

## Poor Ethnography

In 1981 "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" published answers to a questionnaire posing the following question: "Ethnography – Ethnology – Anthropology of Culture – Folk Studies. What are they? What is their aim?"<sup>1</sup> Apparently, the question concerning ethnography divided the respondents the least. Despite great differences in perceiving the pursued discipline almost all agreed with the image of ethnography presented by L. Stomma. An auxiliary science – ethnography - whose range corresponds to the first phases on research: observation and description, fieldwork. The characteristic type of ethnological research is a monograph pertaining to a sufficiently limited group so that the author is capable of amassing the majority of his information thanks to personal experience. Ethnography also encompasses methods and techniques referring to work on the spot, the classification (...) and description of particular cultural phenomena regardless whether the heart of the matter concerns arms, tools, beliefs or institutions (Claude Lévi-Strauss). Ethnography thus encompasses works that are often the easy victim of derision – studies that propose catalogues of farm tools, rural wells, beliefs about plants, etc. and the range of their occurrence, monographs dealing with particular villages, etc. Naturally, they would be deprived of all meaning if they were to constitute an aim in itself (unfortunately, this does take place). After all, their role entails collecting sources and the introduction of order within the latter for the sake of ethnology. In this sense they can be useful and valuable. As can be seen, the differentiation of ethnology and ethnography is not a question of terminological jugglery. Its indispensability is delineated by the regrettably rather unfamiliar motto formulated by Jean-Thierry Maertens: Each ethnologist must be also, at least partly, an ethnographer. After all, the path from ethnography to ethnology remains long.<sup>2</sup> A quarter of a century ago ethnography did not pose a challenge for the authors of New Polish Ethnology and the respected representatives of its classical form. It remained merely a first step, necessary but still ra-

ther simple and calling more for organisational than intellectual effort. Questions, problems, and cognitive difficulties were to come to the fore after this stage, naturally for those capable of following the long path towards ethnology. Reflection, interpretation, and science worthy of a university level - all pertained not so much to practicing ethnography, which took place "somewhere", as to the creation of ethnology and anthropology taking place "here", in the very centre. Exercises and professions, the path and the target – this was the order of the relation. It would be difficult, therefore, to become surprised that ethnography vanished from the names of scientific institutions. Anthropology and ethnology sounded more serious and more respectable and, predominantly, they better revealed the meaning of the network - the discovery of the "truth" of culture and man. As is usually the case, conciliation above all decisions – and the question of ethnography became its unexpected and unconscious cause – is more the effect of ignorance, lack of concentration, and absence of deeper reflection than an obvious and well-devised assessment. When practicing ethnography was regarded as an object of studies, *being there* – as the phenomenon in question was interpreted by Clifford Geertz, one of the most brilliant commentators – revealed its entire complicated nature. Suddenly, everything started to become distorted. What is that mythical "terrain" in which research is to be conducted? Why is it to be precisely that and not the other, what are the criteria of selection, and what should be the decisive premise? What about research itself, the great task of collecting sources and putting them into order? What methods of obtaining information are most adequate, and when can we accept that sources are so complete that we can start transforming them? What sort of methods should be applied and what sort of carriers can be used in view of the fact that they all somehow deform reality? These are only some of the more obvious questions. The heart of the matter does not lie in the fact that there are no answers. They do exist, but when everything has to be justified then ethnography, an ancillary science and the first step towards ethnology, begins to expand and grows complicated. It becomes involved in interpretations and presents ambiguous material for further analysis, endowed with a great number of question marks. Nonetheless, thanks to studies by C. Geertz we can indicate several properties of ethnographic knowledge, i.e. those that define it the strongest.<sup>3</sup> Probably the most obvious is its local nature, the outcome of a close connection of the presented image and fieldwork. Naturally, one cannot be everywhere and see everything. The solution to this obvious observation was to assume the form of a monograph: a single place, a single institution or belief, nothing more and yet so much, intensely and personally observed and experienced.

We attach importance to the idea of a monograph not because this is the form in which real ethnography was to realise itself. Belief in the existence of small, isolated cultures that can be totally grasped has lain in ruin for long. The fact that decryption calls for distinction and is always made by someone continues to exist and possesses obvious significance. Today, a monograph is not a holistic description of something, but a detailed depiction of someone. Geertz coined the term “thick description”: Ethnography comes down to thick description. *What the ethnographer is in fact faced with—except when (as, of course, he must do) - he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection - is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity; interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censuring households ... writing his journal. Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.*<sup>4</sup> To present “something” in an ethnographic manner designates not only providing diverse images, as colourful and intense as possible, but also presenting it in such a way so that it would disclose meanings. This is the obverse and the reverse of identity, its two indispensable sides. To see and seek meaning is the point of departure for practice, which ends with a record of sensible perception. In order to provide such testimony, to obtain local knowledge, the ethnographer sets off, and, just as Jerzy S. Wasilewski, he “travels” or like Andrzej Stasiuk, he “goes to Babadag”. He comes across space, physically experiencing its concrete nature. This fact restricts and closes, moderates the cognitive impetus, but at the same time forces to become cautious, brings forth the importance of the detail, and hones the senses that touch reality. On-the-spot practice offering dense description – such is the path that we follow.

We do not describe the entire World, but only the selected particular world experienced by us. Our activity is limited by space, on the one hand, and by invisible and omnipresent time, on the other hand. The fact that our discipline has been always facing the temporal problem is testified by its important categories - cold, archaic culture of the folk type. Within the spaces of those cultures – natural for ethnographic activity – time was to signify so little that its impact could be outright ignored. Images – the effects of lengthy observation (months rather than years) - could be regarded not as historical evidence but as a

description of the nature of those worlds. Today, such a premise cannot be maintained. The contemporary shape of the life of the protagonists of ethnographic grand narratives from the first half of the twentieth century has changed immensely. The Boro tribe, the Nuer people, the Trobriand islanders, the inhabitants of Białka, Jurgów, and Łapszanka, whom we visited at the end of the previous century, all differ. The obvious character of this observation is the reason why it is necessary to accept not only the fact that we were there and wrote here but also that we were there and then and are writing now. This act has its consequences. The ethnographic account becomes light because time deprives it of its ultimate and categorical qualities, while at the same time granting it universality. After all, everything turns out to be particular, distinctive, and in this sense exotic, since nothing can resist the voracious passage of time. This outright audible murmur of time renders ethnographic activity feverish, immensely expands its domain, and prolongs its duration infinitely. If the world has actually diminished and time has accelerated then we are facing a magnificent challenge. In his essay: *A la Recherche du Présent Perdu* M. Kundera wrote: *When we study, discuss, analyse a reality, we analyse it as it appears in our mind, in our memory. We know reality only in the past tense. We do not know it as it is in the present, in the moment when it's happening, when it is. The present moment is unlike the memory of it. Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting. We can assiduously keep a diary and note every event. Rereading the entries one day, we will see that they cannot evoke a single concrete image. And still worse: that the imagination is unable to help our memory along and reconstruct what has been forgotten.*

*The present - the concreteness of the present - as a phenomenon to consider, as a structure, is for us an unknown planet; so we can neither hold on to it in our memory nor reconstruct it through imagination. We die without knowing what we have lived.*<sup>5</sup> In the sketch: *In Search of Present Time* he added:

*By definition, what a narrator recounts is a thing that has happened. But each little event, as it becomes the past, loses its concrete nature and turns into an outline. Narration is recollection, therefore a summary, a simplification, an abstraction. (...)*

*The nineteenth century began amid decades of explosive events that, time and again and from top to bottom, transfigured the whole of Europe. Something essential in man's existence changed then and forever: History became everyone's experience; man began to understand that he was not going to die in the same world he had been born into (...)* *The shape of every little object – every chair, every skirt – was stamped with its imminent disappearance (transformation). The age of descriptions began (Description: compassion for the ephemeral; salvaging the perishable).*<sup>6</sup>

The author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* deals with the problem of the present upon the occasion of his journey across the history of the novel. It is not written by an ethnographer, albeit literary problems affect him too. Just like the novelist he is compelled, willing or not, to resolve the question of presentation. Ethnographic knowledge is historical since it is by way of necessity the outcome of recollection, evocation, the enlivening of memory; it is testimony and a view from afar. Such distance in time and space is not so much complicated as unavoidable. This is the way things were there - says the ethnographer, coming to terms with the historical and local nature of his knowledge stemming from personal experience and producing his own testimony.

By the very nature of things, ethnographic knowledge is thus limited and fragmentary. Its features are enhanced by the fact that it is the outcome of someone's cultivation, and that a concrete someone had derived it from a certain place and time. The ethnographer is distinctive not because he wishes to be original but because he is a person, a unique *summa* of places, time, language, tradition, family, and a multitude of other factors that distinguish him. Ethnography should be thus treated as the outcome of a meeting of individualised qualities and life. The auteur character of this knowledge, the fact that it always possesses its characteristic style, confirms its incompleteness and non-systematic qualities. The title of a book by Dariusz Czaja: *Sygnatura i fragment. Narracje antropologiczne* brilliantly captures this quality and at the same time refers to yet another publication: *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* by Clifford Geertz, demonstrating the significance of the literary aspect of this activity. Writing, the process of tackling words, style, and convention, is not merely an enhancing supplement but an important structural element of ethnographic praxis. The force of ethnographic knowledge depends on the quality of its transmission, on the class of the author as a man of letters. After Geertz it is no longer possible to treat the literary quality as a charge levelled against ethnography. It cannot be non-literary, but remains written well or not, a feature that cannot be evaded.

Local and historical qualities, fragmentariness and literariness - each of those traits is connected with a choice. If the latter is to be conscious (which is not necessary, but certainly remains desirable) then it calls for justification. Why the opera and not a highlander's costume, whence mass culture and not that of the Eskimo? A totally fundamental explanation is ontological. We deal with something due to its ontological nature. This necessary condition is probably insufficient. Certain order can be discovered in extremely non-homogeneous collections, i.e. ethnography. The most frequently described spaces were worlds that today are weak, vanishing, marginal, and insufficiently

appreciated. True, they could possess numerous representations, such as the peasant or nineteenth-century tribal cultures, but the centre that at the time generated the civilizational model perceived them as low, archaic, and without a future. Interest in that, which was weak and declining possessed different ideological justifications, but this was a durable tendency: from the strong to the weak, from the certain to that, which calls for justification. To put it differently: the ethnographer seeks poverty and grows close to it. What is the source of this curious predilection, this strange fascination? Evolutionists mentioned the beginnings of cultures, the first stages. This is where they wished to perceive them. For the functional school, the structuralists and the semioticians, these were *sui generis* samples offering a better and easier view of mechanisms ruling culture as a whole. Marginal qualities could be also important for delineating a fuller image of man, for extracting that, which dominates and in reality is concealed and not at all obvious. These justifications, to a considerable extent possessing solely historical value (which is not to say that they were devoid of value), are certainly insufficient to explain the force of the attraction of poor reality. It is by no means permanently ascribed to a certain place, time, or concrete social or ethnic group. It becomes extracted only by comparison and reference, and appears in a relation. Strong and diverse existence refers to weak existence, the certainty of memory - to shameful oblivion, while obvious value - to doubtful quality, the group - to the individual, and culture - to life.

The ethnographer seeking poverty sets off for the Amazon or the cinema in his university town or other peripheries of his world. He assumes according to the wisdom of his discipline - and it is less important for his work whether he does so consciously - that, which Tadeusz Kantor, the great expert on poverty, once said:

*The peripheries do not denote decline and submission. In my private dictionary there exists the term: REALITY OF THE LOWEST RANK. A terrain reserved (illegally) for Art. And thus for all supreme human values. Here, the peripheries possess their high rank. Explosions of this myth, manifested in the most unexpected places, do not act, for all practical purposes, anywhere but in those peripheries. To put it in the language of art and poetry - in the poor courtyard, the pitiful corner, where we conceal our most secret hopes, our imagination, our threatened humanity, our personality. And probably only there we might become redeemed.*<sup>7</sup>

Yet another depiction of the ethnographic promised land comes from the essay: *The Assistants* by Giorgio Agamben. The assistant of this Italian philosopher, living a "damaged life" personifies that what is doomed or, more exactly: *It concerns the unending mass of what becomes irrevocably lost* [in the history of society and in

the history of individuals, far greater than that what can be stored in the archives of memory]. *Throughout our lives, the measure of oblivion and ruin, the ontological waste that we carry in ourselves far exceeds the small mercy of our memories and our consciousness. But this formless chaos of the forgotten that accompanies us like a silent golem is neither inert nor inefficacious. On the contrary, it influences us just as much as our conscious memories, although in a different way. Forgetting has a force and a way of operating that cannot be measured in the same terms as that of conscious memory, nor can it be accumulated like knowledge. Its persistence determines the status of all knowledge and understanding. The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather it entails remaining in us and with us is forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable.*<sup>8</sup>

In this approach towards a comprehension of the force of the attraction of poor reality to which, as we can see, not merely ethnographers succumbed, listen to the great Marina Tsvetaeva describing the “belongings of the poor”.<sup>9</sup>

Paupers' things. A bast mat? That's a phony  
Thing. Like a plain plank of wood.  
Paupers' things – they're all skin-and-bony,  
Wholly – meatless, solely soul-food.

Where'd they come from? Seems – from a distance,

From long ago. Don't strain your eyes!  
Paupers' things – have no pre-existence:  
They are cut from people's insides!  
A shelf? Haphazard. A coat-hanger? Ditto.  
Accidental too that ghost of a  
Chair. Possessions? Dry twigs and hisses, –  
All the woods on an October day!  
Poverty's fractioned furnishings!  
All are – what? – a quarter, a third.  
Clearly they long since interred these things.  
Just to look at you makes me hurt!  
It's hard to take one's sinful eyes off  
You, as off ulcerous sores.  
Viennese chair – where's the Vienna –  
Whose? When? It's a thing to deplore!  
The best things – here – would have slighted  
Your house, right? Sorry! – your store-  
Room. Here alone are such blighted  
Things – things. Your brow arches over  
thus: ? – How else when seeing dull, widow's  
Rags? – Raise a brow! (In lieu of lorgnette –  
A brow!) The eye's no mean asker with those  
Brows. At times an eye's an o-ject.  
So dry at times is it and vacant –  
An immense, gorgeous woman's eye,  
That – compare them – it seems a basin's  
Spirit, the soul – a tub of lye.  
Same as with tub and sieve I'd own it

– To the tsar! on Judgment Day! –  
Each one called here as a poet  
On himself has known that gaze!  
Poverty's modest utensils!  
Each knife is personally known.  
Like a creature, day commencing,  
Partly here, wholly – you roam –  
Out the windows, bare or facing  
Suburbs – you've read the crime news?  
How to gauge chasteness, grace in  
A thing: as baggage it's refused.  
Since it's wobbly and could pulverize  
Right before one's very eyes,  
Since almost nothing that frail survives  
Constant shifts...

She cries –  
Since it's not: a desk, but a spouse,  
Or son. Not a, but our  
Chest.  
Since nobody for hearts and souls  
Gives out baggage checks.  
Paupers' things are drier and thinner:  
Drier than snags, thinner than bast.  
Paupers' things are – put simply – spirits,  
That is why they burn up so fast.

These texts, written in such different forms by authors whose points of departure were dissimilar traditions and spiritual experiences, demonstrate the beauty and goodness of premises for wandering across the provinces of poverty. Firm ethnographic presence is not based, therefore, on a convenient repetition of a once made choice. Its spiritual sources and the question whether they had been made consciously are already the themes of separate reflections. Even today, when one follows a designated direction, they reveal well-known drudgery. The described world disappears and there is nothing that one may match with the image in order to test its adequacy. Informers vanish somewhere in non-being or, worse, change their convictions, views, and stories. That what has been seen, heard, felt, touched, and experienced in other ways has to be contained within a single whole. In the wake of Malinowski's *Dziennik* it is not, however, possible to pretend that we simply had not been there. In other words, we too should find ourselves within the presentation. This forces us towards literature and renders our scientific endeavours, already previously rather poor, even more meagre.

At the same time, this is by no means an individual ailment, but the feature of an entire discipline. Ethnography is quite correctly situated along the margin of the social sciences. He who deals with poverty fares poorly. The ethnographic tent, compared with the solid edifices of other sciences pertaining to the main

current of reality and based on the experiment and quantitative methods, does not have an imposing appearance. On the other hand, it features astounding adequacy both in relation to the constantly nomadic character of ethnography – a science of the path and on the move – and to the traits of the world examined by it. There where the dominating features are disappearance, change, fleeting memory, the bustle of daily life, the detail and minutiae, poor endowment appears to be the most suitable. Anthropological narration, its basic instrument of work based on a catalogue of concepts and categories devised in the course of its history and applying comparison as the fundamental manner of extracting meaning, will never possess such force and expression as the one characteristic for the grand texts of the interpreters of the poor world. The ethnographer will not create *Stalker* or *The Kolyma Tales*, *Wielopole* or *Fado*. His art, just like his science, is distant from the centre and in this sense remains marginal. Powerlessness, lack of lucidity, the absence of contemporaneity, in a word: provincialism, come to the fore also in this particular encounter. This would appear to be a weakness if it were not for the qualities closely connected with it. Such openness, blurred form, and borderline qualities open up towards otherness and render its presence obvious and constant. The tendency towards making use of the experiences of other sciences, permanent in ethnography, and inspirations borrowed from the world of art - all are sustained by its provincialism.

Encircling ethnography, we continue coming across specific poverty, paradoxically brimming with potential and diverse meanings since *burns so fast*. The ethnographer wishes to trust that *the whole world hides in every particle* (Bruno Schulz) and as befits a zealous believer he wants to confirm by means of his praxis the revelation bestowed upon him. He thus multiplies images and adds postcards and successive fragments. The storeroom containing these snatches displays considerable confusion: French monarchs and the song *Polesia Czar*, Eskimos and the Maasai, smokers, mountain climbers, those living in the jungle and in the streets of great metropolises, chaotic treasures lacking order. This is a collection of evidence and, at the same time, testimony of heroic memory, ever renewed despite the depressing knowledge that only a few of its products will become animated in some sort of recollection. What is the purpose of these poor riches?

In his lecture: *The Inevitability of the Humanities*<sup>10</sup> the German philosopher Odo Marquard posed the following thesis: *The more modern the modern world becomes, the more inevitable do the humanities become.*<sup>11</sup> Justifying this thought, Marquard indicated the erroneousness of the popular conviction: the humanities based on narration are archaic and in the course of a modernization of the world are ousted by modern

natural sciences based on an experiment and by humanities using measurements. A closer look, however, shows quite the opposite. Sciences founded on narration come into being as a response to the successes of experimental sciences and the modernisation changes initiated by them. The emergence of experimental sciences is not the cause of the death but of the birth of the humanities; in other words, the humanities are not the victims of modernisation but its outcome and thus are thoroughly modern.<sup>12</sup> After some time, every sort of progress within the range of the former will enforce a growing need for the latter. The more the world becomes modernized the greater its need for narrative sciences. Recurring opinions about their crisis in modern reality should be treated not so much as a crisis of capacity but as a crisis of surcharge. The humanities are not dying off but - although they are developing - they do not keep up with their modern indispensability.<sup>13</sup>

The necessity for those detailed narrations and the growing need for them come from the fact that modernisation stimulated by the experimental sciences produces losses in the environment while the humanities compensate those losses.<sup>14</sup> Uniformisation, objectivisation, globalization – the effects of modernisation – deprive man of his tradition, history, and specificity. In order to successfully tackle them, to bear the burdens and challenges of modernization, one needs narrative sciences, which at least partly provide a chance for regaining that, which is lost. They spin three types of stories: those that produce sensitivity, preserve, and orientate. First, they restore colour and intensity to reality and level the modernization disenchantment of the world. Second, they translate and justify the collection, reconstruction, and storage of the remnants of the past. No epoch has produced so much destruction as the modern one, and no epoch has preserved as much as the modern one thanks to the development of the ability to take an increasing part of the past into the future.<sup>15</sup> A museum, a Skansen, a concert of old music, a reconstruction of a mystery play – these are the forms of such narration. Finally, they extract from the homogeneous and magma-like presence the components creating it and cast light upon them, thus making it possible to discern their quality, meaning, and wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Such narrations not only make it possible to better understand them and to endow their existence with depth and intensity. Their easily and universally accessible collection shows the ambiguity of reality, the possibility of its various comprehensions and experiencing. It becomes possible to draw forth the premises of diverse choices. On the other hand, it is impossible to justify any sort of categorical and exclusive qualities with the assistance of such a collection. The inevitability of the humanities is also based on the fact that they demonstrate and stress the value

of ambiguity and disclose the misery and poverty of unambiguity and exclusiveness.

The Odo Marquand lecture discusses narrative humanities, whose province is ethnography. The meanings and future of its existence in the light of the reflections pursued by the author of *Apology of the Accidental* appear to be lucid. At the beginning of the twenty first century, in a reality characterised as post-modern, liquid, post-metaphysical, and ontologically weak this discipline appears to be much more contemporary than prior to the breakthrough, which all sorts of “post...” wish to put into thought.

All anthropo- and ethnological projects intent on extracting models, functions, mechanisms or structures of culture as such were important in conducting a quest, but their ultimate outcome – a cultural common denominator, proved to be always a phenomenon of a concrete culture and not some sort of a general rule. They can, however, continue being fascinating if we see in them principles organising strong anthropological narrations, revealing not the mythical foundation of culture but metaphysical premises making it possible to present it in a given manner. A survey conducted a quarter of century ago offers a good image of various discourses, a debate that, however, does not pertain to the idea of a strong narrative. Only within its space do particular elements assume meaning. Hence the domination of ethnology and the servile nature of ethnography, the significance of ideas and the weakness of reality. If, however, as G. Vattimo wrote in his essay: *Hermeneutics and Anthropology*: We do not wish to continue transforming anthropology into metaphysics – a description of the universal structures of the existence of man, anthropology conceived as a scientific description of the constants of particular cultures - profoundly determined by the metaphysical idea of science and, on a more concrete level, the Occidentalisation of our planet,<sup>17</sup> then the situation changes significantly. The otherness that takes place does not consist of a critical overcoming of the past, its rejection in the name of new premises or methods for the sake of a better process of approaching the truth. It should be connected with an awareness of the contestability and discursiveness of all foundations and, at the same time, with their necessity. In his encounter with the “others”, an event that opens up all sorts of ethnologies, the ethnologist is a person who knows how those phenomena had been created. Such knowledge renders this encounter special and in many instances becomes the basic reason for its existence. It is, therefore, impossible to eliminate or even suspend it. It is, however, feasible to indicate the weakness of the conclusions that deprive them of their categorical and ultimate nature. This weakness is the necessary outcome of the historical quality of each meeting and can be reduced only by metaphysical premises. The

discovery of their presence, restoring the nature of anthropology, does not lessen the importance of its accomplishments but turns them into a problem and calls for reinterpretations. Actually, it enlivens them, makes them contemporary, and revitalises them. The history of the discipline seen from this perspective is not a movement from childhood towards maturity, but an amassment of the historical experiences of a new phenomenon, not always unambiguous and open towards new comprehension. Today, ethnology in the above-presented meaning of the word is frail not only because it embarked upon the effort of an exegesis of its history. Otherness and the space of its references also possess an equally weak character. G. Vattimo: That which we can actually observe is a collection of contemporary “derivatives” of the primitive, hybrid forms, relics contaminated with modernity, *margins of the present which embrace both Third World societies and the ghettos of industrial societies*. (...) We are dealing not so much with a total organisation of the world according to rigid technological schemes as with a “mine” of preserved forms that together with an uneven division of power and natural resources on a global scale becomes the source of increasingly numerous margin situations constituting the truth of primitive culture in our world. (...) Anthropology is not an encounter with radical difference or a scientific “putting into order” of the phenomenon of mankind in the categories of structures. In all likelihood, its form of the dialogue is inclined towards the past and the ancient, but only in such a way in which the arche may appear in an epoch of fulfilled metaphysics: as that, which survived and is marginal and contaminated.<sup>18</sup>

If this characteristic of the contemporary existence of the discipline is apt then the process of seeking and disclosing truth in its space runs a course contrary to the one described by L. Stomma in the memorable questionnaire. Becoming acquainted with grand narratives, the ability to apply them, and even their critical analysis, in a word, the process of being an ethnologist is a necessary stage but not an ultimate one. The encounter with the others, with strangers, is impossible in the field of ethnology, which is always some sort of an epistemology, with the ethnologist situated within a point transcendental in relation to this event. In order to experience this fundamental meeting one must possess indispensable personal experience. Practising ethnography, field research is nothing else than a quest for such experience. It also cannot be reduced exclusively to intellectual games, but remains a great physical exhaustion, the spiritual discomfort of a voyeur and an intruder, the feeling of loneliness and unlikeness. This must give rise to aggression and bad emotions. Malinowski’s call: *Exterminate the brutes* is, after all, the archetypical howl. Such experience somehow extracts from previous existence and weakens it by depriving

it of natural and obvious qualities. The ethnographic event starts with such a state, but in order for it to actually take place it is necessary to experience the positive nature, the insight, and to capture the principle, which, true, would not make it possible to become domesticated in alienness and in this manner to bear it, but enables its comprehension or at the very least explanation. While describing this event it becomes mandatory to refer to F. Ankersmit and his presentations of the historical experience.<sup>19</sup> F. Ankersmit needed this category in order to demonstrate that it is possible to reach historical reality differently than only *via* the intermediary text. The Dutch researcher emphasised that this event possesses an aesthetic nature and is some sort of an illumination producing obvious knowledge. Similarly, in relation to an artwork it severs the contextual network and from the surface refers directly towards the essence. Within the clearance produced by this rift there emerges an unknown truth of being, not to be derived from historical wandering across contexts. The practice of ethnography has to be perceived as a search for an experience of this nature. Such ethnographic experience is poor. It is personal, individual, and different, which today means insignificant. One has to toil and reduce oneself while waiting for it, without any certainty that it truly took place. The deserts towards which ethnographers set off in search of illumination are not marked on any map because the place where they are perceived depends on a concrete ethnographisation of anthropology. Finally, the pure flash that blinds us has to be expressed and entrusted to language and narration. As in the poem by Miłosz – *What once could smite, now smites no more*. Poor ethnography is itself a poor courtyard, a neglected corner, a lowest ranking reality, a space where we salvage our humanity. This is truly good poverty.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Etnografia – Etnologia – Antropologia kultury – Ludoznawstwo. Czym są? Dokąd zmierzają? (Odpowiedzi na ankietę)*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1981, no. 2, pp. 67-81.
- <sup>2</sup> *Etnografia...* op. cit., p. 72.
- <sup>3</sup> I used the following works: C. Geertz, *Zastane światło*, Universitas, Kraków 2006; C. Geertz, *Wiedza Lokalna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2005; C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultury*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2005; C. Geertz, *Dzieło i Życie*, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Kundera, *Zdradzone testamenty. Esej*, PIW, Warszawa 2003, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>6</sup> M. Kundera, *Zasłona*, PIW, Warszawa 2005, pp. 19-21.
- <sup>7</sup> T. Kantor, *Wielopole-Wielopole*, Teatr Cricot 2, *Program Florencki*.
- <sup>8</sup> G. Agamben, *Profanacje*, PIW, Warszawa 2006, p. 48.
- <sup>9</sup> M. Cwietajewa, *Poemat schodów*, in: M. Cwietajewa, *Być chłopcem twoim jasnowłosym...*, Miniatura, Kraków 2006,

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- <sup>10</sup> O. Marquard, *O nieodzowności nauk humanistycznych*, in: O. Marquard, *Apologia przypadkowości*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 100-118.
- <sup>11</sup> O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>12</sup> O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 103.
- <sup>13</sup> O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 104.
- <sup>14</sup> O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 105.
- <sup>15</sup> O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 109.
- <sup>16</sup> O. Marquard, op. cit., pp. 108-110.
- <sup>17</sup> G. Vattimo, *Koniec nowoczesności*, Kraków 2006, p. 137 and 147.
- <sup>18</sup> G. Vattimo, op. cit., pp. 148-152.
- <sup>19</sup> F. Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, Kraków 2004, pp. 223-403.

