



CEU DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

The Doctoral Thesis in Comparative History

by

**Piotr Wciślik**

on

“License: The Prefigurative Politics of Polish Dissident Social Media  
Activism, 1976-1990”

will be held on

**Friday, May 4, 2018 at 10:15**

in

**Nádor 9, Senate room  
Central European University (CEU)  
Budapest—1051**

Examination Committee

Béla Greskovits – Chair (Department of International Relations, CEU)  
István Rév & Balázs Trencsényi – supervisor (Department of History, CEU)  
János Kis – CEU internal member (Department of Political Science)  
Pawel Sowinski – external member (Polish Academy of Sciences)  
Balázs Apor – external reader (Trinity College Dublin)

### 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.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

*Piotr Wciślik*

### EDUCATION

MA in History, 2009. CEU Budapest, Hungary. History Department.

MA in Sociology, 2008. University of Warsaw, Poland. College of Inter-Faculty Studies in The Humanities.

MA in Iberian Studies, 2007. University of Warsaw, Poland. College of Inter-Faculty Studies in The Humanities.

### WORK EXPERIENCE

Since 2015. Digital Humanities Centre at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (CHC IBL PAN): Deputy Director, responsible for data-driven research project and international cooperation.

2014-2015. Blinken Open Society Archives at the CEU: Roma Digital Repository Project Coordinator

2010-2014. Blinken Open Society Archives at the CEU.

### RESEARCH PROJECTS

*New Exploratory Phase in Research on East European Cultures of Dissent (NEP4DISSENT)*. COST Action CA16213. Project co-author and scientific officer. 2017-2021.

*Future of Polish and Czech Literary Bibliography: Towards integration and exploitation in comparative research*. Scholarly mobility project funded by Polish and Czech Academies of Sciences. Principal Investigator. 2017-2019.

*Polska Bibliografia Literacka – laboratorium wiedzy o współczesnej kulturze polskiej (PBL\_lab)* [Polish Literary Bibliography – knowledge laboratory on contemporary Polish culture], project by IBL PAN and PCSS PAN, funded by Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki (NPRH) [National Endowment for the Humanities]. Project co-author and scientific officer. 2015-2018.

*Negotiating Modernity: History of Modern Political Thought in East-Central Europe*, project supported by the European Research Council, principal investigator: Balázs Trencsényi, CEU Budapest. Expert on contemporary Polish political thought. 2010+

## PUBLIC LECTURES

*Understanding Authenticity of Bibliographic Metadata with Bruno Latour: the case of PBL\_Lab project*, lecture at the “The Authenticity of Collections – an international and interdisciplinary symposium on authenticity, recording and digitization of collections,” Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg, March 2016.

*Networked Democracy? Contours of Political Thought of the Independent Publishing Movement in Poland after Martial Law*, guest talk at the "New Approaches To The Solidarity Movement" Research Group Seminar at Collegium Civitas, Warsaw, January 27, 2014.

*Movement, enterprise, network. The political economy of Polish underground press*, public lecture in the Samizdat Lecture Series at OSA, Budapest, June 24, 2013.

## CONFERENCES

*2016 ASEES Convention*, Washington D.C., November 17-20, 2016. Participation in panel discussion: The Researcher-Librarian Interface in Digital East European Studies.

*The Allure of Totalitarianism: The Roots, Meanings, and Political Cycles of a Concept in Central and Eastern Europe*, Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena, October 6-8, 2016. Presentation: “Dissident Social Critique in Transition: The Case of *Homo Sovieticus*.”

*Digital Humanities 2016*, Uniwersytet Jagielloński and Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny, Kraków, July 11-16, 2016. Presentation, with Maciej Maryl: “Remediations of Polish Literary Bibliography: Towards a Lossless and Sustainable Retro-Conversion Model for Bibliographical Data.”

*Alternative Encounters: The ‘Second World’ and the ‘Global South’, 1945-1991*, conference at the Imre Kertész Kolleg, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Jena, November 2014. Presentation Non-violence and Double Standards: Solidarity with Fighting Afghanistan in late-dissident Poland.

*1989: Thinking Revolution in East-Central Europe*, conference under auspices of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague, October 2014. Reaction paper to Michal Kopecek’s keynote The 1989 and the Ideas of Revolution in (post-)Dissent.

*Teksty kultury uczestnictwa* [Texts of participatory culture], Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa, November 2013. Participation in the panel discussion Digital Humanities in Poland: Perspectives and Challenges.

*Opening Up Social History Repositories: New Technologies and New Methods*, 44th Annual Conference of the International Association of Labour History Institutions (IALHI), Open Society Archives, Budapest, September 2013. Co-organizer. Presentation: Innovative Use of MARC records in the Archival Context.

*Concepts on the Move: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Disciplinary Transfers, Entanglements, Receptions, Translations and Redefinitions in Conceptual History*, The 16th International Conference on the History of Concepts, Bilbao and San Millán de la Cogolla, August 2013. Presentation: “Political Languages of Anti-Solidarity: Mirosław Dzielski and the Differentia Specifica of Polish Neo-Liberalism.”

*Declines and Falls: Perspectives in European History and Historiography*, conference under auspices of the European Review of History, Central European University, May 2013. Presentation: Making Time During Communism’s Demise: 1989 and its temporality.

*Second Circulation of Publications in the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) against the History of Samizdat in the Countries of the Soviet Bloc after 1956*, conference under auspices of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw, May 2012. Presentation: The Political Thought of Samizdat.

*Europe and the World: An International Graduate Student Conference*, Princeton University, April 2012. Presentation: “Samizdat networks and political thought of dissent under late Socialism: a historical laboratory of the present?”

*Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and the Legacy of 1989: Comparative workshop on recent history of political and social thought in East Central Europe*, under auspices of the Negotiating Modernity project, Prague, May 2011. Presentation: “Totalitarianism” and Dissident Political Languages in Central Europe: Late Communism and After.

## **GRANTS AND AWARDS**

Doctoral Research Support Grant awarded by the CEU for visit at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, September-November 2015.

Visegrad Fellowship at the OSA, Budapest, June-July 2015.

Péter Hanák Prize for the Best MA Dissertation, CEU History Department, 2009.

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Socrates Erasmus Scholarship, 2005-2006.

Minister of Science and Higher Education Award for Academic Achievement, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2007-2008.

## LANGUAGES

Fluent English and Spanish, native Polish.

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### BOOKS AND EDITED VOLUMES

*Thinking through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989*. Edited by Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik. Budapest: CEU Press, 2015.

### ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS

“The Rubber Waistband and the Resistor: Solidarity Radio And Media Fantasies Of Emancipation Under Late Socialism In Poland.” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 115 (2017), 175-210.

“Remediations of Polish Literary Bibliography: Towards a Lossless and Sustainable Retro-Conversion Model for Bibliographical Data [with Maciej Maryl].” *Digital Humanities 2016 Conference Abstracts*. Edited by Maciej Eder and Jan Rybicki. Kraków: Jagiellonian University & Pedagogical University, 2016, 621-623.

“Demokracja sieciowa? Szkic na temat myśli politycznej niezależnego ruchu wydawniczego w Polsce po wprowadzeniu stanu wojennego [Networked Democracy? Essay on Political Thought of the Independent Publishing Movement in Poland after Martial Law].” *Drugi obieg wydawniczy w PRL na tle historii samizdatu w państwach bloku sowieckiego po 1956 roku*. Edited by P. Gasztold-Seń, N. Jarska and J. Olaszek. Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2016, 123-144.

Introduction [with M. Kopeček]. *Thinking through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989*. Edited by Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik. Budapest: CEU Press, 2015, 1-35.

“Totalitarianism” and the Limits of Polish Dissident Political Thought: Late socialism and after.” *Thinking through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989*. Edited by Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik. Budapest: CEU Press, 2015, 73-107.

“Movement, Enterprise, Network: The Political Economy of Polish Underground Press.” *Samizdat. Between Practices and Representations*. Edited by Valentina Parisi. IAS Publications No 1. Budapest: Central European University, Institute for Advanced Studies, 2015, 73-86.

“Political Languages of Anti-Solidarity: Mirosław Dzielski and the *Differentia Specifica* of Polish Neo-Liberalism.” *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference on the History of Concepts*, Bilbao 2013, 155-162. DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1387/conf.hcg2013.2>