to delegatize the Union in November 1981 failed. Jaruzelski felt secure enough to terminate the Martial Law in spring 1983, even though many of its extraordinary provisions came into force as ordinary regulations (including the cancelation of the Censorship Act of 1981). Soon it would transpire that the only practicable form of clandestine trade union activity was to publish factory newsletters, whereas the impact of Solidarity's Clandestine Factory Commissions (Tajne Komisje Zakładowe, TKZ) in terms of organizing protest actions or exploiting the very limited possibilities of the worker institutional representation inside factories, was much more meager.

At the same time, the momentous resilience of the horizontal and decentered communication networks was an independent factor shaping both the dissident thought and practice. Rather than just a response to the clarion call by Solidarity's leaders, it was the resilience of the underground print culture that weighted upon their intellectual considerations.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to its social media nature, the networks of independent communications were the only institution of the underground resistance which fully resonated with Bujak and Kulerski's vision of a body politics without a head, that could reconcile conspiracy with prefigurative democracy. Underground social media both staged and made intelligible the autonomous civic initiative which again became the core political form of dissident democracy, replacing Solidarity's deliberative assembly, for which conspiracy was not a suitable environment.

The specter of political sectarianism proper for conspiracy about which Michnik admonished, was not something underground media activists were particularly afraid

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economy, in contrast, was only read as such by dissident actors, with – most of the time – little correspondence in terms of actual attitudes of the actors involved in informal economic activities.

<sup>29</sup> Mielczarek, "Drugi obieg," 68-69.



of. The “Declaration of Solidarity” published by the Committee for Social Resistance (Komitet Oporu Społecznego, KOS) in December 1982 and signed by a number of representatives of Warsaw-based journals, publishing houses and resistance structures read: “We reject the calls to come out [of the underground]. For the regime every instance of social initiative beyond its control is part of a conspiracy. In a country where the power itself is illegal, the scope of our freedom depends on non-public action. Thanks to the underground Solidarity social bonds have not perished, we survived with dignity yet another epoch of contempt. Coming out equals consent to national captivity.”<sup>30</sup>

“Nobody needs to be further persuaded that since the society, thanks to the conspicuous openness of activities of a brave few, had breached the barrier of fear, only the secret, underground life presents us with chances for living towards freedom. Only conspiring we can be sure that the entire independent organization of society we have created will not be destroyed from one day to the next” - announced the *Little Conspirator* a highly popular guide to dissident activity published in the aftermath of the Martial Law (with 10 editions in 1983-1984),<sup>31</sup> authored by the leader of CDN publishing house, Czesław Bielecki, and his associates, the legendary singer-songwriter Jan Krzysztof Kelus and his wife Urszula Sikorska. While the tactics of publicity has shown its clear limits with the imposition of the Martial Law, the alternative was not exactly a simple and direct return to the practices of the underground state of the 1940s. If it is true that *Little Conspirator* claimed to be building on the best practices of anti-Nazi resistance (under Martial Law the symbols related to the anti-Nazi Home Army had generally acquired a second life), at the same time it was a clear case of reinventing

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<sup>30</sup> “Deklaracja Solidarności,” KOS, supplement dated December 12, 1982.

<sup>31</sup> *Mały Konspirator*, p. 3.

a tradition. “Underground society may act with efficiency and solidarity if it organizes itself – bottom up, through individual enterprise – into independent, self-governing social institutions – ‘firms.’ The Home Army conspiracy, despite appearances, did not emerge as a pyramid of units with simple relations. It was a confederation of ‘firms’ between which functional relations were established.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, the structures of the underground resistance during the Second World War were quite hierarchical. They were made to resemble a state structure, with a government, a military, a parliament, an education system and even courts, with lines of command and the division of powers, all of it subordinated to the government in exile, and the resistant media were typically modeled as organs of a given political party or an agency of the underground state.<sup>33</sup> Now it became retrospectively imagined as a decentered and non-hierarchical network of small groups, a ‘confederation of firms.’ While this underground state existed to prepare the population for armed struggle in the event of the collapse of the Nazi occupation regime, the conspiracy of the 1980s was operating within the ‘long march’ time horizon, increasingly excluding the possibility and the pertinence of a one-time revolutionary action, be it in the form of a general strike or otherwise. “We do not want to abolish totalitarianism in three months – one of the *KOS*<sup>34</sup> printers argued – but we believe that three or five years of regular publishing of our fortnightly can to a certain extent change the consciousness of the readers. We are all bi-professionals [*dwuzawodowcy*], e.g. everyone has a job, but once every month or every two weeks he becomes active in a way which is invisible for others around him.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Mały Konspirator*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 23-26.

<sup>34</sup> Acronym for Committee for Social Resistance (Komitet Oporu Społecznego).

<sup>35</sup> “Niezależni (Wywiad z drukarzem),” *KOS*, no. 57 (1984).

Bi-professionalism points to another important aspect of the self-understanding of underground press activists. According to the editors of *Wola*, the informality of the organization was the key to reconcile conspiracy and democracy.

This “underground” is in fact overground. Words are confusing, we tend to say “underground Solidarity,” when in reality this is all connected to the social and family life... This is a model of society conspiring as a whole. Without any secret service tricks, without codes, walkie-talkies and the like. It is not a military conspiracy with its hierarchies and commands. Instead you get a lot of good will. Conspiracy means life – children are born, your dearest die, but the newspaper must be published, because there is somebody waiting for it. While at work, you find many people who don't know anything or not much more than that you are doing something important. This is why the model that emerged is very democratic – not the position, age or social status, but precisely the fact that you are doing something important decides about worth of a person.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, it was a “soft conspiracy,”<sup>37</sup> informal and based on ties of friendship rather than on an institutional subordination to a central leadership, and the softening factor were the practices of underground social media activism.<sup>38</sup>

However, that was a different form with respect to the one practiced by Solidarity. Democracy that characterized the sixteen months of Solidarity's Carnival - with its emphasis on publicity, with its deliberative assemblies careful about matters of political representation, and understood primarily as exercise of oversight over delegated powers – could be imagined and was intelligible within the broad repertoire of political modernity, be it as an alliance between major social groups, the workers and the intelligentsia, as an alternative Constituent its National Congress was thought to represent, or as a resurrection of the parliamentary traditions of the Polish gentry-republicanism.<sup>39</sup> Its deliberating bodies, the committees of various levels, the delegates,

<sup>36</sup> “Siła Woli” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> “Na początku drogi. Rozmowa z przedstawicielami Zeszytów Edukacji Niezależnej” in *Struktury nadziei*, 96.

<sup>38</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 63-67.

<sup>39</sup> For a good overview of political interpretations of the phenomenon of Solidarity, see Elżbieta Cieżewska, *Filozofia publiczna Solidarności. Solidarność 1980-1981 z perspektywy republikańskiej tradycji politycznej* (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2010), 25-68.

and even the general strike were still feeding the old utopias of the self-government of workers' councils. All these interpretative instances, Solidarity was intelligible and staged as body politic assembled in a bounded social space that anticipated the desired shape and form of a polity.

The resilience of the underground print culture reflected prefigurative politics as it could be practiced in conditions of clandestinity: how to self-organize democratically without publicity and deliberation, how to practice prefigurative politics without large-scale deliberative assemblies and modes of political spokespersonship. The social media nature of the underground communication networks created a different framework for thinking about prefigurative democracy, one that relied less on classical political imaginary and its imperative of political representation, of giving embodiment to the demos in a bounded social space, such as the *agora*, the parliament of the party of a new type. In a networked assemblage, the imagined demos fractures into interlocking initiatives. Its social mandate does not rest on public deliberation and delegation of authority, but on the everyday plebiscite of individual commitment to undertake and sustain certain forms of action, and on mutual recognition thanks to which new initiatives partake in the authority of the initiatives of an established reputation.

The unlicensed newspapers staged, rather than represented, the underground society, and what was put on display were social networks of media activism. As the editors of *Wola* later remembered, “The most important thing about a [samizdat] newspaper was its materiality. Coming out every week, it demonstrated – to the outsiders, of course – that communism did not shatter us, that there is still a conspiratorial government, structures, printers. It made the impression that there is an

underground army out there, doing its job.”<sup>40</sup> “It was instrumental to display the independent society – that it keeps living together, as a whole. An additional function of the underground press was to motivate people to keep permanent contact. Passing along leaflets, periodicals, books and dues, it sustained the audacity of independent existence.”<sup>41</sup>

There were various nodes where the action concentrated - The Committee for Independent Culture, the Task-Force for Independent Education, the Committee in Defense of Lawfulness, the Fund for Independent Publications etc., but also the factory and inter-factory Solidarity structures – however, that did not translate into a single center with a hierarchy of command. These funds, committees and structures, but also editorial boards, were all *non-elected*, self-appointed bodies. They stood or fell in virtue of the recognition of the value of their actions, the individual authority of the activists who headed them, and in virtue of alliances with other initiatives. Correspondingly, rather than deliberative assemblies and chains of political delegation, “free initiative” now became prefigurative democracy’s core meaning. “We are operating – a representative of the Committee for Independent Culture explained – within a realm of autonomy founded on a model of a democratic society, with its freedom of initiative and association... organized by people who recognize a need to join forces for a more effective action under, needless to say, abnormal circumstances. In order to act together in organizing funding for independent publishing, video production, to counteract the repression.”<sup>42</sup> The concept of “free initiative” meant first of all that in principle everyone – regardless the position in the network – can propose to undertake an

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<sup>40</sup> Zalewska, *Będzie Strajk*, 104.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, 105.

<sup>42</sup> “Zakazana kultura. Rozmowa z przedstawicielami Komitetu Kultury Niezależnej” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 67.

collective action and seek consent of others to act-in-concert. But also: everyone is free to join, modify or decline the initiative. For the *Little Conspirator* anything short of bottom-up collective action amounted to a sign of *bolshevization*:

When a firm develops, it spontaneously generates subsequent agencies; top-down specialization, following an order from a center is a typical expression of *bolshevism*...Only a *bolshevized* organization is unable to work without the intervention of a boss. Only a *bolshevized* center must use hands-on, micromanagement because the middle level is unable or unwilling to make decisions, or both.<sup>43</sup>

The idea of democracy as free initiative translated into a deeply participatory character of the movement. As we have seen, the most general fact about the underground publishing culture of print was that social communication was entrusted collectively to everyone involved in the publishing process, a rule that applied to all levels of its operations and considered all the actors involved.<sup>44</sup> Especially conscious of the fact were the veteran publishers from NOWA, which carried the 1970s dissident ethos into the underground of the 1980s. “NOWA – they declared emphatically – is not an ordinary publishing house, based on the commercial, publisher-client, relations. We are a movement which has ambition to reach the largest number of supporters possible, which on the very bottom of the conspiratorial ladder aims at blurring all distinctions between readers and the house's collaborators; which remains open to all valuable initiatives.”<sup>45</sup>

This participatory principle worked not only on the level of declarations, but was also realized on the ground. More often than not the editors of the periodicals which were the organs of various Solidarity structures understood their role as something more than passive transmitters of their leaders' position, and claimed an active part in shaping

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<sup>43</sup> *Mały Konspirator*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Paweł Sowiński, “Tylko nie obojętność. Autorzy książki zakazanej 1977-1989” in *Opozycja i opór społeczny w Polsce po 1956 roku*, 83-84.

<sup>45</sup> “Wywiad z NOWĄ,” *Kultura* 444 (1984): 81.

the structures' policies and representing their constituency.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the journals and the publishing houses were themselves reliant on the commitment of many others who made the operations of the underground communication network sustainable – and not rarely the printers and distributors were claiming an initiative of their own. Thus, the Kraków printers of the Warsaw based, but country-wide weekly *Tygodnik Mazowsze* were reported to rewrite a news item (which they deemed inaccurate) about a strike in their region.<sup>47</sup> Leaving some space on a stencil to be filled with local news was a related practice. The printers of the fortnightly *KOS* were said to threaten to go on strike because of an article about the US invasion of Granada which they found unacceptable (the article questioned the anti-Communist motivations of the US government, and finally did get published only to cause a minor stir).<sup>48</sup> CDN printers successfully pressed Czesław Bielecki to terminate the cooperation with the journal *Wiadomości*, whose texts they found not worthy to risk for.<sup>49</sup>

The prefigurative dimension of the underground social media was especially evident in the case of the sector of underground publishing which was the closest to Solidarity's original constituency: factory newsletters and the newspapers of the inter-factory and regional structures, which relied on the commitment of the workers for printing, distribution, storage, provision of information and last but not least, readership. It was these journals that were the main expression of Solidarity's illegal existence and the main token of identification with their trade union. While the public mood was favorable to strikes and protests during the Martial Law, it dissipated as normalization set in. On the other hand, even after the 1986 general amnesty there were

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<sup>46</sup> “Wywiad z redaktorem naczelnym,” *Z dnia na dzień*, January 27, 1985.

<sup>47</sup> “O drukowaniu 'Tygodnika': rozmowa z szefem poligrafii TM”, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 201 (1987).

<sup>48</sup> “Niezależni (Wywiad z drukarzem),” *KOS* no. 57, 1984.

<sup>49</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 46.

few activists willing to put their credentials at stake and risk participation in the legal but inauthentic factory self-management bodies. The clandestine Solidarity local structures had little chance of influencing the welfare of the workers except for making public their grievances, revealing cases of mismanagement and protesting various scandals. The newsletters were a barometer of social tension also for the factory management, which eagerly read the confiscated materials, and if this did not help, a news item could always be quoted during a shop-floor meeting.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, it shouldn't be surprising that the workers involved in the underground press pressured the independent editors to include as many items concerning matters of their immediate concern as possible. At least in one reported case, that of the Warsaw based journal *Wola*, this pressure effectively led to a change in the overall editorial policy – what started as an opinion journal set up by Warsaw University's young academics to discuss matters of the resistance strategy under the Martial Law, ended up being one of the most popular and trusted outlets of the Warsaw factories.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps not that unimportant was the material side of it – to be a worker-friendly journal meant big print and good readability, even though otherwise the rule was to squeeze as much text on a single page.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, as 1989 was approaching, less factory newsletters,<sup>53</sup> more fine print and less frequent news items from factories in the most prestigious newspapers such as *Tygodnik Mazowsze* were an index of the

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<sup>50</sup> "Gazetki Zakładowe," *Z dnia na dzień* June 23, 1988.

<sup>51</sup> "Siła Woli" in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 104.

<sup>52</sup> "Wszyscy jesteśmy proletariuszami" in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 100-101.

<sup>53</sup> In the Mazowsze region, the number of factory newsletters dropped from 44 in 1983, to 26 in 1985, to 12 in 1985. "Prasa zakładowa Regionu Mazowsze," *CDN – Głos Wolnego Robotnika*, November 14, 1988.



eminent change of center of gravity of democratic opposition,<sup>54</sup> and what David Ost will call “Solidarity’s defeat,” the estrangement of the labor constituency.<sup>55</sup>

Democracy as free initiative also implied a mistrust of political representation. Liberty of collective action on behalf of the matters of public concern was given priority over matters of political delegation. To act democratically in this non-procedural, performative sense would be to express an interest in a matter of concern and be willing to undertake an initiative together with others that share it. According to the editor of *Z dnia na dzień*, the regional organ of Silesian Solidarity, involvement in the matters that concern other people was a “creative” way of rejecting the identification with the authorities. “It is a creative mistrust, because it does not signify an escape into privacy, but to the contrary, in one way or the other we have learned to get involved with the matters of other people. Despite many negative, I would say tragic social phenomena that we observe, I can state with full responsibility: there is no way back to the indifference and atomization of the 1970s.”<sup>56</sup>

It was in virtue of calling attention to the matters of public concern and organizing people around it that those various collective bodies emerging from the movement laid claim to political spokespersonship, and not the other way around. Again, the authority of those bodies, active in the fields of culture, education, public health, human rights and last but not least publishing itself, was strong with individual authority of its members, their real impact in their respective areas, and the

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<sup>54</sup> Part of the problem was that, as time went on, it got harder and harder to gather information from the shop floor, as activists involved in printing the newsletters would get sacked sooner or later and after a while their contact with the factory would loosen up. “Gazeta czy Organ? Rozmowa z redaktorami Tygodnika Mazowsze” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 161-162.

<sup>55</sup> David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> “Wywiad z redaktorem naczelnym,” *Z dnia na dzień*, January 27, 1985.

responsiveness to criticisms those initiatives arose. However, they did not command any binding executive power towards those involved.

On the other hand, while – especially after 1986 – underground print culture became a home to a full spectrum of liberal, conservative, socialist and green journals with clearly defined ideologies and nuclei of political groups and parties started to form around them, individuals for whom underground social media activism was the prime identification (or at least those who reflected on what they were doing politically as underground press activists) espoused reluctance to formulate political programs and any thick ideological visions, and an aversion to traditional political institutions, especially the political parties. For many social media activists, the popular quip had it, there was no point in joining a party since the most liberating experience of their lifetime was to leave one. To the extent that a journal was dependent on the workers constituency, its editors had to negotiate their political ambitions with the workers' lack of interest in ideological matters and demand for accurate reporting and practical guidelines concerning the resistance in factories and the trade union.<sup>57</sup>

As for the larger movement is concerned, most of the publishing underground consisted of people who became active after the Martial Law and such attitude extended to the underground Solidarity's leadership. Illustrative in this respect was the “Declaration of Solidarity” mentioned above. “Our aim is freedom and autonomy of the society and independence of the Polish state.” the declaration read. “In a non-sovereign country existence of legal, sovereign social organizations cannot be effectively assured. We continue the activities that had led to emergence of Solidarity, the movement that articulated the aspiration of the entire Polish society. We shall fight for realization of

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<sup>57</sup> “Siła Woli,” 105.

the program of Solidarity and the idea behind it. We shall build a free society capable today to defend its rights. The totalitarian system imposed by the Soviet Union and sustained by force by a sold ruling class, is not capable of self-reform. It will not collapse as long as we consent to its existence...Our freedom depends every day, in evry situation, on each of us.”<sup>58</sup> This belligerent text published in December 1982 subscribed to the prefigurative politics of Solidarity and its intellectual legacy, even if, read scrupulously, it also articulated an identification with the pre-Solidarity dissident legacy. Most importantly, explicit allegiance to the underground leadership of the Union, which had been delegalized only a couple of months before, was conspicuously absent. Further on the declaration did appeal to fight for “restauration of free trade unions” (again, wording is not unimportant, since Free Trade Unions were a dissident labor organization preceding Solidarity), but only as one of the items on a longer list of associational freedoms.

Throughout the 1980s, many political commentators did distinguish between the Solidarity and the underground publishing movement. “To a large degree, independent publishing involves people who identify themselves with Solidarity only in a symbolical way, but nevertheless they form a pool of potential opposition activists. They share common sources of information, a common value system and a common vision of what they want to achieve in the near future, notwithstanding the political differences regarding the long-term programs.”<sup>59</sup> In this context it is also worth remembering that those who operated openly under Solidarity's aegis during its legal existence, were known to the police and therefore not eligible for underground action.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, some of those who joined the underground movement were

<sup>58</sup> “Deklaracja Solidarności,” *KOS*, supplement dated December 12, 1982.

<sup>59</sup> Adam Uważny, “Czytam więc jestem,” *CDN – Głos Wolnego Robotnika*, April 12, 1986.

<sup>60</sup> “Na początku drogi,” 95-96.

uninvolved or even critical of the legal Solidarity, like one of the printers, who did not believe that a trade-union alone could have a lasting transformative effect on the party state, but at the same time did not approve in transforming it into a political movement at the price of sacrificing its social gains.<sup>61</sup>

Loyalty towards the Union was based on good will and sense of common cause, rather than discipline, as well as a self-aware recognition of mutual interdependence. While underground social media activists commonly identified with the symbol of Solidarity, shared the values it stood for and often positively responded to its leaders' appeals, at the same time they clearly perceived themselves as bearers of a distinct political identity and often challenged the sense of political entitlement of the Solidarity veterans, or for that matter, the policies of the regional and national Solidarity leadership, which, as editors of *Wola* argued, had to rely on the opinion expressed in underground press lest it become a dead symbol.<sup>62</sup> This distinct identity was the clearest expression of the fact that underground media activism no longer could be reduced to a front in the struggle of the broader Solidarity resistance movement.<sup>63</sup>

More broadly, the anti-institutional spirit of the underground media activism was very much rooted in the political context of late Socialism. While the futility of establishing a party in a one-party state did not mean automatically a rejection of parliamentarianism, to many, the party was not only an institution belonging to the world of parliamentary democracy, but the Iron Curtain divide notwithstanding, also a certain way of organizing political culture, which some of them rejected. A party meant

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<sup>61</sup> "Tylko fizyczny: rozmowa z drukarzem Terenowego Komitetu Oporu "Solidarności" in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 157.

<sup>62</sup> "Mówić do końca: rozmowa z redakcją *Woli*," *Kontakt* 41 (1985). During the first months of the Martial Law, *Wola* represented a more loyal attitude. See "Uchwała Programowa Międzyzakładowego Komitetu Koordynacyjnego *Wola*," *Wola*, February 4, 1982.

<sup>63</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 43-49.

a political program designed by a few who would enlist support and discipline of the many. Underground publishing, on the other hand, was about bottom-up political action and ideas rooted in the experience of the participants. For the editors of the left-leaning *Robotnik* (unconnected to the eponymous KOR publication from the 1970s), one of the reasons of failure of the previous initiatives inspired by the traditions of Polish interwar socialism was that they were constructed top-down. “There is a certain model of setting up a political initiative: first one publishes a manifesto, then you create the structures and attract people. Our way is the opposite. We are for such a model of political action in which first one involves people together around a concrete initiative - such as our journal – later you build structures, and the manifesto develops only at the end, as an expression of interests and worldviews of people and structures involved.”<sup>64</sup>

Especially illuminating in this regard was the often-recurring question of whether the underground resistance should model itself on the example of the Spanish Workers' Commissions (Comisiones Obreras, CC.OO.), clandestine worker associations set up by the Communist Party of Spain that operated under late Francoism and were commonly believed to be an important actor in the Spanish process of transition to democracy in the late 1970s, which was carefully studied in Poland.<sup>65</sup> The editors of *Wola* were quite skeptical about whether the Spanish experience could be repeated under the conditions of late Socialism. One reason was that the source of CC.OO. success resided in the economic pressure on the employer who operated in a capitalist environment and thus had to take into consideration the economic calculus. In the state-owned economy the managers had all sorts of ways to offset similar pressure and hence a similar strategy could have only limited results. More importantly, the real

<sup>64</sup> “Wszyscy jesteśmy proletariuszami” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 101.

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. Karol Grodkowski [Kazimierz Dziewanowski], “Komisje Robotnicze w Hiszpanii,” *Robotnik* 8 (1978).

difference was not in the type of the social environment, but in the matters of political organization. The CC.OO. were based on a formal membership in the Spanish Communist Party and subordinated to party-discipline. In contrast, the independent publishing movement, in *Wola's* view, derived its strength from the capacities for spontaneous self-mobilization and personal motivation which were based precisely on internalization of certain values willingness to act upon them, rather than from outward impulses coming from a party center.<sup>66</sup>

In other words, what was needed was a political platform which was rooted in the immediate experience of the participants and that would grow together with the movement, held in check by its constituency. Such platform would necessarily mean “eclectic pragmatism,” which, according to *Wola*, also characterized the legal Solidarity and therefore was a continuation of Solidarity's political style. “Our journal is ideologically pluralist – *Wola* emphasized – just as Solidarity has been and still is. I think this is not harmful to the cause, but, to the contrary, creates a situation in which focusing on matters of immediate and concrete concern we build a certain perspective of thinking about Polish issues, a perspective that is informed by the real experience.”<sup>67</sup> While *Wola* itself was leaning towards the left and its interwar, antitotalitarian traditions, at the same time it saw little point in resurrecting the banners of the historical parties. Thus “eclectic pragmatism” and prefigurative politics were the two sides of the same coin.

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<sup>66</sup> “Mówić do końca,” 6-8.

<sup>67</sup> “Mówić do końca,” 11.

## THE GATEKEEPERS

While in the early days of the Martial Law the surrogate mass media model proved to be stillborn, neither desirable nor practicable, publicity remained in the heart of the political debates among the underground social media activists. In the licensed press, even the liberal journalists of *Polityka* perceived the underground press in their own image, as a propaganda outlet of the political opposition to the regime. One of the critics argued that this political character was evident from the fact that more than a half of the journals claimed alliance to one of the dozens of political groups or at least supported Solidarity. Also publishing policy that limited itself to authors and works unpublishable in the official realm, sowed cultural divisions with detrimental effect both to the official culture (valuable works could not be circulated more broadly) and the counterculture (the official realm had quality products as well).<sup>68</sup> That image was far from reality, not only because political pluralism of the oppositional underground was increasingly impossible to bring under common denominator of a single platform for political opposition, but more importantly because leadership of Solidarity did not have under their disposal any practical instruments to transform underground social media into surrogate mass media type of transmission belt. Indeed, as we have seen, recognition of Solidarity as the spearhead of the opposition did not entail the readiness to act as a medium of top-down transmission from the Solidarity leadership to its supporters.

Still, the radical approach to publicity championed by the trade union press activists survived into the Martial Law and internal pluralism, informed critique, and transparency were at the heart of the prefigurative politics of the underground press. Debating how much publicity is to be reconciled with the oppositional underground,

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<sup>68</sup> Piotr Sarzyński, "Oficyny bez adresu," *Polityka* 9 (1989), 1, 8-11.

the opinions varied between a realist and radical positions. The former was represented by the veteran independent press activist Seweryn Blumsztajn. Writing in 1984 from exile in Paris, Blumsztajn proposed to map the space of independent communication as a triangle configured by three functions: propagandistic (aimed at mobilizing the supporters), political (offering middle and long-term strategies and developing the independent political thought) and informational-practical (concentrating on providing news and practical information to the movement, conducting and analyzing surveys of independent opinion). While in the early days of the Martial Law the anti-communist propaganda was dominant, switching to the ‘long march’ perspective demanded more balance between the three, a balance which characterized the best journals, such as *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, but which could be also conceived as a balance between the journals, between different trends and niches in the independent press. On the whole, Blumsztajn was optimistic. “You cannot keep mobilizing when the horizon of victory seems receding and fuzzy. I think the content of independent press becomes more concrete, because the whole way of thinking about the underground changes...There is a tendency to move away from the focus on ‘how to win’ today, tomorrow, or the day after. This open space for more concreteness.”<sup>69</sup>

While for Blumsztajn in principle there was nothing wrong with political propaganda, as long as it was checked by more informed and reality-oriented content, other voices coming from within the independent publishing movement were more radical in their critique. Leszek Nowak, a philosopher in what he himself called non-Marxist materialism, argued that to speak of pluralism of the independent press was an illusion, since “pluralism” meant for him a situation when every ideological alternative has equal chances of reaching the audience. The independent press, needless to say, felt

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<sup>69</sup> Seweryn Blumsztajn, “Uwagi o polskiej prasie podziemnej,” *Baza* 9 (1984).



short of the radical ideal: there were significant disproportions in the outreach of different journals' and the biggest ones, in Nowak's opinion, promoted those ideas that fell in line with their political agenda. To counteract exclusion of certain alternatives, Nowak proposed to form a consortium of publishers which would distribute the most interesting ideas through the same channels and in equal print-runs. However, he did not explain who should form such a new body and on which basis the most interesting ideas should be selected.<sup>70</sup>

Dawid Warszawski (penname of Konstanty Gebert) one of the most influential independent commentators of the 1980s was less preoccupied with the availability of ideological alternatives, and more concerned with the question of professional integrity of underground journalists, which according to him was a question of transparency on the one hand, and critical capacity, on the other. The underground press might be independent of the party-state but, he contended, this did not equal independence as such, as long as social communication was burdened by the reminiscences the party organ media model, e.g. as long as political loyalties prevailed over the right to information. A truly independent press stood or fell with the quality of its contents alone, with the ability to scoop for news and present a persuasive commentary, no matter whether it involved a conflict with the political gatekeepers of information.

“We know everything about the reds, but almost nothing about the backstage operation of the underground structures” - Warszawski deplored, pointing out to the fact that the right to withhold or selectively reveal information to the audience was respected for reasons of political loyalty and on the assumption that the gatekeepers are acting in good faith. “The gatekeepers act in good faith, e.g. they are convinced that

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<sup>70</sup> Leszek Nowak, “Tezy o drugim obiegu,” *Vacat* 32-33 (1985).

lack of transparency serves the cause. However, when it comes to matters of public concern, the arguments of the gatekeepers can be rebuked by pointing to the superior value of informed - and therefore more autonomous and empowered – citizenship. Now, empowerment and autonomy presuppose that one is fully informed.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, to Warszawski, there could be no press independence without transparency, there could be no pluralism as long as the roles of the journalist and the propagandist were not properly separated. While selection of information was itself a necessary part of the editorial process, its criterion should not be political: editors should be guided by questions of public concern alone rather than let political loyalties take upper hand. There was nothing wrong with a journal having a political line, as long it was expressed in the commentary. However, shaping the political opinion should not affect the access to information.

Can culture leap into independence? – asked Jan Walc, both a veteran printer and one of the most brilliant dissident writers, in the eponymous essay questioning the very purpose of the underground print culture. Walc’s essay shared with Michnik’s prison letters the anxiety against mental captivity of the conspirator and questioned the transformative effects of instrumental thinking in the realm of culture. “We are living witnesses to the epoch in which every Pole can articulate in print her true convictions. The exception is a group of professional journalists, staffing the licensed papers... The rest of the society can articulate its convictions more or less normally, albeit in so called ‘second circulation.’”<sup>72</sup> However the very existence of the underground print culture was not an evidence of cultural independence. In a variation on Havel’s theme, Walc observed that rejection of living in the lie does not amount to living in truth. The

<sup>71</sup> Dawid Warszawski, “Prasa niezależna,” *Tu Teraz* 49/50 (1986).

<sup>72</sup> Jan Walc, “Czy kultura może wybrać się na niezależność,” *Kultura Niezależna* 3 (1984), [www.janwalc.pl](http://www.janwalc.pl), accessed November 28, 2017.

unlicensed culture remained captive of the Cold-War mentality to which most of its participants were born, and which was the mirror image of the cultural logic of communism, characterized by primacy of strategic thinking about culture. Taking for granted an image of the world divided by a barricade, in which one could only remain partisan, Walc believed, unlicensed culture built its hierarchies of worth around that divide, attributing the value of truth to every articulation of anti-communism, and at the same time accepting self-imposed constraints on public articulation of internal critique. “Today the building of independent culture depends on our ability to break through the imposing structure of the bipolar world divided by a barricade” – he asserted. To achieve a truly transformative effect, underground culture had to be released from the shackles of strategic thinking. “If Polish culture was to leap into independence, it would need to become a forum of authentic debate, cooperation and contention in the name of values, diverse but constantly summoned, values kept in mind regardless the matter of concern, which one shall not reject or sacrifice in the name of even the most noble final end.”<sup>73</sup>

In sum, the critical voices mentioned above were quite illustrative of the degree of actually existing pluralism of the independent publishing movement. At the same time, they demonstrated how prefigurative politics was a form of politics in need of constant cultivation against the laws of political gravity. “Living in truth,” e.g. practicing democracy here and now espoused by underground social media activists was in a constant tension with strategic-instrumental thinking of a traditional politician. That tension was defining the internal logics of unlicensed print culture, but it also the relationship between the underground media activism and political activism.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibidem.

The traditional politicians would soon have their time. But unlike during Solidarity's Carnival, this time the balance of forces was quite different. Unlike in 1980, underground publishing movement was not an ascending, imposing force. The underground fatigue, which beset the movement after the turning point of 1986, when General Amnesty was announced, marking the beginning of Communism's endgame, had many sources, but is best understood through the lens of the political economy of underground print culture, which the next chapter shall illuminate.

## CHAPTER SEVEN |

### POLITICAL ECONOMY OF UNLICENSED PUBLISHING<sup>1</sup>

“Underground society may act with efficiency and solidarity if it organizes itself – bottom up, through individual enterprise – into independent, self-governing social institutions – firms.”<sup>2</sup> This proposition from the *Little Conspirator*, exemplifies well the pervasive ambiguity in the semantics of the independent press, which serves as the interpretative point of departure for this chapter. On the one hand, the common concept for the collective action for anyone politically active in times of Solidarity was a democratic social movement forming an “independent and self-governing” society. On the other hand, the principal modality of existence of the oppositional underground, especially in the aftermath of the Martial Law, was the dissident print culture: editorial groups, printshops, publishing houses, and distribution networks, which were commonly referred to as “firms,” “companies” or “enterprises.” I propose to interpret this ambiguity in terms of two different cultural frameworks of meaning, or two different semantics, whose compatibility, as this chapter will present, varied depending on the moment in the historical trajectory and its challenges. In some contexts, the firm denoted just a particular form of activity in the dissident repertoire, a form that required higher discipline, entrepreneurial spirit, and managerial skills, but one among many others in the dissident milieu. However, in other contexts, it was meant to signify that networks of independent print culture were something akin to a publishing market and implied that such a prefigurative market should be a corollary of the prefigurative

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<sup>1</sup> An initial version of this chapter was published as Piotr Wciślik, “Movement, enterprise, network. The political economy of the Polish underground press” in *Samizdat. Between Practices and Representations*, 73-86.

<sup>2</sup> *Mały Konspirator*, 4.

politics. The debates about political economy of the underground publishing culture intensified in mid-1980 as the publishing movement experienced its crisis, that prompted questions about how independent culture should be run. Should the independent space of exchange of cultural goods be regulated by market mechanisms, or by conscious (democratic) political decisions? To what extent the hierarchies of cultural worth should be dependent on readers' demand? What is the relation of free culture and intellectual rights?

## THE BUSINESS OF PUBLISHING

For many underground editors, especially those initiated into political life during Solidarity's Carnival, which owes its name to the public effervescence that seemed to be radiating from the Gdańsk Shipyard to every workplace and every university aula in Poland, it was quite a change to descend from the world of deliberative assemblies, with their unending debates and resolutions, the world of political trials and their honor of having the condemning last word, the world of protest action, the strikes and the marches, last but not least, the world of charity and distribution of relief, to the underworld of tedious organizing of infrastructure, production and distribution of printed matter in conspiracy. But for others, perhaps less given to endless debates about the latest move by the regime, its nature, the qualities of the society under its rule, or scenarios of collapse, this was just a natural match for their skills and temperament, a way of contributing to the resistance in the most meaningful way. The latter group which had not been attracted by Solidarity's deliberating assemblies, but who decided not to remain passive in the face of the Martial Law, were at the core of the activities of

CDN, one of the largest underground publishing companies,<sup>3</sup> and most probably contributed most to the resilience of the underground print culture in the 1980s.

The firm stood first of all for an institutional form of dissident activity which valued laboriousness over spectacularity, put the prize on regularity rather than the right political momentum. Not that there was nothing thrilling in the publishing business. On the contrary, every account of the realities of the underground publishing is generous with adventurous anecdotes about each and every element of the publishing process, sometimes involving the hide and seek with the secret police, sometimes, the murky figures the underground publishers had to deal with to secure their operations, friendly and not so friendly neighbors, or the firm's employees with uneven conspiratorial skills; everything could turn out wrong, from picking up a smuggled offset printer or hiding a couple of tons of printing paper, through choosing the place to get the printing done, to transporting publications from that place to the distribution hub, a *skrzynka* or a *śluza*, and further through the network. In part the entrepreneurial spirit of the publisher resided in being able to harness all that contingency. The historian should avoid diving into the anecdotal layer though, among other reasons because it would obscure the hierarchies of worth that the semantics of the firm implied. The very stubbornness to make a journal or a newsletter appear with regularity was believed subversive just as much as the publication content, especially so in the case of resilience in the aftermath of a police raid. "Though Zenek Pałka has been beaten, the printers' rollers are far from quitin'" (Choć pobity Zenek Pałka, nic nie wstrzyma ruchu wałka) – as the rhyme went, put in circulation by Jan Walc on the last page of the issue no. 24 of *Biuletyn*

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<sup>3</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 12.

*Informacyjny* (1980), after his printer associate was arrested and beaten in Wrocław in 1979.

Furthermore, behind regularity there was managerial efficiency and efficiency was the singular avenue of prefigurative politics. CDN's Czesław Bielecki considered it an articulation of anticommunism to be able to build extensive networks of cooperation without developing bureaucratic tendencies, even if that anticommunism was affirmed in a way resembling the spirit of (anti-)socialist competition, as in case of the following proposition from a 1984 issue of *Słowo*: "If any there is a single sector of production in which Poland is ahead of the rest of the world, this is the production of underground prints. If there is a product of hands and intellect, that distinguishes the Poles from other nations, it is our independent journals and books."<sup>4</sup>

We can take as the measure of accomplishment of this competition of sorts the case of Kamil Sipowicz's volume of poetry *The Secret History of the Elements* (*Tajemnicze dzieje pierwiastków*), published by the underground publisher *Przedświt* in 1983.<sup>5</sup> The publication gained some notoriety. As Sipowicz was at the time the editor of the Socialist Youth journal *Razem*, many in the publishing underworld believed that he did not belong together with the poets on censorship index and that printers should not take risks for party functionaries (especially since that was a book of poems). The *Przedświt* publishers wanted to demonstrate that aesthetic values were not divisible and that the bifurcation of national culture into licensed and unlicensed spheres (not to mention the émigré sphere) should be bridged. "Literature is one and we are an illegal publisher out of necessity... The single criterion that orients us is the worth of the work

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<sup>4</sup> "Przemysł narodowy," *Słowo* 29 (1984).

<sup>5</sup> Kamil Sipowicz, *Tajemnicze dzieje pierwiastków, czyli Poemat kopalno-roślinno-zwierzęcy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Przedświt, 1983).



alone. We cannot limit ourselves to Reds' bashing."<sup>6</sup> That was polemical not only with their own milieu, but also the party liberals from *Polityka*, who criticized the independent publishers for sawing cultural divisions by labeling some authors as oppositional and by constraining the circulation of the most valuable creative works to the publishing underground (why licensed publishers would hold apprehensions against approaching authors with a samizdat record was another matter).<sup>7</sup> Importantly, for authors like Sipowicz, the choice was not ideological, but rather pragmatic: even though his poems were probably not particularly censurable, as a debuting writer he could not expect his volume to be printed in thousands of copies anyways, but with the underground publishers he could get his volume out much faster than in the overground publishing cycle which extended to two-three years.

Perhaps more to the point, during a symposium "On the State of Social Communication in Poland" organized by the members of the disbanded SDP in early 1989, Grzegorz Boruta, the veteran publisher of NOWA, contended that "the independent editors and journalists must be at the same time managers. It is not enough to write or edit well. At the same time, we have to deal with the organization of print and distribution. This amounts to creating a new type of enterprise, one that is in the business of organization of the entire flow of culture – from the author to the reader."<sup>8</sup> The underground publishers were enterprises of a new type in virtue of the social media nature of the communication environment – blurring the boundaries of the traditional division of labor into creators, publishers and readers, and transforming the one-directional transmission of culture into a multi-directional network, in which the flow

<sup>6</sup> "Wywiad Vacatu z Wydawnictwem „Przedświt”, *Vacat* 15 (1983).

<sup>7</sup> Piotr Sarzyński, "Oficyny bez adresu," *Polityka* 9 (1989), 1, 8-11.

<sup>8</sup> Grzegorz Boguta, "Drugi obieg – od środka," *Most* 21 (1989): 63.

of cultural goods depends on autonomous activities of a multiplicity of actors, involved in publishing in the same way one is involved in a social movement.

## A PREFIGURATIVE MARKET?

As long as semantics of the enterprise signified a set of values associated with a particular institution of the parallel polis, adding to the diversity of its life forms, it was uncontroversial, but what if, in addition, the use of the concept would imply that the underground enterprises form together something like a market?<sup>9</sup>

That the idea itself could emerge in the first place is due to the fact that, as we have seen, underground print culture in Poland, unlike in brotherly dissident countries, entered the era of mechanical mass reproduction and sophisticated division of labor very early on. When discussing political economy of underground publishing, samizdat studies most commonly refer to the Marcel Mauss' seminal theory of gift exchange.<sup>10</sup> Alluding to Mauss, Ann Komaromi argued that as an object of exchange, samizdat artifacts escaped pure economic or political calculus, becoming instead "the currency of new and sometimes unexpected social networks."<sup>11</sup> In order to explain samizdat's capacity of generating social bonds through reciprocity, Komaromi pointed out to the ephemerality of samizdat, which testified to the precarious conditions of its production. Like in Mauss, "in samizdat textual exchange, too, the textual object given possesses the spirit (the identity) of its owner or owners—this may encompass the author and/or typist or reader who passes it on—and that spirit confers responsibility on the recipient for proper further exchange."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Gábor Danyi, "Sztuka obdarowywania. Praktyki kulturowe wczesnego samizdatu na przykładzie węgierskiego czasopisma artystycznego," in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 313-332.

<sup>11</sup> Komaromi, "Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon," 656.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 657.

In case of Poland, the Mauss' model fits well the initial stage of samizdat *sensu stricto*, when indeed it all revolved around creating dissident bonds through re-typing open letters and communiques of the incipient oppositional movement, and as we recall from Chapter Two, apart from security reasons, the gravest argument against introducing more sophisticated methods of textual reproduction was that the community dimension would have been lost. Nevertheless, with technical upgrade of the means of production, the emergence of publishing enterprises, and with sophisticated division of labor replacing the "sam-" (self-) aspect of samizdat publishing, in Poland the unlicensed publishing became a mass phenomenon and inevitably its aura to which Komaromi alluded, changed in the process. Ephemerality, which Komaromi interpreted as the text's identity or spirit, did not evaporate altogether: titles and their associated organizations would often change names, a single copy of a book would be printed on two different kinds of paper, since that was the material at hand, and blurred typescript and editorial shortcomings would still testify that publishing in the underground was not business as usual (unlike the editions of the Budapest based publishing house AB run by Gábor Demszky, which were hard to distinguish from professional, licensed editions).<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the soul of the publisher was no longer embodied in a copy of an underground bulletin, but surely his history was.

But on the other hand, the underground editors, who, as we have seen, saw professionalism as a subversive act, certainly preferred to achieve the non-auratic stability and fixity of the textual reproduction rather than articulate the identity through ephemeral textual traces. Similarly, the underground texts would continue to travel along social networks, but now the networks would consist of a complex web of intermediaries, rather than the direct typist-to-typist human chain, and therefore

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<sup>13</sup> Oset, "List do Redakcji," *Serwis Informacyjny Społecznego Komitetu Nauki* 41 (1987): 4.

resembled much more commodity exchange, regulated by prices and with relative anonymity of both producers and consumers.

Even though in principle market could appear as a plausible framework of meaning for comprehending the unlicensed print culture after it entered the era of mass reproduction, it was far from obvious reference. For example, writing in 1983, the émigré writer Tomasz Mianowicz, who made the point of emphasizing that Poland's unlicensed publishing has outgrown the samizdat stage (and even pointed out to emergence of a "readership market" to corroborate this claim), on the whole preferred to refer to "independent culture" as an alternative concept instead, to highlight that the uncensored production encompassed all cultural spheres except for theatre and audiovisual media, where the state patronage was still inevitable.<sup>14</sup> But then again 1983 was still the golden age of underground publishing and commodity exchange was operating rather flawlessly. During and right after the Martial Law, far from being suppressed, the underground print culture experienced exponential growth. During this period, it was a producer's market, i.e. the consumer demand was able to absorb everything the samizdat movement had in stock. The independent printed matter was a token of identification with the opposition, and people were buying books and newspapers if not because of their intrinsic worth, than as a contribution to the cause, a form of patriotic self-taxation. For the same reason, there was no shortage of volunteers at every step of the publishing process. It also meant that the turnover of investments was quick enough to maintain the overall fluidity of the underground firms, further facilitated by generous foreign donations. During this short golden age, the political economy of samizdat publishing was rarely on the agenda, as dissemination of cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Tomasz Mianowicz "Samizdat czy Niezależna Kultura," *Tydzień Polski* 12.03.1983; eng. version Idem, "Unofficial publishing lives on," *Index on Censorship* 12, 2 (1983): 24-26.

commons seemed to be aligned with the emergent processes of exchange. It became a burning question once the whole movement entered the crisis and constraints on the operation of the publishing enterprises began to be felt.

Finally, whether underground print culture was a part of the second economy, the grey and the back markets proliferating under late Socialism and often assumed to prefigure the capitalist future, is a complicated issue.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, underground publishing was heavily reliant on black market for ink, paper (in case of bigger enterprises, the acquisitions counted in pallets rather than reams), stencils and sometimes also printing services. More broadly, it seems that disposition of Polish reading public towards informal commodity exchange, shaped by the economies of scarcity is a heavily underestimated factor in the growth of the publishing underground. Difficult as it is to imagine, Poland, the same country that had developed by far the most extensive unlicensed publishing culture in terms of output, was at the same time the country that was in a perpetual publishing crisis due to underdevelopment of paper industry, miles behind every Western country (and in the communist bloc only Albania was faring worse).<sup>16</sup> Poland's "paper apocalypse" was no secret and in the licensed press of the 1970s and 1980s one can find countless reports lamenting the inaccessibility of books as well as debates on the ways of managing their scarcity, either by rationalization of the use of paper or through establishing publishing priorities according to more and more contested socialist hierarchies of cultural worth.<sup>17</sup> But it was not a secret either, that the publishing crisis was a catalyst for the practices of

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<sup>15</sup> Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami. "Czarny rynek" w Polsce 1944-1989* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Maciej Szymczyk, *Polski przemysł papierniczy 1945-1989* (Duszniki Zdrój: Muzeum Papiernictwa w Dusznikach Zdroju, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> M. Woźniak, "Papierowa apokalipsa," *Przegląd Techniczny*, March 10, 1985; M. Szczepański, "Remisja, czyli krótka historia poligrafii," *Kierunki*, September 25, 1983. Barbara Seidler, "Surowiec strategiczny kultury," *Życie Literackie*, August 10, 1980;

informal exchange of cultural goods, from sale from under the counter to regular black market, with the *bouquinistes* of the Warsaw Wolumen market being perhaps most notorious.<sup>18</sup> If Poles were accustomed to get their books and journals from behind the counter or on the black market, simply because they could not get them in bookstores, the discretion it required and inhibitions it dissolved, it seems quite plausible that they were better disposed to become samizdat readers than law-abiding citizens of other socialist countries, where problems with purchasing books did not exist.<sup>19</sup>

From this perspective, the black market can be certainly seen as an ally of the dissident print culture, both on the supply and on the demand side. And yet, Czesław Bielecki was certainly the exception in suggesting that the democratic opposition “instead of vilifying the black market and rectifying the white one dominated by the state, should embrace the grey economy, support the second life of privateers, free consumers and free producers.”<sup>20</sup> Typically, the underground publishers insisted that what makes them different from the black-marketeers, is the non-profit motivation. A culture that is illegal, flows together with other illegal goods, it is acquired in a similar way and combated in similar way. Insisting on the non-profit motivation was not only to express the disinterestedness of their care for the good of culture, but also to declare that underground publishing was in the business of political, and not economic subversion. An anecdote from Jacek Kuroń’s biography about publicizing the Workers’ Defense Committee’s statements is quite illustrative in this regard:

Radio Free Europe was continuously transmitting our first communique. In the meantime, serious activity started and it badly needed amplification. One day, when I was talking about it with friends, the literary critic Antek Libera took me to Unia Lubelska square, where from a telephone booth you could automatically

<sup>18</sup> “The Bureaucratic Paper Mill,” *RFE Polish Situation Report* 8, April 15, 1980: 10-13; J. Wyczańska, “Bestsellery z Wolumenu,” *Perspektywy* May 29, 1979; A. Jankowski, “Bestsellery na łańcuchach,” *Prawo i Życie* April 23, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 36-37.

<sup>20</sup> Maciej Poleski [Czesław Bielecki], “Wolność w obozie,” *Kultura* 379 (1979): 97.

connect with the entire world for one zloty only. First, I tried calling Giedroyc in Paris. It worked. I started talking, reading a text, but Gajka and Antek, who were covering my back, gave a sign that somebody was coming, and I hang up. This repeated a couple of times before the entire text was transmitted and I realized, that what I am afraid of is not speaking to Paris *Kultura*, but that using a malfunctioning telephone, I am stealing. And I preferred to have a political trial, however imminent, rather than take the smallest risk of being accused of stealing.<sup>21</sup>

The independent publishers also abhorred the coexistence of what they dubbed the “third circuit,” or the black market, with the second circuit publishing (as underground print culture was popularly called, in contrast to the licensed publishing, or the “first circuit”). First of all, this was because the third circuit was parasitizing on the second. In the Warsaw markets such as Wolumen, Różycki street market or Hala Mirowska, samizdat bestsellers would share the same stalls with the bestsellers in official circulation, as well as pornography, books of dreams, guides to alternative healing and xerox copies of textbooks.<sup>22</sup> More than a few samizdat activists condemned the exorbitant prices at which the underground bestsellers were sold on Wolumen, as “mafia practices” and “profiteering”, especially since it created bad press for the political underground as a whole, silent majority not being able to distinguish well between honest and dishonest producers. Indeed, one would need to have a very predatory image of capitalism – and not the lyrical model widely shared among the dissidents – to believe that all this was a free market in spe!<sup>23</sup>

The established publishers were especially suspicious of the one-time, ephemeral publishing initiatives, which vanished as quickly as they appeared. According to Polish National Library data, 1250 book editions were no-name editions,

<sup>21</sup> Jacek Kuroń, *Gwiezdny Czas* (London: Aneks 1991), 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 246-247 and 278-281. Not incidentally, Józefa Kamińska (pseudonym of Władysław and Wojciech Chojnacki) in her bibliography of underground publications explicitly excluded the “third circuit” from her considerations, due to its “purely commercial considerations.” Józefa Kamińska, *Bibliography of underground publications in Poland: 13 XII 1981-VI 1986* (Paris: Editions Spotkania, 1988), 13.

<sup>23</sup> K.G. Buntowszczyk, “Bibuła, szmal i złudzenia,” *Promieniści* 86, February 16, 1986.

and from over 400 publishers operating in 1982-1987, more than a half disappeared after releasing one or two titles. Often, these initiatives were a matter of opportunity. Suddenly someone had access to printing services (sometimes indeed an office Xerox machine) and decided to take advantage of it to print a wanted title from the unlicensed stock, sometimes adding a publishing label to the reprint, despite no serious editing work had been actually done. Outside the urban centers, most of the publishing business was a business in reprints. Sometimes these pirated editions were done in good faith, e.g. to enlarge a collection of a local independent library, but at other times the profit motive was key.<sup>24</sup> Nota bene, there was also the reverse process of publishing unlicensed editions of popular fiction, most probably to repair one's budget (e.g. Frederick Forsyth's *Devil's Alternative* had three underground editions between 1987 and 1989). "For a time now there proliferate on the independent market publishers whose dedication to the cause can and should be put in doubt." – a commentary in *Wola* alarmed.

The independent book became a lucrative business...If in the early days of independent publishing low editorial standards were excusable, today mediocre publishing is an expression of, if not bolshevization, than at least contempt for the reader, who is expected to purchase everything that supports social resistance and 'struggle' against communism...If we want the domain of independent culture to be a domain of reason, fair rules of trade, responsibility for the word and action, we cannot tolerate editorial piracy, concealed behind catchy symbolism.<sup>25</sup>

The author of that commentary called for a (consumer) boycott of sloppy editions whose primary motive was personal enrichment, rather than enrichment of independent culture. More broadly, he (or perhaps she?) proposed that "healthy competition" was in the interest of independent culture. The reader of the late 1980s, accustomed to the unlicensed flow of cultural goods and increasingly critical of the moral obligation to

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<sup>24</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 53-55.

<sup>25</sup> Mateusz F., "Coraz więcej, coraz drożej, coraz gorzej", *Wola* 207, January 5, 1987.



buy books in support of resistance (to say nothing of the general impoverishment), would enforce certain standards of underground publishing through consumer behavior. In this sense the diminishing demand for the continuously growing unlicensed book production, was a welcome development. The attitude of many other publishers was much less enthusiastic, as we will find out next.

## PUBLISHING CRISIS

The general amnesty announced on September 11, 1986 marks the beginning of the process of liberalization that culminated in 1989, and at the same time, as we will see in the next chapter, of the eclipse of the underground social media and the idea of prefigurative politics. The amnesty coincided with what was generally perceived as a moment of underground fatigue.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps that was inevitable after five years of clandestine activities, both for the social media activists and for their audience.

A prominent symptom of the underground fatigue was interpreted at the time in terms of a switch from a producer's to a reader's market. That was due to habituation to the existence of the underground print culture, which having consolidated lost its aura of forbidden fruit. The readers became more demanding and critical. The critical attitude of the readership had to do both with the contents of the printed matter, and with the general disillusion with the prospects of a positive breakthrough in the stalemate that followed the Martial Law. Political manifestos, geopolitical analyses, denunciations of communist crimes, translations from Western political theory, and mostly mid-brow patriotic poetry, filling up the pages of the underground journals,

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<sup>26</sup> Mielczarek, "Drugi obieg wydawniczy," 70-72. Some authors detect the moment of underground fatigue as early as 1983-1985, e.g. Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 86.

seemed detached from reality, all the more so, given the everyday struggle for survival in the collapsing economy and the bleak future prospects.

But the same fatigue had an eroding effect on the activism, manifested in both professionalization and burn out. Professionalization was often criticized as a symptom of the growing importance of material preoccupations of the individuals involved in underground print culture,<sup>27</sup> however this trend was not strong enough to make up in efficiency for the cumulative effect of individual decisions of the volunteer supporters on which the sustainability of the underground social networks depended.

The process of erosion of the underground social media networks was precipitated by a new, smarter strategy of the repression apparatus. While arrests and prison sentences decreased, material harassment – from heavy fines to seizure of “complicit” private property – followed, creating a significant deterrent of the underground publishing, given that this new strategy of repression targeted especially these parts of the publishing network that formed the interface between the underground and the overground: cars or homes (most of them in cooperative or state housing) that were used for unlicensed publishing and distribution, and which could be seized under new regulations. Most of the time, these were temporarily put at the disposal of the underground by overground people, who were sympathetic to the cause, but not ready to bear the material consequences.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the crisis of underground publishing was an effect of *de facto*, if not *de jure* liberalization in the domain of free speech, which did not manifest itself in any new regulation, however consisted, in broadening of the space for debate and criticism in the

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<sup>27</sup> “Federacja Wspomagania: rozmowa z przedstawicielami Międzyzakładowej Struktury Solidarności” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 140.

<sup>28</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 176-177.

licensed media.<sup>29</sup> In 1985, the party-liberal weekly *Polityka* reprinted a selection of fragments of the underground bestseller *Konspira*,<sup>30</sup> which, however mendaciously glossed and published only after *Konspira* was broadcasted by RFE, was a sign of changing times, as were the selective domestic editions of émigré authors such as Witold Gombrowicz, Leszek Kołakowski or Józef Czapski. Some of the unlicensed journals took the opportunity to emerge overground. *Res Publica*, edited by the intellectual historian Marcin Król received Censor's *placet* in 1987 and in late 1988 the Christian-liberal thinker Mirosław Dzielski received permission to publish the *Newsletter of the Kraków Industrial Society*, which was a licensed follow-up of the unlicensed journal *I3*.

Another dimension of the liberalization was the toleration of public distribution of unlicensed printed matter, which in the final years before 1989 became a regular trading stock on the stalls of the buquinistes in particular in the university quarters of bigger Polish towns.<sup>31</sup> Paradoxically, the possibility of trading unlicensed prints in the open had a negative effect on the networks of informal distribution of independent press, which took more organizational effort to establish and sustain, but were also more repression-proof. The open stalls, on the other hand, were both easy to assemble and to disassemble.

The crisis affected especially badly the readership from the provinces. As the turnover of invested funds got slower, the publishers, in order to make ends meet, had the tendency to both making the print runs smaller (thus making a single copy more expensive) and concentrating on those networks of distribution which would make the

<sup>29</sup> Jacek Maziarski, "O mediach i świadomości społecznej," *Most* 21 (1989): 52-56.

<sup>30</sup> Maciej Łopinski, Marcin Moskit, Mariusz Wilk, *Konspira: Solidarity underground* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Błażejowska, 231.

financial fluidity of their firm more secure: the big cities where the opposition concentrated, with its educated public, both willing and able to afford the increasingly expensive cultural goods.<sup>32</sup>

The point where the spontaneous processes of commodity exchange clashed most radically with the logic of the social movement was the case of the “thick” socio-political or opinion journals. The thick journals were at the heart of the dissident movement: it was through those journals, that the independent public sphere existed, it was where the social and political problems were articulated and where the independent public opinion formed. Last but not least, it was those journals that had the strongest community-building effect: the activity of editing their respective titles, big and small, was how groups of activists integrated among themselves and often identified the publishing activity with oppositional activity at large.

It was the thick journals that became the first casualty of the switch from producer to consumer market. One aspect of this process was the readership preference for books over journals, explained by general de-politicized mood of the normalization, but also by the books’ more permanent value. You can re-read a novel or a historical monograph without it becoming outdated. Conversely, for a political commentary timeliness is crucial and it often was the case that a journal would reach some circles half a year after being submitted to print. Moreover, the publishers’ subordination to consumer demand aggravated the problem, creating a vicious circle: because they were not selling well, the publishers would be reluctant to print journals at all or relegate them to the bottom of the priority list, which meant that they would come out in worse quality, with less regularity and with even greater delay, creating even more consumer

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<sup>32</sup> “List do redakcji,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 202, March 11, 1987.

dissatisfaction and so on. What is more, the preference for the books became a threat for sustainability of the whole network: the books and other non-periodical publications traveled through the channels which were kept open and active precisely due to publication of the periodicals, because it was their regular distribution that required the establishment of reliable networks of intermediaries.<sup>33</sup> Not without a reason, Czesław Bielecki started to build CDN publishing house by cooperating with several Warsaw-based periodicals: an extensive distribution structure was key and one would not create such structure circulating books and audio cassettes alone.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, as for the books themselves, the readers, faced with the double inflation of underground publications and their prices, would often go for the bestsellers (a Solzhenitsyn or a Miłosz) or contemporary historiography dealing with the so called blank spots, anti-communist political pamphlets (Bukowski) and so on, while the new publications, important but less known or more sophisticated writers would remain trapped in the clandestine deposits.<sup>35</sup>

## MOVEMENT OR MARKET?

The reactions to the crisis were very different, and they came from virtually every corner of the underworld of dissident print culture. The distributors, i.e. those who had to deal with the crisis in face-to-face contacts and often covered the losses from their own pockets, were most eager to pressure the publishers to subordinate to consumer demand. An announcement about the establishment of a Warsaw Club of Distributors read: “In the context of the abolition of all representative bodies in the aftermath of December,

<sup>33</sup> Krzysztof Katarzyński, “SOS dla czasopism,” *Vacat* 42 (1986); Oset, “List do redakcji,” *Serwis Informacyjny Społecznego Komitetu Nauki* 41, January 25, 1987.

<sup>34</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 45; Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 220.

<sup>35</sup> “Szansa dla wydawców,” *KOS* 93, April 13, 1986.

we the distributors are the only social milieu which knows and represents the real position of the society on publishing matters.”<sup>36</sup> The distributors protested against being forced to offer publishing goods that did not sell and declared their irritation with bearing the consequences of bad policies. The journals, they claimed, with outdated commentary, too ideological or simply dull, alienated the readership. The readers, unsatisfied, but feeling bad about being picky, would resolve this dilemma by not showing up at all at the distribution venues.<sup>37</sup>

Publishers tended to harbor more doubts about leaving it all to the spontaneity of the market. They were especially worried about the condition of the thick journals: the cost, the long publishing cycle and the dispersed distribution (sometimes each single issue would travel through different distribution networks, and thus reach different audiences, making regular reading impossible). Their disappearance, they worried, would have the effect of eradicating serious political analysis, i.e. anything between ad hoc political commentary and the meta-political musings.<sup>38</sup> Even though prices were a good regulator of exchange ( the price, after all, makes the information about the print run more reliable, helps to avoid speculation and also waste of resources, since the distributors are more careful about the number of copies they plan to sell),<sup>39</sup> it was not entirely clear how to reconcile the consumer's taste, as reflected in the anonymous demand, and the interest of culture, in the name of which the publishers believed to be acting. The one and the other was, in their view, not quite the same thing and in the new situation, in which the average taste prevailed over the political loyalties, and with the liberalization of the official culture, the firms, if they were to transform into profit-

<sup>36</sup> “Listy do redakcji,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 207-208, April 22, 1987.

<sup>37</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 244-45.

<sup>38</sup> Jacek Rakowiecki, “Inaczej,” *Promieniści* 115, November 17, 1988.

<sup>39</sup> “O drukowaniu *Tygodnika*: rozmowa z szefem poligrafii TM,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 201, March 4, 1987.

driven, capitalist enterprises, would be forced to print only the most primitive anti-communist pamphlets and popular fiction. Another challenge was the inertia of the distribution network itself. The distribution of high- and low-brow cultural goods was hard to combine, given that the mediators functioned in a certain social milieu and tended to reproduce, rather than change, the taste of their patrons.<sup>40</sup>

The debate over the commoditization of the publishing movement cut both across and through editorial boards. Dawid Warszawski argued that this was one of few cases in which left-right divide – otherwise quite blurry in the dissident circumstances – actually did apply to reality. In the editorial circle of his journal *KOS*, the supporters of commoditization would usually use arguments which situated them on the right: that there was no such thing as culture and its irreducible interests, just individual consumers of cultural goods; that the market was an optimal regulator of social interactions, the price expressing best both consumer preference and openness for the journal's persuasion, and thus, that upsetting the relation between the product and the price would be demoralizing for all parties involved. Arguments against commoditization would often employ the repertoire of the Left. The editorial left would regard “free word” as commons, access to which was a right of every citizen, with least possible restrictions, whatever their nature. In particular, commons should not be treated as ordinary commodities and the cost of their production should be covered by either voluntary donations or redistribution mechanisms. Even a small financial restriction in access would affect culture as a whole, since the readers under budget constraint would buy *KOS* at expense of other cultural goods.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Stara czy Nowa? Rozmowa z szefem Niezależnej Oficyny Wydawniczej” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> Dawid Warszawski [Konstanty Gebert], “Tyle hałasu o 10 zł,” *KOS* 113 (1987): 4.

## FUND FOR INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS

In terms proposed by Warszawski, the reaction of the independent publishing movement as whole to the crisis was a resolutely leftist reaction, which consisted in establishing collective bodies with the aim of regulating the flow of publishing goods according to cultural and political principles that put significant constraints on the spontaneity of market exchange. In 1986 the Consortium of Independent Publishers was established, integrating the biggest underground firms, to manage the Fund for Independent Publications (Fundusz Niezależnych Wydawnictw, FNW), coordinate activities, defend intellectual property rights as well as offer financial help to the smaller firms.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, the Social Council for Independent Publications (Społeczna Rada Wydawnictw Niezależnych, SRWN) was set up in the capacity of a monitoring body for the FNW. The Council was composed of people with public authority and unrelated to any of the big publishers. It was also recognized by Solidarity leadership. It audited the operations of the fund, evaluated the quality of production from the perspective of its cultural significance, offered mediation in case of conflict, monitored the realization of the ethical code of independent publishing, and, last but not least, issued long term policy recommendations.<sup>43</sup> Also, launch of complementary institutions – the bank of translations and a mutual-security scheme<sup>44</sup> – was announced.

Establishment of the FNW was an assertion of autonomy of the leading publishing initiatives with respect to the leadership of Solidarity, mirroring the

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<sup>42</sup> “Komunikat FWN,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 222, October 7, 1987; “Szansa dla wydawców” *KOS* 93, April 13, 1986.

<sup>43</sup> “O sprawach podziemnego ruchu wydawniczego: rozmowa z przedstawicielami SRWN i FNW,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 191, 10.12.1986.

<sup>44</sup> “Wydawco, ubezpiecz swoje mienie,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 196, January 28, 1987.



intellectual manifestations discussed in the previous chapter. As the publishing crisis was accelerating, it was instrumental to be recognized as a separate entity of the underground, and as such, a target of dedicated funding from abroad, which hitherto was pooled together under Solidarity earmark. The funds came mostly from the US Congress passing through the National Endowment for Democracy, Free Trade Union Institute run by the AFL-CIO and to Solidarity's Coordinating Office in Brussels, , the second biggest donor being Jerzy Giedroyc's Instytut Literacki, the publisher of the *Paris Kultura*.<sup>45</sup> But the reverse of autonomy vis-à-vis Solidarity leadership was dependence on foreign subsidies, and enterprises which had access to that stream of funding had also a considerable leverage over smaller players.<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, the fund was criticized for creating unfair competition, e.g. due to demand of subsidized publishers prices of paper on the black market were going up towards a threshold that resulted prohibitive for smaller producers.<sup>47</sup>

The underground leadership of the Mazowsze region was rather reconciled with the idea. In fact, already in 1984 Konrad Bieliński, who was in charge of distributing the printing infrastructure smuggled from abroad, had proposed to form a body that would serve as a bank of information for the publishers and which would play a regulatory function, relieving the leadership from the task of mediating in conflicts over equipment and counteracting "gangserism" in that regard.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the first efforts to rationalize the publishing market in the light of increasing scarcity of resources were made already during Solidarity's Carnival.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Patryk Pleskot, "Dolary na bibułę. Amerykańska pomoc finansowa dla drugiego obiegu wydawniczego w Polsce w latach 1982-1989" in *Drugi obieg w PRL*, 527-538.

<sup>46</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 113-114.

<sup>47</sup> Sowiński, *Zakazana książka*, 116-117.

<sup>48</sup> Friszke, "Regionalny Komitet Wykonawczy," 457-458.

<sup>49</sup> Fałkowski, "Ruch społeczny," 89.

The fund had a relatively open and clear access policy. Any publishing house could join the consortium, provided that it was functioning for more than a year, released at least 12 volumes of books (especially original titles) or periodicals, functioned without stoppages for at least nine months, subscribed to good editorial practices, did not rise prices higher than the threshold set up by the FWN, and respected intellectual property and copyrights.<sup>50</sup> Initially, 45 per cent of the budget was distributed among the consortium members and the rest used to subsidize smaller firms. Despite the criticism about this policy leading to privileging the established over new publishers,<sup>51</sup> in the following years, as the consortium grew to include more firms, this ratio modified to 75 per cent (the remaining 25 per cent was distributed among new publishers without their own infrastructure, in a form of loan that could be written-off in case of the success of the enterprise). The spokesperson of the fund argued that after all, that was a voluntary act of solidarity with the smaller players in the first place, and in the context of the crisis of the movement as a whole, the “market” should be further rationalized and efforts concentrated.<sup>52</sup>

The main purpose of the FWN was to fix the problem of the financial fluidity of especially those firms who published original works, paid the royalties and restrained from producing so called *fajans* (“crap” would be the closest English equivalent) - all sorts of memorabilia emanating the symbols of political resistance, such as stamps, postcards or calendars. These were produced to accumulate the resources for more ambitious publications, however the practice created another vicious circle. While the *fajans* revenues were meant to support production of publishing goods, at the same time

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<sup>50</sup> “Komunikat FWN,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 222, October 7, 1987; “Szansa dla wydawców,” *KOS* 93, April 13, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> “Małe jest piękne: Rozmowa z wydawnictwem Metrum,” *KOS* 124, September 27, 1987.

<sup>52</sup> “Zasady funkcjonowania FWN,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 244, February 23, 1988.

it limited its demand, since many opposition supporters would feel exempted from buying books once they had bought *fajans*.<sup>53</sup> While the fund did not explicitly forbid the production of *fajans*, it definitely regarded it as a negative effect of the commoditization of the underground culture.

The case of intellectual property rights is quite interesting in this context. Despite that many an article would appear in the underground press with annotation “printed without knowledge or consent of the author,” the major publishers were in principle adamant about the need to respect intellectual property rights, as far as authorship and integrity of the works was concerned: editorial ethics demanded to acquire the permission of the author, translator or the first publisher, and never modify the integrity of the work without previous consent.<sup>54</sup> Best practices were set by NOWA, which already in October 1981, concluded an agreement with the exile Instytut Literacki, the biggest publisher of *tamizdat* literature. The agreement transferred to NOWA the publishing rights for all *Kultura*’s authors except for Czesław Miłosz and Witold Gombrowicz, while the royalties (3 per cent of the sales inside Poland) were to support a scholarship program for independent scholars and publishers.<sup>55</sup>

The deference for intellectual property rights would seem to be a case for a strong preference for regulating exchange of cultural goods by property rights. However, at a closer inspection, that demands several qualifications. First, the policy held mainly for domestic and émigré authors to detriment of foreign writers. Moreover, respect for intellectual property did not translate into freedom to negotiate prices – the

<sup>53</sup> “Szansa dla wydawców”, *KOS* 93, April 13, 1986.

<sup>54</sup> “Kłócimy się o tytuły: rozmowa z przedstawicielami Oficyny Literackiej (Kraków)” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 136.

<sup>55</sup> “Umowa z NOWą,” *Kultura* 410 (1981): 4-6.

authors were usually paid according to the predefined honorarium charts.<sup>56</sup> The same applied to the underground printers and binders – while these were one of the few regularly paid occupations, there was no labor market as such, their salaries were most of the time set and changed by the publishers.<sup>57</sup>

The profit margins the distributors added to the cost of the printed matter were not supposed to be very wide either. On top of list of publishing best practices, which the FWN had ambitions to set, was to print the price on the book, as well as to periodically communicate the legitimate cost of production of a publication (expressed in price per page).<sup>58</sup> That anti-speculation measure was discussed already in 1981.<sup>59</sup> The very idea of a “legitimate cost” was antithetical with the free market principles. At least in part, that was due to the coexistence of the unlicensed publishing with both the official book market that kept the prices artificially low, and the black market that boosted the prices of the most wanted titles. To make good on the non-for-profit orientation of the underground print culture, the independent publishers had to be competitive with respect to official publishing and to avoid contributing to the expansion of black market.

Reports of the SRWN also serve as the evidence that the institutional response of the underground publishing to the crisis was explicitly on the side of cultural commons and preferred the semantics of the social movement as its main cultural frame. In fact, “independent publishing movement” is the collective category that the council applies consistently in reference to the collectivity of publishers, printers and

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<sup>56</sup> “Stara czy Nowa? Rozmowa z szefem Niezależnej Oficyny Wydawniczej” in Nawrocki, *Struktury nadziei*, 173.

<sup>57</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 130-131.

<sup>58</sup> “Komunikat FWN”, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 222, October 7, 1987; “Komunikat FWN,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 232, December 16, 1986; “Szansa dla wydawców,” *KOS* 93, April 13, 1986.

<sup>59</sup> Fałkowski, “Ruch społeczny,” 89.

distributors “The independent publishing movement - we can read in the first report – is our greatest strength, the most effective way of establishing ties with the society and shaping its opinion, deserving praise and propagation worldwide. As long as there are no manifestations, protests and strikes, it is the principal battlefield. The independent publications are the most important arm of the society in the struggle for achieving its justified aspirations.”<sup>60</sup> The council credited the movement for promoting unfalsified image of history of Poland, of the communist rule, and of the anti-communist resistance; for disseminating the knowledge about the nature of totalitarian regimes, debunking its myths and its newspeak; for making accessible the contemporary achievements of political, social and economic thought, as well as the greatest achievements of Polish culture at home and abroad; for working towards good relationships with other nations, especially the neighboring ones, despite the official propaganda of hatred; and lastly, for creating a pluralist public sphere.

The council argued against abandoning the movement to the market mechanisms alone. Where the general interest of culture was at stake, it should prevail over economic calculus. Market competition was a positive factor as long as it served to improve of the quality of the cultural goods, however in the circumstances of a limited supply of paper, equipment and printing services, the uncoordinated, chaotic rivalry for scarce resources did not counteract the inflation of prices, but to the contrary, it brought about the spectre of an overall collapse. In the SRWN's opinion, the publishers should coordinate their activities and establish a policy which would counteract the overlapping publishing initiatives that increase the costs of overall publishing infrastructure, and therefore create the inflation of prices of the cultural goods, diminishing the purchasing capacity

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<sup>60</sup> “Niezależny Ruch Wydawniczy: opracowanie Społecznej Rady Wydawnictw Niezależnych,” *Serwis Informacyjny Społecznego Komitetu Nauki* 40, January 11, 1987.

of the readers. They should form self-financing enterprises, support should be offered only in case of effects caused by “external forces” and if a given initiative had a broad social relevance.<sup>61</sup>

The council called for balancing long-term goals and instantaneous political effects: shaping an autonomous vision of Polish culture in the long run should have priority over primitive anti-communism. That was again both an affirmation of a prefigurative aspiration towards a full culture, and an indirect criticism of the spontaneous consumption patterns. A special mention was reserved for those publishers who, despite adversarial circumstances, continued to publish periodicals, which, according to the auditors, were at the core of the independent intellectual life and constituted “the most spectacular success of the Independent Publishing Movement and all independently-minded Poles in the last decade.”<sup>62</sup>

## A NETWORKED ECONOMY

From the perspective of the independent publishing movement, as articulated through its collective institutions, sustainable solutions for dissemination of cultural commons and the unlicensed expressions of public opinion had certainly a priority over creating strongholds of market competition inside the decaying socialism, as unfettered commodity exchange could only aggravate the situation. However, from a still different perspective, the very terms of the debate on the publishing crisis – movement or market, right or left – were obscuring, as much as they were illuminating the very nature of the samizdat media environment and its ills. Hitherto the publishers, their products and their policies were in the spotlight, revolving around the model of independent culture, and

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<sup>61</sup> “SRWN: o sytuacji w Niezależnym Ruchu Wydawniczym,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* no. 213, 27.05.1987

<sup>62</sup> “Niezależny Ruch Wydawniczy: opracowanie Społecznej Rady Wydawnictw Niezależnych,” *Serwis Informacyjny Społecznego Komitetu Nauki* 40, January 11, 1987.

how it is affected by different regimes of commodity exchange. However, the response to the crisis was very different from the perspective of how to organize the space of flows of the cultural commons, i.e. from the perspective of the distribution network.

According to an activist from Silesia region, it was not the bad publishing policy that was the problem. Rather, the system of distribution needed to be changed in order to counteract the skyrocketing prices. Subordinated to the market processes, more and more printed matter would reach a smaller circle of either rich or enthusiast collectors, whereas an average reader could effort less and less; relying on rich enthusiasts was neither sustainable in the long run, nor was it the point of all that risky business, whose aim was to reach the widest audience possible. To counteract this trend, the distribution system should rely less on individual taste and purchasing power, and more on financing the purchase of publications from membership dues of Solidarity local units and other collective structures, as well as create new reading groups. It is true that individual reader could easily get alienated from the whole samizdat movement if she happened to pay dear for a publication that resulted uninteresting; but there was something for every taste, and when printed matter circulated in a group, it was more likely to find its reader. The problem with this blueprint was that while the samizdat movement overlapped in a considerable degree with the underground Solidarity structures, some dissident media activists did not belong to the trade union, while collecting membership fees was considered to be a restricted domain of the trade union activity.<sup>63</sup>

That focus on distribution was a minority perspective, but held by quite influential figures, such as Tadeusz Wypych, editor and the man in charge of the distribution of *CDN Głos Wolnego Robotnika* and other publications of the Interfactory

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<sup>63</sup> “Sprawozdanie jednego z dolnośląskich punktów kolportażowych SW,” *Biuletyn Dolnośląski* 77 (1987).

Workers' Committee of Solidarity (Międzyzakładowy Robotniczy Komitet "Solidarność" MRKS), one of the biggest and certainly the most radical organization of the Warsaw post-Martial Law underground.<sup>64</sup> Wypych, writing in the Paris *Kultura*, saw the greatest obstacle for overcoming the crisis in both institutional and intellectual inertia of the underground print culture. According to Wypych there was not so much a clash between a movement logic and the market logic, but rather the two logics were complicit in bringing about the crisis. The organizational model of the independent publishing emerged in the pioneer years before Solidarity and coalesced in the first months of the Martial Law. It took the form of the social movement, whose main actors were 'firms,' the printshops and publishing houses. Both provided for the movement's political existence in the sense that they were the only publicly recognizable parts of underground print culture, which otherwise consisted of many more actors.

The movement took upon itself tasks of representing independent public opinion and providing access to independent culture. As long as it enjoyed popular recognition and support, the more mundane questions of political economy concerning how to organize the flow of opinion and culture were rarely posed and easily harmonized. When the crisis hit, the problems of what to print and how to distribute it came to be the order of the day and when rational redistribution of funding for independent publishing came to be perceived as a possible solution, the firms came to be considered as its sole recipients.

Unlike the free marketeers, Wypych did not contest the necessity of rational redistribution of resources: it was "ideological" (in the sense of privileging political dogma over the pragmatics of real life practice) to assume that independent publishing

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<sup>64</sup> Kaliski, „Meandry Radykalizmu. Międzyzakładowy Robotniczy Komitet "Solidarność" w *Solidarność Podziemna 1981-1989*, 489-529.



could function without subsidies. The real problem was not whether to offer support, but how to target it. Here, Wypych was equally skeptical about the “social movement” rhetoric. The institution-building in response to the crisis reminded him of a “socialist gigantomania.” He contested the claim to spokespersonship for the publishing movement as a whole, and the “clandestine authority” of the Council seemed to him a contradiction in terms and a symptom of detachment from reality.

The creators of the FNW, Wypych argued, were trapped in the actually existing political forms: reifying the firms as the only possible actors of the movement and therefore, the only possible beneficiary of the redistribution.

The firms have never been the only agents of this [second] publishing circuit, but rather just a form of institutionalization of possible and reasonable activities in the broader social context and its material conditions. Ultimately, the role of the ‘firm’ boils down to the existence of a single purse, whose expenditures and revenues bind together multiple enterprises into a more or less coherent chain of actions. In contrast, their role of a reader-facing brand is illusory. Rather than informing about a publishing enterprise, it serves to veil the material shape of the publishing movement: who wrote, who edited, where the paper comes from, where printing takes place and how the funds are managed. In this sense, the names and logos of ‘firms’ are in the first place overt and public symbols of those particular actions, which has to remain clandestine for reasons unrelated to publishing matters. Despite this fact, the ‘firms’ are still seen as the exclusive subject of the independent publishing, and independent publishing as a whole is perceived as a domain of action of the publishing ‘firms.’<sup>65</sup>

Firms enabled the activities of the independent publishing movement, but at the same time obscured the existence of other actors which made the activities of the firms sustainable. This was especially the case, Wypych argued, of the distribution channels, mediating between the firms and the reader. The distribution structure eluded the logic of both the movement and the market. It was constituted neither by collective decision, nor by individual entrepreneurship. It was a “*sui generis*, small social structure existing according to its own rules and functioning in a different social space than the firms.”

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<sup>65</sup> LL [Tadeusz Wypych], “Uwagi o niezależnym obiegu wydawniczym,” *Kultura* 481 (1987): 59.

The quality of this space was, first of all, opacity: the necessary anonymity and clandestinity. Thinking in terms of independent publishing movement (and therefore in terms of public action organized around firms) rendered them invisible.

Subsidizing the firms instead of the distribution structures through the FNW only aggravated the problem. Rather than providing incentives to make the distribution structures adjust to the plurality of tastes and make the turnovers more regular by improving access, it made the publishers focus on competing for the subsidies in order to go down with the prices. The effect was that “the reader is protected against expensive books with lack of access to any books at all.” More disturbing still was the effect on the movement’s cultural role, and in this respect Wypych shared Walc’s doubts about dissident print culture’s intellectual independence.

The flood of uncontestably correct and modestly interesting publications, targeted at the average, typical reader, is the specter of our shrinking market and the manifestation of its weakness. Just like the price is optimized, so the contents undergo optimization, so that the publication can make it through the inefficient, contingent distribution to a random reader...As a result, the independent publishing ceases to challenge the monopoly of the sovietized culture, and starts to represent a converse, but complementary worldview. It becomes a harmless lore of an incapacitated society.<sup>66</sup>

According to Wypych, the entropy and underdevelopment of the distribution network was the core of the problem. The crisis manifested itself not only the above mentioned vicious circle of slower turnovers, diminishing ambitions and shrinking outreach. It was also the problem of losing touch with the reader. The books not only reached smaller audience, but also the wrong one: people received books they did not want to read and did not have access to the ones they wanted. Again, this was not a problem of insufficient competition as such, but rather of the inability of going beyond “leaflet stage”, or recipient-blind distribution. What was needed were institutions enabling

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<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, 62.

printing on demand, subscriptions, information about novelty, archives, libraries, catalogues, and neither there was a forum to discuss these problems. The solution proposed by Wypych was to transform the hitherto anonymous distribution structures into equal players and redirect the common pool of funds toward subsidizing the better organization of the space of flows. These subsidies, Wypych concluded, should support, rather than another “democratic representation of the consumer sector,” a “general tool adjusted to market mechanisms.”

Wypych's analysis of the publishing crisis was unique for its capturing the complexities of the social media nature of the underground print culture: consciousness of its opacity, decentered and anti-hierarchical character translated into mistrust towards anybody that could lay claim to political spokespersonship for the whole and concentrate political action. Conversely, the proposition of a “tool adjusted to market mechanisms” did not follow from a “free market” ideology which Wypych clearly rejected, but from the fact that “market mechanism” was a handy cognitive tool to imagine a spontaneous coordination of communication. Not less importantly, Wypych's network perspective on underground publishing translated into a distinctive view of the meaning and purpose of the organizing the flow of cultural goods. The FWN put emphasis on the cultural-political content: building a social movement around fostering independent national culture, science and political thought. Here the emphasis was less output-oriented and more access oriented. The purpose of the underground publishing was to enable access to culture in a personalized way, where all instances of individual taste and creativity could find their niche. Solidarities that the independent print culture was said to be producing should be an effect of horizontal communication processes, rather than participation in the same imagined community. The problem of political economy of cultural commons, as seen by Wypych, was neither a question of consumer

demand, nor particularly understood aims of national culture, but ultimately a question of organizing an uninterrupted and unmediated space of flows.

## MOVEMENT, ENTERPRISE, NETWORK

For Mateusz Fałkowski, who studied the political economy of underground press culture from a similar perspective, the publishing activities were a form of prefigurative politics in its own right. “Informal economy of the underground publishers and discussions on the ways of coordinating the [publishing] movement, should be treated as a kind of political program of the opposition.”<sup>67</sup> According to Fałkowski, both the activities and the semantics of the firm and market which was used to endow underground dissident print culture with meaning and to articulate the distinction from the old regime, had a transformative effect on the participants, and opened them for the free market future to come, as its pioneers.

I doubt whether similar conclusions can be drawn from = all we have said thus far. The semantics of the firm was articulating first of all the internal distinctions between different forms of dissident activity, rather than adherence to economic models. It was meant to say, that freedom can be realized through doing rather than debating, that a clandestine organization established for the sake of spreading the free word was an attractive space for practicing freedom in the absence of deliberative assemblies.

At the same time, notions of “firm” and “market,” are not in themselves indicators of a desired market future to come. These were not alien words under late socialism, they did not signify unambiguously foreign reality irreconcilable with the ever-reforming planned economy in the same way the word “capitalism” signified such

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<sup>67</sup> Fałkowski, “Ruch społeczny,” 98.

allegiance. Rather, if the notion of the “firm” was used in a polemical sense, it was to articulate that the publishing initiatives were “self-sustainable, self-governing and self-financing” companies, i.e. that they were putting in practice the “3xS” program of economic renewal that the regime announced in 1982 as the foundation of the First Phase of Economic Recovery Plan, but never delivered. Similarly, going from gift exchange to commodity exchange was inevitable at certain level of growth, not exactly a matter of choice of a program.

Most of all, neither “market” or “firm” indicates that the publishing initiatives were profit driven. Articulating the aims of the social movement in terms of efficient industrial organization does not in itself imply that these initiatives were undertaken in the name of the kind of market economy that became the aim of the post-1989 reformers. When in 1984, Konrad Bieliński proposed to set up a regulatory body that would counteract signs of ‘gangsterism’ in competition between the publishing initiatives (mainly manifested through intercepting the smuggled equipment), and he called that idea in the spirit “modern capitalism rather than bolshevism,” he most probably meant the regulated market of the postwar capitalism, not the deregulated market of the future to come.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time, there is a crucial difference between ‘social movement’ and ‘market’ as cultural frames of cognitive tools to make sense of underground publishing initiatives. The idea of ‘independent publishing movement’ was a marker of identity the way ‘market’ was not. Independent publishing initiatives were a common good, the market was there for bad and for good, and unfettered commodity exchange was far from being an ideal that underground publishers were pursuing. Prefigurative politics,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, 93.

after all, was a *normative* concept which postulated that forms of organizing a social movement can bring closer the desired social order. And supremacy of laws of supply and demand over hierarchies of cultural worth was not part of this desired order.

If cultural semantics of market and firm was not a marker of allegiance to the free market economy, its popularity might be explained as a cognitive tool to grasp the social media nature of independent communication. The concept of 'social media' did not exist at the time, but social media features of independent communications, as we have seen, were approximated through different notions at hand depending on the period, such as 'independent publishing movement' (as an autonomous form of dissident counterculture) 'trade union press' (as a particular form of activism within a more complex media policy of Solidarity), 'means of social communication' (as opposed to transmission belt model of the licensed press). Market and firm were another set of such approximations. In particular, Wypych's insightful critique of both the market processes and of the democratic social movement perspective promoted by the FNW, came as close as it was possible at the time to grasp the networked, peer-to-peer character of underground publishing. In political terms, that critique was in itself revealing of the way in which prefigurative politics, due to its embeddedness in networks of horizontal communication was correlated with a horizontalist political worldview, mistrustful towards the idea of political representation, however democratic that might be. Imagining the dissident public sphere as it should be, this horizontalism pierced through the thicker representations of collectivity, which it perceived as mystifications, however without at the same time advocating the thin imaginary of self-interested individualism. It endowed social communication an intrinsic political value, irreducible to neither to pedagogic value of commodity exchange in the socialist

environment, nor to political spokespersonship in the name of independent culture. That was a swan's song of prefigurative politics.

## CHAPTER EIGHT | THE BIRTH OF TRANSITIONAL POLITICS

Conventional politics would soon have its time. The general amnesty announced on September 11, 1986 marks the true end of the Martial Law and the beginning of the process of liberalization that culminated in 1989. At the same time, it marks the eclipse of the underground social media and the idea of prefigurative politics of which it was the main carrier throughout the 1980s. An eclipse, rather than a failure. The war of position between the self-limited counter-revolution of Jaruzelski's regime and the underground society, of which the underground print culture was the most accomplished political form, turned out to be a victory insofar as the authorities were in the end forced to compromise. However, the compromise, the 'new social accords,' would be an achievement of a different kind of politician than the social media activist, guided by a different philosophy of action.

The perceived sense of underground fatigue and the opening in the official realm translated into a substantial turn in the oppositional strategy of the Solidarity leaders and their counselors, manifested in both political thinking and political practice. That strategic turn was marked by two principal tendencies.<sup>1</sup> The first was a shift of the center of gravity of independent activities from the underground to the public realm. Prefigurative politics continued to be at the heart of the reasoning of the proponents of that shift, however, under the contemporary circumstances, it was accompanied by the observation that when it came to realization of the political and cultural aspirations of the society *here and now*, any genuine avenue for its public exercise would be more effective than the underground.

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<sup>1</sup> Brzechczyn, 62-64.



The official and half-official sphere is now of paramount importance – Kuroń assessed – all kinds of cooperatives, enterprises, self-management and especially local self-government, independent, but officially accepted publishers. Here the movement can be rebuilt its mass character. People, who truly care for Solidarity, but who are weary of illegality and disturbance, can participate in legal activities that will have our support. What is equally important, through these activities we can radically increase societal agency (podmiotowość społeczeństwa) – lay the foundations of the democratic order in the real and effective way. I think that vis-à-vis such actions, Solidarity's [underground] structures should have a service role.<sup>2</sup>

The underground, Kuroń argued, was important as long as no such public avenues existed. But to the extent that the underground society was a reality, and created conditions in which an activist minority could live a truly autonomous life, now it was coming to be perceived as a deterrent for the opposition movement as a whole, given that, well entrenched, the activists would not be willing to give up the measure of freedom actually achieved in the underground for the uncertain perspectives of liberty of public action, even if rebuilding the mass character of the opposition movement was at stake. The underground could either convert itself into a backstage for the public stage of prefigurative politics, or left to its own devices, burdened by fatigue and inertia, further shrink until only the professional conspirators remained, increasingly marginalized and frustrated.

“The time of negation is over” – announced veteran oppositionist Jan Lityński.<sup>3</sup>

If Martial Law was the negation of societal agency, its outcome was social passivity and apathy. That legacy of the Martial Law was becoming a burden for the ruling party, struggling to put the country on track of economic recovery while maintaining its grip on power. But even if the desired model of transformation was a form of authoritarian capitalism, Lityński argued, still the transition to such model would not work without genuine social initiative. That in turn created a momentum of political opportunity for

<sup>2</sup> Kuroń, “Krajobraz po bitwie,” 356.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Lityński, “Skończył się czas negacji,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 224 (1987): 1-2.

the opposition, which should use every crack, to enter the public arena by forming and participating in social organizations, alongside the existing underground institutions, to press towards reform by way of *faits accomplis*. The underground resistance negated this moment of opportunity at its own peril. *Nota bene*, for Lityński the measure of achievement of such politics of *faits accomplis* was the *de facto* liberalization of public sphere, which could only happen thanks to coexistence of the licensed media with the underground media. If underground press was the example of how prefigurative politics could have a transformative effect on political power, it was also an example of how cooperate with the communist reformers without compromising integrity, through “compelling the system to reform” by force of political facts, rather than through “alliance with the reformers.”

Some of the most renowned social media activists shared Kuroń’s and Lityński’s diagnosis. Czesław Bielecki of CDN, together with the former editor of *Wola* Maciej Zalewski and Anatol Lawina, a veteran dissident activist associated with NOWA, published in *Tygodnik Mazowsze* an important opinion piece demanding recognition of the fact that the center of gravity of the oppositional activities had switched from the trade union activities towards independent activities, and that the latter stood a better chance of creating political *faits accomplis* in Polish public life. Speaking as “Solidarity’s men,” the three authors questioned what until 1986 remained a Solidarity dogma, i.e. that reconstitution of the Union was the necessary condition of any compromise, or what they called the syndicalist strategy. Solidarity, as a trade union, the authors argued, was effectively blocked from reanimating its activities in workplaces and to transforming them into the strongholds of a broader social movement, as it happened in 1980. At the same time, the broader underground society gave birth to dozens of independent initiatives which outgrew the original syndicalist

framework. “Solidarity today – the authors declared – is a decentered, multilayered, and ideologically heterogeneous movement of free social initiatives, an opposition movement receiving its impulse from the trade union experience.”<sup>4</sup> While the Party would not permit the re-emergence of an organized mass movement, its effect, creating politics through *faits accomplis* in different realms of public life, could be achieved by the multiplicity of independent activities.

Unlike in 1980, the existence of these initiatives was not shielded by the Union’s protective umbrella, and yet Solidarity leadership considered their activities as surrogate with respect to the syndicalist agenda. Solidarity’s men, the authors argued, should recognize that factories had ceased to be the principal arena of oppositional activities. Strikes and wage pressure is mounting independently of the Solidarity structures due to economic collapse and the Party’s deficit of legitimacy. On the other hand, operating from clandestinity, the structures were unable to perform the more positive role of preparing the worker elite to be real actors in the process of economic recovery, which, as the authors affirmed, would necessarily require a new economic order, the transition towards which could only involve deterioration of the standard of living and deepening of inequalities. At the same time, social and political initiatives, from burgeoning political parties, social associations of Catholics, through peace and ecological movements, to people active in local government and worker self-management institutions, were continuously expanding, attracting and recruiting increasing numbers of Solidarity’s men. These initiatives no longer bowed to the underground leadership of the Union, rejected subordination to the syndicalist agenda and demanded recognition and voice. To avoid break-up and fragmentation of the

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<sup>4</sup> “Pytania ludzi Solidarności,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 195 (1987): 1-2.

opposition movement, Solidarity leadership should not only renounce the exclusivity of its political mandate, but also recognize

the necessity of complementing the syndicalist model of the opposition in workplaces, with the less spectacular, long term program of organizing people in their places of residence, into communities of shared locality, ideas, profession or religiosity. Only the community men will be capable of going beyond the horizon of strikes and welfare demands. Our understanding of civility (*wieź społeczna*) is still too shallow and emotional. We still hope for its renewal in critical moments, but we fail to address it in the daily, slow, organic social work. The program of local and social community building is the only way of building a civil society. That program used to be the foundation of the idea of independentism, which gave birth to Solidarity.

The unlicensed publishing movement was conspicuously absent from that statement.

The dissident social media activism itself fit well the image of the heterogeneity of “free social initiatives” that the authors identified as the new center of gravity of the opposition, and the proposed philosophy of political action was squarely framed by prefigurative politics of transforming public life by promoting new forms of civility, at the same time rejecting the mandate of Solidarity leadership to work towards a political compromise in the spirit of the Gdańsk Accords. On the other hand, less clear was the relationship between the underground print culture and that new forms of publicly practiced civility.

*Nota bene*, when the statement was published, Bielecki, was becoming active in the Economic Association (Towarzystwo Gospodarcze). Set up as a lobby of entrepreneurs, it was one of the initiatives which gauged the space of maneuver in public life. While it took almost two years to register, the association was tolerated by the authorities, despite the fact that Bielecki himself was still the boss of the underground CDN. Thus, the idea of new civility was to combine underground and overt activism, rather than forsake the latter. It is equally illustrative that within the Economic Association, Bielecki was opposing Aleksander Paszyński’s ambitions for the

association to become an interlocutor of the authorities in preparing the economic reforms.<sup>5</sup>

The drive towards publicity, advocated by Kuroń, Bielecki and others found an echo in the strategy declaration announced by the Solidarity leadership of the Mazowsze region at the end of 1987. The declaration presented Solidarity as a spearhead of the larger movement for autonomization of society, whose principal stage was declared to consist of public, legal or officially tolerated, civic initiatives such as factory self-management and local self-government bodies, political clubs and economic associations. Solidarity activists and supporters should join such movement without preconditions, including the precondition of restoration of Solidarity, even though “trade-union pluralism” remained its important goal. “A new space for social autonomy emerges in Poland today, which incorporates trade unions, local and labor self-management, community and economic associations, political clubs and civic initiatives of every kind fighting for equality before the law. This is the space from which the shape of the anti-crisis pact shall emerge.”<sup>6</sup> Importantly for this strategy, the new compromise is an ultimate horizon of preexisting new forms of civility which should emerge by force of facts, not as a result of it.

## THE NEW COMPROMISE

Putting political compromise with communist reformists first was the other tendency that marked the opposition’s strategic turn. That tendency was characterized by consolidation of the oppositional elite, which happened in stages.<sup>7</sup> First, in response to the amnesty the Interim Council of Solidarity (Tymczasowa Rada “Solidarności”, TRS)

<sup>5</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 179.

<sup>6</sup> “Nowa Strategia S,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 232 (1987): 1.

<sup>7</sup> Brzechczyn, 65-72.

was formed in September 1986 by Lech Wałęsa in order to form a public representation of Solidarity alongside the clandestine TKK. It largely consisted of former TKK members who at some point were uncovered and imprisoned (as in case of Frasyniuk and Bujak, de facto leaders of the Solidarity underground), which disqualified them for further conspiracy. The main task of TRS was to harmonize underground and overground activities. In addition to TKK and TRS, Wałęsa's "sekretariat" in Gdańsk, where Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński would start to play a major role, was another center of command in its own right. All three would subsequently consolidate into the National Executive Committee (Krajowa Komisja Wykonawcza, KKW), formed in October 1987. Establishment of a uniform representation of Solidarity was precipitated by the activities of the Working Group of the National Commission (Grupa Robocza Komisji Krajowej), established in March 1987 by veteran Solidarity activists with a 1981 National Commission mandate, under leadership of Andrzej Gwiazda, which contested the mainstream leadership for marginalizing Solidarity's statutory bodies and for forsaking its Action Program in favor a political compromise which disregarded the interests of the original constituency of the Union, the workers. Nobody from that group was coopted to the KKW.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, what would later become the Civic Committee<sup>9</sup> (Komitet Obywatelski przy Przewodniczącym NSZZ "Solidarność" Lechu Wałęsie, later Komitet Obywatelski „Solidarność,” KO), first gathered in May 1987 on personal invitation by Lech Wałęsa in capacity of his advisory council. In 1989, this assembly of intellectuals, scientists, Union's activists and experts, would play a pivotal role in the Round Table

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<sup>8</sup> Brzechczyn, 68-69.

<sup>9</sup> Andrzej Friszke, "Geneza i historia Komitetu Obywatelskiego" in *Komitet Obywatelski przy Przewodniczącym NSZZ Solidarność Lechu Wałęsie*, ed. Małgorzata Strasz (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2006), 5-69.

negotiations, organization of the 1989 electoral campaign and selecting Solidarity's political representation to the contractual Parliament. Members of the Civic Committee ultimately stepped in the role of traditional politicians for whom prefigurative politics was no longer main philosophy of action. Their task was to reform the country and to bring it back to normal, including normalizing politics along the well tested models of liberal democracy and market economy.

That was not a sudden, but a gradual shift. The first declaration of the group of 63 "representatives of independent communities" gathered by invitation of Lech Wałęsa on May 31, 1987, the eve of the visit of John Paul II to Poland, was a rather general manifesto, which defined the marginal conditions for overcoming the political impasse needed for putting Poland on the road of economic recovery in terms of basic collective rights of the national community to internal sovereignty, rule by authentic, democratic consent and liberty to choose the economic model.<sup>10</sup> The second public statement of the same group, dated November 7, 1987, carried a much more detailed vision of the process of deep reform, a specific vision of transition from communism in its terminal phase towards a new order, which combined both philosophies of action, the prefigurative politics and the politics of compromise.

The second statement connected the postulates of deep economic reform and new social accords, put forward by Solidarity, with the task of reconstruction of civil society. "The Martial Law and the crisis of the last six years have deprived many people of hope, engendering passivity and disillusion - especially among the young whose future prospects have been taken away. Shattering of social bonds is one of the greatest grievances we have suffered in the last forty years"<sup>11</sup> – the statement read. "Increase of

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<sup>10</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 327-329.

<sup>11</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 330.

[social] initiative, whose necessary precondition is societal agency, will yield results only if individuals will find support in communities, associations and unions that enable, inspire and shelter individual initiative.” The Committee called upon the authorities to remove administrative and political barriers hindering freedom of association, but also upon the citizens to work towards expanding the new forms of civility through a determined exercise of rights. “In many cases civic initiatives are stifled and civic rights infringed upon not only because the authorities break the law, but also because the citizens, due to ignorance, passivity or intimidation, are incapable of exercising their rights.”<sup>12</sup>

The important innovation of this pronouncement was the pluralist vision of the new compromise between the society and the state, in which the parties to the agreement no longer were rendered in terms of two mass organizations facing each other. *Nota bene*, if ‘trade union pluralism,’ according to the statement, was one of the ways of achieving renewal of civic bonds, and perhaps the more significant than others given the imperative to generate social trust for the process of economic reform, Solidarity was no longer framed in the role of the representative of the society, despite its historical mandate. “The social and economic reform should be based on social accords between the state power and the authentic representatives of the communities.”<sup>13</sup> Authentic representation is a keyword of the political language of KO. It is understood as a democratic mandate to exercise public authority which is derived from rootedness in community, as opposed to political appointment by the authorities. In that vein, Catholic intellectual Andrzej Wielowiejski proposed that the compromise should necessarily entail “the element of authentic social control and the mode of negotiation and social

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<sup>12</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 332.

<sup>13</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 331.



accords by people representing specific communities, not the appointed experts, consultants, even the most venerable and honest, whom the authorities would like to involve in social dialogue or consultation by way of concession and privilege. Thus, representation, not consultation.”<sup>14</sup>

That understanding of the democratic mandate was, as we have seen, quite embedded in the prefigurative philosophy of political action: the idea that freely forming social initiatives, rather than political mechanisms of delegation of power, should be the source of democratic agency. But on the other hand, if the transformative effect of prefigurative politics was primarily understood as a gradual process of radiating civility, of piecemeal transformation of different domains of public life, in the political vision emerging in the Civic Committee, more emphasis is put on the specific political effect of the new compromise in which the politics of *faits accomplis* should culminate. As we have seen, the strategy of underground society did assume a new compromise as its ultimate horizon. But like in that old socialist joke,<sup>15</sup> it was an ever receding one even at the turn of 1987, and because of that the inevitable tension between prefigurative logic of politics of *faits accomplis* and instrumentalist logic of politics of compromise was never quite openly debated. And yet, the underground society was a body politic without a head and the networks of underground print culture were the political form in which that body without a head was given shape and meaning. On the other hand, if it was to be a party to a new compromise, the multiplicity representing civil society was in need of a head.

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<sup>14</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 108.

<sup>15</sup> Radio Yerevan was asked: When you say that socialism is the ultimate horizon of our times, what exactly do you mean by ‘horizon’? Radio Yerevan answered: A thin line between heaven and earth that keeps receding the more you try to approach it.

That second statement of the Civic Committee (which at that point operated without such appellation) was the outcome of a debate, whose transcripts enable us to understand better the unfolding politics of the compromise. The most important theme of the Theses prepared by the Catholic lawyer Andrzej Stelmachowski, one of the key negotiators in the future talks with the government, was the shared conviction, similar to Lityński's, that social atomization is holding back both Solidarity and the ruling party in their respective designs. Janusz Onyszkiewicz illustratively defined that shared diagnosis of the political moment in terms of shift in the politics of the ruling Party from the strategy of 'atomization' towards a strategy of 'balkanization.'<sup>16</sup> After having repressed independent civil society organizations during the Martial Law, the rulers realized that economic recovery was not possible without minimum social legitimacy for the reforms, which they hoped to generate through controlled opening of the public sphere, as long as the civic activity would not transform into a mass movement, and as long as the ruling Party remained the only organized political force.

For the opposition, that was a chance to promote new forms of civility and to overcome the isolation of the underground. But also, it was the moment of raising the political wagers. The opposition should use the openings in the public sphere to create bold *faits accomplis*, and in particular, as Stelmachowski put it, "reappraise social accords and other extra-parliamentary forms of lawmaking and forging new directions of social growth." The term 'social accords' was obviously a reference to the Gdańsk Accords which in 1980-1981 became a source of law despite not having any specific legal status, but as the restoration of the mass movement was considered beyond the horizon of political opportunity, the concept of 'social accords' was reinterpreted by Stelmachowski as politics of *faits accomplis* done by rights-aware citizens.

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<sup>16</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 92.

Stelmachowski invoked a model of participatory lawmaking involving civic stakeholders, following what he saw as a tendency already present in the West. “Instead of unilateral dictate we have participation of interested social groups and - what is no less important – a chance to raise legal awareness through such process.”<sup>17</sup> Promotion of participatory lawmaking was preferable as a way of political enfranchisement to the restoration of the constitutional role of the parliament as the source of ordinary lawmaking, which most of the assembled intellectuals considered unlikely.

But then again, without a representation, that multiplicity of social initiatives participating in the reform process would ultimately underwrite the legitimacy of ruling party. Could Solidarity serve that role? Like the head of Cheshire Cat, it was not quite beheaded, but it seemed to be fading away except for the unique grin of its Chairman. That question was only answered in the negative, i.e. a straight return to the multimillion mass movement of August 1980 was not possible due to both the underground fatigue and because the authorities would not tolerate its reemergence. On the other hand, a positive answer was the matter of the biggest controversy during that debate. Clearly, most of the eminent public figures assembled by invitation of Lech Wałęsa were convinced that even though restoration of Solidarity in the form of organized mass movement representing delegated power of millions of Polish citizens was not possible, still the political representation of the forces of new civility should form around the old banner of the Union and its Chairman, given that, as Michnik emphasized, it continued to be only generally recognizable and accepted banner the majority of the population would be inclined to identify with.<sup>18</sup> Jan Lityński, one of the few veteran media activists present and at the same time one of the biggest Solidarity loyalists at the time,

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<sup>17</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 150.

articulated this even more sharply, advocating that a possible compromise could be put on the table only once the *de facto* restoration of Solidarity in workplaces happened (as he spoke the movement for registration of public Solidarity factory committees was already on its way), rather than precede it as its precondition. “Reconstruction of the trade union on the basis of facts, accomplishments, rather than accords. I am not at all an enemy of the accords, I just think the compromise can be made only once the power recognizes the *faits accomplis*, it recons with them”.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, that old banner alone was not enough to account for the plurality of communities which were supposed to be the party to the agreement. And the Civic Committee, which emerged as an advisory council to Lech Wałęsa, was slowly starting to understand its role as the political form through which the representation of the civic multiplicity can be given shape and meaning. Onyszkiewicz was first to articulate this position, insisting that KO transformed into a “national assembly of great opinion-making force, gradually coopting the representatives of emerging significant organizations,” to make sure that unity of action was maintained despite differences and bickering that inevitably would accompany the process of their consolidation. On the other hand, Aleksander Hall, representing one of the veteran political groups of the opposition, the conservative Young Poland Movement, admonished against Civic Committee stepping in that role prematurely, the act which would not quite reconcile, but rather stifle the pluralism of the burgeoning political associations, clubs and parties *in spe*. Only after their consolidation such a role could be undertaken by the Civic Committee, provided it was representative of that entire spectrum. Of the same opinion was Marcin Król, a political thinker who was more sympathetic to Solidarity but cherished his independence. Most of the KO members

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<sup>19</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 139.

however were convinced that the organizations forming around Solidarity's banner are variegated enough to give shape and meaning to the representation of independent civility, and that pluralization was somehow a natural tendency which must be balanced by some institution of unity, rather than further incited.

## THE LEGITIMATION EXCHANGE

Thus, at the end of 1987 the philosophy of action of the Civic Committee oscillated between the prefigurative politics of *faits accomplis* and the strategic politics of the new compromise. The status of the KO was unclear. Whether it was to become an institution similar to KOR, a body that in virtue of its authority lends recognition and visibility to particular initiatives which are active on the ground and have their own agency, but which commands no executive power over them; or whether it should be the source and concentration of these initiatives, with the mandate to act on their behalf. Lech Wałęsa, the political man, was very much aware of this paramount dilemma, when he spoke about two philosophies behind the idea of assembling the committee: "whether the role of this body is first to organize these groups and split at some point, or only to propose, signalize what other should accomplish." And at the end of 1987, he was closer to the second option.<sup>20</sup> But that dilemma would not be solved unless the nature of the new compromise was not decided first. Whether, as the underground activists argued, the anti-crisis pact should emerge from the space configured by the politics of facts *accomplis* asserted by independent initiatives, or whether it should constitute that space.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Skórzyński, *Rewolucja Okrągłego Stołu* (Kraków: Znak, 2009), 91-98.

The difference was paramount. To understand that difference, we need to remember that the wager of the power game in the 1987 Poland was the legitimacy of the Party to enact deep reform of the State. That wager became even more patent a few weeks after the KO assembly, on November 29, 1987, when the referendum on the so called ‘second stage of economic reform’ took place. The citizens were asked whether they support the “program of radical economic recovery” involving to two-three years of “rapid changes,” and the “Polish model of deep democratization of political life” strengthening self-government, extending rights and enlarging participation of citizens in public affairs. And then the unheard of happened, as the authorities not only lost the referendum, but also publicly conceded the they didn’t have the popular consent to undertake the deep reform and that they were not willing to proceed without a public articulation of such consent. For the opposition that was both a confirmation that the “time of negation” did run its course and that the articulation of that popular consent was in their might.

Thus in the aftermath of the referendum, a new option was on the table. That option can be best understood following Pierre Bourdieu, as a circuit of legitimating exchange, in which “powers based on (physical or economic) force can only obtain their legitimation through powers that cannot be suspected of obeying force” and where “the legitimating efficacy of an act of recognition (homage, a mark of deference, a token of respect) varies with the degree of independence of the agent or institution that grants it.”<sup>22</sup>

Now, forms of that legitimating exchange can be either direct or indirect. The prefigurative framework of political action made room for an indirect form of

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<sup>22</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 104.

legitimizing exchange insofar as the independent public agency both assumed and required a tacit consent of communist reformists and an equally tacit recognition that the margins of both liberty of public action and reformability of the system have expanded. The political arena of that circuit of legitimation was civil society. The communist reformers were to remove barriers for civic initiative, which would fuel the economic reform. That might still have been the meaning of Solidarity's offer of the anti-crisis pact informally articulated in February 1988 by Geremek in the interview in the second issue of the licensed journal *Konfrontacje*, created with the aim of presenting views of the opposition in a controlled way. A new compromise, Geremek argued, had better chances than in 1981. "The experience of the society is that it should keep its aspirations and goals within reasonable boundaries; the experience of the authorities – that without authentic social initiative a breakthrough in the economic crisis, which everybody desires, is impossible." While the society was prepared to respect the constitutional realities, including the monopoly of political power of the PZPR and the system of international alliances, the authorities should recognize the society's right to self-organization and work towards 'institutionalization of pluralism,' including trade union pluralism. But to speak of "institutionalization of pluralism" was to say that, unlike in August 1980, the party to the agreement would not be an organized political force. The term 'anti-crisis pact' that Geremek used to designate a 'contractual arrangement' (układ kontraktowy), could be read as a series of mutually reinforcing, but still unilateral concessions between the forces of civil society spearheaded by Solidarity, and the state powers.

But an entirely different thing was a pact in the literal sense of a written compromise signed by two parties, or what can be understood as a direct form of legitimating exchange. In such scenario, the "anti-crisis pact" would require a signatory

articulating social consent in a much stronger and material political sense, an organized political force whose mandate would be partially constituted in virtue of its recognition by the ruling power, and that fact would inevitably make it contestable by other opposition forces, not to mention that in case of failure of the reform, a direct legitimization exchange could deal a fatal blow to both signatories. “If mistrust, disillusion, bitterness and despair result to have the upper hand – one underground commentator articulated a common anxiety – the attempts of the leadership of Solidarity and the opposition as a whole to reach a deal with the authorities would have been a fatal mistake, since that would put us on the side of the bankrupt power facing rebellion.”<sup>23</sup> Second, if the anti-crisis pact was constituting, and not constituted by the space of independent politics, the political agency would be bound by its terms to a greater degree than acceptable for many underground activists, who believed to owe to their own agency the measure of liberty they had enjoyed.

In early 1988 any such alliance was still beyond political imagination of both the rulers and the opposition. Even the ‘institutionalization of pluralism’ seemed not to be on the table. The underground structures of the opposition were still operative and police repression continued. Something like a registration movement was burgeoning, but except for Marcin Król’s journal *Res Publica*, the economic associations, political clubs and Solidarity factory committees, if tolerated, were denied official registration. The pro-reform impulse coming from Gorbachev’s Moscow was not materializing.

But times were changing fast. The surveys of public opinion commissioned after the lost referendum were alarming that the society was on the verge of despair, and the willingness to put up with a sovereign that is not able to secure either political peace or

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<sup>23</sup> Skórzyński, *Rewolucja Okrągłego Stołu*, 109.



sustenance was shrinking fast, especially for the youngest generation, for whom the memory of the Martial Law was a weak deterrent. Part of the ruling elite was proposing what can be called a “chileanization,” scenario, involving general Jaruzelski using the instruments of the Martial Law to achieve a radical liberalization of economy against both the conservative wing of the party and the likely strikes, in the aftermath of which a measure of political pluralism could be introduced by attracting a small number of predictable oppositionists. However, parallel to underground fatigue, there were abundant symptoms of fatigue at the commanding heights and Jaruzelski had no stomach to launch such a nuclear option.

And then first massive strikes since 1981 took place between April and May 1988. The demands of the Lenin Foundry in Nowa Huta were economic and not political, triggered by the price increase in February 1988. But then the Lenin Shipyard, Solidarity’s cradle also went on strike, what is more responding to the May Day clarion call of Lech Wałęsa, and demanded restoration of the Union. In response, on May 5, police took Lenin Foundry by force, however the Gdańsk workers, accompanied by Wałęsa and his advisors, managed to walk away from the shipyard unharmed.

Even though they were incomparable in size and scope to August 1980, the spring strikes were a game changer. Despite the repressive reaction of the state authorities (which was accompanied by rejection to hold talks with Lech Wałęsa, under negotiation at that time), the fact that Solidarity, beyond its historical mandate, could extend the circuit of legitimation to the young workers, was potentially a good news, as *uncontrolled* social explosion was feared more. But the spring strikes were also a test of actuality of Solidarity’s mandate for the forces of the opposition. The May strikes both challenged pluralist vision dominant within the KO, which decentered Solidarity’s position with respect to multiplicity of civil society actors, and the underground critique

of the efforts of the Solidarity elite to appeal to the best interest of the ruling elite, which was seen as a symptom of its disconnection from the society. The May strikes demonstrated the underground Solidarity structures were lagging behind the events (neither in Nowa Huta, nor in Kraków underground Solidarity activists, most of them either arrested or in hiding, were leading the strikes), and that the Solidarity elite – headed by Wałęsa – and not the underground, commanded authority among the new generation of workers.

It was at that point when the meaning of ‘anti-crisis pact’ shifted from indirect to direct form of legitimation exchange, from the idea of opening civil society sphere to independent initiative accepting the ‘constitutional realities’ to the idea of a pro-reform negotiations. On the side of the opposition, the idea of a pro-reform coalition was articulated by Lityński and Kuroń, who only months earlier had excluded that possibility. Both however were forced to concede that their previously advocated strategy of creating a civil society momentum that would come together into a pro-reform social movement was losing the race against time, and that, put together with the apparent paralysis of political will of the authorities to achieve a real breakthrough, was creating a rather bleak scenario. “The time is of paramount importance” – Tadeusz Mazowiecki observed. “The time, which the authorities measure by maturation of their own position, and which for us is the time of [growing] social impatience. The matter of time to reach solutions is today the main concern.”<sup>24</sup>

General Jaruzelski and his closest advisors were also becoming aware that time was not on their side, and clearly a direct form of legitimation exchange was the only form of compromise they were willing to contemplate – expansion of the space of

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<sup>24</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 178.

maneuver of the opposition could only happen at the price of sharing responsibility for the reform effort.<sup>25</sup> And the faster the compromise was concluded, the greater measure of hegemony PZPR would conserve. During the summer of 1988 the ruling circle still cherished hopes that a pro-reform coalition could elude restoration of Solidarity and the first official pronouncements in that direction were offering different variants of a ‘Front of National Unity’ that entailed cooptation of the (predictable) oppositional politicians and their minoritarian presence in the governance bodies, but excluded organizational independence which would made the exercise of opposition a real thing. The authorities were also open to legalize civil society. Nota bene, the term ‘round table,’ was first publicly used by Jaruzelski in his report to the seventh plenum of the CC of PZPR, to refer to social participation in the process of drafting a new bill on civic associations. Still, “trade union pluralism” was excluded from the offer.<sup>26</sup> That political line gained full acceptance of Gorbachev during his visit to Poland in July 1988.

During the summer of 1988 Geremek, the *porte-parole* of Solidarity leadership and the KO at the time, distanced himself from the idea of pro-reform coalition. Without free elections, such coalition would produce a fake political pluralism, he argued, while only restoration of Solidarity, could produce the desired effect of generating social consent to deep reform. The restoration of Solidarity and its legitimizing role in the reform effort would become the terms of the trade-off negotiated in the months to come.

The negotiations between Wałęsa, Jaruzelski, and their teams, mediated by the Church, started in August 1988, amidst the second wave of strikes that broke out in Silesia and spilled all over the country. This time, Solidarity’s men were leading the strikes and the demand of restoration of Solidarity was unequivocal as was the display

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<sup>25</sup> The power’s point of view is best presented in Antoni Dudek, *Reglamentowana Rewolucja* (Kraków: Znak, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Skórzyński, *Rewolucja Okrągłego Stołu*, 129.

of the Union's Chairman charisma, especially when he called for concluding the strikes, taking full responsibility, but also assuming the full mandate in the negotiations, whose terms, to say nothing of the outcomes, was at the time uncertain. The strategy of the authorities was to quickly consent to 'social and political pluralism' and its expanded role in the governance structures, at the cost of abandoning the demand of 'trade-union pluralism,' in hope that such arrangement could be attractive for the oppositional elite. But what used to be the maximum program of the opposition at the end of 1987 was now the minimal demand, in tacit recognition that Solidarity, and not the forces of new civility, would be the source of mandate. The future Round Table – which in autumn 1988 already started to denote the systemic overhaul its full scope – had to be squared enough to make manifest that the sides to the compromise are indeed independent, if 'constructive' and not 'confrontational' (another buzzwords of the day) in their political plans.

Nevertheless, if the demand of restoration of Solidarity was instrumental for confirming the sovereign political agency of the opposition, it was not expressive of a desire to return to the mass movement politics of the 1980-1981. On the eve of 1989 that demand was accompanied by the gradual shift from the prefigurative philosophy of political action in favor of governmental logic of big reform. Restoration of Solidarity was meant to be a factor of generating trust in feasibility of deep reform, and that required, in one way or the other, underwriting governmental action and doing politics from within, not from without the conventional arena. On the eve of the Round Table Accords, many political observers began to articulate the need of formation of a 'shadow cabinet,' and soon the tone of the independent public debate was set by the voices questioning the capacity of the dissident political leaders to step in the role of

conventional political opposition and master the logics of governmentality, became as pronounced as the voices questioning the desirability of such metamorphosis.<sup>27</sup>

It took another half year for both the PZPR and the opposition to realize that epochal shift. General Jaruzelski and his reformers in Mieczysław Rakowski's government made one last attempt at triggering the reform without the legitimization exchange, and failed. But psychological factor, overcoming the image of political extremism of the underground with which they had been fed by the security apparatus, was also important. In this, the televised debate between Wałęsa and the head of the licensed trade union organization, Alfred Miodowicz, as well as Wałęsa's travel to France, was of paramount importance. Wałęsa, who for seven years had been a persona non-grata in the public realm, now gained recognition as a statesman figure, from both the society and foreign politicians. And then, Jaruzelski's men also realized that they could not have it both ways, that the legitimization exchange would not work unless concluded with a party independent enough to be in a position to grant it.

For Wałęsa and his men, the mental fence to jump over was also as high as the fence the Chairman has trespassed on his way to the strike in 1980. That mental fence was not only about mistrust towards the communists and the risk involved in sharing responsibility for the decades of economic mismanagement. It was about abandoning the philosophy of political action which was at the core of Solidarity and the dissident politics from their inception. Prefigurative politics meant fighting for democracy in a democratic way, and that democratic way manifested itself in political forms of bottom-up civic initiatives and institutions representing new forces of civility, which were to have a transformative effect gradually radiating over different domains of public life,

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<sup>27</sup> Skórzyński, *Rewolucja Okrągłego Stołu*, 174.

through publicity of political action and exercise of oversight. That transformative effect was what Michnik called the ‘reconstruction of civil society.’ Importantly, a fundamental assumption of prefigurative politics was that reconstruction of civil society must precede regime change, if the regime change was to be grounded on solid foundations. This was why, and not only due to constitutional and geopolitical constraints, Solidarity was renouncing the will to wield governmental power, reclaiming the power of oversight.

## POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSITION

The Round Table negotiations opened a historical opportunity to trigger a process of regime change. As terms of the pact evolved, it became clear that at stake is a political experiment without precedent in the socialist world: dismantling of the one party-state in favor of a transitional model of cohabitation between the representatives of the old regime and a political opposition with an electoral mandate, in which guarantees for the hegemony of the ruling party (president with vast executive power, and a quota system of 65 against 35 per cent in favor of the ruling coalition) had a clear expiry date, leading to a democracy ‘without adjectives.’ But in the course of the negotiated regime change its oppositional architects assumed that to take advantage of the historical opportunity requires a different philosophy of political action, for which the narrowing down of political agency to bargain between elites and sacrificing popular empowerment derived from publicity and oversight, in the name of the future democratic opening, was constitutive.

Illustrative of that intellectual shift was the debate in the Civic Committee on December 18, 1988. The almost farcical expression of the new political tenor was articulated by Stefan Bratkowski, who proposed the committee to call itself the Civic

Assembly. “It is the matter of what we really wish to be. Those who two hundred years ago assembled in the *salle du jeu de paume* also adopted an exaggerated appellation. And I am convinced that this assembly could wish to be the parliament of independent Poland. I am using rather heavy words, but that is really how I feel.”<sup>28</sup> Adam Michnik justified the compromise by appealing to fear of explosion of social anger, the “obligation to remember that the fundamental quality of Stalinist communism is the decomposition of social bonds, decomposition of the legal culture – the rebellion of such society is the rebellion of the slaves, a rebellion of people who know best how to build guillotines.”<sup>29</sup> Contrary to his optimism from the time of resistance, that was a tacit recognition that the underground society has failed to overcome the slave mentality and that only the compromise could open the space in which the reconstruction of civil society could be accomplished.

Less apprehensive about mass effervescence was Leszek Kołakowski, convinced that what the country needed was “an atmosphere similar to war, in which the sense of general mobilization prevailed, a consent to sacrifices in the name of survival...But to organize such a state of psychological mobilization would require a government enjoying social trust”.<sup>30</sup> Kołakowski’s words are a good measure of distance between late 1987 in which the forces of new civility were invested with hope of being the driving force of the grass-roots reform effort, and 1988, in which that same social phenomenon is seen as an object of organized psychological mobilization by governmental action. But perhaps the most insightful declaration of the principles of the political philosophy of transition was the appeal of Marcin Król to the Civic Committee for boldness to think outside the frame of opinion-making body and to take

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<sup>28</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 233.

<sup>29</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 189.

<sup>30</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 195.

political risk commensurate with the critical moment, assuming a self-appointed mandate for negotiations.

Naturally things like [law on] civic associations and changes in the legal system are important, but...if we were in a position in which a grass-roots movement could gradually transform the country, I would totally support it, because that is the right way. But that is simply impossible. Whatever law on associations we have, however active we are, it is already too late for the associations to gradually emanate their representations and so forth, leading to change. In this sense taking a political risk is necessary. All the more, that, it seems to me, we can take the risk and boldly go towards a compromise if we know what we want – and we do know what we want. Namely, we want democracy, that's simple and not sophisticated at all. So, if we know what we want, we can sacrifice something on the way, if we know well what is our final destination.<sup>31</sup>

The KO would find that boldness, assuming the representation of the entire opposition loyal to Solidarity. The committee formally included 135 figures assembled by Wałęsa's invitation to the Church of the Divine Mercy in December 1988. The broad composition of the KO was necessary to stage the inclusiveness of that body, which in fact was remarkable, encompassing, in addition to Solidarity leaders, representatives of dissident political groups (conservatives from "Dziekania" Political Club and the Young Poland Movement, the left from the underground Polish Socialist Party and the Warsaw Wola movement, the youth greens and pacifists from the "Wolność i Pokój" group), as well as prominent figures of cultural and scholarly communities, and last but not least, a strong representation of Catholic priests. Due to that composition, the KO was hardly contestable from outside, by groups such as Solidarity's dissidents, the Fighting Solidarity organization and the Working Group, the "Democratic Revolution" fraction of the socialists, or the right-wing veteran dissidents from Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej, all of which opposed both the Round Table and the mandate of the KO to represent them.

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<sup>31</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 215.



The leadership belonged to a core group consisting of Wałęsa's most trusted advisors: Geremek, Mazowiecki, Wielowieyski, Stelmachowski, Michnik, Kuroń, and the economist Ryszard Bugaj. That core group would lead the confidential negotiations with Jaruzelski's men, guide the Round Table negotiations and define the electoral strategy of Solidarity, including the policy of personal appointments. Each step ahead confirmed the effectiveness of the political talents of the architects of the politics of transition. However, the tension resulting from abandoning the prefigurative philosophy of political action was also mounting. Underground Solidarity leaders, such as Frasiński or Bujak, were finding it hard to justify why they would not just continue to undermine communist power through bottom-up civic initiative, and why suddenly the Civic Committee was in command. The Union was registered in April 1989, but rather than promoting civic agency, the regional Solidarity structures were supposed to have a service role with respect to the KO. Setting up local civic committees, they coordinated the electoral mobilization effort and proposed candidates, however, by KKW appointment, the final decision with respect to both the electoral lists and the campaign strategy was centralized in the hands of the KO.

Most of the representatives of dissident political groups integrated into the KO, led by Aleksander Hall, demanded internal primaries that would enable the political representation of the opposition to reflect better the internal pluralism and democracy of the Solidarity camp in the future parliament. But from the perspective of the majority core group, pluralism and democracy of tomorrow could only be built by maintaining unity and disciplined command along the way. Hall's proposal was outvoted, and both Hall and Tadeusz Mazowiecki withdrew their candidacies, in one of the meeting's most dramatic moments. The Civic Committee still staged the 'institutionalization of pluralism,' but as a political form it no longer reflected in its internal organization the

values and principles it stood by. The new style of leadership was about constraining internal democracy of that body in the name of the future democracy for all.

That crack between the old and the new philosophy of political action was articulated by the Chairman himself, in his own unique style, speaking to the KO during the assembly at the Warsaw University in mid-April 1989, whose agenda was to finalize the list of Solidarity candidates for parliamentarians. Wałęsa appealed:

Dear all, we are all creating something unheard of in this country. We have all the chances and conditions, and – in my opinion – the interest of Europe and the world, for Poland to adopt a system already tried in Europe and the world, in all matters. But it rests on us above all if we take advantage of this opportunity and to what extent. All the quarrels, misunderstandings and infighting weaken and destroy us. I want to stress, this is not democracy yet, this is not freedom yet, we are only heading towards that. On the ground we seize today we shall build it tomorrow. If we reverse that problem: we already bring in democracy forgetting that we need to construct it first, it will be to our peril. That is the source of difference of opinions and debate between different groups. Some think: immediately, already democratically, since if we don't proceed democratically already today, tomorrow it will get even less of it. That is one option. The second: seize footholds with known people, democratically guard their work, and only tomorrow start to build democracy – because we are not alone out there, every weakening of our footholds lets others inside, who will fight us and interfere, while we are building.<sup>32</sup>

The addressee of that appeal were the candidates, which Wałęsa called, in the earlier part of his speech, 'men of normal, creative work' that the circumstances needed, but perhaps even more so the people that were not in the room, the 'men of resistance.'

Wałęsa was clear that the compromise was made possible by the resisters, but the resisters, in his view, were not suitable for the tasks ahead. But in reality, rather than men, these were different philosophies of political action that were at odds, the prefigurative and the transitional politics. At that point on April 1989, Wałęsa still cherished hopes to 'marry the men of work and the men of resistance' and his words about 'democratic vigilance' of the new representatives probably appealed to the power

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<sup>32</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 256.

of oversight which the ‘men of resistance’ were supposed to be exercising with respect to their representatives.

Notably, the three most important Solidarity leaders, Wałęsa, Zbigniew Bujak and Władysław Frasyniuk did not run for parliament in 1989. Wałęsa and Bujak offered different motivations. Wałęsa explained that he must remain in the ‘forefield’ of the political battleground with his hand untied in case something went wrong and the ‘desperados’ sent to the parliament failed to achieve the breakthrough. Bujak on the other hand, was fearing the rebellion of the Solidarity bases in the Mazowsze region, critical of the mode of Solidarity’s involvement in the Round Table and the politics of Civic Committee, and most likely to contest the radical measures contrary to the interests of labor the parliament would be likely to adopt.<sup>33</sup> For Michnik, and for Marek Edelman, the legendary leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, that was a wrong decision. On the one hand, Edelman observed, among the candidates appointed by the KO, “there are many people, who are very decent and maybe fit for parliamentary work, but who for the last eight years had not much to do with us. And I am not sure if everyone in every case will be a disciplined member of the parliamentary club.” On the other hand, the Solidarity leaders had authority among the activists and were recognizable to the broader public. “If these people are not in the Sejm, I promise you, in the parliamentary fraction there will be only trouble.”<sup>34</sup>

The tension between prefigurative politics and the transitional politics was evident. Solidarity leaders hoped to be able to mediate between the two logics. But that would not be necessary. On June 4, 1989 the people voted. The leading Party lost miserably the electoral test. The national list of the ruling coalition did not receive

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<sup>33</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 307.

<sup>34</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 302.

enough votes to be elected and that missing 35 seats destroyed the entire quota system on which the political contract rested. The opposition had to consent to changing the electoral law in the middle of the process to have them in parliament anyways. The Round Table Accords were still the supreme law of the Republic in transition and the political process had to continue for a time, despite the fact that the legitimization exchange was so spectacularly nullified. But for once since 1980 it was clear where full democratic legitimacy resided, and it was only a matter of time when to first non-Communist government would be established. At the end of 1989, when Tadeusz Mazowiecki was becoming the first postwar non-communist prime minister, the continuation of the political philosophy of transition would be increasingly justified not by the danger of backlash of the hardliners in the coercion apparatuses, but by the imperative of patient support for the reform, on the one hand, and a post-dissident liberalism of fear,<sup>35</sup> in which premature removal of barriers to political life set in the Round Table contract was seen to endanger the entire reform process by unleashing the dormant ‘slave mentality’ of the post-communist subjects. That philosophy would soon be contested, but the contenders seemed even more brutally emancipated from the dissident prefigurative vision. It was already clear that time of politicians had come, that politics returned to the parliament and the ministries, and that parties, rather than grass-roots civic initiatives would be the fulcrum of political change. Prefigurative politics was already history.

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<sup>35</sup> Wciślik, “Totalitarianism,” 95-107.

## CHAPTER NINE | LOST IN TRANSITION

“And all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.”<sup>1</sup> Marshall Berman’s favorite quote from Karl Marx, which for Berman described the sense of being caught in a maelstrom of modernity, seems to be encapsulating better the eclipse of the dissident print culture, than the narratives of the *annus mirabilis*. From the perspective of dissident media activism, the Round Table Accords and the 1989 elections were no epochal caesura. In most cases there was no caesura at all. Not even a farewell party.

The Round Table negotiations could only feed the skepticism about the place of unlicensed print culture in the political process under way.<sup>2</sup> The oppositional side was represented among others by Grzegorz Boguta of NOWA, Helena Łuczywo of *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, Jan Kofman of *Krytyka*, as well as Adam Michnik, Marcin Król and Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Boguta was untrusted with presenting a list of demands, put forward by underground publishers and editors concerning restoration of freedom of speech, which included the abolition of censorship, cessation of repressions, retrieval of seized property and legal rehabilitation of the activists, as well as equality of access to paper supplies, printing infrastructure and official distribution.<sup>3</sup> These demands were in fact voiced by oppositional negotiators, but at the same time it quickly transpired that

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso 1998), 38-39. Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Błażejowska, 231-232.

<sup>3</sup> “Wolność Słowa,” *Kultura Niezależna* 48 (1989): 163-164. The statement was signed by representatives of CDN, In Puls, Krąg, Krytyka, Myśl, Nowa, Oficyna Liberalów, Pokolenie, PoMOST, Przedświt, Rytm, Stop, TM, Wola, MOST, Wskos.

the aim of the Round Table was to define conditions of the phasing out of dissident print culture in favor of a mass media model of public communication, rather than inscribing it into the transition process in a new role.

The report from the proceedings of the Subcommittee on Mass Media <sup>4</sup> called for transition towards a ‘new information order’ that would reflect better societal pluralism and keep pace of the democratization processes. “The aim of the new order is to make possible for political actors, groups and individuals to freely take part in all the forms of social communication, which requires, among others, the abolition of censorship.” However, the nature of that involvement was understood in the mass media framework, as more balanced reporting, rather than in the social media framework, as building conditions for direct civic involvement in horizontal communication. Even though the concept of ‘media of social communication’ was one of the report keywords, the idea of the new information order was patterned on the model of Western media systems, and reflected rather poorly the dissident social media experience.

The principles on which that new information order was supposed to rest, were a mixture of general rules and transitional clauses reflecting the political imperatives of the day. On the one hand, the new model was to be built on reliable and objective reporting, balanced articulation of opinion “taking into considerations views and propositions not shared by a given party,” oversight of those in power and defense of civil liberties and individual rights (all that could be easily instituted in a single outlet). However, these functions of the media should be harmonized with the more expedient tasks. The media were to take active part in the democratic reform by acting as guardians of the social accords, especially to both “reveal and soothe social conflicts and tensions

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<sup>4</sup> *Sprawozdanie z prac podzespołu ds. Środków masowego przekazu*, [http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/06\\_sprawozdanie\\_prasa.pdf](http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/06_sprawozdanie_prasa.pdf), accessed November 28, 2017.

in the spirit of this [Round Table] agreement.” The transitional clauses effectively excluded the unlicensed social media, whose extended networks, as the experience of Solidarity Carnival showed, could not be disciplined to a degree which could assure they all acted in the spirit of the compromise. For social media activists, especially that second set of rules must have sounded like a set of guidelines for transitional exercise of censorship, an announcement that constraints on exercise of critical expression would hold. Such fears would be further confirmed by the way in which these general policies were translated into specific guidelines and how that specific guidelines were ascribed a differential priority.

Obviously instant access to mass media was on top of the priority list. Unlike in 1980-1981, the opposition successfully negotiated access to airtime in Radio and Television (60 and 30 minutes per week respectively), the right to reply, and participation in the regulatory bodies supervising public media, as well as opening local and regional broadcasting to social and commercial initiative. At the same time, in the report from the proceedings, the sections on access to public Radio and Television were accompanied by a long record of divergences, which in its own right testified to the priority accorded to print and electronic media of mass communication. Both the 1980-1981 experience, as well as the more recent impact of the televised debate between Wałęsa and Miodowicz showed that the dissident social media cannot compare with mass media when it came to public outreach. “From the debate between Lech and Miodowicz we can see that no press, no propaganda, no means of action at our disposal can compete with television. [Wałęsa] appeared on television and suddenly a public breakthrough happened, even though he did not say anything he had not said before.” – marveled Kuroń at one of the KO meetings.<sup>5</sup> At the Round Table, that perspective was

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<sup>5</sup> *Komitet Obywatelski*, 217.

articulated rather bluntly by Marcin Król “The basic issue is not quite the issue of pluralism. Right now, in Polish circumstances, it is the issue of impact of those representatives of the opposition, which want to disseminate among the society political opinions within the framework set by the Round Table negotiations. If you expect us to take part in stabilizing the situation in Poland, you cannot expect that [we do that] through interventions in the [licensed weekly] *Życie Warszawy*.” In other words, “Participation in governance, participation in the responsibility for the state...depends on efficacy of impact on society.” But Król was also making a broader point about how he imagined the media institutionalization of pluralism in the long term, when speaking about the future *Gazeta Wyborcza*. “Without a daily there is no political life, there no formation of political opinions, there is no political impact” – Król affirmed. “I take for granted the [restoration of] trade union press, since this is integral part of the compromise on trade unions and pluralism of trade union press, its diversity... seems to be obvious. But the kind of daily we are talking about here is not a trade union daily, but more broadly a socio-political daily, not representing any particular political tendency, but an entire array of independent tendencies.”<sup>6</sup> Król’s conviction about *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s capacity to reflect a vast array of independent public opinion seem to reflect the transitional idea of institutionalizing pluralism. Obviously, that conviction would be only reinforced, rather than questioned, by the fact that social media model of pluralism embodied by the trade union press in 1980-1981 was never actually restored, neither by the Round Table or later. On the other hand, the subcommittee univocally recommended that the registration of Solidarity should be immediately followed by restoration of its 1980-1981 title, the *Tygodnik Solidarność* weekly, and accompanied

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<sup>6</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z pierwszego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 17 lutego 1989 r.* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Sejmowa, 1990), 44-52, [http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-02-17\\_prasa.pdf](http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-02-17_prasa.pdf), accessed November 29, 2017.



by the creation of *Gazeta Wyborcza* which, after the electoral campaign, would continue as a national daily under auspices of the Civic Committee. While the subcommittee found justified “the aspirations of all new actors of social and political life to have press organs of their own,” the satisfaction of that justified demands would need to be postponed, until free trade of paper was introduced, and respective legal changes enacted.

The legal regulations, in the area of press censorship and licensing, as well and the question of monopoly on paper supply and press and book distribution were of vital importance to the dissident social media. The most immediate change, introduced in May 1989, involved the system of licensing – substituting concession, granted by Censor’s Office, for registration by the same organ. Perhaps more importantly, the registration procedure – unlike before – would not require to indicate the place of print and source of paper (and use of printing equipment for internal and office use would not require registration). But, operating without registration would still be punishable by fines, and registration could be withdrawn, among other reasons, when the publication would infringe the other regulations of the Press Law, as well as the law on censorship. In that area the progress achieved before the elections consisted in removing some of the most vicious amendments to bill negotiated in July 1981, including the fuzzy definitions of constraints on the freedom of speech (“threat to state security” etc.), censorship of scientific publications and control of collection of foreign publications (the same illegal unlicensed book would become legal, if published abroad and brought to Poland).

However, the key article of the 1981 law legalizing exception from censorship for the internal bulletins of social organizations was not restored (despite protest of the opposition negotiators), and, crucially, the law on censorship as such continued in force,

partially because its abolition would be ineffective without the independent judiciary. The negotiators were able to agree that in the future the list of exemptions from censorship should be longer, and list of constraints on free speech – shorter. In addition, the opposition negotiators called upon the state for cessation of repression of unlicensed publishing and upon the underground activists to restrain from sedition. The party negotiators, on the other hand expressed the expectation that unlicensed publishers would act according to the law once the press and censorship regulations would be amended.

The proceedings of the Sub-committee on Mass Media also included several propositions regarding supply of publishing paper, the shortage of which hit the record low in 1989. Equality in access to paper was supposed to come from removal of constraints on paper trade. Imports of paper and printing equipment were to be deregulated immediately, but full commercialization would only be introduced in 1990. The possibly detrimental effects of deregulation on cultural goods were supposed to be offset by an under-defined means of protection. New publishing and printing companies “due to their social role and function in the national culture” could count on tax exemptions. Until 1990, in the light of the acute paper shortage, state rationing of paper would continue, guaranteeing extra supplies for “parliamentary forces, the Catholic and other churches, and trade-unions” (but not other social organizations). In addition, the opposition protested against keeping the monopoly position of the PZPR-controlled media concern RSW Prasa-Książka-Ruch, which and controlled the national network of distribution and was the single largest publisher.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Arnošt Bečka and Jacek Molesta, *Sprawozdanie z likwidacji majątku byłej Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej* (Sopot-Warszawa: MSWiA: 2001) <https://mswia.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/2791,Sprawozdanie-z-likwidacji-majatku-bylej-Polskiej-Zjednoczonej-Partii-Robotniczej.html>, accessed November 29, 2017.

The oppositional representatives to the subcommittee made it clear that proposed changes in the legal regulations were far from sufficient to expect them to call upon the underground publishing activists to surrender their paper arms. “The very principle of existence of unlicensed publishing [is] to speak without censorship, without a muzzle.” – Michnik exclaimed. “Minister Urban’s proposal offered at our last meeting, that each of our journals can be legalized if it subordinates to censorship, is flawless from the point of view of legal reasoning. The only flaw is that it is not realistic. We have been developing our publications in that specific form for so many years, we built their shape, their ethos, their authority, and all that would be in order surrender to censorship at the end of the day?”<sup>8</sup> The refusal of underground media activists to accept the compromise, in other words, should not be held against them. A moratorium on repression and immediate legislative changes were only the necessary steps in the process of democratization, Jan Kofman from the underground journal *Krytyka* argued, but far from sufficient to expect the underground to emerge overground.<sup>9</sup> The decade of unlicensed print culture could not be decreed out of existence by even most liberal regulations, as long as substantial realm of ideas would remain otherwise inaccessible.

Interestingly, in his intervention Grzegorz Boguta, avoided speaking about censorship and instead presented the underground print culture as a prospering publishing market and insisted that in order for underground publishing to cease, overground publishing had to adjust to that standard. “My main thesis is as follows: let us think about marketization of [licensed] mass media. That would mean removing all of its political *entourage*, introducing market mechanisms into its operations, liberty of

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<sup>8</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z drugiego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 25 lutego 1989 r.* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Sejmowa, 1990), 58, [http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-02-25\\_prasa.pdf](http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-02-25_prasa.pdf), accessed November 29, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 108-111.

establishing publishing institutions and providing equal access to the market of mass media and production of culture to all sectors, the state, the cooperative and the private. And therefore, we must revise the existing regulations and practices securing the political monopoly of the state in this domain.”<sup>10</sup> For everyone who knew Boguta as the leader of NOWA in the 1980s and the central figure of the Independent Publishing Consortium, created with the very purpose to avoid and offset commercialization of unlicensed publishing, that might have sounded strange. In a later intervention Boguta reminded that market reform should be accompanied by measures protecting cultural production, such as tax and customs exemptions, which indicates that such choice of framing of the debate was not necessarily an indicator of a change of economic faith.<sup>11</sup> Rather, Boguta’s intention might have been to de-contest the unlicensed print culture by presenting it in a favorable light as a type of economic activity to which obstacles needed to be removed, something everyone at the table seemed to approve of, including Jerzy Urban, who insisted that whereas political repressions against publishing underground could cease, the authorities, serious as they were about market reforms, would be implacable against economic crime.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the day however, the discussion on dissident print culture at the Round Table was not about its new role in the changing realities. The discussion was essentially about terms of surrender. Towards the end of its proceedings, Jan Kofman observed that in a number of important aspects the views of the subcommittee on the

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<sup>10</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z pierwszego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 17 lutego 1989 r.*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z czwartego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 10 marca 1989 r.* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Sejmowa, 1990), 103-104, [http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-03-10\\_prasa.pdf](http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-03-10_prasa.pdf), accessed November 29, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z trzeciego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 4 marca 1989 r.* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Sejmowa, 1990), 84, [http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-03-04\\_prasa.pdf](http://okragly-stol.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1989-03-04_prasa.pdf), accessed November 29, 2017.

fate of dissident print culture were converging. These included the understanding that the division of into different spheres of circulation (*wieloobiegowość*) was “detrimental to the condition of the society and its culture” and that its ‘dying out’ would be evolutionary. That reasons for its resilience would cease with progress and deepening of democratization processes and especially the emergence of a genuine public sphere. And finally, that the role of the transitional reformers (of both sides) was to find ways to speed up the departure.<sup>13</sup> “Our idea – Michnik declared – is the idea of triggering a process, which must be a social process, and which will make unlicensed publishing not worth the trouble. But it must be an autonomous decision of these people.”<sup>14</sup> At the end of that process, some residual unlicensed publishing would remain, just like there were “groups of anarchists and gays who sell or hand out their newsletters on Paris boulevards,” but once the public would have their *Figaro* and *Le Monde*, that would not really matter. In other words, credible mass media was the only way to phase out social media. And with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which was launched right after the Round Table with Michnik as editor-in-chief and staffed by *Tygodnik Mazowsze* journalists headed by Helena Łuczywo, there were reasons for optimism.

## SHELTER FROM THE STORM

Michnik’s perspective was sometimes shared by the underground media activists. “Unlicensed publishing [drugi obieg] is an aberration of sorts” – Konstanty Gebert observed. “It does not seem serious when grown up people, communicating by code and passwords, meet in secrecy in private apartments in order to edit, print and distribute

<sup>13</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z czwartego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 10 marca 1989 r.*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> *Okrągły Stół. Podzespół do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu. Stenogram z trzeciego posiedzenia Podzespołu do Spraw Środków Masowego Przekazu w dniu 4 marca 1989 r.*, 75.

books and journals using makeshift methods.”<sup>15</sup> Funny as it may seem, dissident print culture would carry on as long as censorship existed. After all these years, conspiratorial romanticism has dissipated, but for all the underground fatigue, neither the momentary liberalization nor the threat of repressions, but only the effective withdrawal of that threat, would persuade the printers’ rollers to quit.

But for others the purpose of the dissident print culture was not reducible to the repressive conditions that generated it. Giving away a sense of democratic life actually achieved in the name of the democratic promise of the future came hard. Andrzej Osęka, already writing under his own name in the March 1989 issue of *Kultura Niezależna*, called to resist the temptations of the overground. Both the pessimists, for whom the phasing out of the dissident print culture was a natural inevitability of the opening of the public sphere, and the optimists, who appealed for greater assertiveness in coming out, were enchanted by the “conviction that we are entering the period of great opportunities and radical changes” which will belong “not to those who cultivate their little plots sheltered from the winds of history, but those coming out into the open and publicly accepting the challenge of the future.”<sup>16</sup> But was not that attitude, Osęka asked, requiring the underground activists to sacrifice the autonomy already achieved and rooted in the existence in the name of uncertain victory, was not that attitude reminding “older ideas of politicians, who were ready to destroy the present in the name of the radiant future”? In the present, autonomy actually existed in the form of these ‘little plots.’

Unlicensed culture [*drugi obieg kultury*] as a community, while not perfect, seems to approximate much better the idea of independent society than People’s Poland. In this, and not only in its productive achievements, do I see its value. Everyone who has been around the unlicensed publishing ‘firms’ knows how

<sup>15</sup> Konstanty Gebert, “Warunki Powrotu,” *KOS* 156 (1989): 12.

<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Osęka, “Kuszenie drugiego obiegu,” *Kultura Niezależna* 49 (1989): 4.

even the smallest initiative is appreciated in its full autonomy, and to what extent the denizens of this world are critical towards any impositions and disobedient towards orders. It would be an exaggeration to say that here the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood always reigns – sometimes the situation reminds rather the spirit of early capitalism. However, it is an island, where people learn such things as democracy, thrift and self-reliance. The citizens of that community know very well that in the last years they were the main manifestation of independent society in Poland. And that was because they would not wait, or ask someone's permission, or apply for a license or a privilege – they took what they could all by themselves. That for very many people has become a habit. It is hard to imagine that now they give it all away and subordinate to surveillance and control.<sup>17</sup>

The seduction of legality was not persuasive neither as a reality, nor as a promise. In the present tense, legalization meant less, rather than more autonomy. Even with the best political intentions – about which Oseka was quite skeptical – it would take years for the reform to take hold. It would take years to reform not only the bad laws and regulations, but also corrupt and bureaucratic practices, with no tolerance for civic disobedience and creativity. Even the boldest political decisions at the Round Table would not change the reality subordinated to 'surveillance and control.' But also, Oseka believed, following Jan Walc, that cultural independence was not divisible and relative to the enemy camp. The democratic habit and sense of autonomy developed in the underground would make the activists immune to the promise of might and scale, of deeds of historical proportions, and of command over minds and souls, the illusion that Oseka thought transitional politics to indulge in. "It seems that in the struggle for independence of culture that will play out right now, the questions of form will be fundamental." – Oseka concluded. "It will be a defense of low-key, intimate forms inviting reflexivity, against the clarion calls of the leaders, chants of the masses, and the clamor of political spectacle. That fight was lost in 1980-1981. Perhaps now the outcome would be different."<sup>18</sup> Echoed here was the experience of Solidarity's Carnival

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, 6-7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 8.

– the trauma of the haste in breaking into publicity which ended abruptly with the imposition of the Martial Law. But also, the memory of how, at the height of the political confrontation of 1981, Solidarity leadership was making efforts to transform social media into surrogate mass media.

Still, transitional politics was not built on eschatological expectations and revolutionary zeal, and the nature of the predicament, under Osęka's sharp pen, was rather misconstrued. The proponents of the political philosophy of transition surely were not forgetting, contrary to what Osęka imputed, the lesson of Popper's *Poverty of Historicism* (whose unlicensed edition was one of the remarkable events of the 1980s underground), and as we saw above, they had no intention to impose legality. But neither they saw a new role for the dissident social media under new circumstances. The aim was to normalize the state, this time the European way. And that meant tolerance for 'anarchists and gays handing out leaflets on Paris boulevards,' but nothing more than that – fundamentally, just like in Paris, the public sphere would become the domain of the mass media. In principle, just like most workers would be satisfied with having their interests represented, without wanting to run the factory themselves, most of the audience would be happy with being accurately informed. And in achieving that degree of normalcy, there was still a lot of work ahead. In this sense dissident print culture was the casualty of the hope for normalization, rather than revolutionary zeal.

That sense of estrangement was deepened by the fact that members of the Civic Committee had little consideration for the collegial forms of decision-making practiced in the underground. Tensions were manifest during the Independent Cultural Forum convened by the Commission of Culture of the KO, chaired by Andrzej Wajda. Symbolically, it was meant to be a re-enactment of the 1981 Congress of Culture which was interrupted by the imposition of the Martial Law. But the more these two events



were approximated – Andrzej Kaczyński of *Kultura Niezależna* observed – the more pronounced seemed their differences.<sup>19</sup> The 1981 Congress was a culmination of 16 months of cultural self-management creators and their participants delegated representatives of the creative communities. The 1989 Forum was organized by a self-appointed body emanating from the KO and perhaps more significantly, it had little consideration for restoring associational autonomy or engaging in authentic debate, as it was evidenced during the meeting by the proceeding of the *Charter of Polish Culture*, whose final draft bore only faint resemblance to the discussion happening during the forum.<sup>20</sup> Czesław Bielecki, whose voice at the Forum was very critical of its self-gratulatory tenor,<sup>21</sup> also protested against lack of consultations between the Round Table negotiators and the independent stakeholders. Nota bene, the independent publishers and editors, who took part in the negotiations, made it clear that it was the Civic Committee, and not the unlicensed publishing movement, which delegated them.<sup>22</sup>

## ON THE MARGIN

The epochal outcomes of June 4, 1989 elections only deepened the urge to find shelter from the historical maelstrom. On the eve of the elections, The Consortium of Independent Publishers voted unanimously against resurfacing into the public. “The danger of the current situation – the statement read – is the attempt to push us out of the margins of the full political freedom to the overt domain of licensed liberty.”<sup>23</sup> In other

<sup>19</sup> Leon Bober [Andrzej Kaczyński], “Niezależne Forum Kultury,” *Kultura Niezależna* 50 (1989): 158-163.

<sup>20</sup> “Karta Kultury Polskiej,” *Kultura Niezależna* 50 (1989): 164-165.

<sup>21</sup> Czesław Bielecki, “Głos w dyskusji,” *Kultura Niezależna* 50 (1989): 154-157.

<sup>22</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 187.

<sup>23</sup> Konsorcjum Wydawnictw Niezależnych, “Do wszystkich przyjaciół wolnego słowa,” *Kultura Niezależna* 52 (1989): 169.

words, it made more sense, on balance, to cherish the freedom actually achieved in clandestinity, than to take risks and leap into public circulation. Censorship seemed inactive, but so it seemed in 1981. Rather than political intransigence, that characterized political organizations such as *Solidarność Walcząca* or *Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej*, contesting the very legitimacy of the compromise, here the principal motive was to avoid the repetition of December 13, 1989.

Relegalization of Solidarity has reinforced the trend – as in 1980-1981 – to concentrate publishing activity around the Union. With the current rules of distribution of funding, that creates a danger for numerous small publishing initiatives which contribute to animating their communities. Having supported and sustained the activities of Solidarity for years, we are in favor of a diversified and pluralist structure, which in the event of a coup against civic liberties, will be more resilient against backlash than a political monoculture.

Besides, the shared assumption was that transformative effect of the unlicensed print culture on the licensed public sphere will continue to define the dynamics of the transition. “We are needed on this fully independent margin of the publishing movement.” Bielecki argued. “That margin has defined and is defining what happens on the official side of printed matter. I don’t see the reason why now, threatened with marginalization, we should accept the uniform arrangement only because it is politically, administratively, propagandistically expedient to announce normalization. My answer to such normalization is as follows: instead of normalizing us, restore normalcy to Polish culture...Why should we subordinate to censorship after all these years?”<sup>24</sup>

Not that social media activism remained in the trenches. Without revealing its labouriously knit networks, it nevertheless took by storm the International Book Fairs in Warsaw and Frankfurt. More importantly, testing the limits of the new opening, The

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<sup>24</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 189.

Independent Publishers Consortium set up in April 1989 the Founding Committee of the Association for the Free Word.<sup>25</sup> Its mission was to promote a network of Clubs of Uncensored Book, in which cultural matter produced underground could freely and publicly flow, without the necessity of legalization of its producers. To support the clubs, a new publication *Obieg bez cenzury* (Uncensored Circulation) was launched to reduce the opacity of the distribution networks through promoting the publishers' catalogs, to provide better contact with the readers, their needs and judgements, remedying one of the biggest problems of underground publishing, as well as to promote independent publishing outside the big urban centers, and advocate against censorship. In December 1989 there were around 700 clubs established, half of them in small towns and villages, even though the Association for the Free Word, which was supposed to coordinate the circulation of published matter between the independent publishers and the readers, was still in the founding stage.

"It is difficult to come up with an organizational formula that would not become anachronistic from one week to the next" – Marek Beylin, the secretary of the association's founding committee observed, in a way illustrative of the pace of changes.<sup>26</sup> The original idea behind the clubs and the association seemed eminently outdated. Culture was still under threat, but now the threat was of economic, rather than police nature. A collapse of publishing market could be a likely outcome of removing caps on the price of paper, and the movement should better focus on creating a network of community libraries and providing access to culture, independent and dependent alike. Nota bene, Beylin's vision organizational evolution of the Association of the Free Word, from protecting the interest of independent publishers to securing access to

<sup>25</sup> "Stowarzyszenie Wolnego Słowa." *KOS* 161 (1989): 7.

<sup>26</sup> "U schyłku cenzury," *Obieg bez cenzury* 3 (1989): 1; "Przyszłość drugiego obiegu." *Przegląd Wiadomości Agencyjnych* 219 (1990): 6.

culture for the readership, was revindicating Wypych critique of the underground market, albeit that now the scale was greater and the underground distribution networks were not effective enough.

Meanwhile, as the Berlin Wall was chipped away by the Berliners in November 1989 and PZPR was disbanded in January 1990, censorship remained in force until June 1990. Even though the Censor's Office was practically inactive, its abolition was a matter of principle and the veterans of the unlicensed publishing movement were growing impatient with the indolence of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, whose general aversion to spectacular gestures in this case was deepened by the fear that unreformed courts would step in the place of the Censor with potentially more harmful consequences (why publishers would submit to verdicts of an unreformed court remained a mystery). Krzysztof Kozłowski, the editor of the honorable Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* and senator, interpreting the government's intention, also soberly observed that abolition of the Censor's Office was of rather symbolic importance and would not remedy lack of a culture of accountability among the political freshmen from the Solidarity camp.<sup>27</sup>

But if censorship was a matter of principle, perhaps more vital was the question of the administrative and economic regulations. Certainly, the underground print culture was simply not easy to integrate with the publishing market in the existing form. Resurfacing overground potentially meant, as Andrzej Osęka pointed out, not only revealing the identities of the editorial board, but also the infrastructure, the sources of funding and paper (if not at registration, then to an administrative audit). It meant constraints on publishing activities imposed by bureaucratic regulations and last but not

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<sup>27</sup> "Gorsze niż cenzura." *Obieg bez cenzury* 2 (1989): 1; Cf. Leon Bober [Andrzej Kaczyński], "Przyszło nowe," *Kultura Niezależna* 53 (1989): 104; Ryszard Holzer, "Knebel," *Przegląd Wiadomości Agencyjnych* 216 (1989): 6.

least, it meant fiscal obligations.<sup>28</sup> Entering the rather uneven field of publishing market was not an easy decision. At the point when its liquidation committee started to operate in 1990, the RSW press concern, owned by the successor organizations of the communist party (many of them private companies) controlled most of the press titles on the market and their printing infrastructure, as well as the largest press distribution network. It was quite easier to take over an existing press title, than to debut with a new one with underground credentials, and that is what happened with *Rzeczpospolita* and *Życie Warszawy* dailies. On the local level, a pretender newspaper would have to squeeze itself in between the quickly expanding local editions of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the established press. Monopoly of book trade was held by Składnica Księgarska (wholesale) and Dom Książki (bookstores). But first private publishers, such as Amber, registered in February 1989, were already making big inroads on the market for popular fiction, and so was the Harlequin, the international brand specialized in low-brow romance.<sup>29</sup> But even within its niche, the independent publishing program would need to come to terms with the fact that in a matter of couple of years every previously censored book worth reading would be out on the market and creating a truly independent flow of culture would require more proactive attitude in seeking original contributions, rather than concentrating on diffusion of previously censored reprints, even if for the time being the production cycle in the underground was faster and reader demand higher than the underground and the overground supply combined.<sup>30</sup>

At the end of 1989 when the main assumptions of the Balcerowicz plan were announced adopted by the Sejm between Christmas and New Year, it was becoming

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<sup>28</sup> Osęka, "Kuszenie drugiego obiegu," 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> Bober, "Przyszło nowe," 104; Joanna Lerska [Marta Fik], "Byt i świadomość," *Kultura Niezależna* 55 (1989): 95-96.

clear that unlicensed print culture was no longer a culture apart. Few dissident media activists expected a special treatment from the Solidarity government, but equally few would suspect that they would need to speak out against that government in support of what was yesterday the cultural façade.

According to the new economic order, cultural entrepreneurship was to be treated on equal terms with profit-driven activity, without lightening the fiscal burden or providing incentives for cultural patronage. Adding insult to injury, according to the new regulations, the royalties were to be included in the publisher's payroll, and the payrolls were subordinated to the super-normative wages tax, the so called *popiwek*, introduced to fight hyperinflation, which heavily fined companies exceeding the wage limits set by the government. In an open letter to the Council of Ministers, the underground publishers and editors joined forces with representatives of the new creative associations, to declare in protest that "such administrative solutions can only lead to a complete sterilization of cultural life, to sustenance of information monopolies, and in consequence to further downgrading of the level of civility of the society. We are facing not only material, but also spiritual poverty."<sup>31</sup> "The determination of the authorities to destroy the only good thing we inherited from communism, the habit of buying books, is shocking." – Jan Walc deplored.<sup>32</sup>

Rationing of paper was abolished in early 1990, but the liberalizing effect was contrary to the initial expectations, as productive capacities of the paper industry remained limited and official bidders would still purchase the entire stock. Prices of books indeed skyrocketed. Moreover, what terms exactly would apply to publishers wishing to turn to legal activity was not clear until May 1990, even though Grzegorz

<sup>31</sup> "List otwarty do Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej," *Kultura Niezależna* 57 (1990): 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Walc. "Oduczą nas czytać," *Przegląd Wiadomości Agencyjnych* 225 (1990): 6.

Boguta was now advisor to the Minister of Culture, Izabela Cywińska (and in the following month he would become the president of the Chamber of Book, post he would held until 1997).<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, according to ministry's announcement, the unlicensed publishers, if they legalized, would not be prosecuted for their past fiscal obligations, but from then on, the rest would be treated as part of the fiscal underground. A final amnesty, Andrzej Kaczyński remarked, by any other name.<sup>34</sup>

By the time censorship was bound to be abolished, the editors of *Obieg bez cenzury*, voicing the concerns of the larger unlicensed publishing community, were appalled by lack of indifference of the Solidarity reformers to the fate of dissident print culture, and indeed of any type of cultural production, under the new circumstances.

The independent publishing movement in Poland, a phenomenon without precedence in Europe, has triumphed against what it raised in protest. The abolition of censorship is not a victory of the times, but the victory of the entire movement and its mostly nameless volunteers. The movement has greater moral right to claim it than the lawmaker. For that same reason, as the introduction of the Balcerowicz plan serves a knock-out blow to the entire culture, people responsible for the future of publishing should come out in its defense clear- and publicly. It is imperative to create administrative and economic grounds for the legalization of independent publications. Which of them will survive should be decided by the free market, that is, the readers, and not financial bureaucrat doctrinaires, or preliminary selection.<sup>35</sup>

As many as 147 titles were discontinued in the second half of 1989<sup>36</sup> and many of their editors were relieved to have ended their watch, hoping that the days of the underground were irrevocably over. The situation was a bit better with cultural journals, but nevertheless *Vacat*, *Kultura Niezależna*, *Krytyka*, *Kontakt*, *Arka*, *Most*, or *Obóz*, all disappeared through 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Marek Tobera, "Początki Transformacji Polskiego Rynku Książki," *Przegląd Biblioteczny* 3 (2010): 285-302.

<sup>34</sup> Leon Bober [Andrzej Kaczyński], "Cenzura nie do zdarcia," *Kultura Niezależna* 62 (1990): 114.

<sup>35</sup> "Dura lex, sed lex," *Obieg bez cenzury* 6 (1990): 3.

<sup>36</sup> Błażejowska, 235.

In most of the cases, there was not even a farewell party.<sup>37</sup> From one day to the next, printers and distributors would find themselves without new assignments. With uneven luck, they would just carry on. While publishing activities were given democratic meanings, in the end the principal aim of the conspiracy was to get the job done without getting caught, rather than to contemplate common values, and the matters of security and effectiveness were not working towards providing the members of the resistance with many occasions for integration. The underground society was an imagined community, but unlike in 1981 there wasn't enough sociability involved to produce an integrated community too. For the activists working on the technical side, there was no natural translation between underground and overground activity. Activists of clandestine factory commissions of Solidarity could continue their activity publicly. Obviously, only few media activists were genuinely interested in book selling as such, and those who did, like the legalized NOWA, quickly found out that all of their doubts concerning the dangers of subordinating culture to market were true, and even though the company had a commercial success, mostly due to popularity of Andrzej Sapkowski's fantasy saga about *The Witcher*, that success divided, rather than consolidated the community of people behind NOWA's activities in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>38</sup> Jan Walc, asked to comment on NOWA's imminent legalization in March 1990, remarked: "People joined NOWA for idealism. Right now, publishing is part of the emergent wild capitalism or complicated political or fractional plays. Underground activities, and economic and political decision-making require different kind of incentives and a different kind of courage."

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<sup>37</sup> Mielczarek, *Śpiący rycerze*, 112.

<sup>38</sup> *Obieg NOW-ej*, 241-247.



Czesław Bielecki, the leader of CDN, opted for a farewell party instead. The party took place in a café in Warsaw's Old Town in February 1991. Against intentions of some of his colleagues, he was convinced that the times when the business of publishing articulated important political principles and values were over. "We don't want to be the dinosaurs of the underground" – an earlier letter to CDN collaborators declared. That letter captured the core understanding of prefigurative politics, which, in Bielecki's rendering, was about the necessary relationship between program and organizational form.

Program – since book publishing was never an aim in itself, a matter of satisfying political and intellectual appetite. The book – free book – was to unite us all, publishers and readers, around a civic program of autonomy and sovereignty, which Solidarity as a social movement and a trade union articulated in our name in August 1980.

Organization – since strength and impact of any program is always a resultant of the way that people, who approve of that program and are resolved to act upon it, organize internally. The correct and shared understanding of that the necessary relationship between program and organization, allowed us to build gradually a relatively large and – in the conditions of conspiracy – effective publishing structure, but most of all, to create a group of people coming from different communities who understand and trust each other. After seven years of operations, not the books, but the people are our greatest capital asset.<sup>39</sup>

Even though at the end of 1989 it seemed that abolition of censorship and paper rationing was imminent, "the time, when free word turned into action" was coming to an end. The scope and pace of changes were far from satisfactory, demanding "active participation in establishing ourselves in successive fields of public activity, without taking democratization for democracy." That required flexibility in the program-organization balance and publishing would be no longer the main vehicle. Even though the letter recognized that Poland needs "not only effective political institutions subordinated to social control, but also healthy and strong economy," at the same time,

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<sup>39</sup> Fałkowski, *Biznes patriotyczny*, 188.

Bielecki was convinced that neither him or his colleagues were entitled to transform CDN into business as usual, since that would mean privatizing what was a collective achievement, entailing appropriation of the collective assets and substituting comradely relationship into an employment relationship. CDN could not be turned into a real firm, without creating a conflict between program and organizational form, and without sacrificing the human assets.

What we know in hindsight, thanks to interviews with former underground media activists of the Warsaw area collected by Adam Mielczarek, is that the idea of doing prefigurative politics by other means was shared. Early on, there was some sense of collective, public mission and some of the underground publishing activists entered institutions of local governance to take it over from the people of the old regime, but quickly dropped out, and if they remained, they either had to muddle through the existing structures from one compromise to the next, observing how easy to corrupt were the people of the new regime. And neither they were particularly summoned to become the cadres of renewed public administration by the post-Solidarity politicians, many of whom jumped on the oppositional bandwagon quite late and had neither special consideration for their veteran status, nor a predilection for the kind of political culture they represented.<sup>40</sup> And finally, the quickly ensuing political polarization among the post-Solidarity elites was producing further distance, rather than an incentive for continued civic involvement.

Some expectations were invested in the movement of local Solidarity Civic Committees organized for the purpose of electoral campaigning, and many underground media activists took part, without revealing their identities. After the June elections, the

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<sup>40</sup> Mielczarek, *Śpiący rycerze*, 66-79.

committees were the most dynamic political force in Polish public life, casting a shadow over both the process of rebirth of Solidarity and emergence of political parties. If they were given time to consolidate and constitute a democratically elected leadership, they could have complicated even further the already complex situation of power sharing between the Union's leadership and the parliamentary representation. The committees forced Solidarity leadership to withdraw the resolution on their disbandment, but instead of electing its own leadership, the movement was subordinated to a board, whose members were appointed jointly by Solidarity and the oppositional parliamentary club in an effort to sustain a unified reform movement with a civic and a trade union wing. As a result of that imposition, and the conflict between the two post-Solidarity power centers that ensued, the civic energy of the committees dissipated.<sup>41</sup> The sort of political parties that became the main players in the transition process, born in the fratricidal struggle among oppositional elites, were not quite the model of preaching democracy by example.

In the 1990s the unlicensed publishing movement rank and file, as compared to a statistical Pole, were twice as active in terms of participation in voluntary associations, local governance and political parties. In principle underground cultural, educational and relief activities could be seen as NGO work minus police repression, but judging from what Mielczarek discovered, the former underground media activists internalized the transitional imperative of normalization. For them, as Mielczarek concluded, giving political meaning to civic involvement worked under communism, but after 1989 it would mean to confuse their loyalties, as if critical civic involvement would serve to compromise the image of a free, democratic and independent country they cherished,

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<sup>41</sup> Dawid Warszawski, "Czapka nad komitetami?," *Przegląd Wiadomości Agencyjnych* 208 (1989): 3. Cf. Robert Krasowski, *Po południu. Upadek elit solidarnościowych po zdobyciu władzy* (Warszawa: Czerwone i Czarne, 2012), 134-139.

having contributed to bringing it about. As if different standards of civility applied. Prefigurative radicalism of active citizens who would take matters into their own hands belonged to the past, since in a normal country it was the duty of the state to intervene and correct injustices. However, patent these were, and however the ordinary politics was reluctant to intervene, they profoundly wished Poland was on its way of becoming one. And that wish was what stopped them from reinterpreting the means and ends of extraordinary politics for the sake of the new times.<sup>42</sup>

## LOST IN TRANSITION

What was being lost in transition was the prefigurative philosophy of political action. The dissident print culture was something more than a list of works on the censor's index, and something more than companies operating in the second economy, and the corresponding set of constraints on freedom of speech and enterprise was not the only thing that justified and sustained its existence. It was also a social network of horizontal communication which gave shape and meaning to the prefigurative idea of democracy, i.e. the idea that a transition to democracy is a matter of small collective forms of democratic agency that in its multiplicity could have an immediate transformative effect on the present. That vision of democracy was necessarily open-ended, and in principle compatible also with the tried and tested models. But in practice, its only public materialization in 1980-1981 promoted forms of political participation based on a radical understanding of civic agency as oversight, as counter-democracy, not only vis-à-vis the state, but also with regards of the internal constitution of the Solidarity movement. As a political principle, oversight was the measure of the quality of democracy in the Self-Governing Republic to come, but then again, already in 1981,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, 88.

Solidarity leadership was convinced that sacrifices in quality had to be made for achieving political impact. In 1989 counter-democracy was even less articulated in the vision of how ordinary politics should work.

If it is true that unlicensed print culture gave political form to the idea of the underground society of the 1980s, the public existence of independent social media was equally difficult to imagine without a social environment of a democratic mass movement. And this is why, once prefigurative politics lost its significance as the main philosophy of action of the Solidarity camp, dissident media activists found themselves out of place with their times. Despite initial optimism of restoring the trade union press, which prevailed during the Fourth Congress of Independent Press in April 1989 (just like the Independent Cultural Forum, that was another historical reconstruction) the local governance bodies of Solidarity showed little interest in committing resources for their patronage.<sup>43</sup> That was because prefigurative politics no longer mattered for the reconstituted Solidarity, which was torn between a scaling down to a pure trade-union agenda and political attempts to employ its historical legacy to shield or contest the transition process. But clearly, it was no longer the sort of mass social movement which perceived itself as an anticipation of the Self-Governing Republic, that needed its press to act upon the principles of publicity and deliberation, which were no longer its cardinal values.

Both transitional politics and prefigurative politics were ultimately about democracy. But in Oseka's understanding, democracy already existed in the form prefigured by the dissident print culture, and its further expansion was fundamentally about the growing transformative effect of the multiplicity of these small forms.

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<sup>43</sup> Leon Bober [Andrzej Kaczyński], "Obieg Wolnego Słowa," *Kultura Niezależna* 51 (1989): 163-165; "Zjazd prasy niezależnej," *KOS* 159 (1989): 12.

Transitional politics, on the other hand, was born out of sense of exhaustion of that same understanding and the sense of historical opportunity of effecting a democratic change by more conventional means. The return of ordinary politics which Michnik called a “velvet restoration” was clearly not the Jacobin nightmare Osęka (and before him Michnik himself) feared most. There is a far stretch between sense of historical opportunity and utopia. In 1989 there was no radiant future to excite eschatological expectation. The transitional vision of democracy was a known future – it was enough to cross Poland’s Western border to have a glimpse of it. However, the velvet restoration would proceed through elite negotiations and top-down institutional engineering. The small forms of democratic agency that the dissident media activism embodied, and which were meant to provide solid foundations to the desired polity of the future, as it turned out, were of very little use. Ready to take on Jacobins and despots, nobody expected the Thermidorians, and the historian can’t help to have the feeling, that history under his pen has repeated itself yet again.

## CONCLUSION | ON IMPORTANCE OF (NOT) HAVING LICENSE

The title of this work came very late in process of writing, even though I have used the term ‘unlicensed’ throughout to refer to the media activism and the broader dissident print culture it had engendered. I used this term exchangeably with the notions such as ‘dissident,’ ‘underground’ and ‘independent’ as their common denominator. I also used the term ‘unlicensed publishing’ to translate the vernacular words such as ‘bibuła’ [lit. onion paper] or ‘drugi obiegi’ [second circulation], since highlighting Polish exceptionalism in the category of industrial samizdat production and its historical roots was not important for my argument. All these latter appellations can be seen as synonyms, if what we are trying to describe is a sort of democratic-oppositional succession of being, that many interpretations of dissidence in Central Europe under late socialism has been narrating. However, there were many moments in my argument when, I found it useful to distinguish between dissident and Solidarity politics, or between underground and public modes of oppositional activities, to explore the ways in which the idea of cultural autonomy was debatable.

The term ‘unlicensed’ brings all these notions under a common denominator of refusal to subordinate freedom of expression and free flow of ideas and information to authorization of the cultural surveillance apparatus of the communist state, without the need to make these subtle distinctions, and sometimes that is handy. Yet, I believe, following Claude Lefort, that historian’s business is in complications and, therefore, that subtle distinctions matter more than common denominators. My plan was to contribute to research on dissident political thought and samizdat studies, by aligning them into a fusion: to explore philosophy of political action unlicensed media activism as an instance of a non-

canonical variant of dissident political thinking, and in so doing, to bring the political back into samizdat studies, while making sure that in the process the Cold War paradigm, which the second wave of samizdat studies subordinated to fundamental critique, is not smuggled back in as well. That admittedly breakneck plan favored doing many subtle distinctions.

It does not mean that in writing histories of dissident politics we can fully abstract from the large canvas the Cold War conceptual polarities such as ‘society versus the state,’ ‘human rights versus abuse of power,’ or ‘democracy versus totalitarianism.’ It would be spurious to pretend that they were not at the core of the intellectual value consensus of the day. But I am afraid that repeating, after the dissidents, that democracy is a good and totalitarianism is wrong, that truth should prevail over lies, will not bring our understanding of the intellectual and cultural history of dissidence any further.

One of the ways of going beyond the Cold War optics is to go into details in order to bring to the fore the ways in which the intellectual common denominator was being made internally contestable and debatable. In 1980-1981 everyone agreed as for the principle that exercise of citizenship means exercise of oversight over powers that be, but there was much less agreement on whether that principle should apply equally to democratically delegated power of Solidarity governing bodies, or whether that principle could be suspended in the critical conjuncture Solidarity faced in the period preceding the imposition of Martial Law. In response to the Martial Law, it was not the consensus about the need to ‘force the state to compromise’ with the representatives of society that provided for the dynamics of dissident politics, but rather the different strategies of how the compromise should be enforced. One thing is to say that culture should be independent, and quite another thing is to point out, as Jan Walc or Dawid Warszawski would do, that the purpose and reason



cultural autonomy should not remain relative to the complicity in adversity between communism and anti-communism. Or to debate whether abandoning the exchange of unlicensed cultural goods to market mechanisms would make culture more free. Finally, that in principle censorship was wrong and that the flow of ideas should not be licensed, should not stop us from exploring how that very same principle became negotiable, whether the abolition of censorship was the only purpose of media activism and whether achieving that purpose warranted its phasing out. All that boils down to a rather simple truth, that, despite the final outcome, the triumph and the strength of dissidence resided in the power of intellectual and political imagination, rather than of ethical intransigence in the name of universal values. And that imagination thrived in detail.

So, if my choice of title was not motivated by the necessity to collapse all that subtle distinctions into the common denominator of refusal to submit ‘free word’ and its flow to state license, but conversely, to bring them to the fore, it is justified by the polysemy of the word ‘license.’ License, as we learn e.g. from the Marriam-Webster dictionary, not only combines the meanings of ‘permission to act’ and ‘freedom of action’ (the combination which in itself prompts questions that are at the core of political philosophy), but also stands for ‘deviation from fact, form or rule by an artist or writer for the sake of the effect gained’ (as in ‘poetic license’) and ‘freedom that allows or is used with irresponsibility’ ( as in ‘licentiousness’).

The prefigurative social imaginary, that has been in the spotlight of this work, can be understood as a sort of ‘democratic license,’ insofar as it required a deviation not only from the factual condition of unfreedom – the assumption that communist-type regime does not allow any sustainable form of civic agency – but more importantly from the forms and

rules of political modernity, according to which a transition from a repressive regime to a democracy can only be an outcome of either a revolution or elite negotiations. Prefigurative politics, on the other hand, was a way of asserting that small collective forms of democratic agency are possible even under repressive conditions, and that a transition to democracy can be imagined as transformative effect of these small forms of collective agency gradually radiating over public life. That prefigurative vision of democracy was not anchored in the classical forms of political modernity, such as deliberative assemblies and its rules of delegation of power, since throughout most of its history—with the exception of Solidarity’s Carnival—democracy had to be imagined without a possibility to institute these forms. Yet, what the unlicensed media activists were thinking they were doing, was not only fighting *for* democracy, but performing it. That democratic license envisioned a space where sustaining a collective activity on behalf of matters of public concern was a cumulative decision of individuals involved. That deep interdependence between collective action and unconstrained individual agency produced a sense of equality and empowerment, without necessity of formalizing the deliberative process and the act of decision-making. Finally, that imaginative license corresponded to a prefigurative vision of transition from communism, articulated by the belief that these small collective forms of democratic agency are necessary part of the process, if the desired polity of the future was to rest on solid foundations, a condition that neither revolution or elite negotiation could meet.

Yet the prefigurative philosophy of political action was just one of the variants of dissident political thought. To some extent it can be identified with the concept of ‘anti-politics,’ even though in this work I decided to drop that venerable label, since, as an

analytical category, it generates more confusion than clarity. This work has been constantly oscillating between the writings of the dissident master-thinkers and the political imaginary of unlicensed media activism, in order to probe the entanglement between the prefigurative variant dissident political thought and the dissident social media activism. The prefigurative vision of democracy provided the framework in which the activists could make sense of what they were doing as a form of practicing democracy. But also conversely, if it wasn't for the fact that the dissident print culture had the shape of social media, e.g. a network of horizontal communication in which the flow of information and ideas depends on the cumulative effect of individual decisions, and in which, importantly individual agency can articulate itself through technological means accessible to average person, that particular strand of oppositional thinking, it can be said with some probability, would not have a strong anchorage in the lived experience.

Despite that entanglement, the prefigurative imaginary of unlicensed social media activism and the oppositional political thought need to be distinguished. On the one hand, the prefigurative philosophy of political action was a prominent, but not the only variant of political thinking available to the leaders of the democratic opposition. On the other hand, the activists were far from uncritically accepting their authority. What gives the dynamic to this entangled history is precisely the oscillation between moments of proximity and distance between the independent publishing movement and the broader oppositional social movement. The moments when the degree of convergence and alignment were highest, were the moments of resistance, when the main aim of the oppositional activities was simply to last. But there were also critical moments, in the aftermath of the emergence of Solidarity in 1980-1981 and in the course of the revolutions of 1989, when the wager was

a lot more than resistance. During both historical conjunctures, the philosophy of political action orienting the Solidarity leadership and the prefigurative logics of the dissident print culture were drifting apart.

And this brings me to the last meaning of ‘license,’ the point about ‘licentiousness’ which I would like to read as a matter of self-empowerment, on the one hand, and limit to democratically instituted public authority, on the other. Dissident print culture was born out of civic disobedience with respect to unjust laws of an authoritarian regime, but its relationship to authority endowed with a democratic mandate which Solidarity leadership represented, was equally contentious. In 1980-1989 the debates on the role of trade union press revealed a tension between the political self-understanding of the media activists defending their right to exercise oversight over the delegated power of Solidarity governance bodies on behalf of their constituency, and the leadership, who, without explicitly contesting publicity as an important principle of internal democracy of the Union, nevertheless believed that their democratically delegated authority entitles them to require from its press a measure of alignment with Solidarity’s political agenda and a degree of coordination that would enable a concentrated response to the government propaganda. That effort to transform dissident social media into surrogate mass media was mostly based on instrumental consideration of achieving public impact of the Solidarity agenda, and the multiplicity of small forms of collective agency embodied in the publishing initiatives at least for a time could be seen as disposable (if not competitive) with the emergence of Solidarity’s deliberative political culture. On the other hand, the attitude which Solidarity leadership was perceiving as ‘licentiousness’ of the trade union press, was derived from the deeply cherished sense of self-empowerment, the conviction that the measure of liberty that

the social media activists achieved they owed it to themselves, and not to the Union, and therefore their authority to exercise oversight over the trade union leaders is quite independent from its resolutions.

The eclipse of the dissident print culture in the course of the endgame political process of 1989 is a different political conjuncture altogether. Between these two moments, unlicensed social media activism descended underground, flourished as the political form that gave shape and meaning to the strategic vision of the underground society promoted by Solidarity leaders, and entered a period of fatigue. That same sense of underground fatigue, combined with the deepening collapse of Polish economy and the enduring political stall-mate in the conflict with the state, made Solidarity leaders abandon the prefigurative philosophy of political action in favor of the transitional politics, which gradually shifted the vision of political change from the reconstruction of civil society, whose important assumption was that civic agency will be of paramount importance in overcoming the crisis, towards the legitimization exchange with the pro-reform wing of the regime elites and a top-down transformation of the economic and political system. In the course of the Round Table negotiations, the opposition articulated the demands of abolition of censorship, cessation of state repression and equal access to print infrastructure and paper supply, but especially after the launch of the oppositional daily, the future *Gazeta Wyborcza* was accorded, it was becoming clear that transitional politics will move in the direction of phasing out of the underground print culture. The underground media activists, who were defiant with respect to the democratic authority of the 1981 leadership, had even less reasons to accept the idea that their civic rights were granted as an outcome of a legitimization exchange with the representatives of the same regime which persecuted them for civic disobedience.

However, their sense self-empowerment was no longer consequential. Whether they wanted to admit it or not, they too were longing for normalcy, and the unlicensed print culture was an aberration and a surrogate form of democratic authority which made sense as articulation of civic disobedience in the time of resistance, which was finally over.

Or so it seemed. Now, 30 years after the fall of communism, we are no longer sure. Forces of uncivil society are more and more licentious and democratic authority is employed in ways that are incompatible with proper functioning of the democratic process from which it derives. Many former dissidents are calling for defense of liberal democratic institutions, which they believe is the only way in which our liberties can be enshrined. Mass and sustainable civic disobedience in the name of liberal democracy is however not on the horizon. If we want less license in our public life, it seems, we need more license to achieve it.

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