Anna Grutza

Among Traitors, Thieves, and Brokers

The Play of Intimacy in the Epistemic Economies of Cold War Intelligence Operations[1]

Abstract: This article deals with the communicative interactions between actors as a crucial epistemological moment. In particular, it analyses the information exchanges and negotiations between the Polish section of the US-American Cold War broadcaster Radio Free Europe (RFE) and its Polish informants as go-betweens in the 1950s to the early 1970s. Framing these interactions as *intimate epistemic economies,* the author pays special attention to questions of intimacy, confidentiality, testimony, and trust as well as epistemic uncertainty regarding the identity of actors and the content of messages. Furthermore, following recent scholarship, I investigate the boundaries between the history of science and the history of knowledge by interrogating about the role of subjectivity, ignorance, error, and failure in knowledge making. Finally, two main case studies are used to exemplify the tension between different types of knowledge including rumour and gossip, in the light of the epistemic realm of un/knowledgeability in which the US and Polish secret services operated.

Keywords: Radio Free Europe, go-betweens, epistemology, ignorance, Cold War

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Introduction

The historian and philosopher of sciences James Secord understands knowledge making as a "form of communicative action".[2] When knowledge making and the communication of knowledge become one and the same practice, questions of trust and forms of testimony during the interactions between agents resurface. Judgements about objectivity and epistemic trustworthiness must also be seen as results of "how knowledge travels, to whom it is available, and how agreement is achieved".[3] While these itineraries might have their origin in local practices and exchanges, tracing the processes and mechanisms of the transfer of locally formed knowledges to general and global contexts presents an even more challenging task.

However, general contexts do not remain stable over time. Regarding the early Cold War discourses on the secrets of the atomic bomb, David Kaiser has analysed the changing evaluation of the role of tacit knowledge, as opposed to knowledge transmitted by texts alone. The significance of tacit knowledge was intertwined with the changing stereotypes about scientific actors involved in the construction of the atomic bomb and with historically contingent ideas about the working mechanism of science.[4] These shifts in the cultural and political valance of certain forms of knowledge during the Cold War were also influenced by concepts about the circulation of information as such. The idea of a free flow of information, which developed in the late 1960s, was almost incompatible with the obsession with secrecy and the propaganda wars of the early Cold War years. It implied that, in a free world, information should circulate smoothly and without obstruction, although, as Stefanie Gänger has argued, when ideas or information are said to circulate freely, questions of power, hierarchy, interest, ideology, or agency seem to fade: "'Circulation', so employed, has a life of its own."[5]

In contrast to the idea of the free flow of information, this article looks at a very particular type of actors, namely "go-betweens"[6] in the context of information exchange between Polish and US-American political actors and informants, and the former's crucial position in Cold War intelligence operations related to the sci-

2 James A. Secord, Knowledge in Transit, in: Isis 95/4 (2004), 654–672, 661.

3 Ibid.

4 David Kaiser, The Atomic Secret in Red Hands? American Suspicions of Theoretical Physicists during the Early Cold War, in: Representations 90/1 (2005), 28–60.

5 Stefanie Gänger, Circulation. Reflections on Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History, in: Journal of Global History 12/3 (2017), 303–318, 312.

6 See Kapil Raj, Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators, in: Bernard Lightman (ed.), A Companion to the History of Science, Oxford 2016, 39–57; Enrah Safa Gürkan, Mediating Boundaries. Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560–1600, in: Journal of Early Modern History 19/2–3 (2015), 107–128.

entific work of the US-American and CIA-funded broadcaster Radio Free Europe (RFE) and its Polish section.[7] While the figure of the informant as go-between has already been analysed in the context of communist regimes and the work of RFE, these historical accounts have focused on actors working for the state security in the lower echelons of their bureaucracy. They informed on their fellow citizens, were trapped in serving the state between its repressive apparatus and society, and their agency, though existent, was rather marginal.[8] This article, however, focuses on different types of informants: people who were close to the ruling elite in Poland as secret agents, alleged political friends and allies, or journalists endowed with particular trust by state actors, and hence in possession of very sensitive, secret, and, at times, even intimate information. Their in-betweenness not only resulted from their ambiguous position within Polish society, but even more importantly from their exchanges with the West.

Furthermore, given the mutual observation from East and West, it can be speculated that the knowledge of being observed made a decisive difference to the willingness and personal interest of these go-betweens to share, exchange, or negotiate information. This surely added to the uncertainty regarding the trustworthiness of the information circulated, but also to its distinctiveness and value. Working in the realm of surveillance, the actors discussed in this article constantly lived on the edge of illegality, always under suspicion of becoming enemies of the state and personal traitors. They appeared as tricksters, brokers, or information thieves.[9] Subsumed under the general category of go-betweens, I see these different types of third parties as actors of mediation and brokerage, as intermediaries of cross-cultural, mostly informal, at times secret, but also intimate communication and information exchange. As allegedly trustworthy confidants of the Polish political elite, the inside knowledge of these go-betweens was of interest to a variety of actors – a knowledge that involved state secrecy, intimacy, and treason, mixed with rumour and gossip, but also solidified in textual and factual evidence gathered by the respective enemy.

7 Radio Free Europe (RFE) was an US-American broadcaster based in Munich, with its US American administration in New York, which, along with Radio Liberty (RL), broadcast to the Soviet bloc countries during the Cold War. The most intriguing aspects of RFE were its multiple and parallel functions as a broadcaster, research institute, opinion research institution, a news and information gatherer and evaluator, an overt intelligence operation, and a vast information network.

8 Ioana Macrea-Toma (ed.), Go-Betweens. Family Resemblances of Collaboration under Communism, in: Journal of East Central Europe 44/1 (2017), 1–147; in the context of Radio Free Europe see also: Ioana Macrea-Toma, The Eyes of Radio Free Europe. Regimes of Visibility in the Cold War Archives, in: East Central Europe 44/1 (2017), 99–127.

9 See Natalie Zemon Davis, Trickster Travels. A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds, New York 2006; Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Tramp's Tale. Travels Within the Soviet Union and Across its Borders, 1925–1950, in: Past & Present 241/1 (2018), 259–290.

The local and global circulation of both, these certain and uncertain forms of knowledge, followed feedback mechanisms that, as Sven Dupré and Geert Somson would say, force the historian to consider the "mutual constitution of different types of knowledge as well as to the role and assessment of failure and ignorance in making knowledge".[10] Especially the work involved in intelligence analysis, according to the former CIA veteran Richards Heuer, implied an often impossible kind of judgement that fills the gaps in the accumulated but incomplete information at hand: "It entails going beyond the available information and is the principle means of coping with uncertainty. It always involves an analytical leap, from the known into the uncertain."[11] The judgement of highly ambiguous and uncertain information also led to errors that were not always openly admitted, and also depended on more general historical contexts of knowledge evaluation.[12]

As a consequence, the "dark side of knowledge"[13] – all that was and should forever remain unknown in the light of intelligence operations – plays an important part for the present analysis, which, following Vera Keller, attempts to integrate the history of ignorance into the history of knowledge.[14] Thus, the analytical quest of this article is directed towards the entanglements described by Keller between uncertain and vague forms of knowledge such as clues, hints, and, above all, gossip and rumour, as well as empirical procedures and instruments presented here, for instance in the form of RFE's questionnaire, which solidified these uncertain knowledges into facts. Thereby, the problem of error and vagueness concerns both the historical actors under analysis and the making of the historiographical account itself. The nebulous pathways of knowledge within the data of intelligence services have not lost their opacity since the end of the Cold War. As tricksters, go-betweens could, according to Ernest Gellner, interfere with behavioural evidence about their own existence and activities: "if [the trickster's] trickery and deception are sufficiently persistent, we may never unmask them, or even suspect their presence".[15] The historical evidence of their existence, after all, stems mostly from their own accounts as truth- but also self-interested storytellers.

10 Sven Dupré/Geert Somsen, The History and the Future of Knowledge Societies, in: Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte 42/2–3 (2019), 186–199, 187.

11 Richards J. Heurer, Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999, 31.

12 Cf. for instance the Yuriy Nosenko case: Richards J. Heurer, Nosenko: Five Paths to Judgment, in: H. Bradfort Westerfield (ed.), Inside CIA's Private World. Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal 1955–1992, New Haven/London 1995, 379–414.

13 Dupré/Somsen, History, (2019), 191.

14 Vera Keller, Into the Unknown. Clues, Hints, and Projects in the History of Knowledge, in: History and Theory 58/4 (2020), 86–110.

15 Ernest Gellner, The Psychoanalytical Movement. The Cunning of Unreason, Malden/Oxford/Berlin 1985, 142.

In the following, the article juxtaposes two different settings and two successive time periods, presenting two small case studies in which information about Polish politics and power constellations within the governing elite was exchanged with employees of RFE. On the one hand, I discuss the defection of Józef Światło, a high-ranging employee of the Polish secret service, who decided to turn to the enemy side in the 1950s. On the other hand, the focus is on a different type of go-between, namely the Polish spy Andrzej Czechowicz, who managed to infiltrate RFE and send various RFE documents to the Polish authorities during the simultaneously evolving exchanges between RFE and Polish informants at the UN in New York during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Finally, these case studies shed light on the close relationship between treason, secrecy, surveillance, and information brokerage, adding a new perspective to the topic of intimacy. Intelligence studies discuss intimacy and espionage in terms of gender as well as private and sexual relations, whether in the context of love stories between East German women and Turkish men,[16] or rumours of female 'red spy queens' who are portrayed as "evil temptress[es]"[17] of their husbands. This article, however, looks at a phenomenon that I would like to term *intimate epistemic economies*.[18] By this I refer to various kinds of knowledge negotiations and exchanges between two or more parties who, as go-betweens, used intimacy as a part of their repertoire by playing with the trust of their interlocutors in order to reach agreement on the reliability of their information and the mutual interest in the exchanges. This involved questions of intimacy, testimony, and trust, but also uncertainty about the actors' intentions and the content and epistemic status of the messages exchanged or received.

Empire by invitation: tabulating marvellous tales from distant lands

On 3 November 1983, the president of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)[19], James L. Buckley, gave an address to the American Club in Paris entitled

16 Jennifer A. Miller, Espionage and Intimacy. West Berlin Turkish Men in the Stasi's Eyes, in: Valentina Glajar/Alison Lewis/Corina L. Petrescu (eds.), Cold War Spy Stories from Eastern Europe, Lincoln 2019, 197–228.

17 Kathryn S. Olmsted, Blond Queens, Red Spiders, and Neurotic Old Maids. Gender and Espionage in the Early Cold War, in: Intelligence and National Security 19/1 (2004), 78–94, 85.

18 The term of an intimate epistemic economy alludes to Tolga Esmer's concept of economies of violence, a notion that also departs from the idea of information exchange in the context of personal status negotiations: See Tolga U. Esmer, Economies of Violence, Banditry and Governance in the Ottoman Empire Around 1800, in: Past & Present 224/1 (2014), 163–199.

19 RFE and RL merged in 1976 into RFE/RL. Here they are always referred to as RFE/RL when the analysis focuses on the period of the late 1970s and beyond.

"International Broadcasting and the Soviet Challenge to 'the Right to Know'". Referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Buckley defined the mission of international broadcasting as a means of protecting "the right to 'seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers'".[20]

For Buckley, the role of RFE/RL could not be of greater relevance, as RFE/RL devoted exceptional care to determining what could be considered as true facts:

> "We have a special responsibility to be accurate and we would rather take a few extra hours to check out an item than make an error with which we could be hung. Credibility is our stock in trade, the foundation of the relationship of trust we have established with our millions of listeners. […] An undertaking not to lie implies of course a complementary commitment to tell the truth. […] although political and moral truth may not be capable of clinical proof, they are subject to the tests of human experience and intuition."[21]

Buckley defined the task of RFE/RL as to counter rumours, distortions, and disinformation with what he called "hard facts" and to provide listeners in the East with the full information needed to make sound judgement and personal decisions.

The former US-American ambassador and chairman of the US Board for International Broadcasting, John A. Gronouski, particularly emphasised the unique role of short-wave radio transmissions: "These broadcasts do not require the prior consent of the recipient government. Short-wave broadcasts never intrude on individual privacy. They can enter a listener's home only by invitation, by the flick of a switch, the turn of a dial."[22] For Gronouski, short-wave broadcasts combined a variety of attributes. They could be direct, immediate, universal, and personal at the same time, transgressing borders and the allegedly impenetrable Iron Curtain silently and without resistance. The supposedly genuine free flow of information was seen as disinterested, unimpeded, disembodied, immaterial, non-ideological, and a Western concept.

In line with Gänger's aforementioned arguments, the reality on the ground was, of course, very different from these metaphorical ambitions and newly emerging worldviews of the late 1970s. In many ways, the circulation or simply the exchange of information had a clearly material side and was much more difficult to achieve

20 James L. Buckley, International Broadcasting and the Soviet Challenge to 'the Right to Know'. Address to the American Club in Paris, 3 November 1983, 4. Hoover Institution Archives (HIA) at Stanford University, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 586.

21 Ibid., 9–12.

22 John A. Gronouski, Remarks of Ambassador John A. Gronouski, Chairman of the U.S. Board for International Broadcasting in Washington D.C. at the meeting of the Committee on Education, Cultural Affairs and Information of the North Atlantic Assembly in Munich, Federal Republic of Germany, 27 February 1979, 2. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 41.

than what was associated with the idea of free-floating information. This was all the more true of the work of the intelligence services, which by definition stands in contrast to a free and open flow of information.

However, as Allen Dulles, the former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), noted, foreign intelligence could be gathered in a variety of ways that did not necessarily involve covert operations. In overt operations, information was "derived from newspapers, books, learned and technical publications, official reports of government proceedings, radio and television".[23] RFE and RL played a particular role in this context. One method used by both institutions was to monitor official print media and local radio broadcasts from the other side of the Iron Curtain. They were also under surveillance by the other side, which often led to a self-perpetuating mechanism of feedback loops.[24]

RFE had a large research institute on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at its disposal. Research was a fundamental programme resource at RFE and RL: "Its purpose is to insure [sic] that information broadcast […] is accurate, and that the interpretations broadcast on feature programs are sober, authentic and persuasive […]."[25] According to a January 1976 press release, Radio Liberty even inaugurated a special series of science programmes entitled "Science and Technology Today", which was specifically designed to fill "'gaps' in Soviet listeners' knowledge and serve[d] to supplement data already available through Soviet publications and translation services".[26]

As Ross Johnson admitted, there is "no clear division between gathering information and collecting intelligence".[27] A more publicly acceptable way of obtaining information from the other side of the Iron Curtain was to conduct interviews with refugees, repatriates, defectors, visitors, and travellers by employing audience and opinion research methods. The Audience Research Department used opinion surveys, panel studies, and in-depth interviews as research instruments in order to delve into "reactions to Radio Free Europe as an institution".[28] Since there was no direct contact with the populations behind the Iron Curtain, various tabulation techniques were used to obtain representative results. A fully representative sample of a target population was rarely given and needed to be 'experimentally' adjusted or, in the

23 Allen Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, New York 1965, 56.

24 Ross Johnson, To Monitor and Be Monitored – Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty during the Cold War, in: History and Public Policy Program, Occasional Paper, Wilson Center (2017), 1–13, 6.

25 Board for International Broadcasting Second Annual Report 1975, 25. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 41.

26 Top Western Scientists Broadcast to USSR, January 1976. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 30.

27 A. Ross Johnson, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. The CIA Years and Beyond, Stanford 2010, 235.

28 President's Report, 1964. Audience Research Department, 2. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 571.

words of an RFE memorandum, this method gave them "the opportunity to study effectiveness directly, albeit under artificial laboratory conditions".[29]

In their role as monitors and observers within imperial rivalries, RFE's and RL's working techniques recall what Lorraine Daston in *The Empire of Observation* has identified as the emergence of a new epistemic genre that took hold around 1600, namely observation as a fundamental form of knowledge with its "emphasis on singular events, witnessed firsthand (*autopsia*) by a named author".[30] The newly scientifically acknowledged practice of observation quickly required the establishment of new techniques for coordinating and collating information, with the introduction of the questionnaire, the synoptic map or table, the grid, and the chart as standardised instruments.[31] These instruments of "state simplifications"[32], to quote James C. Scott, were intended to provide a better legibility of the world through statistical or scientific measurement. However, although they facilitated the compilation of information from travellers, they did so despite the persistent "problems of verifying marvellous tales from distant lands."[33] One might assume that this problem of verification has changed over the centuries, but, at least in the case of Radio Free Europe, concerns about the trustworthiness and reliability of sources – human as well as non-human – haunted the station's epistemic operations as much as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Simultaneously, the very foundation of RFE could indeed not be judged by 'clinical proof', but rather by tests of human experience and intuition, subjective knowledge, and even guesswork. RFE and RL thus operated in a completely different realm than they officially claimed, not only with regard to their CIA funding and hardly verifiable CIA patronage but also in regard to its claim to objectively and scientifically secured knowledge. In particular, interviewers relied on traditional forms of communication: they met their interviewees face to face; information was transmitted orally rather than in writing (the interviewer's note-taking was usually done after the event and from memory), etc. Communication was informal rather than official, it required a high level of persuasion and mutual interest for any information to have a chance of being considered reliable. It often required RFE/RL staff to judge the personal integrity or dishonesty of an interlocutor and to navigate through rumours, gossip, and indirect forms of communication.

29 Radio Free Europe Audience Research Section, 2. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 572.

30 Lorraine Daston, The Empire of Observation, 1600–1800, in: Lorraine Daston/Elisabeth Lunbeck (eds.), Histories of Scientific Observation, Chicago/London 2011, 81–114, 81 (emphasis in original).

31 Ibid., 82.

32 James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, New Haven 1998, 3.

33 Daston, Empire of Observation, 2011, 89.

From gossip to fact: the epistemic feedback-loops of intelligence revelations

Contrary to the claim that go-betweens disappeared with the end of the nineteenth century,[34] these intermediaries and agents of knowledge transmission and negotiation seem to be particularly relevant to intelligence work, regardless of the century or epoch. Rather than acting as ingenious mediators between indigenous populations and colonising European powers, as they had been in the age of empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,[35] in the mid-twentieth century they appear at the shadowy, informal edges of knowledge making and information circulation as brokers and information negotiators. Nevertheless, their agency as potential backstairs governors of the world remained central.

During the Cold War, power struggles among the ruling communist elites placed communist East-West go-betweens – intermediaries such as journalists, scientists, and spies – in a vulnerable position, from which they sought to benefit. With their own self-interest and need for self-preservation in mind, they sometimes became cunning exploiters of their relationships between party elites, their supporters, and their Western interlocutors. Not infrequently, these necessities led them to go against party lines and "changed the contents and the paths of knowledge".[36]

In encounters with Western actors such as RFE's journalists and interviewers, oral communication provided enough opportunities to eventually override party doctrines and censorship. As Peter Burke has noted, oral communication in particular, including rumour and gossip, has its own forms and styles that allow messages to be adapted "to the needs of the receivers in a process which involves simplification ('levelling'), selection ('sharpening') and the assimilation of the unknown to the known".[37] For national security and intelligence operations specifically, rumour and gossip were both a source of information and a challenge.

It was not without reason that Gordon Allport and Leo Postman began their analysis of rumour by quoting a high official of the Office of War Information who tried to find a recipe for taming what was "partially – but only partially – correct".[38] According to Allport and Postman, motivational factors in rumour making included primary emotional urges such as fear, anxiety, or hatred. Rumours are not

34 See Simon Schaffer/Lissa Roberts/Kapil Raj/James Delbourgo (eds.), The Brokered World. Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820, Sagamore Beach 2009, xi.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., x.

37 Peter Burke, History and Social Theory, Ithaca/New York 1992, 99.

38 Gordon W. Allport/Leo Postman, An Analysis of Rumor, in: The Public Opinion Quarterly 10/4 (Winter 1946–1947), 501–517, 501.

simply a purely intellectual commodity, "something one substitutes, *faute de mieux*, for reliable information",[39] but a highly subjectively charged communicative event. The "symbolic representations in rumor themes"[40] could have a long-lasting impact on general discourses and contexts. We can even see rumours as a kind of amalgam of information, knowledge, fiction, and unconfirmed but crucial storytelling that eventually changed hands between both sides. Like the pardon-tales tellers in sixteenth-century France, so marvellously described by Natalie Zemon Davis,[41] Cold War go-betweens were story-crafters and truth-tellers at the same time.

The prominent example of Polish defector Józef Światło's revelations shows the extent to which rumour and gossip infiltrated both the information channels of Western intelligence agencies and embassies as well as the Polish Communist Party in the 1950s. Światło was the former deputy director of Department X of the Polish Ministry of Public Security (MPS) (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, MBP) and one of the most trusted officials of the Polish Secret Police (UB). After his defection to West Berlin in 1953, he revealed to the CIA and RFE the criminal methods used in UB interrogations and show trials, information about the UB apparatus for systematic blackmailing against Communist Party members, the UB's network of unofficial informers as well as the inner corruption of the Polish Party and its absolute dependency on Moscow.

Światło was officially interrogated by a commission of the American Congress in Washington. RFE employee Zbigniew Błażyński interviewed Światło in Washington in 1953 and tape-recorded the interrogations. This material was predominantly used in the RFE series "Za Kulisami Bezpieki i Partii" ("Inside Story of Bezpieka and the Party"), broadcast in Poland in 1954. According to Paweł Machcewicz, Światło's revelations triggered crucial feedback-loops: "Hundreds of thousands of people listened to these programs, and the office of the minister of public security kept a special bulletin to record the reactions of both the public and the ministry's own staff."[42] Polish secret agents and ministry functionaries listened to the revelations in the probability and uncertainty of hearing their names and crimes broadcast to the entire Polish population.

The revelations had clear repercussions within the UB system. As Molly Pucci has argued, Światło's defection plunged the UB into a state of shock and alarm: "In December 1953, the PZPR created a commission to analyse Światło and his work

39 Ibid., 502 (emphasis in original).

40 Ralph L. Rosnow, Psychology of Rumor Reconsidered, in: Psychological Bulletin 87/3 (1980), 578–591, 582.

41 Natalie Zemon Davis, Fiction in the Archives. Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France, Stanford 1990.

42 Paweł Machcewicz, Poland's War on Radio Free Europe, 1950–1989. Stanford 2014, 62.

in the MBP. Criticisms and self-criticisms followed one after the other to determine who was responsible."[43] Similarly, Andrzej Paczkowski concludes that RFE broadcasts were "like a bomb going off. In a few weeks the MBP was restructured and superseded by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MSW) along with a separate Committee for Public Security (KBP)."[44] A large number of former UB officials were dismissed, prison conditions began to improve, and Władysław Gomułka, who in 1956 became the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, was finally released from prison.

What was intriguing was not only the direct and rapid impact on the conditions in Poland but also the great interest shown by third parties who, like the British Embassy, hoped to obtain copies of the confidential interrogation reports drawn up by the US authorities. In an internal exchange, a functionary at the British Embassy in Warsaw wrote to his British counterpart at the Embassy in Washington:

> "I have no report on the information provided by Światło. The American Embassy also gave only press reports. This is awkward, because our colleagues pass on to us interesting, but perhaps distorted or exaggerated, statements, which derive mainly from their Polish acquaintances and servants who have, as you may imagine, followed the radio reports […]. We do not know how much of this is to believe. I hope therefore that those concerned in this […] will bear in mind that we do need to know not only that an interesting Pole has defected, but also what he has said. […] At the moment, for example, we are slightly embarrassed not to know what truth there is in local gossip, which attributes to Światło's remarks about Bierut's utter subservience to the Russians, which are not mentioned at all in 'The Times'."[45]

That facts were quickly embedded in local narratives and outpaced by local gossip is one interesting aspect. The other is that this time the gossip was actually more accurate than the reports in *The Times*.

According to RFE, the factuality and truthfulness of Światło's revelations and confessions were contested and ultimately dismissed by the Polish official press as the words of an "agent-prowokator"[46] and a "Judasz"[47] of the Polish People's Repub-

43 Molly Pucci, Security Empire. The Secret Police in Communist Eastern Europe, New Haven 2020, 193.

44 Andrzej Paczkowski, Poland, the 'Enemy Nation', in: Stéphane Courtois et al. (eds.), The Black Book of Communism. Crimes, Terror, Repression, Cambridge/London 1999, 363–393, 383.

45 Northern (N): Poland (NP). Reports of Statements Made by Jozef Swiatlo, Former Official in Ministry of Security Granted Asylum in the US, 1954, Code NP file 1594, http://www.coldwareasterneurope.com/Content/cwee.fo371/111605/001 (20 June 2021).

46 "They are so much afraid of truth", RFE Programme Title: Inside Story of Bezpieka and the Party No. 89, 5 March 1955. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest, HU OSA 300–50–6, Box 2: RFE Interviews with Jozef Swiatlo, 1954.

47 Ibid.

lic, who, according to the Polish newspaper *Życie Warszawskie*, invented rumours designed solely to distract ordinary people and uttered nothing more than a fabulous chain of slander and nonsense.[48] Was Światło a "Judasz"? This question was posed in one of the RFE series by the narrator himself. He concluded that if Światło was a "Judasz", it would mean that he had been the most trusted man, who had been given the most secret missions, and who had finally betrayed the regime by revealing its secrets.[49]

To be sure, Światło betrayed his Polish compatriots as much as he later betrayed the Polish communist elite, portraying himself as a "very decent man"[50] in comparison to the deeds of that very elite. Światło' relationship of loyalty and betrayal to the elite, however, was paradoxical and perverse. He was in fact both "friend and enemy, closest confidant and most dangerous antagonist".[51] He not only knew the gossip surrounding Polish party leaders but also their most intimate acts and love affairs, which were used as discriminating evidence by political opponents. RFE, for instance, revealed that, according to Światło, Bolesław Bierut, the leader of the Polish People's Republic from 1947 until 1956, had had a very close enemy in Jakub Berman: "Światło told how, on Bierut's instructions, he collected compromising material for Berman's file, of which Berman did not know, just as Bierut did not know that Berman was collecting material incriminating Bierut."[52] Światło was the intermediary and confidant of both, a go-between who knew everything about both sides. His inside knowledge, ranging from their political manoeuvrings to their sexual lives, also stemmed from the ambiguous trust placed in him.

As a result, the information exchange and the act of treason can be analysed as events in the particular context of allegiance, enmity, and intimacy. The traitor can be the other side of the betrayer-betrayed dualism, usually involving an "'interested third party'"[53] as the instigator or profiteer of treason. But the traitor can also emerge as a third-party herself, as a go-between trying to profit from the political system of treason. That is why, to quote Tobias Kelly and Sharika Thirnagama, the "guilt or innocence of traitors is […] never clear-cut […]. Treachery is reproduced in the 'grey zones' of political life."[54] The figure of the traitor is an "emblem of society that

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 "They are so much afraid of truth", 5 March 1955.
51 Eva Horn, The Secret War. Treason, Espionage and Modern Fiction, Evanston 2013, 34.
52 "Gossip No 78. Homo Homini Lupus", Radio Free Europe, Munich–Germany, Polish Desk, 31 October 1954. HU OSA 300–50–6, Box 2: RFE Interviews with Jozef Swiatło. 1954.
53 Horn, Secret War, 2013, 30.
54 Tobias Kelly/Sharika Thirnagama, Traitors. Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building, Philadelphia 2010, 1.

observes its inner mechanisms – its circulation of knowledge"[55] and becomes the medium of this knowledge that can never be fully trusted.

Finally, the dynamic of betrayal and secrecy reproduced suspicion and the need for fictional elements that invaded the world of Cold War intelligence. The latter remained a realm of doubt, as one of the responses from the British Embassy in Washington to the colleagues in Warsaw suggests:

> "The C.I.A. tell me that they have also been rather dubious about some of the things Światło had told them. He has clearly not made a very good impression here in Washington. Even so, there is evidence that some of his statements about the position in Poland have been given more weight in official circles than the nature of the source perhaps justifies."[56]

Whether the accounts of defectors can be trusted has already been discussed in relation to Soviet cases.[57] In the case of Światło, RFE was certainly among those who gave his account an extraordinary, and maybe unjustifiably, amount of credit. Officially, RFE not only put its faith in Światło's words, but felt vindicated by the Polish regime's immediate reaction and the introduction of radical changes within the Ministry of Public Security: "We do not know any case in the propaganda campaign, when revelations of the opponent would be so completely and so precisely confirmed by the regime."[58]

The men between the mirrors: "in confidence just between you and me"

From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, RFE was under constant pressure to provide more policy-relevant research. According to the International Research Associates (IRA), RFE's research analysis needed to be "relevant and responsive to policy makers, informative to the public and useful to a variety of potential clients".[59] Similarly, in an informal evaluation and survey of opinion research at RFE in 1965, the authors recommended that RFE's opinion researchers focus more on "what RFE needs to know and less about new techniques of scaling".[60]

55 Horn, Secret War, 2013, 37.

56 Northern (N): Poland (NP). Reports of Statements Made by Jozef Swiatlo, http://www.coldwareasterneurope.com/Content/cwee.fo371/111605/001 (20 June 2021).

57 See Jay Bergman, The Memoirs of Soviet Defectors: Are They a Reliable Source about the Soviet Union?, in: Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes 31/1 (1989), 1–24.

58 "They are so much afraid of truth", 5 March 1955.

59 Statement of Purpose and Operation. International Research Associates, April 1972. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 61.

60 An Informal Survey of Opinion Research at Radio Free Europe prepared by Oliver Qayle and Company, March 1965, 9. HIA, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Corporate Records, box 61.

In particular, the evaluation report found that RFE's opinion research was met with indifference even by colleagues in Policy and Research: "Today the United States Government – the President, the State Department, C.I.A. – make opinion research one of their main intelligence tools. Our feeling is that the intelligence operation at RFE is making only partial use of the tool."[61] The new pressure for more effective and politically relevant research left its mark on RFE's operations. The accounts of defectors were, of course, even more valuable in this respect, but in this context another form of information gathering stands out from the typical interviews with travellers and refugees: the written memos by authors such as Jan Nowak-Jeziorański or Lesław Bodeński, who met with high-ranking Polish official in Warsaw and in New York respectively.

From May 1950 to July 1951, Bodeński was the first director of the RFE Polish Service in New York.[62] He later worked at the Free Europe Committee's Middle European Studies Centre, also based in New York, and then for several years as the Polish Service's correspondent to the UN.[63] In this capacity, he had several meetings with various official Polish journalists and Polish representatives to the UN during the 1960s and early 1970s. Of the latter, he wrote long memoranda which he sent to the Polish Desk and its Polish Research and Evaluation section in Munich and to the hands of Kazimierz Zamorski.

According to these memos, Bodeński met his informants during regular luncheons at the UN Delegates Dining Room. Although the names of all the informants were redacted, it is clear from Bodeński's descriptions that his interlocutors belonged to a very privileged group who worked in close contact with the highest echelons of the party and the political leadership. The four most important informants, with whom Bodeński met regularly, are referred to as informants No. 1., No. 2, No. 3, and No. 4. The memos are based on seemingly routine lobby talk about the mutual exchange of information, including the informants' personal opinions on most current political events. They deal with the negotiation of the Oder-Neisse line as Poland's legitimate border, the Polish December protests of 1970 sparked by a sudden increase in food prices – rumours of which were allegedly circulating as early as the beginning of November –, the subsequent end of Władysław Gomułka's period in office, and the assessment of the political agenda of his successor, Edward Gierek.[64]

61 Ibid., 7–8.

62 Lechosław Gawlikowski, Pracownicy Radia Wolna Europa. Biografie zwykłe i niezwykłe, Warszawa 2015, 124.

63 At this point, I would like to thank A. Ross Johnson – who died so unexpectedly in 2021 – for his help in retracing the positions Bodeński held within RFE and FEC.

64 Cf. Anita Prażmowska, Władysław Gomułka. A Biography, London/New York 2016.

The repeated meetings with each informant were of an informal, almost intimate nature. In November 1970, Bodeński described the conversation with informant No. 3 as "held in an atmosphere of friendliness and frankness. My informant answered my questions with sincerity and with the least amount of propagandizing."[65] The two were not complete strangers. They met and talked to each other regularly, sometimes on a daily basis. The informants, mostly press correspondents, press information officers of the Polish Permanent Mission, and members of the Polish Press Agency (PAP), spoke surprisingly freely, maybe too freely, which leaves room for interpretation as to the nature of the information they exchanged and the reasons for it.

While, for instance, informant No. 3 seemed to have been "highly regarded by the Polish Delegation as an outstanding correspondent and had direct daily access to both the Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Jedrychowski and his First Deputy Josef Winiewicz",[66] which enabled him to have "first hand political information"[67] to share, he insisted in his conversations with Bodeński that he was not a party member and considered himself as "a professional radio correspondent in the Western sense of this word".[68] Similarly, informant No. 4 appeared to become a "valuable source of political information to Bodeński".[69] No. 4 was not only the PAP editor of a special bulletin "with limited intra-party circulation containing all 'confidential' news not designed to be published in the press"[70] but also knew almost every member of the Politburo personally, such as Gierek, whom No. 4 clearly supported, Moczar, Cyrankiewicz, or Jaruzelski. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, as Bodeński noted, he was "willing to pursue a dialogue with me and in doing so he seems to be intelligent, un-dogmatic and cooperative".[71]

As an encrypted telex from RFE in Munich to its New York headquarters proves, Bodeński was given clear instructions on what type of questions to ask: "We would like to emphasise, however, that our experience with information reporting shows that general, so to speak 'across the board' questions for reporters are less useful than specific questions targeted at specific sources."[72] The revised 1968 question-

65 Memo by Lesław Bodeński from 9 November 1970, New York. HU OSA 300–50–11, Box 4: New York Bureau's slipped info items 1970–1973.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Memo by Lesław Bodeński from 2 January 1971, New York. HU OSA 300–50–11, Box 4: New York Bureau's slipped info items 1970–1973.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Telex from Munich 74 to New York: "To Schneider Info Kaufman. From Walter (Cook acting) Info Cook Collins Ross Johnson", 18 September 1968. Encrypted Telex Communication between Free Europe Committee New York and Radio Free Europe Munich, https://fec.osaarchivum.org/record/33093/#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=1683%2C1000%2C6147%2C3054 (21 May 2022).

naire included questions such as: "What is the appraisal of the political status and/or chances of Edward Gierek, Misczyslaw Moczar and Strzelecki? (Discuss in Detail)"[73] or "What are the moods (and attitudes to the present political trend) of the following social strata […]?".[74] This shows that the meetings at the UN were carefully prepared in advance.

RFE's greatest challenges was to build trust between interviewer and interviewee. However, the alleged trust between Bodeński and his informants was of particular nature. It entailed a form of exchange which, as outlined above, will be referred to here as *intimate epistemic economies*. At its core, intimate epistemic economies were knowledge negotiations in which each side sought to offer certain information that had to be reciprocated. Each side believed it would benefit from the exchange although both were ultimately monitored by their own secret services, to whom they were likely to report. In particular, the informants used these moments for matters of self-fashioning[75] or self-justification. Accompanied by expressions of personal honour, anger, and fear, and eventually knowing that somebody else might be listening, these meetings at the UN were used by some of the informants to negotiate their new social and political position at a time of political turmoil.[76]

Mutual trust was allegedly based on confirmations that the meetings were held, as informant No. 2 put it, "confidentially 'between you and me'"[77]. This mutual confirmation of trust, the openness, and the degree of privacy of these conversations are even more intriguing in light of the events that took place in Munich at the same time. On 26 November 1971, Bodeński reported:

> "Last week I had at the United Nations a luncheon with Informant No. 3 and discussed with him for over one hour the Polish situation. This was my first luncheon with him since May 25 when he brought to our meeting photostatic copies of some of my reports misappropriated by Mr. Czechowicz in Munich and threw them angrily on the table at the end of our luncheon. This time our conversation was quite courteous and relaxed as if absolutely nothing had happened. […] My informant seemed to take it for granted that I would continue to report on our conversations to RFE. He spoke rather freely as in the

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 See Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-fashioning. From More to Shakespeare, Chicago/London 1980.

76 For a similar negotiation of status through story-telling in nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire see Tolag Esmer, Confessions of an Ottoman "Irregular". Self-Representation and Ottoman Interpretive Communities in the Nineteenth Century, in: The Journal of Ottoman Studies XLIV 2014, 313–340.

77 Memo by Lesław Bodeński from 5 October 1970, New York. HU OSA 300–50–11, Box 4: New York Bureau's slipped info items 1970–1973.

past but tried to formulate carefully his views and opinions. He acted as if he were a spokesperson of Gierek and his team."[78]

While the regular luncheons allowed the secret services of both sides to peek behind the Iron Curtain, Andrzej Czechowicz, who had decided to collaborate with the Polish security service, worked undercover from April 1965 to March 1971 in the RFE Polish Research and Evaluation Section in Munich under the supervision of Zamorski.

There, the young Czechowicz benefited not only from his access to various RFE documents and reports – of which he regularly sent an impressive number of copies to the SB in Poland – but also from the gossip, rumours, and grievances between Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, the head of the Polish desk, and his team, whom he met in the cafeteria: "[T]here was also a real stock exchange of information going on. […] For me it was […] especially later, when the officer in charge taught me to pull people by the tongue, an extremely valuable source of information, hints and tips […]."[79] On his return to Poland, the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs launched a large-scale propaganda and pan-East European media campaign, using Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and East-German venues and denouncing RFE and its staff as CIA puppets.

Czechowicz was repeatedly invited to give interviews on *Radio Warsawa* and *Telewizja Polska*. The interviews were intended to convince the public of the successful mission of the heroic and highly patriotic spy, but also, and more importantly, of the real existence of the secret RFE reports – some of which were presented to the audience as authentic and tangible evidence of the CIA's and RFE's malicious intentions.[80] As his first publication *Siedem Trudnych Lat* (*Seven Difficult Years*),[81] which was unofficially co-authored by the Polish Secret Police, shows, one of the main interests of the Polish intelligence service was to find out how information circulated and was classified within RFE, the other was to determine "at least several dozen names of people in Poland […] who met with RFE employees during their travels abroad and talked about the situation in Poland".[82] A Polish foreign intelligence report from 1967, archived at the Institute of National Remembrance in

78 Ibid.

79 Andrzej Czechowicz, Straceniec. Czyli Przypadki Urodzonego w Niewłaściwym Czasie. Tom 1, Warszawa 2018, 193–194 [author's translation from Polish].

80 Telewizja Polska, 13.12.71. A transcript of a TV show with Andrzej Czechowicz for internal use by RFE. HU OSA 300–50–9, Box 9: Interviews with Czechowicz, Lach… Andrzej Czechowicz case, Polish and Western Press 1971–1975.

81 Andrzej Czechowicz, Siedem Trudnych Lat, Warszawa 1973.

82 Paweł Machcewicz, Poland's War on Radio Free Europe, 1950–1989, Stanford 2014, 130.

Warsaw, proves that they successfully achieved the first goal.[83] Bodeński's memos show that they also reached the second objective.

While Czechowicz was holding his press conferences in Eastern Europe, Bodeński's informants on the other side of the Atlantic at the UN in New York had to deal with reports about them issued by the Polish Secret Service. Unlike informant No. 3, informant No. 4 was, according to Bodeński's report, deeply concerned. Fearing personal consequences, he decided to end the luncheons abruptly in October 1971:

> "I am in great trouble […]. I have received a message from my head office in Warsaw about some reports in which I am referred to as 'Agent No 4' of Radio Free Europe. […] I stand on my legitimate right to talk at the United Nations with any of my fellow correspondents […]. I also insist on my freedom to talk freely what I think and make my own comments. […] But for the time being there are obstacles and therefore I apologize to fail you. […] I cannot be a Don Quixote and endanger myself in a foolhardily way."[84]

Bodeński realised that this informant knew too much about the Politburo, more than the other informants, which explained his sudden predicament. Bodeński concluded that this contradicted his own earlier assumption that his informant was a UB man.[85]

By December of that year, however, both had returned to their commonly accepted ritual – possibly, though all this remains speculation, with the approval of the Polish secret services, who remained the invisible ear in the discussions. Bodeński at least noted, as always from memory and after the event, that they had spoken "casually in a very friendly way about the latest events in the U.N. Security Council".[86]

Conclusion

The historian who follows the trickster and go-between through the labyrinths of files and archives might fall victim to their most prominent trick:

83 Document No. 9: 1967: Foreign Intelligence Report on RFE, translated by Irena Czernichowska for the edited volume: A. Ross Johnson/R. Eugene Parta (eds.), Cold War Broadcasting. Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A Collection of Studies and Documents, Budapest/New York 2010, 396–397.

84 Memo by Lesław Bodeński from 14 October 1971, New York. HU OSA 300–50–11, Box 4: New York Bureau's slipped info items 1970–1973.

85 Ibid.

86 Memo by Lesław Bodeński from 8 December 1971, New York. HU OSA 300–50–11, Box 4: New York Bureau's slipped info items 1970–1973.

> "In fact, the reason why we are so readily persuaded of the existence of the Trickster is that, while cunning enough, he refrains, for some reason best known to himself, from being *very* cunning. He leaves plenty of suggestive evidence concerning his doings lying about all over the place, perhaps so as to tease us."[87]

The once deceived – whether as historical actors or as historians – protect themselves from being deceived again by suspecting the existence of the trickster and by following the suggestive hints he seems to have left everywhere. In this way they may become trapped in the hall of mirrors that the act of deception erects, only to reproduce it by multiplying an initial misperception or misinterpretation. In the context of this article, this means that the lines of interpretation are not clear. They have been for RFE and are ultimately speculation for the historian.

Furthermore, the trickery and fallacy of deception, misinformation, and duplicity cast doubts on the possibility of solidifying scientific evidence. However, Jenny Rice argues that evidence can also be understood and traced as a process, rather than a thing to be found: "As Carlo Ginzburg writes, 'The word 'evidence' is a piece of historical evidence itself'. […] the Latin word evidentia […] indicated 'an ability to make a topic not only evident, but palpable.'"[88] This palpability is echoed by the Greek word *enargiea*, which Rice translates as "bringing before the eyes".[89] The world of surveillance and propaganda is perhaps more obsessed than any other with the visual and the Greek's interpretation of evidence. The TV shows in which Czechowicz participated show the extent to which truth and facts had to be 'brought before the eyes' and made psychically palpable. Similarly, Bodenski and his informants exchanged their mutual bond of trust in the intimacy of four eyes. No less significant was the airing of Światło's revelations: a process of technical mediation that gave dubious confessions the status of fact and evidence.

In the same vein, RFE's audiences and opinion surveys were scientific means of visualising a population on a grid or scale that could not be reached. Much as in seventeenth-century England, where knowledge of the natural world in a distant place was linked to the categories and trustworthiness of travellers, in terms of Cold War information exchange, the "condition of securing knowledge […] was [as well] the possession of knowledge about the nature of people."[90] Robert Boyle's system of credibility maxims, described by Steven Shapin, which favoured direct tes-

87 Ernest Gellner, The Psychoanalytical Movement. The Cunning of Unreason, Malden/Oxford/Berlin 1985, 142 (emphasis in original).

88 Jenny Rice, Awful Archives. Conspiracy Theory, Rhetoric, and Acts of Evidence, Ohio 2020, 7.

89 Ibid.

90 Steven Shapin, A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England, Chicago/London 1994, 258.

timony over hearsay, could have easily been applied to RFE's interview situations. Like Boyle, Bodenski interviewed his informants directly and looked "them in the eye when they [tell] their tales".[91]

Finally, what has been circulated among Cold War intelligence actors were stories, not facts and evidence. The staging of these stories by various institutions and media was the process by which they were granted factuality under Cold War truth regimes. Evidence and facts such as documents and reports appeared to be mere data: malleable, fluid, and adaptable to the dominant *political epistemologies*[92] on both sides. For the historian, however, this may also mean, as Nathalie Zemon Davis has argued, that the pure factuality and authenticity of such documents should not be the only concern of historical analysis. In her work, Davis does not seek to unveil the stories' "tissue of counter-truths"[93]; she regards the fictional aspects of these documents – their forming, shaping, and modelling of a narrative – as revealing and treacherous moments of what their authors believed to be a good story, namely a narrative that would speak in their own favour and grant them (back) their endangered or new social status. In this respect, the decisions of the go-betweens under analysis to share certain information were often guided by self-interest; their accounts were also means of self-fashioning.

91 Ibid., 251.

92 Cf. Friedrich Cain/Bernhard Kleeberg/Jan Surman, The Past and Present of Political Epistemologies of (Eastern) Europe, in: Hystorika. Studia Metodologiczne 49 (2019), 7–13.

93 Zemon Davis, Fiction, 1990, 3.