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Conclusions

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATION AS A SOCIAL CHANGE STRETCHED IN TIME AND SPACE

> Sociologists have erred in locating social problems in objective conditions. Instead, social problems have their being in a process of collective definition. This process determines whether a social problem will arise, whether they become legitimated, how they are shaped in discussion, how they come to be addressed in official policy, and how they are reconstituted in putting planned action into effect. Sociological theory and study must respect this process.
>
> Herbert Blumer

The abolition of the old order and the transition to another form of social organization was one of the most important subjects of interest for the Chicago school sociologists. Emphasizing its processual character, they pointed out that almost always this evolutionary transition, extended in time, is associated with the creation of areas of chaos and anomy. For some people (whether individuals or specific "we"-communities), these new initially disordered social frameworks are favorable opportunity structures that, thanks to their specific biographical resources, can be used, but not always successfully. For others, a situation in which certain symbolic resources and normative systems lose their orienting power, and the new economic and social order does not allow the continuation of important biographical paths can lead to a more or less significant and protracted sense of sense loss and deepening confusion. This is usually accompanied by a sense of a weakening of social ties, a kind of collapse of the world of everyday reality, and a dramatic deterioration in the ability to plan your own biography.

In many chapters of this book we have repeatedly mentioned that – to recall the words of Marek Czyżewski – many sociologists studying transformation processes in Poland were rather engaged in the "legitimizing service" of social reality instead of subjecting it to critical reflection (Czyżewski 2013). Tomasz Warczok and Tomasz Zarycki (2014: 146–147), first and foremost pointing

to the works of Sztompka, Marody, or Domański, criticized how, "under the guise of neutral analysis[,] they imposed classifications and explanations that magically transform inequalities into natural differences and, consequently, how they are unspeakably socially justified. Justifications may be 'functional system requirements' or teleologically perceived 'progress' (or 'modernization')." In a similar tone, Anna Giza-Poleszczuk much later comments: "as sociologists we did not want to be only passive observers of the 1989 transformation. We thought that our obvious duty is not only to describe modernization, but to actively support it [thus] we have lost the ability of real analysis" (Giza-Poleszczuk 2018), that is, taking into account the multi-threading and multi-dimensionality of social processes, as well as the perspectives of experiences and interpretations of experiencing individuals. The effect of abandoning such an analysis was the belief spread in the public and often scientific discourse about the alleged guilt of certain social groups or social entities for the failure of the transformation process.

In 2006 Michał Buchowski summarized:

> For the troubles brought about by Poland's economic reform, various groups are accused: crooked politicians, corrupted bureaucrats, selfish entrepreneurs, and international agencies, including the EU. However, in the elite dominant discourses in mass media and scholarly analyses it is the "subaltern's' nature" that blames workers, agricultural workers, and the impoverished for their own degraded circumstances, and for society's difficulties which generally "trumps this critique" (Kideckel 2001: 98). Real workers and the impoverished have disappeared from public discourses. Many stories talk about unemployment, the black market, and economic problems that, while addressing macro-level issues, miss the grass-roots perspective. Underprivileged groups are depicted during situations of conflict like strikes or road blockades. In the absence of ethnographic descriptions rooted in everyday practices and confronted with details of social life studies, ideological and essentialized images are concocted. Media images emphasize new kinds of employment and material culture. Advertisements portray middle class professionals and high-tech products that have little relation to "ordinary people" (Buchowski 2006: 467).

The collection of autobiographical interviews collected as part of the *Experience of the Process of Transformation in Poland* project gave the opportunity to capture this forgotten or neglected bottom-up voice, or, as Buchowski writes: "grass-root perspective." Since the publication of the cited text, many of these groups have already been reminded: industrial plant workers (including fibrillating machines), the poor, the unemployed, or the precarious young (see, e.g., Mikołajewska, Wawrzyniak 2016, Gospodarczyk, Leyk 2012, Madejska 2019, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2014, Mrozowicki 2011, Czarzasty, Mrozowicki 2020,

Leyk, Wawrzyniak 2020). However, we believe that the material collected by us fills a gap, showing the biographical process of the working-through of the systemic transformation also among those who somewhat escaped the attention of researchers, being, according to certain sampling assumptions, neither the beneficiaries nor the losers of this great change.

It is worth noting that over time public discourse has undergone significant transformations and – as Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak shows:

> For several years, reverse internal social orientalization[15] has been more and more clearly present in both conservative and leftist discourse, in light of which the contempt of neoliberal elites against the morally winning and demanding dignity of the folk class should be settled (Nowicka-Franczak 2017: 409).

To put it simply, it can be said that both these discourses undermine the possibility of building a dialogical, based on solidarity, bond of a "we-you" relationship (e.g., one that was hardly worked out since the '70s between workers and intellectuals, whose "power" led to the overthrow of the old social order in 1989). They are based primarily on pushing the vision of a society in which "we" are threatened by some "them," to which – like Marek Czyżewski, Andrzej Piotrowski, and Sergiusz Kowalski showed in *Ritual Chaos* (1997) –

> we refer descriptively as a world existing abroad mutual obligations, essentially strange, at best indifferent, and in the extreme case – hostile and threatening, similar to natural elements or mechanical devices. In such an extreme case, it is said of "them" that they behave in a way more or less explainable by external circumstances, but it is difficult to attribute "their" behavior to the value of action understood in terms of meaning. The more "they" are experienced by "us" as a strange and hostile world, the more space is left for justifications to define "them" in terms of objectification" (Czyżewski et al. 1997: 37).

[15] This is a certain option of orientalization emphasizing intercultural differences leading to the identification and isolation of "strangers" or "worse" within a specific "we"-community. We should add, that Andrzej Piotrowski, looking at the split of Polish society as a result of transformational processes resulting in radical economic changes, pointed to a clear division of the emerging knowledge class after 1989 with those segments of Polish society that wanted to remain faithful to the "oppressive and defensive structure of national or regional identity based on fear and a sense of danger from strangers" (Piotrowski 2005: 338–339). He adds that "[…] it is not only about cultural and national strangers, dissidents or newcomers from outside who overcame and subordinate us as their periphery through their civilization advantages, but also about the gap between sections of the native society which perceive themselves as separate, losing common foundations at the level of meaning systems, separate cultural worlds" (Piotrowski 2005: 339).

Interestingly, in the collected autobiographies this sort of categorization of the world and positioning ourselves towards others do not exist. The fact is that during the questions phase of the interview, we did not ask our interlocutors about their ideologies, political sympathies, or grass-rooted theories about the system transformation of which they became subjects and often objects. It is also a fact that these issues rarely appeared in the spontaneous narrative phase, and therefore did not constitute the framework for organizing the biographical account. In this respect we can conclude that narrators have not been feeling a part of history as it has not been a bottom-up transformation project, but a top-down design. We will return to this issue in the following pages.

The systematically gathered life histories (bottom-up voices) were intended to diversify the sample as much as possible and the only ordering factor was (in accordance with the assumptions adopted at the project planning stage) the belonging of the informants to three different cohorts. Thus, the collected autobiographical accounts allowed, first of all, the showing of the life history of people whose experience was in both public discourse and sociological analyses "annulled," their attitudes assessed as "backward" and "inoperative" and their fate as "losers." On the other hand, they gave the opportunity to analyze the lives of representatives of (allegedly key to the capitalist social formation) the "middle class." The stories of people placed by sociologists in this stratum, however, revealed the significant diversity and the multilayered nature of their biographical experiences in connection with social processes, which did not always, and simply, make them "winners" of the systemic transformation. It was probably because, as it was explained in the *Methodological note*, that we have searched for the interviewees in the periphery, and not in the centers understood here literally as the main centers of dynamic processes of social transformation seen in the framework of development and progress. The vast majority of our interlocutors showed their resourcefulness resulting more often from the skilful use of biographical resources and in their own way defined opportunity structures, in many cases distancing themselves from the described neoliberal rhetoric. At the same time, we can point to a certain paradox. The collected data, whose authors were born in the next three decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, show that the greatest trajectory potential associated with the way of social anchoring in modern times (we omit here individual biographical experiences, for example, diseases) in terms of institutionalized criteria of the life course: education and family manifests itself in autobiographical accounts of people born in the 1980s. Two interpretations collide here: the first one indicates that while people who experienced a large part of their life in the Polish People's Republic (PPR) may have difficulty adjusting to the new social, economic, and partly political order, while the younger generation (i.e., those born in the 1980s) without the ballast of the old system, without the bite of the

homo sovieticus syndrome could softly enter a new and obvious reality. The second interpretation falls within the broad diagnosis of modernity and emphasizes that we live in a risk society that entails uncertainty, and a difficult experience of individualism. It seems that the second diagnosis is more likely. Perhaps in a specific set of socio-biographical conditions in individual experiences, does the coherence of educational, institutional, and media messages depicting the model of a man who is "an entrepreneur of oneself" (see Czyżewski, 2013: 19, Stachowiak 2013: 141–161) become so obvious that – in the absence of alternative references – it is accepted unconditionally? What is the significance of the fact that, in the context of the analyses undertaken in many chapters in this book, which show the mutual interplay of social transformation with the processes of chaos and suffering of narrators, the most "vibrating" narratives appeared among those who were born in the '80s and, consequently, their biography is placed in specific phases of the process of social, economic, historical, and cultural changes? We should ask a question here: are the experiences of people born in other decades different and why? What are their interpretive resources, material hierarchies, or orientation systems? Do family situations and values taken from home allow for critical reflection on the experienced social reality – at least by juxtaposing and comparing different world concepts, life patterns, and basic progressive rules? We have tried at least partly to answer these questions in individual chapters of this book, showing various aspects of the narrators' experience and different constellations of social processes.

When designing the study and choosing the birth decades as the basic criterion for the sample selection we also wanted to face the question of whether one can speak about the generational experience of transformation. According to Karl Mannheim, "the generational site" embraces all the people born in a certain period of time in a given place, but the social site itself though distributing chances and resources rather creates opportunity structures, which may be used by a generation. Only then are they interpreted as a common feature and only then does it help to create a generational actuality in which experiences of a generation are connected by interpretation. "We shall therefore speak of a generation as an actuality only where a concrete bond is created between members of a generation by their *being* exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization" (1952: 303). The sense of Mannheim's concept of generation, appreciated as the most complete and sociologically grounded (Pilcher 1994), stresses that the *Generationszusammenhang* is created as the result of specific bonds. So an objective criterion of a social location of a generation related to being exposed to shared collective phenomena, is not enough. "The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide do not, in

themselves, involve similarity of location. What does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data et cetera, and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly 'stratified' consciousness" (1952: 169).

Given the conditions described, which create the social construction of the generation, the meticulous analysis of the gathered materials again points to a certain paradox: although it should seem that transformation is/was a generational experience of those who became its subjects, or often objects, it turns out to be such an experience to a lesser extent. The life histories of people born in the 1980s should also be taken into account here as well. Of course, if we consider the "objective" criteria related to the change of the political system and economic order, this is a generational experience, especially if it is taken in a comparative perspective before and after. On the other hand, the collected narratives show that it was only in the 1980s that the effects of transformation processes fully gain the formation power of biography. We can refer here to the narrative analyses of three young women presented in Chapter X. These three life histories, show a certain and yet not that rare modality of the dynamics of experience based on the maximum use of biographical potential of an individual by the neoliberal labor market in its Polish version. This becomes possible due to the strong alluring embedded mechanisms that obscure (or expose it only to economic logic) other areas of the individual's life, as well as thanks to the commonly promoted and accepted, by virtue of taken-for-granted, necessity for empowerment. This, the case of Róża born in the '70s, shows that the narrator does not follow this logic and frames her biography by reference to very traditional values yet she finds herself in a new reality as a successful individual.

In most cases, the biographical accounts of people from the 1980s clearly unveil a sort of seduction mechanism based on the myth of education as a biographically planned path of a better life. This is also based on the myth of a self-steering market economy that is to ensure the satisfaction of needs, social advancement, and access to goods. If we follow its logic, we will put forth individual development, as well as take full responsibility for our own actions in terms of success or failure. That is, we agree to the social distribution of roles between *winners* and *losers*. In this context, we can again observe certain paradoxes.

First, the experience of ideological seduction is repeated in the next generation. Of course, it concerns a different reality, but in some sense the strategies for rationalizing the world described in Chapter VII (analyzing the PPR) are reproduced. Of course, we are not talking about the ideological alignment of both systems, but about paying attention to how they can be worked out at a biography level. Again, paradoxically, it can be said that in the

PPR period it was "easier" to build a critical attitude towards the system after the ideological seduction phase. We are currently dealing with the new type of naïveté. Our interviewee, born in the 1980s, would like to experience getting chances. When choosing a project of action based on education they expect their future will be as reality is now. Yet, long term patterns of interpretations of actions could not be directly transferred from the previous system. This is due to two factors: the specificity of the current system in which it is assumed to be difficult to define fairly stable biographical stabilization patterns and a rhetoric based on the illusion of aspirations, seemingly guaranteeing specific biographical developments. At the same time, the current education myth was also supported by the rhetoric of the PPR system, in which, paradoxically, this biographical career (in the case of parents of narrators, or imagining their unfulfilled aspirations) worked out. Education was a way of social advancement, although its measure did not have to be high material status, rather stable work and social prestige. Of course, in retrospect and comparing the two systems, this positive picture may appear to be deceptive. Many of our narrators came to this conclusion by comparing the lives and work of their educated parents with their present day situation. In the vast majority of cases, this comparison, made from the perspective of adulthood, and thus looking at the then life of parents through the eyes of an adult who is in a similar biography point, triggered a reflection on the past and the present. Thus, the universal balancing of one's own biography in relation to the life cycle shown in the context of social and family relations, in the case of the respondents, was mediated by the processes of systemic transformation. Let us repeat again: narrators most often did not talk about them directly by placing their or their family biographies in the constellation of historical processes. Rather, they talked about themselves, their parents, and life experiences for which the social reality was the background.

Summing up our considerations, we want to return once again to the analytical categories frequently cited in the chapters of the book, but developed in previous studies devoted to the experience of war (Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996). It is worth emphasizing here that the discussed project *Biographical Experience of Transformation* is to some extent a continuation of the studies of the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź, where research was organized and conducted based on autobiographical narrative interviews focused on biographical experiences of World War II and the socialist statehood in Poland and East Germany.[16] Thus

[16] We have in mind two projects: *Biography and National Identity* based on life stories of Poles who experienced WWII. The research was conducted in the early '90s in the department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź (Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996 and Dobierała, Waniek ed. 2016) and the project *The People's Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in*

it inscribed in chronologically defined logic of just researched phenomena, which enables to treat the already conducted projects as a source and a point of reference in empirical, analytical, and theoretical reflection. According to our research experience we could once more observe that events which are typically defined as the breakthrough moments or the turning points determining the framework for periods of history do not necessarily appear in autobiographical narrations.[17] The same happened in this research: the breakthrough of 1989 and possibly other events contributing to the transformation such as the presidential elections in 1990, or the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Poland in 1993, the access to NATO and the EU, or the denomination of the zloty did not play a substantial part in our interviewees' biographical experiences. To the contrary, the events identified as symbolically significant and alluded to in the public discourse did not necessarily determine any meaningful framework for interpreting biographical experiences. Thus what was the most used category from the previous research was this describing biographies as rooted in *milieu*. Looking at the collection of narrations from the three projects, we can say that only in the narratives about the experience of war did individuals talk about great historical events. In the typology of life events, war is defined as an event of low probability, but if it occurs, it is experienced by the majority (Hoerning 1990: 131). So the war was the basic frame of reference for life stories. Nevertheless our analysis showed that even in this case, there were few narratives rooted in history, that is, presenting biographical experiences from the perspective of great historical processes. In the case of the narratives focused on PPR times, the rooting of one's own biography in the perspective of history was not so much about the events of those times, but about the references to the war. Moreover, showing one's own biography in the context of the family fate of parents and grandparents and their patriotic involvement in the fight during the war time, most often happened in the case of narrators, who wanted to legitimize their biography in this way. These were people who criticized the socialist system at the time of the narrative interview, but who had

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Memory and Biographical Experiences of People Born between 1945–1955. A sociological comparison based on the biographical comparison by the Polish-German Scientific Foundation (PNFN 2012-03) implemented in 2012–2015 by the Department of Sociology of Culture of the University of Łódź and the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg, funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science. As a result of these projects, the Department of Sociology of Culture disposes of more than 200 narratives with people born in the following decades of the 20th century, beginning with the oldest narrator born in 1909 and the youngest in 1988.

[17] A very similar phenomena was observed by Antonina Kłoskowska during her research on the biographies of young Poles of the democratic breakthrough (Kłoskowska 2012: 322–355).

been seduced by it at some point and then changed their perspective and took, sometimes quite active, action against it. In the case of narratives collected now, rootedness in history is extremely rare, as a recessive thread in the context of justifying parents' biographies and their entanglements in the socialist system, although these issues are usually faded out of awareness.

The vast majority of the informants, irrespective of education or social status, narrated the sequence of events in their life from the perspective of their own social environment. This could be understood broadly: from family relationships and the family in general as a biographical resource, but also the only reference frame, work, or the local community. One, therefore, searches in vain for a framework of civil society according to its classic definitions in the gathered data. It should be emphasized that we did not ask about it, that is, during the questioning phase we did not bring up topics that did not result from the spontaneous narrative we just collected. Can one draw far-reaching conclusions from here? Certainly not, it can be assumed that our interlocutors have political views, in one way or another they create a society that we could define as civic. The thing is that the stories about their lives before the task do not reach this frame of reference. So what constitutes the "essence" of biographical recapitulations of – let us recall – the so-called ordinary people? Again, one should refer to one of the analytical categories defined as biographical vectors developed in the project on war experiences – resourcefulness.

> It shows links to the biographical action scheme and institutional pattern (coping as the opposite of helplessness, that is one of the constitutive features of trajectory experience). However, the story about biographical experience in terms of resourcefulness may concern attempts to control destructive effects of trajectory […] (secondary adaptations in the sense of Erving Goffman). All in all, if the concepts of process structures refer to experience as a psychosocial reality that is reached through the analysis of the narrative, while the notions of biographical vectors refer to ways of reporting experiences interpreted as experiences of a certain kind (Piotrowski 2016: 48–49).

Here, some terminological difficulty must be clarified. At present, as we have emphasized many times here, the concept of resourcefulness can be associated with the repertoire of neoliberal language imposing on the individual the task/obligation of coping with life. It should be stressed, however, that the analysis of many autobiographical accounts about biographical experiences rooted in various historical moments of our society shows a specific, culturally developed strategy, which can be called by capacity to adopt and cope on the level of getting by. These developed resourcefulness strategies are quite common in our narratives and, somehow "ahead" of trajectory experience, are specific "preventive" strategies. Their bases are usually quite traditionally

reference points. The way of bringing order in life goes through family and social networking – building of social ties. But, at the same time, in the case of the youngest group of narrators setting a new family seems to be no longer a pattern for stabilization. Whereas in the case of a person born in the 1960s and 1970s, establishing one's own family was connected with the desire to stabilize one's own biography, especially responsibility for children. Of course it should be analyzed more as cultural than systemic change. Yet, at the same time, as we showed on the basis of narrative analysis, family and family ties remain as one of the constitutive biographical components of people's life. This contradiction may cause certain problems on the level of coping with one's biography – the pattern of individualization is contrasted here with the traditional pattern of family relationships. Moreover in the narratives we could also see deinstitutionalizations of biographies of young people who rely on family – they were often brought up by grandparents and in adult life could observe that institutionalization processes are rather faced than having real social meaning.

Analyzing the interviews from this project, as well as recalling the analysis of previously collected narratives, we can only confirm that resourcefulness is one of the basic culturally developed strategies in our society. It should be treated primarily as a way of dealing with difficulties experienced on an individual and collective level. At the same time, we can also look at resourcefulness somewhat critically: working out ways of dealing with social reality can lead to normalizing strategies. This was the case in many of the narratives of the communist era when social abnormality was accustomed to the world in which we had to live. Similarly, nowadays, neoliberal rhetoric raises the idea that effective management of one's biography is the basic modus operandi of a successful life. The cases we have described exemplify this way of thinking and this type of resourcefulness. At the same time, we also have shown how people, in this case not seduced but incapacitated by this rhetoric, simply have managed to cope with the transformative reality. Of course they had to deal with their own life experiences and social opportunity structures (or the lack of them). But, we can metaphorically say that their resourcefulness was the answer to the discourse of winners and losers, and the idea was not to be labelled a loser. Here we can put forward a hypothesis, which would require further in-depth analysis, that our society has been quite smoothly subjected to the new economic order, which has often taken the form of an economic regime calling for surrendering to the invisible hand of the market and taking for granted the high costs of transformation. Perhaps focusing on coping with everyday life through resourcefulness and avoiding the label of the loser was one of the reasons why people did not take to the streets even in the most difficult moments of the transformation, when the unemployment rate reached 20% or more.

The collected narratives delivered very rich and diverse material. In the book we could present just some analytical perspectives and we have a deep feeling of insatiability. When constructing the logic of our presentation we decided to focus on chosen problems and present it mainly through the case studies. Of course such strategy has advantages and disadvantages. Beginning from the last ones, we have to admit that although the discussed problems are generated from the material, they are at the same time *our* way of social reality interpretation.

In his *Scope of Anthology* (1967) Claude Lévi-Strauss describes the Indian who during his visit in New York was not interested at all in the usually impressive image of the metropolitan space, but

> All his intellectual curiosity for the dwarfs, giants, and bearded ladies who were exhibited in Times Square in that time, for automats and for the brass balls decorating staircase banisters […] All these things challenged his culture, and it was the culture alone which he was seeking to recognize in certain aspects of ours (1967: 44).

We have the impression that our approach to the collected materials is similar to that of the Indian – our attention was caught by specific problems and social processes. It can always be said that this is not the only analytical view, that there are no synthesizing generalizations and summaries in our considerations. Adopting this critical point of view, we are also convinced that the strategy we adopted for presenting the effects of work in the project gave the opportunity to capture, at least some part of the bottom-up perspective, an ordinary person. This allowed us to show some aspects of social processes from the level of biographical experience and their interpretation, not so easy to grasp with other research techniques. Thus, we are convinced that we have at least partly managed to fill the gap in existing analyses of the transformation process. Showing individual cases is always a kind of laboratory of connections between what is one-eyed and social; and stimulates what is necessary in the work of a sociologist – sociological imagination.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that materials collected using the autobiographical narrative interview method as part of the *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland* project showed multidimensionality and multilevelness of individual experiences of systemic transformation in Poland. They deny the common schematic and stereotyping distinctions, which entails the discrediting of those who – in the conditions of "governing through freedom" – have not become enterprising enough to face the necessity of "taking life into their own hands." And as Ulrich Bröckling says: "Forcing people to develop their own individuality also means that ultimately they are to blame for their failures" (Bröckling 2016: 5).

Last but not least, we can ask the question; what is the role of sociologists in the (dramatic) processes of change, social conflict, or tensions?

One solution would be a look at experiences of people through the prism of Fritz Schütze's idea of a liaison work concept inspired by the legacy of Everett Hughes – one of the classics of the Chicago School (Hughes 1972: 303 and on). It involves the transition of differences in language-conditioned cultural codas (understood as the resources of interpretation that enable the defining and giving of meaning to the world of life) with simultaneous explanation of various points of view of interaction partners or different realities (cf., Czyżewski 2005: 348). Marek Czyżewski distinguished three types of intermediary work in public discourse (2005: 356–385; 2006: 130–132): hegemonic, symmetrical, and asymmetrical. As it seems in the transition between the socialist social formation and the neo-liberal model of capitalism, the symbolic elites took up its hegemonic variant, that is, one that did not take into account other points of view ("of non-subjective" mass) and either simply ignored them or – defining them as unwise, wrong, distorted, or immersed in the mental legacy of communism – granted themselves the right to lecture and rebuke a "rebellious ward," reluctant to "do up modernizing backwardness" in reference to Europe (cf., Piotrowski 2005: 338).

As a result, as Sergiusz Kowalski wrote in 1997, the process of decomposition of the former communist order was spreading: "it was the work of the elite in which the masses had little to say, and even less to do" (1997: 295). And yet, it would be possible to introduce a modality that would take into consideration the other party's perspective on equal terms and take into account its hierarchy of validity (symmetrical variant) and even one that (in a special situation of suffering) would be based on the patient listening to the voice of an "ordinary citizen" (asymmetrical variant). At this point, once again, it is worth asking a question about the alleged guilt: are "ordinary citizens" or intellectual and political elites really to blame or should we (also) look for the answer somewhere else?