polish 4(168)'09
sociological
review
ISSN 1231 – 1413

ANTONI SUŁEK
University of Warsaw

On the Unpredictability of Revolutions
Why did Polish Sociology Fail to Forecast Solidarity?*

Abstract: The 1989–1981 Solidarity revolution took everybody by surprise: the political authorities, the democratic opposition and the observers of social life in Poland. It also took the sociologists by surprise. This essay tries to explain why Polish sociology did not forecast Solidarity. The author argues that the reason for this failure lies in the fact that the birth of Solidarity was a revolutionary, and therefore naturally unpredictable, event. It was also an unprecedented one. It was the first anti-totalitarian revolution. He also points out that major social conflict was unthinkable in the context of mainstream theories and did not fit into Polish sociologists' ideas concerning their own society. He recognizes that the amazement which Solidarity evoked stimulated reflection which led to a deeper understanding of social process and the nature of prediction in sociology.

Keywords: Solidarity; Polish sociology; revolution; social forecasting.

For unrefined critics of the social sciences such as the "historicists," whose "poverty" Karl Popper (1957) exposed, the unpredictability of revolutions significantly attests to the immaturity of sociology vis-à-vis the natural sciences. Astronomy is able to predict an eclipse of the sun precisely many years in advance yet sociology is unable to predict an earthly revolution shortly before it erupts! "Had a social scientist in 1780 known half as much about society as the old Babylonian astrologers knew about astronomy, then he should have been able to predict the French Revolution," the "historicists" could have said (Popper 1974: 338). Meanwhile, sociologists today do not consider astronomy to be a good reference point against which to evaluate sociology. They also know why it is so difficult to predict revolutions. Quite exceptionally, however, there are cases where it is possible to *demonstrate* that sociologists in a particular country was unable to predict a revolution which occurred in that country and *investigate* the reasons for its occurrence.

Revolutions are rare occurrences altogether and they are particularly infrequent in countries with a well-developed sociology. Sociology develops in democratic countries, countries in which elections, not revolutions, take place. In authoritarian countries, where revolutions do erupt, we would be hard pressed to find a developed sociology.

---

* The first version of this article was presented at the conference "Solidarity: Event, Consequences, Memories" which was held at the University of Warsaw University to commemorate Solidarity's 25th anniversary, 22–23 September 2005.

Poland's case is exceptional. A revolution broke out in an authoritarian country. In 1980–1981, under the influence of the mass social protests of August 1980 and Solidarity, the Polish mutation of the system called "real socialism" began to collapse. Although the revolutionary process was checked by the *coup d'force* of 13 December 1981, the ignited conflict was frozen for a while. Democracy was instated in Poland in 1989, this time as the result of a process initiated by a political contract (Staniszkis 1984; Ash 2002). At the same time, Poland has a sound tradition of sociological reflection and research, one of the most powerful in Europe (Kwaśniewicz 1993; Szacki 1998; Mucha & Vaitkus 2006). This way, Poland became the perfect "strategic research site" (Merton 1987) for observation and analysis of the relations between revolution, or more generally—social change, and sociology. This essay is one of the texts which has tried to take advantage of this situation (cf. e.g. Sułek 1993; Mucha 2003).

Sociology's Surprise with Solidarity

Savoir pour prévoir, afin de pouvoir. Until recently, in the nineteen-seventies, August Comte's positivistic ideal appealed to Polish sociologists. Predictability ranked high as a goal of science. The goal was technological—to know in order to plan, construct, evoke, prevent, warn, avoid. Forecasting disciplines such as futurology, predictology or social prognostics already existed. Institutions solely committed to forecasting also existed. Experts representing these disciplines wrote extensively about the *methods* of prediction, suggesting by the very use of the word that it was possible to *learn* how to forecast the future. Prediction was viewed as the litmus paper of the quality of social science and valid prediction—as the test of the theory on which this prediction was based. Accurate social prognosis would also have a positive effect on the social scientists' self-esteem. They would be the ones who knew how to penetrate the future, knew about something before it happened, and before other people knew it was going to happen.

It would have been a great achievement to foresee such an event as the birth of Solidarity in Poland in 1980–1981 *beforehand*. Polish sociology did *not* foresee this event, however. This would not have been surprising had Polish sociology been an inferior and peripheral discipline. It was a relatively mature discipline, however. It had a ramified infrastructure and a relatively up-to-date methodology. It was theoretically heterogeneous and had accumulated an impressive body of data on Polish society. Yet this sociology did not predict Solidarity. This is not an accusation, it is merely recognition of a fact which needs to be explained.

Polish sociologists, generally speaking, have acknowledged this fact and in 1980 and later they asked themselves and others why mass revolt and self-organising society had taken sociology by surprise. Not everybody acknowledged the fact, however. Here are three verbatim quotations. "This time Polish sociology did not screw up and was not taken by surprise," wrote one—on what basis we do not know. "One knew that something was bound to happen," said another *post factum* and he was surely right,

something always happens. "It was possible to foresee the outburst of protests on the basis of my data," a third one ensured, forgetting that one cannot predict anything on the grounds of empirical data alone, without a theory, not to mention why he did not predict the outburst himself.

We need not rely on words because we know what Polish sociologists did predict. We shall ignore the speculations of specialists in "the Marxist theory of social development" and theorists of "developed socialist society." Let us see instead how far the experts on Polish real socialism went in their prognoses. In 1979 Jan Szczepański, its most persistent researcher, wrote, oblivious of the censors, to *Kultura*, the Polish monthly published in Paris:

> I forecast that the Polish economy in the 80s will initially take the 'it will be all right' stance until a serious shock takes place which will cause a radical change in the methods of planning, administration and management, which of course will produce a certain level of disorganization at first but, with consistent action, may take the economy to a higher level. Of course the politics of the 80s will be a continuation of what is happening in the 70s. I do not foresee any serious change in the country's domestic politics but I do foresee an aggravation of conflicting forces. Above all, the Pope's visit may lead to the development of a powerful political, Catholic movement in the future. […] As far as socialist democracy is concerned, nothing is going to change, unless crises and shocks force it to, but they will not erode the ossified, ideologically sanctioned forms of the political system. The principle of the leading role of the party will not change and therefore the party will not want to resign on behalf of any representational institution. […] Oppositional groups such as KOR (the Workers' Defence Committee) will be used in unproductive struggle, partly tolerated, and its operations will only lead to more political literature. On the other hand, the Catholic movement may become a real political force and a situation conducive to the realization of Piasecki's vision[1] may develop (Szczepański, 1980: 234–235).

Even in this exceptionally bold prognosis there was no room for anything even a bit like Solidarity. Neither was there room in the cautionary report issued at the same time by "Doświadczenie i Przyszłość" (Experience and the Future) (1979), a discussion group of oppositional intellectuals:

> The diagnosis which emerges from the existing reports is a critical diagnosis—the authors wrote. Since social processes in Poland have been and are still under the influence of the political factor, a considerable portion of the postulates are postulates for change of political mechanisms and structures. There is universal awareness that the rift between the social consequences and declared political slogans is widening, that disharmonious development is deepening social differences for which it is usually the weakest who are paying. […] The condition of society depends on various political activities whose consequences are often unpredictable and which increase the intensity of uncontrolled processes. These find different and more complicated expression than they do in the capitalist system but this difference will not protect us—as history to date has shown—from unexpected explosions of crisis.

The authors of this report recognizes the increasing tension and, painting a picture of "explosion of crisis," demanded that the authorities begin to reform the country. This crisis, however, was to resemble former crises and breakthroughs (1956, 1970) rather than being something basically new, unknown in post-war Polish history—something like the mass protests in August 1980 and Solidarity.

Polish sociology's failure to predict Solidarity was due to a specific conjunction of causes in sociology and in Solidarity. Both were equally important.

---

[1] Bolesław Piasecki (1915–1979), a rightist politician who wanted to create a movement combining nationalism and Catholicism, but one which would recognize the authority of the Communist party.

The Limitations of the Sociology of the Stabilization Period

Prediction is a bridge thrown into the future. Bridges are built of pillars and spans. The pillar of prediction is diagnosis, recognition of the present whereas the spans are theories or at least generalizations which connect known facts with unknown, as yet nonexistent ones.

As far as diagnosis is concerned, in the decade of the nineteen-seventies or even earlier it was the common opinion that Polish society was now quite accurately described in many sociological monographs, reports and articles and it was time to synthesize. Certainly, the knowledge which had been accumulated on grand processes such as industrialization, urbanization and migration, and about grand social categories such as the workers, peasants, intelligentsia and youth, was quantitatively impressive. However, sociology did not offer the whole truth about Polish society. This became increasingly evident in the late 70s and completely blatant after 1980. Due to passage of time and selective retrospection it is now hard to determine the truth about Polish sociology in the 70s. We had better trust our contemporary observations or at least those of times closer to those ones.

This is what Jakub Karpiński (1988: 122–123), a sociologist and activist of the democratic opposition, wrote in his autobiography:

> Sociologists usually studied things which were rather limited with respect to time, place of study and subject: they wrote monographs of the various professions or designed questionnaires and—basing on the answers—studied differences in opinion, and also occupational differences or differences in wealth which they called 'social structure' although it may have been more appropriate to reserve the term structure mainly for institutions, including governing institutions […]. It looked as if sociology was a science of the present, and even then the incomplete present. […] When sociologists took interest in contemporary Poland they often did so by studying a representative sample of the population. They asked selected samples questions and the answers were the basic material […]. This way, they learned what Poles are like, but I also wanted to know what Poland is like […], how society is organized, what the authorities do and what resistance they confront, particularly in times of truth, pivotal moments in which people change their opinions concerning the feasibility of action and other people in addition to the governing authorities and other collectives have a voice, unofficial and formerly unrecognized agents of social change speak up.

This bold critique applies to the early 1970s and is based on its author's retrospection but more systematic evaluations concerning the second half of the nineteen-seventies are consistent with it. For example, this is what Jadwiga Koralewicz (1987: 10) said in her introduction to the book on Polish society before the crisis:

> "In the late 70s sociologists mainly focused their attention on various elements of social consciousness—such as values, attitudes, orientations or visions of social consciousness. Clearly missing, meanwhile, were studies of various types of institutions, particularly authority institutions. This is a great pity because among the many hypotheses on the sources of the Polish crisis it is the hypothetical pathology of the institutional-political system which gained particular significance."

The case was similar with *theory*, the instrument of prediction. It is not so much that the dominant theories in Polish psychology in the nineteen-seventies did not foresee the great social conflict. They did not enable such prediction. Such a thing did not fit into the mainstream sociological conceptions—their language, perspective or assumptions (Misztal & Misztal 1984; Mucha & Skąpska 1991).

This applies first and foremost to theories understood as models of society. Structural-functional theory which was so influential in Poland and which describes society in the language of processes of adaptation and integration did not supply any categories facilitating conflict recognition and analysis (although, as Piotr Sztompka (1974) demonstrated, this theory could have been developed in this direction). The official Marxist theory of social development naturally did not provide for such a possibility as mass revolt of the working class against governance in the name of "its objective interest" executed by the "workers' party" (as the governing Communist party in Poland was called). The theory of "developed socialist society" which emerged in Poland in the first half of the nineteen-seventies at a time of improved standard of living and increased social optimism also did not leave any room for structural change. Society was already "developed" and the "scientific-technological revolution" was merely to stimulate its "further development."

Qualitative change in society may come about due to conflict in social structure but in Poland the dominant stratification theory in structure research made it difficult to recognize its existence. Both the theory itself and the research conducted on the basis of this theory presented society as a system of strata and socio-occupational groups consisting of individuals who have similar incomes, education, prestige and organizational position and conceptualized change in social structure as the result of individual and group mobility (for a review see Wesołowski & Słomczyński 1975; for critiques see Tyszka 1978 and Szawiel 1981). Stratification theory, to use the words of Stanisław Ossowski ([1957] 1963), understands social structure as scheme of gradation and functional schemas which assume concordance and cooperation, not as dichotomic schemas ("the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor, those for whom other work and those who work") which permit conflict. Yet the empirical research inspired by this theory in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies demonstrated various tensions in the social structure. For example, there were reports of structural barriers to egalitarianism manifested in the large role of ascribed factors as determinants of social position (Pohoski 1979), the reduced possibilities of upward mobility in general, leading to the blocking of the young generation's life aspirations (Nowak 1964; Zagórski 1976) and status inconsistency—discrepancies between education, income, prestige and authority (Słomczyński & Wesołowski, 1978). After 1980, these phenomena were quoted as structural roots of the protests. Earlier, however, they were not considered to be causes of a potential conflict. On the contrary, a positive role of status inconsistency for functioning of both social system and an individual was emphasized.

It was only in the mid-seventies that new research and new interpretations began to expose more serious disturbance of the systemic equilibrium. For example, in a study conducted in 1978, Magdalena Gadomska (1981) and Wojciech Zaborowski (1986) exposed the increasing importance of the "Us–Them" dichotomy in lay theories of social structure. One example of such an interpretation is an essay by Stefan Nowak (1980) showing that society had internalized egalitarianism and some of the other values of socialist ideology and that these values were being used as standards for the critique of "real socialism." A report published by the "Doświadczenie i Przyszłość"

[Experience and the Future] discussion group (1979), based on sociological research, registered and highlighted various symptoms of the imminent crisis and society's "critical consciousness," combined as it was with "passivity and apathy." But, as Jan Malanowski ([1981] 1984) was soon to demonstrate in his revealing book "Polish Workers," the actual situation of the workers, the "working class," and the authorities, the "governing class," had not been properly researched although these groups were strategic from the point of view of social dynamics and these are the ones which clinched in the great political conflict of the late nineteen-eighties.

In global approaches to society formulated prior to the mid-seventies, not only was there no room for conflict, there was also no place for political power.[2] This was paradoxical. Sociology made it clear that, as opposed to capitalist societies, socialist societies were "political societies," meaning that they were organized top-down fashion and that politics was "a basic set of values which executed control over all domains of collective life" (Szczepański 1972). The key to social development, it ensured, lay in changes in the elite and the institutions of power but the authorities could only be studied at the local level and was not included in syntheses of knowledge on Polish society. Even in Winicjusz Narojek's (1973) innovative book on "the planning society" the topic of political authority was discussed very cautiously. Jakub Karpiński's (1975) book *Ewolucja czy rewolucja* was exceptional in that it gave a detailed account of the mechanism of execution of political power but the book could only be published in Paris and few sociologists at home noticed it—also because it was so avant-garde. However, new conceptualizations of Polish society appeared in the late seventies and sociology began to speak a different language. At the Sociological Convention in Cracow in 1977 (just after the workers' protests in 1976!), a plenary paper on "the developed socialist society" was still presented but at the same time it was argued that Poland fell far behind the ideal of "equal opportunity" in social status attainment (Michał Pohoski). There was also mention of "social vacuum," poor identification with groups other than one's family and nation (Stefan Nowak) and "tensions in the social system" (Jadwiga Staniszkis). Shortly after, Witold Morawski (1980) formulated the concept of "imposed industrialization" and Staniszkis (1979, 1980) began to write about "contradictions in socialist society," "economic-political cycles" and "regulation by means of crises" (which guaranteed systemic "ultrastability" nevertheless!). These new ideas later helped to explain why the system collapsed but they could not forecast it. There was no theory of real socialism which could include and connect into one whole the history of the system, its political structure, the functioning of the political-economic system and collective action. Without such a theory it was impossible to predict the 1980 protest and the birth of Solidarity.

---

[2] There was no room for conflict not only in sociological theories. These were only one form of social consciousness. Jan Strzelecki (1985) argued that harmony between individual interests and the common good was a major assumption of the "lyrical model of socialism" which dominated official public discourse. Barbara Szacka ([1987] 2005) demonstrated empirically that in school textbooks for the younger classes of primary school in 1976—1984 "portrayal of contemporary Polish society as a harmonized, integrated and conflict-free whole goes hand in hand with the tendency to eliminate any conflicting vision of past societies from the historical picture and to show that consensus reigned" (p. 123).

Undoubtedly the aforementioned limitations of Polish sociology were related, first and foremost, with the authoritarian nature of the Polish political system, with its lack of freedom of research understood as the freedom to choose one's research topics, freedom to choose one's methods, freedom of ideas and speech (Ajdukiewicz 1957) and one must remember that "on a social scale interest dies out with freedom of discussion" (Ossowski [1962] 1983). This is not the whole story, however. According to Piotr Łukasiewicz's (1991) apt words, sociology in the nineteen-seventies was "a limited sociology." The system managed to convince sociology that there was no serious and real alternative to the existing system and sociology manoeuvred within this narrow cognitive horizon. Besides, nearly everybody was likeminded at the time. Sociology did not treat real socialism as something transitory but neither did it treat it as something unchangeable. It simply assumed that socialism existed and would continue to exist. To permit the idea that it could change, one would have to transcend this framework. Not politically, because sociologists who sympathized with the "democratic opposition" sometimes did, but intellectually.[3] However, the Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk: the necessary theories only emerged in the eighties when "real socialism" was heading for downfall and the disintegrating system was disclosing its hidden structure.

Not only theories can lead to prediction, however. So can inductive generalizations of observed cases. Sociologists are familiar with the "social optimism curve" plotted on the basis of research conducted by OBOP (the Centre for Public Opinion Research; cf. Koseła & Sułek, 1986).In the first half of the seventies, optimists had an advantage of 60 percentage points over pessimists but when economic growth slumped in the mid-seventies, optimism plummeted and the optimism over pessimism advantage approached zero, violent workers' protests (against price rises) burst out in 1976. Optimism soon increased again and even exceeded the earlier level, only to plummet equally quickly so that by 1980 the optimism over pessimism advantage began to approach zero. There was no *logical* reason to expect another protest. There was no "law" stating that when the pessimists begin to outnumber the optimists the social system breaks down. It had been "empirically" demonstrated, on the other hand, that Poland went through cycles: protest—new government—promises and hopes—"detachment of the party from the masses"—protest—new government etc. Although it was based on only two cases (1956 and 1970), this observation provided a *psychological* reason to predict that the present political authorities would also collapse due to the protests. It did not offer sufficient foundation for the prediction that the protests would achieve a similar scale as in 1980 and even less foundation to predict such serious consequences.

The *dominant patterns of empirical research* (Sułek 1992) were also not conducive to prediction of major social conflict. Until more or less the mid-seventies, the dominant methodology in Polish sociology was the questionnaire. This was not just quantita-

[3] Even in the report of the "Doświadczenie i Przyszłość" discussion group, Edward Lipiński, the doyenne of the Polish economists, noted that its proposals for "profound political reform," the necessary condition for overcoming the crisis, remained "within the framework of the political system reigning in Eastern Europe."

tive dominance due to the fact that empirical sociology was based predominantly on questionnaires. The questionnaire method functioned as a *model* for sociological method. The questionnaire method and the related tendency to understand society as an aggregate of individuals, together with the focus on social consciousness, limited the chances of studying new inchoate tendencies in Polish society. The traditional language of questionnaire items and categorizations prevented sociologists from recognizing early enough that society was now ascribing significance to values relating to dignity, empowerment and citizenship. Of course it was not questionnaires per se which were at fault but the researchers who used them. They failed to notice "novelty" in society so they did not enquire about it, nor did they expand their cafeterias. They only got back what they had originally assumed to exist (Marody & Nowak 1983). Questionnaire studies are mass studies and "centrality" is one of their major features: they focus on the mainstream because elites and peripheries are hard to access. They also focus on phenomena with which society is already familiar. New ideas emerge at the periphery of the system, are usually endorsed by but a few and therefore fall into the "other" category. It was hard for questionnaire-dominated sociology to notice the existence of alternative and dissident groups, counterculture and opposition—the groups from which historical change begins—and also began in Poland.

These were just a few of the reasons why sociology failed to predict Solidarity—discipline-related reasons. A second group of reasons is inherent in the unpredicted event itself.

The Peculiarities of the Solidarity Revolution

When we turn to the Solidarity revolution in search for the reasons why sociology failed to forecast Solidarity we can definitely say that the most important reason was the *unprecedented nature* of the 1980 protest and the birth of Solidarity. Zbigniew Brzeziński (2005) attested to this uniqueness when he included Solidarity in the "pantheon of grand revolutions" alongside the American revolution, the French revolution and Mahatma Ghandi's movement, events which either took place on faraway continents or in remote times. Although it may have been possible to foresee yet another crisis in Poland it was not yet possible to foresee how the crisis would develop. There was no "necessity," no universal law on the basis of which to expect such a case. There was also no such "tendency" whose next and expected "expression" Solidarity would be in Poland in 1980–1981. The "third wave" of democratization initiated in 1974 by the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship was just beginning to ascend (Huntington 1991; Doorenspleet 2000) and we only know *ex post* that this was the beginning of a historical wave, not a fleeting fluctuation.

As a *revolutionary event*, Solidarity was inherently hard to foresee. James Davies' (1962) famous theory of revolution is often evoked in this context: revolutions break out when rapid growth follows a period of stagnation and then this growth is suddenly interrupted creating a chasm between awakened aspirations and suddenly diminished chances of satisfying them. The problem is that this is not always the case and so this

theory does not predict how the breakdown will end—with revolt or revolution, angry outbursts or attempts to change the political system. Mass revolution needs a political project and intellectuals (ideologists and experts) are needed to prepare and carry out the revolution. It is difficult to foresee that a coalition of the masses and the elites will develop. In Poland this coalition did not develop in Warsaw although here modern working class communities and powerful communities of the critical intelligentsia existed side by side. Neither did it develop in Lublin, a large city in south-east Poland where the first workers' strikes broke out (and subsided) in the 1980s although it has two universities, a state one and an independent, Catholic one. This coalition developed in Gdansk where an oppositional movement of workers *and* the intelligentsia had already developed and the strikes this movement organized were supported by representatives of the media and Warsaw intellectuals (Karabel 1993; Kubik 1994).

If it is difficult to predict revolutions. It is even more difficult to predict *new types of revolutions*. Of course Solidarity was not the first workers' revolution and someone even said it was "the *last* proletarian revolution in history." It was the first revolution of a new type: Timothy Garton Ash (2005) called it "the first velvet revolution" and Bronisław Geremek (2005) called it "the first anti-totalitarian revolution."

As opposed to other revolutions," Geremek argued, "an anti-totalitarian revolution is characterized by the fact that […] its goal is not to intercept power but to advocate for citizens' agentive rights and democracy. In its quest for human freedom and rights it eschews violence. It appeals to mass civic movement and leads to extreme political change but avoids extreme means.

The Solidarity revolution was so original that it is difficult to define its historical uniqueness, so it was even more difficult to predict. The mass protests in summer 1980 and during the "first Solidarity" period had great internal dynamic. Such minor events as the firing of Anna Walentynowicz,[4] an employee at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, triggered a process whose scale and rapidity exceeded all initial expectations. In July 1980 Lech Wałęsa, then an unknown activist of the "illegal" Free Trade Unions of the Coast , allegedly told a British diplomat that "he was absolutely sure of success, but it would take years before independent trade unions became reality" (Wiatr 1988: 149).[5] The dynamics of the situation, first the strike and then the revolution, were so intensive that the revolution had to "self-limit itself" (Staniszkis 1984). The very word "solidarity" is a lovely example of Solidarity's self-dynamics. This is what Mirosława Marody, authoress of the first sociological book on Solidarity (Marody [1981] 2004) said later on:

A name was given to the events. This name helped people define and own the situation. Use of the world "solidarity" in itself played an important role when the protests began and then spread all over the country. Some names impose certain obligations on us, particularly if they are accompanied by expectations and external support (Marody 2005).

---

[4] Anna Walentynowicz is the heroine of Volker Schlöndorff's film *Strajk—Die Heldin von Danzig* (2007).

[5] Similarity to the confession of the patron of the Gdansk Shipyard, quoted by Davies (1962), is obvious. In January 1917, in Switzerland, a month before the outburst of the revolution and the fall of the Russian Tsar, Vladimir Lenin doubted whether "we, the old [will] live to see the decisive battles of the coming revolution"—and only hoped that "the scarlet sun of revolution" would shine for the youth, as Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (1976) put it in *Lenin in Zurich*.

If revolutions take not only tyrants but also revolutionaries by surprise, why should they not surprise observers and those who investigate them? Not only Isaac Newton with his superhuman genius[6] but even the Laplace's demon with his divine genius would not have been able to predict the course of things because nothing here was prescribed, settled or determined.

Another reason why it was impossible to predict Solidarity is that, in addition to being a many-million, "total social movement" (Touraine *et al*. 1983) it was a trade unionist movement, a front on behalf of democracy and a national uprising. It was a *social discovery*. Popper argued in *The Poverty of Historicism* that one cannot predict the course history will take on the basis of progress and the increasing role of science. In order to predict it one would first have to predict scientific discoveries and we cannot know today what we will discover tomorrow, just as we cannot predict social discoveries, and therefore their consequences.

The unpredictability of Solidarity is also attested to by the fact that today, nearly thirty years later, we find it difficult to explain it fully and new factors keep cropping up in our attempts at explanation, their role in the birth of Solidarity is still being debated and new ideas and explanatory theories are continually being proposed (Latoszek 2005). It is particularly important that *new concepts* , not yet adopted prior to 1980, are continually being introduced to explain how Solidarity came about. For example, "new middle class," a new category combining qualified workers and that part of the intelligentsia which was not related to the authorities, appeared for the first time in 1981 (Kurczewski 1982). The utility of such concepts in attempts to explain Solidarity has also helped to understand why sociology could not have *foreseen* Solidarity. How could it if the concepts and ideas which could help to foresee it did not emerge until *after* the event.

Consequences for Sociology

The Solidarity revolution forced sociology to reflect and revise many ideas concerning Polish society and of course this change was not limited to sociologists. Just as there is such a thing as the "polymorphism of human personality," described by Stanisław Ossowski ([1943] 1967), there is also the polymorphism of society. It's unknown albeit sometimes anticipated possibilities manifest themselves in exceptional situations and, once exposed, must be taken into account when creating a new societal image and new self-image and they may leave a mark on "the entire formation of social life." August 1980 and Solidarity also changed Polish sociology as a science although attempts to describe this effect are still at the conceptualization stage (Kurczewska 2006).

Solidarity triggered the birth and growth of the *critical sociology of real socialism*, so different from the sociology of the seventies, the time of stability (Rychard 1992). Sociology of the time of stability, with its assumption that there was no alternative to the system, bound by censorship, busy studying Poles' individual attitudes and

[6] This is an allusion to the inscription on Newton's monument at Trinity College, Cambridge: *Genio qui ingenio genus humanum superavit*.

opinions, was unable to explain the activities of society as a collective historical agent. Sociology of the time of crisis saw society as a system. It approached the phenomena it studied from the perspective of the history of real socialism. Its analyses combined the macro-social, institutional and micro-social perspectives and this allowed it to link systemic processes with the behaviour of individuals who participated in the life of institutions. It combined empirical investigation with theoretical reflection and was therefore able to describe the investigated phenomena in "general sociological" terms. These analyses distinguished between "the authorities" and "society" but their authors sympathized with society's striving for emancipation.

Another of Solidarity's important effects was the reflection on, and refinement of *sociological methodology* (Sułek *et al*. 1989). The questionnaire method was increasingly criticized. Other methods now gained recognition. They aimed at giving a more in-depth and comprehensive definition of situation, cognitive categories and the new language of small but influential communities, like groups of political activists, counter-culture circles and religious renewal movements. New methods of institutional analysis were developed, as were anthropological methods of investigation of everyday life, investigation of collective action and political interactions, social movements and small groups, or methods of analysis of texts expressing their strivings and visions of the world.

The surprise caused by the birth of Solidarity and the problems involved in the explanation of this development stimulated reflection which led to a *deeper understanding of social process and the nature of prediction* in sociology. Sociologists became increasingly aware that forecasting understood as guessing the future has limited value, restricted to deterministic isolated systems which fail to respond to predictions which concern them. Eclipses of the sun, quoted in comparisons of sociology to the natural sciences, are so easy to predict because they take place precisely within such systems. Revolutions, meanwhile, take place in a different kind of systems—ones which are nondeterministic, nonisolated and sensitive to the signals of the upcoming threat to their stability. Minor, "accidental" events, such as the proverbial movement of the butterfly's wings which triggers a series of atmospheric events finally leading to a thunderstorm on another continent can also set the internal dynamics of these systems in motion. The future of social systems is not a performance according to the scripted scenario. Social process is not a film which has already been recorded and whose as yet unviewed scenes merely needed to be shown. The future does not exist and is not waiting to be discovered. It is in the making now in real time. The future is being created by social actions (structurally limited, of course) which are a combination of willpower, knowledge and values.

The collision of the prognoses of the time of stability with the Solidarity revolution clearly demonstrated the epistemological limitations of social forecasting. A generalization of this experience can perhaps be found in the words of Stefan Amsterdamski, philosopher of science, in the foreword to his Polish translation of *The Poverty of Historicism* (Popper [1957] 1984: xiii-xiv):

> Every fragmentary prediction must assume stability of some conditions in which it takes place. […] Stability of these conditions depends on the human decisions and behaviours which constitute the studied processes.

Also […] these assumptions apply to the invariance of value systems […] in a given society […]. When these assumptions are explicit, as a rule they expose certain conflicts of value, when they are implicitly adopted—they conceal these conflicts. […] But although prognosis exposes conflicts such as these it usually conceals the fact that they are derived from the acceptance that other values are inviolable, immutable. For example, such predictions implicitly assume that […] the systemic forms of society in which the predicted process is taking place will remain unchanged. Since many assumptions which are taken for granted are implicit, prognosis plays an ideological role: assumed contingency stability is treated as if it were a fact of life, completely independent of human behaviours which might eventually change these contingencies. […] The more long-term social prognoses are, the more doubtful they become. The greater the probability that assumedly impossible processes will take place.

In the social sciences the possibility of prediction is the prediction of possibility, Amsterdamski wrote a few years earlier ([1980] 1983). But this was before Solidarity. Today, after Solidarity, even such an open formula is insufficient. The case of Solidarity showed that one can only foresee something whose existence is permitted, on the basis of a paradigm or theory. Anything which is predicted must first be mentally conceived. In this sense, social science will never be able to predict the course of things, it can only predict what scientists have first thought of. We can hardly expect history and social reality to take only this one, narrow course, however. We are condemned to the unpredictable and we should be thankful that things happen of which sociologists never dreamed.

Solidarity was a lesson in humility for all who believed in their scientific predictive faculties. Nobody foresaw it. Just as nobody foresaw the fall of the communist system in 1989,[7] the painful social complications of the "transformation" and many, very many events including major political turning points. No Polish sociologist predicted in 1989 that, for example, several years later, in 1993, former communist activists would regain power as the "democratic left." After the leftist's triumph in the 2001 election nobody refuted the prognosis that Poland was in for a long spell of stable post-communist government, nor foresaw that they would soon enter the stage of agony which would end with the 2005 election. Just a few months before the 2005 election nobody foresaw that the conservative Law and Justice party would win, not the liberal Civic Platform, nor that Law and Justice would have to step down after losing the premature 2007 election. But these surprising political vicissitudes are not causing sociologists much discomfort. They have left Comte and forecasting alone and have turned toward explaining and understanding, toward the hermeneutics of social life. And nobody now expects them to say what will happen tomorrow.

References

Ajdukiewicz, Kazimierz. 1957. "On the Freedom of Science." *Review of The Polish Academy of Sciences*, 11(1–2): 1–19.

Amsterdamski, Stefan. [1980] 1983. "Możliwość przewidywania i przewidywanie możliwości" [The Possibility of Prediction and the Predictability of Possibility], in: *Nauka a porządek świata* [Science and the Worldly Order]. Warszawa: PWN.

Ash, Timothy G. 2002. *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, 3rd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[7] Ralf Dahrendorf forecasted the fall of communism in 1989. Intrigued, Jerzy Szacki asked him later on how he knew. "I guessed," he heard. Cf. Szacki (1998a).

Ash, Timothy G. 2005. "Europe for Revolution." *The Guardian*, 1 September.
Brzeziński, Zbigniew. 2005. "Solidarność Europy" [The Solidarity of Europe]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1 September.
Davies, James C. 1962. "Towards a Theory of Revolution." *American Sociological Review*, 27 (1): 5–19.
Doorenspleet, Renske. 2000, "Reassessing Three Waves of Democratization." *World Politics*, 32 (3): 384–406.
Doświadczenie i Przyszłość, 1979. *Raport o stanie Rzeczypospolitej i drogach wiodących do jej naprawy* [Report on the State of the Republic and Ways to Repair It].Warszawa: NOW-a.
Gadomska, Magdalena. 1981. "Consciousness of the Classes in Current Vision of the Social Structure." *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 3 and 4: 39–54.
Geremek, Bronisław. 2005. "Solidarność jako model wyjścia z komunizmu" [Solidarity as a Model Way Out of Communism], in: *Od Solidarności do Wolności. Konferencja międzynarodowa Warszawa–Gdańsk 29–31 sierpnia 2005* [From Solidarity to Freedom. International Conference, Warsaw–Gdansk 29–31 August 2005]. Warszawa–Gdańsk: Fundacja Centrum Solidarności, pp. 3–20.
Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: Oklahoma University Press.
Karabel, Jerome. 1993. "The Origins of Solidarity: Workers, Intellectuals, and the Making of Oppositional Movement." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 26 (1): 25–56.
Karpiński, Jakub. 1975. *Ewolucja czy rewolucja* [Evolution or Revolution]. Paryż: Instytut Literacki.
Karpiński, Jakub. 1988. *Taternictwo nizinne* [Lowland Mountaineering]. Paryż: Instytut Literacki.
Koralewicz, Jadwiga. (ed.) 1987. *Społeczeństwo polskie przed kryzysem w świetle badań socjologicznych z lat 1977–1979* [Polish Society before the Crisis in the Light of Sociological Studies 1977–1979]. Warszawa: PWN.
Koseła, Krzysztof & Sułek, Antoni. 1986. "Metody badania procesów społecznych" [Methods of Research into Social Processes], in: A. Sułek (ed.), *Metody analizy socjologicznej* [Methods of Sociological Analysis]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 265–309.
Kubik, Jan. 1994. "Who Done It: Workers, Intellectuals or Someone Else? Controversy over Solidarity's Origins and Social Composition." *Theory and Society*, 23 (3): 441–446.
Kurczewska, Joanna. 2006. "Socjologia i socjologowie wobec Solidarności" [Sociology and Sociologists vis-à-vis Solidarity], in: A. Sułek (ed.), *Solidarność: wydarzenie, konsekwencje, pamięć* [Solidarity: Event, Consequences, Memory]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, pp. 270–287.
Kurczewski, Jacek. 1982. "The Old System and Revolution." *Sisyphus. Sociological Studies*, 3: 21–32.
Kwaśniewicz, Władysław. 1994. "Between Universal and Native: The Case of Polish Sociology," in: B. Nedelmann & P. Sztompka (eds.), *Sociology in Europe: In Search of Identity*. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 165–187.
Latoszek, Marek. 2005. "'Solidarność:' ruch społeczny, rewolucja czy powstanie" [Solidarity: Social Movement, Revolution or Uprising], in: M. Latoszek (ed.), *"Solidarność" w imieniu narodu i obywateli* ["Solidarity" in the Name of the Nation and the Citizens]. Kraków: Arcana, pp. 240–282.
Łukasiewicz, Piotr. 1991. "Socjologia ograniczona" [Limited Sociology]. *Krytyka*, 34/35: 47–50.
Malanowski, Jan. [1981] 1984. "Polish Workers." *International Journal of Sociology*, 18, no. 3.
Marody, Mirosława. et al. [1981] 2004. *Polacy '80. Wizje rzeczywistości dnia (nie)codziennego* [Poles '80. Visions of (un)usual Reality]. Warszawa: Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
Marody, Mirosława. 2005. "Nieprzewidywalny stan świadomości" [Unpredictable State of Consciousness]. Interview. *Rzeczpospolita*, 13–15 August.
Marody, Mirosława & Nowak, Krzysztof. 1983. "Wartości a działania. O niektórych teoretycznych i metodologicznych problemach badania wartości i ich związków z działaniem" [On Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems in the Study of Values and their Relations to Behaviour]. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 4: 5–29.
Merton, Robert K. 1973. "Three Fragments from a Sociologist's Notebook." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 13: 1–28.
Misztal, Barbara & Misztal, Bronisław. 1984. "The Explanatory Utility of Major Sociological Theories Developed in Poland 1970–1980." *Sociology*, 18 (2): 239–252.
Morawski, Witold. 1980. "Society and the Strategy of Imposed Industrialization. The Polish Case." *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 4: 69–81.
Mucha, Janusz L. 2003. "Polish Sociology 1990–2000: Society After a Breakthrough, Sociology in Evolution," in: M. F. Keen & J. L. Mucha (eds.), *Sociology in Central and East Europe: Transformations at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. Westport, CN: Praeger, pp. 117–131.

M u c h a, Janusz. & S k ą p s k a, Grażyna. 1991. "Powojenne społeczeństwo polskie w opinii socjologów" [Post-War Polish Society according to the Sociologists], in: J. Mucha et al. (eds.), *Społeczeństwo polskie u progu przemian* [Polish Society at the Threshold of Transformation]. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

M u c h a, J. & V a i t k u s, S. (eds.). 2006. Special Issue on Polish Sociology. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 6 (3).

N a r o j e k, Winicjusz. 1973. *Społeczeństwo planujące. Próba socjologii gospodarki socjalistycznej* [The Planning Society. A Sociology of Socialist Economy]. Warszawa: PWN.

N o w a k, Stefan. 1964. "Changes in Social Structure in Social Consciousness." *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 2: 34–53.

N o w a k, Stefan. 1980. "Value Systems of the Polish Society." *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 2: 5–20.

O s s o w s k i, Stanisław. [1943] 1967. "Z nastrojów manichejskich" [Manichean Moods], in: *Z zagadnień psychologii społecznej, Dzieła* [On Social Psychology. Works] vol. 3, Warszawa: PWN, pp. 189–197.

O s s o w s k i, Stanisław. [1957] 1963. *Social Structure in Social Consciousness*, transl. by Sheila Paterson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

O s s o w s k i, Stanisław. [1962] 1983. "Problematyka swobody słowa w dyskusjach naukowych" [On Freedom of Speech in Scientific Discussions]. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 4: 3–8.

P o h o s k i, Michał. 1979. "Proces osiągnięć społeczno-zawodowych w Polsce" [The Process of Socio-Occupational Achievement in Poland], in: *Tendencje rozwoju społecznego* [Trends in Social Development]. Warszawa; Główny Urząd Statystyczny, pp. 216–237.

P o p p e r, Karl R. 1957. *The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

P o p p e r, Karl R., 1974. *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 5th ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

P o p p e r, Karl R. [1957] 1984. *Nędza historycyzmu* [The Poverty of Historicism], transl. by S. Amsterdamski. Warszawa: Krąg.

R y c h a r d, Andrzej. 1992. "Krytyczna socjologia instytucji realnego socjalizmu a poznawcze wyzwania transformacji: ile kontynuacji, a ile rewizji" [A Critical Sociology of the Institutions of Real Socialism and the Cognitive Challenges of Transformation: How Much Continuation, how Much Revision]. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1 and 2: 19–23.

S ł o m c z y ń s k i, Kazimierz M. & W e s o ł o w s k i, Włodzimierz. 1978. "Reduction of Social Inequalities and Status Inconsistency," in: *Social Structure*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, pp. 103–121.

S o l z h e n i t s y n, Alexandr. 1976. *Lenin in Zurich*, transl. by Harry T. Willetts. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

S t a n i s z k i s, Jadwiga. 1979. "On Some Contradictions of Socialist Society: the Case of Poland." *Soviet Studies*, 32 (2): 167–187.

S t a n i s z k i s, Jadwiga. 1980. "Systemowe uwarunkowania funkcjonowania przedsiębiorstwa przemysłowego w Polsce" [The Systemic Determinants of the Functioning of Industrial Plants in Poland]. *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 32 (2): 119–139.

S t a n i s z k i s, Jadwiga. 1984. *Poland's Self-limiting Revolution* (ed. by Jan T. Gross). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

S t r z e l e c k i, Jan. 1985. "Socjalizmu model liryczny" [The Lyrical Model of Socialism], in: E. Mokrzycki et al. (eds.), *O społeczeństwie i teorii społecznej. Księga poświęcona pamięci Stanisława Ossowskiego* [On Society and Social Theory. In Commemoration of Stanisław Ossowski]. Warszawa: PWN, pp. 206–221.

S u ł e k, Antoni. 1992. "The Rise and Decline of Survey Sociology in Poland." *Social Research*, 59 (2): 365–384.

S u ł e k, Antoni. 1993. "Polish Sociology in Time of Restructuration," in: J. Coenen-Huther & B. Synak (eds.), *Post-communist Poland: From Totalitarianism to Democracy?* Commack, NY: Nova Science Publ., pp. 151–162.

S u ł e k, Antoni, N o w a k, Krzysztof & W y k a, Anna. (eds.). 1989. *Poza granicami socjologii ankietowej* [Beyond the Questionnaire Sociology]. Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego i Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne.

S z a c k a, Barbara. [1987] 2005. "Społeczny wymiar obrazu Polski w podręcznikach szkolnych dla klas I–V szkoły podstawowej" [The Social Dimension of Poland's Portrayal in Textbooks for Primary School Grades I–V], in: B. Szacka *et al.*, *Polska dziecięca* [Children's Poland]. Warszawa: Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 75–124.

S z a c k i, Jerzy. 1998a. "Ja w końcu jestem socjologiem" [After all, I'm a Sociologist]. Interview. *Zdanie*, 1–4.

S z a c k i, Jerzy. 1998b. "Polish Sociology 1944–1989: in Service of Society or in Service of the Regime?" *Polish Sociological Review*, 2: 115–131.

S z a w i e l, Tadeusz. 1981. "Social Structure and Attitudes vs. Ethos Groups." *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 3 and 4: 21–38.

S z c z e p a ń s k i, Jan. 1972. "Teoria, badania i praktyka industrializacji" [The Theory, Investigation and Practice of Industrialization], in: A. Kwilecki (ed.), *Teoria i badania socjologiczne a praktyka społeczna* [Sociological Theory and Research and Social Practice]. Warszawa: PWN, pp. 35–54.

S z c z e p a ń s k i, Jan. 1980. *Możliwości lat osiemdziesiątych* [The Potentials of the Eighties]. *Kultura* (Paris), 1: 234–239.

S z t o m p k a, Piotr. 1974. *System and Function: Toward a Theory of Society*. New York: Academic Press.

T o u r a i n e, Alain, D u b e t, Francois, W i e v i o r k a, Michel & S t r z e l e c k i, Jan. 1983. *Solidarity. The Analysis of a Social Movement: Poland 1980–1981*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

T y s z k a, Andrzej. 1978. "Diagnosis and Vision of the Structure of Socialist Society," in: *Social Structure*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, pp. 33–52.

W e s o ł o w s k i, Włodzimierz & S ł o m c z y ń s k i, Kazimierz M. 1977. *Investigations on Class Structure and Social Stratification in Poland, 1945–1975*. Warszawa: IFiS Publishers.

W i a t r, Jerzy J. 1988. *The Soldier and the Nation. The Role of the Military in Polish Politics, 1918–1985*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Z a b o r o w s k i, Wojciech. 1986. "Dichotomous Class Images and Worker Radicalism." *International Journal of Sociology*, 16 (1–2): 105–123.

Z a g ó r s k i, Krzysztof. 1976. *Zmiany struktury i ruchliwość społeczno-zawodowa w Polsce* [Changes in Socio-Occupational Structure and Mobility in Poland]. Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny.

Biographical Note: Antoni Sułek is Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Sociology, the University of Warsaw, Poland. His interests cover the history of sociology, sociological methodology, public opinion research, and ethical problems in sociology. His books (in Polish) include: *Polish Surveys. Essays on Questionnaire Research* (2001), *Garden of Sociological Methodology* (2002) and *History of Sociology at the University of Warsaw* (Ed., 2007). From 1994 to 1998, he was President of the Polish Sociological Association, and from 1999 to 2001 he served as Chief Adviser on Social Affairs to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland.

Address: E-mail: suleka@is.uw.edu.pl