



## Obituary

Eugeniusz Jaworski, PhD

(31 October 1933 – 30 December 2020)

Zdzisława Mokranowska

University of Silesia in Katowice

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2963-0252>

Eugeniusz Jaworski, PhD, worked at the University of Silesia since 1975. An ethnographer, ethnologist, and anthropologist, he taught and pursued his research at the Institute of Cultural Sciences, Department of Theory and History of Culture. It is safe to say that he was the co-creator of culturological school at the University of Silesia; he was present at its birth and contributed extensively to its coming of age and development. He started working for the University as an already experienced cultural researcher. Previously, for nearly twenty years, he had worked at the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom. He resigned from the position in favour of the University believing that it was the very space where he would successfully enhance the acquired knowledge, research experience, and numerous competences to the higher level of critical and theoretical awareness, and pass it all on to the young generation through teaching. This idea was his driving force at all times, never to be cast aside. He was born in Poznań to a family of teachers. He was characterised by responsibility, virtuous persistence, and respect for work and the fruits of human labour. He commenced his degree in 1951, and once the Department of Ethnography at Adam Mickiewicz University was dissolved in 1954, he continued to study at the University of Warsaw. He was an alumnus of prominent ethnographers such as Professor Eugeniusz Frankowski and Professor Witold Dynowski. Throughout his academic career, he remained loyal to his role models' messages and often referred to

their works; he also recommended to his students to have learned about their accomplishments.

Born in Greater Poland, he found his place on Earth in Upper Silesia, which he started exploring already back during his student research camps. From 1956 on, he lived in Bytom. Long years of numerous encounters with residents of Silesia and his professional predisposition made Doctor Eugeniusz Jaworski a prominent expert in the local culture. He took it upon himself to conduct extensive independent studies on the specificity of Silesia analysed in the context of the past and the present, while his ability to observe human behaviour and choices made his knowledge about the region truly exceptional and enviable.

Having completed his degree in ethnography in Poznań and Warsaw, he pursued his devotion at the Upper Silesian Museum, thanks to which he was granted the chance to work with Doctor Józef Ligęza and Professor Mieczysław Gładysz. It was also a period of intense field research, which allowed him to collect valuable materials including data on the traditional culture of Upper Silesia. During his endeavour to establish an open-air museum in Chorzów he decided to focus his research interests on the topic of wooden constructions. While working at the museum in Bytom, he remained in touch with academic centres from across Poland; he participated in seminars by Professor Maria Ossowska and Professor Witold Dynowski, in meetings of the Silesian Science Institute; he acted as an active member of the Polish Ethnological Society.

He had great respect for people living in Silesia. He would often remark that he had learnt a lot from them. After all, he was fighting to overcome the negative stereotype of people from Upper Silesia, in particular of a Silesian man; he was able to view the region in the perspective of European civilisational values that arrived there early, transforming the common culture of inhabitants long before similar changes occurred in other parts of Poland. He was interested in the ethos of work in the industry, but also analysed causes and degrees of changes that had turned former agrarian communities into those composed of miners, steel workers, and foundry workers aware of their professional value. He earned their trust with ease and ensured never to abuse it. In his descriptions of transformations occurring in the culture, he would always attempt at protecting privacy of individuals for whom these transformations entailed important personal experiences, were sources of pride but also fear of the unknown future. He could communicate proficiently with everyone; adroit at holding a conversation, respectful of his interlocutors, open to listening – it all made each conversation with him last in memory long after it took place.

He was a historian of tangible culture both because of his passion and education. His knowledge in this regard was outstanding. He was

an expert in outfits, furniture, tableware; he could identify the source of fabrics, cutlery, and porcelain. To him, each item served as a source of information on those who likely had designed, manufactured or used it in the past. He was fascinated by the human ability to make things with utmost precision and by how precision and aesthetics are related. He could conduct extensive disputes on the values of objects of everyday use, but he also was skilled at finding people who would help him complement his knowledge about objects that were no longer in use. He appreciated even seemingly small pieces of information which, once consolidated, formed the foundation of empirical knowledge in ethnography requiring theoretical, scientific analysis. He had a distinctive feature that was important when it comes to academic teaching, namely, he was generous with his time – each time someone asked him for information, and explanation, a solution to a problem, he would always eagerly offer his help.

He was an incredibly well-read man; having superb memory, he surprised and amazed others with his deep understanding of research areas that are a rare object of interest for a present-day humanist. He could discuss mathematics and economics, modern military and history, politics and global-scale social issues, but also culinary arts, literature, painting, and medicine. Doing so, he would never make banal remarks; his extensive knowledge was astoundingly deep at the same time. If he did not surprise one with his accurate views and knowledge that made him an interesting interlocutor in a conversation on nearly any topic, he would ask an accurate question, sometimes a surprising one, though it always made a dispute more lively. Although he did not flaunt his artistic talents, his taste combined with his inclination to order and aesthetics in every area of life made him stand out from others on daily basis and, once someone got to know him more closely, brought him great respect. Moreover, he had a rare gift – a scientific intuition. Sensitive to inconsistency and incoherence of thinking, he was wise in a courageous and responsible way; he did not fear ramifications of his choices often made in opposition to the externally imposed standards and recommendations.

Elegance was his hallmark, while his ability to compliment his interlocutor was a magnificent start for every conversation. He was at his best in private conversations, as he liked neither conference disputes nor gossiping. A direct conversation was his natural environment. However, there was another side to this – although he would passionately engage in discussions and note-making, he rarely published, following the old rule stating that the only works worth publishing were those completed and marked by originality. Nonetheless, during his work at the University of Silesia, he was successfully talked into becoming a co-author of a few books and numerous articles that continue to command respect to this day

due to their scientific merit. Preparation of the study he considered most important to have been printed, namely, a reviewed version of his doctoral dissertation, was highly time-consuming. He dedicated it to Upper Silesian wooden constructions. We hope that it will soon be published by Śląsk Publishing House. This publication might tell us more about its Author than any recollections by his family, friends, and colleagues. Perhaps it will say a lot more about the feature of the local landscape that was present until fifty years ago, namely, the now forgotten rural house. The Author considered it to be not only an autonomous object of his multi-aspect studies but also a source of knowledge about past methods of construction and high professional skills of “simple craftsmen”.

He paid little attention to accolades. He had but a few decorations, all of them fairly earned: a Gold Distinction for Care of Historical Monuments, a first-grade gold Award of Honour “Merited for the Union” awarded by the General Committee of the Polish Cultural and Educational Union in Český Těšín, Marian Mikuta Award “Merited for the Theatrical Culture”, and, lastly, the Medal of the Commission of National Education. This meant that he cared equally for historical monuments of tangible and intangible cultural heritage; that for many years, he maintained scientific, institutional, and personal contacts with Poles in Zaolzie; that the Society for Theatrical Culture owed him a lot and, lastly, that he was not only a wise well-educated man but also a valued university lecturer. For many of us, friends and colleagues alike, he was also a master and a guide in the mysterious field of culture from around the globe.

A cigarette and a cup of coffee in his hands as inseparable elements of his image, his legs crossed; he became an icon of style related to the model of conduct of past intellectual and artistic elites. He was an individualist, a man of impeccable manners; he had class. Faithful to rules he considered right, he deeply believed that a person should continuously work on oneself, overcome one’s powerlessness, obstacles, shape one’s own personality. As a rationalist and an aesthete, he linked scientific truth to methodology, beauty, and order. He was sensitive yet highly disciplined intellectually and well-organised. He used to keep his weaknesses hidden deep inside, as he complained very rarely. For this reason, none of us really considered the possibility of his sudden passing.

His everyday presence, his vast knowledge, his effective advice, and his kind smile will be long missed by us all. The void after the passing of Doctor Eugeniusz Jaworski will be long felt and devastating for everyone who knew and valued him.

This is an extended and altered version of the obituary entitled “Kulturoznawca powinien interesować się wszystkim” published in *Gazeta Uniwersytecka. Miesięcznik Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach*, April 2021, issue no. 7 (287).