Class and Cultural Narratives
The Upper Silesia Case

Prace Naukowe

Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
w Katowicach
nr 3803

Paweł Ćwikła, Monika Gnieciak, Kazimiera Wódz

Class and Cultural Narratives
The Upper Silesia Case

Table of Contents

Part I

Kazimierz Kutz's Writings about Silesia

Part II

The Case of Stefan Szymutko

Introduction

The social world of Upper Silesia

The Silesian Voivodship exemplifies a region where the industrial past has left a permanent mark on spatial forms, social relations, institutions, patterns of culture as well as collective identifications and individual biographies (Wódz, 2013: 7). At the same time, the geographical location of Upper Silesia has determined its cultural character – in its over thousand years long history it belonged to various political, civilizational, economic, social and cultural orders: Polish, Czech, Prussian or German (Geisler, 2009: 67). Hence, Upper Silesia is a typical example of a borderland, where different ethnic groups and distinct cultural traditions intermingle (Wódz, K., Wódz, J., 2006: 12). Add to this the peculiarity of settling Upper Silesia in the time of the Polish People's Republic, unification related to the dynamics of the national culture of every day and popular culture or – in broader terms – globalisation and the dissemination of definite patters and lifestyles that accompany it. All of these contribute to the validity of the question of the region's contemporary cultural identity.

The traditional image of Silesianness established in subject matter literature consists of: cross-border cultural diffusion, specific economic past, distinctive dialect and a number of ethos features of the Upper Silesia workers communities. Among them, at the very heart there is positive valorisation of hard manual labour, religiousness and strong social control marking the norms of the life in a mining (metallurgy, factory, etc.) settlement. The latter manifested itself in direct interactions being part of extensive bonds of relationship and neighbourhood, also overlapping the vocational life connected with local workplaces, parishes and municipal districts: "[...] living in communities inhabiting workplace housing estates related to a sense of far greater familiarity and attachment. It was based on close neighbourly relations and almost familial way of life within particular *familok* houses. This intimacy translated itself into mutual help and support, spending time collectively, mutually paid casual visits, collective celebration of holidays and other events important for the community members, the rules and spirit of the community included leaving the front door unlocked, which allowed other residents of the house to enter freely" (Mandrysz, 2011: 105). Rooted in everyday routine the norms of social life were influenced by a deep, generation-wide bond with the workplace – the industrial centre which has shaped its workers' lives multidimensionally.

Over the centuries two economic orders have dominated in the Silesian landscape: agrarian and industrial. They jointly shaped the peculiar plebeian-proletarian cultural character of the region. The change that occurred after World War II, when the leaders of the Polish People's Republic decided to grant Upper Silesia an exclusively industrial specificity, brought about the breakup of the traditional model of indigenous communities' functioning: "the region was treated in a special way by the communist authorities" (Wódz, K., Wódz, J., 2006: 15). The special treatment consisted, on the one hand, of the fact that the authorities paid attention to the development of the traditional industries (mining was one of the basic branches on which the state earned hard currency), thus also to the development of towns located in the region, on the other hand, special care was taken to make the political control eliminate any manifestations of the cultural distinctness of the region. As a result, there was a situa-

tion in which the native inhabitants of the region reduced their cultural life (in which the specific, distinctive features of Silesian culture were manifest) to family life and relations within local communities (Wódz, K., Wódz, J., 2006: 15–16). During this period of time, to put it in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the fully developed, traditional forms of the Silesian culture, till then very much institutionalised and thus continuously reinforced, ceased to be reproduced. This was the first stage of dismantling of the local cultural and social values – deeply rooted in the Silesians' mentality and identity. The 20th century saw further changes in the cultural mosaics of the region. Started in 1989–1990 the industrial transformation (naturally effected by the system transformation) brought about the region's deindustrialization resulting in the restructuring of industrial centres and massive reduction of employment in mining. A rapid liquidation of the recently dominating branches of industry (chiefly extractive and metallurgical) triggered many previously not predicted, negative phenomena such as destabilisation and pauperisation of working-class communities, degradation of urban space, appearance of extensive urban waste and dilapidation of former mine- or factory-owned buildings, emergence of poverty enclaves, ghettos, inhabited by individuals and families dependent on social welfare, threatened by social exclusion (Wódz, K., Wódz, J., 2006). The problems were taking on dramatic dimensions especially where the falling industry had not been replaced by any considerable investments, where new workplaces in the service sector (especially if these are specialist services requiring high qualifications, such as financial, legal, consulting, educational, PR, etc.) cannot compensate losses related to the winding up of establishments previously employing hundreds or thousands of employees – including significant groups of narrowly qualified blue collar workers (Wódz, Gnieciak, 2011: 100). The restructuring of the steelworks and closedown of the coalmines forced the residents of factory housing estates to look for jobs outside of vicinities. Everyday commuting disturbed the established rhythm of life of the so far mining settlements, thus cutting Silesians off from their familiar space. People started to distance themselves from one another both in the sense of space and in terms of the weakening of neighbourly bonds. Transitioning from one job to another caused diversification of wages, lifestyle changes,

deviation from the established framework of community life (Wódz, Gnieciak, 2014). In the aftermath of this process the Silesia rooted in tradition ceased to exist and its social image underwent a dramatic change. The process of reproduction and creation of an axionormative system – a set of professed, experienced and practised values as well as their expressive norms and rules of practical behaviours and actions – has been relaxed. Accordingly, it became more important for researchers to be looking for some traces of the representation of Silesian specificity in popular culture artefacts. All the more that the end of the Polish People's Republic in 1989 did not manifest itself only in traumatic economic restructuring as also simultaneously led to the empowerment of national minorities, ethnic groups and provincial communities (Browarny, 2012, http://www.polska-niemcy-interakcje.pl). The system transformation was accompanied by a process of reviewing the collective memory, being thus far selective or ideologically distorted. Works by Silesian writers that were created during that period of time constitute an integral element of the process. By means of autobiographies, family stories and regional novels, the story of Silesia was retold, constructed out of a variety of memories and personal narratives. The region's history has become a private, familial history, a report on the neighbours' fate, the trajectory of development and downfall of communities, settlements, towns (Uniłowski, 2001).

In this very book we deal with the identity of Upper Silesia and of the Silesians, tracking the traces of their presence in literature, which due to the authors' age and output refers to the Silesian reality as seen from the perspective of the 1990s. The writers' memories inevitably stem from the reality of the Polish People's Republic, and it is through the lens of that era that we will be following the transformations of Silesian *structures of feeling* captured in the regional literature. Regional as it is rooted in that part of the world, but also global (or put more narrowly: national) due to the authors' talent and a wide cultural perspective featuring their writings. The novels / the writers' memories constitute a particular type of the social representations of Upper Silesia, the representations which belong to a community within which they are created to a greater extent than to an individual. Their nature consists in ongoing reproduction, redefinition, constant

creation. Rather than a matter to be taken for granted, they build up identities based on a collective definition of reality.

These notions of identity and its representation were put under examination in the SPHERE[1] Project (the 7th UE Programme) – aimed to study the cultural, social and economic transformations which occurred in communities whose past was connected with the heavy industry. The research included both the mechanisms of development of new individual and group identities and the attempts to preserve traditional identities. The purpose of the detailed analyses was to determine the influence of the economic transformations on the changes in the sense of an "attachment to place, 'private homeland' and their significance to individual 'history' and social belonging" (Wódz, 2013: 14). We refer to the research conducted by Professor K. Wódz, hence this book contains overt references to *Restructuring Class and Gender. Six Case Studies* (Wódz, Gnieciak, 2012).

Silesian identity and its representations

The emphasis in this book is put on understanding local identities through the representations produced and disseminated by the local people, the residents of the working-class estates placed in Upper Silesia. As sociologists we wish to emphasise that it is important to remember that representations are "a form of social thought" (Jodelet, 1984). The notion of identity and its reflection in regional representations is determined within the conception of Bausinger for whom social identity "[…] is the whole of the subject's constructs referred to

---

[1] SPHERE was the acronym of a European Union project funded by the Directorate General Research under its Seventh Research Framework (FP7). Its full title was *Space, Place and the Historical and contemporary articulations of regional, national and European identities through work and community in areas undergoing economic REstructuring and regeneration*, and the project ran from April 2008 to September 2011 covering 6 countries (Poland, England, France, Germany, Spain and Turkey) carrying out research into the transformations occurring in the European postindustrial regions. The Polish research included the internal division of the Silesian Voivodship to reflect its actual differentiation into Silesia and Zagłębie, and two towns were selected: Ruda Śląska (the estates of Godula, Nowy Bytom, Wirek) in the Silesian part and the borderland of Dąbrowa Górnicza and Będzin (the estates of Ksawera and Koszelew) in the Zagłębie part. The research was conducted by researchers from the University of Silesia under the direction of Professor Kazimiera Wódz.

one another – the whole is not just a sum of the elements; its array is somehow integrated. Elements of the construction of self are derived from identification with other persons or groups, with selected social structures as part of the system of I – Other; they are also derivates of such culture categories as norm values and even artefacts" (Bokszański, 1989: 50). Mediated by the already mentioned cultural artefacts, that is film, art, literature, collective identities consist of, in accordance with Ralph H. Turner's model, the "self-image," that is a kind of image of a given community in collective consciousness and the "self-concept" based on it, which is changing slowly because it is perceived by individuals and groups as posing coherent and sustainable characteristics of the subject (Bokszański, 1989: 50). These two elements make up the regional identity, which – according to Piotr Sztompka (2003) – should be understood as "a sense of community and identification with members of a certain community expressed subjectively with the phrase 'we,' which is accompanied by an awareness of being separate from those outside termed 'they'" (2003).

Therefore, the category of identity as employed in this book is connected with the search for the Silesians' own image contained in the literature of the region seen in a particular perspective. The above-described events of the 20th century and the turn of the centuries did make some of the researchers concede that as a result of some deep social changes that occurred during the mentioned period of time, the Silesian identity constitutes now a special creation, a cultural form functioning in the manner of an "invented tradition" as described by a British historian Eric Hobsbawm. In his approach, thus constructed identity is "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm, 2000: 1). Hence, through literature we try to find the image of Silesian identity it recorded, composing the social (self-) concept of the region. Our attempts are at grasping the formation and evolution of written identities, historically rooted in industrial societies, mainly touching upon the prevailing occupational structure, consequently, it concentrates on the process of transformation of

industrial cultures. Through the analyses of literature, the book seeks to clarify the significance of such changes for the culture of the Silesia region.

The notion of identity does not appear so often by mere accident: "forced by the external economic conditions deindustrialisation processes adversely affect the overall life of the residents of former workers' settlements principally situated near former places of work – factories, steelworks or mines. For them the fall of their works often means the beginning of their personal and family drama, fight for survival and identity dilemmas connected with attempts to find oneself in a new reality – determined by a new symbolic order emerging along with the crisis of Keynesianism and welfare state, based on the doctrine of neoclassical economics and the economic practice of deregulation" (Harvey, 1989). Thus, identity tensions are the main area of investigations throughout the research, in which the focus was on capturing the moment of change, of reconfiguration of the old patterns into new ones.

Working-class culture through *structures of feeling*

In our work we frame the presence and interaction of representations and cultural productions brought to the surface, through Raymond Williams's concept of *structures of feeling*. Wishing to identify meanings and values that are actually lived and felt, "and the relation between these and formal or systematic beliefs" (Williams, 1977: 132), he uses the term 'feeling' to draw a distinction with the more potentially 'fixed' notion of ideology as 'world view.' Williams viewed structures of feeling as the articulation of a "kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material." As a mode of cultural analysis, structures of feeling provide confirmation of the vital, lived experiences or attitudes of a group or of a society in a period, defining a particular quality of social action, within unsteady processes of historical change. His approach emphasises the bumpiness and the dynamic quality of particular moments and periods in which he posits an interplay between dominant, residual and emergent consciousness that helps make sense of structure and agency (Kirk, 2008: 6). Their

development was analysed by means of the tools used during the research on narration and discourse analysis. Identity is bound up with where one lives and, in that sense, as Raymond Williams pointed out long ago, identity is ordinary (1958). It is inscribed in the everyday; configured through those practices actors are engaged in (or excluded from) and which shape complex relations of belonging. But identity is clearly more than just the sole experience of where one lives, the everyday social interactions, say, of neighbourhood, community, workplace or town, no matter how significant they may be. Identity may be a product of local/regional structures and practices, but how it interacts in a range of ways with wider identity forms and material practices associated with nation and state is a crucial dynamic, too, in the shaping of individuals and communities.

The historic development of identity significantly marks and defines what a region is about, in as much as a region and its evolution will impact in turn upon those identities. Identity is not a static concept. Therefore, the central aim of the following discussion is to illuminate the traditions, alignments and forms that shape experience over time. Identity is bound up with notions of place-belonging (Kirk, 2008: 6).

The assumption which was fundamental to the analysis was the fact that literature holds a reservoir of identity representations. Williams argues that in the production of literature for example, "the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon" (1965: 64). Cultural representation is critical to the identity, belonging and 'feeling' of people in relation to their sense of place, space and self (Contrepois, Jefferys, Ross, 2011: 1). Moscovici adds that the representations constitute "consensual universes of thought which are socially created and socially communicated to form part of 'common consciousness.'" Social representations as common knowledge represent a trunk from which common-sense theories stem, they are "cognitive systems with a logic and language of their own [...]" (Moscovici, 1984, after Niesiobędzka, 2005: 14). Social representations, as a Polish researcher Cezary Trutkowski emphasises, "make the unknown known – their specific role consists in 'domesticating' the reality, making it understandable for individuals. The 'unknown' is converted into the 'known' thanks to

the existence of two processes which contribute to the transformation of social representations through the inclusion of new elements into their existing systems" (199: 10). These cognitive systems do not represent individual opinions, images or attitudes, but they are specifically shaped social 'theories' enabling cognition and structuring of reality. Thus, they are the basis for creation of individual and social identities (Niesiobędzka, 2005: 14). As another critic, Jean-Claude Abric, commented on the function of representations "all reality is represented, that is to say appropriated by the individual or the group, rebuilt in its cognitive system, integrated into its system of values depending on its history and of the social and ideological context that surrounds it" (Abric, 1994: 15), and the interpretation the author adopts corresponds with the social function of literary creation understood in accordance with Williams in the above-quoted sentence. Abric later says: "Values and the context in which they are created have an influence on the construction of reality. In social representations there will always be a part of individual or collective production, creation. For that reason, they will never stay for ever, even if their evolution tends to be a very slow process. As bearers of meaning, social representations establish a bond and, in this sense, they have a social function which help people communicate and find themselves in their environment and act. They also define what is legal, tolerable or unacceptable in a given social context (Abric, 1994/1997: 16, after Mugny, Carugati, 1989).

The social representations that circulate in our culture are shaped by and in turn shape the socio-economic context of their time and are both public-facing and internalised. As noted by Williams (1977) stories or narratives – representations – have a hegemonic function and become naturalised as the 'common sense' of society and as 'just the way things are' – whether this is to do with political, oral or culturally representational narratives and forms. People live through and alongside distinctive cultural representations that are either received and embraced or created and thus 'made' (Contrepois, Jefferys, Ross, 2011: 6). We based our search for analytical units for the research on the statement found in Howard S. Becker's book *Telling about the Society*. Simply put, a 'representation of society' is something someone tells us about some aspects of social life" (Becker,

2007: 6). Later on, the author noted: "My own professional colleagues – sociologists and other social scientists – like to talk as though they have a monopoly on creating such representations, as though the knowledge of society they produce is the only 'real' knowledge about the subject. That's not true. And they like to make the equally silly claim that the ways they have of telling about society are the best ways to do that job or the only way it can be done properly" (Becker, 2007: 5–6). In the discussed project we hopefully managed to avoid similarly false assumptions. According to Williams, literature is yet another way of depicting society, and that which makes it different from sociological presentations is the method of collecting data, type of record and also a different intended use, but what it has in common with them is the fact that it is a specific kind of representation of definite social problems. As Lancaster (1997: 24) pointed out, while regions are often the product of distinct economic forces, they are also constructs "that are created both by people who live in them as well as those who observe them externally and that it is the act of reflection on this process that constitutes the formation of the region." They are also myths – imagined communities – that interact with material forms (Anderson, 1983). John Kirk, a British researcher behind the creation of the SPHERE project, in his *Classifying Matters* makes a reference to the claim made by Beverley Skeggs (2004) who emphasised the role of the novel in the development of images on the reality of great social communities. He believes that since the industrial revolution the realistic novel has performed important social functions, specifically educational and ideological ones, shaping tastes, and its readership became a distinctive feature of the privileged with access to cultural capital enabling social reproduction of the class. The novel worked as a kind of a "moral magnet" for the bourgeois, something that helped shape answers to important social problems that can be solved only in reference to "ideological work." "As a new emerging cultural form since the mid-19th century the novel began to exert an influence not only on the understanding of the situation of other groups, but also on the shaping of the self-image of the writer's background. This long-standing idea has secured its place in the *Encyclopaedia of Sociology* where what is emphasised is the importance of literature as a kind of production of forms of

insight into the social world" (Łęcki, 1999: 128). Referring the above remark to Kirk's reflection one should say that literature, including the novel, would play a significant role of both cognitive and creative nature. This perspective on literature is not new in Polish sociology: As Ossowski observes (1983: 233): "*The Magic Mountain* [...] will deepen a reader's knowledge much better than a scientific work. One can learn a lot about crowd psychology from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, psychoanalysis from *Hamlet, Richard III*, Slowacki's *Kordian*, Mickiewicz's *Dziady Part IV*, Dostoyevsky's novels, which anticipated Freud and his successors." Another researcher studying sociological aspects of literature, Arnold Hauser (1980: 293) so writes about the author of *The Experimental Novel*: "Zola's literary theories are not entirely free of charlatanism, but his novels have, nevertheless, a certain theoretical value, for, even if they do not contain any new scientific insights, they are, as has rightly been said, the creations of a considerable sociologist." Jerzy Topolski (1978: 13) explained the common territory of sociology and the novel by commenting that "the novel [...] used to be and sometimes is a predecessor of science as it captures and presents matters which take a long time to be studied scientifically. This is clearly seen on the example of two sciences which came into being in the 19th century, one of them is the science on human's mental life – psychology, the other, sociology, deals with the collective life of individuals. The issues within the scope of the sciences appeared first in the 19th century in novels, which thus paved the way for scientific investigations." And when Balzac described himself as a Doctor of Social Sciences there was "in this designation – as Wolf Lepenies said (1997: 22) – a little self-irony and a great deal of self-awareness," his *Human Comedy* was first to be entitled *Social Studies* (Ćwikła, 2006: 140).

As mentioned above, the main theoretical interpretation we assumed is the thought of Raymond Williams, sociologist and literary scholar, who made literary analysis one of the most important interpretations of British theory of social class. The working class and its reflection in the literary output allowed him to follow the transformations, atmosphere and problems of the industrialized society in the mid-20th century. Williams, analysing the components of working-class culture in *Culture and Society* (1958) argued that

"the culture which [the working class] has produced, and which it is important to recognise, is the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the co-operative movement, or a political party" (Williams, 1958: 313). Within this view culture is more than mere artistic production or development of ideas; instead, we have a definition of culture and its products as bound within a 'whole way of life:' embedded in experiences and practices, formalised in institutions, instantiated in experiential dispositions and actions and evidenced in complex ways Williams called *structures of feeling* (Kirk, 2008: 2).

This conceptualisation is akin to Pierre Bourdieu's celebrated notion of the habitus as a process constitutive of subjectivity, one powerfully shaping the construction of class formations, and vital, for Bourdieu, in terms of social reproduction (1991). According to Bourdieu, the internalised structure of the habitus acts as a classifying mechanism for making sense of the world – embedded dispositions at an almost unconscious level that generate in the actor a spontaneous response to the world they inhabit: a kind of 'feel for the game,' or a 'design for life.' For Bourdieu, the dispositions constituting the habitus, when activated, work to reproduce the social structures that shaped them in the first place. The notion of subconscious, corporeal learning which makes up the habitus, and which attunes individuals to the circumstances of their existence, offers a key insight into the questions of social reproduction (Kirk, 2008: 3).

Bourdieu's concept constitutes a milestone in its tendency to privilege the substantial, economic and objectivist approach to social class. In the model proposed by the French sociologist, classes do not have to be reduced to the economic field as theoretical entities ("classes on paper"), they are not real groups (effectively mobilized groups). It is the symbolic struggle which determines what kind of social fields and social differences will, if it is the case, represent class differences (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu emphasises the objective character of social space which determines compatibility and incompatibility, class proximity and distance, at the same time warning against treating classes as entities existing independently in social space, and classes described in statistical analysis (one of the manifestations of the structure of social space) – as real groups. What is

therefore particularly important to notice is the difference between statistical analysis and studying class awareness. For Bourdieu statistical analysis demonstrates abstract indications of the internal structure of social space, which only "explains the likelihood of individuals linking with each other in groups, families, associations and even trade unions or political movements" (Bourdieu, 1985: 725). Distances between the statistically analysed positions within the social structures are related to the likelihood of group mobilisation and constitute class construction. The likelihood of mobilisation rises if the positions in the social space are proximate.

The assumed importance of the concept of class is very close to the notion of the working-class culture adopted after Raymond Williams's concept, wherein culture is "a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour" (Williams, 1961: 41). Following this paradigm, we concentrated on the lived culture of a particular time and place, in context, which means "the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intention which proceed from this. Bourgeois culture, similarly, is the basic individualist idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intention which proceed from that" (Williams, 1985: 313). In other words, we have dealt with culture formation, which for Williams is "a dialectical process involving hegemonic and oppositional forces, a field where residual, dominant and emergent tendencies involving class, ethnicity, gender, age and locality all converge and collide" (Zembylas, 2002: 188).

Yet, such a view of identity formation, as it has been suggested, undercuts a sense of *agency* in Bourdieu's approach to this phenomenon (see Sayer, 2005). In our book we studied the passing of the working-class communities. Owing to the methodological tools developed by Williams, the analysis of identity, literature and social class could acquire its theoretically coherent shape as described below.