# Introduction

## *The Anthropologist as a Poverty Inspector*

### An Anthropological Shift in Perspective

#### *The "Culture of Poverty": Getting Beyond the Concept*

The demands of anthropological work in the Trobraind Islands (Malinowski 2002 [1922]) postulated the longest possible stay in the area, in order to experience life as the residents there experienced it. However, this was practically an impossibility from the standpoint of my research on poverty and sudden impoverishment. This basic foundation of ethnographic description—the authority of first-hand experience (Clifford 1988a)—would seem particularly risky here, placing me, the researcher, in the middle of ethical complications. It should seem apparent from either side of the fence that the ethnographer will eventually return home with his or her tape recordings and memories, and the consciousness of this fact destroys any hope of real participation. The metaphor of the sudden appearance of the White Man, Foreigner, or Traveler is entirely justified here, and differences in ways of being, moving about, or the "colonization of the future" (Giddens 1991: 86) are visible at once. Crossing into the sphere of poverty and misery, ethnographers immediately note their difference, much as Marcel Griaule once did when beginning his research on Sudanese villagers in the 1930s: "Hundreds of eyes follow us. We are in full view of the village; in every crack in the wall, behind every granary, an eye is attentive" (quoted in Clifford 1988b: 70). As the inevitable Foreigner, the researcher is condemned to being a poverty inspector, always on a temporary stay.

Foreign realities of being are often found in remote places, or at least have always had a certain spatial dimension. Marcel Mauss, for instance, was fond of observing loaves of bread in European bakery displays. This allowed him to develop the premises of his idea on the scope of Celtic civilization, and at the same time to construct a theory of encountering

cultural otherness from observing facts in their full scope. In the tradition of searching for "patterns of culture" initiated by Ruth Benedict, otherness took the form of a socioeducational complex that forms the cultural shape of the individual and his or her psyche ("culture and personality school"). Much has been written, therefore, on the impact of generally acknowledged values on the shaping of a mental life (while recognizing all its complexity as revealed through psychoanalysis), on the impact of education and reigning norms, on the categories of time and space, the notion of prestige, the symbolic universe, the body, or on gender. This made the inert power of "cultural reality" visible: patterns of emotion or of precise thinking underwent a dramatic change, establishing and conditioning the behaviors of individuals, conditioning the whole.

Oscar Lewis's research into the impoverished slums of New York and San Juan (1968; 1970), which allowed him to create the paradigmatic concept of the "culture of poverty," mainly adopted this psychocultural tradition. In a brief summary of his many years of research, Lewis stated that his "culture of poverty" not only represents, but above all perpetuates a sort of order. Time, space, the body, work, and money have set forms here. The phenomenon Lewis describes thus takes on clear and set attributes, including a lack of participation in greater social structures, a particular form of organization with the evident erosion of community ties, the deprival of a childhood, a tendency to live for the moment, the immediate present, and, most importantly, a "weakness of the structure of the ego," a resignation and a fatalism (Lewis 1968: xlii–lii). Categories of this sort give the "culture" being researched—or more accurately, its representatives—certain relatively stable attributes, i.e., settled and socially stimulated "biopsychological dispositions" that are typically found in representatives of the "culture of poverty." This image of the culturally shaped psychosocial pattern was carried further, however, which is why it has appeared in subsequent concepts of the culture of poverty. This was the case with the controversial theory of the "underclass," initially based on the purely structural stratifying categorization by Gunnar Myrdal (1962; see also Aponte 1990), in which the tradition of thinking in categories of the "culture of poverty" was assigned negative, stigmatizing connotations. It was given attributes of powerlessness, inertia (the perpetuation of "bad" patterns), and disintegration (of social and family ties); its emblem became the clever and insolent man who was unemployed, lived in temporary relationships, and neglected his family. Trapped in a circle of poverty, criminality, and the habitual inaccessibility of employment, this image created the basis for the investigation of a culture of "social defectiveness," a culture of

social aid dependants and the redistribution of benefits—a "parasitical culture." This caused the paradigm of the mental constitution of the individual in society to hover perpetually over consecutive theoretical descriptions of spheres of poverty—the cliché of the "defective" or "maladjusted" social character. This is also the point where the critique of the concept of "culture of poverty" has started and caused so much debate (Leacock 1971; Valentine 1968; see also Aponte 1990) and where the critique of the myth of "dependency culture" has also emerged (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992).[1]

To my mind, the problem equally derives from the fact that the whole image of the reproducibility of "patterns of culture" originally pertained to other foreign cultures whose attributes were mutually non-transferrable, such as the cultures of the North American Indigenous People described by Ruth Benedict. In the "culture of poverty" or the "underclass," on the other hand, this reproducibility was chiefly meant to concern "our" familiar culture, existing within the sphere of the local social structure, which evolved, or became visible in a particular historical moment, when cities, agglomerations, and stable groupings of people emerged. This time marked the birth of sociology. The metaphors of the terminology describing poverty thus pertain to the order of signifiers of the imagined society "in general," first of all to "our" European societies, certain historically located specific structures with all their philosophical bases, such as the post-Enlightenment ability to model reality and to make it operative. This is also the background of the concepts of economic, definitional, and existential effectiveness. Oscar Lewis's "culture of poverty," therefore, clearly bears upon this "local" sociological model of culture and society. At one point Lewis writes of the "adaptive" property of the culture of the slums, using the categories of "efficiency/non-efficiency" (1968: xlii–lii). From this perspective—that of a culture as a properly functioning organism—we can see why, for Oscar Lewis, the powerful ties that bind social groups, like those that exist in rural societies or any kind of developed sociocultural organization, are precisely what defer the creation of a "culture of poverty," safeguarding people against the disintegration and deprivation of "culture." As such, this model *a priori* includes a package of values characteristic for the imagined well-developed societies such as work, co-citizenship, good social bonds, and civic participation, which later became the basis for the reconstruction of poor people's world view. At this point something paradoxical takes place: the norms of "our" society begin to serve the description of an entirely *different* social environment, an other and incomprehensible culture (Valentine 1968: 113–120). Then we also see that a model of "culture of poverty" described in this manner, its loss

and its "lack," is none other than the flip side of "our" culture; as Charles Valentine has phrased it (1968: 116–117), it is the picture of an "unpatterned social existence." In this book I am going to follow this particular element of critique and attempt to build my own way of getting beyond this powerful image.

### *Social Trauma and Dependency: Shift in Perspective*

The "culture of dependency," of people reliant on social aid (receiving welfare, long-term deprivation of work and earnings), has almost always been a bone of contention in public statements on poverty, both in the Enlightenment discussion on the "Poor Law" (Patrick Colquhoun was most clearly using the term "dependency" in a negative sense in 1815) and in the storm of public opinion spurred on by the Thatcher program carried out in Great Britain. On the basis of research concerning British social assistance, the authors of *Dependency Culture: The Explosion of a Myth* (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992) revealed the circulation of signifiers in the theoretical and administrative description of a group of social assistance clients in Kent and London. It turned out that in the everyday emic experiences of social care clients, the official terms were still inevitably associated with notions of criminality, demoralization, calculating opportunism, and turns of phrase like "cancer," "defect," "loss," and "parasitical behavior." The linguistic and definitional backdrop of social assistance in practice—in spite of all intentions—thus utilized symbolic Foucauldian discourse mechanisms that form the social image of "wild poverty," following the path of least resistance. This practice brought along the discursive, symbolic imperative to work and to be independent, which was in turn confronted by the reality of unemployment and dependency. In this fashion, dependency unambiguously came to be a defect and a weakness—this may be precisely the reason why stress is placed on social assistance symbolically "making clients independent," emphasizing their opportunities to make their own decisions. This may also be the reason for social aid strategies in which the "assistance" of clients has some effect on the decisions being made, such as the choice of the branch they use, or the selection of magazines or other goods they order.

Similarly, to translate this image into Polish circumstances, one often reads that long-term unemployment and reliance on welfare or social assistance creates an analogous "culture of dependency" over time. In fact, it creates something called a "culture of unemployment," a culture of "living on welfare" (Marody 2002), a culture of "systemic helplessness" (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, and Rychard 2000: 85) and "learned helplessness" (Sztompka 2000: 58, 106–107; Zinserling 2002). It has

also been suggested that the ex-miners, ex-workers, and, above all, the rural folk create a "systemic residue" (on the polemic surrounding the use of this term with regards to rural folk, see Szafraniec 2002). The terminology alone demonstrates these groups' evident failure in dealing with the post-transformation reality. As such, all of these terms create a picture of social isolation and social passivity, of an inability to be in and adapt to civilization, of social groups who require ongoing assistance and *activation* (see, for example, European Social Fund, Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy documents, years 2007–2013, priority I, measures 1.1, 1.5, and 1.6). They remain outside of the main drift of social development—outside of the positively or normatively understood transformation from the People's Republic (PRL) socialism to a democratic state.

This perspective is particularly visible in the context of the transformation that occurred in Poland in 1989. The violent impact of the system change brought the experiences of unemployment, degradation, and sudden impoverishment to many people and to many social and professional groups. It also ushered in new images of reality—many began to have the impression of submerging into dangerous and uncontrolled chaos (Tarkowska 1993: 90–91; Szpakowska 2003: 18). Piotr Sztompka (2000; 2004) later named this phenomenon the "trauma of the great change." "Social trauma" is a term that, to some degree, encompasses the social experiences of which I write, i.e., the sudden and unexpected arrival of unemployment, poverty, and painful degradation for many groups of people. Moreover, this occurrence was essentially external, unanticipated, "swift and sudden," and consumed all of social life. What happens in a society under such circumstances? Piotr Sztompka demonstrates that particular forms of response emerged. When faced with trauma (the incomprehensible reality of the transformations), we see the emergence of certain typical make-do strategies, originally described by Robert Merton in his *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), a book devoted to American social responses to the experience of financial crisis. First of all, the inability to reach goals (cultural goals, such as a certain level of affluence in American culture) prompts the innovation of strategies that are carried out in a new, criminal fashion, often in defiance of norms. Secondly, there are conformist strategies, a total yield to change, without "sticking one's neck out." Third, there are strategies of ritualizing life, compulsively repeating established ways of being in the world. Fourth is a regressive response, a flight "into another world," or even the creation of private "rituals of regression" (Sulima 2003). Fifth is a revolt strategy. In the context of the Polish trauma of the 1990s, as Sztompka writes, these sorts of coping strategies emerged.

Here, however, these strategies took on a special aspect, as the result of a trauma. One example of these experiences might be behavior that appeared in many post-transformation societies, independently recorded by various researchers, and marked by an aspect of "resignation" (in a sense, this is a Mertonian strategy of "retreat," or a "ritual of retreat"). This includes practices of complaints, grumbling, and declarations of resignation within closed groups, something commonly known as "village grumbling" within rural communities (Kędziorek 1996), or, elsewhere, the language of the "poor mouth" (Buchowski 1996: 60), social "grief" (Rakowski 2006a; 2006b), and "complaints" (Bruczkowska 2004). "They laid it all out, they laid it out. … What'll happen next, that I don't want to know." "It's all done for, I'm through looking ahead, there's nothing—there's nothing here, and nothing's how it's going to stay." "What could there be here—there's not going to be anything, I tell you." These monotonously repeated phrases were present in almost every ethnographic conversation in the Polish countryside. The unemployed in the former mining town of Nowa Ruda provided similar statements: "Things'll only get worse and worse, going downhill, and nobody wants to say a word … and why should they? There's nothing to talk about." Piotr Kędziorek splendidly captured this kind of ritual denigration of one's position (1996): "We're mute, we're stupid. Why ask us any questions? We don't know anything round here."

Some might claim that all these examples, revealing social trauma, are symptoms of regression—of disadvantageous and ineffective changes—and bear testimony to an "incapacity to exist." From the resulting perspective we are dealing with a "nonadaptation," or, to borrow a phrase from William Ogburn (1964: 86–95), a "cultural lag" (the notion used by Ogburn to capture certain slowness in culture while facing rapid change, coming from the external world—social, technological, knowledge based, etc.). One example of such a lag is when certain behavior remains the same, despite changing socioeconomic conditions. We might cite social demands or incessant lamentation as examples. These societies are portrayed as lacking in initiative, as "passive subjects" undergoing the trauma of transformation. Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka (2000: 20) has even written about their "pathology of agency." Nonetheless, it is abundantly visible that a certain world of the values of mainstream society—of Polish society, or, more broadly speaking, of "Euro-American societies" (such values as active social participation, subjectivity, self-aware entrepreneurship, a task-based approach, the ability to plan one's future, and so forth)—is implicit in this concept. It is only against this yardstick, through contrast, that one sees this as "cultural incompetence" or "cultural lag." Through the inappropriateness of the griping

and grumbling and all manner of grudges, it is apparent to many people that these things bear testimony to a lack of constructive social behavior (cf. Buchowski 2003: 114–119).

And yet, here we find something entirely different. The recurrence of this behavior, and its constant presence, allows us to confirm that it is a certain form of social communication and a way of grasping experiences, albeit an entirely incomprehensible one—the exact reverse, it would seem, of the popular "keep smiling." How are we to perceive this phenomenon? From the perspective of the theory of great transformation, this grumbling is doubtless a symptom of this social trauma, an example of "cultural lag," passivity, resignation, or "learned helplessness" (or even perhaps—inertly—"systemic helplessness"). At this point, however, I would like to execute an *anthropological shift* in perspective. All these complaints and accusations, the grief and the laments, can then be treated in opposite fashion, as testimonies of cultural activity, as testimony to the many people who have experienced a great deal of tension since 1989, and have lived through it in a way that suits their culture. The complaints, resignation, and laments are thus, to my mind, a fully fledged mode of communication that includes various manifestations of personal regression and degradation, the social theatre of the "losers" of the transformation (Sulima 2003). This is an inner-cultural framework for surviving a situation. Here we cross beyond the nonanthropological tradition of remaining in "our" society. It is an ongoing attempt to cross beyond the categories of thought in "mainstream society."

### *Hermeneutics and Anthropology*

We might say that the premises of cultural theories often create at least two different perspectives: of culture as a functioning model and of culture as a mode of behavior and being in the world. In the first case, concepts and key words are operationalized and employed, as a project of modern, functional social sciences. Then a negative image of a "culture of complaint," or in general of culture as modifying and distorting functional or economic behavior (what are called "cultural factors"), is created. Then too, "independence" or "social subjectivity" becomes positive and unconditionally desired; it becomes a manner of perceiving culture that presumes that any incomprehensible and uneconomical behavior is merely a "cultural factor" (a kind of distortion). Then, through this language, there also arises a constant imperative to become independent, both in an economic and a physical sense, prompting a rejection of the inexpressibility and radical alienation of the experience of poverty and degradation.

However, from another perspective—the point of view taken in my research—all forms of "culture of complaint" (and thus of "cultural lag") are words and behavior that express dependency. In this sense, they are not symptoms of trauma or "responses to change," attempts to adapt or to tune in. They begin from an adamant, unmodified level of culture, even its "rock-hard core," as it was posed by Gordon Mathews (2000: 11–17), and their correlation with the reality of the events transpiring, however this might be understood, is obscure, and filled with researchers' misconceptions. They are the axis of an oralized knowledge, or a social experience—a "folklore" (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 380–381) that is, for instance, the expression of an ongoing (social and existential) dependency, a prereflexive structure of being that is, in part, shaped through history. One might trace its genealogy to show this "culture of complaint" to be an inertia, a Braudelian (1982) structure of "longue durée," tied to the rural memory of centuries-long, almost sacral dependency, or, in workers' environments, to a structure that forbids stepping out of the group or other ways of life, achieving success and "putting on airs" instead (Hoggart 2009). As such, these are ways of being in the world that are utterly incomprehensible in the contemporary language I use, in which we may find deeply embedded notions of effectiveness.[2] This is why, from the anthropological perspective I have adopted (my "anthropological shift"), they are perpetually present as hardly comprehensible and very silent "aspects of culture," which always leave behind an inexplicable residue of behavior. This is why an encounter with being in a culture of the other often ends in the annoyance, failure, and, as Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (1996) has written in her article devoted to the field specifics of an anthropologist's experience, irritation of certain deep cultural knowings, prejudgments, in Gadamer's sense of the word, such as those that concern the specific European sense of independent subjects, or their entrepreneurial/economic motives for action.

From this perspective, we cannot speak exclusively of cultural conditions that predispose people to behavior that is not outwardly economical, or that is outright uneconomical (radically other), that predisposes them to resignation and complaints. The practice of "social grumbling" is not, therefore, merely an external cultural factor (though we can speak of cultural conditions); it is a sphere in which we come to apprehend the radical difference (given that they take on the whole mainstream structure of the world), and incomprehensibility, to a large extent, of those who engage in it. In other words, hearing their regrets and complaints, maintaining their incomprehensibility and full otherness (autonomy, fully fledged culture), we ought rather to treat them as "folklore," a knowledge or cultural experience ("lore") making itself known. These

lamentations and complaints enclose the speakers, after all, in the space of dramatic, though simultaneously commonplace (as in the grumbling, for instance), decisions; the exhaustion and using up of words, and their rhythm and recurrence, are highly significant here (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 13–16). As Roch Sulima has stated (1992a), these are composed of screams and silence: a scream is a sign of contact with the world, while silence expresses the opposite, showing its strength in "insistent silence," in a ritual lack of words in conversation, in statements like "there's nothing to be said." "This makes way for conducting anthropology/folklore studies in existential categories," Sulima wrote two decades ago (1995). In existential categories, the statements, complaints, and moaning gathered by ethnographers demonstrate the constant, unrelenting, and unmodified nature of the reality of culture.

Consequently, the hermeneutic project of apprehending the impoverished, socially and economically degraded human being is an attempt to bridge contact with a way of being in the world (and a creation of a separate "culture of powerlessness") that is geographically near (the reality of "our" society). Yet, it is absolutely different in terms of culture, and not entirely comprehensible. The culture of the losers of the transformation, of complaints, moaning, even resignation and regression, passivity and fatalism, Oscar Lewis wrote about for years, is, to my mind, a fully fledged testimony of culture. Though it is a testimony that sometimes declares itself with great suddenness, when combined with the terminological whole of the mainstream culture it allows some people (as is the case with criminal environments) to think that this is "not culture, but rather a lack thereof" (Hernas 1976: 475). Research experience as hermeneutic experience therefore has little in common with an experimental approach. It neither checks nor verifies the previously anticipated reality, more resembling Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of "negative experience" (2004: 350), i.e., that which "thwarts expectations." It is a kind of research in which the "tests" and "facts" of culture refuse to submit to increasingly sophisticated interpretations. Every encounter involves taking up a kind of challenge: it is an anthropological attempt to contact an utterly alien reality. The anthropological perspective I take and its value reveals itself in the flip side of culture, a testimony of dependency and powerlessness, in such words as "helplessness," "impotence," and "passivity," as well as "shrewdness" and "canniness." In sum, this generally concerns a certain concept of the people upon whom my research is focused.

How are we, therefore, to deal with other notions of the culture of poverty, the culture of dependency, and ultimately of those degraded during the period of the transformation in Poland? Within these no-

tions, their culture, labeled a "culture of dependency" or a "culture of poverty," signifies a lack or a shortcoming, and not a presence. As Charles Valentine once wondered, "Is Culture not a Culture?" (1968: 113–120). I would like to stress that it is not my intention to criticize the values or the attributes of mainstream culture. I am not denying the positive attributes of entrepreneurship and independence, nor of "civic attitudes" or being geared toward taking on challenges—a forward-thinking attitude. I, myself, participate in this world, which is undoubtedly my cultural *shikata ga nai*—a Japanese expression for "it can't be helped" (Mathews 2000: 14). Furthermore, the impoverished, poverty-stricken, socially degraded and the chronic welfare receivers also participate in it and "dream" of it, a fact to which their complaints and grief would seem to testify (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992: 135). I am not of the opinion, therefore, that descriptions of social change showing the "inability to exist" in the new conditions, an incapacity to "take advantage of the transformation," vulnerability to social trauma (Sztompka, 2000) and phobias (Kocik, 2001: 97–103, cf. 88–90), or images of change expressed in sociological variables (such as attitudes toward pro-market changes, the structure of a farm's expenditures, opinions on the "state of Polish farming," the presence of optimism or hope, or even lifestyle indicators such as diet, dental care, or the habit of eating in restaurants) portray the phenomena accompanying the transformation in Poland in an *appropriate* and significant fashion. They describe them in a manner appropriate to their method and their paradigm. Nor am I trying to suggest that I find the practices of complaints or any sort of illegal or socially unstable odd jobs (or sometimes even semicriminal earning strategies) appropriate or lucrative in either a social or an economic sense. I am writing, after all, about impoverished and degraded people who are eagerly awaiting some form of work and livelihood—and one that is legal and fully acknowledged.

There is no getting around it—this is an anthropological dimension of sympathy, if only by dint of the fact that anthropology is, in essence, professional empathy. In this case, however, this empathy holds an entirely different meaning than it does in its colloquial use, and is doubtless incomprehensible to many. Empathy takes on a different form here, and is not, as Joanna Tokarska-Bakir phrased it (1999b), an attempt at common consolation, or a shared desire for things to improve. Nor does empathy mean that someone who knows the cause of a "bad situation" carries a functional social lesson in his head, along with a design to "solve the problem." Empathy is in itself a kind of renunciation of action (ibid.); a person who empathizes remains in the world of those with whom he empathizes, though he is merely visiting them. He records all

the grief and the laments, trying neither to conquer nor to invalidate them, not trying to create a more functional reality, crossing into the social sphere of dependency. This "anthropological shift"—the anthropological inspection of the world of the degraded human—allows one to recognize at once, through "nonaction" and this special kind of empathetic thinking, that these worlds are by no means "empty." It allows us to recognize this other, alien manner of functioning in the world with all seriousness (and attention), for all its tensions, anxieties, and social phobias as an existence *par excellence.* Finally, it allows us to describe, as Valentine once urged (1968: 120), impoverished people's fully fledged experiences and ways of being, i.e., to describe the internal, cultural world of the degraded.

## Toward a Method

### *Maurice Merleau-Ponty—The "Patron Saint" of the Present Ethnography*

As an anthropologist, I am always shifting my focus of attention from the social events currently transpiring in more visible processes, after which I turn my gaze further still—to the social experience of participation in these processes, to the interior world of the person I have met. This "shift in the … centre of gravity," as a Polish anthropologist Katarzyna Kaniowska has phrased it (1995: 24), travels "from cultural objects (phenomena, norms, customs and so forth) to the cultural subjects that make use of them." I have tried to capture this dimension in my research, and a certain self-referential aspect is visible in the objects of my investigation and of my research. Social experience is always joined to a way of being, to activity and to one's impact on events. The shaping of experience itself is therefore affected by the socially manufactured conditions in which it is acquired (Berger and Luckmann 1967). As such, the creation of social representations makes the society itself, including the anthropologists, function differently; this fact is not unfamiliar, for, as Paul Rabinow has stated (1996), representations are "social facts."

In a sense, however, this shift extends significantly further and is difficult to perceive clearly. It would seem to be evident that anthropology cannot precisely explain processes or the "facts" of history (though this is precisely upon what it remains based). It often only reports their significance, what is said, thought, and perceived about these facts and events. As a Polish historian Małgorzata Szpakowska has noted (2003: 11), the transformations an anthropologist studies, and the significance

thereof, take place "not only in a quantifiable sphere, but also (and primarily) in the sphere of the consciousness." Yet, how are we to delve into the sphere of the consciousness of the people we study, that is, of my interlocutors and partners? How, from the point of view of the anthropologist, can one speak of another person's experience of "cultural existence"? The custom in anthropology is to try to extract these things from widely differing materials, from tape-recorded statements, from opinions that are jotted down, from filmed events and from many other media—from various records of the reality being researched. These latter materials form the basis for ethnographic texts, in which events are constantly transforming into meaningful content. According to Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics (1981), when situated in an ethnographic reality, Clifford Geertz's "thick description" (1973; see also Clifford 1988a: 37–41), these texts begin to bear within them a certain cultural "world," though one with no direct indicators. This is, therefore, a sphere of indirect ("nonostensive") references, in which meanings are always precipitating from events, a dialectic of events and meanings (Ricoeur 1981: 205). On every occasion there occurs a step beyond the framework of knowledge inhabited by the discourse participants, the knowledge that indicates "me," "you," "the environment," etc. As Ricoeur writes (1981: 202), these are "non-situational references which outlive the effacement of the [world]."

We might say, however, that this knowledge is only a fragmentary version of reality, which, in many respects, turns it into elaborated stories, fiction revealing the ethnographic content (Clifford 1988a; 1988b). Moreover, the very ethnographic authority that stands behind this knowledge is a kind of covert poetics of the ethnographer's text (ibid.). It thus turns out that written ethnography that records other people's realities is always an arbitrary step in writing. This was, after all, what gave birth to the crisis of representation and the literary turn in anthropological methodology. What, therefore, is the relationship between the reality encountered in the field and the manner in which it is recorded and represented? What is the relationship between the discourse, the material of events and instances that take place, to use Emil Beneviste's definition of "instance of discourse" (see Clifford 1988a; see also Ricoeur 1981: 198), and the ethnographic knowledge presented? Such questions have begun to be asked in ethnography, leading to the discovery of the strategy and inevitable necessity of *textualizing* other people's realities in ethnography, which appears with each new paragraph (Clifford 1988a). James Clifford writes that textualization is the process of extracting a text from a fluctuating and dynamic situation, i.e., from discourse, conversation, from the incidents and events of life,

from "being there." Ethnographic writing about others, about their internal cultural worlds and their internal expression, is thus a kind of action whose main onus rests upon the writer, the anthropologist who inscribes the meaning for good.

Some ethnographers have decided, however, to reverse this relationship, to give the right to action and to creating the text in part (or perhaps mainly) back to the people being encountered and described. Famously, Kevin Dwyer based his *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question* (1982) on conversations he held with Faquir Muhammad, his Moroccan interlocutor, using numerous interspersions in an attempt to show an impromptu and "decentralized" process of creating ethnographic knowledge. To Dwyer's mind, the other person, the ethnographic interlocutor, has more knowledge of "what is being talked about," more than the ethnographer, or at least the possibility should exist to negotiate the meanings of words and behavior. Then the ethnographic interlocutor is able to create his or her own fiction, rupturing the textualized images, the "textures" in which the ethnographer is continually trying to "clothe" them (ibid.: 275–276). This awareness of the "vulnerability" to wounding or to "breaking" the line of thought then becomes a method of practicing ethnography.[3]

I cannot fully agree, however, with the vision of humanity or the subject of the ethnographic research, presented before us here. From this perspective, after all, the ethnographic interlocutor, whose statements and way of being in the world the ethnographer attempts to grasp and collect, is a person who, to some degree, tries to "play" and "negotiate" with his or her cultural knowledge, building its narratives, images, and approximations. At any rate, this vision keeps both the ethnographer and the interlocutor within the sphere of the "discourses" and "texts" they create—and this is precisely the perspective of textual anthropology, or the "reality of the text." Then, however, the "discourse" or "real-life situation" in which everything an ethnographer sees, hears, and feels is a fiction created by the native information source, a fiction of the world in which they live, not unlike the other fiction ethnographers create in tandem: the fiction of the other ("ethnographic fiction") and the fiction of themselves—i.e., of the ethnographer—becomes the "fiction of ethnography" (Clifford 1988b: 80). Consequently, this is a perspective in which both people seem to have their cultural equipment at the ready, and given that this is a certain linguistic world, they can choose whether to make it accessible to the other (Burszta 1992: 127–128). At any rate, the natives manage this knowledge themselves, or at least they are conscious of the fact that they can be "making it accessible" (and, to some degree, indeed they can); this concerns knowledge concealed

from strangers, though in a way that concurs with an unconscious cultural *praxis.* Another consequence follows: the world presented by the other person becomes, from this perspective, a creation (as opposed to a work), and in this way it departs from reality itself. As Wojciech Burszta argues, "discourse in a sense 'evades' reality's control, as the world created in its framework is one possible world, an imagined one" (1993: 195). I do not believe, however, that this is the case. "Imagined" cultural knowledge does not, in the majority of cases, forfeit its reality. It generally appears only at the moment of movement, at the moment when this cultural world is "set in motion," and particularly in the case of the most internal, reflexive actions. As Gordon Mathews has phrased it (2000: 13), this serves as its invisible and very real "bedrock basis," or, as Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland similarly opine, it is what one sees *with,* but seldom what one sees (quoted in Hastrup 1995: 51). Our most internal, idiosyncratic behavior can be said to act in reality, though it does often remain invisible. "No one ever actually *saw* a social relation, a kinship system or a cosmology," Hastrup writes (1995: 48), to which we might add that these things do, after all, form the trajectories of our lives, our struggles, our successes, and our tragedies as well. This is why, on a certain level of cultural behavior, it is not true that this internal world of cultural actions severs itself from reality—or at least not in the environments where I conducted my research. Nor was the ethnography that came about there an unconstrained "knowledge" of any sort. As Rabinow has written, transparent ethnographies do not exist.

In her anthropological study of self-awareness of customs (based on the analysis of letters, diaries, and other written testimonies), Małgorzata Szpakowska (2003: 12–13) writes that she is incapable of accessing the "internal realities" of her research subjects as "a subject among subjects." After all, subjects do participate in a shared world of "views, perceptions, opinions and convictions," which leads them to develop designed or created images of the world and themselves. A moment later, however, she adds that the statements she collected "were always formulated in a code of sorts, and did not necessarily match the author's intention (to say nothing of their adherence to the facts)" (ibid.). This is linked to what Georg Simmel once demonstrated, Szpakowska (ibid.: 13) writes further, that often what others say is not the same as their "inner reality"—what they say is only a "transformed," "teleogically directed, reduced, and recomposed" version of this "inner reality" (Simmel 1964: 312). To my mind, this is a key point. On the basis of my ethnographic practice I have adopted the notion, like Simmel, or like Maurice Bloch, Madagascar ethnographer and author of *How Do We Think They Think? Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory and Literacy* (1998),

that what people say is quite often a fairly inadequate key to how they think and live (ibid., particularly the chapter entitled "Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science"), which means that a culture's inner world does not hold easy equivalents in words, declarations, and behavior. To a substantial degree, this is a kind of "silent" or "wordless" knowledge with no explicit definition (ibid.; see also the chapter "What Goes Without Saying: The Conceptualization of Zafimaniry Society"). As we all know, however, this invisible reality and cultural knowledge does exist, and it shapes our behavior, our way of being, and our perception in a very real way. This is another reason why the "transformed," "reduced," and "recomposed" version of this reality is not merely a negative value, or a "curtain." I would say it stands as more of a challenge, to look at the world of culture in a way that allows us to perceive the reality that is actually transpiring, a reality whose words and declarations are often merely distant relatives. I would say that this reality is at the very least "perceptible," and that the texts and fictions of both the ethnographer and the subject of his or her research change very little.

But why, indeed, is it "perceptible"? I would say it is because the subjects of the statements or the cultural behavior, much like the ethnographer, are people of "flesh and blood," and they are continually interested in the processes going on all around them, as, for example, that the sun is "very hot today out in the fields." Put simply, they have real bodies and no less real worlds. This is a foundation for my ethnographic knowledge, an ethnography based on perceiving the horizon of the body (and the world). This is even the primary condition that allows one to encounter another, different person at all. This is not my own observation, of course, but rather an idea imported from the phenomenological "patron saint" of the present work, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The social phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty has been most perceptively outlined against the backdrop of phenomenological traditions in the social sciences by Herman Coenen (1989), and then as part of the anthropology of Thomas Csordas (1990; 2001a [1994]). Coenen has shown that, as compared to the classical social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, Merleau-Ponty went further: insofar as the I-Other relationship in Schütz does not result in any real knowledge of subjects, the latter's work provides room for the body, and a shared orientation toward the world, some form of understanding and coexistence (Coenen 1979). A communication of sorts therefore transpires through the body. Subjects see the world with a certain anonymity of seeing in the backs of their minds; this facilitates the act of seeing, but in itself it is impossible to comprehend, as one cannot, after all, "see from everywhere" (see Merleau-Ponty 2002: 79). The world is thus a constant derivative of

interwoven (ibid.: 171) and returning acts of perception and expression (Merleau-Ponty 1973). In and through the horizon of its anonymity, it is always simultaneously assigned to a concrete subject, and only his or her perspective allows for its existence and its confrontation with another person's view. In short, seeing and being in the world are always tied to a particular body, and they are always "somebody's."

In this way, Merleau-Ponty delves into a preverbal, vital level of being in the world where everything is confronted anew. One might also say that he delves into a level of abrupt, spontaneous movement of the cognitive/experiential world, toward "untamed" or "undomesticated thoughts." As Polish philosopher Stanisław Cichowicz writes, these "reside in the heart of the human *praxis,*" a "landscape of data for exploring and reshaping that emerges from unprocessed being" (1999: 11). As such, this is also an archaic source of Claude Lévi-Strauss's search for the roots of ethnographic knowledge about the world. It was this dynamic image of phenomenological "savage perception," as Merleau-Ponty himself called it, that lit the way for Lévi-Strauss in the latter's research; *The Savage Mind* (1994 [1964]) was even dedicated to the memory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his famous essay "The Science of the Concrete," he wrote of a moving, sensory (physical) field, within which these internal worlds of culture, forms of bricolage, of "speaking with reality," were continually being produced. In similar fashion, Merleau-Ponty wrote, "just as nature finds its way to the core of my personal life and becomes inextricably linked with it, so behavior patterns setle into that nature, being deposited in the form of a cultural world" (2002: 405). But what significance does this have for the anthropology of culture and for my subject, the experience of social degradation, and for the social being as such?

The significance of this hermeneutics of the body and world is simply vast for the practice of ethnography. Firstly, it is possible to situate this primary communication, this largely preverbal *praxis,* in the sphere of field events and other people's ways of living, the worlds in which they live. The coexistence of the ethnographer and other people in the center of a field of practices is somewhat in opposition to the notion of an ethnography of "subjects struggling against one another," which, to a large degree, excludes such communication (in the pretextual sphere). Instead of a perspective of mutual suspension of the subjects' consciousness, their mutual "annihilation" to allow only one of them to exist (the "either you or I" strategy, existence through negation, as Sartre presented it), phenomenology extracts a world in which the "I" meets another person. As a result, their worlds coexist, even if they clash. How is this possible? Merleau-Ponty says that when the "I" encounters a "you," the world

is equipped with a "shift." This shift takes place in either cooperation or counteraction. Encountering another person thus entails a reorganization of the world; it forces us to apprehend, and makes our apprehension adopt a new way of being toward its objects, forcing the entire field to "shift." As such, encountering another world is also a form of knowledge of this shift, while the whole phenomenological *inter-monde* facilitates this (lack of) knowledge—another person truly becomes the "other" when, as Merleau-Ponty writes, they become what they are: themselves—i.e., "unlimited" beings, "an outrage for objective thought" (2002: 406).

This allows the inclusion of those "incomprehensible" structures of cultural being in ethnographic reflections, it allows me to note the enormous role played by the practice of moaning and sorrow at the collapsing, "sickly" world (Rakowski 2006b), and to grasp the local manner of using certain key words, such as "nerves" (Low 2001 [1994]). These led me to a nonverbal lived experience, and, at the same time, to a nonlinguistic "world."[4] At this juncture, however, it is primarily the incomprehensible inner universe of culture that emerges, incomprehensible because of its new image of indirect, nonostensive references to the "world in which people live." As I have said, this "world" and all its images go hand in hand with a "vulnerability"; its presence and foreignness, after all, force a reorganization of "my" world and simultaneously reveal parts of the world of "others." Such ethnographic knowledge is, therefore, constantly giving way under the pressure of the other world, in which I participate as an ethnographer. It is constantly "trembling," "left open," it is veiled, then revealed—it is "practically invisible" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 75). One might say, in sum, that in order to be "vulnerable to wounding," one has to have a body.

Secondly, the process of accessing this "internal reality" looks entirely different. Here I must return once more to Merleau-Ponty. He demonstrates that a field exists between subjects that comes before texts or any other kinds of "permanent expression" (Dilthey). This is a position of an "anonymous life" (see Merleau-Ponty 2002: 404), a horizon filled with quiet activity, where the experience of what is found in the outside world is located. Only then does an orientation and dependency on the world or, in other words, on the body (the experience of pain, for instance), appear between these subjects. The lion's share of this "reality" is, therefore, in itself preverbal and prelinguistic, and this very reshaping—as per the phenomenological description—is "merged and reshaped" in a way that allows all sorts of "ruptures" and "incomprehension." This sphere is accessible, but never in full. It always remains open. The ethnographer's role is that of the constant

observer, ready for anything. This observer creates a description of the world, which is less given (*dany*) than assigned (*za-dany*) (Tokarska-Bakir 1995: 14), and through the "shifting" of this world sees the results in his or her observations themselves. I should like to emphasize, however, that this world is neither their "presentation" nor their "representation." It does not resemble a foundation, but is "merely an attempt to describe" (Migasiński 1995), dependent on the situation and on the concrete subjects, which are always different.

We might, therefore, state that ethnography is a record of a mutual cultural "cultivation" of the body and the world, an experience ever present in the transformations of the world, and simultaneously in the subjects' "internal reality."[5] This is a description of a cultural landscape that incorporates all its "past actions" (Ingold, 1992), one might say, the experience of the body, or its "earlier" form of speech; it takes place through action, through being in the world, or indeed, in the material world, in things. After all, things change alongside experience. We might take, for example, a candle flame that, when a child touches it, literally becomes "burning"—it becomes another being (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 60). In contemporary ethnography, research has begun on certain silent physical acts that contain the most vital social experiences, giving a significance to events that have never been acknowledged, creating a "vacuum" in the historical sciences (Bloch 1998: 67–70). This is a silent oral history, one that exists beyond rulers' projects and decisions, beyond the central facts in the history of events (Thompson 2000: 3–8). As such, this is a history which serves people standing in the wings of crucial political events and decisions, very often so "voiceless" people—the poor and the socially degraded (ibid.: 109; Tarkowska 2000a: 30–31; Buchowski 2003: 119).

### *Method: (Lack of) Ethnographic Knowledge*

What, then, is my subject? What kind of reality am I trying to render? I shall try to respond to these questions once again, this time shifting the response to the field of (ethnographic) research. As Florian Znaniecki has noted (1973: 28), this is, above all, "someone else's" reality, not mine, and is, therefore, always the experience of concrete subjects (Merleau-Ponty). As an anthropologist, it is precisely this sphere of culture I seek to research. True, this is a sphere that exists, to some degree, nowhere and everywhere; it is found, as is customary to say, at the "crossroads between worlds," i.e., that of researchers and their subjects, their interlocutors (Kubiak 1997: 11; Zimniak-Hałajko 2000: 111). As I have mentioned, it is a participation in the oral substance of someone's life "as it happens," and a participation in the social process of creating another

person's experience. To my mind, however, owing to its very nature, this sphere has very seldom been compellingly communicated, which is partly why I have chosen to call it the territory of anthropological/ethnographic (lack of) professional knowledge. This knowledge or, plainly speaking, ethnographic experience, has often been the subject of reflection, though it has continually been bypassed and pushed into the sphere of wordless practices. These experiences are, in fact, often extra-verbal, practical, and intuitive, precisely the kind that cannot be written down, but can only be applied.

I will try, therefore, to present the premises of my methodology, and at the same time, the "cosmology" of the following research, the special character of the reality that was encountered in this fashion, a reality that had experienced the "great change" and post-transformation degradation. This is precisely the level of professional lack of knowledge, a sphere of experience that is most difficult to communicate. It is the ability to conduct an ethnographic conversation or interview, the ability to create a delicate and impromptu set of questions, evasions, new encounters, the ability to understand knowing silences, or when to drop or pursue a topic, and so forth. As such, it is a level of knowledge that remains hidden and silent; for indeed, how is one to speak of it? Precisely—at times it cannot be expressed.[6] I do believe, however, that the value of the existence of beings of ethnographic knowledge should not be denied simply because it cannot be communicated. After all, there does exist something like an *ethnographic experience.* In speaking of experience, I do not have in mind a quasi-biographical reflection on the anthropologist's private emotions, anxieties, or moods, which emerge during the course of the field research. Nor am I speaking of an autoethnography or ethnographic self-analysis/self-reflection (on self-conscious, reflexive ethnography). By *ethnographic experience* I am referring to something far more straightforward. I mean experience conceived as a certain practical ability, a skillful practice, that is, what we are thinking about when we say that we have had some kind of experience from having accomplished a task. As an anthropologist, I believe that I begin to have experiences when I spend time in another person's reality.

Therefore, contrary to recent belief, it is research experience, and not "the act of writing" (the anthropologist is "one who writes"—see Geertz 1973: 35), that marks the identity of the anthropologist. This was a fundamental discovery for me: conducting ethnography is, to some degree, tied to its prior absence and then, a certain presence. This comes from the fact that beginning every research means setting off on a long and winding road, and what we anticipate might not turn out to be there at all. Often—at least when the ethnography is truly interesting—it is

not there. The subject of ethnography is, therefore, such that it is always being created, it is evolving in time. This is the basic attribute of anthropological work, of the anthropological experience. How, then, does this subject come to be? How does anthropology create its subject? This is a question posed by Johannes Fabian in his well-known book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983), devoted to temporality and the process of ethnography. At one point he writes, "Fieldwork, demanding personal presence and involving several learning processes, has a certain time-economy" (ibid.: 89). In the creation of ethnography, there is, consequently, a certain tension in time—and on a range of different levels.

I would now like to recall some of my own research: I was conducting research in a place where people were occupied with and interested in "digging holes." In the former mining town of Wałbrzych, a city with tremendously high unemployment, several thousand jobless men worked through the entire year digging surface coal in what are called "bootleg mines" (the Polish *biedaszyb* literally means "poverty shaft") in order to support themselves and their families. Here is an extract from my research experiences.

On the first day of my research, before I had seen the bootleg mines, two men covered in coal dust carrying picks and mining helmets passed me in a lush meadow on the edge of town. They looked utterly bizarre, I would even say unreal. A few days later, after I had got to know them and was returning with them through the fields to their homes, I realized that the coal dust signified an active, working bootleg miner. The people we passed immediately recognized this, and stopped to ask them about coal, and to strike up deals for sales and delivery. I then started observing this more closely. It turned out, for instance, that private city transport did not charge the diggers, and their only proof of their occupation was the coal dust covering their bodies and clothing. It also turned out that the diggers were not allowed to sit down on the buses if they were riding "dirty." Some time later, I heard many stories from them about the St. Barbara's Day festivities in the bootleg mines: on that day, the diggers go "clean," as they say, spread a table with a clean tablecloth, and then drink a few toasts to each other's health. But it was only a half year later, when we met for St. Barbara's Day, that I truly understood what it meant to go "clean"—they were all scrubbed, their hair combed and their clothing clean and pressed. This created a tremendous contrast with the black and "dirty" bootleg mines where they worked on a daily basis. From then on, I began to turn my attention to this: after their workday was finished, the diggers turned into very clean people, and took very good care of themselves.

A few weeks later I started speaking with the diggers' wives as well. The wives of the teams with whom I worked kept their distance from the bootleg mines. "My woman wouldn't come here," one of the diggers told me, "not for all the money on earth. She doesn't even want to hear me talk about it. When I come back from digging holes, she always says [laughs]: 'Don't kiss me, you're all dirty.'" As it turned out, however, during the time I lived there, she cleaned his work clothes, soaking his black, sooty clothing in the attic of their old building, and then washing them in an old-fashioned machine. Her husband was not allowed to enter the flat in his dirty clothes. Every day after work he left everything on the doorstep and entered the home wearing little more than his underwear. These actions took on a certain changeless, even ritualized order.

Then I recalled the decades when these people worked in the Wałbrzych mines, recalled the shower rooms, in which they invariably washed themselves before returning clean to the buses, to the town, to their families. It occurred to me that the shower room marked a boundary between, on the one hand, the dirt and the mine, and the cleanliness and life outside the mine on the other. The division between life before the shower room (in the mine everyone addressed each other in the familiar form, regardless of age or position) and after the shower room (when they returned once more to the formal form of address) was clear. There was a sharp rift between the work in the black depths and the clean world outside of the mine. Now this mine had risen to the surface. For when the shower rooms ceased to be, the dirt of the mine, the black coal dust, spread far and wide, along with its strength as a signifier, and in this new environment, powerful and mutually contradictory meanings began to multiply.

### *Pretextual Ethnography*

This is a certain fragment of the ethnographic knowledge I gained during the course of my research. How did this knowledge occur? How is ethnography created? What was the process of its origin? How is its subject created? We shall look into this process in a few consecutive stages.

(1) As I have stated, ethnography comes from a special kind of absence. What does this mean? I went to the Polish countryside during the time of the great change because I (the ethnographer) had never been there, nor had my ethnography of this place (or perhaps, of this event) previously existed. But this also means that after a few days, as bootleg mines became everyday reality and lost all trace of the "exotic," they began to "bore" me. The work of these people became no more than hard work. I kept asking myself whether there

was anything anthropological in what I was seeing. Were my activities there, in fact, anthropology? At that moment, it was impossible to say what was part of the knowledge being acquired and what was not, impossible to discern what should really be of interest to me. The result was a certain fear of the void, an anxiety born from lack of knowledge. I worked as the diggers did, trying to understand how their work affected their place in the local society, trying to understand how they spoke of it, seeing neither the dirt, nor what they did with it. Only later did I recall how, in the first days of my research, I wanted to help work in the bootleg mine, and it was decided that it would be better if I refrained from going along, because I would get dirty. Someone even said contemptuously: "The hell he's going to, just wait and see, *he'll get all dirty* [emphasis mine]". I also recalled how, in some holes, a number of the diggers removed their outer layers and gave them to me, so that I could go down wearing something "dirty," as they put it. At the time, I paid little attention to this.

(2) The result of all this is an ethnographic way of looking—and in tandem an ethnography, as such. This means that after some time one's perception becomes attuned to hearing essential things. After all, one's way of seeing and observing things, of hearing voices and understanding them, changes from one day to the next. I initially took no notice of the hygienic practices in the diggers' homes, and only later did I begin to observe them carefully, from a special perspective. As I gained knowledge, I learned to hear and see in a more observant manner. "One time I was visiting my neighbor," a digger told me. "I was dressed up, all clean, and I asked him if maybe he wanted to make a bit of money." This sentence stuck with me, particularly the phrase "all clean." Then I knew that my perception was changing and that I was learning something. After a few weeks of research I had acquired new cognitive skills, i.e., I had begun paying attention to things that had earlier seemed irrelevant, or that I simply had not noticed. Beforehand, I had been looking and I had seen practically nothing, I had heard what my companions in the bootleg mines were saying, allowing the most important things to slip by unnoticed, perhaps a fairly frequent experience among anthropologists.

(3) The problem was that I made some decisions and picked up on some things, while hundreds of other possibilities kept presenting themselves, to acknowledge other elements as vital and "significant." For instance, while working at the bootleg mine, I realized the great significance of hearing/physical practice or knowledge that

was involved in doing this sort of work, and to what extent it could become routine and entirely unremarkable. As one digger put it in an unsolicited statement, "I know that already—you've got to understand, I've got feelers like an animal … the structure gives the signals … if it all goes to shit, well, that's that." Let us take a look at one more fragment (a statement from another digger): "Birch tends to snap like matchsticks, but the spruce generally creaks. I've got an allergy to birch. … It just snaps right away, it's dangerous, while spruce just cracks a bit at a time … it gives you signals, and then you don't just sit there and wait, you know you've got to beat it. … Recently I was sitting there and I heard the spruce crack, so I picked up a roof timber, punched it in, made some supports … and it's all still standing there to this day." Soon thereafter, I discovered that they used only "quiet" manual equipment (picks, saws, shovels, hoists, cradles, sieves, sieve stands); there was even a cult of manual work, in part associated with the danger of the police or city patrol hearing the noise from the machinery. Diggers increasingly did their work by night because bootleg mines are essentially illegal. At the same time, diggers were capable of spending hours discussing their self-made constructions for sifting coal, the equipment's virtues and new ideas for improving it. At this point the fear of there being no substance for ethnography was suddenly replaced by an overabundance of associations, an overabundance of potential knowledge. Then what the researcher has originally encountered as a void becomes an ethnographic swamp that pours in from all sides.

(4) Yet things are even more complicated. Numerous inconsistencies and sudden accelerations appear in fieldwork, such as unexpected "twists" in the way things are seen and apprehended. When I attended some St. Barbara's Day celebrations, suddenly, as if touched by a magic wand, I gleaned all the ethnographic "facts" concerning the dirt in their full scope and total contrast, and then I understood a great deal more than what I had known to date. I had the impression that curtains had parted, revealing knowledge that had been concealed from me. Another moment when "the curtains parted" occurred when I lived with a digger's family in an old building in Boguszów-Gorce. It was during one chance evening that I noticed something that had totally escaped me before—the pile of dirty clothes, covered in coal dust, lying right in front of the doorway.

I shall attempt to make a summary. I perceived many silent and heterogeneous processes of gaining knowledge, which were difficult to communicate. Firstly, the subject of my ethnography was noticed and

captured, thus leaving behind the seeming impression of the nonexistence of the explored reality, i.e., in some way, I perceived something essential. Secondly, a dynamic and fluctuating, yet operative, cognitive competence, a certain professional concentration (or sensitivity), emerged. Thirdly, a process occurred whereby the strands and elements deserving attention multiplied, causing a spontaneous selection of field observations, opening an attempt to harness the chaos of the various research paths. Fourthly, as a researcher I am constantly dealing with a (cultural) reality in which there are sudden and accidental plot twists, whereby things are unexpectedly revealed, taking the form of a temporal event.

This bears testimony to the idea that ethnography is a long-term process, a kind of event that has a "time economy." On the one hand, it is made up of more or less conscious research steps, on the other, of unpredictable plot twists, of unexpected discoveries and associations that have a real effect on the progress of the ethnography being created. During this process an operative knowledge, an ability, develops. How is one to pass on this knowledge? How to write about it? The problem is that this knowledge originates in the event, implying, as Johannes Fabian (1983) demonstrates in his book, a certain "coevalness" of being between the anthropologist and his or her subjects. Only from this original encounter do the subsequent rungs of the typical ethnographic distance emerge, such as Geertz's (1988a) "being there" and "writing here," or perhaps "being then" and "writing now," which are integrated later on in the ethnographic, present-tense description. Thus, the grammatical tense used in ethnographic writing bears this complicated time reference to the real research subject (discourse events, for example). The result is a suppression and hiding under the "ethnographic present" the processual aspect of fieldwork—the temporal and noncoherent aspect of field events, filled with ruptures and accelerations, is then buried beneath the ethnographic message. However, it is only when the perspective includes decision-making, plot twists, and learning processes (the perception of such things as coal dirt) that this layer of functioning and practical, unspoken knowledge, of ethnographic experience, begins to be visible.

The process of acquiring ethnographic experience is also made visible in the practice of taking field notes. This action is directly linked with the creation of written (i.e., materialized) ethnographic knowledge, which might be why this unvoiced process becomes apparent in it. Field notes, after all, are not merely revealed knowledge, or knowledge that is written and textual. As Roger Sanjek observes in his introduction to the excellent *Field Notes: The Makings of Anthropology* (1990a), notes (the silent voice of anthropology) are a fragment of an exceptionally embar-

rassing and privatized professional knowledge (Kaniowska 1999: 49–50; Rabinow 1996: 28–58; Zimniak-Hałajko 2000: 115). Moreover, this process of jotting down notes is further complicated by the fact that one must oscillate between various processes (temporalizations)—the writing itself, in which we keep a distance from the subject, and full participation in a given event. According to Rena Lederman, author of the outstanding *Pre-texts for Ethnography: On Reading Field Notes,* notes thus become dangerous, as they are "challenges to the memory" (1990: 73). This less concerns recollections, as such, than the particular temporal process of creating knowledge in use, in practice, in a word, in the field. Spread out over time, notes are constantly selecting from shifting conclusions, separating the most correct conclusions from momentary phantasmagoria, shuffling the order of various elements. Where should the focus be? What should be remembered? What should be written down?

In the form of field notes, ethnography thus slips out from the sphere of the written text. Notes are a pretext, a documentation of the pretextual sphere of ethnography. The "headnotes"[7] that Simon Ottenberg (1990: 144–146) describes are of this very nature. These "thick notations," arising in the head of the researcher like mnemonic knots where they lead their own strange lives, sometimes for several years at a stretch, remain in the ethnographic memory and are supplemented with written notes. They are entirely private, intuitive, and almost subconscious; and they record a reality with no concrete reference point, something Fabian, in one of his lectures, called ethnographic "non-referential memory." This is a kind of spontaneity that can be entirely incomprehensible for the writer himself. In my own notes, for instance, I found the note "Junk and cascades!" and to this day, I cannot decipher what I might have had in mind. A note also contains a condensed version of the knowledge acquired. It is a moment in which the text is in the process of being created, is emerging, and, to some extent, is still in the realm of the unwritten text—that of the events in the field and the roles being played out. It is ethnography that comes about from these half-chaotic, half-precise movements—first as a process, then as a path, *The Ethnographer's Path* (Sanjek 1990b: 398–400), and only then as a closed description, a closed text. As such, there is a certain continuum from pretext to text. As James Clifford precisely phrased it (1990: 51–52), the first thing to appear is the "inscription," which is fairly fleeting and pretextual, then the "transcription," which is distanced and temporalized, and finally the "description," a product that is often final. This process of recording ethnographic knowledge is at least potentially unending. It splendidly depicts the layer of professional ethnographic (lack of) knowledge, the

pretextual element of the discipline. As such, ethnography is more an art of remembering and of perceiving than an art of writing culture (Kaniowska 1999: 53–57). It records the mysterious process by which pretextual human activity crosses beyond individual events and begins to mean something on the outside (Ricoeur 1981; 1989), albeit in an utterly fragile and phantasmagoric way. Nonetheless, it does have some significance—and this means it is worth recording.

We are sketching out a tension between the position of ethnographers as researchers who carry some experience inside of themselves, and ethnographers as writers who carry in themselves texts, textual statements. I believe that, in the latter case, the identity of the professional ethnographer is clearly assimilated by the act of writing. Supporters of the "Writing Culture" paradigm (Crapanzano, Tyler, also Dwyer) make a passionate appeal for the ethnographic text as a lively echo for the preservation of field dialogues and heteroglossia. By the same token, however, they approach ethnography as a discipline that quite naturally includes the art of writing, devoting all their energies to writing; in a sense they are graphocentric or scriptocentric (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). Stephen Tyler attempted to take notice of these writerly efforts of postmodern ethnography in his well-known text, *Post-Modern Ethnography: From the Document of the Occult to the Occult Document* (1986). Therein Tyler proposes a range of practices for writing ethnography in which no kind of closed text ought ever to arise. He wages a war on all representations implanting themselves into written anthropology, and he broadens the ethnographic "crisis of representation" on all sides. He attempts to shift all representation into evocation, thus focusing attention on the vocal act of ethnographic writing. As such, he creates a kind of performance that disrupts all sense of professionalism and security and opposes all records of experience (ibid.: 137–138), all mimesis, evading all the traps of textualization in advance. I dare say that, according to Tyler, ethnography is a certain postmodern exorcism conducted upon the textualized product of an ethnography that remains modernist. It is an attempt to animate a living, many-voiced field experience in the moment of writing—albeit after the text. One might say that it is post-textual ethnography. What if we were to attempt to go even further back? What is the source of this whole situation of conversation or living discourse, I wonder? Along with the whole process of negotiating and creating significance, the process of creating the field of the text (filled with momentary relationships of domination and servitude), all the attempts made by works called "Writing Culture," I should like to stress, aim at restoring an immediate dialogue. How are we, therefore, to cross from discourse (the discursive event) to text without the discourse

adopting a petrified form filled with "hidden authority"? This was one of the chief tasks of the ethnographic avant-garde. What if we were to attempt to go even further back? What is the source of this whole situation of conversation or living discourse, I wonder? How did the authors of the ethnographies even end up there? What were their courses through the field, what were their concepts and their chaotic notes? With what ethnographic pretexts did they come in contact, and with which did they become so well acquainted that they ceased to notice them? I have nothing against writing anthropologists—it is, after all, a splendid thing to be able to write an anthropology, or to write about the writing of anthropology; and were it not for their texts, I myself would scarcely be capable of writing today. I would, however, like to delve further within the field marking the identity of the discipline, into my ethnographic (lack of) professional knowledge—a knowledge most difficult to relate. The silent path of the ethnography that thus evolves, the professional lack of knowledge, *The Makings of Anthropology*, is, I believe, my primary anthropological experience and my primary skill. Alongside the occultization and mobilization of the lifeless ethnographic text (the lifeless document) proposed by Stephen Tyler, I propose the notion of the mobilization, the animation, and perhaps even the occultization of the silent, nonverbal, and pretextual practice of professional lack of knowledge in the field, of ethnographic experience. It awaits its explorers and its most difficult language, which may, perhaps, enable it to communicate this world.

## The Most Bitter Side of the Polish Transformation: Fields of Research

### *The "New Poverty"*

Looking back, we can see quite clearly that the system change that began following 1989, apart from its good sides, had the effect of bringing sudden poverty and economic collapse to many social groups. The change—i.e., the shift from People's Republic (PRL) socialism (1952–1989) to a democratic state, from a centrally driven economy to a market economy—ushered in new and largely unforeseeable social and economic processes, and an entirely new reality along with them.

We might say that the transformation that occurred was accompanied by an unpredictable effect. There appeared an entirely new world with new regulations (such as the experience of the free market economy), one that was incomprehensible to many. Most social groups continued to live according to the old reality, and thus came clashing up against

the new and (subjectively speaking) unpredictable post-transformation reality (Tarkowska 1993a: 88–89; Sztompka 2000; Szpakowska 2003: 18). Many people had difficulty finding their feet in this new situation. For many this process quite unexpectedly brought unemployment and resulted in poverty. A new social experience emerged: the coming of an unforeseen change, a "bad change" from the outside, creating a certain "temporal dimension" of the social transformations (Tarkowska 1993a). State factories, an enormous network of state-owned farms, and many other socialized village factories (sewing shops, dairies, tanneries, etc.) were liquidated as part of the broadly defined deindustrialization of whole regions. To these experiences we ought to add the economic collapse of the countryside, which shouldered the heaviest costs of the transformation (Kocik 2001; Szafraniec 2002). It was in the countryside that a severe economic recession set in, a sharp dip in the viability of (mainly small and medium-sized) farms, and an end to all centralized regulations, guaranteed purchases, and ensured farm viability, be it for larger or smaller amounts. This resulted in new, sprawling regions of unemployment, poverty, and want. This phenomenon was called the "new poverty" (Tarkowska 2000c: 54–59); it came about in the sphere of a newly democratic state, and was all the more striking in that it was taking place across a vast area (Beskid 1999; Golinowska 1997) and in full view (Tarkowska 2000a). Piotr Sztompka (2000) has referred to this widespread social experience as the "trauma of the Great Change."

The experience of sudden impoverishment and the existence of poverty are not, of course, devoid of historical background, and are partly rooted in the processes of the previous decades, or even of previous centuries. As many authors have demonstrated (Tarkowska 2000a: 9–12; see also Beskid 1992; 1999), there were entire spheres of poverty in the PRL years, though these were kept invisible (and still are, to speak from today's perspective), which is why the contemporary phenomenon of poverty among certain groups stands out so clearly. Poverty and social inequality were imperceptible during the PRL period for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was the centralized policy of almost compulsory employment and various other social benefits, bonuses, coupons, factory vacations, credit relief, and so on (Tarkowska 2000a: 11), as well as the guaranteed purchase and pick-up of farm crops. Secondly, owing to the principle that poverty could not exist in a socialist state, the topic of the phenomenon itself was made a political taboo. The few sociological works on the subject were never published (ibid.: 9); moreover, the word *poverty* had no right to exist in the public language, as Elżbieta Tarkowska writes further. Various euphemisms were used, however, to speak of the poor, such as "insufficiency" or "people with limited powers

of consumption" (Czechoslovakia). Meanwhile, poverty did, of course, exist in the PRL—and above all, it touched retirees, pensioners, unqualified laborers, families with many children, families with problems of alcoholism, and single mothers (Gliński, quoted in Tarkowska 2000c: 53–54). The scope of poverty increased in the 1980s, and when the society of the People's Poland entered the transformation period, a substantial portion was already hovering on the verge of poverty (Golinowska 1997: 311–312; Tarkowska 2000c: 54).

There is, however, a certain continuity of experiences and spheres of poverty, deriving from pre- and postwar Poland. Poverty is, after all, a phenomenon present in various states and in various epochs (Tarkowska 2000c: 49; Geremek 1989; Szytełło 1992), while the creation of modern-day spheres of poverty, it turns out, is often largely derived from many previous relationships. In prewar Poland poverty touched a vast portion of the society. Somewhere around one million citizens lived in a state of deprivation, almost below biological capacity for survival (Żarnowski 1992). Though mainly concentrated in overpopulated, work-deprived villages, this deprivation was also present in the industrialized cities, above all during the crisis of the 1930s.[8] Furthermore, people also remembered the poverty and unemployment in the Great Crisis (1929–1935), which produced profound social trauma (Sztompka 2001: 162). One description of these social experiences can be found in the work of Florian Znaniecki (2010), in his (and Thomas's) work on groups of peasant emigrants from overpopulated villages, and in studies on the psychosocial effects of unemployment in city environments and factory housing estates (Zawadzki and Lazarsfeld 1993). A second unrecognized and underexamined wave of unemployment appeared in the 1950s (Tarkowska 2000a: 12), further increasing the postwar level of poverty. As such, various spheres of postwar poverty and shortage had existed long before in Polish society. As Małgorzata Szpakowska has written (analyzing first-hand written social sources, such as reports contained in letters and diaries), it was a time when "shortage and widespread indigence" (2003: 33–39) were experienced. The modernization of living conditions and widespread migration to cities for factory labor during the PRL era (see, among others, Czechowski and Stelmachowski 1990; Czerwiński 1975; Gołębiowski 1990; Kaczyńska 1999; Styk 1994; Marody 1991b: 231–234; Szczepański 1973; Szpakowska 2003: 14–15; Tarkowska Tarkowski 1994: 276; J. Wasilewski 1986; Wódz 1989: 76–79) were thus a natural response to this widespread postwar substandard existence of poverty and overpopulation of the countryside. However, they were also the result of the socialist propaganda of the "great construction," the building of the "new city,"

and the "new man." We ought also to add that in the Stalinist years, this propaganda was preceded by a rhetoric of "cleansing" and "drainage" of the suffocating old quarters of the cities—hotbeds of poverty and all that was "rotten," "diseased," and "tainted" (Tomasik 1999: 95–99).

In the social history of the Polish lands we can therefore trace a certain continuity in the creation of regions of poverty, shortage, and social isolation through the transformations that occurred, which can be translated into a map of these phenomena. The most susceptible are medium-sized cities and industrial monocultures, such as Wałbrzych, Nowa Ruda, Lubsko (Rakowski 2006a), and Żyrardów (Lipko, 2003), with factories that have monopolized the local labor market (Osińska and Śliwińska, quoted in Tarkowska 2000c: 58), and where massive unemployment appeared after the factories were liquidated in 1989. These phenomena took their toll on the old, postindustrial quarters of cities in Upper Silesia and in Łódź, where a great many people apparently lost their industrial jobs. At any rate, there are multiple studies about the poverty of these locations (on Łódź, see, among others, Golczyńska-Grondas 2004; Grotowska-Leder 1998; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1999; on Katowice and the Upper Silesian Industrial Region, see Wódz 1994). It is well known that the post-state farming societies, such as those scattered about the Recovered Territories, particularly in Pomerania, Warmia, and Mazury, in the wildernesses of Bieszczady and the Low Beskids, as well as in many other regions of Poland, also experienced poverty and unemployment after 1989 (Tarkowska 2000e: 90–117), when factory workers were suddenly stripped of their employment. Another poverty-stricken region was the villages of the "Eastern wall" and the lands of the onetime peasant/worker villages, such as the vicinities of Szydłowiec and Skarżysko-Kamienna (the former Central Industrial District), which experienced a very high level of unemployment after the liquidation of heavy industry (Rosner 2002). The village areas in particular were places of invisible poverty and hidden unemployment, where poverty was often scattered over space and buried most deeply (Kocik 2001: 70–71; Tarkowska 2000c: 58–59).

### *Post-Transformation Social Degradation*

This work therefore seeks to examine the social experience of swift impoverishment—a new, post-transformation poverty that, as Tarkowska has noted (2000c: 54), arrived suddenly and was dramatic in its effect. My work principally concentrates on the experiences of groups that were thrust into poverty in Poland after 1989. As I have already mentioned, this "bad change" came unannounced—nobody saw it coming. These groups initially expressed their approval of (or some relief at) the

changes that occurred in the state-owned companies and farms (Tarkowska 2002: 100–101) or the Wałbrzych mines (see chapter 3). Nor was the "free" market feared in the countryside (on the villagers' attitude toward the centrally regulated prices of purchases in 1992 and 1999, see Kocik 2001: 75); later, however, a profound disappointment emerged. Unemployment and the humiliating necessity of relying on welfare (whose colloquial name in Poland derives from the name of Jacek Kuroń) appeared. Later came the loss of rights (the unemployed were prohibited from working off statutory hours, which was vital in gaining rights to welfare) and, finally, the unprofitability of work on many farms. The result was impoverishment and the loss of social security; and more blows followed hard on the heels of the poverty and unemployment, creating private and social trajectories of degradation.

The subject of study and the field of research are thus the experience of a changing reality that took place in these impoverished social groups, and of their ways of functioning in the new world, a world of unemployment and of financial incapacity, both personally and in the old institutions. The former, historically impaired social territories bereft of social capital do not always overlap with the places that experienced this poverty (Tarkowska 2000cd: 59, 66; see also a study on the continuing patterns of culture of prewar farming factories in state-farming societies: Palska 1998). Poverty is primarily represented here in the form of a transition from a person with a stable social status to the status of one who is unemployed, who suffers shortage (later poverty), and who participates in family, social, and private life. The experience of this "bad change" that comes from the outside world is thus, above all, the experience of social and biographical degradation. The world of the degraded after 1989 is the anthropological focus of the present work. Why is degradation the frame I have chosen for my field of study? After all, many methods of grasping and describing poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic impairment, from quantitative socioeconomic indicators (Golinowska 1997: 19–30) to the most subtle, theoretical concepts of the social and political sciences (in terms of the strategy of approach as well, i.e., the prevention of poverty; see Lister 2004; Lepianka 2002: 5–7) can be listed. In the history of research on poverty the consecutive theoretical concepts mark out a definable course. This begins with Oscar Lewis's "culture of poverty" (1968; 1970), through the notion of the "underclass" (Domański 2002: 24–25; Gans 1996; Katz 1999), "dependency culture" (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992), the concepts of marginalization, social exclusion (Frieske 1999; Kowalak 1998; Lepianka 2002; Washington, Paylor, and Harris 2000), and social isolation (Wilson 1987; Lepianka 2002: 18), and proceeds to entirely new strategies

of researching and conceptualizing poverty, shifting the responsibility for its definition onto the shoulders of the research subjects themselves, thus granting them terminological subjectivity (Lister and Beresford 2000; Lister 2004). All these concepts form a certain continuity of change and reorientation, overlapping in various ways and serving different perspectives in describing poverty. They have often been applied in researching impoverished regions in Poland, particularly the concept of the underclass (Golczyńska-Grondas 2004: 38–39; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998; Wódz 1994; Tarkowska 2000e: 116–117). It ought to be added that some of these, particularly the concepts of marginalization and social exclusion, function differently, depending on the research context and specifics (regional, ethnic, national), and so on (Lepianka 2002: 18). In turn, by thinking mainly through concepts of social exclusion and marginalization, and, to some degree, of the underclass (Gans 1996), other thinkers prefer to emphasize the processual nature of the phenomenon of poverty and the dynamics of its transformations, as poverty can then be regarded as a consequence of social changes.

In this study I have chosen the term *degradation* as a way of defining my field of research, as it gains its significance first of all through the temporal perspective: the perspective of impoverishment, the abrupt appearance of unemployment, and the associated loss of social status. Therefore, the temporal dimension is crucial here. It is directly related to the condition of wider economic transition and social change, which started in Poland in 1989. What is more, this notion is both related to individual, biographical perspective and to the wider, or even massive, social experience. Thus, degradation is about facing a certain "external" socioeconomic process, a kind of fate, and about particular reactions to this situation developed along the way. By using this term I am able to capture a certain moment in time and space, the chronotope for the described process and experience. Thus the impoverishment of various groups and field sites, also related to the specific time of transformation, is the main feature of the notion. This gives an important specificity and serves it more appropriately than the notions of social exclusion, marginalization, or "dependency culture," and it is also more specific than the new concepts of conceptualizing poverty. In a work devoted to the general issues of poverty, we may find a few moments when the temporal dimension of the experience of poverty is framing the knowledge; it is usually about the temporality of the everyday experience of poverty. There is also an important reference to the societies of Central and Eastern Europe, where the process of income decline took place on a massive scale and where it was particularly hard to capture poverty even by such measurement tools as relative poverty lines (Lister 2004: 41–42).

Therefore, there is something very specific in the dynamic, temporal dimension of getting under the new socioeconomic conditions in Central and Eastern Europe: the impoverishment, the sudden experience of poverty, the situation of degradation. Using the term *degradation,* I tried to give a clear description of some new conditions and experiences occurring in time—as Dorota Lepianka writes, "the painful degradation processes" (2002: 16). Most importantly, I tried to capture here both changes to the external (social, economic, political) and the internal (psychological, behavioral) reality, to describe methods of social survival (cf. Tarkowska 2000b: 32).

### *Postsocialism: History and Experience*

The experience of unemployment, generally after many years of steady work, was of tremendous significance for my research. The experience of degradation thus goes hand in hand with the capacity to hold down a job, and the associated (self-)expression of one's social (professional, economic, etc.) status. Indeed, it is not only unemployment that signifies degradation and social exclusion (particularly in Western Europe). Often, it is even enough to do work that is below one's qualifications or "under the table," or to do "one-off" jobs and to be poorly remunerated (making it impossible to satisfy personal and family needs) for social exclusion and marginalization to occur (Lepianka 2002: 17). In these circumstances of transformation and abrupt change in Polish reality, both unemployment and the new replacement jobs, often informal and very poorly paid—i.e., the "working poor" type (see Tarkowska 2000b: 37; see also Stanaszek 2004)—were the central causes of poverty and social degradation. In fact, they created the "new poverty" (Tarkowska 2000c: 56–57; cf. Golczyńska-Grondas 2004: 31). Social degradation is thus quite naturally tied to the past. This is why degraded societies are less often groups impoverished and socially impaired from the outset than groups formerly functioning with some capability and financial stability, with families, with a feeling of security ensured by the socialist state, and with sizeable (perhaps even oversized) social status.

Work and life in the PRL period thus become a stable point of reference, and present-day social experiences are closely tied to the past, having the structure of a "changing reality" (Tarkowska 1993b). The past very often becomes the degraded person's "point of departure" (here I am dealing with a narrative, a mythologized rendering, which is, of course, not the same as inauthentic). In such situations, I always encountered a researcher's dilemma: it is extraordinarily difficult to make a uniform picture or "recreation" of the past or a historical reality, as the PRL modernization of the country is, to my mind, an essentially ambiv-

alent phenomenon. On the one hand, it led to the socioeconomic tragedy of loss of freedom under slogans and appearances of progress; on the other, this was a time when stable living conditions were created, a time of progress and education for several generations. In Małgorzata Szpakowska's research on lifestyles and customs, for instance (2003: 33), we can see that in spite of everything, the standard of living, at least technically speaking, increased during the PRL period (Szpakowska writes that a certain "material and civilizational advance" took place). For me as a researcher, this contradiction between the everyday, accustomed life within the People's Republic and its tragic consequences, both during those years and afterwards (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, and Rychard 2000: 17–20), is utterly irreconcilable. This ambivalence about the changes of the PRL period, particularly when apprehended alongside the current changes, is a cognitive threshold I am incapable of crossing. By the same token, it cannot be merely overlooked, and the ever-present "point of departure" or the experiences I have recorded is the inseparable background of these people.[9]

Social degradation as a social experience, the experience of functioning in new and often incomprehensible circumstances, is thus the groundwork of my research (researching the social cost of the system change). In this way, my work falls in line with multidimensional phenomena whose scope goes well beyond Poland, touching the whole of the postcommunist Central and Eastern European bloc, and further still, into the countries that once made up the former Soviet Union (USSR); and it generally fits in with the context of anthropological research on postsocialism (Dunn 2004; Hann 2002a; Humphrey 2002; Schäuble, Rakowski, and Pessel 2006; Kőresaar 2003; Verdery 1996). In the new postsocialist circumstances (during the transformation and with the simultaneous rise of information and globalization), many social labor groups were stripped of almost all their symbolic capital and found themselves at the bottom of the social structure, with no access to material, social, and symbolic goods. In his research in Romania/Transylvania, David Kideckel (2002; 2008) has shown, for example, that the disintegration of the status of workers as a class functioning in the communist era caused this group to shoulder the whole brunt of the recession and the collapse of the socialist economy (2002: 115–116; see also Hann 2002b: 4). This sudden deprivation of goods and privileges from whole social groups is quite characteristic of Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. These groups experienced disorientation on many levels: an incomprehension of the source of their work and their unemployment, an ignorance of the processes of privatization, and, as such, an increased dependency on the unregulated, capitalist market, or even the black

market (Kideckel 2002: 119; Hann 2002b: 11). From this perspective we see entirely new modes of existence in the postsocialist world, modes that became incomprehensible to these groups, in which something was suddenly expected from them (the intentions of these expectations vary) that differed from what had come before, i.e., being socially, economically, and sometimes even politically active. They were also expected to participate in what were often neocapitalist structures (Hann 2002b; Kideckel 2002: 116–118; cf. Domański 2002), for which they possessed neither the requisite knowledge nor the skills. In these new conditions they had to actively attend to their own interests, or hold themselves responsible for their lack of success. This reliance on themselves or on blind fate, in comparison with the former governments that had once organized their lives and employment, makes for a postsocialist "condemnation to freedom," which has been described many times (Marody and Rychard 2000; Rychard and Federowicz 1993; cf. Sztompka 2000: 56–57).

As a subject for anthropological research, the world of postsocialism is thus an extraordinarily complex reality, though it does often betray certain shared attributes in many areas. There is no way to describe these changes without reference to the experiences of the former, socialist system, as many phenomena are organically tied to those of the previous, widely understood social and cultural practices, if only in terms of an "informal economy" or a strategy of "constant camouflage" of personal opinions and the private "I" (Szarota 1995: 210; cf. Tarkowska and Tarkowski 1994: 267). Nor can these changes be described without reference to the former way of being and acting in the socialist state—even if this was acting against the system (see Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, and Rychard 2000: 18–19). One example here is the research into the postsocialist economic relationships in local societies, where an informal "grey" economy continues to be present in some places, as is a familiar relationship with bureaucrats, decision-makers, and an economy based on customs, rituals, games, and barter, or on "talking people around" (Hann 2002b: 9–10; see also Humphrey 2002; Ledeneva 1998). Nonetheless, the post-transformation and postsocialist changes cannot be described through reference to the social practices of the socialist state. Through their dynamic, they are, to some extent, unpredictable, as they have their own disarming sense of process (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, and Rychard 2000: 16–19). Though the heritage of socialism still exits somewhere beneath the transformations, it is primarily a current of grassroots, noninstitutionalized behavior that moves along its own winding trajectory. Suddenly impoverished and disoriented social groups appeared everywhere, finding themselves in the foreign landscape of the

free market and politics, a free social discourse and a free narrative, both in terms of the collective and of themselves. As Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, Mirosława Marody, and Andrzej Rychard claim outright (2000: 19), there is no way to treat these postsocialist transformations in a channeled or teleological fashion; there was no single "real" transformation, for it ran its course in various manners, and is seen differently from different perspectives. It is a crucible of grassroots and institutional transformations combined (though the grassroots perspective is of particular significance here).

The experience of social degradation—the liquidation of factories and a secure farming existence, unemployment, the devaluation of possessions, the necessity of suffering poverty—is one of the private, noninstitutional dimensions of the transformation, and one that is very complex and difficult to describe. It contains many instinctive throwbacks to the "old" structure of the world, to tried-and-true methods of dealing with reality, which are utterly ineffective in the current circumstances. Many of my interlocutors functioned and built their world in the phantasmagoric structure of the socialist economy, and, in a sense of daily practice, *believed* in the system (Hann 2002b: 11); what later transpired was for them a "vacuum" of sorts, an incomprehensible and terrifying process. The disintegration of an old world so deeply rooted in the previous economic system of some social groups (laborers, working villagers, state-farm workers, independent farmers) triggered unpredictable social processes and unanticipated phenomena. We are still trying to grasp these processes, to assign them their sociological or historical significance, given that history follows its own course and bypasses people's experience. Meanwhile, a great deal has occurred there. These people have lived from day to day and have made an ongoing effort, if not only to gain a better tomorrow or to survive, then at least to comprehend, and to find an answer to a question: How is it that things changed so much? How is it that things are the way they are?

## *The Studied Phenomena*

From 2001 to 2006 I conducted my research in Poland among the social groups that were struck by poverty after 1989.[10] The situation of these groups was almost always tied to the liquidation of former workplaces, factories, or mines, or to the loss of farming subsidies and purchase guarantees. At the same time, this research concerns people who were abruptly made impoverished, who were often drawing social welfare payments, living off their own pensions or those of their parents, and also off many informal methods of acquiring sustenance, though these seldom sufficed to provide for themselves and their families. Tarkow-

ska (2000c: 56) notes that for the poverty-stricken in Poland during the transformation period, the following attributes or "factors increasing the probability of being impoverished" were typical: (1) youth, (2) unemployment, often long-term, (3) large families, (4) a low level of education, (5) residence in a small town or a village. She continues, "the unemployed and those involved in farming are over-represented among the poor populations" (ibid.). My research concerns the unemployed workers of closed factories and impoverished farmers—in short, poor people. The profile of my interlocutors differs slightly, however, as a result of the fact that the focus of my research is the processes of impoverishment and social degradation, of the people who experienced the transformation in the most painful fashion. We might, therefore, say that the typical representative of my "research group"—my "subject"—is a poor person who has been unemployed for years (generally since the early to mid-1990s), or is working illegally or at odd jobs (taking advantage of various "ecological niches," such as collecting forest berries). Generally, this person is between the ages of thirty and sixty (more often a man than a woman, as statements from men were the substantial majority), recalling his or her employment in the PRL period (or in the early years of the transformation) and the path to his or her unemployment. It is often a person with a trade- or elementary-school education, from a deindustrialized region, a small or medium-sized town, or a village. The experience of degradation and impoverishment was, therefore, decisive in my choice of interlocutors, my research subjects, and the cocreators of my text.

As I have said, my anthropological interlocutors were experiencing the harshest aspects of the Polish system change—"the other side of the transformation," as *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* journal phrased it (2002, no. 4). The path they walked went from adapting to and acting within the socialist system (while often quite aware of its violence) to exploring the incomprehensible limits of the daily existence they had once forged for themselves.

In describing the structure of the Polish transformation, Marody (2002) has shown that, following 1989, we were dealing with three "streams" of adaptation to the new circumstances. She isolated "privatized" Poland, i.e., the workers in the dynamic commercial companies, generally holding high qualifications, taking risks, and earning substantially; then "state" Poland, i.e., the workers in the "public sector," or the state institutions, the bureaucracy who earned less but who held regular employment and a stable social position (a full-time contract); and finally, "welfare" Poland, i.e., those who received pensions or welfare money. This final category covered people who were receiving and supporting themselves off of social assistance, welfare, family pensions,

unemployment insurance, and social aid, all of which could be seen as characteristic of my field of research (cf. Golczyńska-Grondas 2004: 30–32). There are also many unemployed who take farming and construction jobs in the EU countries. I would like to point out, however, a second dimension to the existence of this collectivity, i.e., the sphere of generally invisible actions. In fact, many of these people did work, though as part of a "grey economy." They earned their pay and other direct goods through informal, hidden ("transient"), often semi-legal labor, work that made use of the remains of socialist industry or, one might say, the new "ecological niches," to reference Justyna Laskowska-Otwinowska's remarks on strategies of these sorts practiced by impoverished Polish Roma (2002: 228–229). These activities have already been described or mentioned by researchers from both Poland and abroad (Golczyńska-Grondas 2004: 75–76, 123–124; Sikorska 1999: 117; and Sławomir Piotrowski's 2004 article on the collectors of scrap from military training areas), and both Chris Hann (2002b) and Francis Pine (2002) have called attention to the practice as well. The present book carefully describes informal methods of earning money and acquiring goods, including all forms of scrap collecting and demolition of old buildings (infrastructures): gathering scrap metal and bricks, digging coal in bootleg mines, gathering mushrooms, berries, and wild herbs, wood, and pine branches, using industrial rubbish tips (scrap, nonferrous metals, synthetic materials, clothing and chemicals—whatever might come in handy), and poaching. An enormous wave of these phenomena flooded Poland in the years 2002–2005. Their scope and various incarnations are noted in many press articles of the period (Danilewicz 2006; Bakoś and Ryciak 2004; Lipko 2003; 2004; Trusewicz 2004, as well as numerous series of articles in the local press concerning scrap collectors and scrap thieves, particularly in the spring of 2004). This world of unending work and hunting for means of survival is the third element of my field of research. One might say that beyond the "private," "state," and "welfare" Polands, there existed another, fourth dimension of making do in the new reality—"ecological" strategies and activities, or, to phrase it differently, "hunter/gatherer" Poland.[11]

### *The Field Research*

In this way I tried to record a fragment of a concealed history that had taken place over the last few years—a history that was still undergoing change, and for this very reason required special observation and careful recording (see Tarkowska 2000b: 28–31). I conducted my research, therefore, in places where this "flip side" of the Polish transformation had played itself out in a particular fashion. There were three such regions:

(1) the poverty-stricken, jobless villages of the Świętokrzyskie Foothills, the vicinity of Przysucha and Szydłowiec; (2) the deindustrialized former mining town of Wałbrzych, a city of vast unemployment, as well as its satellite, the town of Boguszów-Gorce; and (3) the villages surrounding the enormous exposed brown coal mine in Bełchatów (mainly in the wealthy municipality of Kleszczów, some of whose inhabitants are nonetheless very poor).

In each of the fields I have presented, my research involved many hours of ethnographic conversation: listening to spontaneous narratives, conversing in groups, and observing the participants. It was based on maximum contact with my subjects and on observations of those on the sidelines. I managed to tape-record the majority of the conversations, and later to write them out, though a substantial part of my material came about through making field notes and recording the statements I had heard, which is an obvious necessity in ethnographic research in environments of this sort. I also made use of interviews recorded and transcribed by my students and I am citing them in the following parts of the book. In just my own recordings—not counting the recordings and transcriptions of my students—I gathered around two hundred hours of tape; altogether this adds up to the considerable sum of several hundred pages of materials. I also attempted to keep a research diary, which is an extremely important source of ethnographic knowledge; in turn, my colleague Paweł Pałgan took several hundred photographs, which had enormous significance for my interpretations.

In some cases I managed to live and spend longer periods of time in the homes and farmsteads of my interlocutors (as did my students and colleagues). For several days at a time I lived with them and spent time with them, and later, in the years that followed, I returned more than once. None of this altered the fact that I remained a stranger among them, though they knew me and were accustomed to me. To some extent, I occupied the position of the "accepted ignoramus," a "marginal position" on the borderline between the role of a "distanced" ethnographer and one who had "gone native" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 78–84; see also Mosse 2006). I often spent time in the field when I was a complete stranger as well, wandering about and observing behavior, conversations, objects, and everything that occurred all around me. I was often treated with suspicion, sometimes with indifference, but most frequently I managed to forge close bonds and kindly relations, though these were still full of mistrust.

On every occasion, however, this fieldwork was very difficult and filled with awkwardness (as well as a constant sense of unrest), as it was research on people who were suffering poverty and social degradation.

## Notes

1. It is true that one theory aiming to change our research perspective on poverty is the theory of social marginalization (see Frieske 1999; Kowalak 1998; Lister 2004). Within its scope, a research phenomenon crosses beyond narrow cultural horizons, is closely tied to a whole network of social relationships, and contains multiple strategies—addressing space, education, and health. This theory avoids the standard messages of philosophical anthropology: class determinism (Marxism) or individualism (neoliberalism). I fear, however, that the conceptual network of marginalization, to some degree, also brings about symbolic systems, succeeded by the terminology of relevance/irrelevance. Having his say in the debate on the "underclass," Herbert Gans (1996) expressly warned against further categories and key words appearing in conceptualizations of poverty.
2. According to the authors of *Dependency Culture,* the word used by British unemployed for assistance payments or the right to receive them is 'dole' (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992). In conversation, however, it kept acquiring odd shades of significance, expressing a permanent and unchanging relationship, and when repeated multiple times, it turned into a sort of lament (the administrative term thus undergoing a shift in meaning). It then pertained more to the ontological sense of being as a dependency, in which such a thing as independence or full subjectivity is a delusion (a text in another language). It is a word that materializes the full power of the condition of dependency, and simultaneously, a monthly payment of benefits—the "dole," or allotted portion, takes the form of a Heideggerian *das Geschick*: participation and fate.
3. This gives rise to a situation where the reality of being in a culture is co-negotiated or disrupted, a form of ruptures, questions, and answers as opposed to a textualizing description. Then, too, stress is placed on the fully fledged rendering of another subject, on his or her words that "break" the ethnographer's statement, and on his or her impromptu generations of meaning. These errors and elements of "discord" (with various "facts," for instance) then become of the utmost importance (Dwyer 1982: 269–270)—all "miscommunications" between ethnographer and interlocutor take center stage in this new anthropological knowledge (Rabinow 1977: 154; cf. Dwyer 1982: 281–285). Ethnography thus becomes more of a field for an interactive game, where the I-you differences are made increasingly distinct. As such, it finally discards the long Western tradition, stripping it of its "Archimedean point" (Dwyer 1982: 281), in which the foreigner and his or her cultural knowledge are constantly misrepresented, depending on the present requirements.
4. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (see 1997; 2000: 13–14) has recently written in similar fashion about the analysis of "reciting prayers" and "demented repetition."
5. Roland Barthes has written remarkable passages on such 'early' body language, outside of 'identity' and 'self-consciousness', in his essay on Phillippe Sollers's drama, in which he compares it to speech at the moment of awakening, even before a man confronts his own identity. Identity, he writes, can be imagined "like a predacious bird who flies high over our dreams in which we are deeply engaged in our life, our serious history; and when we wake, when the bird falls down on us, only then, before he touches us, we have to overtake, and begin to speak" (Barthes 1965: 599).
6. My experience tied to running ethnography workshops for students of the Warsaw University Polish Culture Institute, during which we did field research in Wałbrzych, had a great impact on the creation of this text. I then recognized that knowledge

I knew all too well from the field and research practice, and so anticipated by my students, was almost impossible to communicate directly—I was often forced into "silence" or "circling around" something. Moreover, I realized that the ideas I have formulated, to some extent, coincide with the views of Kirsten Hastrup in her outstanding article "The Empirical Foundation: On the Grounding of Worlds" (1995).

7. Kirsten Hastrup mentions the sort of "rich headnotes" described by Simon Ottenberg (Hastrup 1995: 56).
8. This historical context is also created by phenomena shaping the social map in the time of the partitions, and in earlier centuries: the reality of the impoverished and overpopulated Galician villages (S. Szczepanowski's *Nędza Galicji* … [The Misery of Galicia …]), or the post-manumission reality, with the difficulty of managing the peasants of the Russian partition / Congress Poland (Łukasiewicz 1992; Smykowski 2002). Moreover, it concerns all of the urban poverty, the "street people," the poor workers, the urban rejects, derelicts, the "rogues, harlots and evil-doers," "people of easy virtue," the "tavern folk," and so forth. Elżbieta Tarkowska (2000b: 49–52) places the trajectory of various impoverished groups in prewar Poland and previous centuries in a continuity, summoning a synthetic rendering of history (in particular, the collective work edited by Jan Szyteło 1992).
9. Polish anthropological attempts to describe the reality of the People's Republic have been made several times (Robotycki 2001), both by historians (including Szarota 1995) and cultural historians (Bednarek 1997; 2000). They have also been picked up in increasing numbers of source-based works, largely written by historians and sociologists (such as Szpakowska 2003; Mazurek 2005; Szpak 2005). Of course, there are also many works undertaking a retrospective attempt to grasp the social condition of Poland during the PRL and on the threshold of the transformation (Beskid 1992; Marody 1991; Machaj and Styk 1994). As far as is possible, I provide mention of works on the PRL history in the various research areas (Wałbrzych, in particular) in the relevant chapters.
10. During my research, unemployment was at its highest in the history of post-transformation Poland, i.e., after 1989. According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, the registered unemployment levels in the subsequent years were as follows (January statistics): 0.3 percent in 1990, 6.6 in 1991, 12.1 in 1992, 14.2 in 1993, 16.7 in 1994, 16.1 in 1995, 15.4 in 1996, 13.1 in 1997, 10.7 in 1998, 11.4 in 1999, 13.7 in 2000, 15.7 in 2001, 20.1 in 2002, 20.6 in 2003, 20.6 in 2004, 19.4 in 2005, 18.0 in 2006, and 15.7 in July 2006.
11. "Hunters and Gatherers" is the title of a text I published in 2004 (in *Op. cit.* journal). The term "hunter/wheeler-dealer" was used by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas to define a type of man from an enclave of poverty in Łódź who "concentrates on organising living space and bringing home all kinds of 'loot'" (2004: 75). In turn, Hanna Palska and Joanna Sikorska, in their study of a poor family (2000: 254), wrote of a "gatherer" method of acquiring the essentials. Sławomir Piotrowski has written of "scrap gatherers" in the countryside after the state farms were dissolved (2004). Furthermore, Artur Bakoś and Igor Ryciak (2004) used the term "hunter/gatherers" to define poor people supporting themselves by collecting undergrowth and scrap.