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Enclaves of freedom. On *second circulation* publishing in the PRL

In 2016, Poles celebrated the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR), which was soon followed by other organisations which today are referred to as the *democratic* or *independence opposition*, which operated overtly, though outside the legal system, in the People's Republic of Poland (PRL). On 29 September, KOR's first *Komunikat* was issued, and that date is conventionally considered as the beginning of the independent publishing movement of the *new generation*¹.

The impressive development and growth of the *second circulation* at specific stages of its existence (in 1976–1980, during the Solidarity period, and after 13 December 1981), which was associated with the activities of the democratic opposition, yet developed on its own and independently of various communities and social groups, remains the most important testimony and written documentation of the drive for independence of Polish society in the late communist period. The phenomenon has been analysed and described many times². I have also devoted several publications to it³.

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¹ The history of conspiracy press and illegal publishing houses in Poland dated back to the January Uprising (1863–1864), and was continued within the operations of the Polish Underground State during WWII.

² Vide e.g.: D. Dabert, "Między wizją a spełnieniem. Profile ideowe i artystyczne czasopism literackich w drugim obiegu wydawniczym 1982–1989", Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2014; J. Błazejowska, "Papierowa rewolucja. Z dziejów drugiego obiegu wydawczego w Polsce 1976–1989/90", Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warszawa 2010; "Papierem w system. Prasa drugoobiegowa w PRL", M. Marcinkiewicz, S. Ligarski (eds.), Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Szczecin 2010; "Wbrew partii i cenzurze. Media podziemne w PRL. Studia i artykuły", P. Karela, P. P. Warot, T. Wolsza (eds.), Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warszawa 2012.

³ E.g. in monographs: "Przeciw. Obok. Pomimo. Kultura niezależna w Łodzi w latach 70. i 80. XX wieku", K.W. Tatarowski, A. Barczyk, R. Nolbrzak (eds.), Dom Literatury, Łódź 2015; K.W. Tatarowski, "Niezależna literatura i dziennikarstwo przed 1989 rokiem. Idee – ludzie – spory", Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016.

Before we proceed to a more detailed, yet succinct due to the space available herein, specification, one should consider the social and political roots and the specificity of the Polish anti-system resistance movement, convergent in time, though fundamentally different from the broad wave of youth protests in the West⁴ in the late-1960s.

Protest movements in the West and independent culture in the PRL

The situation displayed a paradoxical nature: in Poland, the protest and independent culture movement inevitably led to the dismantling of the communist system, the same system which in May 1968 was demanded, in various ways, by their French, German and German peers, who carried banners with images of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara and slogans stemming from arguments inspired by the writings of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Bakunin. The Western protest movements often completely opposed previous cultural and artistic achievements. In Poland, *Nowa Fala* (New Wave) poets and authors of play stagings began with a critical analysis of the surrounding reality referring to specific trends in literature and art which they intended to continue and develop creatively.

The peak of protest movements in the United States and in Western Europe occurred in the late-1960s (Paris spring of 1968, clashes with police in Bremen, Hamburg, and Munich, revolts at universities in Rome or Milan, and at American universities). In Poland, the start date was March 1968 in combination with later workers' protests violently suppressed by the PRL authorities in the December of 1970 and June of 1976.

In Western Europe (*The Red Brigades* in Italy, *The Red Army Faction* in West Germany), protest movements were continued (also, but, of course, not exclusively) in the form of anti-system and criminal armed formations, which utilised terror as a means in their fight. Such a phenomenon did not exist in Poland, while the independent culture movement developed and expanded taking in 1976 the form of outside-censorship *samizdat* publishing, which until the very end of the People's Republic remained an alternative and competing centre of information, education, and culture and arts (literary, theatrical, plastic arts, musical, and film centre) in relation to official sources. Within the civil-political sphere, there formed an overt, though illegal, democratic opposition, which represented various types of political thought and different world-view inspirations (the diverse in that respect Workers' Defence Committee,

⁴ The first study of the topic in the Polish context was authored by: A. Jawłowska, "Drogi kontrkultury", Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1975.

Confederation of Independent Poland, Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights, Ruch Młodej Polski, and many more).

The first confrontation in the history of the PRL between the authorities and culture authors and university students occurred in March 1968. Its immediate cause was the removal of *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve) from Teatr Narodowy, the National Theatre, in Warsaw. However, the social and political atmosphere in which the decision was made, the war between different factions inside the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) which used anti-Semitism and anti-intelligentsia attitudes as their weapons, were the reasons why the defence of the staging of a work by Mickiewicz against censorship became a struggle for basic values, thus transcending all aesthetic or moral issues, and the realm of historical reckoning.

A result of the March protests and the violently suppressed workers' strikes in the North in the December of 1970, was the formation of art groups (literary, co-creating *Nowa Fala*, also known as *Pokolenie* (Generation) 1968–1970), and theatre groups, which abandoned the language of allusion and historical analogies and referred directly to the present social and political situation. Both in statements satirical in nature (the Warsaw-based *Salon Niezależnych* (The Room of the Independent)) and in plays saturated with dramatic themes, in which their creators utilised the poetic texts of their peers (*Jednym tchem* based on the poems by Stanisław Barańczak at Poznań's *Teatr Ósmego Dnia*). In that respect, a breakthrough event was Łódzkie Spotkania Teatralne (Łódź Theatre Meetings), which, according to Lech Śliwonik, became a manifestation of the "voice of the generation"⁵. Censors' interventions which intensified in the early-1970s resulted in the cancellation of these student theatre meetings in 1978.

On the notion of *second circulation* publishing

From the autumn of 1976, the underground press constituted a part of the so-called **publishing and cultural *second circulation***. The term appeared from 1976–1989 within the same semantic field as the notions of *independent literature*, *publishing movement outside the reach of censorship*, and *samizdat*. The notions of conspiracy press or publishing, historically associated with the activities of the Polish Underground State during WWII, were used less frequently.

The notion of *second circulation* itself has a much broader semantic scope than in the application discussed herein. One could say that *second circulation* encompass those projects (within various fields of economic or artistic activity)

⁵ L. Śliwonik, "Spacyfikowana rewolta pokoleniowa. Łódzkie Spotkania Teatralne – lata siedemdziesiąte", in: „Przeciw. Obok. Pomimo...”, op. cit., pp. 145–171.

which remain outside the control of the state (mainly, the revenue office), including the entire area of the so-called *grey zone* of employment. In respect to the understanding referred to initially of the *second circulation*, from 1976–1989 it meant the broadly understood **social-cultural movement**, which was organised independently of the PRL authorities, and encompassed:

- cultural and artistic activities (various types of literary meetings, theatre stagings, art exhibitions, which were organised in churches or private apartments);
- academic and didactic activities (e.g. lectures for university students delivered by Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych (Academic Courses Association), and
- electronic media activities (*Radio Solidarność* broadcasts, recording and propagation of tapes and video cassettes).

Another component of the thus understood *second circulation* was the **independent publishing movement**. Its beginnings were associated with the creation and the emphatic emergence of KOR and other groups usually remaining in clear (though illegal) opposition towards the communist regime in the PRL. All that occurred in 1976 and lasted until Poland regained independence and preventive censorship was lifted; as the conventional date of the beginning of the independent publishing movement in Poland one could consider **29 September 1976** – the day on which the first issue of KOR's *Komunikat* was published giving rise to *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, the first independent newspaper circulated within a considerable area of the country.

The scope and reach of the influence of *second circulation*

The *Robotnik* information and intervention magazine (with its title referring to the traditions of the Polish Socialist Party) had a national (meaning: large cities and industrial centres; underground press reached towns less often and on an irregular basis) reach. Other underground newspapers of an extra-regional reach were created at the same time or slightly later. At the beginning of 1977, the first issues of *Zapis*, a literary journal, *Spotkania*, a Lublin-based magazine of young Catholics, and a whole range of other opinion-making quarterlies with a literary, opinion-social or political focus were published. By the August of 1980, nearly **200 titles** of independent magazines and **300** books and brochures were published.

Within the period of the legal presence of NSZZ „Solidarność“, i.e. between late August and 13 December 1981, there occurred a real boom in outside-censorship publications. Various cells of the independent trade union published within that period throughout Poland approx. **3,200 titles** of bulletins, newspapers and magazines (only some, like *Tygodnik „Solidarność“*, held

the so-called *debit*, or a publication permit and were subject to censorship; a considerable majority appeared as internal union press, and was not controlled by the state). In that time, over **2,500** books and brochures were published without a permit⁶.

From the introduction in Poland of martial law on 13 December 1981 until the first half of 1986 almost **1,400** independent press titles were recorded in *Bibliografia publikacji podziemnych* (including many with an inter-company or supra-local reach, published on a continuous basis and in circulations reaching a few thousand copies); publishing houses also operated publishing the works of domestic authors, émigré authors, and translations of writers from other countries.

The quoted figures indicate the scope of the phenomenon. There is no certain and accurate data regarding its social reach and influence; researchers posit that the underground press (not including the legally operating *Solidarność* when it was generally accessible) reached approx. 10% of the population and its influence on public opinion (not only domestic, in fact) on a wider scale was possible thanks to the Polish Department of Radio Free Europe, which quoted articles published in *second circulation* on air and discussed them extensively (as did to a lesser extent, the Polish programmes of the BBC and Voice of America)⁷.

The socio-political consequences of the presence of independent press and publishing houses in the PRL

Second circulation publishing undermined the stability of Lenin's model of the functioning of the press in the PRL. One could conclude that it constituted **a free-market element in a non-democratic system**. It was completely independent of the directive of the state monopoly, and, regardless of the constant threat of repression, poor production capabilities, and difficulties in acquiring basic materials (even paper), it was able to develop an alternative model for circulation of information and artistic and socio-political values. It operated according to market rules in economic terms, there appeared elements of competition and rivalry between the publishers and specific communities.

The result for Polish culture of the breach of the monopolistic model of the media in the PRL was the emergence of the origins of a democratic *political*

⁶ I quote the data after: J. Kamińska [W. and W. Chojnacki], "Wprowadzenie" [to:] "Bibliografia publikacji podziemnych w Polsce (13 XII 1981 – V 1976)", Editions Spotkania, Paris 1988.

⁷ I discussed the issue in detail in: "Literatura niezależna i praca podziemna w Rozgłośni Polskiej RWE", in: „Czas Bibuły 1. Mechanizmy – ludzie – idee”, R. Wróblewski (ed.), Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2013, pp. 23–36.

*culture*⁸ and – to quote Stefan Żółkiewski – a democratic *literary culture*⁹. Those aspects of the activities of the *second circulation* were indicated by Leszek Nowak, a Poznań-based philosopher, in an article entitled “Dwie tezy o drugim obiegu” published in the underground journal *Obraz*:

That which bears the modest name of *second circulation* is one of the main phenomena of late communism as it is the process of depriving the tri-masters of one of their powers – spiritual power grounded in the monopoly on the means of indoctrination. First, by overcoming the monopoly itself, thus at the material level. And on that basis [...] consisting of creating new decision centres controlling alternative means of communication of cultural content – there occurs a process of transforming the creative intelligence layer¹⁰.

In the quoted definition, what is striking is the emphasis on the political aspect of the existence of *second circulation* publishing (its participation in the process of depriving the Party-State of its monopoly on the means of indoctrination). That was manifested in the creation of independent information, education, and cultural centres. And since they formed independently, they could represent the interests and views of various units, groups, and individuals, they could articulate different political and socio-economic statements. In essence, the *second circulation* created the opportunity for making Polish culture pluralistic, speaking in different voices.

In the underground press, there occurred many real discussions and disputes, both political and literary; from weeklies and biweeklies (*Tygodnik Mazowsze*, *KOS*, *Wola*, *Biuletyn Dolnośląski*), to monthlies and quarterlies (*Zapis*, *Puls*, *Arka*, *Kultura Niezależna*, *Obecność* and many more); fact-based discussions which revealed clearly different attitudes and points of view regarding fundamental issues.

⁸ The differences in the meaning and the history of the notion were discussed in: F. Ryszka, “Kultura polityczna”, in: idem, “Nauka o polityce. Rozważania metodologiczne”, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warsaw 1984, p. 246: “Culture accompanies persuasive actions and political games [...] ideology can include fight [...]. Ideology pushes people to engage in politics. Culture at least makes them think about how to do that”.

⁹ According to S. Żółkiewski’s understanding of the term: “A researcher of literary culture is less interested in individualised artistic expressions [...] and more in a common semiotic system, the *language* of literature, the codes known to the receivers and used by senders, for which they constitute the frame and the basis of own creative ideas, individual expression, original violations of social semiotic systems, and tools of collective communication” (S. Żółkiewski, “Główne tendencje rozwoju polskiej kultury literackiej 1918–1939”, in: idem, “Kultura. Socjologia. Semiotyka literacka”, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1979, p. 5).

¹⁰ L. Nowak, “Dwie tezy o drugim obiegu”, *Obraz* 1986, Issue 3, p. 27.

Their reach did not exceed the top few percent of society – yet for those interested in them, they were accessible. The problem was not the reach of the political thought as much as the ability to access it freely. In democratic Western states, the percentage of people who read serious opinion-political articles was surely much higher than in Poland. But in the case of the former, anyone could read them, while in Poland they were read only by those who had access to forbidden literature. In the case of the former, citizens could make free choices without the impending negative legal consequences – in Poland, if one picked up samizdat, she/he was making a choice of a political and ideological nature, thus coming into conflict with law.

Cultural and axiological dimensions of the operations of the *second circulation*

Independent literature and art creators, through autonomous choices, were making a fundamental breakthrough in the existing Party – State relationship, the monopolistic owner of the press and all means of mass communication and the subordinated literary and journalistic communities controlled by omnipresent censorship. In terms of ideology, there was a diversion from the state-enforced obligation of unified thinking. The choice was of an axiological, i.e. ethical, nature. And, therefore, it required some courage. It required courage in 1976 when the *second circulation* opened up; it required courage after 13 December 1981, in the years of martial law, when serious penalties were associated with performing and propagating independent works. One consequence for artists who chose independence was the loss of the status of more or less obedient partners cherished by the authorities, and a reduction to the role of a persecuted person branded as an *enemy*. Though, as Zbigniew Herbert wrote in “The Power of Taste”:

It did not take any great character
our refusal dissent and persistence
we had a scrap of necessary courage
but essentially it was a matter of taste
Yes taste
which has fibres of soul and the gristle of conscience.

Modification of the roles of the sender and receiver of *second circulation* communications

If one of the constitutional conditions for the functioning of the press, electronic media and cultural-artistic communication within the authoritarian system was the “blocking of bottom-up articulation”¹¹, the contribution of the underground press and independent cultural initiatives was the activation of the receivers: readers of the underground press, the audiences of theatre plays, film viewers, and visitors to art exhibitions. Receivers co-created the nature of *second circulation* publishing. The character of the relationship between the artist and the receiver of theatre plays or art exhibitions changed.

The issue was raised by one respondent to a survey on the independent forms of artistic activity after 13 December 1981 organised by *Ognik* (a body of Ogólnopolski Głos Nauki i Kultury) in issue 4 of 1984:

The shows organised by the authors themselves in their workshops or other locations considered worthy by the community possess a private or intimate atmosphere [...]. The new mode of presentation also offers a chance for closer contact between the artist and the audience. [...] An opportunity for direct meeting emerged. The realisation, both among artists and the audience, about that aim and the form of such meetings creates a state of mutual acceptance, and adds a sense of closeness and bonding.

There also occurred a change in how artists imagined the receivers of their art and how *ordinary* people imagined artists. That aspect of the issue was raised by Halina Mikołajska in a letter to Kazimierz Deymek published in *Puls* (Issue 22/23 of 1984):

I am not sure whether there are in Poland any other actresses with so many visits to remote theatres, cultural centres, parish houses, and churches. [...] Therefore, I know the audience not based on my imagination or ministry reports, which are often confusing or plainly fabricated. I know it somewhat personally. I know the wheres and the hows. I have seen it with my own eyes, how it changed and has been changing. I can assure you that there is a completely outstanding « third Poland », which has never existed before or has never been that populous. Poland which is tired yet which is not giving up. It gathers in its thousands and squeezes into lecture rooms and concert venues, into churches and other locations, receptive and hungry as never before.

¹¹ As posited by Jerzy Drygalski and Jacek Kwaśniewski in “(Nie)realny socjalizm”, Piechur, Warsaw 1988, official publication: Warsaw 1992.

As presented in the examples, the spiritual changes, the transformations of the scale of the values and attitudes among the artistic elite were associated with corresponding changes in the general consciousness. Therefore, one could say that independent publishing and artistic initiatives resulted in the creation of the origins of a democratic model of literary culture, alternative yet subject to the same criteria of evaluation and assessment as the *official culture*, which was subject to censorship, Party-State patronage, planning, subsidising, etc.

Second circulation and the official publishing policy

An interesting phenomenon within the discussed period (particularly within the period of the legal presence of *Solidarność*) was the *model* influence of *second circulation* on official publishing policy. Censorship mellowed, and entire social groups participated in the process of *detotalisation* of the cultural policy of the authorities. Suffice to say that one of the stipulations made by the student strike in Łódź in the winter of 1981 was to release for viewing a film entitled *Robotnicy 80*.

The actual situation in the editorial practices of state magazines was discussed by one of the debaters of *Kultura Niezależna* in a discussion on *The End of the Culture of the PRL* in 1984:

Sure, I saw the perfect example of that in the case of Mieczysław Rakowski and his *Polityka*, when that unfortunate soul was looking at a text knowing that he should scrap it, and yet he knew that if he did that, the text would appear in the underground press. Therefore, he would start thinking whether it would not be better, risking his position and conducting various cunning games, to publish it in *Polityka* seeking some form of support.

That *model* influence of the *second circulation* was also visible before August 1980; it also played a significant role in the processes of *liberalisation* visible in culture subject to state patronage in the late-1980s.

Polish underground press in other states of the *socialist community*

Finally, one should mention the inspirational role of the *second circulation* for other states of *real socialism*. As George Urban, director of Radio Free Europe 1983–1986, stated:

The Polish publishing movement was developing at an astonishing pace [...] I decided that all language stations should inform our listeners in other countries in detail about what Poles were striving for and how they proposed to achieve that – because the Polish underground not only presented the absurdity of the communist system, but also defined the path for an alternative way of thinking and acting¹².

Polish ideas, he continued, were propagated, benefiting millions of people throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Therefore, the Polish freedom enclave expanded and radiated to other countries, which since WWII had belonged to the *socialist community*. In fact, in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, though to a lesser extent, *second circulation* publishing was also present. And in a significant way it aided the democratic changes which occurred in that part of Europe at the end of the 1980s.

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¹² G.R. Urban, “Radio Wolna Europa i walka o demokrację. Moja zimna wojna w czasach zimnej wojny”, transl. by M. Antosiewicz, Prószyński i S-ka, Warsaw 2000, p. 115 [English version translated from Polish].

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(Summary)

Second circulation publishing, the broadly defined publishing and cultural movement, independent of the authorities of the PRL and not subject to state censorship, was initiated in the autumn of 1976 by the community which opposed communist party rule in Poland. The author of the article offers a synthesis defining the notion of *second circulation*, indicating its scope of influence and its reach, discussing its significance at the levels of community, cultural and political life, and its influence on the democratic changes in Poland and other Central and East European states in the late-1980s.

Keywords: *second circulation* publishing in the PRL, independent culture in the PRL, journalism in the PRL, press market in the PRL.