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Dialogic Society—the Crisis of Social Communication in Poland

Abstract: This article attempts to diagnose social communication in post-1989 Poland. It analyses the issue against the larger backdrop of the most familiar communication theories formulated by representatives of the contemporary humanities (Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of creative discourse, Lyotard's dialogue as the differentiation of rationality, Waldensfels's category of understanding and communication, Charles Taylor's communitarianism). Another important reference point in addition to these theoretical conceptualisations is the philosophy of Józef Tischner who devoted many of his essays to dialogue in Polish social life, both in communist times and after the fall of the communist regime. The author proposes a diagnosis of the crisis of social communication in Poland. This crisis is rooted in the weakening of community bonds and the resulting lack of foundations on which dialogic society, based on trust and receptiveness to new experiences and ideas, the prerequisites for civil activity, could be constructed. Two forms of communication have taken its place: individualistic communication (the individual's world is constricted to personal experiences) and collectivistic communication (the individual unreflectively accepts the current social stereotypes and views them as obvious truths). Such an attitude leads to the development and fortification of the "culture of distrust" syndrome with its extremely significant social consequences. This is particularly visible in the context of the quality of public debate and the relations between the government and society. Such phenomena as poor voter turnout, negligible participation in voluntary associations, lack of confidence in the authorities and interpersonal relations are all symptoms of the crisis of social communication.

Keywords: social communication, dialogic society, monologic society, dialogue, individualism, collectivism, community.

Reflection on social communication greatly exceeds the boundaries of the different scientific disciplines. This is because we are touching the most fundamental issues of humanistic thought. We cannot possibly consider the phenomenon of social life out of context of speech, that uniquely human faculty, or—more generally—the ability to create a system of symbols and imbue them with meanings which provide the groundwork for all interpersonal attachments. The problem of social communication touches the absolutely fundamental problem of the nature of society, the question posed by the classics of sociology and sociological thought: what is society? How come that people who live side by side develop a system of relations, attachments and interests, a communication system which goes far beyond the purely verbal sphere. "It is banal to say that we never live alone," writes Emmanuel Levinas. We are surrounded by beings and objects with which we somehow relate. Through our eyes, through touch, through liking, through the sharing of work we are with others" (Levinas 1999: 24). What is more, the system of human relations cannot be reduced to the exchange of material goods, knowledge or information alone. It is essentially the opening up of

one's self to another person. It is from the meeting of these two different and unique worlds—I and Thou—that dialogue is born" (Levinas 1994: 222–226).

Some Reflections on Social Communication

The ancient Greeks were deeply convinced that human nature is "dialogic." In a well-known fragment of his "Politics" Aristotle wrote that "the voice signifies joy and pain and that is why other beings also have one (…). But speech serves to define the beneficial and the harmful as well as the just and unjust" (Aristotle 2001: 27). The ancients viewed speech as more than simply an essential tool for the existence of the human being or human animal (*zoon politikon*), however, argued the Stagirite. In his *Phaedrus* dialogue, he puts into Socrates' mouth the significant words in which he demonstrates the destructive role of the written word for the human ethical condition and explains how the written word displaces the dialogue, that most natural of attitudes based on mutual contact which is not mediated by abstract symbols. "This discovery," says the Athenian sage, will instil amnesia in human souls because the man who learns it will no longer exercise his memory, he will put his trust in the written word and will recall everything from without, from signs alien to his nature, not from the inside, from himself (Plato 1999: 72).

The fact that social communication is an area of interdisciplinary reflection makes it impossible to define the phenomenon precisely but on the other hand it allows us to grasp its complexity and multifaceted nature. Philosophical reflection, for example, focuses on the analysis of the logical aspect of utterances or on the philosophy of dialogue represented by such philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas or Martin Buber. It also formulates a completely new ontological and epistemological perspective where the world is perceived not through the prism of "subject–object" relations or relations between two independent subjects but as a communality of experience and understanding. Only in the sphere of reciprocity—the sharing of experience and co-operation—is it possible to cognise the world around us. Each more specific humanistic discipline also studies some aspect of social discourse. Linguistics, for example, analyse the structure and form of language, sociology views social communication as a form of constructing social order, political science studies the various forms of political discourse. In short, various research perspectives not only help us to see the entire spectre of this social phenomenon, they also permeate and enrich each other.

The famous Russian literary theoretician, Mikhail Bakhtin, analysed discourse from the perspective of the literary text and found that work of art has an irremovable dialogic dimension. This dimension is more than just the author's product, constructed with the specific "material" of language and symbols. One of the essential elements of a work of art (in this case the literary work) is the recipient, the person who interprets the message, gives it specific meaning. Without him or her a work of art is merely raw material, a potential instrument of artistic communication. "Only an utterance is capable of forming a direct relation with reality and with a living, speaking human being (subject)," says Bakhtin. "Language contains only the potentiality (schemas)

for such relation (…). Meanwhile, the relation with the object and the speaking actor—the subject (and the relation to language as a system of potentialities, givens) does not exhaust the determinants of the utterance. (…) Utterances do not exist in reality outside of this relation (…) Only utterances can be adequate (or inadequate), authentic, true (false), beautiful, just, etc." (Bakhtin 1986: 430).

This opinion transcends the theory of literature. The author demonstrates that perception of surrounding reality is only possible in dialogue: in the meeting of different human experiences, reflections, sensitivities. It is here that the whole axiological, ethical and aesthetical sphere is shaped, the entire cultural sphere, the tissue of social life. This is how cultural artefacts and the products of collective experience are transmitted and lay the foundation for identity and the rooting of individuals in society.

This crucial aspect of social communication is further developed in the work of many other writers. The well-known French postmodernist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard points out that every relation with another human being is based on understanding. Our approach resembles the approach of the anthropologist who tries to recognise and discover the latent meaning of studied behaviours and social institutions. Her objective is not to discover the utility function, however, but rather to create the possibility for the kind of understanding which takes place in interpersonal relations. And this is how he views the role of sociology which, he writes, "embraces the originally social, if this way we want (…) to understand this relation thanks to which subjects are mutually given" (Lyotard 2000: 121). However, in contemporary societies there is a visible atrophy of meta-narrative, that is certain culturally rooted systems of norms, values and goals. Contemporary culture, called postmodernist culture, sentences men and women to the incessant search for, discovery of and confrontation with newer and newer, momentary goals and attitudes (cf. Lyotard 1997: 20). Here discourse is not only a factor which contributes to the construction of a permanent cultural foundation for social life but also as an experience which allows people to discover again and again the incessant mutability of the world.

Particularly important in this context is the distinction between two planes of social communication which Bernhard Waldenfels calls "understanding" and "communication." Entering a polemic with the theory of one of the most significant representatives of phenomenological sociology, Alfred Schütz, he argues that not only his theory but actually the entire legacy of humanistic sociology, beginning with Max Weber, fails to see a crucial aspect of the reconstruction of the social world. The category of understanding to which all the representatives of this current of sociology refer means the mutual interpretation of the meaning of behaviour in the course of interaction. The search for, and establishment of, this meaning originates in self-understanding. This is why experiencing the self is central to social experience. "The primacy of understanding is always the primacy of the self" (Waldenfels 1989: 242).

Therefore, what Waldenfels is postulating is to substitute understanding with communication. To replace the construction of social reality which is the outgrowth of the egocentrism of one's own cognitive experience with the common search for the meaning of surrounding reality, its elaboration and attribution, in the space of discourse, the only one in which it can take place. In other words, from this perspective the social

world is the outgrowth of the continual process of exchange and confrontation of various experiences. It is polycentric. "Acts of communication," writes Waldenfels, "differ from acts of understanding in that in this case we immediately have a three-piece relation. I understand something or someone but I communicate with someone about something: here «another» is not cast in the role of a special type of object but as a co-subject. (…). Hence social activity means that my activity shares its meaning with another's activity, not that it is simply «oriented» toward it" (Waldenfels 1989: 245).

Social communication issues are present in contemporary theoretical reflection, not only in the context of analysis of the phenomenon itself but also as the diagnosis of social crisis and the postulated major reconstruction of its foundations. The entire communitarian current suggests that at the roots of the crisis lies the atrophy of community bonds and their replacement with impersonal relations mediated by various economic and political institutions. The main representative of this idea, Charles Taylor, argues in his book *The ethics of authenticity* that dialogue is the principle developmental mechanism of human identity. What is more, it is the foundation of human condition. Who we are as individuals, and above all what determines our humanness is rooted in dialogue. "The universal feature of human existence (…) is its fundamentally dialogic nature," Taylor writes. "It is through the acquisition of the rich languages of human expression that we become complete subjects, capable of self-understanding and hence of defining our identity" (Taylor, 1996: 32). And in his opus magnum, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*, he adds that, "(…) one cannot be a subject completely independently. I am only a subject in relation to certain interlocutors: in a certain relation to those who played a key role in the process my self-definition (…)" (Taylor, 2001: 70). Also, who we are and what we strive for develops in dialogue, the encounter with another human being. "We always define our identity in dialogue," Taylor points out," and sometimes in the clash with identities which our significant others would like to ascribe to us" (Taylor, 1996: 33). Out of the sense of identity grows something which Taylor calls "orientation," that is one's rooting in a certain ethical system, awareness of the goals towards which one is striving. What this means is that social life is dialogic in the sense that interpersonal relations are only possible within the framework of these "orientations." Beyond them there is only the interchange of words which have specific meanings, not dialogue.

The Crisis of Social Communication in Poland

In this article I would like to focus on one aspect of social communication—to present it as a basic factor in the construction of social order. At the same time, however, social communication is an area of social experience where social and cultural change is perhaps most concentrated. Social communication is a lens in which the consequences of social change converge. Their perception affects the form and quality of "communication." On the other hand, "communication" has major impact on all spheres of social life: education, politics, the economy. Taking this assumption as my point of departure I want to reflect on the manifestations and consequences of the

crisis of social communication in Poland, whose symptoms are becoming very salient and whose consequences are becoming very serious in conditions of democracy and free market.

The person who probably contributed most to reflection on the state of "Polish conversation" was Józef Tischner, the renowned philosopher who died a few years ago. One of his books, *The Polish Form of Dialogue*, written at the turn of the seventies and eighties is now a classic. It is a history of the "meeting" of Marxists (who often broke away from the official, party interpretation of Marxism in their ideological perusals) and Christianity, both in the institutional sense, that is the Catholic church, and above all in the intellectual and spiritual sense, as two great traditions of reflection on humankind. Although this book is extremely important for the history of Poland and the experiences of the intellectuals in the second half of the 20th century, it shows just a fragment of the "Polish dialogue."

Reflection on the condition of social communication in Poland , its strengths and limitations, is apparently a function of how society itself and the individual's place in society are understood. When society is in a state of crisis this inevitably leads to communication crisis or, to put it another way, disrupted social communication is a symptom of more serious social malady. According to the author of *The Ethics of Solidarity*, who also gleans his inspiration from Taylor, the essential feature of human social existence is the encounter by which he means much more than just interpersonal relations which sociologists usually call interactions. An encounter is the experience of the tragic nature of human existence, entry into the realm of another's experiences, anxieties and concerns. The encounter is the axiological and ethical foundation on which human development rests. It is the yardstick of good and evil, the source of worldly order and meaningfulness. The encounter is what opens up the space where we can experience mutual exchange and understanding, the framework for discovery of our personal freedom. The encounter marks the entry into the world of drama. For human life is drama, is it not? Or strictly speaking, "the human being is a dramatic being" (cf. Tischner 1998). Tischner argues that "dramatic time and two openings—intentional opening onto the stage and dialogic opening onto another human being—are what constitute [human] nature" (Tischner 1998: 10). To be a dramatic being is more than the sociological metaphor of society as theatre. Human life does not consist of putting on masks or playing roles. It is meeting another person, entering her experiential world. More still, it is experiencing her pain of existence, the difficulties with which she must continually struggle. Encounter in the drama of human existence inevitably assumes entry into dialogue. This is what "dialogic opening up to another" really means. Human life is always life "with someone," not side by side, it is the "mutual understanding" which allows one to take root in the world (cf. Tischner 1998: 230 ff.).

Social communication in Poland is much more than strictly scientific (philosophical, sociological, political) reflection, however. It has become an area of popular stereotypes of the Poles and Polish society. In popular opinion, limited or even contorted and degenerated communication are one of the reasons why the country's developmental potential is being wasted: upward mobility of certain social groups is

being blocked, civil activity is being curbed, barriers of distrust are being constructed, and pointless disputes which antagonise instead of leading to compromise are being instigated. This stereotype of Polish society, generally labelled "quarrelsomeness" is often thought to be one of the Poles' most common faults. This stereotype often becomes a universal master key which is used to explain nearly every weakness of social life in Poland.

This blemish on the spiritual condition of the Poles has been the object of reflection not only for representatives of the social sciences. It is also part of the canon of Polish art, particularly literature. It was Cyprian Kamil Norwid who viewed Polish society as a "polemic nomad camp" emerging from widespread envy and contempt for other human beings. "(…) pray show me but one [person] whom Polish society would not take to be a «madman» or «halfwit»! (…) this is the one and only society in the whole of Europe which behaves this way—what I am saying is that it never has any man who is at least slightly it's superior as anything other than a madman or halfwit," he wrote in one of his letters (Norwid [early 1880], 1983: 758). In another letter he wrote that, "(…) were anyone to descend the stairs of history holding a lamp of impersonal light, he would find quite a different kind of disrespect which is the cause of this national nonexistence. Disrespect not for one person or another, or one authority or other, but disrespect for the person —the man" (Norwid [February 1852], 1983: 197). What is more, the Poles' attitude is clearly ambivalent. On the one hand we have the deep polarity of opinion, both on many social issues and in the domain of ethics, culture or morals. This "polemic nomad camp" is already an integral part of the social discourse landscape. On the other hand, Poles react extremely critically to sometimes acute polemics, disputes or exchanges of ideas but fail to notice that these are an obvious and healthy democratic mechanism or what we customarily call "open society." Many people believe these disputes and polemics to be "substitute topics," an intellectual pastime of the elites who do not understand the real problems of "ordinary people," in other words, as a "sidetrack" so to say, a more or less pathological current of social life rather than its core, foundation, mechanism without which it cannot function properly.

Monologic Society and Dialogic Society—an Attempted Portrayal

One cannot possibly discuss this problem in isolation from the specific determining factors of time and place. We are talking about the crisis of social communication in Poland, a country in a state of profound change in all spheres of social life and struggling with the legacy of communist regime. We can also view the experience of transformation in Poland as a major metamorphosis of the system of social communication. This process, often called the passage from the monocentric order to the polycentric order, or from social monopoly to social pluralism, or—to put it simply—from totalitarianism to democracy, actually involves quite fundamental social transformation. It involves relinquishing monologic society in order to construct dialogic society (cf. Tischner 1992: 131 ff. and 146 ff.). This, we may say, is the most

important and also the most difficult aspect of "grand change." The most important because willingness to face and accept new challenges is only possible if an inner attitude of trust and unbridled exchange of ideas is adopted—in other words, dialogue. The most difficult because it cannot be decreed or superimposed. It touches the most personal spheres of human experience.

What are the typical features of monologic society? Not only does monologic society have a single ideological system which it strives, for better or worse, to inculcate in human minds at the peril of all other, alternative ways of thinking and viewing the world. Its constitutive feature is the way in which it seeks information about the world or, to put it another way, seeks the truth. In monologic society knowledge of the world is closely bound to power (in more than just a strictly political sense). We get to know the world by adopting the ideas of those who "stand higher up." On the one hand the authorities claim to own the only truth and on the other hand society needs a source of a clear and cohesive vision of the world.

Dialogic society, meanwhile, is a society where people strive to know the truth about the world in encounters with other people, in dialogue. Hence if there is dialogue, there cannot be a belief in a one and only truth carefully deposited in the hands of a particular individual or group. We know, or rather discover, the truth in the other person because the secrets of the world are uncovered in this mutual encounter. As Józef Tischner wrote,

> (…) dialogue in which the truth of various members of society is expressed is not social life's external decoration, it is its essence. The ultimate truth about social life does not drop from a cloud, like rain, it grows from down below, from the inner depths of individual experience, from mutual understanding and agreement (Tischner 1992: 133).

Legally guaranteed pluralism, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and independent media are not enough for dialogic society to develop. These are all very important elements which are conducive to the development of favourable conditions for social dialogue. The development of dialogic society depends, above all, on a proper, other-focused mindset and mode of perception. Who is this other? An enemy, rival, stranger, outsider or a source of new experiences, reflections and mutual enrichment? It is from this perspective that Tischner wrote that, "dialogic society demands a new sensitivity to the values of truth. It originates from revolt against lying which was visible from the very beginning of communism. But this revolt must be completed. This will not be possible without renewing contact, more deeply than ever before, with the great philosophical tradition whose roots reach back to ancient Greece" (Tischner 1992: 149).

Dialogic Society in Poland—a Diagnosis

What are the problems facing the development of dialogic society in Poland and what is causing them? One of the main causes we habitually point to is the widespread, deep crisis of social trust. All the existing research consistently shows that, compared with other European nations, Poles are least willing to trust other people. They treat others

as potential enemies, out to take advantage of them and deceive them. Naturally, this attitude has its consequences for all dimensions of social life. However, it looks as if this catastrophically low culture of trust is a symptom of a more general crisis which we may call the crisis of community. Let us have a look at it from the perspective of social communication. Two different types of reception of social reality may be detected. One is what we can call individualistic. The individual's personal experience becomes a unique microcosm beyond which he or she finds nothing significant or worthy of attention. Other people's experiences, pursuits, cares and hopes are completely neglected or are perceived as something which will not and cannot become an object of enquiry or reflection. The only real world is "my" world and nobody can understand it anyway. Every argument questioning my individual assessment of reality is rejected, either as a product of wilful manipulation or as an experience of the "elite" which is unable to understand "ordinary people." This is the Polish version of the "closed mind" syndrome discussed by Allan Bloom. Although, in America, this syndrome is the product of individualism and the resulting relativism which have dominated western philosophical and intellectual culture. This echo of Rousseau's postulated return to one's inner self and listening to one's inner voice, drowned by culture, suggests that only within ourselves can we find the answer to the most fundamental question of the meaning of life. Although this attitude has very prosaic origins in Polish society, the similarity is quite clear. It is impervious to any dialogue. Dialogue ceases to exist because community no longer exists. Human life begins to resemble the world of prisoners of Plato's cave where shadows on the wall are widely believed to be the one and only true reality which anyone can know (cf. Bloom 1997: 31; Taylor 1996: 39–47).

The second type of social reception (or rather another symptom of the same social communication "malady") is collectivistic. Individuals repeat certain opinions and evaluations without submitting them to critical reflection. This way, numerous ideas widely believed to be true or even obvious despite the lack of any facts to support them begin to function in society. Every attempt to refute them or demonstrate their oversimplification is treated as a form of manipulation, all the more impudent the more it tries to deny what "everybody sees."[1]

A good example of this mechanism is the collection of articles published in the weekly paper *Tygodnik Powszechny*, originally presented to a conference in Cracow in September 2005. The conference was devoted to "economic myths," that is opinions concerning the consequences of social transformation in Poland within the last sixteen years which are widely applied in political discourse and economic mechanisms

[1] The development of new communications technology, especially the Internet, has created extremely wide and previous unknown possibilities for discussion and exchange of ideas. The heated discussions on various thematic portals, socialising and attempts to rediscover old acquaintances all certainly demonstrate the human striving to overcome loneliness and counteract the atomisation of society. These are all examples of the development of dialogic attitudes, albeit mostly restricted to the private sphere. It seems rather unlikely that they will improve the quality and condition of public discourse, however. This is probably the consequence of the "amoral familism" syndrome, comprehensively discussed in Polish sociology (Tarkowska & Tarkowski 1990), that is the building of strong social relations at the microstructural (family, neighbourhood) level accompanied by alienation of the individual in his or her relations in larger, more anonymous social structures or institutions of public life.

in general. Hence we keep hearing that "people have no money" or (a more "scientific formulation") that society is in a state of "ubiquitous pauperisation," the universal key to the understanding of the reasons for well nigh every social problem and daily hassle. So what if all the empirical evidence testifies to the contrary. For many politicians, journalists and above all ordinary people it is quite obvious. Of course many more similar examples can be found, for example the opinion that the main cause of unemployment is privatisation or its "stronger" version that unemployment is caused by market reforms. Opinions such as these lead directly to the conclusion that the fewer reforms there are, the lower the unemployment rate will be and to the demand for state control, regulation and supervision as a remedy for bankruptcy, dishonest competition (or all competition) and employee-employer conflict (cf. *Tygodnik Powszechny*: 9–15 and 9–11). These "myths" are having a major effect on social life in Poland. They determine the outcomes of elections and hence the form of Polish politics, both national and local. They are the substrate for frustration, fear and prejudice but also for the hopes and expectations of many Poles. Sooner or later they will prove to be invalid because they must, considering that they are not based on knowledge and understanding of the elementary mechanisms of democratic society and market economy. This is how social distrust, alienation of many social groups, apathy, passivity and despondency deepen. A "vicious circle" develops where stereotypes, half-truths and simplifications are treated as something obvious and when politics based on them fail to bring the intended effects this despondency stimulates further, increasingly absurd demonstrations of demagogy and reinforcement of a-social attitudes.

The Determinants of Dialogic Society

This "collectivistic" type of reception of social reality cannot possibly help to construct a space for communication. Even if an opinion or set opinions is expressed by a dominant group and even if this group is deeply convinced about the validity or even obviousness of its opinions, this in no way helps to develop an atmosphere conducive to dialogue. On the contrary, the collectivistic approach reduces the chances of dialogue to nil. Because how is this dialogue supposed to look? What we have here are "polemic nomadic camps" (Norwid) where people who are convinced they are right, have no intention of getting to know other people's experiences and opinions, and merely want to prove they are right, are engaged in disputes. The other is either "familiar" and fully shares the given point of view or a "stranger" who has yet to find the "truth."

What do we need to create this space? In short, community is the necessary condition for the development of interpersonal communication, whatever the level. Without community there is no communication, no conversation, only monolog. We may say that the monologic society of the communist days has not transformed into dialogic society. All that has been achieved is the provision of certain institutional and legal foundations for its development. Monologue no longer takes the form of superimposed propaganda and administrative elimination of ideas other than the

officially accepted ones. It therefore no longer gives the illusion of "ideological social unity" It has become a parody of dialogue where every social group or community has a system of opinions, evaluations and expectations relating to social life which it believes to be so obvious that it is not worth confronting with other opinions. Instead of diversity and mutuality we have antagonism and conflict. In the wake of this state of affairs comes the stigmatisation of various social groups and concrete individuals, based on stereotypes and simplifications. Hence we have "solidarity Poland" and "liberal Poland," "Europeans" and "Polish patriots," "elites" and "ordinary people." These labels are rather convenient shortcuts for the characterisation of the main attitudes and expectations of Polish society but they lead to a "black-and-white" view of reality and make it difficult to recognise the complexity of attitudes, choices and ideas of specific people which rarely fit into generally accepted schemas.

If dialogic society is to develop, people must acknowledge that each individual's spiritual and intellectual development is only possible in encounter with another. This encounter is the discovery of experiences, sensitivities and knowledge of other people. This acknowledgement must be followed by the desire to confront these discoveries with one's own experience, one's own biography. In other words, one must leave the narrow circle of individualism and cease to copy collectivistic schemas thoughtlessly. These specifically human faculties—the ability tell good from evil and the capacity for self-improvement—are made possible by speech which must take the form of conversation. It is in this vein that Hannah Arendt diagnosed the crisis of European culture when she wrote, "The modern age, with its growing world-alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes encounters only himself. (…) In the situation of radical world-alienation, neither history nor nature is at all conceivable. This twofold loss of the world—the loss of nature and the loss of human artifice (…)—has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass-society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still related to one another but have lost the world once common of all of them" (Arendt 1994: 110–111).

What is needed, therefore, is a revival of mutuality where another is not just someone who "stands alongside" but is a partner in communication and co-operation (cf. Tischner 1998: 230–231). And if this mutuality is to develop, people must be curious of the world and must have trust.

In this context the aforementioned Allan Bloom mentions openness and distinguishes two types. Indifferent openness which has dominated contemporary culture is oriented towards acquisition of information, assimilation of facts which are useful in everyday life or ones which "would be unseemly not to know." This is a purely pragmatic approach. It avoids everything which is uncertain, equivocal, ambiguous. It is fuelled not by curiosity but merely by specific, measurable needs and, as far as discourse in Poland is concerned, the need to express one's fears and frustrations. Searching openness, on the other hand, is not oriented towards the acquisition of ready-made information. Its aim is to ask questions. It takes no heed of the utility of

knowledge but is fuelled by disinterested curiosity. It ventures into the land of uncertainty and doubt where answers emerge in creative dialogue within an "open-minded community" (cf. Bloom 47–48).

Thanks to curiosity we begin to ask questions concerning other people, society, the world. This is how we get to know the world, describe it, evaluate it. Unless we are intrigued, curious, open to other experiences and reflections, we are forced to live either in our own closed world or to shut ourselves into groups which provide security and mutual understanding but exist "against" rather than "for." Their raison d'être is affirmation of the in-group and rejection of strangers. Meanwhile, curiosity is the foundation of mutual trust. If we perceive another who has a different set of experiences, opinions or sensitivities from our own as someone who "does not know how it really is" or, worse still, consciously denies the "truth," then that person naturally cannot be trusted. At best he or she can be the object of exposure of "false consciousness" and the sources of that consciousness. Such an attitude is related to what Tischner called the "hermeneutics of suspicion"—a stance inherited from communism and based on the conviction that a person's self-presentation and that person's true self are contradictory and that this contradiction needs to be "exposed" and deciphered. People are not who they present to others because they always have reasons to conceal or falsify something (cf. Tischner 1992: 168–169). In other words, without curiosity and trust there is not and cannot be a dialogic society or, more simply, a community. To borrow from Taylor, what we mean is a community of orientation, a shared space where it is possible to adopt the stance of searching receptivity where asking questions is viewed by another as an invitation to search together and this in turn broadens the horizon of communication (cf. Taylor 2001: 52 ff; 71–72). Dialogue is not only the building block of human identity in the world, it is the most fundamental condition of social life.

The problem of social communication in Poland is one of those problems which determines every dimension of social life to a greater or lesser extent, beginning with ordinary interpersonal relations through one's attitude towards the past, evaluation of current policy and public discourse, the capacity for economic co-operation, and ending with the general but no less important question of one's attitude to Polishness and one's vision of Poland's place among other nations. Reflection on dialogic society is not purely theoretical, therefore. I would like to draw attention to two basic issues.

1) The quality of public debate. Lack of openness to arguments, experiences and needs different from one's own and the belief that one's own point of view is true and universal are factors which are seriously eroding the quality of public debate. This can be seen in the inability to formulate convincing arguments or the poor culture of discussion. This is not just a purely "technical" problem and its solution is not to be found in application of the methods of public relations.

2) Relations between the authorities and society. The quality of public debate is having a significant effect on relations between the authorities and society. When we speak of citizens' distrust of the authorities, poor political culture, the authorities' tendency to avoid dialogue with society, problems which journalists call by the umbrella term "arrogance of power," the source of the problems can largely

be traced to society. First, we have the prosaic observation that the political elite in democracy is always an emanation of society. Second, however, Polish society seems to have an insufficiently developed dialogic attitude and forces the authorities to conduct a monologue. On the one hand, passivity and avoidance or poor self-organisation skills are the consequence of the monologic attitude but on the other hand they are a very fertile soil for the development of such an attitude. This attitude gives birth to the expectation that some "new force" will come and "put everything right." From this perspective the authorities are the creator of social order and when they fail to deliver this leads to even greater apathy, disappointment and withdrawal. This "vicious circle" becomes a mechanism conducive to social frustration and feelings of entitlement, both of which are fertile soil for political radicalism and populism. Therefore, when we speak of the crisis of authority, the weakness of the political elite, the inefficient state institutions, it is also worth looking at the problem from the perspective of the condition of society and its ability to "talk."

We inevitably face the following problem: what will become of monologic society and what are the prospects of dialogic society? We may say that dialogic society is the road leading to enrichment of social communication, new experiences, freedom of creative expression and the resulting diversity and finding ways to reconcile it. "Mutuality is not the simple exchange of things," wrote Tischner, "it is something much more fundamental (…). Where there is mutuality, everybody can say that he is himself thanks to you (…). In mutuality men and women build the human being internally" (Tischner 1985: 109). The question: "monologue or dialogue" is essentially the question of the status of otherness, difference and variety in social life. Is it viewed as an irremovable malady of social life or as an opportunity for development and an element of one's identity? Can individual, political and national life develop despite of otherness or thanks to otherness? Does this otherness open up the space for dialogue or does it effectively restrict it?

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