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III. BEI DER REDAKTION EINGEGANGENE BÜCHER

Western Esotericism and Parapsychology in Socialist Poland: Between Censorship and the Official Culture¹

Introduction

When we think of occult topics² in contemporary Polish literature, Olga Tokarczuk is probably the first author to come to mind, in particular her novel *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* [*Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*] (2009), because it contains astrological themes. Two points are worth mentioning in this regard. First, Tokarczuk consulted the parts on astrology with Leszek Weres (b. 1945), who began his activity in this field in the 1970s and became an outstanding figure in the booming esoteric scene of postsocialist Poland. Secondly, the Polish cultural environment in the 1970 and 1980s was deeply marked by a complex web of paranormal beliefs and practices interacting with specific elements of esoteric currents that had an impact on various areas of life. The year 1989 and the 1990s witnessed an explosion of New Age thought, but the ground for this change had been laid during the previous two decades.

The esoteric knowledge community in Poland before 1939 was diverse and vibrant, but it was considerably impaired due to World War Two and the first years of the communist regime.³ Yet, local groups with an interest in occultism and psychic phenomena (re-) emerged as early as in the late 1940s and, despite being subject to

¹ This research was supported by the National Science Center (Poland) with the grant “In Search of Another Knowledge: Western Esotericism in Communist Poland,” DEC-2020/37/B/HS2/00894.

² Although there are essential differences between esoteric currents and parapsychology, I use the terms occult, esoteric, and paranormal synonymously and explain the reasons for this in the next section.

³ This is evidenced by Sołowianiuk 2014; Weaver 2015; Rzeczycka, Trzcińska 2019a; 2019b, and others.

repressive actions by the state, particularly during the Stalin period, sought possibilities to operate in the public sphere and thus expand their social and cultural relevance.

My approach centers on the press and the book market under socialism, considering the key ideological, social, and cultural frames in which texts concerning occult and paranormal beliefs and practices were embedded. I offer an opportunity to think about how the official approach to these matters changed within more than forty years by looking first at the censors' critical opinions and then at the authors and works that reached a wider audience. This perspective can contribute to bringing out the peculiarities of Polish censorship and gaining a broader insight into what issues were tolerated at what time in official cultural life and in what ways occult actors appeared in the public sphere in order to win at least limited approval from the authorities. I also offer an account of how the various individuals and groups that dealt with such diverse themes as spiritualism, anthroposophy, astrology, dowsing, and extrasensory perception made efforts to pursue their interests despite the ideological constraints they faced. In doing so, I intend to complicate the Polish master narrative that stresses the conflict between the materialist worldview imposed by the communist authorities and traditional Polish Catholic religiosity, as well as the struggle between the regime on the one hand, and political dissent supported by the Church on the other.

The first part of the article provides an introduction to the issues of the occult and the paranormal in socialist Poland. The second part outlines the specificity of censoring practices, while the third examines the early efforts to integrate occult ideas and practices into the official culture and to legitimize them through the connection with scholarly associations. The last two sections demonstrate that from the early 1970s onward, more and more books, press articles, and magazines dealing with parapsychology and esoteric currents were released with the approval of officials. The paper is based on an inquiry into more than one hundred and fifty folders from the extensive collection of censorship documents stored in the Archive of New Acts in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych, AAN),⁴ and an examination of books and periodicals issued by state-con-

⁴ The censorship collection (GUKPPIW, 2/1102/0) comprises more than seven thousand folders of varying content and volume.

trolled publishers and, to some extent, by various associations. Juxtaposing these three different sources seems necessary because the censorship collection has a great many gaps. As regards the press, I primarily refer to the weeklies *Przekrój* [Cross-section], *Literatura, Kultura*, as well as *Polityka*.⁵ The first one was an entertainment magazine that reached a circulation of five hundred thousand, and up to seven hundred thousand copies and had several million readers, whereas the other periodicals were printed in smaller numbers.⁶ I also make use of documents from the Archive of the Institute for National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, AIPN) in Warsaw.

The Occult, the Paranormal, and State Socialism

I see paranormal beliefs and esoteric currents as the pursuit of another (“real,” “hidden”) knowledge, which goes beyond the socialist-materialist understanding of the world and human beings. It is difficult to give a definitive answer to the question of whether the fascination of tens of thousands of people with dowsing, astrology, yoga, or mental suggestion resulted from their disillusionment with, and dislike of, state socialism (Fürst, McLellan 2017; Żak-Bucholc 2007, 37–40), or whether it was an articulation of a quest for a new subjectivity and self-improvement which manifests itself in different political regimes and cultures, as Joachim Häberlen (2017) argues. Undoubtedly, however, publications on the aforementioned themes, along with a variety of related contexts, played a meaningful part in the dissemination of cultural and scientific theories, new spiritualities, and in the emergence of a new awareness of the human-society-environment relation.

Before embarking upon an analysis of these topics in the Polish press and book market, it seems necessary to elucidate the link between Western esotericism and parapsychology. I can think of two arguments in favor of bringing these categories together. First,

⁵ The findings are based on an analysis of a dozen periodicals, including youth and regional magazines.

⁶ In the mid-1970s, the circulation of the weekly *Literatura* was between 27,000 and 46,000 copies, *Kultura* was distributed in about 100,000 copies, and *Polityka* in 250,000 up to 300,000 copies (*Biuletyn nakładów prasy [...] roku 1973*: 12, 14; *Biuletyn nakładów prasy [...] roku 1978*: 24–25).

they existed simultaneously and conditioned each other throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; in fact, what happened was “the naturalization of the supernatural,” as Egil Asprem (2018, 289) succinctly put it. Admittedly, it was scientific attempts to explain paranormal and supernatural phenomena that enjoyed significant success in Eastern Europe during the Cold War (Musiał, Wolniewicz 1975; Lux, Paletschek 2016; Sziede, Zander 2017). But it should be underscored that the ideas and practices of the occult milieu in the post-war epoch were heterogenous and evolved over time, although at first glance this is not apparent as they were grouped first under the capacious banner of “radiesthesia” and then “psychotronics.”⁷

Among the prominent members of this community were individuals such as Lech Emfazy Stefański (1928–2010), a writer and theater director, who was initially preoccupied with hypnosis and extrasensory perception, then with the occult, and finally founded a neo-pagan group.⁸ Some key actors in this milieu such as Roman Bugaj explored paranormal abilities and the history of alchemy, while others such as Lucyna Winnicka were involved in popularizing psychic surgery and Rebirthing-Breathwork. And still others such as Jerzy Prokopiuk became recognized experts in gnosis and anthroposophy. Obviously, these actors were in more or less close contact with each other. The striking diversity of topics covered in Polish paranormal magazines and publications issued by, for instance, the “Różdżkarz” Service and Production Center (Centrala Usługowo-Wytwórcza “Różdżkarz”) also provides illuminating evidence for a wide understanding of themes often put under the headings “occult,” “paranormal,” and “esoteric.”

⁷ The term “psychotronics” was coined in 1967 by the Czech psychologist Zdeněk Rejda. Its scope of interest was supposed to be much broader than that of parapsychology. The research methods drew mainly on the findings of physics, yet some authors underlined that psychotronics did not reject the knowledge of magicians and psychics *a priori* (Stefański, Komar 1983, 58–60).

⁸ Probably for these reasons, Zbigniew Łagosz (2019) calls Stefański an “esotericist.” Stefański was a youth friend of Miron Białoszewski, co-founder of the Theater on Tarczyńska Street, and a writer and poet. He also published some articles on the arts in the 1950s. Stefański studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, before completing a master’s degree in theater directing in 1967.

Secondly, a number of scholars have offered definitions of Western esotericism⁹ and depicted its intertwinements with parapsychology,¹⁰ but it was an “empirical” definition proposed by Hartmut Zinser that proved particularly useful for advancing my insights into the intersections of psychic explorations, occult practices, and religion-like beliefs in postwar Poland. According to Zinser, the category of esotericism embraces all those writings and practices that (1) contradict the teachings of established churches, (2) are not compatible with the findings and methods of science, and therefore are presented as “higher knowledge,” and (3) can “simply be sold as esoteric in the esoteric market.”¹¹ As I will demonstrate, in the early 1970s there emerged such a market where astrology, dowsing, and reincarnation stood side by side with telepathy, skin vision, yoga, and brain optimization, and were (inter)connected in various constellations.

Research on esoteric and paranormal issues in postwar Poland has been carried out mainly by sociologists of religion and cultural anthropologists. They have focused primarily on new religious movements and New Age thought after 1990 (Musiał 1997; Borowik, Doktor 2001; Hall 2007; Żak-Bucholc 2007; Karp 2008).¹² Relatively little attention has been paid to paranormal beliefs and practices in the socialist era (Bator 2005; Hall 2007, 112–121; Żak-Bucholc 2007, 37–64; Hall 2014; Żak-Bucholc 2014). A limited number of studies have addressed the hippie movements and the situation of

⁹ Among the most recognized definitions are: “a form of thought” (Faivre 1994), “higher knowledge” (Neugebauer-Wölk 1999), “rejected knowledge” (Hanegraaff 2012), and “discursive formation” (von Stuckrad 2010; Wissen, von Stuckrad 2016). Worth noting is also the concept of “non-hegemonic knowledge,” encompassing a variety of Western occult and parapsychological notions (Lux, Paletschek 2016).

¹⁰ See Hammer 2001; Partridge 2014; Lux, Paletschek 2016; Asprem 2018.

¹¹ „[...] all jene Schriften, Lehren und Praktiken [...], die 1. entweder, soweit es sich um Religiöses handelt, mit den erklärten Lehren der Kirchen in Widerspruch stehen, oder 2. soweit es sich als Wissen versteht, mit den Erkenntnissen und Methoden der Wissenschaft nicht zu vereinbaren sind und deshalb als ‚höheres Wissen‘ ausgegeben werden, oder 3. was auf dem Markt der Esoterik schlicht als esoterisch verkauft werden kann.“ (Zinser 2009, 7).

¹² Yet occult actors did not necessarily see themselves as religiously involved, as demonstrated in the studies conducted by Doktor, Kosela et al. (1984–1990).

Freemasonry (Tracz 2014; Krok 2015; Łagosz 2013). Another aspect that has been examined is the secret police's interest in some occult actors (Łagosz 2013; 2016; 2019). Thus, research efforts are less advanced than in the case of the Soviet Union (Menzel 2007; Menzel, Hagemester, Rosenthal 2012; Smolkin-Rothrock 2014) and East Germany (Schneider et al. 2016; Schneider 2016; Anton 2018).¹³ The niche nature of occult and parapsychological groups in postwar Poland, their diversity and their tangled interrelations are probably decisive reasons why this community is understudied. A notable exception to this is the artistic group Oneiron, active in Katowice from the mid-1960s to early 1970s, whose members were concerned with alchemy, astrology, anthroposophy, the tarot, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead (Zagrodzki, Ruksza 2004; Mraß 2005; Niesyto 2015). Yet, since their literary works were either published abroad, or distributed solely among friends and acquaintances, they are not examined here.

Censorship's Inconsistency

The practice of censorship, as Derek Jones (2001, ix) aptly pointed out, "has scarcely been a monopoly of governments." Esoteric currents and paranormal beliefs provide a good example of this rule, as they have been suppressed over history by the church and various political regimes. However, they have also devised strategies to cope with restrictions and claimed the right to access the official cultural system. Despite a growing body of scholarship on the Main Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Public Performances (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, GUKPPiW) and regional censorship offices, the focus of interest remains on measures to combat anti-communist and anti-Soviet arguments, undermine the Catholic Church's influence, and counter criticism of the situation under socialism. On the one hand, this is understandable insofar as those topics were a core concern of the censorship. On the other hand, the less obvious forms of eschewing the socialist worldview remain underemphasized.

¹³ Recently, the role of the occult in communist Bulgaria has been examined (Ivanova 2017; Vitanova-Kerber 2021). Several other articles address yoga and parapsychology in the former Eastern bloc, yet they do not touch upon censoring practices or upon the publishing market.

The Main Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Public Performances was modeled on the Main Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Glavlit). It had a hierarchical structure and its practices reflected and reacted to sociopolitical changes that were taking place between 1945 and 1990.¹⁴ The authorities did not tolerate dissent from dialectical and historical materialism, in particular until 1955. However, recent research reveals that “the impact of the communist party and state on censors’ decisions was smaller than has generally been thought” (Nowak 2019, 111). One reason for this was that low-ranking petty officials could not make the final decision, and decisions taken at the regional level could then be appealed to a higher authority, sometimes resulting in ideological concessions (Nowak 2013). The interactions underlying a reconsideration and change of the initial decision are difficult to reconstruct as they were mostly played out informally. It can, however, be assumed that private contacts between the publishing company or particular authors and the censorship office in Warsaw or some ministry played an important part in this process.

The regime’s ambivalence toward occult and paranormal themes may be observed particularly in the mid- and late 1940s. As an illustration, I will provide reviews of two books whose fates turned out differently. My first example comes from the district censorship office in Bydgoszcz. The publishing house Księgarnia Popularna in Gliwice planned the second edition of *Wielki sennik egipsko-arabski* [*The Great Egyptian-Arab Dreambook*], with five thousand copies. On October 24, 1949 a female censor¹⁵ expressed her harsh criticism of that work:

This is a pile of nonsense for the gullible [...].

Księgarnia Popularna is only interested in reissuing the *Dreambook* because they hope to make good business out of it.

In my opinion, this kind of book ought not to be published; it is a waste of paper and we should not foster people’s naivety.¹⁶

¹⁴ See, for instance, Budrowska 2010; Gzella, Gzella 2013.

¹⁵ Her first name was most likely Irena, the surname is difficult to read.

¹⁶ „To stek bzdur dla naiwnych [...]. / Księgarnia Popularna zainteresowana jest w powtórny wydaniu *Sennika* jedynie z tego względu, że liczy na zrobienie dobrego interesu na tej książce. / Moim zdaniem nie należy wydawać tego rodzaju książki; szkoda papieru oraz nie należy popierać naiwności ludzkiej.” (AAN, 2/1102/0/5.1.2/2830, 222).

Her superior agreed with the negative decision. Similarly, a booklet submitted by the Polish Society for the Study of Rosicrucian Christianity was rejected in March 1949 by the censorship office in Warsaw. The booklet, titled *Gdzie są umarli* [*Where Are the Dead?*], was the second part of the Polish translation of *The Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures* (1939) by the theosophist, mystic, and astrologer Max Heindel. Following the structure of the original, a total of twenty booklets were planned, including volumes on dreaming and hypnosis, heavenly existence, healthy nutrition, inner seeing, angels, and the esoteric dimension of Golgotha. The censor Stefania Kalinowska argued:

The author attempts to prove by means of reason the existence of a “material spirit.” In order to do so, he refers to the latest discoveries in the field of natural sciences, particularly physics [...]; he arrives at idealism, which is one of the two latest philosophical currents of the capitalist world (the other strand being agnosticism) [...]. The author accuses those who do not believe in individual afterlife of stupidity and sophistry [...].

I consider the booklet harmful and propose to reject it, all the more so as the author announces further “reasonings” on the same subject.¹⁷

Probably much to Kalinowska’s surprise, three days later permission was granted to the publisher by her supervisor. The allotted amount of paper, however, was drastically reduced. So, on the one hand, the text was accepted for publication, but on the other hand, releasing it may have become unprofitable.

It seems that the reason for allowing some books or posters to be printed was recognition by the authorities that certain ideas and practices considered incompatible with the socialist worldview could not be eradicated immediately. This is well illustrated by a remark made in May 1945 by the censor Sabina Lewi, who expressed

¹⁷ „Autor usiłuje dowieść drogą rozumowania istnienia ‘materialnego ducha’. W tym celu wykorzystuje najnowsze odkrycia na polu nauk przyrodniczych, zwłaszcza fizyki [...]; dochodzi do idealizmu, który jest jednym z dwu najnowszych kierunków filozoficznych świata kapitalistycznego (drugi kier. agnostycyzm) [...]. Autor zarzuca nieuznającym indywidualnego życia pozagrobowego głupotę i mędrkowanie [...]. / Broszurę uważam za szkodliwą i stawiam wniosek o odrzucenie jej, tym bardziej, że autor zapowiada dalsze ‘wywody’ na ten sam temat.” (AAN, 2/1102/0/5.1.2/2830, 193–193v.).

her concern about posters advertising the services of a fortuneteller. “I allowed it because I thought that if I didn’t give permission, they would do it in secret,” she explained.¹⁸ What is also interesting is that the censorship list of October 1, 1951 mentioned only a few titles on spiritism and freemasonry.¹⁹ Given the plethora of esoteric periodicals and books released before 1939 and still available after the war, as well as the fact that this and the subsequent lists included even what would seem to be innocuous entertainment (e.g., romances by Helena Mniszkówna and Hedwig Courts-Mahler), one might think that the authorities treated occult issues with surprising leniency. However, the scarcity of these kinds of publications in the 1950s suggests that they were recognized as undesirable, and as such they were either not allowed to be printed—and internal censorship documents have not survived or I have not been able to find them—or authors and publishers abandoned their attempts to reach a wider audience.

Toward the Official Culture: Intermediaries and Legitimation by Science

The impact of Western culture was becoming more and more apparent in the 1960s, especially in the Polish cities. This also regards censors’ tolerance and readers’ interest in the occult and paranormal. Liberal tendencies in politics, occult actors’ successful strategy of associating paranormal ideas and practices with scientific discourse and organizations, as well as the support of influential personalities resulted in a growing number of texts devoted to the issues discussed here. A closer look at the press and books issued by state-controlled publishers between 1960 and the early 1970s shows different levels of criticism of these themes and identifies those that won approval from the censorship office, albeit there was obviously a clear difference between authors, works, and topics that were tacitly tolerated by the authorities and those that received active support.

¹⁸ „Zezwoliłam, ponieważ uważałam, że jeśli nie dam zezwolenia to będą to robić w ukryciu.” (AAN, 2/1102/0/1.1/1, 30–31; quoted in Budrowska 2020, 46).

¹⁹ Several such lists were constructed from November 1945. See Kondek 1993, 39–45; Żmigrodzki 2002, 3, 10, 23, 27, 42–43 (position no. 2, no. 262, no. 910, and no. 1507).

On the one hand, there were translations of Bergen Evans's *Natural History of Nonsense* (1964), Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (1966), *Spirits, Stars, and Spells: The Profits and Perils of Magic* by Lyon Sprague de Camp and Catherine Crook de Camp (1970), and Gustav Jahoda's *The Psychology of Superstition* (1971),²⁰ as well as some isolated anti-esoteric works by Polish authors, such as Józef Radzicki's *Znachorstwo* [Quackery] (1960).²¹ On the other hand, these skeptical and derogatory views of the occult and the paranormal were effectively mitigated or even opposed by references to Soviet and Czechoslovak experiments in psychic phenomena, as I will discuss further on. Also, the first Western studies on the psychology and phenomenology of religion appeared in Polish (Mircea Eliade, Erich Fromm, Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung), and some time later a series of books on yoga brought back to Polish readers an Eastern tradition that had been marginalized since 1945 (Kavalayananda, Vinekar 1970; Michalska 1972).²²

But perhaps more telling than academic and popular science books were shifts taking place in the content of the press. As early as mid-1959 *Za i Przeciw* [For and Against], a Catholic and pro-communist magazine, published a series of articles on Stefan Ossowiecki (1877–1944), an engineer and a celebrated psychic before 1939 (Szomański 1959).²³ In the following years, *Przekrój*, the lifestyle magazine *Ty i Ja* [You and I], journals for young people such as *Dookoła Świata* [Around the World] and *Radar*,²⁴ as well as a number of other periodicals featured longer articles on dowsing, telepathy, hypnosis, and yoga.²⁵ A point worth adding is that

²⁰ Interestingly enough, these books come from English-language countries, while no anti-esoteric works of, for instance, Otto Prokop, the main opponent of occultism in East Germany, have been published in Poland.

²¹ The author's understanding of quackery included dowsing, astrology, chiromancy, and magic.

²² The social demand must have been high, for Michalska's *Hatha yoga* appeared in 1972 and 1974, and the aggregate number of copies was ninety thousand. I mention this issue here because yoga was not only presented as a health practice, but was also associated with esoteric practices.

²³ It was published by PAX, a pro-communist Catholic organization.

²⁴ I am grateful to Ulrike Lang for drawing my attention to *Radar*.

²⁵ See [Redakcja] 1960; Geppert 1960; Jach 1960; Kaden 1963; Kowalczyk 1963; Kaden 1964; Iłowiecki 1964; Jaworski 1964; S. 1968; Iłowiecki 1968.

these texts were, as a rule, not prominently placed in periodicals. A remarkable exception to this trend was the *Przekrój* cover of September 19, 1965 with a picture of the communist premier Józef Cyrankiewicz and Charles de Gaulle in the top half, and an article on clairvoyance and psychic powers in the bottom half (Jaworski 1965).

Such a juxtaposition could have had serious consequences for the editor if it had not been for Cyrankiewicz's wife, Nina Andrycz. Andrycz (1912–2014) was a gifted actress and a regular client of the astrologer and anthroposophist Robert Walter.²⁶ This, and the presence of such questions in the most circulated entertainment magazine in Poland, can be seen as evidence of the popularity of paranormal issues among the cultural elite. The article was another attempt to bring back to public memory Stefan Ossowiecki, whose abilities were discussed from a science-based perspective, citing the expertise of Stefan Manczarski (1899–1979), a noted engineer and a mentor for postwar parapsychologists. Two years later, Ossowiecki was reintroduced to a wider audience by Krzysztof Boruń in *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* [*Democratic Weekly*], and shortly thereafter, readers were reminded of Julian Ochorowicz, a psychologist and an eminent investigator of psychic phenomena (Boruń 1967a; 1967b; 1967c). This case also demonstrates the pivotal role of specific actors in the promotion of certain ideas; Boruń (1923–2000) was a member of the editorial board and combined his passion for writing science fiction with his interest in paranormal practices.²⁷

Significant for (re-)establishing recognition for these issues was also a Polish translation of Leonid Vasil'ev's book *Experiments in*

²⁶ Andrycz 2003, 89–91, 115, 258–260, and 274. Andrycz was married to Cyrankiewicz from 1947 to 1968. She was in contact with Robert Walter (1908–1981) from 1943 and used to visit him at his home in Komorów near Warsaw. The secret police documents do not mention her by name, but she can easily be identified by the initials N.A. A chemist by profession, Walter was read in theosophy and other esoteric currents, had a large library, and gathered around him a considerable group of individuals, including some university students. This last circumstance and his masonic contacts alarmed the secret police and resulted in his arrest on April 11, 1952. He was freed from custody on October 30, 1954 (AIPN BU 0 1251/226, 32–45, 308–312).

²⁷ Boruń and his daughter later jointly authored a book on Ossowiecki (Boruń, Boruń-Jagodzińska 1990).

Mental Suggestion [Eksperimental'nye issledovaniia myslennogo vnusheniia] (1962). It was praised for its criticism toward the supernatural, yet the introduction gave a wider scope for interpretation. As its editor Zuzanna Stromenger argued, the book's greatest virtue was "the Author's moderation and objectivity in illuminating real phenomena falling within the scope of so-called parapsychology [...]. He [Vasil'ev] is also not afraid to say that there are many questions [...] still waiting to be elucidated."²⁸ This interpretation was not an isolated incident. Charles E.M. Hansel's *ESP: A Scientific Evaluation* was read in a similar fashion. The same strategy of tempering the author's claims or even opposing them was employed in the afterword to *Spirits, Stars, and Spells*, where Jerzy Prokopiuk (1970) sketched an outline of the history of esotericism in Poland and finally referred to Soviet parapsychology.²⁹ In general, introductions and afterwords obligingly included some passages inspired by Marxism in order to please or mislead censors (Prokopiuk 2004, 100). Printing anti-esoteric or anti-psychological works side by side with writings by Jung, Fromm, etc. was also a deliberate tactic employed by commissioning editors in state publishing companies (Prokopiuk 2004, 100).

However, it was clear to occult actors that only anchoring their work in science and the support of influential figures from politics and culture would enable them to become more independent and, finally, to organize themselves in associations.³⁰ Manczarski, Boruń, and Stefański were active in the Section of Bioelectronics of the Polish Society of Naturalists (Polskie Towarzystwo Przyrod-

²⁸ „[...] umiar i obiektywizm Autora w naświetlaniu szeregu rzeczywistych zjawisk wchodzących w zakres tak zwanej parapsychologii [...]. Nie boi się on też wprost powiedzieć, że wiele spraw [...] czeka jeszcze na wyjaśnienie” (Stromenger 1970, 6).

²⁹ Prokopiuk (1931–2021) played a vital role in bringing the works by Freud, Fromm, C.G. Jung, Meister Eckhardt, and Novalis to Polish audiences.

³⁰ As early as 1972, the Interdisciplinary Section of Parapsychology (Międzynaukowa Sekcja Parapsychologiczna) was established under the aegis of the “Three Continents” Club, whose goal was to strengthen cooperation with students from Africa, Asia, and South America. However, the entrenchment of parapsychology in established organizations such as the Society of Naturalists and the Cybernetic Society was crucial for its legitimization. It is telling that the Warsaw Association of Radiesthesists was set up in 1976, shortly after the Section for Psychotronics of the Polish Cybernetic Society was founded.

ników im. Kopernika; Boruń, Boruń-Jagodzińska 1990, 208–210). In 1962, the former two were also co-founders of the Polish Cybernetic Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Cybernetyczne), for which Manczarski, then Head of the Geophysics Department of the Polish Academy of Sciences, served as vice-president until 1974. Moreover, Stefański was the Society's secretary for a time.³¹ In this way, the ground was prepared for establishing in 1975 the Section of Psychotronics (Stefański, Komar 1983, 58), which also benefited from the support of Edward Kowalczyk, minister of communication and the president of the Polish Cybernetic Society throughout the 1970s (AIPN BU 001043/1611, 54–55). Among the individuals who provided the academic underpinning to occult themes was furthermore Roman Bugaj (1922–2009), a chemist and a historian of science based at the University of Warsaw, who began with books on alchemists and later contributed significantly to paranormal magazines in socialist Poland (Bugaj 1957; 1976; 1990).

1970s: More Diversity and the “Benefit of the Society”

Whereas parapsychology took center stage in the 1960s, the situation changed during the next decade in favor of thematic and ideological diversity, although the (partly enforced) scientification of paranormal issues was still discernible. For instance, some magazines carried regular features on astrology (Jokel 1970–1972). Articles on dowsing, Zen, and talismans, were printed, too, but a great breakthrough came in the summer of 1974. This is when *Literatura* published an excerpt from Max Freedom Long's work on Huna magic next to an article on psychotronics in its August 15 issue, and a short time later featured an autobiographical account by Czesław Klimuszko, a Franciscan monk and a psychic. His *Moje jasnowidzenie świata* [*My Clairvoyance of the World*] (1974), divided into eighteen episodes, sparked a lively response in the mass media (Lasota 1974; Iłowiecki 1974; Lessmann 1975). Even Stanisław Lem (1974) felt challenged to speak out on occult and paranormal beliefs, but, surprisingly enough, he did not re-

³¹ Both Manczarski and Kowalczyk were renowned experts in the field of radio and television transmission technologies. Manczarski was also engaged in experiments with the clairvoyant Czesław Klimuszko, conducted, among others, by Stefański and Boruń (Boruń, Boruń-Jagodzińska 1990, 208).

ject them completely. As an aside, it is worth remarking that the popularity of *Literatura* increased significantly during this period. Although it is difficult to assess how much the aforementioned publications contributed to this, the possibility that the editors sought to increase the number of readers by addressing these themes cannot be dismissed out of hand.³²

That same summer of 1974, *Dookoła Świata* began printing an impressive series of articles covering esoteric and paranormal topics that ranged from mesmerism, spiritualism, and channeling to hypnosis, and yoga. Also of relevance is the fact that the authors, Krzysztof Boruń and Stanisław Hadyna, cited the First Congress for Psychotronic Research in Prague as a major impulse for their texts (Boruń 1974a, 1974b; Hadyna 1974). In this way they disseminated the knowledge of this event, and since the circulation of *Dookoła Świata* exceeded 300,000 copies, its social impact can be compared to that of reputable magazines such as *Polityka*.³³ *Kierunki* [Directions] and *WTK–Wrocławski Tygodnik Katolików* [Wrocław Catholic Weekly], weeklies published by the PAX association, also featured longer articles on astrology (Łaszowski 1974) and yoga (Niedźwiedzka 1974a, 1974b, 1974c). From then onward, there was a continuous increase in publications on these topics.³⁴ This is even true of *Polityka* and *Kultura*—periodicals basically critical of the paranormal (Konarzewska 1974a; Osiatyński 1974; 1977; Winnicka 1978a). The screening of a documentary film about psychic abilities on public television on July 4, 1975 undoubtedly encouraged some literati to tackle such subjects (Godycka, Sieręgowa 1975).³⁵

In general, the mid- and second half of the 1970s saw the spectacular success of occult and paranormal knowledge. Along with Boruń and Stefański, a number of journalists were crucial to this

³² In 1973, individual issues of the magazine sold an average of just under 27,000 copies a week, while at the end of 1974 the magazine was selling 46,000 copies (*Biuletyn nakładów prasy [...] roku 1974*: 12).

³³ *Biuletyn nakładów prasy [...] roku 1974*: 11.

³⁴ For instance, Lessmann 1974; Manczarski 1974; Stefański 1974; Zieleniński 1974; Lessmann 1976; Stefański, Komar 1977.

³⁵ The film was titled *Spotkanie z psychotroniką* [An Encounter with Psychotronics] (1974) and featured Stefan Manczarski, Lech Emfazy Stefański, and Tadeusz Pasek, one of the pioneers of yoga in socialist Poland. It was shot by Stanisław Suchoń, who made several more documentaries on related subjects.

process, such as Wanda Konarzewska, Jerzy Lessmann, Bogna Wernichowska, Wiktor Osiatyński, and Lucyna Winnicka. Winnicka (1928–2013), a talented actress, gave up her film career to focus on promoting Far-Eastern spirituality and alternative medicine. Her debut in this field was a personal account of her experience with psychic surgery in the Philippines (1976). From then on, she would publish travel accounts and popularize Rebirthing-Breathwork, Polarity Massage, and similar therapeutic techniques, as well as biodynamic agriculture, inspired by Rudolf Steiner (Winnicka 1978b; 1979; 1982; 1983; 1986).³⁶

Pamiętnik jasnowidza [A Clairvoyant's Diary], an autobiographical narrative by fortuneteller Józef Marcinkowski, who performed under the pseudonym Akhara Jussuf Mustafa (1911?–1982), is another expression of the leniency or indifference of censors in dealing with occult issues. Published by Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza³⁷ in 1976 and 1985, the book is unique inasmuch as the author describes his activity as a clairvoyant before and after WWII. Mustafa makes no secret of the fact that his profession was a life's necessity, but his narrative suggests that visiting psychics was normal under socialism:

Up to the 1960s I was, so to speak immodestly, “the fortune-teller of Warsaw.” Later, “my fame” spread around the country, crossed its borders and even reached the antipodes [...]. When I was summoned to the police as a witness, I found out that my telephone number had been found in the notebooks of usurers, swindlers and con-men, sometimes in the notebooks of victims of fatal traffic accidents, etc.³⁸

The censor's review of the manuscript was short. What raised objections were drastic scenes of violence in a concentration camp

³⁶ In 1982, Winnicka founded a self-help organization called Akademia Życia [Life Academy]. She was also a member of the Polish Psychotronic Society.

³⁷ The 1976 edition was issued in a run of fifty thousand, the 1985 edition in 150,000 copies.

³⁸ „Do lat sześćdziesiątych byłem, że się tak nieskromnie wyrażę, ‘wróżem Warszawy’. Później ‘sława moja’ objęła kraj, przekroczyła jego granice i dotarła nawet na antypody [...]. Wzywany na MO w charakterze świadka dowiadywałem się, że numer mojego telefonu znajdowano w notesach lichwiarzy, szalbierzy i oszustów, niekiedy u ofiar śmiertelnych wypadków drogowych itp.” (Mustafa 1976, 269).

and a mention of the persecution of one of the characters by the secret police (AAN 2/1102/0/7.3.3/3566, 117). The preface by Marian Pilot (1976) emphasized Mustafa's literary talent, his share in the collective Polish experience, responsibility toward his clients, and a critical attitude to clairvoyance (sic). These remarks and descriptions of the misery of pre-war Poland, contrasting with economic progress after 1945, were possibly intended to earn the favor of censors and may have contributed to their positive decision.

Establishing the "Różdżkarz" Service and Production Center in Poznań, a company focused on selected occult practices and alternative healing methods, was an important step in the process of negotiating the place of this community in the Polish press and book market. "Różdżkarz" was originally closely linked to the Greater Poland Association of Dowzers (Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Różdżkarzy)³⁹ and engaged mainly in commercial business, but it also developed publishing activities. Thus, it paved the way for other groups engaged in esoteric and parapsychological issues which, from the early 1980s onward, were becoming more and more numerous. Among the first titles it issued were Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's *An Invitation to Create an Ideal Society* (1977), a manual for diviners (Tomala 1977), and a textbook on astrology (Szuman 1978).⁴⁰

Remarkably, on the front page of each book in the "Różdżkarz" Library series (Biblioteka "Różdżkarza"), the following catchphrase was placed: "Protecting and shaping the environment are a national duty and a social task."⁴¹ Notably, this phrase was apparently inspired by Edward Gierek's speech at the Seventh Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) in December 1975 (Kossak 1977, 56) and proved to be an effective strategy in relations with the censorship office and other authorities. For instance, in 1976, the application for registration submitted by the Warsaw Association of Radiesthetists defined its aim as "striving to enhance the country's health and economic situation through studying radiesthesia and related phe-

³⁹ The Association was formed in 1973 (Prinke 1980, 132) and changed its name to "Greater Poland Psychotronic Association" (Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Psychotroniczne) in the early 1980s.

⁴⁰ Leszek Szuman (1903–1986) was a popular astrologer and author living in Szczecin.

⁴¹ „Ochrona i kształtowanie środowiska obowiązkiem narodowym i zadaniem społecznym.”

nomena and developing methods to use these phenomena to the benefit of the society.”⁴² Similar arguments were given by editors of paranormal magazines.

1980s: State Publishers’ Discovery of Occult and Paranormal Themes

Despite the severe economic crisis and the traumatic break in cultural life caused by the declaration of martial law in December 1981, the first esoteric and paranormal periodicals emerged at the turn of the 1980s, starting with *Problemy Astrologii*, published annually by the Poznań Association of Astrologers (Stowarzyszenie Astrologów w Poznaniu).⁴³ The diviners also made efforts to found their own magazine. The project of a magazine titled *Róźdzkarz* was thwarted by martial law and conflicts within the Society (AAN 2/1102/0/3.2.2/496), but in July 1985, the monthly *Problemy Zjawisk Nieznanych* [*Problems of Unknown Phenomena*] was launched in Poznań. Another magazine was *Biuletyn Psychotronika-Trzecie Oko* [*Psychotronic Bulletin–The Third Eye*], a monthly published by the Warsaw Association of Radiesthesists, soon renamed the Psychotronic Society (Towarzystwo Psychotroniczne).

The occult community intensified its book-publishing activities as well. In the 1980s, auxiliary materials, bulletins, manuals, and conference proceedings appeared in Bydgoszcz, Gliwice, Opole, Poznań, Warsaw, etc., some under the aegis of various associations or professional organizations, and others in state publishing houses. What these publications had in common was a broad range of topics. A glance at randomly selected issues of *Biuletyn Psychotronika–Trzecie Oko* will suffice: anthroposophy, spiritualism, astrology, chiromancy, divining, and clairvoyance, among other things.

However, neither similar conference proceedings often labeled “for internal use only” in order to be treated more leniently by the censors, nor paranormal magazines issued in several thousand

⁴² „[...] dąży do zdrowotnego i gospodarczego podniesienia stanu kraju poprzez poznawanie zjawisk radiestezyjnych i pokrewnych i wypracowanie metod racjonalnego wykorzystania tych zjawisk dla dobra ogółu” (Kamińska et al. 1976).

⁴³ The Poznań Association of Astrologers (Stowarzyszenie Astrologów w Poznaniu) was founded in March 1978. Originally, it was a section of the Greater Poland Association of Dowers (Prinke 1973, 132).

copies could satisfy public demand. Cultural periodicals and entertainment magazines were crucial in this respect, as were national and local newspapers, which attracted tens of thousands of readers. For example, articles on parapsychology, numerology, astrology, chiromancy, the tarot, Indian and Tibetan culture, as well as yoga appeared in *Przekrój* from 1982 to 1988, with much greater frequency than before, and *Literatura na Świecie* [*Literature in the World*] devoted its April issue in 1983 to psychotronics. Some journalists and scholars expressed their dissatisfaction with these developments (Zonn 1975; Musiał, Wolniewicz 1975; Rurański 1984), but the trend could not be stopped.

Another noticeable development was the interest from state publishing houses. Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, a publishing company with strong financial and personal links to the ruling party, issued three books on astrology (Szuman 1982a; 1982b; Prinke, Weres 1983) and one devoted to near-death experiences and communicating with spirits (Szuman 1983). Thus, it seems that the Polish translation of Ramond Moody's *Life after Life* [*Życie po życiu*], issued in 1979 by Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, was also of importance for the interest in the paranormal. Wiedza Powszechna issued *Od magii do psychotroniki* [*From Magic to Psychotronics*] by Stefański and Komar in 1980, 1982, and again in 1983, at first in 20,000, and the following editions in 50,000 copies. In 1982, Iskry offered the second edition of *Tajemnice parapsychologii* [*Secrets of Parapsychology*] by Boruń and Manczarski. Even the publisher Nasza Księgarnia, which specialized in children's and youth literature, followed this trend, as exemplified by the 40,000 copies of Juliusz Herlinger's *Historie niewiarygodne* [*Unbelievable Stories*] in 1984, comprising chapters on psychic phenomena. However, among the titles sold in state bookshops at that time, those on divining (Spychalski 1983; Januszewski 1985) achieved the largest print runs, amounting to 70,000 and even one 100,000 copies.

The late 1980s witnessed a boom in the esoteric market. Diverse national and local associations were operating, public lectures were organized. Last but not least, the radio, television and film industries were also instrumental in the dissemination of these ideas.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For example, in 1970, a local radio station in Szczecin invited the astrologer Leszek Szuman for an interview (Staniewski 2022), and in au-

Concluding Remarks

The relatively large number of publications on similar themes under socialism, with the exception of the 1950s, provokes questions about the underlying causes of this situation. Following from my examination of texts that were prevented from being distributed and those accepted for print, I draw three conclusions. First, occult and parapsychological subjects attracted journalists, translators, scientists and artists, and the endeavors to embed them in the official culture met with considerable success. In the 1970s, a fairly large esoteric market emerged—in the sense of Zinser's definition quoted earlier—in which various currents and practices coexisted, with allies among important academic and publishing institutions. Initially, parapsychology played a major role, but the scope of issues soon expanded. Second, these topics were apparently considered rather irrelevant by censors in comparison with ideological and political taboos specified in the lists of banned data and other burning topics. As Jerzy Rurański (1984) observed, of all the threats to the system in 1981, paranormal publications “were the least” important. I believe this is also true of the 1970s, for books and magazines on paranormal beliefs and occult practices may have diverted public attention from social and political tensions. Hence, they may have been regarded by the authorities as a kind of safety valve and evidence of the regime's ideological concessions or even intellectual and spiritual freedom. It is also not out of the question that releasing for publication texts that contradicted Catholic doctrine could have been aimed at weakening the influence of the Church, but further research is needed to verify this hypothesis.⁴⁵ Third, this stream of publications obviously had a twofold dimension, as it not only contributed to disseminating specific ideas and practices; it also generated revenue for

tumn 1979, Wanda Konarzewska discussed psychokinesis and telepathy in her television programs. In 1980, Janusz Kijowski directed the film *Głosy* [Voices], which explores the theme of unidentified sounds heard by the protagonist and later by a male acquaintance. The film received a number of accolades. Five years later, the first Polish film (titled *Medium*) dealing fully with psychic phenomena, directed by Jacek Koprowicz and with an impressive cast of actors, was screened.

⁴⁵ Zbigniew Musiał (1997, 207) states that “the propaganda of occultism” in the 1970s was “centrally steered,” but does not provide evidence for this assumption.

both state-controlled publishers and the milieu. Furthermore, the engagement with occult and parapsychological topics contributed to undermining the socialist system by connecting with global cultural currents that questioned the materialist understanding of human beings and society, and stressed plurality, agency, as well as individual experience.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ Brigitta Helbig-Mischewski 1995 points out the impact of the New Age discourse on Polish literature and literary criticism, without, however, referring to the "local," Polish history of occult knowledge under socialism, and Joanna Żak-Bucholc 2007, 42–44 speaks briefly about entanglements between esoteric currents and particular trends in psychology and psychiatry in late socialist Poland.

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Westliche Esoterik und Parapsychologie im sozialistischen Polen.
Zwischen Zensur und offizieller Kultur

In diesem Beitrag wird die Entwicklungsdynamik paranormaler Ideen und Praktiken im sozialistischen Polen untersucht, mit Fokus auf Presse und Buchproduktion. In den neunziger Jahren kam es zu einer explosionsartigen Ausbreitung des New-Age-Denkens, doch der Grundstein dafür war bereits in den zwei Jahrzehnten zuvor gelegt worden. Der erste Teil des Beitrags bietet eine Einführung in die Problematik des Okkulten und Paranormalen im Sozialismus; dabei wird auf die Definition der Esoterik von Hartmut Zinser zurückgegriffen. Der zweite Teil behandelt die Zensurpraktiken, während der dritte Teil die Bemühungen einiger prominenter Mitglieder des okkulten Milieus um die Einspeisung bestimmter Themen in die offizielle Kultur und um die Unterstützung durch die akademische Community schildert. Die letzten beiden Sektionen machen darauf aufmerksam, dass seit den siebziger Jahren immer mehr Bücher, Presseartikel und Zeitschriften, die sich mit diesen Themen befassten, die Genehmigung der Zensurbehörde erhielten. Dies ist zum einen auf die unterbrochene und ungleichmäßige Liberalisierung des Systems zurückzuführen. Zum anderen war das okkulte Milieu aber stark bestrebt, Teil der offiziellen Kultur zu werden und sich in den wissenschaftlichen Organisationen zu verankern. Die Autorin stellt daher die These auf, dass paranormale und esoterische Themen von den Behörden als relativ harmlos oder gar als nützliches Sicherheitsventil angesehen wurden.

