

ARTICLE

FOUCAULT: MADNESS AND SURVEILLANCE IN WARSAW

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ABSTRACT. The paper revises the biographical data about Michel Foucault's stay in Poland in 1958-1959. The main inspiration comes from the recent very well documented literary reportage book by Remigiusz Rzyziński, *Foucault in Warsaw*. Rzyziński's aim is to present the data and tell the story, not to analyse the data within the context of Foucault's work. This paper fulfills this demand by giving additional hypotheses as to why Polish authorities expelled Foucault from Poland and what the relation was between communism and homosexuality. The Polish experience, the paper compels, might have been inspiring for many of Foucault's ideas in his *Madness and Civilization*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality*. On the other hand the author points to the fact that Foucault recognized the difference between the role of the intellectual in the West and in communist countries but did not elaborate on it. In this paper the main argument deals with the idea of sexual paranoia as decisive, which is missing in Foucault's works, although it is found in e.g. Guy Hocquenghem.

Keywords: Foucault, homosexuality, communism, Warsaw, secret service, gay persecution, sexual paranoia.

In 1976, in an interview for the „Hérodote” journal, when asked why there is so little geography in his project, Foucault made a statement that his studies of certain areas of knowledge were always conducted with some investment:

If one wanted to do a correct, clean, conceptually aseptic kind of history, then that would be a good method [to write about something just because it is important – P. S.]. But if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area of question. I tried first to do a genealogy of psychiatry because I had had a certain amount of practical experience in psychiatric hospitals and was aware of the combats, the lines of force, tensions and points of collision which existed there.

My historical work was undertaken only as a function of those conflicts.¹

It is not clear what Foucault exactly means when he says, “practical experience in psychiatric hospitals”. He might mean his research time in Sainte-Anne hospital’s psychiatric institute and the internship in Münsterlingen hospital in 1954. But he could as well mean his earlier stay at Sainte-Anne as a patient after his first suicide attempt in 1948. Foucault was explained by the psychiatrists that his problems and disturbances stemmed from his homosexuality. Such was the tendency back then. Foucault might have actually meant both these sides of the clinic. We might be allowed to understand that the whole body of Foucault’s work preceding *The History of Sexuality* was personal or “engaged” precisely because of its implicit relation to (homo)sexuality, and that was made explicit in his final work. There is a “translationability” between, e.g., “madness” and “homosexuality”, and such a link can be made between *Madness and Civilization* and *The History of Sexuality*.

The writing of *Madness and Civilization* started in Sweden and most of it was completed during Foucault’s stay in Poland in 1958-1959. Little was known about this stay. There is not much about it in Didier Eribon’s biography except a six sentence paragraph. In 2017 Remigiusz Ryziński published his book *Foucault w Warszawie* [‘Foucault in Warsaw’], which, I believe, ought to be translated soon, and not only because it gives a detailed account of Foucault’s stay in Poland. In this paper I intend to combine two things: I wish to present Ryziński’s findings of biographical data and of the documents he found and quoted; but then I take them as a point of departure to give commentaries he doesn’t give, to show academic connections he doesn’t show, to explain communism’s contexts he doesn’t explain.² This is not an accusation: his book is not intended as academic. I want to read it as an invitation to rethink Foucault, communism, and homosexuality in communism according to Foucault.

On the one hand, then, this book could be deprecated as dealing only with biographical detail. On the other hand, I agree that Foucault’s experience of a communist country and the problems with homosexuality he experienced there might have a deeper connection

¹ Michel Foucault, “Questions on Geography” [1976], in *Power / Knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, translated by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mephram, K. Soper. (1988), 64.

² To avoid the problem of delimiting what is Ryziński’s information and what is my commentary, I always indicate what he says, and usually then move on to build my commentaries around his discoveries. Perhaps I read his book against his wish, which was not academic. Yet I found this book inspiring also on an academic level, much as I enjoyed reading it as a good piece of literature. One of the literary games I appreciate the most is perhaps not really understandable outside the Polish context, yet I would like to mention it if only briefly. When Ryziński depicts his interviewees, their apartments and their sayings, he stylises himself consciously on the language of the novel *Lubiewo* by Michał Witkowski. This novel was published in 2004 (in English as *Lovetown* in 2010) and, as we tend to think in queer literary studies, it changed the discourse of Polish queer literature. In the first part Witkowski writes a fake press reportage about a couple of elderly queens. This is exactly the style, language and aesthetics of the apartment that Ryziński “rewrites”. However, even though Witkowski might have actually written about existing people, his account is ostensibly fictional. Ryziński’s is not. The quotation of Witkowski by Ryziński is supposed to suggest that there were “originals” of this fiction. Both authors contribute to our understanding of how queer people lived queer lives under communism and – importantly – after the transition to capitalism.

not only to *Madness and Civilization* which was finished in Warsaw,³ although dealing with French history. Just as the quoted above interview shows, exploring history for Foucault is not the same thing as for historians. It stems from the current situation, both on general and personal levels, and the study of genealogy is supposed to influence our today. *The problem and the stake there was the possibility of a discourse which would be both true and strategically effective, the possibility of a historical truth which could have a political effect.*⁴ There is a link between Foucault's sexuality and the psychiatric discourse which condemns this kind of sexuality, and, likewise, there is a connection between Foucault's sexuality, and fellow sexualities, and the communist state with its disciplinary apparatuses. Foucault's Polish experience links to *Discipline and Punish* perhaps the most. And *Discipline and Punish* links in its way to *The History of Sexuality*. There is a small Polish-French bridge to it. One of the books Foucault had on him in Warsaw, and as Rzyński notes, he didn't have many (whenever he wanted to read something, he went to the Polish Academy of Sciences library in a, noteworthy, classical palace which shall also be discussed later on, or to the Warsaw University library, or, most often, he borrowed it directly from Leszek Kołakowski), was Jean Genet's novel. He lent this novel to his French-speaking Polish gay friends.⁵ As we remind ourselves, in the last chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, "The Carceral", Foucault offers a somewhat capricious or arbitrary date of the completion of the carceral system:

Were I to fix the date of completion of the carceral system, I would chose not 1810 and the penal code, nor even 1844, when the law laying down the principle of cellular internment was passed; I might not even choose 1838, when books on prison reform by

³ This is also certified in the preface to *Madness and Civilisation*, which did not, however, appear in all the editions nor translations. My English translation contains a different version of the preface without the paragraph in question. I shall try to refer to the content after the Polish translation. Foucault says he finished the book "under the great persistent sun of Polish freedom". Rzyński mentions only this fragment. More importantly, however, Foucault subsequently mentions his Swedish and Polish friends in the rhetoric of obscure excuse. It says more or less: "Other names should be called as well which only apparently don't have much significance. They know nonetheless – my Swedish and Polish friends – that there is something of their presence in these pages. May they forgive me that I put them and their happiness to the proof so akin to this book which discusses only past sufferings and covered with dust archives of pain". This paragraph as I understand it makes a link between the past and the present madness, and also an undisclosed link not to homosexuality per se, but more specifically to the "Warsaw scandal". It is as if Foucault suspected that his stay in Warsaw could have created problems with the secret service to some of his companions. I guess he did not know at that time that some of those boys were actually implicated in the scandal – and this suggests that he felt not only a victim, but also somewhat guilty. I am not sure though whether he changed the preface later because he learned that he was not guilty of anything.

⁴ Foucault, "Questions on Geography", 64.

⁵ Polish writer Jerzy Zawieyski, a homosexual who was surveilled, wrote in his (secret) diary that he borrowed Genet's *Oeuvres complètes* "from M." in 1958. Foucault could have been the only person to possess Genet's work in Poland at that time. Zawieyski is a curious example. He was a politician in communist Poland belonging to the official (allowed) catholic party. In 1968 he defended dissidents in his speech at the communist parliament for which he was persecuted and harassed. This caused a stroke. When in hospital, Zawieyski somehow fell out of the window and died, which was most probably a political murder, although officially it was called a suicide. This is a very Foucauldian story, so to say.

Charles Lucas, Moreau-Christophe and Faucher were published. The date I would choose would be 22 January 1840, the date of the official opening of Mettray.⁶

This is precisely what the difference between history and Foucault's archeology implies. It can be "capricious" because it is personal and does not stand before the History's tribunal. I take seriously the rhetorical figure used by Foucault in this opening sentence. It is *anteoccupatio* and *concessio*. Its function here is to say something in this kind of modality: "If I were a professional historian, I would set the date here..., but because I'm not, I can make it more personal, so I set it here...". I am not trying to say that there is no argumentation behind this choice. I am trying to say that one of the reasons Foucault chose Mettray was as a homage to Jean Genet, Mettray's former alumnus, who was not mentioned in the book, and perhaps Foucault thus wanted to suggest that Genet was the writer who made him understand the importance of the carceral system, and, not unimportantly, its relation to homosexuality.⁷ And this is suggested by the deliberate sentence structure. I believe Ryziński shares this opinion that homosexual experience is at the very core of the whole body of Foucault's work. It has to be said, *Foucault in Warsaw* does not deal with the philosophical content of Foucault's work. There is only this small remark which makes me say that I believe Ryziński and I think alike, only now in this essay I am making it more academic:

Madness and Civilization was for sure an attempt at understanding himself, his alterity which at the same time is an identity. It was also a gate leading to the study of sexuality. Madness as a category of social exclusion is certainly the same thing as homosexuality. You just need to exchange the words.⁸

This "academic-ish" remark is necessary so that Ryziński can prove that the experience of everyday madness (under communism)⁹ and homosexual persecution were related and Foucault could note that.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* [1975], transl. A. Sheridan (1995), 293.

⁷ I've come to realize right now that actually it is a good, and not that naive, question: why did Genet not write about madness in his novels?

⁸ Remigiusz Ryziński, *Foucault w Warszawie* (2017), 109. All the translations from this book in my article are mine. Two pages later Ryziński notes accurately that Foucault declares in his *Madness and Civilization* that one of the reasons for choosing the topic was the archeology of silence, and homosexuality has its archeology of silence as well. *Could Michel Foucault's doctorate have been written in a better place than socialist Poland?* (Ibid., 111)

⁹ When Foucault asked his Polish friends about mental asylums, they named Tworki, a hospital near Warsaw, but it is uncertain if Foucault visited it – Ryziński didn't find any documents there. Nonetheless the idea of visiting a contemporary asylum – or, perhaps it should be added – a contemporary asylum in a communist state – proves that Foucault's thinking stretched beyond French classicism. Perhaps he had heard about *psychuszka*, Soviet mental asylums where political dissidents were kept. They existed (or exist...) in the Soviet Union, but not in Poland. At least in theory. Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel *Apelacja* (1967), which was banned by the censorship in Poland and was published in France, tells a story of a regular mental asylum where there is a political dissident kept. There might have been a lighter version of isolating political dissidents in asylums also in Poland.

Ryziński is a professor of philosophy who obtained his doctorate on Roland Barthes at Sorbonne under Julia Kristeva. Yet the book about Foucault represents the genre of literary reportage. This is a part biography, although this book is actually not only about Foucault. Ryziński conducted his research at the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Memory] in Poland, and went to all the places where Foucault was known to have been and looked for books of records and documents; he met all the living people who knew Foucault in Poland in the 1950s; he also met Daniel Defert, Foucault's life-long partner, for a chat on the Polish years and to find traces of the Polish stay in Foucault's archives in Paris. I shall only briefly sum up the results of this research, hoping that the book gets translated soon. Until this day it was known that Foucault had to leave Poland due to some obscure "scandal" (i.e. sex scandal). Ryziński confirms that; however, things seem to be much more complicated, and we still don't know the real reason. At first Foucault stayed at the Bristol hotel in Warsaw, the most exclusive hotel back then, and also the most infiltrated by the secret service. Yet there are no records of his stay in the hotel archives.¹⁰ SB [Security Service] shadowed all the foreigners who stayed there. The first level of shadowing was the hotel staff (also taxi drivers, train staff etc.). If a foreigner was more "interesting", then the hotel room was bugged. Ryziński found in the archives at the IPN a map of bugs in Warsaw; the Bristol hotel was a hotspot, the most bugged place in the city. There was also another level of shadowing (if a person was "extremely interesting") which involved photo and film footage. It is known that, for example, the above-mentioned writer Zawieyski (to whom Foucault lent Genet's work) was filmed in order to get compromising material for possible blackmailing. After a period in the hotel, Foucault moved to his own flat in the very centre of Warsaw (on Chmielna street now, Rutkowski-go street then), which was rented by the French embassy, and after Foucault's departure used by his successors. It is noteworthy that the apartment was located next to several gay cruising places. Foucault had a professional life, but his friends were a circle of gay men. Not all of them were his lovers. Not all of them spoke French or English. When Foucault was leaving Warsaw (to go to Gdańsk, Kraków or to France for a while), some of the boys kept his keys and they would go to the flat to have parties; or for sexual encounters. One of the boys became more than a sexual partner for Foucault. Daniel Defert showed Ryziński in Paris a photo of a boy, that is, of the boy, of Jurek. Foucault kept this photo. He kept also his notebook from those times. Jurek was registered by SB as an agent and the service arranged their meeting at the Institute of Literary Research library at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Jurek worked as a librarian there. The Polish Academy of Sciences (which is also my place of work) is located in a classicist palace which has a peculiar structure of internal corridors. It could be said that if on the surface it represents rationality or reason as the face of science, inside it displays a certain kind of madness or obscure complexity. Therefore, it could have been an interesting place for Foucault. The French Centre in Warsaw was at first (before Foucault) located there as well. I should perhaps remark

¹⁰ We know that he stayed there from Foucault, who told that to Bernard Kouchner in 1982 in Warsaw when they came to support political dissidents, and from a letter to a friend in 1958.

that after the worst Stalinist period, after 1956, the library of the Institute of Literary Research became one of the very few places where foreign academic and literary books in different languages were actually available. If we assume that Foucault wanted to find something for his doctoral thesis, that was one of the places to go. Jurek in fact was straight and then married with kids, and he died in 2011. One of the possible reasons why he decided to become an agent could be that his life, or career, was blocked by his “past”, that is, he couldn’t become a student because of his father’s anticommunist engagement and death in a Stalinist prison. It is unsure whether he was informed how he would be used by the secret service. During his sexual encounter with Foucault, the secret service entered the room and then, threatening the French embassy with the “scandal”, forced them to expel Foucault. This is the outline of the story.

Several things remain unclear however. Rzyziński accurately points out that homosexuality was not illegal in Poland. Although in 1952 the communist constitution, allegedly revised by Stalin, was introduced, it did not change the 1932 Criminal Code, which legalized homosexuality (with the age of consent being set at 15). This makes Poland different from the USSR and East Germany, where the infamous paragraph 175 remained until the 1960s. Homosexuality as such could not constitute a penal reason for expulsion then. Prostitution in soviet Poland was illegal, however, both hetero- and homosexual. Perhaps this could have been used as an argument. It might well, however, be that there is “crime”, and there is “scandal”, and they need not overlap. Moreover it seems that “homosexual scandal” was rather a surface pretext, therefore there could have been, or must have been, something “deeper”. Why? Rzyziński found archives on other French people working in Poland (SB intended to shadow them all). Foucault’s successor, Pierre Arnaud, was described as “having many intimate contacts with Polish ladies”.¹¹ This offers an interesting comparison. Arnaud was not trapped nor expelled. His folder remains in the secret service archives – Foucault’s does not. It seems logical to suggest that it was destroyed, and if so, it must have contained something more important. Some of Rzyziński’s interlocutors made vague remarks that Foucault was interested in the functioning of homosexuality in Poland, perhaps for scientific reasons. If he was interested in contemporary mental asylums in Poland, then he might have been interested in other contemporary aspects. It is tempting to think that there was something in Foucault’s research that caused the expulsion. However, here I think Rzyziński is not convincing enough when he says:

Someone who, like Foucault, was interested in prison, regime, violence, lack of freedom, could not sleep well in a country overwhelmed by the communist madness. It just required finding any reason for expulsion, making a good plan and getting rid of Foucault from Poland.¹²

First of all, this is achronological. “Prison”, “regime”, etc., came about in Foucault’s later research. It could be a matter of debate whether Foucault had, early in his mind, a plan of

¹¹ Rzyziński, *Foucault w Warszawie*, 104. See also about Christian J., a lector of French in Cracow, who was known to be a homosexual, and was not expelled either (*Ibid.*, 106).

¹² *Ibid.*, 107.

his subsequent research and developed it teleologically, finally disclosing the very gist of it (homosexuality)¹³, although I tend to doubt that. Yet I myself have constructed this idea of “translatability” of Foucault’s various areas of coverage. And in this matrix I understand what Ryziński means¹⁴; and he might not be wrong. Still, the fact is that the published version of *Madness and Civilization* does not seem to constitute any threat for the communist regime in Poland. Another question that could be raised (and Ryziński does not do that), is whether the manuscript of the doctorate, or any other writings that could be found in Foucault’s flat, were studied by agents. Especially given that his gay friends, among whom some were agents, had the keys to his flat.

And if it was not the research, and doubtfully homosexuality was the reason, then we are led onto the crossroads of conspiracy theories. Leniently speaking we could suspect that the secret service suspected Foucault of being an agent.¹⁵ Even though, it has to be said, the communist secret service, especially under Stalinism, albeit not only, used made-up accusations against Polish citizens (e.g. whose family lived in exile etc.) of serving foreign intelligence agencies etc. In 1968 this kind of argumentation was repeated in an anti-Semitic campaign. In the 1970s, according to current political needs, some literary critics started, for example, considering which Polish writers’ work could serve German (i.e., West German) intelligence. Given all this – the very “suspicion” was in fact also a pretext, an argument against people who were just intended to be persecuted. What does it mean

¹³ Eribon quotes Foucault’s colleagues who later would say they were not surprised Foucault finally wrote a book about sexuality, because he himself considered sexuality to be fundamental, the fundament of his persona. I could agree with that. This might be a frequent feeling among queer people, although in queer theory it is a matter of debate whether sexuality is the core of personality (and theory respectively), or it is one of the interwoven threads. See Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* [1989], transl. B. Wing (1992). The connection between Foucault’s analyses of madness and homosexuality was made also by Guy Hocquenghem in his book *Homosexual Desire* (the French original from 1972 preceded the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*). Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* [1972], transl. D. Dangoor (1993), 51). It could be said then that Hocquenghem “anticipated” Foucault’s step towards sexuality. (Compare also on this point Jeffrey Weeks’ *Preface* from 1978 to this book, *ibid.*, 34-35).

¹⁴ Although it seems also an evasion to use the category „he could not sleep well” – this is very imprecise. He couldn’t sleep because it tortured his morals and empathy? In another place Ryziński claims that this was one of the happiest periods in Foucault’s life. He couldn’t sleep because he couldn’t stand being followed? In another place Ryziński writes that Foucault was perfectly aware that he was followed and shadowed, and that he didn’t care. And then in the grammatical construction of this paragraph Ryziński actually makes an infelicitous jump, an absurd change in agency: because Foucault couldn’t sleep, the service had to find any reason whatsoever to get rid of him. There is too much lacuna in this reasoning.

¹⁵ There is an echo of this idea in the account of Stefan. Stefan was one of the boys who kept Foucault’s keys, and confirmed to have been the philosopher’s sexual partner. Later in the 1960s he was arrested for a month and tortured during an interrogation about the mysterious death of a boy which the service called “homosexual plot”. *He doesn’t know what Foucault’s thesis was about, but he suspects that the French guy wrote about “this gay life or communist system” and therefore he had trouble. – He was always very curious about everything. Gossip from the city and political issues, no difference. And that’s why we thought he was, well, maybe not a spy, but a natural born researcher, inquisitive. Or perhaps a spy?* See *Foucault w Warszawie*, 178. Ryziński found Stefan’s archives at the IPN and they do not suggest he called Foucault a spy to the service’s knowledge. Yet he uses the plural “we”. It sufficed that any of the boys who were shadowed, wired or interrogated, or were agents themselves, repeated to the service (or were recorded saying) this “suspicion”, backed with the information that “he asks for gossip”. It sufficed to construct the image of a spy.

to “intend people to be persecuted”? These were reasons for public show; or, simply, propaganda reasons. Or, on the other hand, internal games. Rzyziński does not construct this kind of argument and perhaps I am wrong in this reasoning, but I will use it as an example. The communist authorities hated Charles de Gaulle and his government. The French ambassador in Poland, Étienne Burin des Roziers, was a degaullist. He was shadowed by the SB all the time, yet Rzyziński found that out of the seven volumes of files made on him, only one remains today. Foucault, who was not a degaullist, and neither a communist, was Burin des Roziers’ friend. The secret service files conclude that there is nothing with which to attack Burin des Roziers. On only one thing the ambassador and the Polish authorities differed: Burin des Roziers wanted to increase the academic exchange between both countries, and the Polish authorities did not want that (that is to say, most probably the Kremlin did not want that). The Foucault affair could have been used as a showcase. This is in the sense of “internal games” and “showing” that I meant. While my hypothetical story might be purely fantastic, the fact is that such games were played by communist authorities (see the footnote above about Jerzy Zawieyski – he drastically “ruled out” this way in an internal game). Homosexuality as a “weak point” was considered a good, useful tool. Yet what is most surprising in Rzyziński’s discoveries is that the “Foucault-gate”, if I may, did not end with his expulsion. Jurek, the boy whose photo Foucault took to France and later Defert kept in the archives, was allowed to go to Paris in 1960 to visit Foucault in order to deliver new reports on him and on other “French intellectuals”. Daniel Defert told Rzyziński in Paris what Foucault had told him about this stay: Jurek confessed that he was never gay and that he was an agent, and that the secret service told him that Parti Communiste Française was illegal in France and needed support from soviet bloc comrades, therefore Jurek’s reports were important; Jurek understood the manipulation after seeing the PCF’s official residence in Paris; and Foucault wrote the report on himself, amused, and Jurek translated it into Polish. In 1965¹⁶ another boy, Rudolph, was allowed to go to Paris; before he was allowed to go, the service recruited him as an agent under the pseudonym Henryk, in order to infiltrate the gay community in Paris. His name also appears in Foucault’s red notebook from his Polish days in 1958-1959. Rzyziński quotes Rudolph’s report in which he informs the Polish secret service that Foucault rejected the position of *attaché culturel* at an unknown French embassy, and that he wanted to settle his affairs with Daniel in order to lead a public life.¹⁷ Rzyziński does not ask the question: why did the Polish communist secret service want to infiltrate French homosexuals? Perhaps Rzyziński does not ask, because that would require him giving an answer. And the answers seem absurd. Let me try giving a rational answer, and it will immediately seem absurd. We might assume that the Polish secret service believed that homosexuality in France was an equally dreadful secret as in communist societies,

¹⁶ In the meantime Foucault visited Poland for a short period in 1962 to participate in a conference. Rzyziński did not find any reports on Foucault documenting that stay.

¹⁷ Rudolph also knew Roland Barthes, and as Barthes was supposed to come to Poland, Rudolph’s information actually could not be of any significance to the Polish service. Namely, Rudolph said that Barthes asked Rudolph in advance to put him in contact with “some Polish boy”.

therefore collecting “compromising data” would allow them to blackmail, or even get agents. Even the information about Foucault’s will to “settle” things with Defert, which, I guess, implies keeping him in the closet (or quitting him), is absurd, because Foucault’s, Barthes’, Yves Saint Laurents’ etc. homosexuality was not a secret then. Either Rudolph misunderstood what Foucault had said, or he consciously played to the expectations of the Polish secret service, with their image of gay life in the West, i.e., he gave them what they wanted to hear. I tend to agree with the latter. There is a trace of a different and more complicated explanation though.¹⁸ Finally, it should be stressed that perhaps we should not try to find a “big reason” or some big plot behind this. The secret service’s *modus operandi* used often a particular kind of epistemology which I would call “knowledge just in case”: it is better to know something than not to know. Here we arrive at Foucault’s concept of “knowledge / power”. Although soviet societies (or dictatorship) epistemology seems different from Western epistemology, and Foucault studied the latter in his major works, I think he realized vaguely what the problem was, for example, in a 1977 interview *Truth and Power*, when he hinted:

the intellectual was hounded by political powers, no longer on account of a general discourse which he conducted, but because of the knowledge at his disposal: it was at this level that he constituted a political threat. I am only speaking of Western intellectuals. What happened in the Soviet Union is analogous with this on a number of points, but different on many others. There is certainly a whole study that needs to be made of scientific dissidence in the West and the socialist countries since 1945.¹⁹

Even though Foucault did not write such a study, I dare say firmly, if a bit turgidly, that thanks to his Polish experiences, he was well equipped to do it. Now if I had to point to the major difference between Western and socialist countries in knowledge / power (not only among intellectuals), I would say that this difference consists in the degree of paranoia. I have written on paranoid epistemology in Poland in relation to homosexuality

¹⁸ More or less at the time Rudolph was sent to Paris to shadow Foucault, Foucault was considered for a high position in the degaullist Ministry of Education. His candidacy was blocked by several academics who supported their position with the fact that Foucault was homosexual. And, as Eribon says, they also mentioned “the Polish affair” in this context. Rzyziński quotes Rudolph’s report that Foucault is considered for this high position in the ministry. Eribon could not have known that, so he did not even suspect there could have been something going on connected to the secret service. But Rzyziński does not ask this logical, if a bit conspiratorial, question: did the Polish secret service intervene somehow? Did it help those people who blocked Foucault’s candidacy? Did the Polish secret service have unofficial contact with the French communist party, or even with degaullists? Why would the Polish secret service want to block precisely Foucault nonetheless? Could it really only be because he was homosexual?

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Truth and Power* [1977], in *Power / Knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, translated by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper. (1988), 128. It is a known “problem”, or question, that a) either Foucault did not specify that his analyses apply mostly to French context (history) and his general conclusions ought not to be taken as universal; b) either, in Edward Said’s words, *his insouciance about the discrepancies between his basically limited French evidence and his ostensibly universal conclusions*. Edward W. Said, “Michel Foucault, 1926-1984”, in *After Foucault. Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (1988), 9.

elsewhere.²⁰ Let me give a brief example. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault discusses discipline as *a mechanism that coerces by means of observation*, ‘observation’ further defined as *eyes that must see without being seen; the network of gazes*.²¹ As for the first quotation, I like the Polish translation more. Perhaps I like it more – because it is more “Polish”? Tadeusz Komendant, who was not only Foucault’s translator, but also his Polish monographist, used not just “observation”, but translated *le jeu du regard*²² as “a game of gazes”. The Polish version is closer to the French original than the rather unhappy English choice, still it adds the plural to *regard*. I wonder if Komendant’s version is “more Foucauldian than Foucault”.²³ Foucault discusses various techniques of observation, optics and architecture, which lead him eventually to the Panopticon. The “normative” and “corrective” gaze during communism was aimed at anyone who stood out. For more examples of suspicious and “surprised” gazes thrown at people who wore colourful clothes or smiled in a “strange” way, or gazed “suspiciously” etc., please read Czesław Miłosz’s analysis in *The Captive Mind*.²⁴ Certainly it included any kind of body stylisation which could fall under

²⁰ Piotr Sobolczyk, *Polish Queer Modernism* (2015).

²¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170-171.

²² Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (1975), 173.

²³ Or perhaps it is more Deleuzian? I am thinking about the distinction that Deleuze made in an interview about Foucault, the distinction of their views on society: *For me, a society is something that is constantly escaping in every direction. When you say I am more fluid, you are completely right. It flows monetarily; it flows ideologically. It is really made up of lines of flight. So much so that the problem for a society is how to stop it from flowing. (...) It is flowing everywhere and governments are able to block it. We approached the problem from opposite directions. You are right to say that society is fluid, or even worse, a gas. For Foucault, it is an architecture.* Gilles Deleuze, “Foucault and Prison”, in *Two Regimes of Madness. Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, transl. A. Hodges, M. Taormina (2007), 280. In Deleuze’s fluid society there is a place for the “game of regards (escaping in every direction)”, and therefore for a paranoia. Perhaps this is exactly the difference that blocked Foucault from intertwining ‘paranoia’.

²⁴ Compare, for example: *It is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails between people in the East otherwise than as acting, with the exception that one does not perform on a theater stage but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in. Such acting is a highly developed craft that places a premium upon mental alertness. Before it leaves the lips, every word must be evaluated as to its consequences. A smile that appears at the wrong moment, a glance that is not all it should be can occasion dangerous suspicions and accusations. Even one’s gestures, tone of voice, or preference for certain kinds of neckties are interpreted as signs of one’s political tendencies. (...) [People from the West in comparison] lack that internal concentration which betrays itself in a lowered head or restlessly moving eyes.* Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* [1953], transl. J. Zielonko (1955), 51. Also: *Work in an office or a factory is hard not only because of the amount of the labor required, but even more because of the need to be on guard against omnipresent and vigilant eyes and ears.* (Ibid., 72) Also: *For most people the necessity of living in constant tension and watchfulness is a torture, but many intellectuals accept this necessity with masochistic pleasure.* Ibid., 76) Miłosz was writing this in 1950-1951, that is, some eight years before Foucault’s stay, and he was describing the Stalinist period. After 1956 during a period called the “thaw”, the conditions were for a moment moderated slightly. In order to understand “preference for certain kinds of neckties” better, I suggest watching a very good documentary on Polish fashion during communism entitled, *Political Dress* (2011), directed by Judyta Fibiger. The movie with English subtitles is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ut56-ZZo_FE [retrieved July 10th 2017]. Let me just quote Barbara Hoff, a Polish fashion designer from the era (time: 3.18-3.46): *The Party paid close attention to how people looked. Fashionable people were oppressed in socialist Poland, by the authorities, by the Party, by the whole communist establishment at all levels, from the lowest, from the People’s Militia and the rest of society. Quite frankly, society could not stand fashion.* And also the Polish punk musician Tomasz Lipiński talking about the 1970s and 1980s (time: 49.11-49.40): *It was strange, the combination of those clothes and the liberties taken in the streets. Instead of walking around with reserve, looking down, we were*

the category “gay”.²⁵ In fact this kind of a gaze is still to be found on the Polish streets. This “game of gazes” is of a paranoid structure. And it had its reversal; people also looked suspiciously at others who looked suspiciously (perhaps they were secret agents?). It also had its “gay reversal”: gay people, it is a well described phenomenon, used to recognize themselves by specific gazes (games of gazes). Certainly it happened in the West as well. Imagine now Foucault on the streets of Warsaw in 1959, in stylish jackets, not really speaking Polish, not used to this paranoid “game of gazes”, gay; “standing out”. And knowing he was observed that way. Imagine now that you are a Western gay man in a cruising place in Paris and you wonder if that guy is giving you glances because he wants to flirt with you. This is your major epistemological problem. And translate this experience now into communist Poland: you are a gay man in a cruising place in Warsaw and you wonder if you read correctly the glances of that boy as seductive, but then in the back of your head emerges doubt: what if he is an agent? This is the difference of the paranoia degree. We could provisionally assume that ‘paranoia’ could be somehow substituted with Foucault’s ‘madness’. As far as I know, Foucault did not analyse knowledge in its relation to paranoia. Although he certainly was aware in his analyses in *Madness and Civilization* that there exists the reverse side of knowledge, the madness of rationality. On the other hand, perhaps, Foucault did not include the concept of paranoia because it suits hermeneutics too well, and because it could draw towards the concept of “repression”, and Foucault’s aim was anti-hermeneutical and anti-psychoanalytical: *we are not linking these ‘exclusions’ to a repression; we do not presuppose that beneath the manifest statements something remains hidden and subjacent. (...) There is no sub-text. And therefore no plethora.*²⁶ In the next move Foucault differentiates discourse analysis from traditional interpretation: *To interpret is a way of reacting to enunciative poverty, and to compensate for it by a multiplication of meaning; a way of speaking on the basis of that poverty, and yet despite it.*²⁷ I am not trying to say that Foucault’s idea of discourse works only in the West. It describes communist states as well. Still there is a difference in epistemology, or the everyday epistemology, if you prefer. If we try to apply Foucault’s sentence to the thinking of the secret service, we could paraphrase that in the fact that they deal with “enunciative poverty”, i.e., with the lack of the **correct** (i.e., desired) enunciation, they multiply interpretations. The state of multiplicity of interpretations which are forced into the light, or assumed to always be behind the surface by nature, is paranoid. However, in the next move the secret service reduces those multiple interpretations into one apparently rational, or at least one constructed in accordance with rational rules, and apparently it reduces paranoia. Yet in fact it supports paranoia.²⁸ While

rather extraverted, theatrical with every step. It provoked great aggression of those grey citizens who preferred to be sunk into the background. For them someone who stood out was a threat.

²⁵ Sobolczyk, *Polish Queer Modernism*.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* [1969], transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (1972), 119.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁸ Hocquenghem goes even further when, following Sandor Ferenczi, he says that the police or secret service has a homosexual libidinal investment in persecuting homosexuals: *It is clear that on the pretext of protecting young people and the public, the judiciary and the police are pursuing their own libidinal aims. (...) The law is clearly*

“reparative paranoia” might be desired in the humanities, at least in parts of it,²⁹ it makes everyday life uneasy. Last not least, it also contributes to knowledge production, i.e. also to the condition of intellectuals.³⁰ I am not sure if this is how Foucault saw the West vs. socialist difference in the *Truth and Power* interview, but this is how I see it. This implies that there is no escape from the category of “paranoia”, which could be one of the versions of the “Fr-oucault” project, as Leo Bersani calls it.³¹

I have mentioned above that Rzyziński’s book is not only about an episode from Foucault’s life. During the process of collecting information and data in the archives, Rzyziński found interesting documents and met with people who led a gay life in the 1950s and later, and he decided that this is an interesting story on its own.³² It has to be explained that there are actually no books written by Polish historians on the topic of homosexuality from modernity till the fall of communism. As a matter of paradox, there are books and articles on sodomy and sexuality during the middle ages in Poland written by historians, as well as a contemporary “history” of homosexuality after 1989, mostly in the works of sociologists and literary scholars. This has to do with the situation in the humanities. For some reason the map of Polish humanities has a, roughly, left wing, i.e., one interested in (post)modern discourses, and it is represented by literary studies and sociology mostly, and there is a right wing, represented by mostly historians, which is suspicious towards the so called “new methodologies”, including “queer historiography”. Most of the knowledge we have about gay life in the 1920s and 1930s (such as cruising places, clubs, ways of meeting etc.), as well as under communism, comes from (secret) diaries of writers, letters of those writers, or from biographies of these writers. And some parts of this work was made by queer activists.³³ To give an example, I learned that the communist secret

a system of desire, in which provocation and voyeurism have their own place: the phantasy of the cop is not some creation of the homosexual’s deranged mind, but the reality of a deviant desiring operation on the part of police and judiciary. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 66. I assume Foucault would oppose such a perspective. On the other hand, to support Hocquenghem’s view, think about William Friedkin’s *Cruising*.

²⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is about You”, in *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), 123-151. Sedgwick mentions Guy Hocquenghem’s analyses of homosexuality and paranoia (*Homosexual Desire*, 55-61). I wonder what Foucault thought of Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*, which no doubt he knew: Hocquenghem had, in the 1970s, used the concept of creating the category of the nineteenth century before Foucault, although he binds it with ‘repression’, the concept that Foucault later rejected. Still, there are many similarities, some of which were also inspired by Foucault’s early works, especially *Madness and Civilization*. Perhaps Hocquenghem is as important (yet deliquescent) a point of polemic reference as Marcuse in *The History of Sexuality*.

³⁰ Compare: *Knowledge is to be found not only in demonstrations, it can also be found in fiction, reflexion, narrative accounts, institutional regulations, and political decisions.* Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 183-184).

³¹ Leo Bersani, “Fr-oucault and the End of Sex”, in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (2010), 133-138.

³² Little is known about the lives of „ordinary” gay people during communism. These people mostly lived in closets, and now, at a certain age, also in the specific “age closet”, they don’t identify with young generations of queers, and they disbelieve someone would be interested in their accounts. This is changing however. Some of the older gay men have given interviews to contemporary gay magazine “Replika”, where they came out after 1960. Many of the men interviewed by Rzyziński actually opened up for the first time before someone from a younger generation. Later on I offer a hypothesis as to why this silence was kept for so long.

³³ Krzysztof Tomasiak, *Gejerel* (2012).

service infiltrated gay men circles after reading in 2012 the secret diary of Miron Białoszewski, a writer I studied extensively, where he wrote that he was interrogated in 1967 in an investigation named “the homosexual plot”. Rzyziński also mentions in passing this investigation which seems to be one of the biggest organised investigations of this time, because one of Foucault’s lovers from his Warsaw times was also arrested for a month in connection with this investigation. We still know very little about it, yet it seems that it was quite a paranoid action which might have been targeted at collecting “gay data”. We might speculate that the real political aim was connected to the antisemitic campaign that started in 1967 where one of the politicians, Bolesław Piasecki, an anti-Semite and a Polish nationalist before the war, joined the anti-Semite faction in the communist camp. There was an internal fight between fractions in the communist party. Piasecki’s son Bohdan was kidnapped in 1957 and murdered, although no-one was ever sentenced for that. The investigation continued till 1978 (Bolesław Piasecki died in 1979). It might have been a political murder committed by the secret service, which means it would come as no surprise that it was never “solved”³⁴, and therefore open to paranoid and makeshift investigations. One of the hypotheses was “the gay plot”. The association of gay people with criminality worked both ways. At first they were investigated under the assumption that they were “criminogenic”. After “the gay plot” in 1967 – or any other before that we yet know nothing about – despite the fact that it was a paranoid investigation not grounded in any evidence, the service was assured in continuing operations against gay circles because it was proven they were criminogenic (and even politically suspect perhaps) because there was an investigation against them. This mechanism is exactly what Foucault studied in *The History of Sexuality* when he described the label-making of the homosexual. It *made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of “perversity”; but it also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf (...)*.³⁵ The “reverse discourse” is usually understood – not without reason – as the possibility of constituting a gay identity, a subjectivity. It has to be stressed though that Foucault says it is a possibility. While the control discourse appeared everywhere (I assume), the “reverse discourse” did not necessarily do so. My claim is that it silenced people in the Polish context, it kept them in the closet – in some cases put them back there if they imagined they would come out – it sustained paranoia. This is why I place an emphasis on paranoia as an important factor. Foucault’s thesis supports the “paradox” that the societies where homosexuality was illegal for a longer time quickly turned into the most liberal societies in this respect, cf. Norway (1972), Germany (1969), UK (1982). Still a paradox remains why in Poland, where homosexuality was made legal in 1932, the real social visibility, subjectivity, and agency, came only after 2000. Before Rzyziński had found the secret service archives from the 1950s and 1960s, we only heard rumours that gay people were infiltrated, or we knew that public figures, writers mostly, had some trouble

³⁴ Nowadays historians tend to think that the boy was kidnapped and killed by secret service agents who were of Jewish descent as an act of revenge due to Bolesław Piasecki’s prewar anti-Semitic activities. It proves my point: the historians have not mentioned “the homosexual plot”.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* [1976], vol. I, transl. R. Hurley (1978), 101.

with secret agents. We knew that there was the “Hyacinth action” in 1985, an organised action of arresting gay men and creating “homosexual files”. We knew that from a few queer activists who were subjected to this campaign, and not because the historians wrote about it. In fact the above mentioned IPN was created to investigate instances of “communist crime”. In 2007 a group of queer activists requested the IPN to acknowledge “Hyacinth action” as a communist crime, however this request was rejected and IPN claimed that the persecution was a legal action.³⁶ It was clearly a projection of similar prejudices on behalf of the conservative authorities and, as well, of conservative historians. In theory, post-communist conservative parties differed in everything with the soviet authorities; in practice homosexuality is the one point (or one of the points, although I do not know of any other) where they actually agree. It is estimated that the IPN has a collection of 11000 “homosexual files”, only they do not know where they are. According to one theory, they might have been destroyed after 1989 either by the communists or by influential dissidents who needed to maintain the clean image of good Catholics. According to another theory, those files were not destroyed, only they are not kept in one “gay archive”; they are spread all over via personal data, therefore they can be re-collected with the “chain-letter” method (once you find some information in somebody’s personal files, it leads you to another person, and then it has a snowball effect). There are also theories about what the purpose of this campaign was. One such theory, and in my opinion the least probable, is that it was actually directed against political dissidents from the Solidarność movement. I am convinced that queer dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s could have abstained themselves, and could have been blocked by their peers if they knew about their homosexuality, because queerness could have been easily used for blackmail. This pullback among the political dissidents could be a reproduced scheme even today since many of these people are politicians, but that is another story. Another theory suggests that the soviet authorities reacted this way to the AIDS panic and they wanted to be prepared (i.e. to have control over gay people who were considered to spread AIDS). Yet this theory is contradicted by the fact that during the mid-1980s there was a shortage of condoms in Poland and a Swedish gay organisation sent boxes of condoms to Poland, but these were withdrawn by the Polish authorities. Last but not least there is the theory that the campaign was a reaction to the first unofficial (i.e., illegal) gay movements in the 1980s in Poland. Their illegality was of a different nature than the illegality of Solidarność. And because these early gay organisations were in contact with some gay organisations in Europe, most notably with the Austrian HOSI, it was easy to explain among the communist authorities that gay circles are part of a broader international “espionage network” and that foreign services might infiltrate Poland through homosexuals. I agree mostly with the latter hypothesis, which is quite rational, although still based on paranoid assumptions. I wish to emphasize that the “Hyacinth action” did not produce any “reverse dis-

³⁶ See my publications on “Hyacinth action”: Piotr Sobolczyk, “GayRL czy QueeRL?”. *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2012); Piotr Sobolczyk, “The Hyacinth Beneath the Foot”. *Arterie* 2 (2015); Piotr Sobolczyk, “Różowe i brązowe”. *Arterie* 1 (2016).

course"; on the contrary, I think it blocked the nascent queer voice. It silenced it and arrested it in the closet. Those who actually dared to speak, and dared to speak in the name of their homosexual identity, were very few. With this context in mind I can return now to Ryziński. Looking for Foucault's files, Ryziński found gay archives with more than 300 personal files. This proves that during communist times, queer people were constantly hounded. Another thing we might learn from the structure of these files is that they are organised as "gay files". They were all in one collection (in four volumes). This suggests that something had actually happened to the "Hyacinth action" archives if they are spread and not collected.³⁷ It has to be said as well that Ryziński did not encounter any difficulties at the IPN doing his research. And, last but not least, he was the first person in 50 years, i.e., the first researcher, not agent, to read these files. Ryziński concludes after reading the files (he quotes bits of them, and certainly this is worthy of another book dedicated exclusively to these archives) that *it is like in Foucault's theory: describing something creates it. (...) There were no homosexuals in Poland until they were filed.*³⁸ Once again, this is not an academic conclusion, because his is not an academic book, which is why Ryziński leaves it there. In the reports of agents, there are not only personal characteristics but also a tendency to classify homosexuals, to create a general theory of homosexuality, to extract it out of "cases".³⁹ Still, it would be difficult to prove that Foucault found the germ of his idea in Poland and developed it 20 years later. It seems to me that there is a bit of an Egg of Columbus effect with Foucault's theory: many queer people had experienced the influence of power and knowledge discourses on their bodies, just as Foucault felt them, yet nobody created a coherent theory out of this personal experience; after Foucault formulated it, many queer people instantly "found themselves" in these words. Such is the case here with the files as well: we instantly see Foucault in them. However, coming to the end of my deliberations, we should not take Foucault's formulations as some final point. His strong theory is subjected to the very rule he describes: perhaps it allowed queer subjects to find some control over themselves, though it might cause "reverse discourses" as well, not only among the non-queer. This is actually a provocative project of how thoughts on homosexuality through Foucault blocked other possibilities. But that is another story.

³⁷ Ryziński says he started his research on Foucault at the IPN by submitting the query "Michel Foucault", "Foucault", "Michel", "Paul Foucault", and there were no results. While if you wanted to submit a query about the "Hyacinth action" victim, you would have to know their name. Only after Ryziński submitted "homosexuality" could he find the data on Foucault, yet in order to do that he had to read all the documents. (By the way, he uses a curious way of saying how he found the correct key-word: *I finally submitted the most obvious word in the context of Foucault's stay. Foucault w Warszawie*, 14). This euphemistic formula is a conscious quotation of all "silence" formulas used to indicate sodomy and then homosexuality.

³⁸ *Foucault w Warszawie*, 55.

³⁹ Compare, for example: *pederast is a similar deviation of norm like humpback, mushmouth, or freckle-face. The latter deviations are visible however, this one is secret.* Conclusions of agent "Gustaw" (Quoted after Ryziński, 62).

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