

Introduction*

I.

Reinhart Koselleck, the biggest outsider in German historiography, proposed the idea of *Sattelzeit*, or saddle period. Koselleck intended to use it to characterize an age when the basic notions of our world were formulated and reformulated. He was trying to grasp – in historical terms – the groundbreaking processes shaping the modern era. The saddle period stretches from 1750 to 1850. Old political and social structures disintegrated, and new ones were created in this period. In the course of those epochal changes, crowned and accelerated by the French Revolution, obsolete words reclaimed new meaning, traditional topoi became charged with emotion and an almost oracular power; new notions multiplied, prepared to replace old, philosophically deconstructed concepts. And so, for instance, “‘democracy’ replaces the republic” and “‘emancipation breaks out from its natural, specifically generational rhythm, broadening its initial meaning related to a person, the legal meaning of acquiring personal autonomy, into the realm of eradicating class privilege, to finally become a universal, future-oriented term put in a different context yet always promising to eradicate not just impersonated class authorities, but ‘authority’ in general.”¹ Terms coined back then remain operative today as conceptual and semantic elements of multiplying discourses. On one hand, the image of the saddle period is supposed to suggest the movement of an equestrian who mounts and dismounts a horse; on the other, it is meant to inspire the settling of our conceptual categories – which constitute the foundation of all humanistic and social disciplines – into a mind-set structurally oriented towards the future.

* Additional proofreading of this paper has been done by Alan Lockwood.

¹ R. Koselleck, *Semantyka historyczna*, sel. and ed. by H. Orłowski, trans. by W. Kunicki, Poznań 2012, p. 31 [trans. from the Polish by A.W.].

The example of the term “emancipation” mentioned above denotes a quality typical of the initial conceptual structure of the modern era, namely the time-bound contents of interpretation, which now acquire a new value of anticipation.² In other words: our notions are related to the future and what is to come is understood as depending solely on the creativity of contemporary people. To quote Jerzy Szacki: “The idols of the new era are motion, change and acceleration.”³

The press and journalism were born in the saddle period. On one hand, they were meant to report on the approaching political, scientific and social changes as those came in, then, on the other hand, to critically describe reasons due to which those changes were being obstructed. In this respect, journalism is conceptually connected to awaiting a better world, with its acceleration, and contains in its essence the function of promoting this among the emerging *vox populi*, those people finally able to read the same words and ponder their meaning, allowing those words to resonate.

Thus I suggest reflecting upon the last idol that Szacki points out: acceleration. Our conceptual position differs from that held during the saddle period. The distinction lies in the rapid growth of new contents of interpretation, as well as in the increasing momentum of the processes of change. The development of journalism in recent decades can serve as a clear symptom of that difference. Information is passed along at an ever-increasing pace, and its contents are continually restricted by the medium they flow through (the Internet), which leads to the development of a netocracy, in which journalists morph into media workers. Today, the public eye must be informed faster as the changes are faster. And in a world unified in the process of globalization, every instance of change – even if distant geographically or culturally – is of essential importance. Thus journalism now tends to give up on broader political, historical and cultural context, due to which the constant flow of information acquires only extra-instrumental meaning. If we add the issue of commercialization of information, journalism as such – which no longer grounds its content in context – inevitably turns into a luxury good for the rare owners of excess spare time. It becomes decontextualized and deprived of its initial mission – it becomes part of the system, a part separated

² See: R. Koselleck, “Grenzverschiebungen der Emanzipation. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Skiz,” [in:] idem, *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, pp. 182–202.

³ J. Szacki, “W poszukiwaniu czasu historycznego,” [in:] R. Koselleck, *Warstwy czasu. Studia z metahistorii*, trans. by K. Krzemieniowa and J. Merecki, Warsaw 2012, p. xvi.

from its essence. In other words, the accelerative nature of journalism also constitutes its biggest threat.

Acceleration understood as the basic category of historical and social processes was recognized by the French philosopher and urbanist Paul Virilio – philosopher of the necessity of dromology, or the science of velocity, as the field of reflection for all contemporary social and anthropological research. According to Virilio, politics, obliged to find solutions to problems more and more rapidly, became a dromocracy,⁴ economics became a corporate discipline, war became an Infowar, and the information system turned into the architecture of the virtual world – more important today than the natural world (the saddle period, by the way, marks the outset of the denaturalization of man: the separation of the rhythm of producing goods and information from the rhythm of nature). This kind of politics performs some of the functions historically attributed to the city, the polis. This situation clears the way to manipulating virtual symbols. Such manipulation constitutes the structure for action in the sphere of immediate intersubjective contact between senders and receivers. This leads to synchronizing emotions:

After the long history of the standardisation of public opinion in the age of the Industrial Revolution and its systems of identical reproduction, we are entering the age of the synchronisation of collective emotion, with the Information Revolution no longer promoting the old bureaucratic collectivism of totalitarian regimes, but what we might paradoxically call mass individualism. The term is apt since it is each and every one of us, one by one, that is subject to mass media conditioning in the very same instant. [...] what others currently term TELE-REALITY in no way fabricates the event as claimed. But it does contribute to multiplying it indefinitely – to the point of industrialising the exemplariness of what crops up, ex abrupto.⁵

II.

Philosophy and social sciences most certainly need to look at the science of acceleration as an important element of their own ponderings. Because of the technical nature of sending messages, media studies are essentially related to the concept of velocity and its impact on mediatization processes. However, unlike other social and humanistic disciplines, media studies are strongly

⁴ See: P. Virilio, *Vitesse et politique*, Paris 1977.

⁵ Idem, *Ville panique. Ailleurs commence ici*, Paris 2004, pp. 44–45 [trans. from the French by J. Rose, in: *Cultural Politics*, 1 (3), 2005, pp. 347–348].

connected with the very practice of creating messages. Therefore, they do have a practical face, which finds confirmation in the fact that analyses in the field of media studies are often based on media behaviour. In that respect, this field of study not only provides the theoretical frame that can be used to explain the reality of the media but also accepts the challenges of programming practical journalistic and media behaviour. This book is at the intersection of this inevitable and defining bipolarity.

Not all journalistic genres seem equally susceptible to acceleration. Reportage, its goal certainly being to provide information, has in its essence the ability and obligation to put described events in a broader context. This essence is constituted by acting slowly. But, with increasing frequency, using trendy events as topics makes even reportage an element in synchronizing emotions and, as a result, a tool in the hands of democracy. Reportage, too, can operate along the scale of velocity, superficiality, subjectivity of the message, negligence in finding sources and weakness in explaining historical processes that would facilitate a deeper understanding of a given event. One victim of velocity is American-style New Journalism, where narration in tandem with creative and subjective interpretation were meant to justify widespread unscrupulousness in the process of research. Despite all this, reportage remains one of the few tools in a journalist's toolbox that enables them to inform regarding facts in the presence of the causes and possible effects of those facts. This is part of journalism as a means of cognition, not just as a means of passing on facts. Today, for this reason, reportage is an element of practice that we can describe as belonging to the slower past, on one hand, and on the other hand – on the condition that it is properly planned and built – as constituting the journalism of the future.

III.

Contemplating the future of journalism and its cognitive function became a core that gave rise to an institution, on which we focus in this collective study.

The Laboratory of Reportage (Laboratorium Reportażu, LR) is an experimental workshop and didactic unit operating at the University of Warsaw's Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies. The LR considers "reportage the fullest form of journalistic expression."⁶ According

⁶ M. Miller, P. Wojciechowski, "Laboratorium Reportażu (zarys problematyki badawczej)," *Studia Medioznawcze*, 2008, vol. 4 (35), p. 141.

to its initiator, founder and *spiritus movens*, Marek Miller, journalism in its entirety, and reportage in particular, is a cognitive tool. In order to tackle a given topic from many points of view, the LR cultivates the tradition of collaborative work on text, as well as multimedia storytelling techniques. In the image and likeness of LR practice, upon which I will elaborate in a moment, this book, too, is a collaboration. Authors consider different aspects and theoretical issues within the field of interest and practice of the LR. And so, the text co-written by the founder of the laboratory, Marek Miller, and writer Piotr Wojciechowski, "Laboratory of Reportage: An Outline of Research Issues," is a retrospective consideration of the essence of the individual, their perspective and vision, while the essay by Prof. Zygmunt Ziątek, "Reportage as Literature. Genealogy of Marek Miller's Laboratory of Reportage and its Place," places LR practice in the history of Polish reportage.

The LR keeps thinking about its own identity, and as a result of that process, its publications undergo a number of alterations. Methodology, as well as projects completed at the Laboratory, constitute both a practical and a theoretical answer to media acceleration and the acceleration of the reportage genre.

From the very beginning of its existence, the LR was interested in epistemological foundations of journalistic practice and, through them, in its cognitive potential. It researches the issues of form, the influence of reportage on creating and sustaining a democratic community. It also ponders the future of the genre in a world marked by its constant commercialization. Thus the LR is on one hand mostly a studio, etymologically dedicated to reportage coverage of issues important for our society, a hotbed for texts. But on the other hand, it is the place where journalistic methodology is intellectually and scientifically forged and its very foundations are problematized. Piotr Wojciechowski tackles this duality of the LR in his essay "School – Community – An Island of Ethos (Reflections of a Teacher about the Laboratory of Reportage)," while Krzysztof Muszyński wonders, *mutatis mutandis*, about community as a topic of journalistic statements in his text "The Space of Community in the Projects of the Laboratory of Reportage."

The history of the Laboratory of Reportage extends to 1980 when the Reportage Workshop (Pracownia Reportażu) was established in Łódź. It had been strongly marked by an experimental approach to the genre. One example is a text composed by five reporters prior to the actual week it reported on: "Będzie tydzień w mieście Łodzi" (A Week to Come in the City of Łódź); another, a well-known, widely remarked book, *Kto tu wpuścił dziennikarzy* (Who Let the Journalists In) published in 1985, tells the tale of the birth of Solidarity from the point of view of shipyard employees on strike

in August 1980. Eighteen journalists conducted interviews for the book. Marek Miller was the leader of the group.

The workshop, rather informal in character, was also a place for debating the state and the potential of reportage. Three documentary films became a measurable result used to learn reportage techniques: *Hanna Krall*, *Krzysztof Kąkolewski* and *Ryszard Kapuściński*. Inquiries into theory and techniques were followed by a book composed solely of quotations from interviews used in those documentaries – an LR handbook: *3 x K: Polska Szkoła Reportażu* (3 x K: the Polish School of Reportage).

The Reportage Workshop in Łódź was the place where *Filmówka. Powieść o Łódzkiej Szkole Filmowej* (Film School. A Novel About the Łódź Film School) was created. It was the first harbinger of future large-scale (in terms of time) experiments: The narrative of *Filmówka* covers more than fifty years, and materials for it were gathered over the course of a decade.

In 1999, the Reportage Workshop prepared the book *Zagrajcie mi to pięknie, czyli „Pan Tadeusz” według Andrzeja Wajdy* (Play It Beautifully: “Pan Tadeusz” According to Andrzej Wajda). The publication was inspired by the film director who, probably after reading *Filmówka*, realized the value of a panoramic, polyphonic description that harnessed the method cultivated at the Reportage Workshop. He asked the studio to document the process of making the feature film he was about to begin shooting.

The Reportage Workshop moved from Łódź to Warsaw, to the Collegium Civitas – and took the name the School of Reportage. In 2001, it moved again. The Institute of Journalism at the University of Warsaw became its new home, and the LR continues to operate from there, conducting both didactic and journalistic-creative activities.

The first project of the Laboratory of Reportage was Miller’s reportage *Góra Góry, czyli ekonomia zbawienia* (Góra on the Top. The Economics of Salvation) published in 2007. The book portrays Rev. Jan Góra, of the Dominican Order. The reportage was then dramatized for Polish TV Theatre and Polish Radio Theatre. In its next experimental project, the LR tried to prove that the reportage genre can be successfully applied to historical reconstruction. This approach resulted in another book by Miller, *Uczta grudniowa 1840 r., czyli Dwóch na słońcach swych przeciwnych Bogów* (December Feast of 1840, or Two Gods on Their Opposing Suns), also published in 2007. It is a tale spun by witnesses of Adam Mickiewicz’s poetic improvisations in Paris. It was dramatized for the National Stry Theatre in Kraków. Another 2007 publication, *Sekta made in Poland* (Sect Made in Poland), was based on the paradigm of action movies (exposition, first turning point, conflict, second turning point, resolution), which was surprisingly fitting to the mechanisms of psycho-

manipulation used on sect members. Following the steps of previous books, this book was also dramatized for the Sary Theatre and for Polish Radio Theatre.

The above-mentioned projects (excluding *Góra Góry*, which is the most low-key of the three) use their topics as a pretext to make inquiries into the awareness of larger groups of people at a given historical moment. They do not limit themselves to simply delivering facts but – with the use of artistic means and elements of other journalistic genres, such as essay or interview – they put those facts through a process of far-reaching and multidimensional interpretation. These projects are also a prelude for monumental endeavours that perhaps best express the character of the LR: *Europa według Auschwitz. Kronika – Reportaż* (Europe According to Auschwitz. Chronicle-Reportage) and *Dzieje Bazaru Różyckiego* (History of the Różycki Bazaar).

The general formula of LR activities can be summed up as follows: the category of de-acceleration as a programmatic ideal of reportage journalism. And so, through this programmatic de-acceleration, anti-urgency is the *oeuvre* and the goal of the LR, its answer to the qualities of the contemporary *Sattelzeit*. But this category remains related to the typically modern notion of awaiting a better world that will not come without a better, more critical journalism, seen as an activity of describing the world in line with the facts presented in a broader narrative context, in a “horizon of meaning” (to use another fortuitous formula coined by Koselleck). The fruit of the LR’s work belongs to journalism that is free, thoughtful, sensitive to the processual origin of described events, their historical, political, social and cultural contextualization. Group work in journalism – the plurality of voices – assumes an ideal of intersubjective journalism that boldly manufactures long books resisting the dominant tendency: real narrations in the post-narrative world described by Lyotard, as opposed to the chronic brevity of netocracy.

Marek Miller summarized the *Europa według Auschwitz* project as follows (and these quotes, after some thematic changes, can be easily used to describe the *Dzieje Bazaru Różyckiego* project, as both focus on describing decisive events – visible symptoms of groundbreaking changes, social and anthropological mutation:

Europa według Auschwitz is a chronicle-reportage based on accounts and testimonies of people who participated in the events directly. We want to reconstruct the reality of the camp, composed of scenes and words that were uttered back then. We want to do it using the oral history method. We use a specific variation of oral history that we call polyphonic oral history. It is based on editing together thousands of accounts and statements without any additional commentary or narration. The specific narrative structure and dramaturgy we use make it possible to achieve the effect of an epic tale

that remains a historical document based on source materials. The power of a chronicle made this way lies in its credibility and aestheticism that lets any reader delve deep into the problem and judge it on their own. Our method considerably limits subjective interpretation of the topic and makes it relatively easy to assess the objectivity of sources used. Chronicles built this way fill a gap between scientific studies and memoir literature, and bring archival materials unknown to the public eye closer to a broader audience in the accessible form of reportage.⁷

Miller filled these sentences with his vision as well as with methodological questions, which became the topics of other texts included in the present volume. Miller himself, in the text “The Polyphonic Documentary Novel,” suggests a deeper look into his ideal of reportage, oscillating around the notions of polyphony and reportage novel. Paulina Orłowska, in her essay “The Concept of the Polyphonic Documentary Novel of the Laboratory of Reportage and Mikhail Bakhtin’s Theory. The Political Face of Polyphony,” analyzes conceptual relations occurring between oral history and the polyphonic novel, as put forward by Mikhail Bakhtin. Ultimately, the epic moment mentioned by Miller becomes Leszek Nurzyński’s subject of study. His text “The Last Grenada: The Różycki Bazaar Myth in the Polyphonic Documentary Novel *Dzieje Bazaru Różyckiego*,” connects the notion of mythical-epic narration with the monumental LR project *The Różycki Bazaar*. The volume concludes with the essay “The Criticism of the Polyphonic Methodology: A Theology of Journalism,” where Jacek Wasilewski problematizes the polyphonic novel as a genre and claims that its final goal is the construction of a common history of a given human formation, while that history should strive for compatibility with the truth of conscience.

Most of the texts in this volume, especially theoretical elaborations on ideas presented in the programmatic essay by Miller, seem attached to “classical” – maybe too “classical” – concepts and analytical methods, with Bakhtin’s concepts of “polyphonic” and “dialogical” literature dominating the scene by a long stretch. In the 1970s, the most renowned works of Bakhtin, such as *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*, had just been translated and released in Polish. In Poland, they were understood as criticisms of totalitarian systems concealed in narratives oriented to literary theory and cultural studies. Becoming polyphonic (multi-voiced) and dialogical simply became aspects of the political agenda for freedom of speech and antonyms of the language of propaganda. Of course, this ideological interpretation of

⁷ M. Miller, *Europa według Auschwitz. Litzmannstadt Ghetto*, collaboration: Z. Kraszewska-Kelcz, J. Podolska; participation: M. Januszewska, A. Korycka, B. Bereza, P. Orłowska, Oświęcim 2009, p. 11.

Bakhtin probably was not decisive either in choosing him as patron saint of the Laboratory of Reportage or in his work becoming the inspiration of the “polyphonic reportage novel.” It is more – as far as my understanding is concerned – about the analytical and constructional values of his concept. Indeed, in this volume we delve into contemplating the distinction between polyphony as described by Bakhtin, used in prose fiction, and polyphony of accounts gathered, selected and ordered by the author (or authors) of a “reportage novel”; Zygmunt Ziątek only just scratches the surface of this issue in his essay “Reportage as Literature,” when he follows the steps of Ludwik Flaszen and recalls the notion of testimony, in writing about “mirrors of diverse states of mind” and “nodes of collective experience” undergone by the protagonists of Miller’s reportage about the Gdańsk Shipyard protests.

Referring to Bakhtin in a theoretical sense, without engaging in any criticism of his study or considering whether it is relevant in contemporary literary studies, is simply meant to point out three main postulates valid in the practice of the polyphonic novel: the importance of differentiated voices and points of view within the community recounting their experience; a lesser role for the narrator in framing those experiences, through the narrator’s recounting language; and the group, synchronic character of the experience. Precisely this construction value described by Bakhtin places him at the starting point of the narrative technique, with no aspirations as to defining the state of study regarding this thought. In fact, while telling a group story, we must put facts in order, structure them, remove inconsistencies – and use this construction to arrange the past. The task of the reportage journalist is not just to describe it, but to reveal seams and support elements used in the process of arranging a story. At this point, journalism touches anthropology.

IV.

As the Laboratory of Reportage may be the only place in Europe where theory and practice – according to the vision of Aristotle, the biggest category classifier – go hand in hand, deepening one another in a mutual transfer of aims and potential, it has seemed important to us to properly broaden the LR’s methodological and epistemological base.

Thus this book is a short summa of the work performed to date, and a retrospective view upon what has already been contemplated, but also a starting point for further research and publications. Its goal is to deliver a theoretical basis for scientific reflection on the reportage genre, as well as

on its potential, as yet only incompletely harnessed. The task of reportage is reviving facts as they were; then getting to know them and finding the right form for passing them on. Of course, this does not require going back to medieval chronicles. But it is important to deliver – in coherence with the historical awareness that characterizes contemporary people – the short- and long-term causes of processes within which events (scenes and words) become comprehensible.

If that is the goal of reportage, neither the journalist nor the reader can acknowledge acceleration. The LR practices reportage style that does not plunge deep into current affairs at the dictates of current necessity. Instead, it attempts to become familiar with topics underlying current events. The LR is about reportage that strives not to become the victim of dominant discourses, and so assumes that words used by witnesses are analyzed. Journalism is at stake – journalism programmatically heading for an anthropological and historical interpretation of what protagonists saw, heard and experienced. This kind of journalism problematizes itself and turns its methodological and epistemological foundations into subjects of reflection, even before the reportage is created. This kind of journalism, thanks to its fruit, deconstructs the information system currently being produced, in acceleration, by media workers. And yet, precisely for this reason, the LR reportage *oeuvre* is an open work, which attempts not to offer theses constructed *a priori*, but instead to give readers the opportunity to formulate them on their own. Slowing down is the guarantor of freedom.

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