

KRZYSZTOF ŁUKASIEWICZ

ON THE ORIGINS OF POLISH CULTURAL STUDIES

KRZYSZTOF ŁUKASIEWICZ

Ph.D. D.Sc., associate professor at the Institute of Cultural Studies, University of Wrocław. His research interests include history of reflection on culture, philosophy of culture, and cultural studies methodology. Editor and co-editor of *Wokół koncepcji kultury Floriana Znanieckiego* (2008) and *O kulturze i jej poznawaniu* (2009). Managing editor of the *Prace Kulturoznawcze* quarterly. ORCID: 0000-0002-9657-3385.

It is only upon first impression, and only without proper historical knowledge, that one can be surprised and – from a modern point of view – puzzled by the strict assertion, in equal measures descriptive and evaluative, made in 1888: ‘Everywhere and all the time there is talk about culture’. This comes from the opening page of the introduction to a work with the succinct and equally telling title of: *Das Problem der Cultur*. Its author was Robert von Nostitz-Rieneck (1856–1929), an Austrian Jesuit specialising in pedagogy and historiosophy. In anticipation of potential objections, he immediately explained that he did not mean the title itself to be ‘an empty slogan’ and that was not employing the word ‘culture’ simply because it was ‘in vogue’. He indicated two reasons that induced him to take up the titular issue:

Firstly, the problem of culture is in very close relation with the most important social questions [Fragen] plaguing the modern world. [...] Secondly, the problem of culture is of ever greater significance [Geltung] in the historical examination of the past: there is an undeniable movement leading through historical works toward the history of culture. [...] Thus, even in academic life, the problem of culture has a huge meaning.¹

¹ Robert Nostitz-Rieneck, *Das Problem der Cultur*, Herder, Freiburg in Breisgau 1888, p. 1–3. The spelling of the word for ‘culture’ is in line with German

Today, Notitz-Rieneck's work is remembered only by historians of reflection on culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With some detriment to the author's intellectual efforts, manifested both in his answer to the question about the essence of culture and in the concluding chapter entitled 'The Culture of Humanity and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ', even for these specialists the book is mainly an indicator of the more general semantic and mental shifts and processes. This is also true of Andrea Seier, for whom the use of the word 'culture' in the Austrian Jesuit's work is an excellent illustration of its role as both an integrating and a fragmenting principle: one could classify, compare, hierarchize – and simultaneously observe, organise and predict, all in the name of culture. This systematic statement is closely connected with a more strictly historical assessment: 'At the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of culture becomes the central leitmotif of political and scientific debates'.²

The above introduction to reflections on the emergence of Polish cultural studies serves at least five purposes. First, it refers more or less accurately to how things were in other places, which as a rule is connected – in varying ways and with varying intensity – to the temporal dimension. It reveals straight away that referring the Polish cultural studies (*kulturoznawstwo*) to the Anglophone *cultural studies* is of recent origin and that it is by no means 'innocent'.³ Likewise, it is not exactly right to evoke the *Kulturwissenschaft* tradition as the most influential point of reference. Second, it bears on framing local tradition in the light, or as part, of the supra-local. Third, it speaks up for adopting a historical perspective to one's own position – and furthermore, a perspective including more than just the things one approves of. Fourth, it makes us appreciate the social and intellectual context of the formation of Polish cultural studies, which – when looked at from a different angle – also demonstrates that reflection on culture cannot be reduced to this discipline alone. Indeed, Polish cultural studies had to fight for their place

orthography of that period. See, Fritz Wefelmeyer, 'From Nature to Modernism: The Concept and Discourse of Culture in Its Development from the Nineteenth into the Twentieth Century', in: *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. William Niven, James Jordan, Camden House, New York 2003, p. 26–28. For Georg Bollenbeck (*Bildung und Kultur: Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am M. 1996, p. 230), Notitz-Rieneck's book is one of the works attesting to the category of culture gaining ground at the expense of education, a process related to accelerated modernisation. On the latter question, see, Rüdiger vom Bruch, Friedrich W. Graf, Gangolf Hübinger, 'Einleitung: Kulturbegriff, Kulturkritik und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900', in: *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900: Krise der Moderne und Glaube an die Wissenschaft*, ed. Rüdiger vom Bruch, Friedrich W. Graf, Gangolf Hübinger, Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1989.

2 Andrea Seier, '«Überall Kultur und kein Ende»: Zur diskursiven Konstitution von «Kultur» um 1900', in: *Der Gesellschaftskörper: Zur Neuordnung von Kultur und Geschlecht um 1900*, ed. Hannelore Bublitz, Christine Hanke, Andrea Seier, Campus, Frankfurt am M. 2000, p. 112. For the sake of clarity, it is worth quoting Seier's explanation of the meaning given to the term 'cultural sciences': 'The term *cultural sciences* (*Kulturwissenschaften*) is an umbrella notion, integrating philosophy, literary studies and historiography, political economy and the nascent disciplines: sociology as well as anthropology or pedagogy' (A. Seier, '«Überall Kultur und kein Ende»', p. 113). It is symptomatic that 'sciences' are used in the plural here, even though in German-speaking cultures, the term 'cultural science' was used prior to that, at least since the publication of Gustav Friedrich Klemm's *Allgemeine Culturwissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1855), and – even earlier – Moritz von Lavergne-Peguillen's *Grundzüge der Gesellschaftswissenschaft* (Königsberg, 1838). In an extensive review of a later edition of Klemm's book, Józef Bohdan Oczapowski rendered *Kulturwissenschaft* as *nauka kultury*, or 'science of culture' (Józef Bohdan Oczapowski, 'Z dziejów socjologii', *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1, 1882, p. 458).

3 For a somewhat different take, see, Paweł Łuczeczko, 'Władza a kultura, czyli jak doszło do powstania studiów kulturowych w Wielkiej Brytanii i dlaczego nie ma ich (jeszcze) w Polsce', in: *Historie nieoczywiste: Szkice z dziejów socjologii polskiej*, ed. Paweł Łuczeczko, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2010.

at the table, as their progression to autonomy was often hindered, for reasons not always and not entirely epistemological. Fifth, invoking Nostitz-Rieneck's almost forgotten book makes it clear that many issues related to studying culture and to more or less institutionalised activities for its sake are independent of time and space, since they touch on the very core of the question of culture, and keep recurring on the strength of the object's own logic.

It is difficult to find a direct counterpart to *Das Problem der Cultur* in the Polish literature of the late nineteenth century, but for the purposes of this discussion I will disregard the changes that occurred both in culture itself and in reflection on culture over the twenty years following the book's publication – and quote a speech given by Józef Teodorowicz in Vienna at a rally to support the construction of an Armenian cathedral in Lviv:

*The culture today elevates man to the level of stars. – And so as to delve into the spirit of this movement, I must touch upon culture. It is verily a difficult task to separate and tell apart the lights from the shadows. Yet if I could, at this very moment, speak to culture, I would tell her: Oh, culture! I admire you in the splendour of your works, ceaselessly created by your insatiable spirit that always thirsts for progress. Yet I bemoan you whenever you combine your genius with hubris, which – even more insatiable than your desire of knowledge – throws you into a realm of conviction that you can solve each and every problem that life confronts us with!*⁴

These words may seem just as historically exotic as the passage from Nostitz-Rieneck, and both authors do indeed have much in common. At this point, however, let them serve as further evidence of the very distinct emergence of 'the problem of culture' in the intellectual discourse at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both quoted texts bear clear marks of the authors' worldview. That, however, only underlines the significance of this issue, which you had to address and consequently, with time, make it one of your concerns and reframe it according to your basic philosophical and ideological tenets. In other words, in the worldview struggles fought at the beginning of the previous century, the category of culture played a considerable role, and – to travesty the title of the perhaps most important Polish text concerning this subject matter, penned by Stanisław Brzozowski⁵ – historical materialism was not the only philosophy of culture.

We have to leave aside the question of the place reserved for the notion of worldview in various systematically developed conceptions of culture – although 'view of the world' and even 'view of the world and life' were among the topics written about at that time and a bit later. It is nevertheless important to emphasise that the epistemic and scientific approach to culture formed as part of a much broader and richer current of cultural reflection. To relate this to the emergence of Polish

4 Józef T. Teodorowicz, „Ojczyzna nasza” kultury, transl. Jan Miodoborski, Drukarnia E. Winiarza, Lwów 1908, p. 6.

5 The author alludes to Brzozowski's essay 'Historical Materialism as Philosophy of Culture', first published: Stanisław Brzozowski, 'Materializm dziejowy jako filozofia kultury. Program filozoficzny', *Przegląd Społeczny* 8, 1907; *Przegląd Społeczny* 9, 1907 (translator's note).

cultural studies as an academic discipline – a discipline aware of its relatively autonomous status, and offering a university degree, which was postulated and discussed in Poland with increasing resolve in the late 1960s – one might say that part of the intellectual and social context of this emergence was the various, including intellectual, effects of appreciation of culture by the Second Vatican Council. For some time, the discipline was largely devoted to carrying on the tradition of Christian reflection on culture, which saw a vivid enough development in pre-World War Two Poland, albeit focusing mainly on the conspicuous theme of so-called crisis of culture. The Polish cultural studies of today also have many points of convergence with conceptions that clearly accentuate their ideological character.

Due to its ambiguity, the term ‘culture’ would at times become something of a *Kampfbegriff*, a rally call to intellectual debates and social action. Despite the distinctively negative connotations of *Kulturkampf* in the Polish, but also German, memory and historiography, I propose to follow Georg Bollenbeck in noting – not so much to exorcise the term but to get a wider perspective – that it referred to all sorts of activities intentionally directed at cultural goals.⁶ Without a doubt, the status of culture as a category, its social and historical determinants, and even the history of the word itself, differ in many respects between the German and Polish contexts. William II’s state was among the most powerful empires in Europe, while Poland was not even on the map, but beginning in the end of the nineteenth century, efforts at changing this state of affairs and resurrecting Polish sovereignty intensified in all spheres of the social life.

It is of course impossible to reduce the Polish independence struggle to the struggle for Polish culture. Yet even if we were to consider the latter as the only available form of, or as a camouflage for, the former, it still brought with it a deepening of cultural reflection. A more detailed analysis and description of this subject is contingent on the adopted understanding of the political sphere and its influence on the ways culture is reflected upon. An equally important question, yet one all too often approached superficially or easily instrumentalised, concerns the more narrowly defined cultural policy. On the one hand, institutional stabilisation of Polish cultural studies as an academic field and a university course was connected to the intentions and actions of particular state agencies; on the other, one of the tasks of cultural studies was to consider the foundations, possibilities and forms of cultural policy. Even if this was used in ‘strategic’ talks with decision-makers and public presentations of the competences of a cultural studies specialist, at the same time (as has been described in more detail elsewhere⁷) an argument was made – from a specific political position and applying a particular definition of culture – that cultural studies were not a necessary element of social and political life. Furthermore, it should be remembered that cultural policy

6 See, Georg Bollenbeck, ‘Warum der Begriff «Kultur» um 1900 reformulierungsbedürftig wird’, in: *Konkurrenten in der Fakultät: Kultur, Wissen und Universität um 1900*, ed. Christoph König, Eberhard Lämmert, Fischer Taschenbuch, Frankfurt am M. 1999, p. 17. One of the sources for this opinion is the body of answers to a survey about the future of culture announced in April 1909 by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

7 See the publications associated with the grant *Polish Cultural Studies: The History and Legacy of the Discipline* (Grant No. 0063/NPRh2/H11/82/2014: *Kulturoznawstwo polskie. Historia i dziedzictwo dyscypliny*).

had also been raised as an epistemic problem in interbellum Poland, which was a period abounding in attempts to politicise culture.

The conception of Stanisław Brzozowski mentioned above was a point of reference and a source of inspiration for Eugeniusz Krasuski, author of the 1913 book *Questions of Culture (Zagadnienia kultury)*. Krasuski engaged in polemics with Karol Irzykowski over Brzozowski's *Voices in the Night (Głosy wśród nocy)*, supported establishing the Stanisław Brzozowski Society, and was an activist in and for the city of Łódź,⁸ where he headed the local Public Library Society; his First World War diary appeared in print a few years ago. His other publication was a brochure with one of his talks (*Ideas and Life, Ideały i życie*, 1916), but *Questions of Culture* remains Krasuski's most important and most ambitious work. It was noticed years ago by Ryszard Nycz for its symptomatic character.⁹ It is also, one may add, an eclectic work, but its eclecticism, while still being a fault, lays bare the period's dominant ways of thinking. Krasuski located the 'essence of culture' in a network of relations stretched between the will, values, science, and life. In keeping with the modernist programme, his definition was closest to Georg Simmel's. As he wrote:

*real culture is no 'state', no 'status quo' but an unceasing striving, an activity manifesting itself in continuous cooperation by everyone for everyone. It is a collective phenomenon, a socio-national manifestation. Especially in Poland, this is not remembered enough.*¹⁰

It was a time when Polish thought, just as European thought in general, was occupied by the question of culture, and no effort was spared in introducing structure to this new and increasingly popular sphere. For instance, Wilhelm Feldman proposed to adopt the following distinction:

The process of change in values that we are currently experiencing is essentially a question of culture. This question embraces all issues of our individual and social life, and an immense part of the misunderstandings and non-understandings that we encounter at every turn results from identifying culture with civilisation.

*We speak about the need to adopt the forms of economic production from the West, and its political forms; we call this culture. We speak about strengthening our intellectual life, about new ideas that see as the goal man's struggle with nature, man's taming of nature with a view to ruling the universe; this, too, we call nature. Meanwhile, all these issues are merely civilisation.*¹¹

8 In Czesław Domański and Alina Jędrzejczak's history of statistics in Łódź, Krasuski is characterised as a 'social and political activist from the period of Poland's re-emerging statehood' (Czesław Domański, Alina Jędrzejczak, *Rozwój statystyki łódzkiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2015, p. 45). Cf. also *Bezbronne miasto. Łódź 1914–1918*, ed. collectively, Wydawnictwo Jacek Kusiński, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna im. marsz. J. Piłsudskiego w Łodzi, Łódź 2014.

9 'This type of sociological-cum-cultural perspective on the alienating mechanisms that intensify in the phase of accelerated technological and civilizational modernisation turned out to be the most popular in Polish thought of that period' (Ryszard Nycz, *Język modernizmu. Prolegomena historycznoliterackie*, Wydawnictwo Leopoldinum Fundacji dla Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1997, p. 72).

10 Eugeniusz Krasuski, *Zagadnienia kultury*, Nakładem księgarni Wincentego Jakowickiego, Warszawa 1913, p. 132.

11 Wilhelm Feldman, 'Cywilizacja a kultura', *Krytyka* 1 (2), 1910, p. 65.

Foreign authors were well known in Poland. One example, apart from Simmel, is Ludwig Stein. While his *An der Wende des Jahrhunderts: Versuche einer Kultur-Philosophie* (1900) was not translated, even in part, some of his writings in social philosophy were available in Polish. Despite the use of 'philosophy of culture' in the subtitle – which in itself is very telling – *An der Wende...* contained considerations that were closer to sociology than cultural theory. This had to do with the fact that more conscious attempts at distinguishing between social and cultural issues had not yet been undertaken. For Krasuski, these spheres were closely connected in a number of ways, but it was philosophy of culture that proved a more binding perspective. This is attested by the reception of *Questions of Culture*. Treating the book as an impulse for the formation of a new philosophical subdiscipline and a harbinger of its author's more independent works, Kazimierz Bleszyński concluded his review by distinguishing between the 'impassive cultural science' and the 'vivid philosophy of culture'.¹² Bleszyński's preference was self-evident but we should not overlook the recognition of 'impassive cultural science' as a pre-existing point of reference for philosophy of culture. Let us also note that Krasuski's work received a very general but favourable review by the young Florian Znaniecki,¹³ and that the distinction made by Bleszyński echoes in the subtitle to Znaniecki's 1921 work *Decline of the Western Civilisation: A Sketch from the Interface of Philosophy of Culture and Sociology* (*Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej. Szkic z pogranicza filozofii kultury i socjologii*). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the dilemma conveyed by this distinction was shared by many thinkers, and as late as in 1926, disheartened by his previous occupations, Stanisław Ossowski wondered whether he should not 'ditch aesthetics and take up – this time for good – sociology and philosophy of culture (I need to relate one concept to the other, somehow)'.¹⁴ The following year, he named 'philosophy of culture (the human world in nature)' among 'questions for the future' and pondered at length about semantic differences between two forms of the Polish adjective derived from 'culture' – *kulturalny* and *kulturowy*.¹⁵ A summary of a university class taught ten years later by Tadeusz Kotarbiński includes, in its turn, the following words:

cultural theory renounces establishing judgements and norms – as a 'cold' discipline; philosophy of culture contains emotional elements – judgements, and establishes norms; historiosophy deals in doctrines concerning the entirety of history, its formation and development tendencies; finally, sociology looks for laws governing social change. A question arises if deliberations of this type are justified. Their scientific value is often disputed. Indeed, if being scientific requires intersubjective verifiability of results, then deliberations from the field of, for instance, philosophy of culture or historiosophy are scientific only to a minimal

¹² See, Kazimierz Bleszyński, 'Z literatury filozoficznej', *Krytyka* 40 (1), 1913, p. 254. For other reactions to Krasuski's book, see, [C.W.], 'Nauka i studja', *Echo Literacko-Artystyczne* 15 (2), 1913, p. 1451–1452, and [K.], 'Z ruchu wydawniczego', *Kurier Warszawski* 292 (93), 1913, p. 4.

¹³ Florian Znaniecki, 'E. Krasuski, Zagadnienia kultury', *Książka* 13 (11), 1913, p. 561–562.

¹⁴ Stanisław Ossowski, 'Fragmenty „Dziennika”', *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (4), 1983, p. 33.

¹⁵ S. Ossowski, 'Fragmenty „Dziennika”', p. 39.

degree. Despite that, they can be engaging and profound, like, say, good journalism, provided that they are done intelligently. What can we do to become an intelligent humanities specialist? It is best to train the scientific mind (ścisłość umysłu) in the more suitable fields outside the humanities (like logic or mathematics), and only then work in the humanities: the skills will get transferred. Apart from the accuracy of scientific thinking (ścisłość myślenia), an intelligent specialist in the humanities should be characterised by the ability to discern things that are of import and essence.¹⁶

This history of philosophy of culture in Poland is a separate subject altogether, but let us note that the opinions about its fundamental meaning, and even warnings against its dominance, which one could hear in the interbellum years were vastly exaggerated. What is more, the polemics of the period show that the ‘impassive cultural science’ mounted a counteroffensive and was slowly getting an upper hand. One could even argue that with the strengthening of the state and the social, civilizational and cultural change, there was increasing demand for sociological reflection, considered to be more modern. After a collapse immediately after World War Two,¹⁷ philosophy of culture gradually regained its status as a subdiscipline; it had its proponents and even some institutional footing, but when Polish cultural studies were stabilising, it was not philosophy of culture that was their point of reference. Still, the cultural studies’ first projects were accused of being mistaken in identifying their scientific status, which meant, in a stronger version, that the new discipline was in fact crypto-philosophy, or, in a weaker version, that it concentrated solely on the philosophical foundations of the scientific endeavour. The further debates about and within philosophy of culture are beyond the scope of this paper, but to provide a better understanding of the initial phase of cultural studies as a university discipline in Poland, it also bears invoking the polemic of Jerzy Kmita¹⁸ with Marek Siemek’s characterisation of modern philosophy. In the context of this thread it is also worth to invoke the premises adopted by the Department (now Institute) of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. Years later, these premises found their expression in the research project *Polish Culturology of the Twentieth Century (Polska kulturologia XX wieku)*. The project’s head, Andrzej Mencwel, offered the following description in 1987:

Polish cultural thought is a crucial aspect of Polish cultural history. It is not identifiable with literature, philosophy, pedagogy or social theories, but cuts across and at the same time unifies these fields. This stems from Poland’s peculiar modern history, in which the question of the wholeness of national culture and of its historical role provoked reflection

¹⁶ ‘Seminarium filozoficzne pod kierunkiem profesora Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego. Rok akademicki 1937/38’, *Studia Filozoficzne* 1, 1978, p. 154.

¹⁷ I share the opinion that Bogdan Nawroczyński’s 1947 work *Życie duchowe. Zarys filozofii kultury* ‘concluded [...] the first half-century of the formation of Polish philosophy of civilization and culture’ (Włodzimierz Kaczocho, *Filozofia cywilizacji i kultury. Teorie filozoficzne rozwijane w Polsce w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*, Ars Nova, Poznań 1998, p. 9), but it did not open a new one.

¹⁸ Jerzy Kmita, ‘Filozofia drugiej połowy XX wieku’, *Studia Filozoficzne* 9, 1979. Siemek’s position was later challenged from a different angle by Andrzej Kołakowski (Andrzej Kołakowski, ‘Kulturalizm i filozofia kultury’, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 5, 1995).

*that was articulated in various languages (literary, philosophical, one of social or pedagogical thought, also artistic) but was generally uniform precisely when it came to culture.*¹⁹

A few lines later, while sketching culturology's trajectory of development, he added:

*This historical situation (and hence, our research situation) gets even more complicated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cultural thought, having transformed into philosophy of culture, seems to become the central problem of a number of programmes, works, and achievements. Philosophy of culture, or the question of the human character of historical reality as the 'object of our obligation', the domain of possible conscious project and conscious realisation.*²⁰

Two problems arise at this point. The first one, less important to our present discussion, has to do with terminology. Apart from causing some semantic inconveniences, the move from 'cultural thought' to 'culturology' implies affinity to anthropological thinking rather than to philosophy of culture, which is indicative of shifts in the wider epistemic field. The other, more significant issue is the close connection of Polish cultural thought with Polish socio-historical reality. That questions of this kind are easily ideologised does not negate their importance, but they do require much more methodological and interpretative vigilance. This is well recognised by scholars specialising in philosophical and sociological thought,²¹ who have studied on numerous occasions the tension between the particular and the universal in the fields of their mother disciplines and have pondered the consequences of this tension for research practice. Mencwel's stance in this regard was firm, but the question of culture, despite its local colouring in Poland, had a more universal character.

In one of his last texts prior to World War Two, Bogdan Suchodolski offered a succinct characterisation of the field when he wrote that culture had existed for centuries, but the problem of culture was of a much more recent provenance. Suchodolski himself put much effort into his own project, also formulated in the interbellum period, of organising the more interesting among the dispersed statements about culture made by Polish thinkers. There had been many ideas regarding the name for the research field that emerged from these statements or was inherent in them: cultural science/sciences (*nauka/nauki o kulturze*), civilizational science/sciences (*nauka/nauki o cywilizacji*), culturology, culturalistics (*kulturalistyka*), culturalist thought. The term *kulturoznawstwo* also appeared in

19 Andrzej Mencwel, 'Wstęp', in: *Historia i kultura. Studia z dziejów polskiej myśli kulturalnej*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1987, p. 7. For a somewhat different perspective, see, Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Narodowość a cywilizacja', in: *Uniwersalizm i swoistość kultury polskiej*, ed. Jerzy Kłoczowski, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1989–1990 and J. Jedlicki, 'O narodowości kultury', *Res Publica* 2, 1987.

20 A. Mencwel, 'Wstęp', p. 8.

21 Leaving older literature aside, I refer the reader to an excellent article by Stanisław Borzym (Stanisław Borzym, 'O przedmiocie historii filozofii polskiej', in: *Filozofia polska w tradycji europejskiej*, ed. Stanisław Pieróg et al., Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2011) and the very instructive study by Piotr Sztompka (Piotr Sztompka, 'Czy istnieje socjologia polska?', *Studia Socjologiczne* 2 (201), 2011).

the interbellum period (in philological discussions, among other places), but was used rather sporadically. Names were not the decisive factor, but attention paid to thinking in a precise and systematic way helped to curb their randomness. This is perhaps also a good place to admit that despite the work on the history of the term ‘culture’ done before 1939 by Stanisław Wędkiewicz, and later on by Marian J. Serejski and Czesław Głombik, we still do not have a monograph detailing the Polish history of the word and the category.²² This is even more true regarding the terms ‘cultural/civilisational science’ (*nauka o kulturze/cywilizacji*) and ‘cultural/civilisational theory’ (*teoria kultury/cywilizacji*), although the latter could boast a long genealogy. In 1823, in an article published in the *Dziennik Wileński* daily, Jan Waszkiewicz argued, following other, mostly French, authors: ‘I call an immaterial fruit, or an inner good, any such fruit that is outside the jurisdiction of the senses, that is, not comprised of matter, one which has value for its usefulness. A set of fruits of this kind we call a *nation’s civilisation*’.²³ What is more, since civilisation – which satisfies, directly, ‘moral needs’ and, indirectly, ‘physical needs’ – has an impact on ‘wealth’, it is in political economy’s best interest to ‘get to know more thoroughly the principles that this immaterial production follows in its advancement’.²⁴

This yet another forgotten episode in the history of Polish thought warrants a mention because it demonstrates the multitude of sources and factors lying at the roots of Polish cultural theory. Ultimately, civilisation/culture did not enter the established lexicon of political economy, but the fact that the discipline did take up this question testifies to its connection with the progressing processes of modernisation. Following many other authors, Suchodolski traced the origin of the problem of culture back to the Enlightenment, and then confirmed this genealogy in his own historical research. Stanisław Pietraszko, to whose great commitment and determination we owe the emergence of Polish cultural studies as a university discipline, similarly noted the singling out of culture as a separate whole in Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski’s *Thoughts on Polish Writings* (*Myśli o pismach polskich*, 1801, 1810), even if the work was a long way from any coherent description of this whole. A century later, the term ‘culture’ became widespread and as such needed a more comprehensive conceptual characterisation which would go hand in hand with changes in the cultural life. That is why in pursuing the establishment of cultural studies as a field of knowledge and a degree course, both purely epistemic and ‘practical’ arguments were raised. On the one hand, it was contended, the existing ways of perceiving culture were inadequate. On the other, the proposed models of shaping it were at variance with the needs of contemporary cultural life. In somewhat simplified terms, the situation of Polish cultural studies as they were ‘obtaining citizenship’ might be portrayed as follows. In the epistemic sphere they collided with the claims of sociology of culture, which in the meantime had succeeded in

22 This role is not played by Bartosz Działożyński’s recent book (Bartosz Działożyński, *Cywilizacja. Szkice z dziejów pojęcia w XVIII i XIX wieku*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2018).

23 Jan Waszkiewicz, ‘Teoria cywilizacji. Wyjątek z rękopisu pod tytułem: Krótki zbiór ekonomii politycznej, ułożony podług sławniejszych w tej nauce autorów’, *Dziennik Wileński* 10, 1823, p. 164.

24 J. Waszkiewicz, ‘Teoria cywilizacji’, p. 174. For more on Waszkiewicz, see, Wojciech Giza, ‘Narodziny polskiej myśli ekonomicznej w ośrodku wileńskim’, *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie* 585, 2001.

securing a reputation of the academic discipline best equipped to study cultural issues. The task of educating cultural workers was, in turn, claimed by cultural and educational pedagogy (*pedagogika kulturalno-oświatowa*), which promoted very peculiar models of cultural participation. While sociology of culture was a new subdiscipline, pedagogical conceptions and programmes had a longer tradition, which sometimes – albeit seldom – featured proposals to ground the pedagogical recommendations and methods in cultural theory. But regardless of these competing claims, Polish cultural studies emerged as an answer to the challenges brought about by the changing socio-cultural reality. They also constantly proposed new ways of tackling these challenges, which nevertheless did not shield them from criticism for alleged lack of practicality or ‘escaping into theory’. In other words, cultural studies’ self-promotion as a new field of knowledge was contrasted with a conviction that their proclaimed area of interest was already parcelled out and sufficiently attended to.²⁵ In this context, the analysis of other disciplines’ theories of culture undertaken by Pietraszko revealed their usurpations. Similar work was done by the Poznań school. And when cultural studies were introduced into Polish universities – which in fact confirmed the field’s epistemic and social significance – the accompanying texts did refer to, older or newer, tradition, but also emphasised that the discipline kept up with the newest intellectual currents and trends. Another often stressed point was the cultural studies’ focus on more general questions, which was juxtaposed with the narrow areas covered by each particular ‘cultural science’ – provided, of course, one accepts such collective characterisation. Even this advantage could be presented as a fault, yet if we reject reducing culture to a loosely connected set of fields, then the attractiveness of cultural studies will consist precisely in this integrating approach, able to transcend inter-field differences. This latter ability is a necessary condition of providing orientation in the increasingly complicated and fragmented world.

The more narrowly treated and more precisely defined cultural studies have not overshadowed other approaches to culture, although they have caused major shifts in the balance of power. As a self-limiting intellectual programme, Polish cultural studies have their roots in a wide discourse about culture that arose in the beginnings of modernity, but gained momentum at the turn of the twentieth century. The discourse had many participants, who entered it with different intentions and backgrounds, engaged in various interactions with one another, and at times decisively changed its shape and form. Cultural studies – whether or not one subscribes to this interpretation of their origin – were among the most active actors in this polyphony. Today, too, ‘everywhere and all the time there is talk about culture’, but the talking is largely done by other people, to other people, using different words, and with different goals in mind.

Translated by Jakub Ozimek

²⁵ I decided not to refer to ethnology/anthropology, psychology, historiography, art studies, and literary studies not so much due to the conciseness of this text but because I consider sociology / sociology of culture, in theoretical terms, and broadly understood cultural and educational pedagogy, in practical terms, to be the best background against which to present the epistemic and educational proposition that was Polish cultural studies.

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ABSTRACT: The article presents the rise of Polish cultural studies to a scientific discipline and academic trend, placing it in a broader perspective of culture as such and of early-modernist intellectual approaches to it. Revealing the philosophical, social and political context behind cultural studies, the paper uses it as a background to discuss different approaches to reflection on culture which cultural studies had to confront on its path to its cultural identity. This is where culture in its general theoretical dimension meets the specific Polish historical conditions.

KEY WORDS: the concept of culture, philosophy of culture, Polish thought, sociology of culture, modernism