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COLD WAR (POST-)TRUTH REGIMES: RADIO FREE EUROPE BETWEEN "STATES OF AFFAIRS" AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF HOPE AND FEAR

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/// Introduction

Dealing with truth has always meant entering a highly controversial arena. At the same time, as Hannah Arendt notes in regard to the political scene, no one "has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one […] has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues" (Arendt 2000: 545). However, this does not mean that various political actors and systems throughout history have not deployed truth as a rhetorical, symbolic, or propagandistic tool of political tactics. In fact, neither blatant lies nor naked truths seem to govern past or present political truth scenes alone. The political, like the scientific field, is also subject to diverse moral economies and does not operate without reference to human passions and emotions (see Frevert: 2011).

Generally speaking, whether in politics or science, truth has never been either pure or innocent (see Daston 1995; Merton 1938; Proctor 1991; Shapin 2010) and this despite the fact that objectivity has often been regarded as a warrant of truth. Objectivity appears, therefore, to be one of the major achievements and promoters of modernity. The appeal to objectivity guarantees a certain strength and stability to truth claims; it asserts distance, critical reflection, and the purity of "naked" facts, which can be studied

or grasped in a quasi-sterile environment carefully isolated from a subjective, emotional, or even irrational impetus. Subjectivity, if it is linked to anything at all, tends to be linked to a moral, spiritual, or inner truth that belongs to the private life of the individual and only occasionally and under exceptional circumstances enters the scientific or even the political field.

However, as shall be shown, in line with a praxeological approach to truth (Kleeberg & Suter 2014), there has never been – at least in the realm of social reality – a clearly detectable line between subjective and allegedly objective truths. According to Bernhard Kleeberg, truth has to be studied as *situated* and "cannot be analysed along the common oppositions of knowledge and belief, universalism and particularism, science and politics, objectivity and subjectivity, but is closely linked to *subjectivity*" (Kleeberg 2019: 27).

The study of the interdependency of truth, power, and subjectivity was one of the main scholarly preoccupations of Michel Foucault (2000a, 2000b). For Foucault, power, being deeply rooted in pastoral power – the Catholic ritual of the confession and the inquisitorial interrogation – is absolutely not indifferent to subjective truth (see Foucault 1988, 2000b). On the contrary, power displays a strong will to truth (Foucault 1980b); it continuously and with scrupulous precision requires the individual to reveal his innermost thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, and subjects them to various regimes of truth.

These kinds of rituals and the coercion to truth-telling not only constitute a technology of the self (see Foucault 1988) and a political tactic but also a technique of identity politics (Kleeberg 2019: 26). When social groups invoke truth as a social operator for their correct interpretation of reality and their specific identity formation then "an explicit reference to truth or to the objectivity of knowledge often obscures that we are not dealing with epistemological arguments but rather with […] the moral economy of a *Gefühls-* and *Denkkollektiv*, which Lorraine Daston (1995) has described" (ibid.: 27).

This article focuses on the Cold War as an era in which the organised and institutionalised employment of truth as a political weapon was paramount. It will also try to shed light on various truth situations or truth scenes (Kleeberg 2019) that were a constitutive element of everyday life under communism, on the resistance, and on Cold War truth regimes. The latter concern above all places, forms, rituals, and scenes of truth and knowledge or fact-making and the respective moral and social implications of these facts as agents of social, political, and epistemological change.

These chosen contexts will allow truth to be studied as multi-faceted and plural, including not only "hard facts," "undeniable certainties," and "naked truths," but also "'dirty' everyday truths" (Kleeberg 2019: 33) and the world of relativity made up of perceptions, emotions, narratives, metaphors, symbols, and belief systems. They will all be linked to one major institution: the American broadcaster Radio Free Europe.

In doing so, the article also follows Frieder Vogelmann's postulate for the future of critique in his recent article "Should Critique Be Tamed by Realism? A Defense of Radical Critiques of Reason":

> [W]e need to understand critique as a practice, free epistemology from the idea of sovereignty, and pluralize reason. The first step is to realize that critique doesn't [sic!] need a fixed standpoint. On the contrary, we can understand a successful critique to be one that moves us – that makes us change our standpoint. […] Only by clinging to a conception of critique that lays down the law by issuing timeless truths are we forced to think that critique requires a fixed standpoint. Yet there are alternatives. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault illustrate the notion of a critique that forces us to move, and that changes as it moves along […] (Vogelmann 2019: 12).

This article invites its readers to be "moved along," following the different standpoints that a "critique as practice," as well as "truth as practice," can take.

Accordingly, I argue that it is a plurality of vantage points that can broaden our understanding of truth and illuminate the dangers of post-truth discourses and politics. Hence, this article follows a suggestion made by Dominique Pestre, namely that we will never be in God's position, that there is no superior epistemological view, and that it is the "multiplicity of framing, scales, results and values that guarantees that we might understand anything worthy" (Pestre 2012: 435). In addition, in regard to the work of Radio Free Europe, its listeners and messengers, of particular importance is the quest or at least the tangible tension that draws the attention to a problem already investigated by Thomas Nagel in *The View from Nowhere*: "[H]ow to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included?" (Nagel 1986: 3).

Finally, in what follows, the different vantage points taken on matters and questions of truth in the context of the Cold War will draw upon this somewhat uneasy relationship between internal and external standpoints, subjectivity and objectivity, as well as on individual judgements and actions, and social and political interpretations of the world.

/// Radio Free Europe: Where "Truth" Gets Together

The place where "truth gets together" that I want to introduce here is Radio Free Europe (RFE), a radio station that was situated in Munich and worked under a US umbrella from the early 1950s onwards in order to "communicate anticommunist messages" (Johnson 2010: 7) to the people who lived behind the Iron Curtain. Together with Radio Liberty (RL) the station was in various regards a very particular one: "These were American-sponsored but distinctively […] national radio stations – 'surrogate' in the sense that their broadcasting identified fully with the interests, culture, history, and religion of the nations under Soviet and Soviet-inspired rule" (ibid.).

Hence, any sign of particular Americanism was carefully avoided. As the director Robert Long stressed in *The New Yorker* in 1950, RFE did not want to sound like Americans broadcasting to Eastern Europeans (Johnson 2010: 39). On the contrary, nationals were meant to speak to nationals. In this way, as a mass medium that was able to constitute an "imagined political community" (see Anderson 2006), RFE's broadcasting acquired its specific power and importance for Polish civil society. Marcin Król writes in this respect that "[l]istening to Radio Free Europe created for a vast number of Poles the perhaps artificial but nevertheless essential sense that one was living in a larger company" (Król 2001: 431). By transmitting stories of Polish dissidents and by reading Polish underground literature, RFE had the power to evoke national sentiments of belonging to a common interest group and the consciousness of the necessity and possibility for reform.

Nevertheless, RFE's mission and purpose were not at all innocent. According to Simo Mikkonen, we have to imagine the US authorities at the end of the Second World War not as powerful players and strategists in the wake of the new *Pax Americana* but as actors deprived of reliable access to valuable information, that is, as hesitant and almost ignorant actors lacking any certainty about the intentions and (expansion) plans of the Soviets:

> Immediately after World War II, U.S. authorities found themselves with very little information about conditions in the USSR. The United States, therefore, tried to reach across the Iron Curtain to increase its knowledge while avoiding direct military conflict and making an effort to cultivate indirect methods of getting at its adversary. […] It was in this context that Radio Free Europe in 1950 and Radio Liberation in 1953 (later known as Radio Liberty [RL]) came into existence (Mikkonen 2010: 772).

In the Cold War information war, radio was, as Linda Risso claims, "definitely one of the weapons of choice" (2013: 145). However, the creation of RFE was embedded in a more carefully placed public discourse of peaceful cultural diplomacy and the promotion of freedom and democracy, while the US State Department and CIA regarded it as a means of "psychological warfare." For the CIA in particular, RFE became a crucial supplier of information: "It seems that to the CIA, RFE may have been a more important provider of information about events in the Soviet bloc than the CIA's other sources. According to A. Ross Johnson, 'The CIA early became a consumer of rather than a source for this information'" (Machcewicz 2014: 37).

For these reasons, RFE created a "vast information gathering system" (Johnson 2010: 43), which included a research department, a monitoring section of communist broadcasts, and a collection of Eastern European publications. It conducted interviews with travellers and refugees. Above all, as Friederike Kind-Kovács notes, a particular kind of literature that became known as *samizdat* (self-published) and *tamizdat* (published-over-there) delivered crucial background information from inside the Soviet bloc and was archived by RFE on a large scale:

> [The station's] main driving force was their special awareness of the literary underground press's great potential for the rapprochement between the intellectual communities in a divided Europe. […] The oral transmission of the texts […] reached the listening people in a far more immediate way […] (Kind-Kovács 2013: 72–79).

RFE is of particular interest in regard to the truth regimes of the Cold War because it occupies a highly ambivalent and controversial position: on the one hand, it has been regarded as a propaganda tool and as an agent of the CIA's "psychological warfare" missions; on the other hand,

its strong and mutually beneficial connection with the Eastern European underground networks cannot be denied either. Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel, for instance, have always stressed RFE's importance for their struggles and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the *International Herald Tribune* Havel once said: "If my fellow citizens knew me before I became president, they did so because of these stations" (Nelson 1997: 188). The example of RFE's truth practices shows that truth could take different forms in different truth situations.

Moreover, the reason why RFE is so interesting for the study of truth and truth regimes is because it was a place where various actors – Western and Eastern as well as human and non-human – came together. The reason for this was, on the one hand, RFE's alignment with other anti-communist institutions, such as the Free Europe Committee (FEC), and with the American government's plans to employ Eastern and Central European exiles and refugees for "keeping Stalin at bay" and, on the other hand, the employment of highly sophisticated collections of modern technology and of cataloguing systems designed to order and provide better legibility and retrievability of the huge amounts of underground pamphlets, files, and journals that RFE used in order to verify facts from falsities and faked news.

However, radio stations gather and produce not only facts and objectivity. Generally, it much more often happens that radio reporters, speakers, and interviewers – in trying to catch the distinct atmosphere of an event and report on the spot, and in seeking proximity to their audience – sacrifice the critical distance that would allow them to remain "totally objective," even though to be objective was RFE's self-proclaimed goal, which it tried to attain despite the clear obstacles it faced in reaching the place of events as well its audience and informants. At the same time, RFE's entanglement with American anti-communist institutions, the CIA, and the US government made its impartiality doubtful. RFE operated in a biased manner, relying quite often on its pre-existing Western attitudes; it was there to free the Eastern European and East-Central European "captives" and "slaves" of communism from their chains of innocence by appealing to their "hearts and minds."

RFE has to be analysed as an epistemic machinery that simultaneously engaged in broadcasting "truth" to the common people behind the Iron Curtain and in producing knowledge for the scholarly and political public interested in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the "truth" it appealed to did have various layers: it was the truth of a propaganda battle between

two superpowers; it was the truth of the Eastern and Central European dissidents who aspired "to live within the truth"; it was the truth of RFE's listeners who used their own agency to contextualise and interpret the station's messages in regard to their own everyday life experiences; it was the truth of the empirical events RFE's broadcasts referred to and the truth of certain selection and interpretation processes conducted by RFE's staff.

In taking a closer look at RFE (Figs. 1–5) we find first of all no bare words, no "naked truths," but masses of material, catalogues, and the newest technology; we see human actors carefully engaged in epistemic practices. István Rév, however, notes in regard to the same collection of pictures:

> The aura of professional care, devotion, the ambition of accuracy […] shine[s] through […] these calculated photographs. […] The photos and their captions, like documentary images in a mirror, were meant to persuade the US administration – the financial backer of the radio operations – the public, and the broadcasters themselves that they took the ethos of factual, reliable, but neither neutral nor disinterested or impartial journalism seriously. The photographs served to demonstrate that despite the physical distance, the broadcasters were up-to-date on local events […] (Rév 2019: 146).

Rév puts particular emphasis on the fact that the US administration and the US Information Agency thought it crucial to "create 'the *atmosphere of objectivity*'" (ibid.: 147).

The US Information Agency defined objective reporting not as neutral or disinterested but urged the radios, RFE and RL, to "sound objective" (ibid.), that is, "to tell the truth, providing dispassionate, 'genuine information'" (Georgiev 2019: 173) and to be convincing without engaging in "naked, shameless propaganda" (Rév 2019: 148) as the Soviets did. This meant at the same time that politicians as well as many Western journalists, as Rév argues, "seemed to be convinced that history (and truth) was on the American side […] Objectivity thus understood was not a 'View-from-Nowhere', but a View-from-the-West" (ibid.: 147).

In accord with Stephan Shapin and Adi Ophir (Ophir & Shapin 1991: 3–21), RFE was also, of course, a distinct place of knowledge-making involving different human and non-human agents and communities in practices and communication chains of "knowledge[-making] in transit" (Secord 2004: 654–672). James Secord analyses knowledge in transit as

Figure 1. Radio Free Europe workflow: the station of Czech monitoring. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/12 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 2. Radio Free Europe workflow: press clipping archives. The thematically structured press clipping archives consisted of, *inter alia*, Subject Files and Biographical Files. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/81 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 3. Radio Free Europe workflow: man operating the transmission control equipment. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/5 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 4. Radio Free Europe workflow: senior Czechoslovak analyst Hanus Hajek examines biographical card files. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/84 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 5. Radio Free Europe workflow: central news room. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/35 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

a form of "communicative action" giving "interaction between agents a central role in epistemology" (ibid.: 661). This allows him to refocus questions of trust, testimony, and communitarian objectivity on "questions of how knowledge travels, to whom it is available, and how agreement is achieved" (ibid).

For RFE especially, the question of trust in its messages and messengers was of paramount importance. RFE was supposed to sound not only objective but trustworthy as well. As journalists could not cross the allegedly hermetically sealed Iron Curtain themselves, RFE mostly relied on the accounts of travellers, refugees, exiles, and dissidents. Trying to ensure the trustworthiness of the information obtained as well as of the informants at the Polish unit of RFE, for instance, "the reports were carefully checked for accuracy and plausibility. Only those reports which passed the various filtering screening systems were recommended as subjects for producing radio programs."[1]

Nevertheless, there was neither total reliability nor total certainty but, at best, probabilities and degrees of certainty and reliability: sources were evaluated as "believed to be reliable," "usually reliable," or "fairly reliable."[2] The evaluation of an anonymised account about Warsaw–Bonn relations edited on 8 July 1970 gives an excellent example of the kind of epistemic uncertainty in which RFE operated:

> This important report originates from a serious and usually reliable source, who is well versed in the field of Polish politics […] and has access to the circle of the initiated. […] The second part of the report deals with source's personal contacts with some leading politicians in the FRG. For obvious reasons, this part of the report is almost impossible to check and we can only again stress that, on the whole, source is a reliable and trustworthy person and that nothing that he reports here strikes us as improbable.[3]

[1] See the content description of the information items and correspondence from RFE field offices of the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives' online catalogue: https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/jmLJ972r#context, accessed 17.07.2020.

[2] See the Information Items and Correspondence from RFE Field Offices. HU OSA 300-50-11, box 3. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest.

[3] "Background Information on Warsaw-Berlin Relations," 8 July 1970. HU OSA 300-50-11, box 3. RFE Polish Unit Information Items and Correspondence from RFE Field Offices: Berlin News Bureau Slipped Information Items. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest.

The allegedly reliable source of Polish origin[4] was regarded as trustworthy not only by his informants but also by his interlocutors, whom he met sometimes with his wife or alone "na piwko" (for a beer) in a restaurant. He passed on confidential information that he had access to as a trusted member of informal political circles, including from his private *tête-à-tête* meetings with well-known German politicians like Franz Joseph Strauß, Gustav Heinemann, Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg (senior), or Helmut Kohl.

Similarly, Pawel Machcewicz states that, in the post-Stalinist period, many prominent party members and even secret police collaborators were among RFE's sources; the network of contacts between the communist elite and anti-communist émigrés was highly complex and double-edged: "Outside Poland, the regime's most trusted journalists could talk openly with people from the 'hostile' radio station, which they fought fiercely in their writings back home" (Machcewicz 2014: 190). Well-protected and trusted members of the communist elite quite often remained unpunished even in case of their detection. In the context of the Andrzej Czechowicz spying affair,[5] for instance, RFE informants, who met with RFE's Polish Service correspondent Lesław Bodeński at informal luncheons at the United Nations in New York, were well aware of the fact that their conversations were surveilled by the Security Services: "[H]e [informant no. 3] brought to our meeting photostatic copies of some of my reports misappropriated by Mr. Czechowicz in Munich," Bodeński states in one of his reports, "and threw them angrily on the table at the end of the luncheon."[6] Despite this hall of mirrors of the allegedly omniscient Secret Services and the issued disciplinary warnings, the meetings at the UN continued to take place. Another informant of Bodeński justified his actions: "My superiors

[4] The source may have been Marian Podkowiński, a Polish journalist, publicist, and writer, whose circle of close friends included the most important people in West Germany and who was, *inter alia*, a correspondent of *Trybuna Ludu* in Berlin and Bonn. According to the diplomat and ambassador Janusz Roszkowski (2009), he did not stay long with *Trybuna Ludu* because of the fact that he did not avoid contacts with his fellow journalists from RFE. However, according to Pawel Machcewicz, Podkowiński was also a secret police collaborator: "[H]e also reported on his contacts with people who were close to RFE. It is not out of question that they treated their conversations with him, a player of the party establishment, as a source of useful information about the situation with the PUWP […]. Rumors about Podkowiński's contacts with RFE may have been an internal party intrigue in 1971" (Machcewicz 2014: 191–192).

[5] Andrzej Czechowicz was talked into collaboration by the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs as a new agent in RFE's Polish Service in the 1960s, where he photographed thousands of pages of internal documents (see Machcewicz 2014).

[6] Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest: RFE Polish Unit Information Items and Correspondence with RFE Field Offices, HU OSA 300-50-11, box 4, RFE Memo by Lesław Bodeński, New York, 26 November 1971.

investigated me on the basis of the reports stolen by that man. […] I am entitled to my opinions […]. I have known most intimate State secrets and was never guilty of any indiscretion."[7] Internal party intrigues, struggles for power, and personal political convictions were among the multiple reasons for this kind of collaboration and information exchange.

Moreover, some of the traveller accounts and above all the life stories of refugees and defectors were often biased and contradictory. Nevertheless, the émigrés were "considered to qualify as ideal mediators" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 464) and typical representatives. What RFE did not officially take into consideration was the fact that the émigrés themselves often had trouble making sense of their own Cold War experiences and quite often relied on Western interpretations of the events happening in their countries – interpretations they had received while listening to Western radios like RFE (see Feinberg 2017).

The mission the US administration had given RFE, that is, to discern truth from lies and objectively and dispassionately to assess the situation behind the Iron Curtain, was not one RFE or its messengers could perform flawlessly. On the contrary, the accounts were highly subjective and, as Melissa Feinberg has thoroughly explained, on both sides "government officials and their populations used the concept of 'truth' (or 'lies') to indicate their conviction in their own rightness and to give their view of the world the weight of a fact or moral absolute" (Feinberg 2017: xi). As Feinberg stresses, there was little room for "alternative points of view" (ibid.) and "truth was determined more by ideology than by any kind of objective corroboration of fact" (ibid.).

In the three following parts of this article, I want to take a closer look at the various further reasons why truth remained not easily discernible and why an objective as well as subjective judgement of reality constituted a challenge for Eastern as well as Western actors like RFE. These three parts are at the same time three further vantage points that illustrate how "various scenarios, participating actors, communicative practices, and horizons of theoretical reflection repeatedly produce *their own* forms of what is claimed as truth or what is subject to critique" (Kleeberg 2019: 32).

[7] Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest: RFE Polish Unit Information Items and Correspondence with RFE Field Offices, HU OSA 300-50-11, box 4, RFE Memo by Leslaw Bodeński, New York, 20 March 1972.

/// Move 1: Between Telling Lies and States of Affairs

There is a relation between the state of affairs and truth. At least – and this is what our common sense would say – there should be one in the world of social reality. There should be a certain dependency of what we claim to be true and what is happening out there in the world. If this relationship cannot be established – if a statement, written or oral, that does not merely deal with philosophical or metaphysical questions, misses any link to a current or past state – then we say the statement is false or we call it a lie.

However, what authoritarian and totalitarian regimes clearly teach us – as perhaps no other mode of government – is that we are able as human beings and as societies to construct whole political, social, and cultural systems and structures around what we call the state of affairs: the Cold War propagandists' ambition in particular was not depicting the world but "changing it, even with words. The conviction was that reporting what was not true (yet) might become true and real as a consequence of reporting, thus motivating and mobilizing listeners" (Rév 2019: 149).

In a similar line, Arendt noted in her elaborations on *Truth and Politics* that the liar in particular "takes advantage of the undeniable affinity of our capacity for action, for changing reality, with this mysterious faculty of ours that enables us to *say*, 'The sun is shining', when it is raining cats and dogs" (Arendt 2000: 563). For Arendt, the liar is the actor on the political scene par excellence saying what is not so "because he wants things to be different from what they are – that is, he wants to change the world" (ibid.). The liar can change the context, the whole factual structure.

Communism, for instance, was that successful in its construction of a new world fulfilling the promises of happiness and equality through various forms of mendacity during the Cold War that it succeeded in inverting the relationship between statements and the state of affairs. The former had to verify or perform the latter and consequently statements had to constitute the state of affairs. This inverted logic created certain states that were clearly detached from experienced reality but remained nevertheless very real as a pragmatic part of social experience. People acted as if things were as they were said to be. "Truth," that is, the truth, as a final outcome or assertion, was done, lived, or enacted despite the deviant states – with the obvious paradoxes of lived Cold War experiences that this entailed.

This phenomenon is not easy to explain and this is the point where the work of critique normally comes into play. Marxist scholars would have spoken of a "false consciousness" of the world proletariat; the Frankfurt

School would have analysed the commodity fetishism of capitalist societies. Both would have postulated that the actors do not know what they are doing and that it would be the role of a third party to "enlighten" them.

In contrast, I argue that during the Cold War this was less and less the case. People living under the premises of "real socialism" were not necessarily blinded; they were not cut off from their immediate reality and knew what was happening, at least in terms of the manifest experience of shortages around them and the empty and worn-out Five-Year Plan slogans and Party promises. However, truth indeed was used "as a *second-order concept* that relates to the observation and judgement of knowledge" (Kleeberg 2019: 26). These judgements were never value-free, objective, or neutral; they depended on the information available to the actors, who were making sense of their own world. Despite the relative individual agency of such reflections on one's own social reality, there wasn't always consent about it, while at the same time it was the highest concern of the Party not to make this schizophrenic world, which it was constantly producing, collapse. The parallel realities and worlds that co-existed in this way were not just antagonistic but irreconcilable. The ordinary people and sometimes even the political elite could not always invoke truth in order to strengthen their "own decision-making capabilities" (Kleeberg 2019: 31); their agency was limited by the "quasiautomatic [sic!] operations of a system that produce[d] lies for everyone, including its producers" (Kołakowski 2013: 60).

Arendt has described this process in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she claims that the result was "people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction […] and the distinction between true and false […] no longer exist[ed]" (Arendt 1958: 474). The Polish philosopher and historian of ideas Leszek Kołakowski makes a similar statement in his book *Freedom, Fame, Lying and Betrayal*, published in 1999:

> Lies in politics are a frequent occurrence, but in democratic countries freedom of speech and criticism protects us from some of their harmful effects; the distinction between truth and falsehood remains intact. […] The same cannot be said of totalitarian countries; […] There the distinction between true and the politically correct was entirely blurred. As a result, people half came to believe "politically correct" slogans which they had been mouthing, from sheer fear, for so long, and even political leaders sometimes fell victim of their own lies. […] This was not merely an instance

> of lying: it was an attempt to eradicate altogether the very concept of truth in the normal sense of the word (Kołakowski 1999: 30).

Eradicating this "normal" concept of truth became possible because people were forced to take for granted what was said. It was the strategic employment of violence – the paramount threat and terror of the Stalinist era – that enabled the Party to eradicate the concept of truth, to blur its boundaries dangerously with its antonym: "All these lies […] harbour an element of violence; […] although only totalitarian governments have consciously adopted lying as a first step to murder" (Arendt 2000: 565).

For the same reason, individual agency was curtailed; individuals were separated, even atomised; movement was often, as in the case of Hungary or the GDR, painfully restricted and surveyed. The state's aim was to force its population to ignore what they knew or might get to know and even what they experienced every day. As a result, what and whom the people knew was what and whom was in their immediate surroundings. In order to better understand this mechanism – without using the label "ideology" right from the start – it is worthwhile to go back to one of the most prominent thinkers of power and truth mentioned above, namely, Michel Foucault.

According to Foucault, these "pathological forms of power" – he specifically speaks of fascism and Stalinism – were not quite original despite their historical uniqueness: "They used and extended mechanisms already present in most other societies. More than that: in spite of their own internal madness, they used, to a large extent, the ideas and the devices of our political rationality" (Foucault 2000a: 328). Foucault identifies discourse – its control and distribution – as a main mechanism of political power. For Foucault the problem consisted in "seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses that, in themselves, are neither true nor false" (Foucault 2000b: 119).

Moreover, Foucault points out that our society is subjected to the production of truth, and thus he links truth to his concept of power. *Effects of truth* are produced because power persistently incites us to produce them: "[W]e *must* speak truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit" (Foucault 1980a: 93). Speaking truth is hence related to certain "acts of truth" (Foucault 1994: 125), which reveal the subject's inner thoughts and state of mind and which constitute political techniques that

enable a certain elite to govern others. These are the ideas and devices of our political rationality that were also incorporated in what seemed to be the internal madness of totalitarian regimes, where they were used to their absolute extremes.

However, power not only incites but also curtails the production of truth. In an interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino in June 1976, Foucault defined the role of truth in power relations as follows: "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true […]" (Foucault 2000b: 131). Each society establishes mechanisms to distinguish true and false statements by empowering a small group of individuals "who are charged with saying what counts as true" (ibid.) and who sanction those who claim the opposite.

Taking Foucault's reflections into account, the quasi-automatic operations of a totalitarian system that produced lies for everyone and that blurred the boundary between true and false could not function without a strong reference to the subject, the self, and its subjectivity. The system of lies was paradoxically at the same time a machine that incited people to speak truth. This way it could eliminate political opponents by "objectively" judging and sentencing them to death. The show trials inverted the relation between the state of affairs and statements as well.

/// Move 2: Revealing and Clothing the Naked Truth

In his essay "The Power of the Powerless," Havel gives a strong example of the most apparent consequences of the average man's revolt against the well-established rituals of communist power. Venturing into the realms of totalitarianism, Havel describes the system's core mechanisms, namely ideology, obedience, and a power structure that runs through the entire society. Embedded in this kind of ideological architecture, the citizens submit to everyday life routines that continuously perpetuate the basic automatisms of the totalitarian regime.

This is the context in which Havel places the parable of the greengrocer in one of his central essays. Havel's greengrocer, as part of his daily routine – automatically and almost *en passant* – places a sign in front of his shop window that reads "Workers of the world, unite!" He performs this repetitive action every day without any inner or moral involvement. "It is [just] one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life 'in harmony with society'" (Havel 2018: 359). However, this seem-

ingly insignificant action, this detail, contains all the logic of what Foucault has called the "microphysics of power." This form of power incites and subjects the individual to acts and rituals of truth, demanding the revelation and confession of her or his inner thought. The greengrocer's everyday routine constitutes, as Havel says, the "blind automatism" which "drives the whole system" (Havel 2018: 361), but it also performed what Foucault named "effects of truth."

Havel's parable offers the opportunity to analyse the consequences of an attempt to speak the truth about the real or bare foundation of a given state of affairs:

> Let us imagine that one day something in our greengrocer snaps, […]. He stops voting for elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. […] In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. […] His revolt is an attempt *to live within the truth*. [But] the bill is not long in coming (Havel 1996 [1979]: 171).

The greengrocer might be dismissed from his post or his wages might be reduced. Most probably he will be persecuted by society. He will be punished for his rebellion because he has not just revolted as a unique and insignificant individual but he has done something incomprehensible to his environment and hence something incredibly dangerous: "By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game" (ibid.). His speech act has dismantled the structure of power by showing it to be mere illusion and that its foundation is that simple in essence. Havel states it even more provocatively:

> He has broken through the facade of the system and exposed the real, base foundation of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: By this action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain (Havel 1996 [1979]: 172).

By stating openly what manifested itself so undeniably, the greengrocer stopped the system from being universally applicable. It is fundamental for the "truth games" (Rux 1988 [1982]: 15) of communist power that their

rules remain unchallenged by anyone. Soviet society had to be homogenized politically, economically, and socially.

Speaking the truth or "living in the truth" – an appeal that was made by many dissidents in Eastern-bloc countries – was in reality a much more difficult task. At the same time, Arendt, for instance, regards the mere telling of facts as not leading to any kind of political action:

> Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, because it has little indeed to contribute to that change of the world […] Only where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle, […] can truthfulness as such, unsupported as such by the distorting forces of power and interest, become a political actor of order. Where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truthteller […] has begun to act (Arendt 2000: 564).

Moreover, the core of the parable deals with personal and collective responsibility and hence with individual and collective forms of action.

Like Havel, Arendt defines human freedom as "the appearance in the world of the moral person or personality who embodies the law" (Arendt 2003: xxii). However, for Arendt, thinking and acting have to be treated in an essentially different manner. While thinking is intrinsically linked to the individual, acting is only possible in reference to and in the company of others: "Thinking is self-reflective, whereas an agent can act only with others than himself […]" (Arendt 2003: xxi). Hence, *doing truth* (see Kleeberg & Suter 2014: 211–226) could have been possible only in and with the collective. It had to be a collective action that constituted the power of the powerless.

It appears that doing truth is related to the way we consider agency. Doing truth necessitates more actors then just human beings. Bruno Latour could as well have stated these doubts about the power of "pure words" or "pure discourse." While in Havel's parable of the greengrocer the facts can still be exposed as naked, Latour concludes at the end of *We Have Never Been Modern* that "[t]here are no more naked truths, but there are no more naked citizens, either. The mediators have space to themselves […]" (Latour 1993b: 149). In his article "Clothing the Naked Truth," Latour concludes that "[l]onging for the naked truth is like longing for the purely spiritual: they are both dangerously close to nothingness. I prefer truth warmly clothed, incarnated and strong" (Latour 1989: 115).

Latour would refrain from speaking of "naked truths" or of "naked emperors" but would focus on mediations, delegations, and translations; he would clothe the "naked truth" again because for Latour a sentence "does not hold together because it is true, but *because it holds together* we say it is 'true'" (ibid.: 101). Latour draws attention to all the allies which have to be recruited, mobilised, and mustered in order for "a statement to hold true, that is to resist all attempts at breaking or bending it […]" (ibid.: 102). Therefore, Latour focuses on material forms of discourses as resources that "have constantly to be brought in and mobilized in order for an account to resist" (Latour 1989: 114). In order for a fact to become incarnated and strong, it needs the ability to cause other entities – human and non-human allies, whole *dispositifs*, such as laboratories or factories, instruments, pronunciations and accusations – to mobilise, gather around it, and make it durable, solid, and robust: in short, to make it a harder fact.

However, all the apparatuses involved, the imbroglios of human and non-human actors and the whole cascades of ever-more simplified inscriptions, are gathered and multiplied because of a core characteristic of modern societies: "They simply put faith in superimposed traces of various quality, opposing some to others, retracing the steps of those who are dubious" (Latour 1986: 27). Latour puts emphasis on the *faithful* records – like underground literature and the networks of *samizdat*, *tamizdat* and *magnizdat* circulation during the Cold War – as having the ability to convince people and make them believe. These written traces are powerful as well because they can all be compiled in one place, where the balance of power may eventually be tipped. In this way, according to Latour, they allow for the study and control of barely visible facts to be explored "through the 'clothed' eye of inscription devices" (Latour 1986: 17).

As I have argued in section 2 of this article, without intending to overestimate the power of Radio Free Europe, RFE was exactly such a place where human and non-human actors worked together, where huge amounts of data, files, recordings, papers, and messages from dissidents and exiles from the "Other" Europe were gathered, selected, verified, catalogued, and stored, and where the newest technology and knowledge were co-responsible for producing what RFE regarded as the truth about the communists. As the reports it issued and used for its own information purposes "accumulated, they were transformed into evidence about everyday life behind the Iron Curtain, helping to provide a scientific basis for Western knowledge about totalitarian societies" (Feinberg 2017: 90).

At the same time, as Feinberg has shown as well, the process of verifying various information sources, especially interviews conducted with refugees and exiles, did not always result in a totally objective picture of reality: "[The] task of sorting facts from fictions, or truth from lies, was actually quite complicated" (ibid.: 89). On the one hand, the underground literature that RFE gathered was characterised by a "crucial epistemic instability of works whose truth […] value could not be taken for granted" (Komaromi 2015: 139). On the other hand, "claims about emotions were hard to verify. Because they came from personal experience, claims about emotions like fear were generally taken at face value" (Feinberg 2017: 90). Feinberg notes that negative emotions and respective stories about life behind the Iron Curtain were often taken as a confirmation for pre-existing Western attitudes, which RFE ultimately broadcast as the truth about Eastern and East-Central Europe.

To conclude, invoking the truth involved a considerable risk for the common man in the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, the mere telling of truth, the saying what is – that the emperor is naked because this is the actual state of affairs – was only a necessary but not sufficient condition to give the needed strength and power to the powerless. That the truth-teller could make any significant impact was conditioned, on the one hand, as Arendt noted, upon the very fact of the all-pervasiveness of lies, and on the other, as Latour would argue, upon a collective that was able to mobilise huge networks of material and human allies and to bring these actors and traces together in one place. The case of RFE, however, shows that the task of truth-telling is also distorted in being handed over to an institution with its own mission and political purpose.

/// Move 3: Radio Free Europe and the Epistemology of Hope and Fear

Focusing again on RFE and everyday life under communism, I aim to analyse whether the line between facts and emotions or subjectivity and objectivity reveals how much the Cold War itself manifested patterns of what we call today the post-truth era. Can an anthropological approach help to uncover the ordinariness and emotional as well as symbolic side of these "big words that make us all afraid, [but that] take a homely form in such homely contexts" (Geertz 1973: 21) as the radio listening environment? What can emotions like trust and distrust or hope and fear tell us about Cold War epistemology? The experience of living during the Cold

War, especially in the Stalinist period, can exemplify to what extent small "facts speak to large issues [and] winks to epistemology" (Geertz 1973: 23), that is, to what extent issues of common sense, everyday matters, and alleged banalities influenced Cold War truth regimes. In this sense, I aim to further elaborate on the question that Feinberg asked in *The Curtain of Lies*: "How did the existence of something as subjective as fear take on the status of fact […]?" (Feinberg 2017: 89).

An important concept that helps illuminate this epistemological problematic is the notion of common sense. According to Clifford Geertz, "When we say that someone shows common sense we mean to suggest more than that he is just using his eyes and ears, but is, as we say, keeping them open, using them judiciously, intelligently, perceptively" (Geertz 1983: 76). For Geertz, common sense remains still vaguely defined and urges the scholar to redraw the line "between mere matter-of-fact apprehension of reality […] and down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom" (Geertz 1983: 75), which gets blurred for those who refer to their common sense. More generally, common sense is an organised body of considered thought as well as a cultural system that "rests on the same basis that any other such system rests: the conviction by those whose possession it is of its value and validity" (Geertz 1983: 76).

Furthermore, one has to understand the way emotions like trust, fear, and hope operate and guide or influence common judgements of available knowledge and experiences of everyday life. In his book *Trust: A History*, Geoffrey Hosking draws attention to the significant contribution of anthropology to the study of trust (Hosking 2014). For Hosking the decisive clue that anthropologists gave to historians in particular consists in the anthropologists' long-established analytical perspective on human relations as being deeply rooted in symbolic systems and everyday life rituals of exchange: "[T]hey [the symbols] generate both meaning and relationship. They join together signifiers from disparate spheres of knowledge so that they gain new meaning by their combination" (Hosking 2014). In addition, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, to whom Hosking refers, regards the human world as much more ruled by our senses and emotions than by objective reasoning: "[M]an does not live in a world of hard facts, […]. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusions, in his fantasies and dreams" (Cassirer 1944: 43).

To an extent that must not be ignored, emotions such as fear and hope or trust and distrust were key to everyday life experiences of the Cold War. They were part of social reality, structuring and changing it in the same

way as truth and lies did. Especially during the great purges of Stalinism, life was penetrated by all-pervasive fears, suspicion and distrust. One might think, for instance, of the first chapter of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, which caries the title "Arrest." At its very beginning, the narrator asks: "How do people get to this clandestine Archipelago?" (Solzhenitsyn 1974: 3). The reader realises that with a question about the roads that take the suspects to the Gulag, she or he has entered the realms of a world that is neither totally imaginary nor real, starting with the arrest. "But there is [sic!] where the *Gulag* country begins," writes Solzhenitsyn, "right next to us, two yards away from us" (ibid.: 4). The Gulag begins with the neighbouring apartment, the well-known stranger living next door and the symbolic universe of the arrest.

The arrested will remain in his disorientation and incomprehension for a longer time, while the arrest itself will turn into a warning symbol and shape the memory of the witnesses:

> And everything which is by now comprised in the traditional, even literary, image of an arrest will pile up and take shape, not in your own disordered memory, but in what your family and your neighbors in your apartment remember: The sharp nighttime ring or the rude knock at the door. The insolent entrance of the unwiped jackboots of the unsleeping State Security operatives. The frightened and cowed civilian witness at their backs (Solzhenitsyn 1974: 4).

The experience of the arrest culminates in a cultural frame of meanings, in which sounds like knocks on the door, sharp rings, and even the smallest gestures and hardly perceivable patterns of behaviour became socially established codes and were interpreted in light of a language of fear and distrust that was brought into being by the Party-state.

As in Solzhenitsyn's account, Feinberg has shown that what Hungarian people were haunted by most under Stalinism was "bell fear" and "uniform fear": "The bell fear […] was the terror people felt whenever the doorbell rang […]. Uniforms according to the sources symbolized state power and conjured images of house searches, arrest and torture" (Feinberg 2017: 88). The source that was interviewed by RFE in 1951 saw it as "completely rational for Hungarians to be living in this state of extreme fear" (ibid.: 88), in which *everybody knew* what was hiding behind the symbols of fear and in which *everybody knew* how to adapt their behaviour in accordance with these

warning signs. Fear, hope, trust, and distrust dictated a worldview – not without reason.

In the words of Geertz, the knowledge everybody had about the arrests and the terror under Stalinism, which was established not only through facts but through rumours, fantasies, and emotions as well, entered into the systems of common sense. However, common sense can at the same time appear to be strongly dependent on a steadfast conviction in its validity and hence bears the danger of dogmatism. When a certain worldview is once incorporated into a system of common sense, contradictions to this worldview will rather be excluded from it. It is a frame that tends to guide the observer of an outer reality towards congruencies rather than towards the discrepancies of its presumptions: "As frame of thought […] common sense is as totalizing as any other: no religion is more dogmatic, no science more ambitious, no philosophy more general. […] it pretends to reach past illusions to truth, to, as we say, things as they are" (Geertz 1983: 84). To speak with Stuart Hall, it is precisely common sense's '"naturalness', its refusal to be made to examine the premises on which it is founded, its resistance to change or correction [….] [that] makes common sense […] 'spontaneous', ideological and *unconscious*" (Hall 2004: 67).

This corresponds as well with the study of interviews conducted with Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak refugees in 1951–1952 by Siegfried Kracauer and Paul L. Berkman, who state the following:

> Instead of perceiving all the basic differences in the two streams of communication [Western and Eastern] the Satellite people tend to concentrate on selected factual similarities and parallelisms. Instead of accepting the content of one and rejecting the other [of Western and communist propaganda], they assimilated elements of both, transforming them into mutually-supporting evidence of what they want to believe (Kracauer & Berkman 1956: 169).

Pre-established belief systems of "colloquial wisdom," that is, of common sense, that were grounded in fear and hope, guided the people's unconscious selective reading and listening behaviour.

Looking at RFE's and RL's broadcasting, this meant above all two things: on the one hand, the "freedom and truth broadcasts" confirmed the common-sense knowledge that terror and surveillance were omnipresent and the Soviet regime capable of any kind of cruelty (see Feinberg 2017). On the other hand, as the American broadcasters "had succeeded in

framing their wartime international broadcasting as a beacon of hope and truth" (Spohrer 2013: 35), those who hoped for liberation read "weighty meanings of impending war and liberation" (Kracauer & Berkman 1956: 170) into the broadcasts and "interpreted in the light of their hopes even the most unlikely kinds of Western information" (ibid.: 174).

For RFE this selective process had tremendous consequences. Its sources were also interviews with travellers and refugees from the Eastern-bloc countries, which RFE conducted from the very beginning (see Figs. 6–7). RFE and RL developed special questionnaires which were sent from the bench offices to the Research and Analysis Department in Munich:

> The Research Department kept an archive of information coming from all sources. […] After just the first few years, this archive, often called simply the card catalogue, had become one of the most important collections in the West on the countries behind the Iron Curtain (Machcewicz 2014: 29).

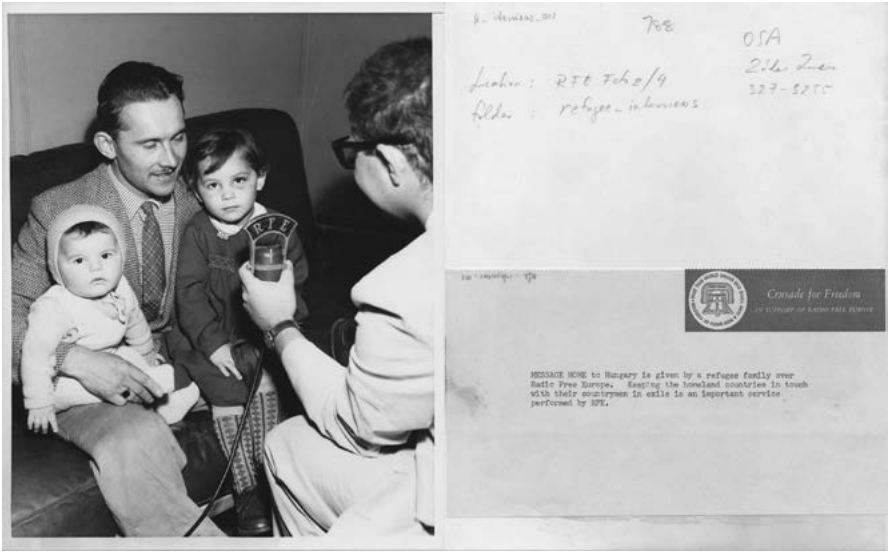

Figure 6. Radio Free Europe interview: message home to Hungary is given by a refugee family over Radio Free Europe. HU OSA 300-1-8:6/1 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 7. Radio Free Europe interview. HU OSA 300-1-8:6/2 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

These interviews and the information retrieved from them were very questionable in terms of epistemic reliability. The sources were not only politically biased but "the radios played an active role in shaping and framing the interviews" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 468). In order to win the trust of the refugees during the interview, these truth scenes, as the pictures show, were established in a particular way: "The interviewers should create an informal relaxed atmosphere, sit with the refugee in a café and chat informally for an hour over a cup of coffee or a glass of beer before asking careful and diplomatic questions" (ibid.: 467). The priority was given to a highly subjective relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee(s);

truth-telling – or rather the act of speaking one's political judgements – still remained linked to the self and to subjectivity; emotions of fear and trust, and psychological as well as physical tensions and relaxations, played a major role.

At RL even, under the guidance of Max Ralis, the director of the Audience Research Department (ARD), in order not to arouse suspicion the interviews were only "conducted informally and orally without recording equipment or note taking" (Mikkonen 2010: 777). Although this was not always the case at RFE, Kind-Kovács draws attention to the fact that the interviews "were taken to portray 'average opinion' and serve as 'typical representatives' of certain national or social groups. Hence, individual life stories, extracted from the interviews, were scrutinized to uncover collective experiences and general attitudes" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 465). As a result, what was *only* common sense was transformed into proven facts and thus it aligned with as well as fostered – in the form of feedback loops and through the affirmative radio broadcast – both interpretative frames in East and West.

This does not mean that RFE or RL did not engage in any fact-checking. On the contrary, the whole information apparatus, including the monitoring section, the research department, the library, and the card catalogue, were supposed to facilitate fact-checking processes:

> While information gathering was one of the radio's most central undertakings, also much effort was invested into fact-checking, as the radio cared particularly about the veracity, reliability and truthfulness of the information they received. Much background research was conducted to scrutinize the contents and experiences presented in the interviews. As RFE considered "information" not as "merely journalism" but as "primarily political analytical work", the proper handling of information through EERA [East European Research and Analysis Department] was considered key in creating a bridge "between research and analysis, policy, implementation of policy and programming" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 468).

The "information items,"[8] which resulted from the interviews and were used for broadcast and background reports, were all classified according to

[8] In his review of Feinberg's book *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* A. Ross Johnson puts, however, emphasis on the fact that the information items were only one and rather a non-scientific source of information: "Even in the early 1950s, the interviews were

an evaluation scheme and annotated with comments that judged their veracity as "rumours," "not confirmed by other sources," "generally known," or "corresponding with other information and reports obtained."[9]

Moreover, the interviewing techniques also contained methods for the evaluation of the subjective accounts of travellers and refugees, which did not much differ from the methods applied by Kracauer and Berkman: "By focusing on the inconsistencies of the answers, on the slips of the tongue, by reading between the lines of the interviews, the analysis attempted to outweigh the inherent biases of the interviewees" (Rév 2010: 241). While Geertz remains very sincere in regard to such techniques and claims that cultural analysis "is guessing at meanings, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses" (Geertz 1973: 20), the RFE interviewers were certainly less frank about their method. Although, as Kind-Kovács notes, RFE constantly reminded its interviewers to mistrust their informants and to formulate judgements "of the interviewees' mental abilities, educational background and ability to speak freely, which introduced every interview report" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 466), the statements of the interviewees could not always be double-checked or confirmed by previously obtained and carefully catalogued sources at RFE. As a result, the information stored and processed by RFE was often of a contradictory nature.

Finally, the frame that RFE and RL used to select information and to judge its content was not objective but favoured those stories that corresponded to their anti-communist idea of a Soviet threat. They, too, transformed the gathered information into mutually supporting evidence. As Kracauer and Berkman note, although the two ideological frames of East and West were designed to confront and annihilate each other, "the two streams actually tend[ed] to reinforce each other" (Kracauer & Berkman 1956: 169). Emotions such as hope and fear were among the driving forces that shaped the interpretative frames and selective patterns on both sides.

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one source of information about eastern Europe for RFE, along with comprehensive monitoring of communist media, information from western journalists, travelers and diplomats, and accounts of high-level defectors such as Józef Światło. The Items (as documented in archived organizational histories) were produced by émigré information staff who were not 'analysts' or 'researchers' […] but whose job was to provide information to émigré broadcasters and American policy officials who made their own judgments. While Feinberg's critique of some first-order 'evaluation' comments is apt, those were not the views of RFE broadcasters or policy officials. My own judgment (as an RFE research analyst in the late 1960s) of the Items as a source of information was that some were golden, some interesting, and many useless" (Johnson 2018: 1071–1072).

[9] See the Radio Free Europe Information Items Collection at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA): https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/?f[digital_collection][]=RFE%20Information%20Items, accessed 17.07.2020.

RFE not only engaged in epistemic politics in broadcasting truth beyond the Iron Curtain, it "stimulate[d] fantasy, it fe[d] hope" (Rév 2010: 240).

/// Conclusion

RFE and the historical context allow truth to be studied as a practice, a process, and a product. In all the examples by which I have tried to analyse how truth operates and is operated upon, truth appears to be highly linked to everyday life experiences, attitudes, opinions, and behaviours. The different truth situations or truth scenes studied here never refer to an absolute or scientifically objective truth. They were an intrinsic part of social reality and in this sense very dynamic, instable, or uncertain and linked to human experiences and judgements, including thoughts as well as emotions. The truth of social reality hence can and does change over time; it is relativistic in the sense that the actors, too, adapt to a steadily changing world. RFE was a place where stability and certainty were established not only through qualitative assessments of alleged facts, but through the purely quantitative accumulation of materials and mutually supporting evidence. Individual accounts were often taken for proofs about the nature of more general occurrences, even despite the lack of evidence or the lack of confirmed information.

What this tells us in relation to the so-called post-truth era is that truth encompasses subjectivity and emotions as part of human reality, and thus our insistence on a certain kind of objectivity that admits neither subjectivity nor emotions to be valid grounds for truth is misguided. The same is true for our understanding of rationality, which is often defined by leaving out a part of our senses, ignoring that whatever was a rational action in a certain period of time might have appeared totally irrational in another. Placing the sign "Workers of the world, unite!" in the shop window was a rational action through and through, but it did not reveal any truth.

At the same time, "truth" would not need to be "revealed" in a Heideggerian sense if we were not social beings who live in highly complex societies or, as Latour defines it, in technologised and complicated ones. In an unmediated world of face-to-face interaction, doing truth or speaking truth might have much more immediate effect. Havel's greengrocer would have the power of the powerless just by speaking what he clearly sees and knows. In a small circle of actors, breaking the rules of a certain truth game could indeed have the potential to cause it to change or collapse. Nevertheless, we are generally dealing with a different sort of cir-

cumstances. The world in which we live and the world of the Cold War are and were highly complicated systems. For almost everything that happens in this world there is the need for mediation, intermediaries, technology, or media, which are not only passive means of our actions, but, indeed, actors that are co-responsible for enacting history, truth, and hence the world as it is or was.

Furthermore, while the Western and institutionalised quest for objectivity strongly reduced the plurality of viewpoints, flattened or denied ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions, and prioritised a solely American view of truth as well as history, it was not truth but subjectivity that returned through the backdoor of epistemology. Although, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison point out in their monumental study of history and the nature of objectivity, "[o]bjectivity was summoned into existence to negate subjectivity" (Rév 2019: 145), the self and the subject remained the source of truth, whether as an active shaper of reality, as in the parable of the greengrocer, or as an interpreter and judge of social reality.

As analysed, this plurality of subjective viewpoints and interpretations, which were also governed by emotions and resulted from the difficulty of living in a world of subverted facts and the omnipresence of lies, was subjected to the inflexible interpretative frames available to RFE as a place where truth was gathered and hence where power over truth was accumulated. The atmosphere of objectivity that RFE was called upon to create was preceded by an informal atmosphere of proximity, staged and calculated friendship, alleged trustworthiness and subjectivity. RFE's reporting was not subjective per se – although neither was it purely objective (see Rév 2019) – but the truth scenes and situations it created for its interviewees, as well as for its listeners, who received RFE's messages in the homely contexts of the radio listening environment, incited the articulation and involvement of subjectivity.

Furthermore, as Rév argues, for journalism, "the antithesis of being objective is obviously not the cultivation of the self or being subjective. […] The problem with reporting is not that their views are highly subjective, but that the stories […] can be fictitious, untrue, fake, calculated, sensational, overdramatized or blatantly false" (Rév 2019: 145). The interview methods that RFE employed give rise to doubts about the staff's ability to sort lies from facts. To a certain extent this did not even appear to be RFE's major goal: broadcasting the truth meant broadcasting the American truth, which did not necessarily allow the needed neutrality for an

objective judgement of individual accounts and life stories. The Western frame dominated.

Finally, the world of the Cold War, like the world of Cold War politics, was not, according to Arendt, a world of truth but a world of lies. In contrast to the traditional political lie that was employed to safeguard state secrets and intentions, the modern political lie, said Arendt, deals "with things that are not secrets at all but known to practically everybody […] [and] meant to deceive literally everybody" (Arendt 2000: 564–565). Once lies become hard reality and part of commonly shared perceptions, to tell the truth means to take huge risks and even becomes a political action. For Arendt, it is only in this sense that we *do* truth and *speak* truth. Only when political lies become the world of everybody, can it happen that hard facts will not necessarily change hard reality any longer. This is the danger that our post-truth era shares with the Cold War experience.

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/// Abstract

In accord with recent scholarly appeals, this article advocates a certain intellectual tolerance and modesty in regard to the juxtaposition of conflicting or even supposedly rival approaches to questions of epistemology and truth. By rejecting the idea of a fixed epistemological standpoint and by moving the reader along a multiplicity of frames and truth situations, the author argues that if the post-truth problematic can teach us anything new about truth, it is the necessity to (re-)acknowledge that there is no omniscient position for the scholar and that none of our scholarly approaches taken separately enable us to grasp the totality. Hence, truth is investigated in

this article as a variable shaping and being shaped by a highly dynamic and uncertain social reality – a reality that is neither constituted of "hard facts" nor of a "soft relativism" alone. From a consideration of the selected Cold War context and the laboratory-like setting of the American broadcaster Radio Free Europe, it can be concluded that a new media-archaeology of the fact requires not only a revision of our understanding of truth but of agency, rationality, and objectivity as well.

Keywords:
Cold War, common sense, Radio Free Europe, state of affairs, truth regimes

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