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The Problem of Polish (Self–)Stereotypes.
The Perspective of Applied Cultural Studies

Summary. The aim of the study is to analyse the stereotype of the Pole in the context of the Applied Cultural Studies perspective. Four basic areas of research can be discerned: other people's variable associations concerning Poles; other people's prejudices and generalizations that influence their attitude towards Poles; the results of Poles' self-evaluation made on the basis of their current experience; the "social frameworks of memory" which shape the Poles' ideas concerning their place in history. Since the purpose of this investigation is to reconstruct the mechanism of self-stereotyping, which involves scholars as much as the society they serve, contingent feelings about their situation are of secondary importance.

Keywords: applied cultural studies, stereotypes, patterns of culture.

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Introduction

When Walter Lippmann came up with the concept of 'stereotype,'[1] he could not have suspected that it would enter into common parlance in such a short period of time. Nowadays, everyone talks about stereotypes. Unfortunately, however,

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[1] W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion Harcourt,* New York 1922.

people using this word are not always aware of its (original) meaning. As a politically engaged journalist, Lippmann sought a tool that would enable him to describe beliefs which reflect that which is valuable for a given community, something worth emphasizing; beliefs shaped by the result of social interaction (including the influence of the media) rather than observations that were made independently. In this sense, Lippmann's stereotypes are similar to the anonymous authorities of Erich Fromm, or the 'other-direction' of David Riesmann.[2] These similarities are not coincidental. Although the concept of stereotype – as a cognitive strategy – has equivalents in other the writing of other authors, Lippmann's basic idea refers to either the social unconscious (including preferences, fears, traumas etc.) or to content imposed on the community by an external body which seeks to take symbolic control of it.[3]

This distinction entails that investigations into stereotypes should head in two directions. It goes without saying that investigation into a group's views on issues determining its relationship to itself and others are crucial. It would be a mistake to draw the line here, however, as it is equally important to look into where those attitudes come from. It is important whether they are long-standing patterns,[4] or whether they result from a (rapid) change in collective thinking. Whether these changes are part of a spontaneous process is an additional problem. In a world in the thralls of globalization, continuously threatened by conflicts monitored by a ubiquitous media, the postulate of political maturity, which Marek Ziółkowski associates with being familiar with one's own "subjective and particular interests", seems rather unlikely to be achieved in practice.[5] Access to knowledge of this kind depends on the insight and thoughtfulness of the participant in social activities, in other words on qualities which – statistically speaking – most participants do not possess. This explains the participant's susceptibility to external stimuli, which actually makes them complicit in the creation of stereotypes, and at the same time their victim.

The second issue is whose beliefs we would like to investigate. Are we interested in how we perceive ourselves, or how we are perceived by others? The relationship undergoes reversal. We get our own back on these others as authors and users of stereotypical images. It is clear that this image differs in principle from that with which they identify themselves. And this is where the difficulty lies. The path from disa-

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[2] E. Fromm, *Escape from freedom,* New York 1994.; D. Riesman, N. Glazer, R. Denney, *The lonely crowd*, New York 1953.

[3] M. Foucault, *Trzeba bronić społeczeństwa*, trans. M. Kowalska, Warszawa 1998 pp. 22–23, 222, 263–265; J. Habermas, *Strukturalne przeobrażenia sfery publicznej*, transl. W. Lipnik, M. Łukasiewicz, Warszawa 2007, pp. 436–437; C. W. Mills, *Elita władzy*, transl. I. Ratalski, Warszawa 1961, pp. 398–399.

[4] F. Braudel, *Gramatyka cywilizacji*, Warszawa 2006, p. 55.

[5] M. Ziółkowski, *Przemiany interesów i wartości społeczeństwa polskiego*, Poznań 2000, p. 62.

greeing with a stereotypical evaluation of someone or something to a correction of this evaluation is long and complex. Finally, the last issue concerns the longevity of stereotypes. From the time of Aristotle and his *Organon*, social scientists have wrestled with the problem of prejudice distorting the results of their work. They are fully aware that they too are unable to escape the influence of stereotypes, and, to make matters worse, stereotypes of a specific, pseudo-scientific character. In this regard, social scientists conduct a thorough analysis of the content shaping their view of the world. Consequently, they find out what determines the attitude of their social environment and causes that they themselves fall into the trap of everyday thinking. They discover not only the determining factors, but also their heterogeneity (i.e. that which makes the factors dissimilar).

The subject considered in this essay is the stereotype of the Pole. Using the distinctions made above, four basic areas of research can be discerned: (1) other people's variable associations concerning Poles; (2) other people's prejudices and generalizations that influence their attitude towards Poles; (3) the results of Poles' self-evaluation made on the basis of their current experience; (4) the "social frameworks of memory" which shape the Poles' ideas concerning their place in history (including the most recent history).[6]
Since the purpose of this investigation is to reconstruct the mechanism of self-stereotyping, which involves scholars as much as the society they serve, contingent feelings about their situation are of secondary importance. The cultural regulators of social emotions (the fourth definition of stereotypes) are of greater importance. This proposed narrowing of focus does not entail that other aspects of the issue have to be ignored. The aim is rather to prevent the essence being confused with the manifestations. A good illustration of this is provided by *Polish jokes* or *Polenwitze*. We should not underestimate the relationship between 'stupid Polack' jokes and the Poles' feeling of national pride, which heightens the Poles' resentment towards the source of these jokes (the first definition). However, it is equally important that both the jokes and the angry reaction to them are easily forgotten in more favourable circumstances. In the last two decades, American cinema has produced a whole series of films that contain negative stereotypes of Poles. It suffices to mention just a few: *The Immigrant*, *Gran Torino*, *Gravity*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Madagascar*, etc. And these stereotypes continue to be produced. The definition of 'Polish joke' on the English language version of Wikipedia begins with the following statement: "A Polish joke is an ethnic joke intended to mock the Polish people in the English language

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6 M. Halbwachs, *Społeczne ramy pamięci*, trans. M. Król, PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 36–77.

based on the hostile stereotypes about them".[7] The entry goes on to explain that these jokes increased in popularity after German immigrants arrived in the United States after the Second World War.

This last point is significant because – regardless of whether it is true or not – it refers to the problem of strained Polish-German relations. It is obvious that national sentiments, which were nurtured and cherished by both sides, have long histories (the second definition of stereotype). This goes beyond the superficial allusions to Poles living in New York's Greenpoint or Chicago's Jackowo. The Poles and the Germans are divided by the memory of past events, and, to make matters worse, this memory is perpetuated by cultural signifiers. Yet at the same time, data on how the Poles are perceived by the Germans belie fatalistic beliefs about interrelationships. The data demonstrate that if good relations are maintained on a daily basis, people are inclined to reconsider (or at least suspend) their prejudices concerning the identity of their interlocutor.[8] Ultimately, investigation into national stereotypes boils down to reconstructing the mental habits that impel people to use simplified images of themselves and others. Therefore, basic aim of essay is to present some selected patterns of the mechanism that drives the Poles' cultural self-identification.

A Non-Stereotypical Investigation of Stereotypes.
A Postulate of Applied Cultural Studies

A presentation of the cultural patterns that constitute the foundations of Polish national identity requires a preliminary comment on the method employed in the investigation. It is tied up with concept of applied cultural studies.[9] Reflection on the accessibility of the world of culture was initiated by the hermeneuticists, in a symbolic manner. Opposing natural science with "science of the spirit", they argued that cooperation was necessary between the representatives of knowledge of facts and the philosopher engaged in an effort to empathize with the order of values cre-

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[7] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_joke>.

[8] <http://www.nto.pl/magazyn/reportaz/art/4177099,polskoniemieckie-stereotypy-od-chodza-w-przeszlosc,id,t.html>; <http://www.polskieradio.pl/10/485/Artykul/884108,-Jak-Niemcy-widza-Polakow-Przyjaciel-ziec-zlodziej>; <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1329,ti-tle,Czy-Polacy-i-Niemcy-naprawde-sie-nie-lubia-Stereotypy-lagodnieja-ale-w-sytuacjach-ta-kich-jak-mecz-wykraczaja-poza-polityczna-poprawnosc,wid,18381972,wiadomosc.html?tic-aid=117699>.

[9] P. Rotengruber, *Man in a World of Values. What is Applied Cultural Studies?*, "Journal of Applied Cultural Studies" 2015, vol. 1.

ated by a given cultural formation. Familiarity with the patterns of behaviour respected by the participants of the culture became a condition for understanding them. The fact that these hermeneuticists spent over a century endeavouring to confirm the benefits of applying this approach, suggests that doubts concerning its sufficiency are not unfounded. Hence the idea of supplementing the hermeneutic project with a pragmatic component.

According to Florian Znaniecki, the logic of values is a key feature of the world of culture, as – in contrast to the logic of things applied in the description of social facts – it combines heterogeneous sets of norms and directives into a historical whole.[10] The fact that values are rooted in culture ensures their longevity even though this durability might be problematic. These values are also characterized by diversity.[11] As a result of this, knowledge concerning these values not only provides an insight into the realities of the communities upholding them, but also enables its life to be directed by them. Heterogeneous sets of cultural patterns can be dealt with as long as their nuances can be skilfully distinguished. Before this can be done, however, these patterns have to be properly recognised.

The outcome of applying the key of heterogeneity when investigating patterns of culture is their classification into two criteria. The first being the criterion of time, which is useful for distinguishing long-lasting Braudelian patterns from patterns of societal change that involve supplanting that which was previously in force. The second criterion is that of validity, and it concerns the conditions for recognizing patterns of culture. To be more precise, it is based on the distinction – proposed by Jerzy Kmita – between the subjective-rational conditions behind these patterns (word views that determine the behaviour of the holders of these views) and functional conditions arising in response to external determinants. It is worth emphasizing that the reaction is subordinate to the principle of the minimal costs to oneself and maximal benefits resulting from adaptation.[12]

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[10] F. Znaniecki, *Pisma filozoficzne I II*, eds. J. Wocial, Warszawa 1987; F. Znaniecki, *Rzeczywistość kulturowa*, in *Pisma filozoficzne II*, pp. 744–745

[11] J. Wocial, *Znanieckiego filozofia wartości*, in *Pisma filozoficzne I*, eds. J. Wocial, Warszawa 1987, p LXXXII.

[12] Both subjective-rational conditioning and functional conditioning that the subject reproduces reflect their normative beliefs. However, that which determines their individuality should not be underestimated. The selection of patterns according to function is carried out with the help of (technical-utilitarian) knowledge concerning what are the cause and effect of a specific phenomenon of process. It is a different matter with patterns of subjective-rational conditioning. Their normative origins entail that they remain valid even when they come into conflict with practice. P. Rotengru-

The proposed classification comprises four subsets of patterns. These are: patterns of long-lasting subjective-rational conditions, patterns of long-lasting functional conditions, rationally-subjectively conditioned patterns of societal change, and functionally conditioned patterns of societal change. Each of these patterns tells us something different about the group being investigated. It is not just the presence of particular patterns that should be taken into consideration, but above all the interdependence that these patterns create together, with varying intensity and in various ways, through their influence on the group employing the patterns. The aim of the investigation is to identify the dominant patterns and confront them with the needs of the community that reproduces them (sometimes unconsciously).

The last matter that requires some attention is the process by means of which Polish self-stereotypes are reproduced. The available resources are rich. The most promising include: (1) reconstruction and comparison of content that was instrumental in shaping Polish national consciousness in various historical periods; (2) analysis of founding myths found in Polish literature and poetry; (3) study of the memory of contemporary Poles; and (4) the hermeneutics of participation that prevails in their public life. Other sources of information on how the Poles perceive themselves are also available. It would be sinful to not make use of them. On the other hand, a cautious approach is required in evaluating the cognitive merits of the data on the basis of which a scholar intends to settle the issue of what is going on in the Polish soul. It is crucial that the scholar's diagnosis should be more that a mere prejudice, in the shape of yet another stereotype.

A Self-Portrait of the Poles. Selected Evaluative Perspectives

The application of cultural studies as a method for investigating national stereotypes is supported by the fact that culture is understood in this field as a conglomeration of qualitatively different norms and directives. Contrary to the pronouncements made in the name of other social sciences, applied cultural studies does not seek the logos present in the world of values. In contrast, it aims at reconstructing a heteronomous order, the symbol of which is *dia-logos*.[13] This is a decisive argument

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ber, *Man in a World of Values. What is Applied Cultural Studies?*, "Journal of Applied Cultural Studies" 2015, vol. 1.

[13] Cf. M. Siemek, *Logos jako dialogos. Greckie źródła intersubiektywnej racjonalności*, „Principia" 2000, vol. 27–28.

for the suitability of cultural studies being applied in projects which aim to reconstruct (heterogeneous) mental habits. In order to carry this out, points (1), (2) and (3) should be weighed up against point (4). In practice, this entails reconstructing national memories, myths and prejudices, and confronting them with knowledge concerning the state of Polish society in 2016.

It follows from this that authoritative premises are those which are embedded in the history and customs of a given community and those which reflect the various ways the community perceives (and evaluates) itself. It is obvious that Henryk Sienkiwicz deserves pride of place in any investigation into the Pole's self-stereotyping. In the description of Polishness provided by this author, there is continual reference to the bulwark of Christianity, to external threats coming from all angles, and to the subordinate position of heretics or underserved tolerance towards them. The 17th century Poland that comes to life in Sienkiewicz's novels comes across as a power in decline, not just through its own fault, but primarily due to the enormity of the challenges of civilization – challenges with which Poland was unable to cope. The emphasis placed on "offering an example" is striking: the example is supposed to compensate for losses (symbolically), and although the fallen do not achieve a military win, they earn a moral victory. The righteous anger of the defeated is made all the stronger by their death.

It should be stressed that Sienkiewicz is not producer-creator of this stereotype. In addition to Sienkiewicz's tales of Skrzetuski and Kmicic, others which uplift the hearts of Poles are those of Gustaw metamorphosing into Konrad in Mickiewicz's *Dziady*, Słowacki's Kordian preparing to assassinate the Tsar, Mickiewicz's Konrad Wallenrod, Prus's Wokulski, Żeromski's Dr. Judym and Andrzejewski's Maciek Chełmicki. All of these literary characters strengthen the nation's conviction that an honourable gesture is more important than the consequences it brings. The next uprising fails and we fail to draw any conclusions from it. The exception being that we conclude we are entitled to pride in the fallen, and this pride is fully justified, as the fallen amply demonstrated their steadfastness. Assessments of the significance of this mental habit have to go beyond its role in literary sources or, more broadly, high culture. This Polish mental habit has in fact grown to the proportions of a supra-religious *credo*. We can find universal themes here. The miseries of unrequited love, the individual's struggle against an unjust system, the punishment meted out to a wrongdoer – all dangerously reduced to the national issue. This discourse is hermetic, because it has to be so. Others are not invited to brood over our own affairs. Then later we are taken aback when we are not so attractive to others (or indeed are misunderstood by them).

Paradoxically, the mechanism of commemorating resists the influence of professionals, in both the communicative and cultural dimensions.[14] The history of Poland – especially that of the 17th century – as told by Paweł Jasienica, Aleksander Bocheński, or even Janusz Tabir does not provide grounds for a great deal of optimism.[15] Despite their differences, all these authors paint a picture of society that has many reasons to compare what happened in the past with what is happening now. (Hence it is hard to explain why these historians are not more widely known). However, that is just how it is. We prefer national mythology to facts. The diagnosis of Janusz Hryniewicz, describing the ubiquity of feudal patterns of behaviour in Polish economic life, has attained a symbolic status.[16] No matter how radical Hryniewicz seems,[17] his metaphor can explain the phenomenon of Polish national stereotypes' resistance to the power of facts. The cultural environment decides how the nation chooses the content that they want to identify with. In fact, Hryniewicz writes about two nations which are related to each other through convergent beliefs with regard to mutual rights and obligations. As he explains:

> "Feudal organisational culture led to the consolidation of two different types of employee behaviour and management at the farm. On the one hand, the owner-managers had unfettered power and the awareness of decision-making not restrained by regulations, while on the other hand with the peasants the ethos of forced or internalised obedience took shape, alongside a lack of a sense of responsibility and the need for detailed instruction at work and the manager's care outside of work. (…) The longevity of this ethos can be seen in the eighteenth century peasantry's frequent negative reactions to the abolition of serfdom and enlargement of peasant farms. (…) On the other hand, the land-

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[14] Cf. J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, Warszawa, 2008, p. 18; A. Assmann, *Wprowadzenie do kulturoznawstwa: podstawowe terminy, problemy, pytania*, transl. A. Artwińska, K. Różańska, Poznań 2015.

[15] V. P. Jasienica, *Polska anarchia*, Kraków 1988; A. Bocheński, *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce*, Warszawa 1996; A. Bocheński, *Rzecz o psychice narodu polskiego*, Warszawa 1986; J. Tazbir, *Reformacja, kontrreformacja, tolerancja*, Wrocław 1996.

[16] J. T. Hryniewicz, *Stosunki pracy w polskich* organizacjach, Warszawa, 2007, pp. 21–39; cf. J. Burszta, *Chłopskie źródła kultury*, Warszawa 1950.

[17] To be precise, Hryniewicz's proposal is not free from errors involving overemphasizing patterns of long duration, at the expense of patterns of social change. Not everything in our communal lives is characterised by feudalism. Cf. P. Rotengruber, *Wzory kultury gospodarczej jako przedmiot badania. Kilka uwag po lekturze Stosunków pracy… J. Hryniewicza*, „Człowiek i społeczeństwo" 2014, vol. 38, pp. 31–42.

owners increased their powers over the peasantry and decreased the mental and intellectual effort they put into managing (…) Quite often, according to the recommendations of contemporary farming manuals, the lords of the manor felt responsible for the well-being and spirit of the village."[18]

In Hryniewicz's conception, feudal patterns of behaviour can be seen reflected in the day-to-day affairs of the Poles. This is how a stereotype is perpetuated. The vitality of a stereotype is not decided by whether the community that embodies it likes it or not, but rather by the fact that it has become an integral element of the community's identity. In practical terms, this means there is a lack of a (convincing) alternative to the manner in which the boss, the workplace, or professional sanctions or privileges appear in the everyday imagination. There really is little room for thought here, since its place was usurped by habit a long time ago. The supervisor is the father, and the subordinate an (eternal) child. An example of this power relation can be seen in the fact that an employer's personal dislike of an employee nearly always results in them losing their job, even if they do their job well. This occurs because Polish organisational culture allows private opinions concerning an employee to intrude into their professional evaluation. In other words, feudal management practices are still being applied.

The situation is similar with patterns of behaviour which are mandatory on a broader scale. The stereotype of Poland as the Christ of nations, along with its numerous variations, such as "for our freedom and yours" or "gloria victis", is still holding up well. This is due to the fact that neither Wyspiański, nor Gombrowicz, nor Hłasko nor Mrożek managed to set the record straight. They failed in this regard because their reckoning with Polishness was ultimately entangled in the idiom of Polishness. The important point in the dealings of these eminent artists is that instead of brushing Polish obsessions aside, they make them the essence of their – all-too personal – considerations. This is the trap that Theodor W. Adorno identified, when he drew attention to the fact that:

Regarding the concrete utopian possibility, dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction. (…) The untruth of any identity that has been attained is the obverse of truth. The ideas live in the cavities between what things claim to be and what they are. Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity.[19]

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[18] J. T. Hryniewicz, *Stosunki pracy w polskich organizacjach*, Warszawa 2007, p. 33.
[19] T. W. Adorno, *Negative dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Berlin 1966, pp. 11, 150.

According to the Adornian explanatory schema, gathering all the topics which serve to negate (selected manifestations of) Polishness is not possible if certain positive sides of the project are ignored, including imagination of how things should be. And so we come full circle. Our minds continue to absorb that same – but not identical – Poland. Nevertheless, this statement becomes questionable when it is applied to works such as Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantyk*, Mrożek's *Emigrants,*[20] or Hłasko's *Pretty Twenty-Year Olds.*[21] The question remains open, however, when it comes to the stability of the perspective from which Polish reality is viewed. If this criterion is applied, doubts evaporate when the diagnosis is constructed on the state of the opposition criticised by its author, and the order they defend. In necessarily brief considerations concerning Polish mechanisms of self-stereotyping, such cases gain significance. They bear witness to the fact that learning, apart from fighting against stereotypes (sometimes instead of fighting stereotypes), contributes to their preservation.

The image of the self-stereotyping Pole – as the guardian of national values, is particularly dangerous, it has to be said – because it is also the image of a moral cripple, the victim of changes that were as intensive as they were all overwhelming. Sorrow brought about by a loss of vitality occupies pride of place here. For example, Józef Tischner opposes the ethics of solidarity with the mentality of *Homo Sovieticus.*[22] While the former is characterised as being responsible and open to dialogue in public debate, the latter refers to individuals whose mentality has been completely dominated by the collective. It is the environment, and above all the political environment, that shapes the outlook of *Homo Sovieticus*. He does not resist this environment in any way. On the contrary, the symbolic control to which he is subject provides him with a sense of security. And not without reason. *Homo Sovieticus* need not fear the consequences of his decisions, since he hardly ever makes them alone. He is a part of his social environment, in which passivity is rewarded.[23]

Tischner's description is compatible with Hryniewicza's feudal metaphor in his investigations into the Polish patterns of economic life. A peasant serf such as *Homo Sovieticus* prefers a peaceful and quiet life. However, the similarities end there. While the origins of Hryniewicz's feudal mentality are tied up with the nations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Tischner focuses on the changes in the collective mentality that were triggered by the Soviet version of communism. He explicitly re-

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[20] *Piękni dwudziestoletni.*

[21] *Piękni dwudziestoletni.*

[22] J. Tischner, *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo sovieticus*, Kraków 2005.

[23] P. Walter, *Rozważania wokół eseju Józefa Tischnera pt. „Homo sovieticus"* <http://www.racjonalista.pl/kk.php/s,6908>.

fers to Zinoviev, thanks to whom *Homo Sovieticus* was recognised as a product of that communist system.[24] Tischner brings *Homo Sovieticus* to Polish soil and tracks his fate in a reality that has undergone axiological change. The challenges resulting from the clash of liberal democracy with the habits of post-communist thinking are supposed to explain the causes of the dysfunctional transformations with which Poland has struggled since 1989.

The comparison of Tischner with Hryniewicz raises doubts concerning the status of the patterns which are identified as dysfunctional. Are they really patterns of societal change which have recently come to shape our attitudes, as Tischner holds, or are they more enduring patterns, as others hold? It should be remembered that Zinoviev faced very similar objections.[25] Neither pre-revolutionary Russia nor pre-war Poland was in fact free from the problems that both these scholars blame on the changes initiated by communism. So, how to explain their determination, resulting in such similar oversights? Clearly from the fact that their desire to see something managed to override the thing itself. This is how myths are born, including those that aspire to status of founding myths.

By way of justification, it has to be admitted that Father Tischner – unlike anyone else – had the moral authority to condemn the vices of the Poles and urge them to improve. As a chaplain of the Solidarity Trade Union, he was actually asked to do just this. From this practical perspective, his diagnosis (despite its shortcomings) justifies the functional considerations. Tischner's aim was to fix something that was truly broken. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that – in cases where the diagnosis refers to pathological societal changes identified as belonging to the time of the People's Republic of Poland (i.e. the communist era) – Tischner was clearly aware that these pathologies originated before the arrival of communism. In similar circumstances, the choice of the former perspective instead of the second is conditioned subjectively-rationally. In making this choice, the subject is acting in defence of their beliefs, regardless of the facts that belie them. The subject confers an objective character on that which they express, as they want to believe it themselves. For example, Ryszard Legutko begins his *Essay on The Polish Soul*[26] with the following statement:

> The Poland that I know and in which I have lived since birth is a Poland with
> ruptured continuity. It emerged like a new version, consciously constructed in

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[24] A. Zinowiew, *Homo sovieticus*, trans. S. Deja, Warszawa 1987.

[25] E. Kania, *Homo sovieticus – „jednowymiarowy klient komunizmu" czy „fenomen o wielu twarzach"?*, „Przegląd Politologiczny" 2012, vol. 3.

[26] *Esej o duszy polskiej.*

opposition to everything that it had been for centuries. The novelty did not emerge gradually, in a complex process involving many historic changes that shaped social structures, customs, institutions and human minds. The essence of contemporary Poland is new, as if it had been created from a new embryo, unknown to previous generations and the past centuries. The outbreak of World War Two began this dramatic rupture, and it was completed by the introduction of communism. Since that time, we have been dealing with a society which we had never encountered before.[27]

The pressing question then becomes: what was "the old version" of the image of Poland, which Legutko employs implicitly? Without going into detail, it is not disputed that the evaluation of the changes that took place after World War Two demands comparison with what went before the war. To meet this expectation, Legutko cites the views of Miłosz and Kołakowski, according to whom: "Clericalism, nationalism, anti-Semitism, inept foreign policy, comical customs, authoritarian tendencies, a demoralized political class, a feudal-cast social system, an arrogant stance towards minorities – all of this put every intelligent and sensitive person off the pre-war system".[28] However, these factors did not put Legutko off. Why? He placed a creation as amorphous as the Polish soul on the moral scales. There are consequences to this. Neither what we were before the war, nor what we accomplished after it (including the successes of the post-communist Third Polish Republic) undermine the general thesis that: "(…) to a large extent we became a PRL-nation,[29] (…) that Polish people did not feel that they had any role to play in the world, and that, in other words, they became accustomed to being objects, rather than the subjects behind the introduced changes".[30] So where should we look for the solutions to the problems identified by Tischner and Legutko? Certainly not in the myth of Polishness. Although the propositions of Andrzej Leder need to be treated with the utmost caution, it has to be admitted that he was right about one thing – it is time to wake up.[31]

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[27] R. Legutko, *Esej o duszy polskiej*, Poznań 2012, p. 3.

[28] Ibidem, p. 35.

[29] PRL refers to 'Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa', the communist Polish People's Republic.

[30] R. Legutko, *Esej o duszy polskiej…*, p. 186.

[31] A. Leder. *Prześniona rewolucja*. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej, Warszawa 2013.

The Future in our Hands. A Summary

These investigations allow the following conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, the mechanism of stereotyping is resistant to facts. Far more important are the mirrors of illusion that the community peers into.[32] With the use of these mirrors the community shapes its image (fulfilling the its desire to understand itself). This process is facilitated by an empirical component that confirms the group in their conviction that they have "valid knowledge" in this regard. It is of secondary importance whether this empirical component grasps the essence of things, or whether it is loosely connected. The purpose is not to subject the belief of the collective to critical evaluation, but rather to establish it. Thirdly, the confirmation of a stereotype's validity is more significant that its actual content. Although the beliefs of the community do not normally require academic support, they gain significance with its help. In this way they are similar to scientific statements, in the sense that they are easily transformed in a system of directives and social norms (e.g. 20th century eugenics). It is enough to remember that without such support, none of the 20th century political doctrines would have got off the ground, including totalitarian doctrines.

These relationships between science and ideology shed new light on the problem of stereotypes. Frequently stereotypes are combatted with the help of another stereotype, which is wrongly taken as a fact. Just as in Jacek Kaczmarski's famous song *Walls,*[33] those who knock down walls do not notice that they soon begin erecting new walls. This can be seen from the examples provided in this article. Polish national self-stereotypes endure even when they take the form of songs about lost paradise. An antithesis cannot get by without its positive justification. However, this justification is always the same glorification of the past. This places the representatives of memory studies in a difficult position.[34] When arguing about the contents of cultural memory or the possibility of historiographical dialogue with interlocutors from other fields, these representatives are faced with a momentous obstacle. Here we have those who were supposed to understand others, yet they are unable to understand themselves. This is due to the stereotypes that get in their way. The question that needs to be asked here then is this: is there a way out of this impasse?

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[32] Cf . A. Turczyn, *Autofikcja, czyli autobiografia psychopolifoniczna*, „Teksty Drugie" 2007, vol. 1–2, pp. 204–211.

[33] *Mury*.

[34] K. Wóycicki, *Zagadnienie historiografii pamięci* <https://kazwoy.wordpress.com/mojepublikacje/zagadnienie-historiografii-pamieci/>.

The representatives of applied cultural studies believe that they have the means at their disposal to enable a community of history (here a community of memory), simultaneously protecting its symbolic capital and maintaining the distance to themselves. The main purpose of this field is the reconstruction and management of patterns of culture, understood as the hidden regulators of social life. These regulators cannot be reduced to a logocentric theory of culture (i.e. a coherent and general theory), or to the technical-utilitarian conditions of social practice. In the conception proposed here, culture is viewed as a conglomerate of patterns both interrelated by the principle of factuality and tied to the beliefs of the community concerning how things ought to be done. (Subjective-rational arguments therefore join the functional justification for patterns of culture). To be more precise, culture understood as the world of human life reflects a twofold aspiration. On the one hand, human beings must adapt to reality (including natural factors), and on the other hand, they want to shape their environment in accordance with criteria that correspond to the desired state they imagine. Reconciliation of these two perspectives depends on choosing – from among the explanatory schemata (composed of their knowledge concerning what is) – the dominant schema, which should be understood as the schema that gives sense to all the others. Znaniecki called this a 'practical dogma'.[35] The hierarchization of explanatory schema is nothing else than adapting them to the order of values preferred by the community.

Finally, the last issue that has to be raised is the multiplicity and qualitative distinctiveness of patterns of culture. Although in everyday circumstances definite sets of these patterns prevail over the others, it is possible to shift the emphasis between these patterns. Social reality is then subject to change which is reflected in a new approach to common issues. These changes are not particularly dynamic, even though the examples of war and revolution might suggest otherwise. The limits are culturally established ideas concerning what is good and correct. The confrontation between the new and the long-lasting results in the selection of a middle way – adjustments taking into consideration the rules of correct communication. As long as the reformer is aware of the status of the content that forms the basis of their activity, nothing unsettling happens. It makes no difference if they are called stereotypes, myths or dominant archetypes. The important thing is that they are not taken to be representations of the world free from interpretative and adaptive mediations. From the perspective of applied cultural studies, counteracting the effects of overestimating dominant patterns of social order begins and ends with identifying their cultural anchors. A person who can look at these patterns and know that this

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[35] F. Znaniecki, *Rzeczywistość kulturowa*…, p. 752.

is not the whole truth about them is a person who aspires to the status of a critical participant in public debate. Let us hope that us Poles will be regularly granted such a critical attitude towards ourselves.

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