Solidarność has been lauded by well-wishers in the West, ranging from trade-unionists to the busters of the US air-controllers' union, but its nature has been hard to comprehend. It collapsed with surprisingly little resistance after Jaruzelski's military coup, its leaders escaped with unexpectedly little bodily harm, and its top leader Lech Walesa has subsequently shown remarkable equanimity toward the establishment. The view from the inside presented by Staniszkis goes a long way to explain some of the oddities, although one may not be prepared to accept her entire framework.

Staniszkis was one of the seven intellectuals invited to the Gdańsk shipyard during the strikes of August 1980 to help to negotiate on behalf of the nascent Solidarity. It seems that she withdrew from political action thereafter, busily analyzing the events for the benefit of the internal and external scholarly public. "Origins of Solidarity," a study written as early as September 1980 and published in Soviet Studies (Scotland) in April 1981, forms the first chapter of the book. Most of the rest were written or finalized in fall 1981, with the "Concluding Reflections" dated 30 November 1981. On 12 December Jaruzelski declared a "state of war" and crushed Solidarity. The timing is almost too good: if true, we would have a snapshot of how the situation looked to a Warsaw sociologist just a few weeks before the coup.

There is an Epilogue written on 26 January 1982, and one wonders whether the author may have been tempted to adjust the earlier chapters with the benefit of hindsight. However, a close reading reveals nothing suspicious. There are plenty of minor details where the author turns out to be "wrong" in hindsight, suggesting that no post-coup deletions were made. This agrees with the publishers' claim: they received the last revised manuscript in November 1981 (apart from the Epilogue) and could not communicate with Dr. Staniszkis thereafter. The editing work normally carried out by the author was assumed by Jan Gross, to the limited extent such substitution is possible. The result is an untouched snapshot of Poland just before the coup, authentic but unrefined.

The basic thesis is the following. The myth of unity within the communist party precludes discussion which has to precede any orderly reform process. Trapped within their own rigid framework, the Polish post-totalitarian ruling elite long ago learned to
create a temporary "public opinion" when it wanted to be "forced" to carry out reforms. The very real popular dissatisfaction would periodically be allowed to surface in the form of a crisis carefully managed by the elite: a ritual drama, in Staniszkis' words. The summer 1980 sharp food price increases were calculated to bring protests, once more, and the July strikes ran true to the form. Then, in August, the protests ran out of control: the narrow issue of prices (where the regime could easily act out "concessions") was superseded by broader concerns of the Gdańsk workers about their general social status and "dignity."

Dignity is a key term for Staniszkis: for the Poles, it does not matter so much whether one loses or wins a struggle but whether one does so with dignity. The struggles and negotiations focus not around pragmatic issues but around symbolic ones which determine who wins or gains status. The pragmatic Americans may not have a feel for it, but concern for dignity is so pervasive in the book that it's hardly a personal trait of Staniszkis, separate from the surrounding culture. My only reservation is that she might attribute to Polish workers concerns peculiar to the intellectual middle class subculture, and the cleavage between the two seems to be as strong as it is in Soviet Russia, in contrast to American or Soviet Baltic societies where family ties between occupational classes are more extensive. Staniszkis often sounds patronizing toward the workers and self-admittedly feels more in tune with the pro-regime intellectuals who at least share the same articulation ability and vocabulary.

Thus the workers organized Solidarity as a vehicle of upward mobility in terms of social status. Given the role models available, Solidarity's internal structure and processes turned out rather similar to that of another workers' response to social crisis: Lenin's Bolsheviks. Open discussion of different viewpoints was considered harmful to the image of unity (solidarity!). An uncompromising fundamentalist emphasis on high principles was accompanied by the assumption that good intentions and imprecise promises will suffice. Legal codifying of workers' gains during negotiations with the government was found boring and comprehensible at best, and a compromise at worst—and given the "principled" outlook, any compromise deal was viewed as sellout and treason.

Instead of painstaking construction of grass-roots democratic institutions (which inevitably includes articulation of different views, offending the yearn for solidarity), workers placed their trust in increasingly distant charismatic leaders, largely ending up with one-man leadership by Walesa, who dominated the national presidium. In order to speak to the government in a single voice, the role of regional activists was weakened, largely demobilizing them. Solidarity was patterning itself on the authoritarian-bureaucratic model of communists party—the only model they knew.

But in contrast to Lenin, Solidarity did not have an ideology. In fact, the appropriation and perversion of terms like "democracy" by the establishment left the opposition without any terminology they could use without a feeling of "shame of language." Workers did not aim at substituting Solidarity for the government, the authority of which they accepted: all they wanted was an independent trade union to articulate demands regarding government policies of direct concern to them. This is the meaning of "self-limiting revolution" in the book's title.

This modest scope was Solidarity's strength and weakness. The regime had no sufficient provocation to crush the movement, but neither could it accede to Solidarity's autonomy without abdicating its own legitimacy which after all was based on the myth of workers' support. Personal rivalries and ideological cleavages, which always had existed within the establishment, also quickly developed within the Solidarity leadership, with neither organization being able to talk it out in non-esoteric terms because of the fiction of unity. The self-limiting nature of the revolution resulted in an identity crisis for Solidarity by summer 1981: it had tremendous blocking power through strikes but no power of constructive action through legal organization, especially in economic matters.
Within the organization, power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of a central leadership where non-workers became ever more important because they possessed the semantic skills necessary for negotiations. Local leadership faded. Solidarity no longer looked like a vehicle of upward mobility for the workers as a group or as individuals, and its membership largely demobilized mentally. When Jaruzelski struck and the penalty for striking went up from relative impunity to long prison terms under the martial law, the ten million Solidarity members hesitated, and there were no experienced, autonomous, and independently thinking local activists to lead them when the national leaders were suddenly arrested or otherwise prevented from communicating.

The regime was far from united. The communist party rank-and-file was disaffected, and their anti-apparatus drive to democratize the election rules within the party could have reinforced the actions by Solidarity. The fiction of unity on both sides prevented this course. When discussion was blocked, labels became important, and the one million party members who had joined Solidarity were under pressure from both sides to choose one of them; 600,000 chose Solidarity. Massive resignation from the communist party weakened the democratic reformists within the party and polarized the party-Solidarity relations. Although the interests of local functionaries and managers in some ways coincided with those of the workers, the polarized atmosphere turned them into targets of Solidarity charges, and in self-defense they rejoined ranks with the central apparatus.

On the other side of the spectrum, the hardliners among communists disliked Jaruzelski whose military-bureaucratic regime had pushed the communist party very much out of the picture, substituting an army-state for the former the party-state. Jaruzelski effectively tried to replace the revolutionary vanguard legitimacy of the regime by one based on a "social contract" between various forces, including the Church and Solidarity. The communist hard-liners' tactic was to provoke Solidarity into violent incidents by local police actions over which Jaruzelski had no control but which he could not openly condemn because of the myth of unity. Whether Solidarity fell into the trap or not, their relations with Jaruzelski were worsened by such local ploys. The hardliners among Solidarity leadership effectively collaborated with this ploy by pushing a reluctant Walesa to accept a program, in October 1981, which in Staniszkis' opinion amounted to "open conspiracy": Solidarity went beyond the trade union format, speaking out publicly on political topics.

In November 1981 both Jaruzelski and Walesa seemed to have lost control. Negotiations between them became pointless because both knew that the other could not deliver on his promises, even if made in good faith. The multi-sided stalemate and power vacuum became more intolerable than any other outcome, including one's own defeat—not only because the economy was in shambles but also psychologically.

The book's Epilogue claims that a communist hardliners' plot to remove Jaruzelski was planned for around 17 December. Jaruzelski acted on the 12th, forging an alliance with the hardliners but rebutting their desire for lethal repression, and pushing the communist party ever more into obscurity.

This is the gist of about half the chapters, much too lengthy for a review and yet too short to do justice to the richness of argument without which some of the claims might look preposterous. The other chapters describe the pre-1980 evolution of communist-ruled Poland, building the background for the denouncement. The somewhat bafflingly non-chronological treatment starts with the "Origins of Solidarity" and the subsequent strains within the "Self-Limiting Revolution" up to spring 1981. It then shifts to a dissection of the "Dynamics of Working-Class Consciousness," concentrating, if anything, on the 1970s. Next we read about "Detotalization from Above" during the 1970s and the resulting "Dynamics of Political System after August 1980." Then "Tragic Choices" take us back to the first years after WWII, as a preparation to a grand overview of "Three Decades of Economic-Political Cycles." Right when you think you are finally through with flashbacks, here comes "October 1956 as a Ritual Drama." Along with much repetition
of detail, these inconsistencies probably would have been eliminated in the course of normal editing. Not being able to communicate with the author, the editors of course could not act on their own.

Staniszkis is a sociologist whose dissertation on "Pathologies of Organizational Structures" at the University of Warsaw won the Polish Sociological Association Prize in 1976. Her explanation is heavy with psychosociological considerations and terminology (sometimes to the point of pomposness), and it quite possibly underestimates the economic aspects. The discursion into economic cycles is supported by tabular data that fail to convince me of the very existence of such cycles as distinct from a random pattern of ups and downs.

She recognizes that "Communism was brought to Poland on Soviet tanks," but there is little detailed mention of later Soviet pressures on Poland, as if the matter were basically an internal power struggle—or as if the framework of Soviet supreme control were so deeply internalized and agreed upon both by the actors and the author that it is not even noted any longer, the way a hiker does not consciously note gravitational restrictions on his freedom of motion. Should one call this mental attitude "Polandization"?

Staniszkis' perception of the Stalinist period is schizophrenic in a way which might cast unintentional light on the handicaps under which East European scholars work even in the relatively relaxed Poland. On the one hand, most of her historical flashbacks of 1944-54 follow the establishment version, though discussing the dissenting views within the party under Stalin, in that the events within the party are implicitly considered the only ones worth mentioning. On the other hand, there is the section on the first years after WWII (pp. 222-36) which is so incongruous that I started looking for a note identifying this section as an explanation inserted by the Western editor. Instead of an insider's informal account, with occasional Polish references, suddenly there is a profusion of Western sources, including references for such non-Western events as the Katyn massacre, the Warsaw insurrection of 1944, Poland's 1945 ban on all minor parties, Polish postwar inflation figures, decreased real wages and agricultural investment around 1950, and even a long quote from the Polish government-Church agreement of April 1950. It would seem that documental information and even personal memory regarding such aspects have remained blocked in Poland to the extent that one can fill the gap in one's history only with bits and pieces preserved abroad. (Incidentally, the prewar publication dates in notes 17 and 24 are obviously erroneous.)

Governments rarely are pushed over by popular revolutions unless they cooperate by desisting from making use of their full reserves of repressive machinery. The shah desisted; Jaruzelski did not. But the documentation supplied by Staniszkis makes it amply clear (even if her specific model be rejected) that the revolutionary push in Poland was self-limited—and was recognized as such by Jaruzelski even while he crushed the Solidarity organization. The crushing itself was in turn self-limited and is recognized as such by Walesa even while he carries on the struggle. Solidarity never was as solid as its ten million membership suggested; if left alone, it might have crumbled under the weight of its own over-rapid expansion and the resulting structural flaws. Nor has it vanished without altering the situation. The Polish trend toward non-violence in politics has received further reinforcement. Party rule has been blatantly replaced by that of the military-bureaucratic alliance, for better or for worse. Poland will take care of continuing to be Poland.