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## Magic in the Social Construction of the Past: the Case of Teschen Silesia

*Abstract:* The aim of the paper is to consider such ethnolinguistic categories as *magic*, *connotation*, and *cognitive blending* as possible keys to the following questions: How is it possible that we can perfectly adopt different representations of the past and internalize them as our past? How can we reconcile different representations of the past and how is it possible that diverse representations of the past merge in one social memory? Such amalgamations of various forms of representations and diverse scales of objectification can be clarified by means of the theory of magic, by means of the law of resemblance, and the law of contiguity. Such considerations are supported here by empirical study of the construction of social memories in Teschen Silesia, which was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1920. On both sides of the new border different state institutions emerged and influenced local memories.

*Keywords:* magic thinking, social memory, connotation, constructivism, Teschen Silesia

In this text I will consider the origin of the criteria a person uses to select and evaluate narratives about the past. I intend to look at the social transmission of narratives about the past from the perspective of phenomenology and semiotics. The essence of the phenomenological approach to a text is reflected in the etymology of the term—the verb *φαίνεσθαι*, whose Polish equivalent means *to appear*, *to show oneself to someone*. Such a perspective is characterized, *inter alia*, by a suspension of the automatic question as to which texts referring to the past, in social circulation, are true and which untrue. For the social anthropologist, what is more important is how a given text comes to be experienced by its recipient—a potential future transmitter—as true or untrue. In short: how is the truth of a text constituted in experience? The basic advantage of the phenomenological approach to constructing the past is that all analyses begin with the first person ‘I’: from a reflexive consideration of the way we ourselves experience one content or another. This method, drawn from the work of Edmund Husserl, was grafted onto the social sciences by Alfred Schütz, and was also used with success by Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Clifford Geertz, and many others.

Here I will be analyzing my own methods of viewing narratives about the past produced by various entities or institutions and I will try to determine how far they accord with the standards of retrospection in Teschen Silesia. I am referring to standards of spontaneously legitimizing and delegitimizing images of the past, which, on account of their cognitive and social bases, are common to entities (persons) regardless of their preferred vision of the past or choices of self-identity. The theses presented here

are supported by many years of qualitative research, of which only part was strictly institutional in form: this was the team research project *Obraz Polaka na Zaolziu* [*Portrait of a Pole in Zaolzie*] conducted under my direction by the students of the Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology Institute of the University of Silesia in Katowice. I have myself been living since childhood in a Polish-Silesian environment in a part of Teschen Silesia that today belongs to the Czech Republic. Blood relations, friendship, and cooperation tie me still with people living on both sides of the border and having all the contemporary range of identities appearing in the area.<sup>1</sup>

Teschen Silesia is an exceptionally suitable territory for drawing conclusions about the principles involved in constructing a representation of the past. Until the end of the First World War (1918) this territory formed part of the lands of the Habsburg monarchy; in 1920 it was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia. At the moment when the new Polish-Czechoslovak border emerged, the ethnic composition of the people on both sides was the same, in contrast to the current situation. Presently, on the Polish side, the population is predominately Polish-speaking and convinced of their Polish origin, while on the Czech side the people are mostly Czech-speaking and convinced of their own Czech origin. What is most important is that at the moment the border was established the local people who found themselves on the Polish side did not in any way differ from the people who found themselves on the Czech side. The existence of a common historical substrate (*tertium comparationis*) makes it fairly easy to compare the changes in social memory that have occurred here in the time since the border appeared.

If I refer, in the present text, to the history of self-identifications in Teschen Silesia, it is only as a point of departure for considering more universal theses concerning cognitive aspects of the narrative and symbolic construction of images of the past. They are the following:

First thesis: At the basis of the legitimization or delegitimization of a narrative about the past there is a blending of meanings that are similar to one another or are linked by a connotative closeness. This statement is an answer to the question: on the basis of what kind of cognitive mechanisms do the images contained in a commemorative narrative achieve the status of truth or fiction in the understanding of their recipients. This thesis answers the question: in what manner, within the framework of spontaneous perception, is the experience of the accuracy or inaccuracy of a narrative about the past constituted?

Second thesis: At the basis of the forgetting that is a necessary condition of the social construction of memory, there is a blending of meanings that are similar or linked by connotative closeness. This thesis is an answer to the question about the cognitive mechanisms that govern the ‘harmonization’, or unification, of narratives about the past, and thus the elimination of their diversification. The second thesis also answers the question: on the basis of what cognitive mechanisms do people unconsciously adapt a narrative about the past to current socio-political needs?

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<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive—at present—review of these identities is presented by Jakub Grygar (Grygar 2005: 29–55).

Third thesis: The blending of meanings (of which mention is made in theses 1 and 2) can most easily be explained through the use of categories developed within the framework of classical theories of magical thinking.

Fourth thesis: Between the domination of magical thinking within the framework of a specified communicational society and the domination of nationalistic historical policies in that society, there is a close correlation, where both types of domination are mutually conditioning.

Of the authors to whom I refer, only the classical anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski and the contemporary cognitivist Jesper Sørensen speak of magic in the context of the above-mentioned blending of meanings (and thus of indistinction). However, the problem of identifying experience and its adopted representation is not only to be found in works based on the idea of magic or magical thinking. This question occupied, among others, the founder of general semantics, Alfred Korzybski, the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the Polish interpreter, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir. The phenomenon that I want to view in the context of social memory was analyzed by Jean Baudrillard on the basis of media communication theory, observing that thanks to the indistinctness of experience and its pictorial representation, media simulation could be received as 'reality' itself. Analogous statements can be found among authors who are part of the reflexive anthropology trend, which concentrates its attention on the question of the reception of an ethnographic text (James Clifford, Pierre Bourdieu, and others).

Transformations of social memory also have a cognitive dimension (and in this respect, a universal dimension, as they characterise the perception and thinking of every human being), and a *social* dimension. The socialization of an individual has itself a social character, leading among other things to the assimilation of a set image of the past and to the interpretation or reinterpretation of the individual's own experiences in accordance with the internalised keys. Social practices whereby images of the past are distributed and reproduced have a social character. Finally, language, which participates in the direct experience of the individual, as well as in creating of representations of those experiences in the memory and by transmitting them, also has a social character. In the first part of the work, I concentrate more on the cognitive dimension of social memories, while in the second part, on their socio-political dimension. Based on specific examples from the territory I have researched, I try to capture the relation between magical thinking and nationalism.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Magical Basis of Presentism**

The departure point for my reflections is the thesis that all meanings experienced and understood by a human being are the result of categorization. I call categorization the linguistic process of simplifying and maintaining reality both at the stage of sensual

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<sup>2</sup> I am referring to nationalism, which is not so much a choice, as an unconscious structure (a habitus formed in the historical process), which defines a manner of experiencing the world, speaking about the world, and making choices in that world.

experiences and at the stage of creating a representation of those experiences and their transmission through communication. Under the influence of the cognitive system, which as a part of consciousness governs categorization, some fragments of existence become clear and meaningful while others are ignored and forgotten (Lakoff, Johnson 1988: 191; Maćkiewicz 1999: 47–55). The cognitive overcoming of contradictions and the axiological ambiguity of phenomena (their transformation into unambiguous and logically coherent meanings) results from the very essence of language as a medium of understanding.

If the meaning of a word in the cognitive understanding is asked, it can be answered that meaning is a specified cognitive model (a prototype as a mental image, supplemented by stereotypes, which are understood as the connotations connected with it). A given cognitive model is, in relation to sensually perceived phenomena, their generalized image. The relation between representations of former experiences and language is a relation of mutual dependence. On the one hand, language as a cognitive system influences the shape of images of the past, on the other, images of the past, habitualized by their repetitiveness (cf. Bourdieu 2008: 72–86) acquire a systemic character. They are thus transformed into experiential *gestalts*, which, as an element of the cognitive system (*langue*) will define the shape of future representations of the past.

It is thanks to the categorization process that the socially constructed memory of the past can become memory of the continuation of what was ‘in the beginning’. An imagining of the continuity of images of the past is thus a condition of their legitimizing potential in relation to actual self-identifications and social institutions or the claims related to them. Without the illusion—based on selective and creative forgetting—of the continuity of history, there could be no ‘imagined community’ as in the thinking of Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1997): a society understanding itself as a *transhistorical we* that is the object of history. The questions I am trying to answer in this connection are as follows: In what manner are we able to ‘adapt’ the actors of varying historical situations—in which we recognize our forbears—to ourselves? In what manner are we able to project (and thus to transfer) the presently prevailing differences between *one’s own* and *others* into the past, which is generally perceived as one entity?

I would like to begin my attempt to answer such questions by referring to the theory of Alfred Korzybski, who defined the relation between a word and an experienced phenomenon with the aid of a metaphor about a map and a terrain, seeing the largest cognitive problem of the language dimension in identifying one with the other, and thus with identifying ideas and phenomena by means of those ideas (Korzybski 1994: 58). Pierre Bourdieu speaks in this context about the danger of the ‘reification of abstraction’, or the danger of identifying representing models (cognitive generalizations) with phenomena represented by these models, in the understanding of which such models should only help (Bourdieu 2008: 50).

Bronisław Malinowski considered the projection of an idea onto a thing (in other words, the ‘transference’ of the traits of mental images, that is, of cognitive models, onto sensually experienced phenomena) to be a case of magical thinking (Malinowski 1987: 41–56, 100–110). I would like to refine Malinowski’s idea by differentiating two types of magical thinking. The first type is magic in the strong sense, understood as

ascribing direct, perlocutionary, effective power to created signs (including words). It is a matter here of assigning to signs or objects the ability to have direct impact on the world, the ability to ‘materialize’ their meanings. The second type of magic by which I want to explain the phenomenon of constructing the past is magic in the weak sense, which can be summarized as the verifiable fact that words (and signs in general) have an impact on the consciousness, and as it ensues, on intentional reality. On this basis, words can then produce tangible effects on the world. In this understanding, the case of magic in the weak sense could be a cognitive mechanism, which consists in an unconscious projection onto experience and its later representation of the meaning structures of one’s own language.<sup>3</sup>

When we recognize a phenomenon by means of an idea, the prototypes and stereotypical traits of the mental picture associated with it are always to a greater or lesser degree transferred onto the given phenomenon. The best conditions for transferring the traits of an idea onto a phenomenon occur when the phenomenon is already sensually inaccessible, and thus can no longer stand in opposition to the idea that represents it (cf. Eco 2000: 50–52). By analogy, past events, existing only in the form of a memory image, have difficulty in opposing the memory narrative that represents them. A map is most easily confused with the land when we no longer have access to the land, and where there is no longer the possibility of comparing the one with the other and noticing differences. Therefore, representations of past events are the most subject to ‘absorption’ by the presently prevailing symbolic system, as in such a situation all a person can do is to compare certain memory representations with others—on the condition that such differences between representations of the past exist at all.

Forgetting can lead to the mutual identification of incommensurate representations of the past, to their unification. In other words, images of the past pour into, ‘blend’ into, one another, become similar and are identified with one another on account of their meaning similarity (because of their mutual iconic relations) and contiguity (because of their mutual indexical relations). The social framework of memory (in the understanding of Maurice Halbwachs)—including, primarily, the presently prevailing language and other symbolic systems that change with social practices—gives an appropriate trend to such unification of contrary memories or changes them. In this precise manner, ‘the multiple voices of the past’ can be changed into a harmonious unity, the discontinuity of the past can be transformed into continuity, and historical accidents into ‘natural’ necessities (cf. Łotman 1997). In this precise manner, the self-identifications of ‘our forebears’, which were often heterogenous and variable, can in retrospect be experienced as homogenous and permanent, and above all, in accord with our own self-identifications.

Within the framework of a similar amalgamation (blending) (Turner, Faconnier 2002,<sup>4</sup> Sørensen 2007) similar meanings, or meanings that are contiguous in the mental space, are identified with one another. In the second case, meanings

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, every language having a structure, by the very nature of language, reflects in its own structure that of the world as assumed by those who evolved the language. In other words, we unconsciously read the structure of the language we use into the world (Korzybski 1994: 59–60).

<sup>4</sup> [www.markturner.org/blending.html](http://www.markturner.org/blending.html) (Retrieved 15.09.2011).

that are correlative to one another (including meanings connected with cause and effect relations existing in experience or imagination) can substitute for each other on the metonymy principle. In this manner, representations of the past, which might earlier have differed in their origins, modalities, or degrees of generalization, can be identified with one another. Those diverse representations can thus merge into simple images bearing values that are uniformly positive or uniformly negative. One example might be the memory blending of time horizons (Zerubavel 2003) at the basis of the spontaneously experienced achronic *once* or *formerly*, which can metaphorically be understood as a *place* located before contemporary times (Szacki 1971: 208; Szacka 2006: 92; Anderson 1997: 34–47). More importantly, inconvenient fragments of the past can thus be easily replaced by meanings that are more suited to contemporary socio-political needs (cf. Eliade 1998: 43, Gurevič 1978: 122–142, Lotman 1994: 19–30, Uspenskij 1998: 27, Halbwachs 1969: 156, Ong 2004: 201, Ricoeur 2006: 216, Assmann 2001: 81, Le Goff 2007: 9, 18).

I would like to verify the theory presented here in brief using the example of the construction of the past in Teschen Silesia, which, with the exception of the years 1938–1945, has been divided since 1920 by the Polish-Czechoslovakian—and since 1993 by the Polish-Czech—state border. I am referring to the construction of the past by the memory institutions of two nation states: Poland and Czechoslovakia (since 1993, the Czech Republic). It is particularly thanks to school teaching that the images of the past distributed by national memory institutions can be popularized within a given terrain, and thus be absorbed into local common wisdom. Over time they have thus predominated over the family sagas of the autochthons, which had been wrapped around the trans-border and trans-national—to name things from today's perspective—ties of blood from the times before Teschen Silesia's division.

At the time of the territory's division, the ethnic composition of the people living in the non-urbanized lands along the newly arisen border was the same regardless of how it may be defined.<sup>5</sup> The system regulating the use of the linguistic codes functioning here (the Teschen dialect and the Polish, German, and Czech languages) was also the same. And the political situation, including the rival images of the past and self-identifications (Kajfosz 2011) was the same too. Thus it is an almost 'ideal' terrain for following the process of the gradual division of social memory, which, if local informal texts are taken into account, began with the passage of time to copy the division of the territory between two states, whose institutions had different expectations of representations of the past.

Before I turn to examples, I would like to remind the reader only that informal, conventional texts are key to the distribution of images of the past in the communication circuit. The more reproduced the meaning structures are, the more they come to constitute the hegemony of an aperceptive (invisible) tradition over their bearers

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<sup>5</sup> These words refer to the part of the territory of the Duchy of Teschen that after the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire found itself under the jurisdiction of the National Council for the Duchy of Teschen, which proclaimed its accession to Poland. From today's perspective it is a matter of that part of Teschen Silesia currently on the Polish side of the border and the former Czech Teschen counties (Okres Český Těšín) on today's Czech side of the border, called Zaolzie.

(Malinowski, 2004: 234–237, Gramsci, 1994: 1375, Derive 2004: 257–265). The state of this convention is always, furthermore, both the result and the instrument of power. To speak a little more generally: *habitus* (including communication-cognitive *habitus*) are both structured and structuring (Bourdieu 2008: 72). Power, I understand here, after Michel Foucault, as a network of apparent and ‘hidden’ (unseen) forces distributed among many foci (Deleuze 1996: 101–116). The fact that symbolic force is not perceived as force can be explained by the theory of magic, as I will show in the following example.

Polish and Czech linguists define the affinities of the Teschen dialect differently. In naming the dialect, they give it a respective national affinity already at the level of the phenomenon’s direct perception and not only at the level of its repeat description.

In Czech schools, in the Czech part of Teschen Silesia, from the fifties to the nineties (and in part until today), children were taught that the Teschen dialect is an East Lachian dialect. In newer Czech textbooks one can read that the dialect belongs to the Polish-Czech (or Czech-Polish) mixed dialect (Bělič 1972, Hannan 1996: 86). In Polish schools on either side of the border<sup>6</sup> children learn that the dialect belongs to the group of Silesian dialects.<sup>7</sup> Such a conceptual difference—as between the names East Lachian or Silesian—is a world-forming difference. In the first instance, the source of the Teschen dialect is conceptually situated in Moravia, and thus on the Czech side of the border, while in the second instance, it is situated in Upper Silesia, on the Polish side. In this manner, the Teschen dialect is tacitly given one or the other ‘national affinity’ (or, according to newer thinking of Czech linguists, simultaneously one and the other national affinity).

By subordinating the Teschen dialect to the appropriate national language, the national claims of the dialect’s users, or the institutions which represent them, can be legitimized (cf. Malinowski 2004: 229–239). This happens on the basis of a cognitive mechanism that causes a word to ‘transfer’ the traits of the mental image (prototype and stereotype) associated with it onto a phenomenon, which is understood by means of the given word. Metaphorically speaking: the word and the phenomenon in the spontaneous experience ‘merge’ with one another—the map is identified with the terrain. In this sense, the rivalry between the above-mentioned ways of conceptualizing the local dialect is a ‘battle’ over an image of the past—an achronic past, as naming the given dialect does not comprehend its transformation, only a state that was to exist ‘from the beginning’.

### **The Magical Bases of Legitimizing Images of the Past**

It could be asked, on the occasion, how the above-mentioned ideas are themselves legitimized (the Silesian dialect, East Lachian dialect, mixed Polish-Czech dialect,

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<sup>6</sup> In the Czech part of Teschen Silesia, these are schools for children of the Polish minority in the Czech Republic.

<sup>7</sup> In common wisdom, on both the Polish and Czech sides of the border, language is taken as the indicator of nationality.

mixed Czech-Polish dialect); by what means is the local speech drawn into the eternal difference between *one's own* and *others*? How to explain the fact that for various inhabitants of Teschen Silesia, various ideas become credible that emerge in the context of ideas that lack credibility? Where does the credibility of a narrative about the past produced by *one's own*, and the lack of credibility of a narrative about the past produced by *others*, come from?

The answer could be contained in the theory of magic. That is, within the framework of a prereflexive, spontaneous perception, an additional axiological content is transferred from the source of the narrative about the past (from *one's own* in various forms) onto the narrative about the past itself, and this occurs on the basis of an indexical relation, and thus on the basis of the metonymic contiguity of one and the other. Let us look at the matter from the perspective of pupils in a local school: the teacher telling them about Teschen Silesia's past<sup>8</sup> is for them a metonymic representative of the school; the school is a metonymic representative of education, and it follows, of objective truth and the state. One and the other are, in turn, metonymically related with ceremonies which provide the pupil with lofty experiences, etc. Most importantly, the value-bearing connotations connected with one link of the metonymic chain can be transferred to another link, and vice versa. The *loftiness* or *authority* (and other axiologically characterised connotations) metonymically connected with the institution of the school are 'transferred' to the teacher, and from her back to the school, and so on. They are also transferred onto the stories about the past that the teacher presents to the students, and vice versa. In this precise manner, narratives about the past can be legitimized by themselves; they can also legitimize social institutions, including those by which they were themselves produced.

The above-mentioned cognitive mechanism does not stand exclusively at the basis of the colonization of social memory by the nation state. It also stands at the basis of the transmission of possible counter-memories. The teacher, whose authority is transferred onto the narrative he transmits, can be replaced by a museum guide, or by a grandfather, parents, or other family members who constitute for the recipient an authority and to whom the recipient is emotionally attached. Other sources whose authority and values can be transferred onto a narrative about the past they originate—and vice versa—are newspapers or magazines, museum exhibits, or family keepsakes evoking a set image of the past that is a potential narrative. The value-bearing connotation connected with any object (with a relict of the past or its representation) can be transferred onto the story that is associated with it, and the opposite. To repeat: an axiological valuation, positive or negative, associated with the sources of stories about the past can be transferred onto those stories and from them back again to their sources.

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<sup>8</sup> Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Teschen Silesia was not a topic that was discussed separately during history lessons on either side of the border. Nevertheless, what the teacher said on the subject of the state as such referred by implication to all the places within its territory. In addition, sporadic mentions of the Teschen dialect formed part of the subject of the territorial and social differentiation of varieties of the Czech and Polish languages. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the subject of Teschen Silesia, within the 'regional paths' framework, is being broached more frequently in school teaching—particularly on the Polish side of the border.

Roland Barthes calls connotation a myth. That is, it is a matter of the axiologically characterised accompanying meanings (Bartmiński, 2007: 69), which in a spontaneous experience syncretically pass into the sign and even ‘absorb’ it. In Barthes’ understanding, mythical thinking is characterised by control of the connotative content (the unobjectified value-bearing associations) over phenomena. The imperceptible connotation can ‘blend’ with the phenomenon accompanying it (cf. Barthes, 2000: 243); it can combine with it in a veritably magical unity, just as in the spontaneous experience the de Saussuresque element of the signifier merges with the signified (the *signifiant* with the *signifié*), or the word merges with the object for as long as a person, in abstracting from his experiences, does not distinguish one from the other and does not notice that a word (sign) can help form or even produce its object (Malinowski, 1987: 37, 102, 373, Tokarska-Bakir 2000). Barthes considers the invisible connotation to be a figure of myth on account of its ability to create a clear, easily legible, obvious world (Barthes, 2000: 252–264). In this context, what is particularly important is that the connotation, employed instrumentally, is able to legitimize literally everything.

The process of the gradual transformation of the Polish-Czech border into an eternal institution resulting from the natural order can be explained by magic in the weak sense (cf. Barthes, 2000: 262). One proof is that in the eyes of the youngest generation of inhabitants in the Polish part of Teschen Silesia, Poles have ‘always’ lived on their side of the border, and Czechs on the other.<sup>9</sup> The present state of the world, where a Polish-speaking population lives on one side of the border and a Czech-speaking population on the other, is thus projected onto the past. The fact that before 1920 the population on either side of the present border spoke the same language on a daily basis has been almost entirely eliminated from social memory on both sides. This claim concerns the youngest generation in particular. It applies to the middle generation to a lesser degree, although the fact remains that memory of a common dialect is not in general preserved within families (it is increasingly less often transferred between generations). The fact has also lost meaning that on both sides of the border, part of the inhabitants use the same dialect, and part of the Czechs (from the perspective of the youngest generation living on the Polish side of the border) identify with the Polish nationality and are able to speak Polish, sometimes quite well. It should be remembered that similar transformations of memory occurred not within the framework of oral culture, but within the framework of written culture (libraries and archives) and are currently happening through advanced communications technology (including the Internet).

The tangible Polish-Czech border is projected onto the past in such a manner that the past, thus constructed, can legitimize the border and with it the general state of the present world. The history of the present Polish part of Teschen Silesia is beginning to be seen with increasing clarity here as the history of Poland, and the history of the Czech part of the terrain as the history of the Czech Republic—existing, of course,

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<sup>9</sup> I am basing my argument on the empirical results of the research project *Portrait of a Pole in Zaolzie*, which studied the knowledge of respondents living on the Polish side of Teschen Silesia about the people living on the Czech side of the border. The results were reported by Agata Kaczmarek (Kaczmarek 2010a, Kaczmarek 2010b, cf. Kajfosz 2011, Kajfosz 2013).

‘from the very beginning’. In this fashion—at least at the level of local informal discourses—the border is transformed in nature; it loses its historicity; memory is lost of how the border was formed. In this precise manner the past can achieve the form of a *continuum*, the form of an orderly *cosmos*, constructed at the price of collective amnesia.

Local common wisdom (on both sides of the Polish-Czech border) is beginning increasingly to rest on the assumption that the contemporary administrative situation of Teschen Silesia (its current division between two states), like the contemporary institutions of national identification, is not the effect of a train of historical events, but the effect of a natural necessity ensuing from original differences. If, however, from the start, Poles have lived on the Polish side and Czechs on the Czech side (Poles currently constitute a minority in all the Teschen Silesia districts on the Czech side of the border), then the border, by the nature of things, could not have been drawn anywhere else than where it does run. The presentist projection thereby maintains the stability of the local world and the stability of the local national identifications.

As an example, I could cite a joke current in today’s Polish part of Teschen: ‘Do you know how the Czechs originated? When God created people out of clay, he tossed all the ones who didn’t turn out well across the Olza River.’ (Read: God created people on *our* territory, and he threw all the ‘failed products’ on the *others*’ territory). Even if the joke is taken for an obvious fiction, without any pretensions to representing the past, it has the power to create it. The ‘silent’ text implies the existence of an eternal, natural difference between *one’s own* and the *others*’ nationalities, which are not presented here as the products of historical-cultural processes, but as the products of ‘nature’ itself. It should be remembered that before the year 1920, when the town of Cieszyn/Teschen/Těšín was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia, there was no political or linguistic difference between its two parts. I consider that texts (jokes) that are equally clearly imaginary can participate in constructing the collective (non)memory by calling into consciousness the image of the eternal difference between *one’s own* and *others*.

As has been observed, similar examples of presentism can be used to explain the magical transference of the current world’s structures onto the past, including the transference onto it of denotations and connotations of the content of currently functioning *maps* (models of reality, including ideas) as if those maps had existed ‘from the beginning’ and as if they had been used in the same manner as they are used presently.

### **The Magical Bases of Methodological Nationalism**

The fact has been eliminated from the territory’s social memories that before the outbreak of the People’s Spring (the revolution of 1848/49), the national identifications connected with the categories of ‘Pole’ and ‘Czech’ did not function in local circles. The category of ‘German’, which was considered indigenous, ‘*one’s own*’ in the local Slavic language environment until at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is today

universally considered on both sides of the border to have been *other* from the very beginning (cf. Kajfosz 2011).

The local press, which has been published in Teschen Silesia since nearly the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, can be used in attempting to reconstruct the discourses prevalent here during the period of nationalism's birth. In 1848, the concept of 'nationality' did not yet exist in the general Teschen Silesian discourse, as the publishers of the *Tygodnik Cieszyński* [Teschen Weekly] frequently complained. The Polish national movement involved calling on national wakeners—particularly teachers and the clergy working to convince the peasants, who were indifferent to nationhood, to declare themselves for Polish nationality—to replace all the linguistic codes used to that time by the Polish language. However, such a postulate was not generally approved, as is argued in the anti-pan-Slavism *Nowiny dla Ludu Wiejskiego* [The Country-People's News], which wrote in 1848: "...it hasn't yet happened that a farmer, taking his son to school, has asked that his son learn Polish as promptly as possible, everyone only asks that he get as good a hold as he can on German."<sup>10</sup> Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the multilinguicity of official texts in circulation, with the Silesian-Polish dialect as the local colloquial language, was a matter of perfect obviousness and not a 'problem' requiring resolution. Confirmation can be found in the *Tygodnik Cieszyński* (the opposition paper to *Nowiny dla Ludu Wiejskiego*) whose publishers regretted the lack of nationalist consciousness and announced that the state of affairs needed changing.<sup>11</sup>

I agree with Grażyna Kubica's thesis that at the moment of its emergence the Polish national consciousness in Teschen Silesia was an artificial construct, which was presented as natural and eternal, only dormant (Kubica 2011: 38). But I must quickly add: 1) Of all the written languages available here, literary Polish was closest to the subsystems of the Teschen dialect, even if weight has not always been attached to the fact.<sup>12</sup> 2) What was new then in the Duchy of Teschen was not the Polish national consciousness itself, but a national consciousness based on the Herder concept of ethnicity, as written about, in relation to East Central Europe, by Ernest Gellner (Gellner 2009), and as brought to bear on Teschen Silesia by Grażyna Kubica (Kubica 2011: 229–239). German-ness or Czech-ness, understood in this same manner, was no less artificial here, and was not supported in the local dialect system. (The exceptions were then the vicinity of the town of Frydek/Frýdek/Friedek, where a dialect closer to written Czech was spoken, and the vicinity of the town of Bielsko/Bílsko/Bielitz, where the German language was in colloquial use). 3) We can go back in time and state that from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Protestant farming people of Teschen wrote their *zapiśniki* (diaries, often containing descriptions of events or sermons) in Polish or in a dialect stylized on the basis of the Polish literary language (Raclavská 1998: 44–49); they did so, obviously, because it was easiest for them, and secondly, because

<sup>10</sup> *O polszczyźnie w ewangelickim Gimnazjum Cieszyńskim* [in:] *Nowiny dla Ludu Wiejskiego* 23, 1848, pp. 182–183.

<sup>11</sup> *Tygodnik Cieszyński* 34, 1848, pp. 265–266.

<sup>12</sup> It is one thing to claim that the Teschen dialect has the most points of contact with literary Polish and something else again to make the possible, related implications, which would set forth the national allegiance of users of the Teschen dialect without regard for their desires (cf. Finkielkraut 1993: 10–13).

they supposed that their writings would be most easily read by their descendants in that form. The choice of a code clearly has nothing to do here with national symbols, stories, and emotions, even though it is proof of a certain linguistic preference.

Proof of amnesia or simple ignorance about the emergence of nations in today's understanding of the word can be found, for instance, in the use in Polish language texts of the word 'partition' in relation to Teschen Silesia in Austrian times. The memory of how this territory was taken from Poland on the same principles as in other partitions is thus constructed among participants in the local Polish language discourse. Grażyna Kubica considers that the imagining that Teschen Silesia before 1918 was under Austrian partition is disseminated, among other methods, by school texts and publications of local provenance (Kubica 2011: 20–21). For clarification, I will add: 1) Silesia, including Teschen Silesia, was not taken from Poland by any of the states—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—participating in the partitions. 2) The partitions of Poland took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Silesia did not then form part of Poland's composition. It was part of the Prussian state, which earlier, in 1742, had taken it from Austria, leaving Austria the southern fragment of the territory together with Teschen Silesia. The local rulers of Silesia (including Prince Kazimierz of Teschen) had paid homage to the Czech king for four centuries before the partition of Poland, and were politically bound in this manner to the Holy Roman Empire of those days.

The use of this same category—*partition*—for different, not very comparable, situations in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries where Poland lost territory allows the situations to be identified with one another. This is an example of how the coherence (the continuity) of a representation of the past—including axiological coherence—is always at least partially based on the coherence of an actual symbolic (cognitive) system, within whose framework these representations are created. This can be called, let us repeat, an instance of magic in the weak sense, which gives the direction for forgetting. The consciousness of the past's discontinuity disappears here, as does the discontinuity of symbolic systems within whose framework images of the past are constituted. What is responsible for this fact is not only the nationalist educational system, but also the cognitive conditioning of experience and memory as such: the projection of present experience onto the past is a universal fact.

The word *partition* began to function here after 1918 as a metaphor (as a rhetorical figure) which then justified the access of the Polish-speaking intelligentsia of the Duchy of Teschen to Poland. This word, in the course of time, lost its metaphorical meaning and changed into a definition representing 'historical truth'. The above example shows that the similarity of two different meanings connected with one and the same form (*partition*) is easily changed into one meaning, creating a new memory. The same concerns contact: both meanings of the word *partition* blend into one meaning thanks to the same form (*signifiant/signifier*) to which they adhere.

On an analogical principle, the durability of any object (for instance, a relict of the past understood as a place of memory) could be 'transferred' onto the narrative representation of the past that is metonymically related to it. The durability of the relict of the past (for instance, a museum exhibit) could produce imaginings about

the durability of the narrative related with it and the images of the past contained in it. The durability of an exhibit could in this manner ‘mask’ the changeability of its interpretation. Analogically, the durability of linguistic forms (Pole, Czech, German, or Silesian) could ‘mask’ the variability of their content in regard to time, space, social environment, and the discourses suitable to them. Jakub Grygar (Grygar 2008: 73–75) draws attention to the problem in the context of Teschen Silesia. I propose to explain a phenomenon observed by this author by the transfer of traits from the concept’s form onto its content. To be exact: thanks to a magical ‘transference’ of the durability of word forms (*signifiant/signifier*) onto their content (*signifié/signified*) there is possible the conviction that words within the framework of various historical situations and environments always have the same (unchanged) semantic content (and thus meaning) that they have for us at the present time.

In the numerous texts of local provenance that refer to the past, it has become obligatory since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to repeat some variant of the formula that Poles, Czechs, Germans, and Jews lived in Teschen Silesia. Here before me is an example from the English-language Wikipedia: ‘The region was inhabited by several ethnic groups. Most numerous were Poles, Czechs (mainly in the western part of the region), Germans and Jews.’<sup>13</sup> This formulation silently implies—particularly as it is not accompanied by any further explanation—that: 1) The national identifications listed are transhistorical, because they did not arise, were not here transformed in terms of meaning, and did not change in proportions; 2) the differences between them have existed forever and at all steps of history were the same; and 3) contemporary local identifications do not at all differ from the identifications, described by the same words, that appeared in other historical situations and other places. Thanks to such silent implications, the discontinuity conditioned by time (the variability of historical situations), space, or social stratification, are eliminated in the retrospective view.

The formula cited—when it is without more precise explanation—implies, for instance, that Jews have always and without exception had a national identity different from German, Polish, or Czech identity. In such a situation, a word, which is a product of a discourse that appeared relatively recently, is projected onto the ‘entire’ past and as such models it. Participants in the Teschen Silesian colloquial and journalistic discourses have a hard time imagining, today, that at one time in Teschen Silesia there could have existed a *real German* who, instead of going to church (Protestant or Catholic), attended a synagogue.

Such a formulation could in this sense be a proof of the ‘absorption’ of a no-longer-existing, non-homogenous, and variable *terrain* (the past in various historical situations) by contemporary conceptual maps. It could prove—after L. Wittgenstein—that our minds have been enchanted by language (Wittgenstein 1998: 63–64). Such a formula gives to various national identities, it is true, ‘the right to a past’ on a given territory, but it does not give the right to alternative identities. It constitutes an expression of methodological nationalism in the sense that it takes from national identities the right to historical emergence and formation. Such a formula implies

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<sup>13</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cieszyn\\_Silesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cieszyn_Silesia) (Retrieved 14.02.2013).

the transhistoricalness of national identifications. It implies that they have existed eternally, and in the same semantic form.

Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge project can be seen as a way of dealing with the past that consists in 'breaking' the blends of meanings resulting from projecting today's categories of thought onto the past. In these endeavours, it is a matter of 'breaking up' the unity (identity) of concepts and things, of 'breaking up' the unity (identity) of the form and content of words (*signifiant/signifier* and *signifié/signified*). As I observed earlier, in a spontaneous experience, one is often not distinguished from the other. The deconstruction of ideas, which leads to following the transformations of their use within various discursive formations or historical situations (i.e., tracing the transformation of their denotative and connotative content)—in the understanding of the history of madness, death, etc.—can be read as an attempt at the 'de-magification' of our memory and as a strike at presentism.

The strong dependence of the local production and reproduction of texts about Teschen Silesia's past on socio-political procurement can be, among other things, the explanation of the fact that this production and reproduction are unusually dominated by positivism—acquiring here the form of a 'silent' methodological premise, which, on account of its unrecognizability and ubiquity, presents itself as the only way of conducting scientific research into the past.<sup>14</sup> While the increased competition between contrary memories is ameliorated by negotiated compromises—that is, in conditions created by modern communications technology (internet sites devoted to regional issues, Wikipedia, social portals, blogs, etc.)—there are not any signs here of broader thought concerning the manner in which, on a given territory, images of the past are (and at various stages of history, were) constructed, in what socio-political circumstances they are produced, and what socio-political aims they serve.<sup>15</sup>

Thanks to magic thinking in the weak sense, representations of the past—which acquire the form of a historical narrative—can become the past itself in spontaneous experience. Only the reflexive distance to our own spontaneous experience allows us to observe the difference between a representation of the past and the postulated past itself,<sup>16</sup> which is no longer directly accessible. I consider that a similar reflexive attitude could acquire the form of a general *habitus* only in such environments where the *raison d'être* of a narrative about the past does not lead exclusively to legitimizing socio-political claims. I am thinking here of an environment in which the feeling of national community is traditionally constructed more on the civic principle (on the principle of a political decision to accede to a set social contract based on a consensual value system) than on the principle of a second-hand faith in a common ethnic 'origin'.

Teschen Silesia's radical socio-political changes, which required legitimization by the past, could explain why not only positivism, but also nationalism (in the entirely neutral meaning of that word) have acquired here a form that is more 'silent' (the

<sup>14</sup> Grażyna Kubica calls the presentist projection of pan-Polish socio-cultural realities onto the territory of Teschen Silesia 'Polono-centrism' (Kubica 2011).

<sup>15</sup> The exceptions here are the work of Jakub Grygar (Grygar 2005, 2008) and Grażyna Kubica (2011).

<sup>16</sup> I use the word *postulated* here in the same manner as Immanuel Kant uses it when it refers to the '*ding an sich*' (the thing in itself), whose existence we assume even if it cannot be proven.

unconscious, methodological assumption characterizing local memory institutions) than a form that would make it a research object. In Teschen Silesia (on both sides of the border), nationalism is submerged in the very language used to write and speak about the past, and this language contributes to producing the 'social spectacles' (Schaff 1964: 220) through which local journalists look at the past. One proof is the above-mentioned fact that national categories such as Pole, Czech, German, Jew, Silesian, etc., are taken here to be eternal and unchanging in meaning.

Of course, I am not claiming that this is specific to Teschen Silesia. It could be, however, specific to regions affected in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by changes in borders, radical changes in political systems, or forced transfers of populations. In such environments—on account of the need for appropriate historical policies—the constructivist approach to historical narratives (and thus a sceptical distance to circulating narratives about the past) is considered to be socially undesirable or even dangerous, harming the national interest. The problem of contemporary memory discourses on both sides of the border in Teschen Silesia is no longer a defensive attitude toward foreign usurpers, characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a far-reaching inability to understand and comment upon constructivist theories, never mind joining those theories to the local methodological tools in regards to memory discourses.

To summarize, it could be asked whether the local Czech and Polish (minority) memory institutions on the Czech side of the border, and the Polish memory institutions on the Polish side of the border have anything in common? Above all, it would seem they have a common unconsciousness in the form of a common conceptual structure. Outside of a few exceptions, they present national identity (of any kind) as something *original* and *essential*, which as a result of the actions of *outsiders* was changed, and only at a suitable moment returned to its *original state* or did not return to it. The longing to discover and prove the 'original national *arché*', still hides potential questions about the conditions in which the Herderesque concept of national identity drifted into Teschen Silesia, the form in which it took root here, how it was transformed, and what effect it had on local discursive images of the world. In Teschen Silesia, questions about national identifications almost entirely cloak (render invisible) the questions of how those identifications were and are constructed at various stages of history, how the socio-political conditions of these constructions have changed, including changes in the relations of power, and how symbolic force—because open force, particularly the force used by *others*, has been written about often here—acted on those constructions.

If I claim that images of the past and the national identifications related to them could function on the order of magic, I am thinking here of the power of connotation (that is, axiologically characterized associations), which are connected with narratives about the past, in that they superimpose on the worlds (the content) presented by those narratives. Thanks to connotations, a human being knows, in advance—or rather feels—which narratives about the past are credible and which are not credible, before even analyzing and comparing them. In such a situation, legitimization or delegitimization of images of the past occurs already at the level of the spontaneous 'perception'.

In this regard, connotations can block reflexive thinking: this is obviously a question of the current situation in which a human being finds himself and a question of *habitus*. It is not easy to analyse critically a narrative that we know in advance, due to the positive or negative emotions we connect with it, is worthy of our uncritical respect or our uncritical condemnation or rejection. In this understanding, the ‘silent’ or ‘tacit’ axiological content suggests, facilitates, prompts us toward a manner of reading a suitable narrative about the past: it imposes on the intention with which the narrative will be read. In this way, the connotation absorbs images of the past, as it merges with them into one meaning. As has been observed, in the spontaneous experience, a connotation may be transferred onto the narrative about the past from its source and in general from everything that is in indexical or iconic relation to it.

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