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The Traveler's Horizon of Understanding.

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1.

Traveling may be analyzed on many different levels: from the existential experience of moving in space, through symbolic crossing of borders, going back in time or looking ahead to the future, to philosophical journey inside oneself.

The motif of a journey, as an element of a reflection over the condition of human life and an analogy to being in the world, has been known since the origins of human thought. In numerous philosophers' writings, traveling is frequently used to build a metaphor of searching knowledge and one's sense of life, wandering and roaming the paths of cognition as well as critical thinking which surpasses various boundaries. A travel metaphor as a specific philosophical topos was described e.g. by Anna Wieczorkiewicz¹ who noticed that its enormous semantic capacity allows it to be used by even most radically distinct philosophical schools. In this context, she referred to reflections of Van Den Abbeele's who, in his book *Travel as Metaphor*, presents similar associations related with traveling as the ones found in works of the 16th-17th century French philosophers: Montaigne, Descartes,

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1 Cf. A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Podróż do kresu metafory*, "Res Publica Nowa" 1995, no 7-8.

Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Treating a travel metaphor as a critical track Van Den Abbeele convincingly shows that, although each of the mentioned thinkers exercised a separate type of philosophical reflection, all of them still apply a comparable metaphoric system, through which practising philosophy or “critical thinking” appears similar to an unceasing effort of traveling.²

Rumbling complicated routes of human thought, signs of culture and reality is a metaphor often utilised by contemporary philosophers. In Nietzsche’s works, travel is presented as an adventure of thought liberated after God’s death, exploration of unknown areas, detachment from the steady, solid ground.³ According to Paul Ricoeur, understanding oneself is only possible if one takes a “roundabout route among the signs of humankind preserved in cultural works.”⁴

In Heidegger, Jaspers, Bloch and Sartre’s theories (where traveling doesn’t directly appear as a motif but – as ascertained by Pino Menzio, the author of *Il Viaggio dei Filosofi* – is hidden deeper and requires being elicited with the help of hermeneutics⁵), traveling is associated with the forward movement, tension towards the future, transgression, going beyond one’s own human condition – all of them linked with the categories of a project (i.e. pro-iect, from Latin *pro iacere*: “throw ahead”), throwing, liberation, void. A journey understood this way describes an existential, theoretical and artistic experience of a person who, in his/her life “journey” has been deprived of traditional guidance of a “pole-star” and got lost in the centre-less world of multiplicity and diversity. An artist compared to a traveler is someone who starts a journey in order to identify and interpret the world but not the one that is given, known, defined and as such can be presented, imitated, but the unknown world which is still to be identified or even “discovered”. He/she is a symbol of someone leaning ahead in constant striving to cognition and interpretation of the reality, searching new points of orientation, outlining new maps of human experience.

2 In the introduction to his book, Van Den Abbeele writes: „Faktycznie, to question the existing order (either cognitive, aesthetic or political) by means of situating oneself «outside» this order, by means of «critical distance» towards it, is to invoke a metaphor of thinking as traveling” (*Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1992, XIII).

3 Cf. e.g. *Tako rzecze Zaratustra* and *Wiedza radosna*, aphorisms: 279, 289, 38.

4 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutyczna funkcja dystansu*, [in:] *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą*. Antologia, vol. IV, part 1: *Badania strukturalno-semiotyczne (uzupełnienie)*. *Problemy recepcji i interpretacji*, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 1996, 166.

5 Menzio, *Il Viaggio dei Filosofi. La metafora del viaggio nella letteratura filosofica moderna*, *Dimensioni del Viaggio*. IV, 1994.

In the above meanings, a travel metaphor would be close to metaphysics which “removes” the steady ground, the stable foundation of human existence.

A similar reading of a travel metaphor can also be found in works by Paul Virilio who delineates contemporary “traveling for the sake of traveling” characterised by a crazy pace, purposeless and for fear of life itself. Following his concept, traveling subordinated to increasing speed becomes a film, while a traveler turns into a filmgoer because he/she absorbs rapidly blinking images and completes them with his imagination in a similar way (i.e. from behind the glass). Both in the film and in the journey, the boundary between the real and the unreal gets blurred, both worlds are mediated and function on the same level of the recipient’s consciousness. Virilio’s theory seems interesting due to his continuous emphasis on the significance of speed in contemporary life, but above all, due to the underlined paradox: the faster we move, the faster we “fade”; the more images, information, fragments of reality appear in our life, the more – paradoxically – disappear from it⁶.

Irrespective of individual examples, it is essential to notice the main tendency in the contemporary thought emphasising the nomadic (or even “neo-nomadic”) traits in the human nature⁷. On the one hand, a travel metaphor still remains a crucial method of approaching the human condition and people’s attempts to comprehend the world, on the other hand, sociologists and anthropologists see travel practices as a captivating and telling reflection of transformation within civilisation and outlook on life. Such interpretation of a journey makes it an excellent field for drawing comparisons between the traditional model of life and perception of the world and the modern (postmodern) one⁸.

One of the examples of such reflection is a debate on peregrination and traditional comparing life to a pilgrimage, the conclusions of which show that today, it is impossible to think in theological categories characteristic to the

6 Cf. Virilio, *Fahren, fahren, fahren*, Berlin 1978. The topic of similarity between tourism and film was also taken up by Edgar Morin who indicated that a window-pane (in a bus or on the TV screen) common to both experiences separates people from the world (cf. *Duch czasu*, transl. A. Frybesowa, Biblioteka „Więzi,” Warsaw 1965).

7 Cf. e.g. H. Mamzer. *Peregrynacje – miejsce i pamięć a tożsamość*, [in:] ead. *Tożsamość w podróży. Wielokulturowość a kształtowanie tożsamości jednostki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2002.

8 From the broadly understood sociological perspective, the most important theoretical readings of travel are comprehensively described by Krzysztof Podemski (*Sociologia podróży*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2004). From the anthropological point of view – cf. e.g. W. Burszta, *Kilka tez z zakresu iterologii*, „Borussia” 2001 no 24-25. The meaningful fact is that in both approaches, the areas of interest related with the subject of a journey clearly (although, of course, not entirely) overlap – both above mentioned researchers refer to the same authors and theories.

above view because people lack a stable and clearly defined goal they could pursue; stability and attachment to an idea are considered as unreasonable and impractical; the binding values are accidentality, present day and temporality.⁹ It is also spectacularly exemplified by Zygmunt Bauman's metaphors defining postmodern personal models. As widely known, Bauman employed the "travel" categories of "stroller," "vagabond" and "tourist" (and specifically understood "player") and pronounced the (based on the freedom of choice) opposition between "tourist" and "vagabond" to be "the deepest and most momentous division in the modern society."¹⁰ These metaphors, serving as tools to illustrate characteristic models of contemporary life, are based on sociological and anthropological observation and, in spite of being broadly (precisely: metaphorically) formulated, they show in detail specificity of given behaviour (in this case, travelers' behaviour). The most recognizable features of the two main models referred to by Bauman as "tourist" and "vagabond" are: "accidental" life, lack of "firm" identity, lack of affiliation to any place, no burden (including luggage), movability, superficial and cursory contacts with people and unwillingness to take on any commitments. What is common to both attitudes is perception of the external world and specific contacts with this world. Regardless of emotions it brings – experiencing its attractiveness (in the case of "tourist") or inhospitableness (in the case of "vagabond") – the formula of traveling, constant movement, kaleidoscopic changes of surroundings and superficiality of contacts and impressions remains similar. What is radically different is their attitudes towards the world and awareness of one's position in it: the feeling of having freedom of choice and controlling the situation¹¹ typical of "tourist" is equivalent to the pressure of wandering which torments "vagabond".

9 Yet, it is worth remembering about theoretical interpretations, according to which a pilgrim appears as a prototype of a tourist. Cf. e.g. D. MacCannell, *Turysta. Nowa teoria klasy różniaczej*, transl. E. Klekot, A. Wieczorkiewicz, Muza, Warsaw 2002. In this book from 1976, the author for the first time uses a figure of a tourist as a metaphor of a contemporary man.

10 Z. Bauman, *O turystach i włóczęgach, czyli o bohaterach i ofiarach ponowoczesności*, [in:] *id. Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpienia*, Sic!, Warszawa 2000; 151. Cf. Also *id. Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej*, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1994. A phenomenon of mass tourism and a figure of a tourist has a key position in the contemporary sociological and anthropological reflection. Some scholars (D. MacCannell, E. Cohen) see it as continuation of former pilgrimage, others (L. Turner and J. Ash) – colonialism, some others (Urry) – a new type of visual consumption (cf. K. Podemski, *Socjologia podróży*).

11 Bauman compares it to handling a TV remote control – similarly to a TV viewer, a tourist makes a choice and watches as long as it suits him/her. Cf. Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność...*, 144-146; Kowalski, *Odysseye nasze byle jakie. Droga, przestrzeń i podróżowanie w kulturze współczesnej*, Atła 2, Wrocław 2002.

In the (much narrower) research perspective adopted in this text, these discrepancies seem to be crucial as they significantly affect one's perception and interaction with the world. And, even if we repeat after Bauman that both behaviour models are characterised by "being closed" to the surrounding reality, there is a difference between a seemingly open, free and unaware of artificiality of the world "tourist" who doesn't realize his/her own "closure" and "vagabond" identified with the feeling of rejection, the need to escape inside oneself from the hostile world and the internal obligation to be on the road. Both the starting point (free will in the first case and pressure in the second one) and the mental maps of the two model figures are, it seems, completely unlike.¹²

2.

In this text, I will be interested not so much in a metaphor itself as in an experience of a journey as leading to understanding, achieving deeper self-consciousness. Of course, every journey interpreted as an experience of movement in space, a change and an encounter with widely understood otherness should be somehow linked with cognition and attempts to comprehend the world and oneself accompanied by the necessity to redefine one's own identity, however, not all journeys lead to such understanding. It should be added here that my analysis will not only concern the travel experience *per se* but also an authentic account – a story about the journey. In compliance with the applied historical-literary perspective, I will also concentrate on "intellectual journeys"¹³. This approach stems from the conviction that firstly, similar categories (e.g. of a narrative structure) could be deployed for interpretation of travel as experience and reading of text, and secondly, the "account from the journey" composes of the text which undergoes interpretation and a registered experience of interpreting the world as text.¹⁴

12 A fundamental difference between the two behavioral models (tourist and vagabond) is exposed by Podemski, when he writes about leaving home as one of necessary elements of a journey. In this perspective, vagabond (who does not have a home) does not fit in the definition of a journey at all, while tourism is treated as a form of traveling (*Socjologia podróży*, 8-10).

13 Detailed explanation on the subject of "intellectual journeys" I included in my book *Wędrowcy światów prawdziwych. Dwudziestowieczne relacje z podróży*, Universitas, Cracow 2003.

14 Due to the length of this text, I put aside the extensive area of problems related with linguistic aspect of the experience and its important consequences. On the subject of signalled issues cf. A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Podróż do kresu...*, footnote 82; Van Den Abbeele, *Travel...* From another point of view, similarities between reading and wandering may be understood as pursuing the marked out trail (for example subsequent chapters of the book or the path formed by the lie of the land), deviating from the track, going one's own way, etc. Cf. e.g. N. Howe, *Miejsca odczytane*, "Res Publica Nowa" 1995, no 7-8. A meaningful literary example of the connection

I also believe that, regardless of the commonness of mass tourism, in spite of virtual and hyperreal travels and organised or holiday tourism but also despite the rush and the desire of collecting attractions – all of them defining the character of our contemporary life, there are still travelers who start their individual, real journey which aims at experiencing something new, a novelty¹⁵. The frequent effects of those wanders are travel accounts that might be read as attempts to make the unknown or partly known more comprehensible; attempts to convey one's own experience – the registered direct encounter with something new, interesting, inspiring, worth learning.

The importance of such texts does not lie in their informational value (for various media, including travel guides, provide us with comprehensive and captivating information about specific places, monuments, events) but in a clear “individual gesture,” in personal, original interpretation and emotions linked with the travel experience, in recording one's encounter with e.g. a work of art, with “the other” and eventually – with oneself. Such registration seems to be based on a conviction that it is worth and feasible to get to know the world and what is more, describing this experience is possible and crucial.¹⁶

In this sense, “intellectual journeys” become hermeneutics of reality – implemented, of course, in many different ways and depending on intellectual predispositions of the traveling subject who records his/her experiences. Hence, those journeys might be considered an attempt or even a form of understanding.

The above thesis shouldn't evoke many controversies, if we take into account those travel accounts that deliberately refer to the traditional model of a traveler-wanderer. In this context, an excellent example might be “intellectual journeys” of Zbigniew Herbert or – radically distinct, it seems – Ryszard Kapuściński's descriptions.

between the literary and physical aspect of a journey is Ryszard Kapuściński's book *Travels with Herodotus*, which I shall elaborate on later.

15 Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Mini wykłady o maxi sprawach*, cz. 1, Znak, Kraków 1997. In the journey, what also seems important is – underlined by Kołakowski – aspect of “discovering” something, but such discovering in which the essence if not necessarily the knowledge nobody has acquired yet, but, for example, the experience of something new.

16 This aspect of traveling is pointed to e.g. by Leszek Kołakowski who states that the instinct of curiosity and fascination with the unknown, which is a reason for traveling, is a reflection/expression of a philosophical conviction that the world of our experiences is worth something (ibid.).

Zbigniew Herbert, the author of *Barbarian in the Garden, Still Life with Bridle and Labyrinth on the Sea-Shore*,¹⁷ comprehends his role in the traditionally hermeneutical manner: as a “mediatory” or messenger who learns, tries to understand, explains “texts of culture” to himself and others, unveils the hidden and does it being deeply convinced that there exist universal values which are a measure of the human life. Out of the conviction that texts of culture enable a dialogue between generations and epochs, while humankind can be identified as entity and unity,¹⁸ a euphoric comment of the essayist after leaving Lascaux Caves is articulated: “I have never been more comfortably certain: I am a citizen of the Earth, heir of not only Greeks and Romans but nearly the eternity” (BO, 21).

Herbert, the traveler, is also fully aware of the fact that he travels the world of Culture and what he learns has already traces of many looks, readings, interpretations. He does not succumb to an illusion (and he does not mislead the reader) that he discovers “new lands” but carries on an open dialogue both with an artwork itself and with diverse opinions about it; with scientific elaborations, colloquial expectations, tourist guides. Being a true hermeneutist, he stands before texts of culture, and is cautious about every detail, but he also invokes broad historical contexts, he has to touch, go around and “immerse into defined space,” set an artwork he comes for in a real landscape, smell, colour: “...move his face close to the stones, examine their smell, feel the column’s grooves with his hand” (BO, 26). He often writes about the need of being an eyewitness: in *Barbarian in the Garden*, he manifests his enthusiasm caused by the opportunity to see with his own eyes and touch what he has only known from reproductions.

On the one hand, a journey is to him an experience indispensable for analysing history and art; on the other hand, it is a consciously chosen literary tradition.

Texts registering one’s contacts with artworks resemble a process: a poet describes their fragments one by one and records the action of learning (encountering an artwork), gradually adding details associated with the artwork itself and the circumstances in which he, Zbigniew Herbert, is in contact with it. Comparatively, we should evoke here Gadamer who wrote about individual time of each work of art imposing itself on the recipient, having in mind not only transitory works such as music, dance or speech but also painting and architecture he spoke of as “passages of time”. This German philosopher claimed

17 Z. Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*, MŁ and AB, Warsaw 1990, quotes are marked with the abbreviation BO; *Martwa natura z wędzidłem*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1993, *Labirynt nad morzem*, Fundacja „Zeszytów Literackich,” Warszawa 2000.

18 Cf. M. Janion, *Hermeneutyka*, [in:] ead., *Humanistyka: poznanie i terapia*, PIW, Warsaw 1982.

that reception of paintings lies in their active reading, whereas “we learn about architecture by walking and wandering around” and added:

One of the great falsifications which emerged due to excellent quality of facsimiles we have worked out till is that, when we look at great monuments of human culture live, we often feel slightly disappointed. They are not as picturesque as we used to think relying on photographic reproductions we have known. This disappointment in fact means that we haven't gone beyond the picturesque quality of a given edifice and we haven't reached it as a piece of architecture, of art. One should come closer and enter it. One should come out of it and walk around it, gradually “leave” it and this way achieve what this creation of architecture promises to our own experience of life and its intensification.¹⁹

A model example of such an encounter with a work of art is Herbert's account from his journey to Paestum,²⁰ where his initial disappointment with the size of Doric columns (the poet has to set himself free from the encyclopaedic knowledge and images absorbed under the influence of illustrations) abates during thorough sightseeing. The description of the current appearance of Greek edifices made (also in the form of text) in the course of the sightseeing has been assigned a dynamic perspective, in an appropriate order – from the general setting to a more detailed images: first, the outline of the temples on the plain appear from the distance; then, the basilica among other edifices; further – its massive columns, three steps “one has to climb”; and the interior described in the context of historical, architectural, anecdotal details and poetic sensual experiences.

The reconstruction – i.e. the attempt to understand a work of art – is parallel to its direct discovering, with physical and intellectual effort to blend in its literal and symbolic space. Such journey turns into an experience enabling comprehension, while the travel account will be registration of this experience.

Sources and motivations underlying travel accounts of Ryszard Kapuściński – a journalist, author of numerous travel reportages – are of a separate kind. It seems that the evolution of his writings, from early works, through *The Emperor*, to *Imperium* and *The Shadow of the Sun* reflects not only the writer's maturing artistry but also the change in his understanding of

19 H.G. Gadamer, *Aktualność piękna. Sztuka jako gra, symbol i święto*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 1993.

20 Chapter: *U Dorów*, [in:] *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*.

a journey.²¹ His reporter's attitude: the conviction that thanks to eyewitnessing and directness of the report it is possible to describe the reality and show the objective truth – typical of first accounts, is gradually replaced by the experience of complexity and multi-dimensionality of the world, the search of deeper senses and the certainty that understanding is achievable through the process of posing the most elementary questions.

In his *Travels with Herodotus*, published in 2004, the author unveils significant aspects of this transformation: numerous journeys – from the first unexpected travel to India, through the visit in China, to the roaming across Africa – are presented as subsequent, intertwined with his parallel readings, stratifying experiences owing to which Kapuściński evolves from a journalist to a reporter and traveler. His initial, youthful urge to “cross the borders” of his country and move wherever slowly fluctuates into the need of learning and describing the other world as a reporter, and further – the desire to understand what is distinct and what hides under the surface of events:

I wondered how one experiences crossing the border. What does one feel and think? It must be a very emotional, moving and tense moment. How is it to be on the other side? Surely different. But what does it mean: different? [...] But, in fact, my biggest dream which didn't let me sleep, lured and tormented me, was quite modest because I only wanted this very moment, the very act, the simplest action of crossing the border. (PH, 13, author's emphasis)

[Herodotus] is a genuine reporter: he wanders, watches, talks and listens to note down later on what he learnt or to simply remember it (PH,101)

What is expressed by those scenes of massacre full of cries and blood? What inner and invisible but powerful and unstoppable forces led to them? [...] Who will follow them? Not us – correspondents and reporters. No sooner will they bear the victims, clear the wrecks of burned cars and clean broken glass from the streets than we pack our bags and move ahead [...]. Is it not possible to break through this stereotype, go beyond this sequence of images, try to reach what's inside? [...] I began looking for the background and mainsprings of the attack, trying to establish what stands behind it and what it means, so I observed and

21 Cf. id., e.g.: *Kirgiz schodzi z konia* 1968; *Gdyby cała Afryka* 1969; *Cesarz*, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1978; *Imperium* Czytelnik, Warszawa 1993; *Heban* Czytelnik, Warszawa 1998; *Podróże z Herodotem*, Znak, Kraków 2004. Quotes from *Podróże z Herodotem* are marked with the abbreviation PH.

talked with people there, but also read, namely, I tried to understand.
(PH, 214-215)

On the one hand, Kapuściński's wandering fulfils the desire to "be there" – learn and experience the world, try to understand it through the direct experience, hardship of traveling and contacts with other people. On the other hand, his reading of Herodotus is a thorough hermeneutics of the text, a lesson of absorbing knowledge and understanding how one can and should get to know the world in order to make something out of it. Kapuściński, thus, writes about Herodotus that he "is the first to discover the multi-cultural nature of the world. The first to convince that every culture requires being accepted and comprehended. And to understand it, one should first get to know it" (PH, 81).²²

Owing to the parallel of traveling around the world and traveling as reading of a text which describes the world, the present time crucial to experiencing a journey becomes perfectly combined with the past typical of experiencing a book. Kapuściński is aware of this double dimension: reading teaches him to wander and look at the world, whereas knowledge and experience coming from his wanderings allow him to be a better reader. The combination of both "journeys" means a combination (and crossing!) of many spaces, times and cultures proving to the author that it's necessary to go beyond one's time in order to comprehend that "the past and the present create the uninterrupted stream of history" (PH, 256) and beyond one's space – to see that "there are many worlds. I that each of them is different" (PH, 250). Also, that one should use others as a mirror in order to better understand oneself and that a journey is an enormous, wonderful effort "to learn everything – life, the world, oneself" (PH, 253). Thus, once he arrives where Herodotus was born and, in the local museum, he stands in front of objects retrieved from the sea bottom to look at "the world Herodotus knew," he will summarise it poetically, "We are standing in darkness, surrounded by the light" (PH, 259).

Then, he will start another journey.

3.

However, if we take into account contemporary methods of traveling and experiencing the world together with recordings of journeys inscribed in those experiences, inevitable questions emerge: to what extent these accounts

22 Kapuściński frequently refers to Herodotus as the first reporter and a master from whom one learns how to get to know and describe the world, and analyses his relations with people, his methods of gathering and recording materials, the author's comments in the text as well as the very figure of Herodotus "emerging" from outside of his work. Cf. e.g. 169-174, 203, 243-245.

oscillate between a traditional “journey” and postmodern “tourism” and whether such postmodern manner of traveling (and recording the travel) could be treated as a form or a method of understanding the world.²³

The answer to the above questions seems neither obvious nor simple to me, therefore I will only try to outline the possible horizon of answers.

Let us begin with a fact that standard tourist behaviour lead to the loss of the basic sense of a journey which is the feeling of authenticity. The physical presence of tourists in Nature or Culture does not mean they are truly present – they rather collect impressions, not experiences and they are in no way, either creatively or re-creatively, connected with the space they consume. They arrive already “closed” in the world of their own imagination, they see “views” (“post-card” views they had been earlier “prepared for”) instead of concrete landscapes, they mediate their experiences with the help of tourist guides or cameras; they initiate only momentary and superficial contacts.

The problem is not that a tourist knows what he/she will see, while a traveler goes into the unknown – this is not true because a traveler is also “burdened” (or “incited” – as in the case of Columbus who began a journey inspired by *The Travels of Marco Polo*) with earlier known images. The point is that for a genuine traveler, it is fundamental not only to watch but to experience the world, make effort to understand it, acquire knowledge. He/she does not take the world for granted, treating it as a “given” but rather as a “homework”. A traveler of such kind not only has the knowledge (pre-judgements) but also the awareness of his/her own knowledge on a given subject. He also shows the need for an “encounter” – confrontation of this knowledge with the very site, space, object; he/she knows that only in this encounter, in a direct experience linking “known” with “seen,” one can comprehend the world. This is often followed by an optimistic belief that “encountering,” “learning,” “understanding” is possible, or that the key value lies in the very (even doomed to failure from the beginning) attempt to initiate such activity.

Another issue. Security, comfort, “standardisation of services” as the basic rule of tourism²⁴ as well as fast and simple traveling lighten or eliminate the hardship and problems related with moving around but also deeply alter the character of a traveler’s experiences: neither time and space, nor physical exhaustion is a problem anymore; the world “is not resistant,” neither it demands from a tourist activeness, involvement in the contact with another space. Many contemporary “intellectual journeys” contain fear of such easy

23 If we take into consideration anthropological or sociological analyses of postmodern journeys, we can draw an obvious conclusion that due to their underlying falsifications and mediations, they are not the path to either learning or understanding. Cf. Kowalski, *Odyseje nasze...*

24 Cf. K. Podemski, *Socjologia podróży*.

traveling which eliminates the feeling of strangeness, the trouble of experiencing and learning.²⁵ Speed and bustle accompanying tourist tours the traveler juxtaposes to the slow pace of (most often) hiking²⁶ which brings a specific experience of being “in between”: between the familiar but more and more distant home space and the strange but approaching world/place one is heading towards. The traveler finds him/herself on the intersection of two worlds: the new world one arrives to and the world one comes from. Such location resembles Gadamer’s privileged place “between” otherness and familiarity, freedom and constraint.²⁷

In today’s individual “journeys” one could come across numerous attempts to find or regain the “between” dimension. One of them is “temporary roaming,” “being on a trip” periodically, in the “separated” time and space, the combination – returning to Bauman’s postmodern model – of the physically overwhelming experience of being a vagabond with the “tourist” feeling of freedom. Such experiences could be found, among others, in Andrzej Stasiuk’s travel accounts. The writer describes his experiences related with hitch-hiking across Poland:

The sky, trees, houses, ground – all this could be located somewhere else. I was moving in space which didn’t have any past, history, achievements worth mentioning [...] this sequence of images was not a country, it was a pretext. Most probably, a person feels his/her own existence only when feeling on his/her skin a touch of nameless space which unites us with the oldest of times [...] when the mind was only beginning to separate itself from the world and didn’t yet realize its orphanage. (JB,11)

The problem is whether being in the space “between” becomes a kind of alienation or an impulse to learn, compare and make effort to understand.

25 For example: Jerzy Stempowski, using means of transport only to move to a place where he begins his thorough journey on foot, compares group bus trips to “Jonas who traveled far in the whale’s stomach but he didn’t see a lot”(J. Stempowski, *Nowy dziennik podróży do Niemiec*, [in:] id. *Od Berdyczowa do Łafitów*, sel., ed. and introduction by A.S. Kowalczyk, Czarne, Wołowiec 2001, 197). Zbigniew Herbert, commenting on *Voyage en Italie* by Montaigne, is jealous of his long, tiring journey enabling him to melt into “the concrete otherness of landscapes of people and phenomena he passes by” (*Pana Montaigne’a podróż do Italii* [in:] id. *Węzeł gordyjski oraz inne pisma rozproszone 1948–1998*, Biblioteka “Więzi,” Warsaw 2001, 43).

26 Another modern travelers’ favourite means are slow trains which create an opportunity of co-participating in the life of locals, initiating contacts or at least making observations. Cf. J. Stempowski, *Nowy dziennik...*; A. Stasiuk, *Jadąc do Babadag*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2004. Quotes from Stasiuk’s book are referred to with an abbreviation JB.

27 Cf. E. Kobylińska, *Hermeneutyczne ujęcie kultury jako komunikacji* [in:] *O kulturze i jej badaniu. Studia z filozofii kultury*, ed. K. Zamjara, PWN, Warsaw 1985.

Another problem stems from the fact that crucial elements of the real, traditional traveling are attentiveness and reflection. Both serve cognition and allow for noticing various dimensions and contexts of reality, for interpreting and understanding. Concrete and tangible features of the described reality: ruts on the road, cathedral steps worn out by pilgrims, single gestures, details ... they all become a necessary condition of a traveler's cognition and understanding. "Not being excessively spiritual, I always looked for material traces in order to enter into an agreement and alliance," Herodotus confesses in *Labyrinth on the Sea-Shore*²⁸. And Ryszard Kapuściński admits that he induces his students to note down facts and travel impressions on a daily basis because this habit will force them to "concentrate and look actively" and make traveling not "mechanical moving from place to place, checking kilometres, towns, countries" but will turn it into a "form of approaching and understanding the world, other people, other cultures."²⁹

In tourism, instead of attentiveness to the world, instead of insight and reflection, we have collections of the highest possible number of impressions – a fast slide on the surface. The pace mentioned by Virilio imposes perception of the world resembling a group of snapshots but also compels the reality and the world to be attractive, noticeable, ready to meet tourists' expectations. This activates double falseness: tourists perceive what they have been announced and delivered to be seen, whereas the world shows what tourists expect. Such travelers will never learn anything new on their way, they will never experience anything else than what they have expected beforehand. However, if self-cognition in the encounter with the other, new world is considered as an important element of the travel experience, and if we claim that, owing to his/her journey, a traveler "returns to him/herself" enriched with new experiences, we will consider a tourist as representing a completely different attitude as he/she mainly looks for attractions in their excursions, an image of him/herself which would differ from the everyday one. In such cases, it's hard to speak about trying to understand the world or oneself.

Nonetheless, this experience – seen not so much as habitual behaviour of mass and organised tourism but an individual experience based on the postmodern manner of traveling, a fast and unengaged way of looking at the world – allows us to discover significant aspects of the contemporary consciousness. They can be interpreted as postmodern hermeneutics aiming at clashing dissimilar senses rather than probing or explaining them. Cursor, chaotic, superficial perception uprooting things from their natural and

28 Z. Herbert, *Labirynt...*, 29.

29 R. Kapuściński, *Pochwała wędrowania*, „Nowe Książki” 2002 no 7/8, 9.

symbolic context, reminds us of the weak thought, Vattimo's *percezione distratta* (restless eyes, distracted perception).³⁰ Its traces can be found in the already quoted Stasiuk's account:

Each place was good because I could leave it with no regrets. It didn't even have to have a name. Constant cost, continuous loss, prodigality unseen by the world, carnival, wastage, wastefulness and no sign of accumulation. The Seaside in the morning, forests by the San river in the evening, guys with beer mugs, like ghosts in a country bar, like phantoms freezing at my sight in quarter-gesture. (JB, pp. 11-12)

So, who is this traveler who starts a journey – seemingly fast, inattentive and chaotic but not deprived of the need to “stop,” the reflection over the experience of “otherness” – in the space of postmodern habits? Is he/she a new traveler who is aware of both artificiality of the tourist world, the limits of one's own perception and the indispensability (necessity) of travel experiences, liberating a different type of the time-and-space, changing the location of the “I” in the world?

Such cases as Andrzej Stasiuk's travel accounts prove that the real value lies in the intellectual condition and sensitivity of the subject, not the time and method of traveling. The author of *On the Road to Babadag* intentionally inscribes his youth travels' narratives in the postmodern rhythm of quick changes of space, affluence of images and elements of reality, simultaneously attempting at self-cognition through such “acceleration” which in fact annihilates time and space and enables the return to first, elementary, naïve and most important questions.

His later journeys are ostentatiously planned against the current tourist fashions and methods of traveling, although not rarely does he travel with a tourist guide in his hand. Beside reporting the choice of a route and a method of traveling (roaming on the East and South of Europe far from well-known tourist trails, following the trail of the “cheapest tobacco products,” driving an old car, hitch-hiking or taking slow trains), the author constantly reminds the reader that he travels “differently” and “different” things and matters are of his interest. Choosing the vagabond option, Stasiuk devotes his attention to observation of everyday life, houses, people, landscapes:

30 G. Vattimo, *Le avventure della differenza*, Garzanti, Milano 1980, 6. The already quoted author of *Il Viaggio dei Filosofi* writes that the contemporary tourist fashion is a banalised, “weaker” variant of the “strong” experience of traveling as an experience of authenticity. (Menziò, *Il Viaggio...*).

In *Gönc* he pulled up in front of *the Hussite House* but we were not interested in museums. We wanted to watch old women sitting in front of the houses on the main street. (JB, 69)

I went with them, but I didn't care at all about the noble building. I was looking at the young Gypsies. (JB, 95)

If he sometimes tries to "inscribe" himself into the contemporary traveling habits and "feel like a tourist," he feels like "a spy doomed to superficiality" (JB, 110)

However, despite – or maybe – due to this ostentatious gesture, in his "journeys" Stasiuk does not seem to "free himself" either from the effects of the post-industrial reality or from the postmodern way of perceiving it. On the one hand, he fulfils the carnival scheme of "reversing the world" by presenting the modern European reality not through its Western façade but through its Eastern courtyard and suggesting that it is the façade that embodies the anti-world. On the other hand, assuming the role of a revolutionary and vagabond, and demonstratively cutting off from the tourist pattern, he falls into another – the anti-tourist one and neither does he try to learn and understand the reality he arrives in. He only chooses places, situations, images and motives which are radically distinct from the first "façade" tourist vision.

Consequently, he declares his "love of disintegration" and "pitiful predisposition to everything that doesn't look as it should," therefore he only looks for things he wants to see and rejects everything that is put in order, organized, stable and that doesn't match his assumptions about the reality, "I had to abandon this view because it was too unreal" (JB, 100); "I couldn't conform with space which was so irreversibly formed" (JB, 107). It appears that the writer does not want to be liberated from the "limitations" of his own expectations and fantasies, he does not intend to see anything else besides what he looks for; he does not want to "understand" or learn anything, probe into the life of local people or initiate more intimate contacts (apart from momentary meetings amplifying the impression of mental closeness). He is in search for places where he feels "as if he never left home" but he remains "an observer." He wishes to see "images" which seem to him the "reverse" of the post-industrial, organised reality, which "mock at tempting order and affluence" (JB, pp. 214-215). Meticulous descriptions of phenomena, details, bits and single characters present in his account are not tools of understanding the depicted world but of documenting the traveler's beliefs,³¹ whereas

31 It is poverty, rejection, disability, dilapidation and pieces of the past are what Stasiuk considers the only tangible (and, as it seems, continuously strived for) substance as opposed

subsequent experiences pile up in a neverending kaleidoscope of various fragments, pieces, traces which liberate his imagination. It is the imagination together with the desire to “be on the move” (not the reality: visited places, landscapes, people and events) that guide Stasiuk – the traveler and Stasiuk – the writer. That is why, in his travels, he turns down places and landscapes in which he can’t “find any fractures for the imagination to slip in” (FB, 50) and in his account, he may admit, “In fact I can’t remember anything from this journey, so I need to make everything up anew” (JB, 106). And this is precisely why subsequent travels are solely repetitions of the imagined ones, while the non-obviousness of visited lands makes them more spacious than geography would indicate and lets them open to him “the endless space of presuppositions, the vanishing horizon of ideas and the mirage of sweet superstitions the reality could never rise to” (JB, 2019). According to this belief, Stasiuk considers traveling as “simply a relatively healthy type of a drug” (JB, 75), desired (temporary) liberation, return to childhood and a blissful feeling of freedom, respite from the reality.³² It is nourishment indispensable for the imagination but also an individual attempt to save from oblivion things that disappear from the horizon, “to seize present day.” One of the forms of saving such moments are relics: notes, coins, tickets, bills, and other scraps. Stasiuk will mention them, “I keep all those events in a cartoon shoe box. From time to time, I pull out this or that” (JB, 236).

These travel relics provoke telling new stories about memory and space, which “begin in any chosen place and never end” (JB, 236). But what is most interesting in the perspective assumed here, is the – typical of Stasiuk – awareness of the significance of traveling and moving around in the contemporary world³³ and the explicitly exposed conviction that frequent journeys, “collected” experiences, traces, relics, memories do not lead to the groundbreaking cognition, build any wholeness or arrange themselves in any higher

to intangible ideas of the richness characteristic to the post-industrial world. Yet, the world does not have an explicit “face” one could oppose to because – Stasiuk writes in the imagined dialogue with Jakub Szela – even if one tries to do that, „the world will disperse like a phantom and one will be left empty-handed” (JB, 56). Therefore, it seems, watching, “gathering” and collecting itself is to him the most important result of the journey.

32 Cf. e.g.: „...already near Zborów, one starts to ignore his/her identity. It diminishes with every kilometer and, just like in distant childhood, our own existence leaves us as something very different from the rest of the world” (JB, 221).

33 Cf. e.g.: „...I have my border to practice transgression and it is fine and it suits the times when existence is identified by movement, changing places, kinetics, that starting from point A we don't have to reach point B – not only, we don't have to get anywhere and it is enough that we make circles”. *Dziennik okrętowy*, [in:] J. Andruchowycz, A. Stasiuk, *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej środkową*, Czarné, Wołowiec 2000, 140.

senses or orders. The writer often underlines that “he comes back as stupid as he was when leaving” and that on his return “nothing has changed,” and finally:

All points to the conclusion that nothing remains: Ubla, Heviz, Lendava, Babadag, Leskovik and else – they don't leave traces that would be so vivid to believe that quantity will eventually turn into quality, one thing will couple with another and, like a wonderful machine, will produce something close to a sense. (JB, 261)

Andrzej Stasiuk's travel accounts are like his favourite places, “like peripheries without the centre, like limitless suburbs, without the culminating city,” happening in “the present and constantly accomplishing time,” “exhausting in the very act of existence” (JB, 249). As a result, the writer speaks about his own stories like about his own journeys: he can't make out of them any sensible story and comes to a conclusion that “the world is presence, so he doesn't care about the story”³⁴.

This type of “traveling” serves as a means to learn not so much the reality as the representation of the reality. Neither does it help understand the world and its rules, search for fundamental senses, deeper mechanisms, higher orders, universal and supralocal rooting (like in the case of Herbert or Kapuściński's accounts) but it rather serves collecting impressions and images, moving around the world³⁵ hoping that, in view of the “failure” of a story which is unable to assign senses to human life, geography can help “embrace the world” and liberate oneself from reflecting over incidental, temporary existence.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

34 Cf. respectively JB, 216, 227. Stasiuk also writes about the similarity between a journey and a story in *Dziennik okrętowy*, frequently emphasising that both in a journey and a story, he does not move linearly but he always has to meander and blunder. Eventually, he admits, “Writing is listing names. Analogically, a journey is placing beads of geography on a string of life. Neither reading nor the road make us much smarter. Borders like chapters, countries like literary genres, the epic of trails, lyric of resting, blackness of concrete roads at night in headlights brings to mind a monotonous and hypnotic line of print which crosses the reality and leads us straight to the fictitious goal. There is nothing at the end of the book, and every decent journey always resembles more or less tangled noose (99-100, also see 138).

35 In his journeys, however, Stasiuk is always aware of having a home where one can always go back, which significantly affects the character of those travels and which can be perceived as a typical feature of tourist traveling. Another “tourist” trait of Stasiuk as a vagabond would be the very act of “gathering impressions” and the fact that the wandering writer never questions his own identity.