

**ВИМІРИ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ
ТА СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНІ ПРАКТИКИ СУЧАСНОСТІ
DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY AND
SOCIOCULTURAL PRACTICES OF MODERNITY**

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**The Trickster Phenomenon
within the Sociocultural Practices of
the Metamodern Political Sphere**

Abstract

The article examines the Trickster phenomenon, which arises from the Trickster archetype and the figures of the cultural hero and the hero of culture via their syncretisation and transformation within a specific cultural context. Similar patterns are discernible in the public personae and actions of politicians during the era of ‘comicoocracy’ — a prevailing trend in global politics whereby individuals formerly affiliated with show business are elected as heads of state.

The article examines Presidents V. Zelenskyy and D. Trump, each of whom serves as a hero of culture and an exponent of sociocultural positions, embodying the attributes of their respective national cultural landscapes. Likewise, both are characterised by positioning themselves as a cultural hero — a saviour and an organiser of the world. This imposes order upon the palimpsest of cultural meanings that define their political personae.

Nevertheless, the Trickster phenomenon serves as the predominant and unifying framework behind the aforementioned politicians. Furthermore, when examined in conjunction, they may be characterised as the Trickster (Trump) and the Joker (Zelenskyy). It is precisely such leaders who have emerged as indispensable amidst the chaos of political cataclysms in the era of metamodernism — a period defined by meta-irony, oscillation, and post-truth.

Keywords: cultural dimension, archetype, myth, Trickster, socio-cultural practices, interdisciplinarity, V. Zelenskyy, D. Trump.

Statement of the Problem. The research of the ‘Vienna School of Historical Ethnography’ addresses the modelling — and, by extension, the discursivity — of not only modern but also medieval proto-national and ethnic formations (Pohl 2002). Ethnic differentiation, whether real, imagined (such as the ‘Romans as Trojans’), or modelled, must be examined primarily through the prism of the cultural determinants of these processes. Indeed, ethnic consolidation was intrinsically linked to the specific political integration or disintegration of territories, the establishment of institutions of power and their modes of legitimisation, and, consequently, the ideology (political mythology) of state-building as a space of contention for generated meanings. The stance of the ‘Vienna School’ (represented by W. Pohl, H. Wolfram, I. Wood, and others, drawing upon the work of sociologist P. Bourdieu) maintains that ethnic communities are not stable entities of a biological or ontological order, but rather the outcomes of historical processes — or perhaps the historical processes themselves. For instance, medieval ‘barbarian’ kingdoms were typically polyethnic entities, while Roman intellectual ‘virtuosi’ not only facilitated their formation but also produced ethnic discourses, relying either on refined Classical methodology or the Biblical tradition with its established manner of describing ‘tribes’ and ‘peoples’. Leading academics subscribe to Stuart Hall’s definition, according to which national culture is also a discourse — a method of constructing meanings that influences the nation, whilst also organising the ideas and actions pertaining to it. Conversely, national cultures model identity, creating the sense of the nation with which its members may identify (Hnatiuk 2005, 43). Manifestly, the creative catalyst for such construction is myth.

The mythologisation of history manifests itself in the treatment of events as extraordinary, necessitating perpetual remembrance. However, to attain definitive mythological status, events must be endowed with a sense of uniqueness or decisiveness that determines the fate of the world. Consequently, they become ‘eternal’, influencing the present as an exemplar or tradition, and ultimately shaping the mentality. The most representative manifestation of national mentality is, undoubtedly, culture. Universal human culture — which functions through the self-actualisation of both individuals and peoples — exists as a pre-eminent aspect of ethno-national cultures; these, in turn, are constituted as a value-normative manifestation of a people’s destiny and their trajectory within the historical cosmos. Culture operates as a potent ethno-creative force, for it actualises not only realised but also potential variations of the historical process, accumulating the collective experience of generations. This explains why, ultimately, culture always presents itself as national, involving a non-standard interpretation of the phenomenon of national revival (Krymskyi 2008, 300–301). Research into the realm of national myth allows for an ascent to a deeper level of national mentality, where realised human experience is enshrined within archetypes.

The objective of this research is to analyse the Trickster phenomenon within the representation of contemporary politicians, taking V. Zelenskyy and D. Trump as primary examples.

Main body. The national mentality finds its embodiment in culture through specific variations of archetypes, associated with the philosophical notion of the ‘unconscious’ — an idea extensively developed within the psychoanalytic frameworks of S. Freud and C. G. Jung. Broadly speaking, the concept of the ‘archetype’ has been subject to various definitions since antiquity; Jung’s contribution was the introduction of the concept of archetypes within the collective unconscious.

According to Jung, only the superficial (pre-threshold) layer of the unconscious is personal, as it comprises acquired individual experience; conversely, the deeper layer is collective (communal and transpersonal). In essence, the unconscious represents an objectivity that is both open to the world and commensurate with it in scope, possessing a creative character. Whilst the personal unconscious is predominantly saturated with complexes, the content of the collective unconscious consists of specific symbolic structures: archetypes. C. G. Jung conceptualised archetypes as unconsciously reproduced schemata that manifest figuratively in myths, hallucinations, folk tales, and works of art.

Archetypes construct the very system of coordinates that consciousness is unable to transcend. Inevitably, the archetype becomes salient, as human nature cannot confine an individual within the realm of rational truths and formal logic for a protracted period. Apart from the most universal instances, archetypes are rooted in an autochthonous cultural tradition and are transmitted via inheritance within its framework. According to C. Jung, the collective unconscious is characterised by racial and national peculiarities inherited from one’s forebears. Archetypal unity is thus embedded in human nature, including its somatic dimensions (Jung 1976).

C. G. Jung was the first to turn to mythology in order to investigate deep-seated unconscious ideas; however, he documented only a limited number of typical mythological motifs. A strictly psychoanalytic approach to the interpretation of mythological archetypes has frequently faced criticism from mythologists. In particular, E. Meletinsky critiqued the ‘psychological reductionism’ of J. Campbell’s concept — wherein mythology is compressed into the confines of personal ‘psychobiology’ — insisting that the universal foundation of mythology is rooted in cosmicity rather than psychologism (Meletinsky 2000, 70, 156–7). As a formidable cultural tradition, supported by the seminal research of J. G. Frazer, V. Propp, K. Hübner, and others, mythology offers substantial insights to augment the psychological interpretation of images. Presently, the mythological concept of the archetype is broader and more profound than its psychological counterpart.

In particular, S. Krymskyi treats archetypes not as “some kind of ‘spiritual genes’, but as certain presuppositions — that is, inclinations or tendencies which, in different eras, are realised through images that may vary in their means of expression yet structurally constitute specific prototypes or can be reconstructed as such” (Krymskyi 2008, 305–306). Associated with a methodologically distinct way of seeing, such reconstructions are not always oriented towards the past, as by transforming the past into symbols, they can project the future. Consequently, the reconstruction of archetypes is

perpetually relevant and aids in interpreting specific processes as national phenomena. The carriers of national identity and ethnic cultures must 'recognise themselves' in the past, perceiving it through familiar imagery. This gives rise to an archetypal mode of perception, wherein the pattern is internalised – the structural schema of a phenomenon that underlies its reproducibility and ensures stability and recognisability. The analysis of archetypes serves as an adequate and rational scientific method for studying national culture and mentality. It necessitates empirical proof of the pervasiveness and resilience of structures that can be utilised to characterise the ethnic individuality of persons and peoples. A vivid manifestation of the corpus of archetypes is found in folk tales (specifically Slavic 'fairy tales') and the myths that precede them. Through their comprehensive and profound investigation, one can discern a symbolic structure that reflects the essence of the individual or collective soul. The gravitation toward these eternal images is entirely logical; they exist precisely to be reproduced in dreams, phobias, religious systems, and the rituals of traditional festivals. At the same time, the density of the archetypal space is not rigid, which contributes to the low variability of mythological macro-plots. Therefore, archetypes not only actualise national uniqueness (lest culture fall into the trap of stereotypes) but also adapt global experience. Thus, universal archetypes serve as the worldview basis of culture. Notwithstanding that archetypes are steadfast elements of the unconscious, they can alter their guise within the cultural process; hence, both the genetic search for universal images and the historical investigation of the unfolding of archetypal forms remain pertinent. Archetypes of the unconscious coalesce into proto plots that are reproduced across all artistic forms.

The necessity of the research entails an analysis of the correlation between archetypes and the identification of the patterns governing their interaction. Specifically, as S. Krymskyi posits, the existential dimension of Ukrainian national life is revealed through a sequence of archetypes: Home – Field – Temple (whereas for nomadic cultures, these are: Power – Authority – Kin). Manifestly, this concerns the thematization of meanings rather than the full explication of their entire content, especially since, within the Ukrainian configuration, they constitute a shared mental field (Krymskyi 2008, 292–3). Archetypes are not merely imprints (the residue) of a constantly recurring typical experience; they simultaneously function as forces and tendencies towards its reproduction. Thus, an archetype is a form of readiness to represent the same or similar mythical conceptions which, within sensory experience, may manifest as phenomena that accumulate a broad cultural context.

The concept of the phenomenon primarily encompasses 'manifestation', as denoted by the corresponding Greek term *Φαινόμενον*. However, all phenomena are intrinsically linked to our perceptions of them during the process of comprehension; that is to say, they pertain, in one way or another, to the sphere of consciousness. The conscious coexists with the unconscious, which exerts a potent influence upon it. Consequently, the Trickster phenomenon is rooted in the Trickster archetype – a concept that has been thoroughly reflected upon by scholars ranging from P. Radin, C. G. Jung, K. Kerenyi to C. Lévi-Strauss and others.

The author has also touched on this topic before (Demchuk 2023), but important political shifts that have taken place in the world require further sociocultural rethinking. The domain of the Trickster is the unconscious. The figure of the Trickster is well established within the narratives of mythology (Dionysus, Loki), folklore, and literature (Diogenes the Cynic, Hodja Nasreddin, Baron Munchausen, Ostap Bender, Venichka Yerofeyev), as well as in cinema (Randle McMurphy, portrayed by Jack Nicholson in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*), musical culture (the horror-opera *Hamlet* by composers R. Grygoriv and I. Razumeiko), and cultural-artistic practices (Orest Liutyi), among others. The Trickster figure blends with the concepts of the 'cultural hero' and the 'hero of culture'.

The distinction between the concepts of the 'cultural hero' and the 'hero of culture' is based on the research of M. Naidorf, who notes: "Times change, and heroes change with them. Nonetheless, the categories of 'cultural hero' and 'hero of culture' signify vital 'points of entry' into the subject domain when investigating any culture – from those of an archaic type to contemporary mass culture" (Naidorf 2013, 303). Specifically, the cultural hero is a creator of culture (characterised by culture-making and the presence of a mythological context); conversely, the hero of culture is created by culture (characterised by culture-conformity and the presence of a social context), which does not preclude their subsequent mythologisation *post facto*.

Thus, the aforementioned Trickster phenomenon manifests throughout the entire cultural tradition, evolving from the archaic (as an opponent to the cultural hero or a cultural anti-hero) and the modern (as a hero of culture) to mass culture, where, in accordance with postmodern trends, the figure is assembled as a collage, syncretising with both the cultural hero and the hero of culture.

The attributive traits of the Trickster are relatively well-defined within the relevant academic literature (Prokopovych 2019); these notably include provocativeness, artistry, ambivalence, creativity, guile, and a carnivalesque nature, among others. Conversely, the political type of the Trickster remains virtually undocumented in scientific research. We are aware of only isolated studies conducted within the framework of political culture (Abrahamian 1999). Political culture pertains to the realm of 'policy'¹ and is intrinsically linked to the spiritual culture of the individual and society at large, serving as a synthesis of the respective cultures of all social communities and political institutions within the state (Antonenko 2010). However, it does not function as a mechanical substrate; rather, it emerges as a product of culture-making: "Thus, the analysis of political behaviour cannot be considered comprehensive without accounting for the motivating function of culture" (Naidorf 2005).

We have previously addressed this aspect in the article "*The Mythological Context of the 'Orange' Revolution*", where the events of the 2004 Orange Revolution are analysed through a mythological lens and carnivalesque representation (Demchuk 2005). In this study, the pair of presidential contenders is examined as an opposition: the cultural hero V. Yushchenko (former Prime

¹ The English concept 'policy' (as opposed to 'polity' and 'politics') denotes the content of politics, embodied in its goals and values; the problems it solves; the motives and mechanisms for making political decisions.

Minister and Ukrainophile) versus the trickster V. Yanukovych (Prime Minister and former convict), who ‘deculturises’ and brutalises Ukraine’s political landscape, acting as the Hero’s Shadow in accordance with Jungian theory (Jung 1956). Subsequently, upon assuming power (2010), and in confirmation of our hypothesis, Yanukovych executed a classic trickster’s manoeuvre by altering the Constitution of Ukraine. He further attempted to construct a new reality on a continental scale — namely, redirecting Ukraine’s trajectory away from Europe (Euro-Atlantic integration) towards Russia (Eurasian integration).

M. Turchyna rightly posits that “whilst the cultural hero and the trickster are polar opposites, they often exist in syncretic unity, representing ‘two sides of the same coin’, and their roles may be reversed depending on the historical and cultural situation. This ambivalent juxtaposition of two by definition opposing archetypal figures constitutes the essential meaningfulness of the Trickster archetype” (Turchyna 2022, 44). Notably, in our article “*Comicrocracy’ as a Cultural and Political Reality*”, other prominent political figures are discussed within the framework of political tricksterism across both diachronic and synchronic dimensions, including D. Trump and V. Zelenskyy (Demchuk 2020). Consequently, there are grounds to propose the characteristic traits of the psychological Trickster archetype in politics, as the social imagination operates through archetypal imagery:

- unpredictability/chaos,
- narcissism/sexuality,
- marginality/liminality,
- mutability/mimicry,
- rupture with the establishment/protection of the aggrieved,
- destruction/creation of an alternative reality,
- tragic end/political fiasco (which, for a politician, are commensurate).

This scale may serve as a framework for assessing contemporary politicians, particularly for understanding their strategies upon the political Olympus; indeed, a Trickster is easily identified by the controversial response of the electorate — ranging from emotional rejection to profound admiration. The psychological portrait of a leader is formed based on their communicative behaviour and specific manifestations of personality. A frequent marker of such a political persona is public performance as provocation, executed in the style of a reality show.

Currently, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is undoubtedly a pre-eminent political figure. At the commencement of his presidential term, V. Zelenskyy substantially reconfigured Ukraine’s ruling class, replacing the old elite with ‘representatives of the people’ (a rupture with the establishment/protection of the aggrieved) and proposing new rules for the political game. In doing so, he radically transformed the Ukrainian political reality of 2019 (destruction/creation of an alternative reality), which he presented as a social simulacrum. However, during the presidency of the charismatic (narcissism/sexuality) V. Zelenskyy — a president hailing from show business (marginality/liminality) — a full-scale war erupted (the tragic end of the initial presidential period). Consequently, his worldview, declared during the election campaign and relayed to society through the primary message that “the war in Ukraine continues because the ‘party of war’ profits from it”, suffered a devastating defeat (a political fiasco).

O. Dovhanyk has analysed the activities of V. Zelenskyy through the prism of C. Jung's Child archetype (Dovhanyk 2024). However, we maintain that Zelenskyy's 'political childhood' reached its conclusion with the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022 — as is typically the case in the life of an immature individual when an extreme event catalyses their coming of age. Nevertheless, the behaviour of the betrayed or abandoned child is characteristic of the Trickster (e.g., Loki, Prince Hamlet, etc.). Overall, Dovhanyk's idea complements the multifaceted nature of the Trickster as a cultural phenomenon. Indeed, the infernal Putin did not fulfil, but rather violated Zelenskyy's benign intentions, which had been declared during the election campaign as the pursuit of mutual understanding. Even so, the political Trickster is *a priori* creative and predisposed to metamorphosis (mutability/mimicry). He will no longer plead for peace on bended knee, 'looking into Putin's eyes', once the hour of Ragnarök has arrived (the creation of a new cycle of reality). It is precisely he who can transform into a neomythological/metamodern cultural hero (mutability/mimicry) — one who will defend the world against Evil and construct an alternative reality in the form of victory against the backdrop of a previously predicted defeat. He navigates events from a plurality of positions, for, in the element of Chaos, he remains without equal. However, a new stage in geopolitics commenced on 20 January 2025, when, following his inauguration, Donald Trump assumed the US presidency for a second time. He brought about the collapse not only of the liberal world order but also of the American-centric world (Pax Americana); consequently, at present, "It is no longer only technologists and sociologists, but also psychologists and philosophers who are attempting to comprehend Trump" (Posternak 2024).

One of the typical hallmarks of the Trickster is the creation of chaos as a means of terminating the previous world to facilitate the next civilizational stage. Similarly, the Scandinavian trickster Loki instigated a universal catastrophe through a series of his own actions, leading to the demise of the old world and the rebirth of a new one upon the earth, cleansed following the battle of the gods. Consequently, the contemporary Trickster is embodied by Trump; for, in the final analysis, the Trickster corresponds to the scale of the cultural hero, possessing the traits and potency of a Demiurge. Therefore, if one considers the current role of President Zelenskyy in relation to President Trump, he is more akin to the Joker — a transformation of the Trickster archetype within the process of culture-making.

Conclusions. If, in 1997, global geostrategy was positioned by Zbigniew Brzezinski as a game of chess (Brzezinski 1997), then today, in the era of 'comicocracy', it is more akin to a game of cards (it is no coincidence that Trump periodically taunts Zelenskyy regarding a 'lack of trumps').

However, the Joker is an extraordinary card that imbues the game with dynamism, originality, and unpredictability. With a Joker in hand, every move can become an unexpected turn; this card is capable of abruptly shifting an opponent's strategy — a feat which, by and large and at great risk, only Zelenskyy currently manages in his match with Trump. At present, this is a masterful yet ruthless geopolitical game, one that exacts a heavy toll in the blood of the Ukrainian people. It continues, and shall continue, until the other player — Putin — exits the game, having lost his stakes.

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Феномен Трикстера в соціокультурних практиках політичного простору метамодерну

Найбільш репрезентативним проявом національного менталітету, безумовно, є культура. Національні культури моделюють ідентичність, формуючи сенс поняття нації, з яким її члени можуть себе ототожнювати. Зрозуміло, що креативним чинником подібної творчості є міфологія.

Проте культура діє як могутня етнокреативна сила, тому що актуалізує не тільки втілені в життя, а й потенційно можливі варіанти історичного процесу, акумулюючи досвід поколінь. Національний менталітет втілюється в культурі через специфічні варіації архетипів, пов'язані з філософською ідеєю «несвідомого», яку у психоаналітичних концепціях активно розробляли З. Фрейд та К. Юнг. Загалом концепт «архетип» має різноманітні визначення, починаючи з античності; К. Юнг лише ввів поняття «архетипів колективного несвідомого». Нині міфологічне поняття архетипу (Є. Мелетинський, С. Кримський) є ширшим і глибшим, ніж психологічне. Асоціюючись із методологічно специфічним способом бачення, такі реконструкції не завжди заглиблені в минуле, тому що, трансформуючи минуле в символи, здатні проєктувати майбутнє. Архетипи є не лише відбитками (осадам) типового досвіду, що постійно повторюється, але й діють водночас як сили та тенденції до його відтворення. Отже, реконструкція архетипів завжди

актуальна й допомагає тлумачити певні процеси як національні феномени. Аналіз архетипів є адекватним і раціональним науковим методом дослідження національної культури та менталітету, що вимагає емпіричного доведення наскрізності та стійкості структур, які можуть бути використані для характеристики індивідуальності людей і народів. Незважаючи на те що архетипи є непохитними елементами несвідомого, вони здатні змінювати свій вигляд у межах культурного процесу, тому актуальним є як генетичний пошук загальнолюдських образів, так і історичне дослідження розгортання архетипових форм у соціокультурних практиках.

У статті проаналізовано феномен Трикстера, який постає з архетипу Трикстера, образів культурного героя та героя культури через їх синкретизацію та трансформацію, з огляду на певний культурний контекст. Аналогічні алгоритми простежуються у психотипі та діях політиків доби «комікократії» — сучасного тренду світової політики, коли главами держав обирають людей, у минулому причетних до шоу-бізнесу.

Мета дослідження полягає в аналізі феномена Трикстера в репрезентації сучасних політиків на прикладі В. Зеленського та Д. Трампа. У статті розглянуто образи президентів України та США, кожен з яких постає героєм культури, виразником соціокультурних позицій, уособлюючи властивості національного культурного простору. Кожному з них притаманне позиціонування себе як культурного героя — рятівника та упорядника світу. Це впорядковує палімпсест культурних смислів, що характеризує їхній політичний імідж.

Феномен Трикстера є домінантною та об'єднувальною характеристикою зазначених політиків. Утім, якщо спільно розглядати образи президентів, то можна детермінувати їх як Трикстера (Трамп) та Джокера (Зеленський). Саме такі лідери виявилися затребувані в хаосі політичних катаклізмів доби метамодерну — метаіронії, осциляції та постправди.

Ключові слова: культурний вимір, архетип, міф, Трикстер, соціокультурні практики, міждисциплінарність, В. Зеленський, Д. Трамп.

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Main research fields: East-Christian culture, national identity, political mythology.

