Prodigal Son Ten Years Later

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> It is hard to get rid of objects because they exist.
> J. Appleby, L. Hunt, M. Jacob *Telling the Truth about History*

> Not everyone has a right to every question.
> M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*

This essay is concerned with the question of the conditions under which the characteristic late modern mode of interpretation has ceased to function as the moving feature, "factor of movement," of research in the human sciences, a role that it has held since approximately the middle of the 1980s.[2] My intention is to analyze various symptoms of this hermeneutic crisis under the pressure of Holocaust studies, as

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[1] This article is a follow up to: Tokarska-Bakir, J. "Dalsze losy syna marnotrawnego. Projekt etnografii nieprzezroczystej." Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty, 13-22, vol. 1, 1995. ["Future Fate of the Prodigal Son: A Non-Transparent Ethnography Project." Polish Folk Art. Contexts.]

[2] The term "factor of movement" is taken from Stanisław Ossowski, who in 1947 used it in his critique of dogmatic Marxism: "For Marxism to play a more significant role in modern academic life, it needs to become a factor of movement. Retrospection and continuous repetition of old formulas is not enough. One needs to reach for new issues and new methods. This dynamic must be followed by scientific reliability, without which Marxism will not identify itself with a movement of bright minds." Ossowski, S. "Doktryna marksistowska na tle dzisiejszej epoki" ["Marxist Doctrine in the Contemporary Context"], 202, in his Dzieła t. VI [Collected Works, vol. 6], Warsaw: 1967.

well as phenomena connected to the attempt to go beyond language in the so-called ethical turn.[3]

The introduction of philosophical hermeneutics to cultural studies released tensions that were long blocked by (post)positivistic reflection. Although difficult to imagine today, books such as Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960) constituted responses to the "police-like, similar to totalitarian disciplining of cultures and human experience"[4] and the "epistemological reduction of reality's representation to the types of problems tied to sentences true in a logical sense."[5] Gadamer himself believed that his work was, to a certain extent, delayed. The structure of the sciences which he attacked was in the midst of falling to pieces as his book was being published.[6] In the quarter of a century that followed Gadamer's work, the "general collapse of all forms of political and intellectual absolutism," and "recognition of different points of view and of their input into the pool of knowledge"[7] largely became a reality. In truth, it was one of those peculiar transformations in reaction through which a doubt, "is that so?," suddenly becomes a provocation, "so what?"[8] Looking backward, this shift is easy to identify.

À *rebours* positivism

Precisely because of the anti-positivistic character of the observed change, it is hard not to observe a certain paradox of its far removed consequences taking the form of *à rebours* positivism. This has appeared within last few years in several late modern currents of thought. With the term *à rebours,* I mean to designate a phenomenon which Józef Czapski described as follows: "From a timid recognition of the fact that not the entire

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[3] With respect to the "ethical turn," see: LaCapra, D. Psychoanaliza, pamięć, zwrot etyczny, trans. M. Zapędowska (farther LC), in: Pamięć, etyka i historia. Anglo- -amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Antologia przekładów, 127-162, edited by E. Domańska, Poznań: 2002 (farther: D2); Keller, H. Etyczny moment w teorii historii: przedstawiając doświadczenie poznania (farther: HK), in: Historia: o jeden świat za daleko, 71-100, edited by E. Domańska, Poznań: 1997 (farther: D1); see also *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory*, edited by J. Adamson, R. Freadman, D. Parker, Cambridge: 1988.

[4] Zybertowicz, A. "Researcher in a Labyrinth: Notes on Franklin R. Ankersmit's Concept," 49, in D1.

[5] Ankersmit, F. "Modernist Truth, Postmodernist Representation and Post-postmodernist Experience," 21, in D1.

[6] Details have been provided in J.C Weinsheimer's Gadamer's *Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*, 4-36, New Haven and London: 1985. Appleby, J. L. Hunt, M. Jacobs *Telling the Truth about History* [Powiedzieć prawdę o historii, cz. 2, trans. by S. Amsterdamski], New York and London: Norton & Company, 1994. Farther referred to as PPH.

[7] PPH, 286

[8] Already in 1957, R. Barthes observed that any attempt to demystify dominant ideology, before it becomes socially accepted, is met with two reactions: negation and trivialization. Barthes, R. *Mythologies*, 117-174, edited by A. Lavers, London: 1972.

world is within our reach to comprehend, it [positivism] turned into a brutal negation of everything that we are unable to comprehend."[9]

Let me provide three examples. The first will be a radical critique and actual rejection of the possibility[10] of historical objectivity, observed among the "new historians." Carlo Gizburg suggested that the group in question has turned full, comprehensive knowledge of history into a term so clear and unequivocal that in order to force its opinions it had to accept this reversed positivism. The new historians, at least according to Ginzburg in *Just One Witness*, "turned historical testimonies into a wall, which *ex definitione* excludes any kind of access to reality."[11] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht added: "True problems arise when, while stubbornly defending the subjectivism of historians, one excludes the assumption that outside of subjectivism there exists some other reality, as well as desire...to reach this reality."[12] If one recalls the earlier post-positivistic declarations of Adam Kuper, in which he stated that ethnology is one thing, but "reality is a matter of mysticism,"[13] it would be hard to observe the difference between the results of those two approaches of *straight* and *reversed* positivism.

The paradox of reversed positivism can be also observed in the social constructivism[14] which dominates today's social sciences, claiming that society is a self-referential entity and that "nature" (if such a thing exists at all) is beyond men's reach. This leads to my second example. The results of uttering the sentence "We are concerned exclusively with society, because we are not exactly certain about the meaning of nature" must immediately contend with the cultural repercussions of the view that "we are concerned exclusively with society, because we are not certain if nature exists."[15]

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[9]   Czapski, J. (following W. Rozanow) Czytając [Reading], 308, Krakow: 1990.

[10] Domańska, E. Wokół metahistorii [Around Meta-history], in White, H. Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego [Poetics of History], 27, Krakow: 2000: "For many years now, White has been trying to make historians aware of the fact that every presentation of reality is tainted with ideology. And those who point out ideology in other's works do it not because they seek more 'objective' representations of the past, but because they represent different political options, or a different worldview altogether."

[11] Quoted after Strout, C. "Border Crossing: History, Fiction, and Dead Certainties," *History and Theory*, 153, vol. 31, 1992, after PPH, 268.

[12] Gumbrecht, H.U. Gdy przestaliśmy uczyć historii [When We Stopped Teaching History], 195 (farther reffered to as HUG), in D2.

[13] Kuper, A. *From Charisma to Routine: British Anthropology 1922 – 1982*, [Między charyzmą a rutyną. Antropologia brytyjska 1922 – 1982, translated by K. Kaniowska, Łódź: 1987.]

[14] Luhman, N. "The Cognitive Program Of Constructivism and a Reality That Remains Unknown," in *Self-organization: Portrait of a Scientific Revolution*, 64-85, edited by W. Krohn, G. Küppers, H. Novotny, Dordrecht: 1990.

[15] About the issue of skepticism and world's independent existence from cognition, see A. Zybertowicz's answer to F. Ankermit: "reality independent from cognition does exist" (in *D1*, 51). However, according to E. Gellner: "it is completely unspecified, in that it does not display any particular features," and "External reality, which is outside

The logic of this approximation can be observed – and it will be my third example – in Kate Millet's *Sexual Thesis* (1970) and its claim about the cultural construction of gender formulated in the experiment known as the "John-Joan Case."[16] We can likewise find it in a quote from Judith Bulter some twenty years later: "If the unchangeability of sexes will be challenged, we may come to a conclusion that the construct known as sex is equally dependent on culture as is gender. Maybe sex has always been gender and the differentiation will become outdated."[17] Although Butler formulates her statement in the form of a conditional, as an abstract postulate, it perfectly illustrates Czapski's thesis about a positivistic reversal: from regret that the entire world is not within our cognitive reach (in this case our biological sex is beyond our comprehension), one is led to the negation of everything that cannot be comprehended (the negation of meaning of biological sex leading to the negation of differentiation between *gender* and *sex*). A "higher order of humility" resulting from the "humble acceptance of the fact that we cannot feel entitled to knowing the truth," in some cases, may lead to a kind of arrogance. By questioning the existence of the world of nature that is independent from our beliefs, one implicitly rejects limitations which could apply to human appetites.[18]

Critique from Within

I will now take a look at critics of this late modern approach, who, in line with the current of recent debates within the humanities, tend to be its decision makers.

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of culture interacts only in a negative way." (Ibid. 51) This ought to be compared with Gadamer's observation about the negativity of experience, which can be found in the last part of this article.

[16]   The tragic end of the experiment only became public in the 1990s. See F. Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (excerpt), *Time* 5/24/2004: "Died. David Reimer, 38, a boy reared as a girl in an infamous experiment known as the "Joan-John Case"; of suicide, in Wininpeg, Canada. After his circumcision was botched in infancy, Reimer's parents, on a researcher's advice, renamed him Brenda, had him castrated and put on hormones, hoping they would turn him into girl. Some observers hailed the case as proof that behavioral differences between the sexes are learned and socially reinforced. Reimer learned of his true gender at 14, stopped taking hormones and adopted the name David. He later wed and tried to live a conventional life, but had been depressed since his twin brother's 2002 suicide." See also J. Colpatino's *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*, New York: 2000.

[17]   Butler, J. *Gender Trouble*, after Moore, H.L. "Co się stało kobietom i mężczyznom? Płeć kulturowa i inne kryzysy w antropologii", in *Badanie kultury. Kontynuacje*, 406, edited by M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warsaw: 2004.

[18]   It is a paraphrase of J. Gray's statement from *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*. Also see a statement by M. Perrot, a French scholar of the history of women: "Never before has the very idea of nature has been questioned so strongly. Thanks to that very questioning we gain freedom of choice." After C. David from L'Uterus artificiel H. Atlana, *Nouvelle Observateur* 2005 vol. 7/4, after: "Forum," 9/5-15/5/, 2005.

On the subject of the intellectual and ethical effects of late modern, "fluid" identities, Zygmunt Bauman writes: "Changeability and flexibility of identity can be an announcement of a new, up to that point unknown, freedom of self-definition. However, it can also be an early sign of the approaching of a new and capricious sire. Nobody knows how he looks or where he lives, but he is known for his disregard for the fate and feelings of his subjects."[19] Bauman observes that the plasticity and mobility of one's identification are not so much means of emancipation, but rather that of a redistribution of freedom. According to Bauman, that is the source of their negative effects.[20] An increase in the number of possible choices means enabling the restructuring of a subject and its fragmentation, which means both the possibility of emancipation and *desarticulation* (Yves Michaud). However, restructuring can sometimes be forced on the subject. Martin O'Brien follows Bauman in his fears and warns against the threat of confusing orders of theory and real life: "although the metaphor of the 'fluidity' of life excites the imagination, allowing us to see certain issues and discuss them, it also has aspirations to become a theoretical concept, which leads to the widespread interpretation of 'fluidity' as an empirical description of reality."[21] Later he adds: "The generalization of the diagnosis, according to which the nature of identity is unstable and fluid, leads to a false interpretation of basic symptoms of its imagining – symptoms which do not yield, despite seemingly crucial socio-economic changes taking place."[22]

The late modern fluidity of identity slows down one's sense of orientation, but the true hardship emerges from a debate over the conditions of searching for truth. When addressing this issue, Bauman refers back to Aristotle, who claimed that the search for truth takes place in agora – the public sphere – where relations between what is individual (gr. *oikos*) and common (gr. *ecclesia*) are established. Bauman blames several structural conditions of late modernity for the loss of a sphere that would regulate these aspects of life. The first would be individualism:

> On today's agora people confess only from their individual experiences...The discourse is confined by the horizons of an individual. The communal experiences lost "material base," or a social mechanism, which would allow them to crystalize and clear the path to the truth that goes beyond an individual; truth which is collective and objective.[23]

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[19] See Bauman, Z. Tożsamość jaka była, jest i po co?, in Wokół problemów tożsamości, 12, edited by A. Jawłowska, Warsaw: 2001.

[20] Ibid. 20. See also Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: 2000.

[21] O'Brien, M. "Esej o płynności tożsamości," in Wokół problemów tożsamości, ["Essay on the Fluidity of Identity," in *Around the Issues of Identity*], 27. Non-normative concepts of identity are discussed by J. Kochanowski in his Paradygmat zróżnicowany. Socjologiczne studium przemian tożsamości gejów [Diverse Paradigm: Sociological Study of Changes in Gay Identity], Krakow: 2004, would be a classic exmaple of such strategy. I write more closely about it in the second part of this text entitled Kulturkamp(f).

[22] Ibid. 23

[23] Żakowski, J. Anty-TINA, 31-32, Warsaw: 2004.

Blocking of the very possibility of (establishing) truth in the era of late modern individualism can be seen, according to Bauman, also in the contemporary reduction of "common truth," "truth in general" to the "truthfulness" of individuals. Bauman writes: "When questions of truth are reduces to telling the truth by even the most important individuals, the truth about the society, about the state and condition of the community disappears."

The second structural enemy of truth in late modern society is the consumer, as opposed to the citizen. "In the world of consumers we break with communication between *oikos* and *ecclesia*. Public figures assure us that…justice is an empty term, invented by ideologues and that only the interests of an individual exist in reality…But if only the interests exist, how are we supposed to search for the truth?"[24]

Another factor, which makes it impossible for common truth to exist are epistemologies that rule the media: "The technique of transferring the information and the technique of arriving at the truth can be guided by different kinds of logic. The most common source of information, television, by its very nature is not able to keep the viewer interested long enough to explain the logic of any given argument" In this section, Bauman refers to the well-known concept of technopol by Neil Postman, who, when describing media's interest in informational novelties and a complete lack of interest in correcting false reporting, quoted Walter Lippman's[25] statement from the 1920s: "There is no chance for freedom of communication, if it is not equipped with tools to detect lies."[26]

Misuse: Interpretation, Discourse, Narration, and Emancipation

Stepping back from the late modern social reflection, I would like to move back to a discussion of late modern academic practice. Let me quote four more statements, each one of them denunciating the overuse, or misuse, of basic categories of interpretation.

The author of the famous book about 101st Police Reserve Battalion, Christopher Browning, an expert in denier trials,[27] knows very well that facts are something completely different from their interpretation. However, he knows facts that do not allow any interpretation. He writes: "101 Reserve Police Battalion arrived in Józefów in the morning of 7/13/1942 and shot and killed hundreds of Jews in the nearby forest. Such "facts" do not allow for any kind of interpretation, they have no sense, at least not within

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[24]   Ibid.

[25]   Who also happens to be an author of the term "stereotype."

[26]   Lippman, W. *Public Opinion*. New York: 1922. Following N. Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 1985. (from Polish translation by L.Niedzielski, 157, Warsaw: 2002.) The phenomenon of truth paralysis, caused by individualistic anomia, the disappearance of agora-oikos, and the transformation of a citizen into a consumer and reduction of epistemological space by new technologies that is analyzed here, can be often reduced to the faint results of Marxism and Nietzscheanism. See Salij, O.J. Wezwany do miłości, "Rzeczpospolita", 14.04.2005

[27]   *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* 339, edited by S. Friedlaender, footnote 11, (farther referred to as F) Harvard: 1992.

the categories of questions about sense that I am interested in answering.[28] Browning points to the limits of hermeneutics, which are delineated by the interpretation of evil, which – in his mind – is redundant. Although Gadamer claimed that under the influence of interpretation, its object experiences the surge of being (*Seinszuwachs*), when asking a question posed after reading Browning, we are aiming at something completely different. Which experiences have a characteristic that requires silence, or at least control over the commentator's voice?[29]

The second statement not requiring commentary comes from a text by historian Pierre Vidal-Naquete. When confronting deniers, he decided that, although everything should be filtered through discourse, still "there is something that exists outside of it, that have existed before it – something that cannot be reduced to discourse and what he would be willing to call a reality."[30]

A similar ethico-realistic undertone can be assigned to the third statement. Its author, Thomas S. Weisner, analyzes a strictly anthropological theme: child upbringing in the African family. In his *Kultura, dzieciństwo i postęp na obszarze Afryki subsaharyjskiej* (*Culture, Childhood, and Progress in Sub-Saharan Africa*)[31] he criticizes another work by a different scholar researching Africa, entitled *Except-Africa: Remaking Development, Rethinking Power.*[32] According to this thinker, Weisner attempts to prove, "the literary track 'with the exception of Africa' [appearing in disproportionate, statistical factors listings describing socio-economic changes on different continents] constitutes a part of 'narration,' which in and of itself leads towards negation of any progress. He [the author] proposes numerous, positive counter-narratives, which are based on differentiation, surprise factors, unpredictability and the complexity of certain situations. However – Weisner concludes – issues involving 'narration' do not include pressing socio-economic issues of Africa." On the contrary, belief in the self-fulfilling prophecy of negative narration could press for attempts of negating reality and a subsequent lack of initiative to improve it.

The fourth example is concerned with the limits of multiculturalism and is taken from a debate taking place in the United States. The debate was focused on the status of deaf persons and took place in American newspapers in the 1990s.[33] The main problem

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[28]   F, 22-36.

[29]   Book by J. Brach-Czainy, Szczeliny istnienia, (Cracks of Existence), 38, 41, Cracow: 1998, supplies a catalogue of similar phenomena: "Observing the act of giving birth soothes anxiety, because the way it looks – in all honesty – does not allow any doubt… Its brutal force cannot be confronted by fiction."

[30]   Ginsburg, C. Just One Witness, 86, in F.

[31]   Compared in: Harrison, L.E., S.P. Huntington Kultura ma znaczenie. Jak wartości wpływają na rozwój społeczeństw (Culture Matters. How Values Influence Development of Societies), 230, farther referred to as: HH, translated by S. Dymczyk, Poznań: 2000.

[32]   After HH, 249.

[33]   Pride in a Soundless World: Deaf Oppose a Hearing Aid, "The New York Times", 5/16/ 1993, after: P. Schwartz Wielokulturowy nihilizm (Multicultural Nihilism), in: Rand, A. Powrót człowieka pierwotnego (The Return of the Primitive), 338-339, translated by Z. Czarnecki, Poznań: 2003. 1, 22.

is already signaled in the title of the article which is one of the main voices in the debate: *Deafness as Culture*. In the article we find the following: "Deafness is not an impairment. It is, according to many deaf people, a subculture like any other. Deaf people are simply a language minority (speaking American Sign Language) and need as much medical attention as, for example, Haitians or Spanish speakers."[34] This statement is analyzed by Christopher Lash in his *The Revolt of the Elites*:

> Diversity – a slogan universally attractive – became [within American society] to mean its opposite. In reality, diversity turned out to legitimize a new kind of dogmatism, one in which the competing minorities hide behind their respective systems of belief closed to a rational debate. The physical segregation of the society enclosed within racially homogenous enclaves is accompanied by balkanization of opinions. Every group tries to hide behind its dogmas. We became a nation composed of minorities.[35]

The four aforementioned statements criticize the abuse of theoretical categories of interpretation. There are several conclusions to be drawn:

1) Although the discovery of the omnipresence of interpretation used to be considered a major breakthrough, another statement currently carries the stigma of revolution: why do some facts do so well without interpretation? Interpretation is never innocent and it is not always necessary. It lacks innocence particularly in cases where it appears in the absence of need.
2) Although discourse is a valuable theoretical category, not everything begins and ends with discourse.
3) Although narration can give a voice to reality, there are narrations which will deprive reality of that voice. These are simply wrong interpretations.
4) Although multiculturalism, for a long time, was a comfortable and official tool for suspending problems connected with differences, there exists a limit beyond which it is impossible to uphold the existing state of aporia. It signals a need for understanding – just like in the case of debate over cochlear implants for deaf children.

Reactivation of Realities

Having discussed symptoms of interpretative overabundance, I would like to turn my attention to the reverse phenomenon. In particular, I want to look at renewed interest in the sphere beyond discourse, present in various areas of humanities. It emerges through reaching beyond language and human intentionality. Two of the primary directions of this turn, a repeated turn toward reality that we are currently observing, were pointed

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[34] Dolnick, E., "Deafness as Culture," *The Atlantic Magazine*, 37, September 1993; after: Schwartz, P., Wielokulturowy nihilizm (*Multicultural Nihilism*), in: A. Rand *Return of the Primitive* (The debate is already taking place in Poland. Artur żmijewski shot a touching movie entitled Lekcja Śpiewu (Singing Lesson), starring deaf children. In the interview for "Duży Format" (5/16/2005 issue) he said: "They don't won't others' sympathy. Often, they are not interested in integrating with their healthy counterparts. Often they don't even need us. They create their own communities and use their own language. They are a little bit like denizens of some exotic country."

[35] Lasch, Ch. Bunt Elit (*The Revolt of the Elites*), translated by D. Rodziewicz, Cracow: 1997.

out by those who initially questioned possibility of accessing it: sociological constructivists and new historians.

Already in the 1960s, social phenomenology observed the asymmetrical character of attention paid to men and reality in social studies. "Natural sciences are concerned solely with how world is perceived by the onlooker. They never deal with how world, or objects perceive us. But it does not mean that they do not influence us, or each other."[36] R.D. Laing's vague observation was unexpectedly taken up by a group of French and British post-constructivists, sociologists affiliated with Lancaster University (creators of *actor-network theory* (ANT): Bruno Latour, Michael Callon, John Law).[37] By radicalizing the postulate of the symmetry of the strong sociology of knowledge program,[38] they have attempted to redefine the object of sociological studies. By posing questions about who is the author of differentiation between Nature and Society, where society is only a product of this differentiation,[39] they have posed a question about the investigation of reality as a whole, and not only its "social element." They were aiming at creating a series of experiments, which would produce a kind of non-symbolic language detecting poorly mapped aspects of the world, nature and technology. The group became famous after introducing a member[40] of

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[36]   Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*, (Polityka doświadczenia. Rajski ptak, 20, translated by A. Grzybek, Warsaw: 2005)

[37]   Callon, M. "Some elements in a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay," in: *Power, Action, and Belief*, edited by J. Law, from *The Sociological Review Monograph*, vol. 32, London, Boston Henley: 1987. Thanks to Michał Libera for a copy of the article and commentary.

[38]   See Barnes, B. and Bloor, D. "Relatywizm, racjonalizm a socjologia wiedzy" in: Racjonalność i styl myślenia, ("Relatvism, Rationalism and Sociology of Knowledge" in: *Rationality and the Style of Thinking*) edited by E. Mokrzycki, Warsaw: 1992. From last year see "manifest of the second empiricism," Latour, B. Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Facts to Matters of Concern, in Critical Inquiry, 454-497, Winter 2004, vol 30, issue 2.

[39]   The question was waived by Ernst Geller, who explained that society is a transcendental condition of our cognitive abilities and its 18th century variation, which has developed a distinction between "nature" and "society." See also Latour's *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (farther referred to as Pandora), Cambridge, MA and London: 1999.

[40]   The question of the scallop as an "actor" in this experiment has been captured by Dr. Krzysztof Arbiszewski (UMK Toruń), who wrote in his Ph.D dissertation: "An actor does not have to be 'somebody,' it is only something or someone that acts. In order to avoid confusion, researchers from ANT very often used the term 'actant.' However, for their friends in humanities, this particular word sounds alien, weird and repulsive. In addition, an actor was not supposed to move around the network. The network is a set of relations between actors – a set which is dynamic. Some relations become calcified, others do not. If the relations are calcified strongly enough – closed in a black box, according to ANT members – they will create a new actor. Hence, the actor is also a network. Both words, in two different ways, describe the same thing (Latour, B. "On recalling ANT" in Actor Network Theory and After, 19, edited by J. Law, J. Hassard, Oxford: 1999." After: <http://bazy.opi.org.pl/raporty/opisy/dokhab/71000/d71432.htm>, Ph.D dissertation supervised

the research team with full and equal rights (equal with both fishermen and scientists) into their research on fishery. The new team member was a larva form of a certain species of scallops. One might assume that the actions of the Lancaster group were mere eccentricity. But one could also follow the group's own interpretation: the attempt to broaden the range of interactions with the world, establishing some form of non-symbolic communication with it,[41] and creating a "new subjectivity" as a result of the interaction.

Far more dramatic was the turn toward reality taken by the new historians, as it was forced by ethical questions. This happened largely as a result of conflicts over the possibility of manipulation of their discourse by deniers.[42] Hayden White wrote under the influence of those "games with the truth" already in the 1990s. At that point he stated: "Truth, obviously, is important, but only because it often hides reality. And currently I am more interested in reality."[43] Franklin Ankersmit made a turn in a similar direction. He started looking for reality in the most sensual and direct possible contact with history. New historians have become fascinated with artifacts: "direct experience of the past…possibility to touch, smell and taste worlds in the objects that created them."[44] Some, like Steven Greenblatt, went as far as to admit that they have always desired to "talk with the dead."[45]

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by A. Szahaj. Thanks to Dr. Andrzej W. Nowak for help in discovering this text and pointing to the bibliography of B. Latour.

[41]   Using the term "translation," scholars from ANT attempt to prove that cognition, even in the sciences, is based on a number of transformations, through which the "compressing of things into words" takes place. For example (taken from Pandora), if I want to answer the question of whether the soil in the Amazon forest expands or contracts, I need to research samples of the soil in that region. Between a trip to the Amazon jungle and organizing research space (through sampling, applying coordinates, etc.) and a final diagram allowing for an answer about the condition of the soil in the Amazon jungle, there is a series of leaps between things and words. Every single stage works in response to the previous one as a sign. It becomes its representation. Toward the next one, it works as a piece of matter, something that needs to be represented. (Pandora, 69-70) There is no simple imposition of signs on the shapeless matter at any moment in this string of transformations (Pandora, 56-58).

[42]   C. Ginzburg's "Just One Witness" (in: F, 25) is a good case study on that issue. I do not agree with Slavoj Žižek's thesis, which states that "those who undermine the very fact of Holocaust occurring never base their claims on postmodern constructivist discourse, but stick to the empirical framework of facts." See Žižek, S. Perspektywy polityki radykalnej (Radical Politics Perspectives), translated by A. Mazur in *Krytyka Polityczna*, 70, vol. 1-8, 2005. In the academia one can find not only "empiricist deniers," but also "postmodern deniers" coming from, for example, readings of Paul de Man.

[43]   Domańska, E. "Wokół metahistorii" ("Around Metahistory") in White, H. The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 27.

[44]   Gumbrecht, HUG, in D2, 198.

[45]   Greenblatt, S. Shakespearean *Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, 1, Berlekey: 1988. After Gumbrecht, HUG, in: D2, 195. It is hard not to observe that on the level of popular phenomena, longing for the Real is worldwide. Phenomena itself is described as a "post-traumatic culture" and has been developing fast since the end of the 1980s.

Regardless of how we will interpret declarations of that sort, both in these statements and in the experiments of Callan-Latour with scallops, one can recognize the same desire to renew a connection with the world.[46] It is a world, which is not entirely human, one that is characteristic for today's post-hermeneutical humanities. The leash of language became a nuisance to the field precisely because of its biggest asset: flexibility.

Franklin Ankersmit wrote in his *Narrative Logic* about narration as means of domesticating reality, as a mechanism, which does not reflect it, but rather specifies, does not discover, but uncovers it.[47] At the same time, Hayden White differentiated between the cognitively unreachable *event* and *fact* – its linguistic image.[48] These actions were certainly not intended to question reality itself. They were certainly not interested in negating the Holocaust, and yet it was what became an ultimate border and a stop sign for them. It was this particular fact, with its overabundance, which pointed to the poor taste of late modern approaches as auto-thematic narratives, within which every interpretation is acceptable and every definition of truth inadequate.[49] Under the guise of the "event," the long forgotten "object" appeared in front of the historians again. American historians Appleby, Hunt and Jacob used to say that the object is "hard to get rid of, because it exists" and that the event's objectivity is expressed by its insusceptibility to just any given interpretation.[50] It was due to the object that the scholars noticed the threat of aestheticizing historical knowledge by constructivist approaches, as well as relativizing the past. In other words, they observed an unintentional paving of the way to negationism.

This object reappeared before the eyes of the subject, singular or collective. The subject underwent serious degradation after the Holocaust. Philippe Lacou-Labarthe wrote about a "cancer of the subject" in the era of furnaces.[51] Because the discussed subject established itself based on elimination procedures ("elimination is the most reliable method of identification")[52] he/she was reduced by losing the right to interpretation, and if not fully, than at least banning some of the possible questions (this was foreseen already by Heidegger, when he claimed that not everyone has a right to ask

[46]   Hydle, I *Anthropological Theory*, 111-124, Vol. 4(1), London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi 2004, (www.sagepublications.com DOI: 10.1177/1463499604040850 Book Reviews): "Latour's work introduces vocabulary to describe the new hybrids emerging from the wreckage of old dichotomies and taxonomies. Nonetheless, reality is a key term to which he returns throughout the book as he builds a new logic based upon another thought – a 'grammar' distinct from those of the natural and social/human sciences." (emphasis JTB)

[47]   Domańska, E. "Wokół metahistorii" ("Around Metahistory") in White, H. *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory*, 12.

[48]   Event and fact, see *Krytyka Polityczna*, issue 7-8, 2005.

[49]   Van den Braembussche, A. "Historia i pamięć" ("History and Memory"), in D1, 112.

[50]   PPH, 270.

[51]   Lacoue-Labarthe, P. *Poezja jako doświadczenie* (*Poetry as Experience*), 17, translated by J. Margański, Gdańsk: 2004.

[52]   Ibid.

every question). But while the Shoah involved the reduction of the subject, one needs to remember that among the witnesses there is another, different subject – non-subject,[53] a "subject buried alive, almost-shot, not entirely dead."[54] It is a subject, which is a "bearer" of Agamben's *Muselmann*. This particular subject survived, while becoming radically weakened by guilt or trauma.

In a classic description of an epistemological situation, deconstructed by Heidegger and his successors, a vision of this weakened, not fully belonging to the "order of presence," subject accompanied by the dominant "object" (in the form of the "event") is something completely new. In such circumstances, a question about access to the aforementioned subject arises. It is followed by a question about "experience, that is not there."

Experience reactivated

In his *Jak opisać doświadczenie, którego nie ma* [*How to Describe Experience That Is Not There*] Ryszard Nycz writes that the growing interest in the Holocaust studies probably triggered the last of general turns in the realm of theory and a direction of research done within humanities. This turn lead to recognizing language as a condition of possibility and (as a warrant of existence) of cultural experience. It was recognized as a condition of radical attempts to step outside language – toward, ahead or outside of the discursive experience of humans connecting with themselves and the world outside the human realm.[55] We are the witnesses of this particular turn gaining its momentum, attempting (yet again!) to open up the prison of language and turn towards reality. According to Nycz, the reactivation of the category of experience is a sign of the mentioned change. After many years, the category comes back in a form, which its own contradiction: "shapeless, unformed sensations," "incoherent, heterogeneous, discontinuous," – unspecified – according to Ernst Gellner. It means that these will be the sensations, which one can describe only by attempts at substitution,[56] or through negation,[57] but at the same time painfully real, and impossible to forget.

It seems, Nycz states, that "sensations and experiences unimaginable, impossible to be grasped by consciousness, do not belong to the realm of true experience." However, the question is what should be done with massive numbers of individual and collective stories. Its tide is as powerful as resistance against it (against representation):

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[53]   Contrary to Agamben, I am looking at this purely from ontological perspective similar to Žižek in his Patrząc z ukosa. Do Lacana przez kulturę popularną, 39, Warsaw: 2003.

[54]   Nycz, R. How to describe experience that is not there, in *Teksty Drugie*, 7 , vol.5, 2004. (farther referred to as T) Agamben, G. Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive, New York: 2002.

[55]   T, 5, highlight by JTB.

[56]   "It is rather its lining, which is impossible to be represented: experience which is incoherent, not homogenous, discontinuous, graspable only through its secondary symptoms, its incompetent attempts to elaborate, per procura and in effige" (T, 6-7).

[57]   See Zybertowicz, A. Badacz w... , 51,D1.

This traumatic burden of unutterable and impossible to actualize parts of experience become deposited in the non-reflective memory of individuals, as well as the collective community and moves along with them, never allowing itself to be dropped or defused. It creates pressure and demands to be revealed and articulated – always merely halfway. But the revelation and articulation become significant factors and symptoms of realness attached to what cannot be understood.[58]

The category of experience is demanded by what is unreflective, disconnected from the killed and numbed, rendered as a phantom pain of collective memory. It does not remind us of anything like "practical knowledge, acquired through contact with the world. Knowledge which is integrated, conscious, utterable," which we used to call experience. It cannot be reduced to the question of interpretation, narration or discourse. Although all three: discourse, narrations, and interpretations, force themselves into the negativity of this experience it is not its natural area. It is not agora, nor literature, or any other place where one can speak. The wordless reality will be its natural area, which does not wish to reveal what it is exactly, and stops after admitting that it exists,[59] allowing only ostensive, indexed representations.

From a hermeneutical reflection on experience, I would like to extract three guidelines which could potentially play a role in problematizing "experience that is not there."

The first will require a brief mention of "silent figures of experience" in *Kleine Schriften* by Hans-Georg Gadamer. He mentions "hunger," "love," "labor," and "power" – which are only on the path toward language, low on the scale between the world and mind. Gadamer, however, calls these experience.[60]

Second, there is Gadamer's definition of the negativity of experience:

we speak of the negativity of experience meaning two things – firstly, about experiences which match our expectations and confirm them, secondly – about experiences we sense. The latter, proper experience, is always negative. When we experience an object, it means that up to that moment we have not seen things properly and now we know it better. Negativity of experience has a particularly creative sense[61]...The experience, changes the entire knowledge of the one involved in it...Only through the negative cases do we reach a new experience (something that Bacon already knew). Every experience, which deserves to be called negative, destroys certain expectations.[62]

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[58]   T, 6

[59]   T, 8

[60]   In a different text, however, he says: "Experience is not wordless, only to become an object of reflection on its way to be taken under the definition of word's generality. The very nature of experience is based on its search for words and finds ones that express it."(Gadamer, H.-G. *Truth and Method*)

[61]   Ibid., 481

[62]   Ibid., 481-5. See also Gadamer's opinion on the exceptionalism of experience (Ibid., 482) contrasted with scientific concept of experiment as a strictly repetitive activity. It may be that from the difference of those two traditions ("truth"/ "method"?) there emerges contradiction between Gadamer's concept of "experienced man" as somebody "extremely non-dogmatic," who does not have any pretense to be omniscient and is open

The third guideline is a message hidden in the very etymology of the word "experience." After Philip Lacoue-Labarthe:

> The experience, *expérience,* is derived from latin *experiri,* which meant "to test." It's core is *feriri,* appearing also in *periculum* – "danger." Indo-European root is *per,* which connects with meanings such as "to cross," "a passage," "an attempt," or "experience." In Greek, we encounter many words which are related and also connote "passage," or "crossing" : *peiro* –"to cross"; *pera* – "outside"; *perao* – "to go across"; *peraino* – "arrive at the destination"; *peras* – "limit, boundary." As far as the Germanic languages are concerned, in the Old German we encounter *faran,* from which we derive *fahren* – "to transport" and *fuehren* "to lead." Should we connect *Erfahrung* – "experience" – with the same root, or should we connect it to another meaning of *per* – "an attempt, " or the Old German, *fara* – "danger" and *gefaehrden* – "to expose to danger"? Boundaries between those meanings are fluid. It is similar with Latin *periri* – "to try" and *periculum,* which initially meant "attempt," "test" and only later "risk" and "danger."[63]

Gadamer and Labarthe's statements point to the fact that from both a semantic and etymological perspective it is hard to separate "experience" from the "risk" it entails. Experience has cognitive profit as its objective, but it becomes possible only due to negativity and loss. If that is the case with every instance of experience, think how often one might observe this rule coming to life in "the experience that is not there."[64]

From philosophy class we know that there are two ways of arriving at the truth: proofs and futility. The first approach assumes that what exists cannot not exist. The second approach, by contrast, assumes that what exists does exist and what does not exist, exists as well.[65] The question of the "experience that is not there" follows the path we have been warned against: "One can never prove that there are things, which are not, but you steer away from that path! And do not allow the habit of investigation through experimentation to push you towards the path of believing your shortsighted eyes, cacophonous ears and tongue. Judge the proof I have presented to you with your reason and mind." (Parmenides, B1, 7)

However, from the same philosophy classes we remember what the Stoics used to say: "All things have two grips: one with which you can lift them, and the other with which

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to new experiences (Ibid. 484) and Latour's concept of of experience's repetitiveness and limits of the mind that knows about something: "When we experience something for the first time we have no knowledge of the phenomena. Our knowledge starts with the second instance of the same experience. We tend to say that somebody knows a lot about something, when he or she can interpret experience as an example of an event already classified." (Latour, B. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, 219, Cambridge Mass.:1987, after K. Abriszewski Poznanie... 40.

[63]   Lacoue-Labarthe, Ph. *Poezja jako... (Poetry as...)*, 150, footnote 16.

[64]   Differently about "experience without a subject" see Ankersmit, F. Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii, (*Narration, Representation, Experience: Studies in the Theory of Historiography*), 299, edited by E. Domańska, Cracow: 2004.

[65]   Someone impertinent enough to assume that there exists something that is not" (gr. to me on einai, Plato's Sophist) enters the path of impossibility.

the task will be impossible to complete." If the grip on the side of reality seems to be failing, try to use the grip on the side of non-reality – with the things that cannot be explained in human categories, we can try to explain in non-human ones. "Experience that is not there" cannot be lifted with the grip on the side of reality. That is why when we ask about it, we argue with Parmenides and with unexplainable hope observing, one after another, the failures of language.[66]

Translation: Jan Pytalski

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[66] A good example of the fiasco would be an attempt to place this experience in the framework of old, religious language. Such an inscribing of the "Muselmann" experience in the language of traditional narrations in a correct, but necessarily failing fashion, is the text by Jacek Leonciak "Wyjście z grobu" in Teksty Drugie, 48-63, vol.5, 2004. Another, much more vivid example would be a collection of stories by survivors, stylized as traditional Hassidic stories by Y. Eliach Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust, New York: 1988.