

Routledge Approaches to History

**POLISH THEORY OF HISTORY
AND METAHISTORY IN
TOPOLSKI, POMIAN,
AND TOKARCZUK**

FROM HAYDEN WHITE AND BEYOND

Jan Pomorski



Polish Theory of History and Metahistory in Topolski, Pomian, and Tokarczuk

This book traces the development of the Polish theory of history, analysing how Jerzy Topolski, Krzysztof Pomian, and Olga Tokarczuk have both built upon and transgressed the metahistorical theories of American historian Hayden White.

Poland's reception of White's work has gone through different phases, from distancing to a period of fascination and eventual critical analysis, beginning with Topolski's methodological school in the 1980s. Topolski played a major role in international debates on historical theory in the second half of the 20th century. The book's second study is a rare opportunity for English-speaking audiences to engage with the thoughts of Pomian, a philosopher and historian of ideas who has both complemented and developed theories of historical cognition independently from White. In the final chapter, the book presents a study of the historical imagination in 21st-century Central and Eastern Europe through the work of novelist Tokarczuk, the winner of the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature. In considering the contributions of these three thinkers, the book explores the active process by which past becomes history and thus motivates contemporary actions and realities.

By deconstructing and reconstructing contemporary theories of history, this research is a unique contribution to the fields of historiography and the philosophy of history.

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This book is the result of many years of my reading and researching the work and writings of Jerzy Topolski, Krzysztof Pomian, and Olga Tokarczuk. I feel privileged to have met all three of them on my intellectual quests. To Krzysztof and Olga, I address additional words of gratitude for being the first critical readers of the chapters devoted to them. I am also deeply thankful to Danuta Topolska and Anna Topolska, the wife and daughter of professor Topolski, who, throughout my work on this book, graced me with kindness and support, not only in browsing through the private archives left by the Professor.

The results of my earlier studies on Topolski, Pomian, and Tokarczuk have been published in Polish, and these texts, properly reworked for the English-speaking audience and expanded with new threads, were the starting point for writing *Polish Theory of History and Metahistory*. The final outline of my book benefited a lot from the advice offered by peer reviewers who were the first to evaluate my proposal. I am certain that their opinions contributed greatly to the final positive assessment by the Editorial Committee, resulting in my book being now published as part of the prestigious Routledge Approaches to History series.

This book would not be possible without financial support from the Polish Ministry of Education and Science. The grant awarded for winning the “Excellent Science” – a government programme for international promotion of the top Polish scientific achievements – allowed me to cover the costs of translation into English. I am deeply thankful to my translators: Karol Kasprowicz and Konrad Żyśko with whom I engaged in long discussions and (sometimes) fierce disputes in order to work out the best possible way to express in English both the depth and the tone, or true colours, of the thinking, not so much mine, but rather of the three protagonists of my narrative, whose first language was/is Polish, after all.

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Translators' Foreword

Translating Jan Pomorski's *Polish Theory of History and Metahistory in Topolski, Pomian, and Tokarczuk: From Hayden White and Beyond* has proved equally a truly remarkable challenge and a highly responsible task, especially in the face of the magnitude and significance of the authors and works discussed therein. In particular, the intellectual landscape of the monograph has been shaped by the concepts and notions such as *historia*, *dzieje*, *pamięć*, and *poznanie*, fundamental for the construction of each of the chapters and vital for the understanding of the thoughts presented therein. In fact, they, as well as their lexical environment, are so vital for the comprehensive exploration of the ideas promoted by Jerzy Topolski, Krzysztof Pomian, and Olga Tokarczuk that they, undoubtedly, can be juxtaposed with Stanisław Barańczak's *semantic dominant*¹ or Anna Wierzbicka's *keywords*².

It is precisely for those reasons, that is, the heavy semantic load carried by the keywords, as well as due to discrepancies between the lexical systems of the Polish and English languages, whereby a particular lexeme in one language could be rendered in multiple ways in the other, that the translation of the monograph needed to be approached with the utmost caution so that its intricate, nuanced, and oftentimes interwoven meanings are not lost. During the process, we encountered numerous translatory problems and issues that, for the sake of clarity and conceptual order, could and should be divided into certain categories.

Firstly, a category that needs to be put under scrutiny is the narrowing of the quite general and capacious senses of the Polish lexemes. This is best epitomised by the potential variety of meanings which can be attributed to the Polish *historia*. In the light of the assumption that meanings of words are not stable, intersubjective, and uncontested but are activated contextually, it should come as no surprise that the renditions of *history* into English encompass senses such as *history*, *tale*, or *story*. However, the text itself makes a crucial distinction between *historia* and *dzieje*, the latter being consequently rendered by us in the sense of *res gestae*. This is further underscored by Jan Pomorski himself, recognising the distinction between history spelt with the capital "H" (synonymous with history/past reality – *res gestae*) and the one spelt with the lowercase "h" (synonymous with knowledge/science/talk about the past – *rerum gestarum*) – understanding

history as what happened (*dzieje*), on the one hand, and history as what is written or said about history (the past), on the other. History is perceived here in the spirit of *Annales* school tradition as “human” past – history is about humans and their actions, whether we are talking about *historiae res gestae* or *rerum gestarum*. Jan Pomorski refers to the European (especially Marc Bloch in *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*) and Polish (works of the nestor of Polish methodology of history Marcei Handełsmann) way of thinking about the past. This distinction is rather absent in contemporary theory of history (or methodology in the nomenclature of Topolski and Pomorski), but it is still important to acknowledge how the past is being reflected in the present and how it affects the future. Pomorski and *cognising cultures*, which he examines, are therefore the starting point for developing his own concepts. Recognising the community-forming potential of history as a tool to raise awareness of the possibility of humans to change in the world means to be able to make/create history and influence the surrounding reality.

Staying within the broad category of *history*, we follow the translation of *historia powszechna* as *universal history*, relying on the title of Pomian's article: “World History: Global History, Universal History”, published in *Le Débat* in 2009. Such a lexical choice is also in agreement with the titles of other published and well-acclaimed books, for example, the series published in 1966 by Goldenkraft. As for *narracja historyczna*, its rendition *historical narrative* can be traced back to Hayden White.

Yet another major field of translatable challenge concerned the rendition of the Polish lexeme *poznanie*, together with all its derivatives (*poznawczy, poznający, poznawać*), with *kultura poznająca* standing at the forefront of the list and holding a central position throughout the text. After much deliberation with the author of the monograph, we resolved to rely on the term *cognising culture*, accentuating the dynamic nature of the process under discussion as well as its psychological, deeply conceptual dimension³. Thus, we go beyond the epistemologically rooted term knowledge or knowing, which possibly could be encountered in the works pertaining to the discipline of philosophy. We also discard its more vernacular equivalent, that is, *meeting*, simultaneously offering a contrast to the term *cognitive culture*, previously used in the English abstract of Pomorski's article “Abrazja i sedymentacja w roli historycznych metafor fundamentalnych” or article “Jerzy Topolski's Theory of Historical Narrative. On the Trail of Professor's Lost Book”, which was previously translated and published in *Historyka. Studia metodologiczne* in 2021. In the light of this approach, we consequently render *sposoby poznania* as *ways of cognising* and *osoba poznająca* as *the cogniser* (the latter having been used, among others, by James J. Gibson in 1979 in “The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception”).

Secondly, a series of challenges emerged relating to the identification of the concepts holding a steadfast position in the Anglo-Saxon scientific/academic world. One of such conceptions, *historiozofia*, is rendered by us as *philosophy of history*, despite an easily accessible equivalent in the form of *historiosophy*, offered by dictionaries yet not widespread in the available literature.

Another culturally entrenched concept is the one of *pamięć*, where, while our standard, strategic choice seems to be *memory*, we opted for the term *culture(s) of remembrance* (*Erinnerungskultur*) to render *kultury pamięci*, as it refers to the way in which a society deals with its past history. This term has also been well established in the literature on philosophy of history, having been used by Pomian himself. The distinction between *memory* and *remembrance* often correlates to a difference in socio-temporal scale: with remembrance being deeply rooted in time and collectivity and memory relating to the more recent past and individual experience. *Culture of remembrance* corresponds with the cultural approach propagated by Pomian and emphasises its character as an act of meaning-making in the present. Remembrance is important for Pomorski and how he ponders on Pomian's thought, because it can be conceived as a cultural force that helps to redefine social frameworks and to create links between hitherto unconnected *cognising cultures*.

Finally, it should be pointed out that while delving into the English versions of the source works discussed in the subsequent chapters of the monograph, we have encountered several shortcomings in their translations. For instance, the translator of "Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500–1800" rendered the French phrase *spectateurs virtuels* as *potential audience*, while a faithful rendition would suggest *virtual spectators*. It is this term that we adopted in our translation, motivating us also to maintain *spectator(s)* in the sense of *widz* or *widownia* throughout the text.

Another section of meanings struggling not to "get lost in translation" concerns Jennifer Croft's translations of *Flights* and *The Books of Jacob* by the Nobel Prize winning author Olga Tokarczuk. It should be pointed out that the Polish text *nigdy nie stałam się prawdziwą pisarką czy – lepiej powiedzieć – pisarzem, bo w tym rodzaju to słowa brzmi poważniej* has been rather scantly rendered as *But I never became the real writer* (*Flights*, p. 18), and it is this official form that has been used in this monograph. However, as a word of clarification, we are obliged to mention that the English agentive morpheme *-er* in *writer* does not specify the gender of the agent, while the Polish *pisarka* clearly points to a female writer, with Tokarczuk commenting on her impression that the Polish *pisarz* (male writer) sounds more serious than *pisarka*.

Furthermore, in *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk's views are expressed by Jacob Frank when he points out: "*for women are to a considerable extent slaves of this world, knowing nothing of the freedom, having not been taught how to be free*". This is a rendition of the Polish passage "*kobiety są w większym stopniu niewolnicami świata, bo nie wiedzą o swojej wolności, nie uczono je być wolnymi*", where a suggestion arises that women are to a greater extent slaves of this world than men are, a suggestion completely lost in Croft's rendition, thus triggering a different conceptualisation of the world of males and females inherent in Tokarczuk's writing.

Another example of the transformation of the source text in *The Books of Jacob* is the omission of the last phrase in: *Pozwala im na chwilę obcować ze sobą, poświęca uwagę tym postaciom, które pojawiły się w jej życiu, i teraz, odsunięte przez śmierć na drugi plan, są jak ci weterani z Częstochowy, o których zapomniał król i zapomniała*

armia i którzy żebrzą teraz o odrobinę uwagi since the English text: *She permits them these relations for lifetime, and now, having receded into the background upon their deaths, they are like those veterans in Częstochowa whom the king and the army forgot* does not offer any equivalent to *i którzy żebrzą teraz o odrobinę uwagi* [begging for a little attention].

The entire text of the translation has profited greatly from mutual criticism and consultation among the translators, as well as from intellectual debates with Professor Jan Pomorski, who proved an invaluable help and guiding spirit in the process. We both thank him for making this project possible.

Karol Kasprowicz, Ph.D., and Konrad Żyśko, Ph.D.

Notes

- 1 Discussed in detail in his “Mały, lecz maksymalistyczny manifest translatologiczny” [A Small but Maximalist Translatological Manifesto] in: Idem. *Ocalone w tłumaczeniu. Szkice o warsztacie tłumacza poezji z dołączeniem małej antologii przekładów* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5, 1992), 7–66.
- 2 Explicated in her *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 3 The term *kultura poznająca* [cognising culture] was introduced by Jan Pomorski in his famous article *Historiografia jako autorefleksja kultury poznającej* [Historiography as Autoreflexion of Cognising Culture], published in a book dedicated to Professor Jerzy Topolski on the occasion of his 70th birthday: *Świat historii* [The World of History], edited by Wojciech Wrzosek (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 1998), 375–379.



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Introduction

The year 2023 will mark exactly 50 years since *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*¹ was published by Hayden White (1928–2018). Like only few other works, this book and its author – considered by many as the most important figure in the theory of history of the past half-century – have had a profound impact on contemporary theory of history and historiographical inquiries around the world.² The Polish theory of history also owes much to the inspiration drawn from Hayden White’s ideas. I have written about it extensively in the monographic study *Hayden White in Poland: Facts, Criticism, Reception*.³ But the Polish theory of history is also a constant transgression of White’s thoughts, in the theory of historical narrative itself, in the theory of historical cognition, and in the theory of historical imagination. Therefore, although I will refer to Hayden White’s concepts many times in this book, primarily I would like to present the English reader with the original Polish contribution to contemporary theory of history. In the following three chapters, I will reconstruct and deconstruct the *metahistorical thoughts/concepts/ideas* of:

- 1 Jerzy Topolski – the founder of the Polish school of methodology of history, actively present in all the major international debates on historical theory in the second half of the 20th century;
- 2 Krzysztof Pomian – a Polish philosopher and historian of ideas, disciple of Leszek Kołakowski, and one of the most eminent living European intellectuals, for whom Europe, as he himself writes, is “a fragment of biography and an intellectual adventure”, and the historicity of the Being, which he has been studying for over 50 years, constitutes the greatest cognitive challenge; and
- 3 Olga Tokarczuk – a Polish historical writer, winner of the 2018 Nobel Prize for Literature, whose historical imagination knows no bounds, as she has proven time and time again in her works, with her phenomenal historical epic *The Books of Jacob* topping the list, the English translation of which was published in 2021, becoming an instant global bestseller.

What these highly original cognising cultures of history – Hayden White, Jerzy Topolski, Krzysztof Pomian, and Olga Tokarczuk – have in common is *metareflexivity*, a way of having an internal conversation about their own theoretical

2 Introduction

reflection and research/narrative practice. It is worth adding that *metareflexivity* is recognised by the British sociologist Margaret Archer as the highest form of human action.⁴ She admits that the way people engage in internal dialogue is crucial both for their personal and social identities and for the effectiveness of the actions they take within a range of social practices. The experience of continuity and discontinuity of the context of action, considered both in systemic and biographic dimensions, is relevant especially in science. The community of experience shared with significant others (e.g., authorities in a scientific discipline) enables cognising culture to maintain contextual continuity resulting in “repetitive situations, stable expectations, and durable relations”⁵, and particular varieties of internal conversation emerge “at the nexus between contexts and concerns”.⁶ This is often accompanied by an uncompromising pursuit of a recognised cultural ideal (e.g., some ideal of historiography if the self-reflecting agent is a historian, or an ideal of the historical novel if the reflecting agent is a writer). These are the issues that we will be dealing with when we meet the cultures as proposed by Jerzy Topolski, Krzysztof Pomian, and Olga Tokarczuk.

To practise historiography or the historical novel is also to participate, more or less consciously, in the cultural game that plays out between the culture being studied and the culture doing the studying, and also between the latter and the culture of the “audience” targeted by the historical narrative. This is why Chris Lorenz was of the opinion that “although all scientific historians are bound by the rule of reality, they are also bound by what might be called the rule of audience”.⁷ This cultural game with the audience is also a common leitmotif of the analyses presented here. The cognising cultures that Topolski, Pomian, and Tokarczuk create and study bear the stamp of their “today”: the place and time in which they were created. And at the same time they show us, the recipients of their texts, how the past can be present – actively present – in our Contemporary. They demonstrate what causative power it has, both in motivating people to act and in ultimately and directly affecting their collective actions – past as history. This is what distinguishes their approach to history from the metahistorical reflection of Hayden White, who, by default, avoids posing ontological questions. In the case of Topolski, Pomian, and Tokarczuk, the man pondering on history – *homo metahistoricus* – constantly asks himself such questions, being aware that the ultimate addressee and recipient of their reflection will be *homo historicus* (the maker of History). In this sense, the work of expanding the boundaries of the reader’s historical imagination is a prospective activity: a struggle for the future shape of History (*res gestae*).

A critical dialogue with Hayden White’s work began in Poland in the 1980s in the circle of Jerzy Topolski’s methodological school. Interestingly, for many years, Topolski himself remained critical of the thought of the author of *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, and it was not until the 1990s that he began to rediscover White and appreciate the

importance of historical narrative theory. The reception of the American meta-historian's thought in Poland has gone through different phases: from distancing, through sympathetic interpretation, a period of fascination (mainly thanks to Professor Ewa Domańska), to critical analysis and a kind of dialectical *Aufhebung*, as I will try to show in Chapter 1, devoted to the methodological thought of Jerzy Topolski. The oeuvre of this world-famous Polish methodologist and theoretician of history impresses with the sheer breadth of its subject matter (from economic history, through the methodology of history and the history of historiography, to historical syntheses)⁸ and its voluminous character: 30 books and over 1,100 publications. Similar to Hayden White's, Topolski's circle of reception and influence was global, though never as spectacular as the former. They were contemporaries – Topolski was born in August 1928, and White a half of year earlier – and though they grew out of different philosophical traditions (nonorthodox Marxism in the former case, analytic philosophy of history in the latter), they were able, at some point, to recognise the limitations of their backgrounds and develop their own theories, which brought them international recognition. I consider it a symbolic confirmation of this view that at the same time, in 1990, they both entered the editorial committee of the prestigious journal *History and Theory. Studies in the Philosophy of History*, which for years has been regarded as the most important periodical in the world for historical theorists. No wonder then that the work of Jerzy Topolski, who died in 1998 in the fullness of his creative powers, is worthy of recognition and international promotion⁹, all the more so because toward the end of his life he was working on a *New Theory of Historical Narration*, whose assumptions have recently been reconstructed, thanks to the notes found in the professor's archives.

Krzysztof Pomian, a Polish philosopher and cultural historian of Jewish descent, whose theory of historical cognition and history of the past as an object of belief, knowledge, and science – on a metahistorical level – is, in a sense, a complement to Hayden White's famous 1973 study, has been developing his epistemology of historical cognition parallel to White, though completely independent of him. Pomian (b. 1934), barred from teaching at the University of Warsaw in Poland after 1968, emigrated to France, where he was a professor at the CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*), Paris, until his retirement. White, who read Pomian in French, regarded him as one of the greatest minds of the 20th century and dedicated one of his last texts to him.¹⁰ And in his "Foreword", dated 9 February 2014, to *Przeszłość praktyczna* [The Practical Past] – a third volume of the anthology of White's articles and book's chapters, edited especially by Ewa Domańska for the Polish-speaking audience, Hayden White mentions Krzysztof Pomian as the final link in a chain of philosophical reflection on history as a science. The chain that leads from Droysen through Heidegger, Collingwood, Popper, and Koselleck.¹¹ Unfortunately, the Polish philosopher of history is practically absent in the English-speaking world, since he wrote and published almost exclusively in Polish, French, and Italian. This study is, therefore, an attempt at offering a synthetic presentation of and a lecture on his concepts, written especially for the English-speaking audience.

As is well known, Hayden White was particularly interested in the *historical imagination* as an object of study.¹² After all, he tested his theory of historical narrative on texts written by historians, philosophers, and writers alike. Therefore, he would probably particularly enjoy a study of the historical imagination in 21st-century Central and Eastern Europe, of which the 2018 Nobel Prize for Literature winner, Polish historical novelist Olga Tokarczuk, is the “bearer”. Her *reading of the world* is rooted in Central and Eastern Europe. It grows out of that culture. In the third and final study, we will delve into Tokarczuk’s world of historical imagination. This is the world of the cognising culture of history viewed from the perspective of a man of the Anthropocene epoch¹³, reflecting on the fate that his contemporaries have inflicted on the world, aware that she herself – Olga Tokarczuk – is a link in a long chain of predecessors and successors, who *on their pilgrimage* – this category has an epistemic significance for the Nobel laureate, which will be elaborated on in Chapter 3 – reflect on the world, history, and human nature, searching for meanings.¹⁴ Tokarczuk – similarly to Beverley Southgate¹⁵ – treats literature as a method of cognition, and as a tool of communication, creating a story about what she herself – while cognitively wandering through different times and cultures – has experienced. I hope that this meeting with the Nobel Prize winner – on the metahistorical level – will turn out to be equally (or even more) revealing and inspiring for the international community of historians and history theorists as the meetings with Jerzy Topolski and Krzysztof Pomian. I think that the latter two would also agree with Olga Tokarczuk’s thesis and mine that our experience of the past can only be understood and expressed by the multiple historiographic and aesthetic forms – cognising cultures of history, through which the past (*res gestae*) is turned into history (*historia rerum gestarum*).

Jan Pomorski

Notes

- 1 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
- 2 In this context see: Richard T. Vann, “The Reception of Hayden White”, *History and Theory*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1998): theme issue *Hayden White: Twenty-five Years On*, 143–161, and *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*. Edited by Robert Doran (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). See also recent articles on Hayden White’s global influence: Jörn Rüsen, “A Turning Point in Theory of History: The Place of Hayden White in the History of Metahistory”, *History and Theory*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2020): 92–102; Paul A. Roth, Xin Chen, Veronica Tozzi Thompson, and Kalle Pihlainen, “Globalizing Hayden White”, edited by Ewa Domańska and María Inés La Greca, *Rethinking History*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2019): 533–581.
- 3 Jan Pomorski, “Hayden White a polska metodologia historii i teoria historiografii” [Hayden White and Polish methodology of history and theory of historiography]. In: *Hayden White w Polsce: fakty, krytyka, recepcja* [Hayden White in Poland. Facts, criticism, reception]. Edited by Ewa Domańska, Edward Skibiński, and Paweł Stróżyk (Kraków: Universitas, 2019), 67–102.
- 4 See Margaret S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

- 5 Eadem, *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 49.
- 6 Eadem, *Structure, Agency and Internal Conversation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 344.
- 7 Chris Lorenz. "Towards a Theoretical Framework for Comparing Historiographies: Some Preliminary Considerations." In *Theorizing historical consciousness*, edited by P. Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 47.
- 8 A brief overview in English of Topolski's main achievements in these subdisciplines of historical science can be found in Marian Drozdowski, Jan Pomorski, Andrzej Wyczański, and Andrzej Zybertowicz, "Jerzy Topolski - For a New Shape of the Historical Science." Translated by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz. In: *Między historią a teorią: refleksje nad problematyką dziejów i wiedzy historycznej*, edited by Marian Drozdowski (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 50–64.
- 9 An anthology of Topolski's work in theory and methodology of history has recently been published in English: *Jerzy Topolski. Theory and Methodology of Historical Knowledge: An Anthology*, edited by Ewa Domańska and Anna Topolska (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2022), 432.
- 10 Hayden White, "Krzysztof Pomian's Modernist Theory of Culture." In *Wśród ludzi, rzeczy i znaków. Krzysztofowi Pomianowi w darze* [Among People, Things and Signs. In honour of Krzysztof Pomian], edited by Andrzej Mencwel, Jacek Migasiński, Paweł Rodak, and Małgorzata Szpakowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), 319–331.
- 11 "First, the research phase of historical inquiry has been the primary basis for conceptualizing a history of historiography since the time of Ranke and Hegel. Not only that: philosophers have been debating the question of history's status as a science since the time of Droysen and down to Heidegger, Collingwood, Popper, and Koselleck and Pomian" [in:] Hayden White, "Przedmowa" [Preface], in: idem, *Przeszłość praktyczna* [The Practical Past], edited by Ewa Domańska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2014), 7.
- 12 Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).
- 13 On this kind of approach see: Julia Adeney Thomas, Mark Williams, and Jan Zalasiewicz. *The Anthropocene: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Anthropocene Time," *History and Theory*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2018): 5–32.
- 14 As Jörn Rüsen used to say, *evidence* and *meaning* are the two main categories of historical studies. See his *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn, 2017). Probably, Tokarczuk would say: of historical novels, too.
- 15 See: Beverley C. Southgate, *'A New Type of History': Fictional Proposals for Dealing with the Past* (New York – London: Routledge Approaches to History, 2015). The author shows us, on the examples of the work of 19th- and 20th-century novelists, how to create historical worlds alternatively to – and additionally more personal, colourful, imaginative, and ethically oriented – how scientific historians do it.

1 Jerzy Topolski

From the methodology of history to the theory of historical narrative

The chapter devoted to Jerzy Topolski (1928–1998), founder of the *Polish School of Methodology of History* and a participant in the most important debates surrounding the philosophy and theory of history in the past 30 years of the 20th century, will be divided into four parts, following a chronology in order to capture the changes in his views on the aims and tasks of the methodology of history that can be seen by analysing his four seminal books. Firstly, I will attempt to look at Topolski's output from his earliest period, which culminated in *Metodologia historii* [Methodology of History – hereinafter MH], published in 1968.¹ In the second part, I will present his views on the theory and methodology of history from the 1980s, which found their most mature form in his 1983 book, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej* [Theory of Historical Knowledge – hereinafter THK].² Although the title itself refers to Morton White's famous book³, in fact Topolski here exceeds the limits of the analytical philosophy of history. In Part III, I will attempt to show how Topolski's theoretical thought evolved in the 1990s under the influence of Hayden White, narrativism, and postmodernism, resulting in, among other things, the book *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej* [How to Write and Understand History: The Mysteries of Historical Narrative – hereinafter MHN]⁴ in 1996 and the student textbooks *Wprowadzenie do historii* [Introduction to History] and *Od Achillesa do Beatrice de Planissolles* [From Achilles to Beatrice de Planissolles] published in 1998.⁵ Finally, Part IV will be devoted to reconstructing the assumptions of *Nowa metodologia historii* [New Methodology of History – hereinafter NMH], which the author intended to be primarily a new, anti-White *theory of historical narrative*. Obviously, rethinking the oeuvre of the author of *Methodology of History* has accompanied me throughout my academic life – I was fortunate to be one of his direct disciples.⁶ However, it was not until the finding, in 2020, of the outline of his last book in Topolski's family archives, completed just before his death in December 1998, and sadly lost – *New Methodology of History*⁷ – that I started rethinking his contribution to world theory of history in a new and comprehensive way. It is very fortunate that an anthology of Jerzy Topolski's texts on the theory and methodology of history was published in 2022 in English⁸, as it is a valuable addition to my analyses.

Professor Topolski's premature death, when he was in the prime of his creative powers, did not allow him to realise his intention to build a comprehensive

system, involving the methodology of history, but he undoubtedly had systemic ambitions.⁹ He wanted a philosophical-historical reflection to encompass all sections of methodology of history: the theory of historical cognition, the theory of historical research, the theory of historical knowledge, and the theory of historical narration, and – which is particularly worth emphasising – the theory of historical activism, that is, the theory of how history is produced by human actions, something which sociologists today call the theory of social change (Topolski called it rather *theory of historical process*). This plan – apart from *Theory of Historical Knowledge* – was never fully realised, although his subsequent published books are a visible sign of these intentions, a preliminary outline of the problems he had been pondering about after writing *Theory of Historical Knowledge*. Thus, for example, *Wolność i przymus w tworzeniu historii* [Freedom and Coercion in the Making of History], published in 1990, is a return to the theory of historical activism already discussed in *Świat bez historii* [World Without History]¹⁰ and an attempt to show, by means of concrete examples, how history becomes, how it is socially produced, and what historical conditions shape social change. Topolski wrote here:

I wanted to show how man's creation of history simultaneously creates the conditions and constraints for further action. I also wanted to convince that there is no in-built mechanism in history that brings happiness and success to man by itself, i.e. that his history lies entirely in his hand. In other words, they are in the hand of man, who himself is a 'product' of evolution.¹¹

When I asked him about this book, he replied that it was merely an introduction, a prolegomenon to a larger work he was planning to write, touching upon the issue of how History is made in general, which he had been postponing (*Theory of Historical Process/Social Change*). In turn, *How to Write and Understand History: The Mysteries of Historical Narrative* must be seen as a prolegomenon to the planned comprehensive **Theory of Historical Narrative**, the outline of which we know only from the 12-page draft of *New Methodology of History*, found in 2020 in Topolski's private papers. The influence of narrativism can also be seen in the short lecture on the history of historiography *From Achilles to Beatrice de Planissolles*, innovative precisely due to its narrative structure, but this issue will be discussed in detail in Part III of this study. Now it is time to present Topolski's path to the methodology of history.

I The first period: between analytical philosophy of history and Marxism

1 Jerzy Topolski's path to the methodology of history

Jerzy Topolski's account of his path, from his first methodological publications to his last ones, published posthumously, is a history of encounters – encounters at different times and in many dimensions, with different cultures of cognising

history, with people he valued and from whom he learned, and, finally, with books that were meaningful to him, that made him rethink this important issue. Here, we will deal with the first stage of those encounters, culminating in the publication of the first edition of *Methodology of History* in 1968.

Topolski's interest in methodology emerged relatively early, in the late 1950s, thanks to Andrzej Malewski (1929–1963), who studied economics in the same years (1946–1950) at the Faculty of Economics and Law of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and additionally sociology. As is well known, Topolski never studied history and learnt the basics of the historical workshop at a seminar given by Professor Jan Rutkowski, one of Poland's most eminent economic historians.¹² Unfortunately, Rutkowski died soon afterwards, and Topolski took his master's degree in economics under Paweł Sulmicki, PhD – the thesis concerned the extrapolation method in political economy. Nearly three years of apprenticeship with Rutkowski was mostly all about tedious heuristic work on the sources of church archives on economic history (the abundant sources of the Gniezno archdiocese had not yet been explored in this respect) and resulted in the accumulation of such valuable documentation that Topolski was able to use them in his doctoral dissertation entitled *Technika i rozmiary produkcji w rolnictwie polskim w XVII i XVIII w.* [Techniques and Sizes of Production in Polish Agriculture in the 17th and 18th centuries], which Topolski defended at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń in 1951 (supervisor: Professor Stanisław Hoszowski). Its printed version was published in 1955 as *Rozwój latyfundium arcybiskupstwa gnieźnieńskiego od XVI do XVIII wieku* [Development of the Gniezno archbishopric latifundium from the 16th to the 18th century]. Methodological considerations are not to be found here at all nor in the subsequent book *Położenie i walka klasowa chłopów w XVIII w. w dobrach arcybiskupstwa gnieźnieńskiego* [Position and Class Struggle of Peasants in the Eighteenth Century in the Estates of the Archbishopric of Gniezno]. It was not until the renewal of contact with Malewski in the late 1950s that a breakthrough was made. At that time, Malewski was influenced by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (1890–1963), one of the co-founders of the Lvov–Warsaw School¹³, with whom he had been associated since his university days and under whose guidance he earned his doctorate at the University of Warsaw in 1958. In 1960 *Studia z metodologii historii* [Studies in Methodology of History] was published, written jointly by Malewski and Topolski.¹⁴ This 164-page book, published by PWN in a truncated form (without two chapters, which had been removed by the censorship), is regarded as the crowning achievement of this duo. The importance of a jointly written article for “*Studia Filozoficzne*” [Philosophical Studies] is also emphasised in *Metoda materializmu historycznego w pracach historyków polskich* [Method of Historical Materialism in the Works of Polish Historians]¹⁵ due to the pioneering approach to historical materialism itself: It was treated there not as a *hismat*, that is, a set of indisputable laws of history but as a method (research procedure), used by historians to explain human actions.¹⁶

The first period of his collaboration with Malewski consisted in the fact that, as Topolski recalled in a published interview with Ewa Domańska¹⁷, his role

boiled down to finding and providing Malewski with relevant examples from historians' works as illustration/exemplification for his theses on the procedures of justification and explanation in history (historiographical data in the function of exemplification). It was only with time that that collaboration was to enter a higher, partnership level. What is most interesting in this regard is not *Szkice z metodologii historii* [Sketches in the Methodology of History] but *Narodziny kapitalizmu w Europie w XIV-XVII wieku* [The Birth of Capitalism in Europe in the 14th-17th centuries] (1st ed. 1965), preceded by several studies on the subject published in the first half of the 1960s.¹⁸ Malewski returns from the United States in 1961 after a year's stay with George C. Homans, and one can clearly see him scientifically enriching Topolski's new ideas. If one reads Malewski's *O zastosowaniu teorii zachowania* [On the Application of the Theory of Behaviour] and then juxtaposes this reading with Topolski's introduction to *The Birth of Capitalism*, the influence becomes obvious!¹⁹

In *The Birth of Capitalism*, Topolski heralds the Western economic theory as "[...] the main source of new questions in relation to historical material", while at the same time being aware that

historical-economic research is so closely linked to historical-social research that in many parts of the work there is a stronger emphasis on matters of change in social structure than on strictly economic issues. Economic processes take place through the actions of people, so that some elements of a given economic process may be decisively social in character. The question of social structure is an extremely complex issue; however, many of the interrelationships occurring in this area have already been detected in the theoretical social sciences (sociology, social psychology). These findings give rise to questions that historians can pose to the historical material. In our case, for example, we are interested in the motives behind the behaviour of various groups and classes, in particular the nobility facing serious danger at the end of the Middle Ages because they were threatened in their position by the bourgeoisie and peasants. Have sociologists or social psychologists already reached any agreement in this regard and can it also be verified in our material? – asks Topolski rhetorically.²⁰

And, of course, he answers "yes", referring directly to the works of Homans and Malewski²¹, in order to find some regularity in the framework formulated by them ("if the situation of a certain group (class) deteriorates, so that a significant part of the members of this group finds it difficult to cope with the requirements imposed on the members of the group, this group initiates actions aimed at opposing the existing situation") a justification for the historical thesis formulated by them on the special role of the nobility in the genesis of capitalism.²² By accepting the cognising culture inherent in the scientific paradigm of the social sciences, which was just emerging in the United States, and applying the theories derived from it to the explanation of strictly historical issues, such as the genesis of capitalism or the duality in the economic development of Europe,

Topolski – as an economic historian (not a methodologist) – was able to break through into the mainstream of historical scientific discussions and find a permanent place for himself there.²³

Therefore, the conclusion I would like to draw based on the above findings is the following: in the first half of the 1960s, Topolski “works with Malewski’s ideas” far more and more effectively as a historian (i.e. in his most famous *strictly* historical book, *Narodziny kapitalizmu w Europie w XIV-XVII wieku* (The Birth of Capitalism in Europe in the 14th–17th centuries), than as a methodologist of history (for example, in the *Methodology of History*). In the latter, however, the influence of another prominent Polish philosopher of science, Jerzy Giedymin, a student of Ajdukiewicz, is evident. The work on the *Methodology of History* (1963–1966), however, was another period in which Topolski mentally remained under the influence of the *analytical philosophy of history*.

It covers the period from the death of Malewski (1963) to 1968 – the date of the publication of the first edition of the *Methodology of History*. This is the time when Topolski practised the theory of history in a deductive model²⁴, where something is assumed *a priori* about the historian’s research practice without examining it himself. It is characteristic precisely of that current of metahistorical reflection which described itself as an *analytical philosophy of history*. In this cognising culture, no research is conducted on the research practice of historians, but the problems of historical cognition are considered autonomously. Examples from history are only used as exemplification, as a confirmation of the thesis being put forward, formulated within the framework of general considerations about the nature of explanation or justification in history. These are most often random examples – chosen appropriately from history books or even just based on the “imagined reality” of how historians work. This pressure of the prevailing cognising culture of analytic philosophy at the time was so strong that Topolski, in the mid-1960s, absorbing its achievements and writing²⁵ his *Methodology of History*, simply succumbed to it, and the book makes practically no references to historians, except for some sporadic cases. This would not change radically until the mid-1970s, but by then a completely different Topolski and a different cognising culture had emerged. But let us return now to the *Methodology of History* and the search for its author’s sources of inspiration.

The first source has Polish roots, and his name is Jerzy Giedymin. Topolski met him through Malewski, who, for a short period, was Ajdukiewicz’s assistant at the Chair of Logic at the Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM). Jerzy Giedymin (1925–1983), a pupil of Ajdukiewicz and Popper, also worked there (he went to London twice, thanks to a Ford scholarship in 1957/58 and 1959/60, and returned as a declared supporter of *hypotheticalism* in the philosophy of science). Giedymin was a graduate in English and philosophy, and in addition he also graduated in economics from the Poznań Academy of Economics. He received his doctorate in 1951 (his supervisor was Professor Adam Wiegner²⁶ – an eminent logician, from 1955 Ajdukiewicz’s successor at the Chair of Logic at UAM) on the basis of a thesis entitled *Ekonomia polityczna jako nauka historyczna* [Political Economy as a Historical Science] – note the thematic convergence with Topolski’s

MA topic. He did his habilitation in 1960 on the basis of a series of articles *Studia nad metodologią opartą na koncepcji racjonalności* [Studies on Methodology Based on the Concept of Rationality]. Topolski met him after his return to Poznań and was undoubtedly under his strong intellectual influence in the 1960s. This showed in the importance of Giedymin's two books for Topolski's cognising culture: *Z problemów logicznych analizy historycznej* [From the Logical Problems of Historical Analysis] (1961) and *Problemy – założenia – rozstrzygnięcia. Studia nad logicznymi podstawami nauk społecznych* [Problems – Assumptions – Decidabilities. Studies on Logical Foundations of Social Sciences] (1964). This is not a right place and moment to discuss them in detail, so let me use a mental shortcut, quoting Krystyna Zamiara's concise opinion (she was his assistant) about their author:

Applying the methodological principles adopted from K. Ajdukiewicz in his research practice (or, more broadly, of the Lvov-Warsaw School), he proposed a new, more precise interpretation of many categories of Popper's 'logic of scientific discovery' (e.g. the notion of the confirmation of hypotheses, the critical text of theory, etc.) and supplemented them with new categories and assertions (e.g. the notion of credibility of the informant-observer; the logical and theoretical characterisation of questions and answers as a supplement to assertions about the nature of research problems in Popper's sense).²⁷

Topolski finished writing the *Methodology of History* in September 1966, when Giedymin left for London for another year's internship.²⁸ He thanks Giedymin explicitly in the *Introduction*:

The help of J. Giedymin, beginning with the first outline of the book, was of special importance. I refer not only to his novel studies in the methodology of social sciences (in particular the methodology of questions and answers and of historical analyses, on which I have drawn many times), but also to his generous personal advice and the review of this book which he wrote for the publisher.²⁹

In a sense, Giedymin will replace Malewski for Topolski in these years and will be for him a "guide" to the latest literature on the general methodology of sciences and philosophy of science; he will also "open" his mind to analytic philosophy. In addition to the works of Giedymin already mentioned above, it is necessary to mention here two more of his articles on the reliability of informants, published in *Studia Logica* (1961) and the *British Journal for Philosophy of Science* (1963) (the whole Part IV of the *Methodology of History*: "The Pragmatic Methodology of History. Theory of Source-Based and Non-Source-Based Knowledge" is based on the concept presented in these works³⁰) as well as *Wykłady z logiki formalnej, teorii komunikacji i metodologii nauk* [Lectures on Formal Logic, Theory of Communication and Methodology of Sciences] – a book written by Giedymin in 1966, co-authored by Jerzy Kmita (1931–2012) – a

figure whom he met through Giedymin and who would become one of Jerzy Topolski's most important intellectual partners for the rest of his life.³¹ They all grew up scientifically in the circle of Ajdukiewicz, an emblematic figure for the Poznań scientific community, whom some authors even regarded as a precursor of the Poznań School of Methodology.

Let us note that the division of methodology into *pragmatic* and *apragmatic* used in the *Methodology of History* refers directly to Ajdukiewicz's *Logika pragmatyczna* (Pragmatic Logic), a book published in 1965³², although it also appears in the above-mentioned *Wykłady z logiki formalnej* (Lectures on Formal Logic), written, after all, in his circle of thought. In general, Ajdukiewicz and Giedymin are the authors most frequently cited (apart from Marx) in the *Methodology of History*. Malewski appears there many times too, however, references are primarily made to well-known Polish historians such as Witold Kula, Henryk Łowmiański, and Jan Rutkowski. Obviously, the authors from the *analytical philosophy of history* are very strongly present in that work: William Dray, Arthur Danto, Maurice Mandelbaum, William H. Walsh, Morton White, Patric Gardiner, or Georg H. von Wright.³³ Those who are also mentioned are the representatives of the deductive school in the philosophy of science, such as Carl Gustav Hempel, Karl R. Popper, or Ernst Nagel, whom Topolski read with inspiration from Giedymin, and even Thomas S. Kuhn (noted twice) and his famous *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962). Topolski also presents dissenting concepts, reaching, for example, to the work of philosophers of history such as Robin Collingwood, Benedetto Croce, or Isaiah Berlin, who could hardly be included in the analytical current. To capture this complex context, the meeting point of various scientific cultures, at the intersection of which the *Methodology of History* was created, is – of course – necessary, but it would require a separate study.³⁴ Here, I will limit myself to signposting the most important threads.

Firstly, therefore, it should be noted that the entire first part as well as the fourth, fifth, and sixth parts of the *Methodology of History* all grow out of the spirit of analytic philosophy. It is in the conceptual costume proper to analytical philosophy of history that the fundamental problems that should be considered within the methodology of history are conceptualised and presented. It is such an approach, and not the practice of historical research, that imposes the binding rules of the “game of science”.

Secondly, the “historicisation” of historiography we are dealing with here (I am referring to Part II – *Patterns of historical inquiry*) has the character of a top-down scheme, where *Dialectical Reflection* is the final developmental stage of historical science and is therefore intrinsically *ahistorical!* Topolski would only comprehend this in the 1970s.

Thirdly, any explanation in history takes place according to Hempel's model, imposed top-down on actual research practice, and only examples that fit into it are likely to appear in the pages of the *Methodology of History*. Although Topolski is well acquainted with Popper's principle of falsification, he consciously does not apply it, because the overall picture of historical science would cease to be as orderly and internally coherent as he would like to see it.

Fourthly, Topolski is very keen to integrate himself into the discussions held in the 1950s and 1960s by the leading representatives of the analytic school in the philosophy of history and thus remains in the “mental grip” of their thinking; he looks “from inside” this paradigm rather than “from outside” at the problems posed, failing to see that they also are a product born out of this cognising culture.

Fifthly, Marxism **at Topolski’s disposal in those years** is completely vulnerable/weak/unable to cope with the scientific problems at the top of the Western intellectual elite at the time. Therefore, his strength of theoretical “impact” is very negligible in this work. Topolski even forgot what he had concluded ten years earlier with Malewski, that is, the theses of historical materialism can also be heuristic hypotheses. His lecture on *object-oriented methodology* deviated considerably from what he would soon present in *World Without History*, namely the reinterpretation of Marx’s thesis that it is people who make history, but they do not do so arbitrarily, but in the circumstances that condition the efficacy of both individual and collective actions, something which would later be known as the *thesis of historical activism*.

Sixthly, *Methodology of History* was intended to be a bridge built between Polish historiography and the rapidly distancing West, both within the framework of historical science and as a reflection on history itself, but it soon became apparent that the movement was going only in one direction.

These six general remarks must suffice to summarise what Topolski’s adventure/experience with analytical philosophy of history was for him. The next phase in his scholarly development begins roughly in 1968, just after the first edition of *Methodology of History* appeared in print, and falls in the 1970s – this is already the period of the reign of another *cognising culture*, namely the *Poznań School of Methodology*.

2 *Within the circle of the Poznań School of Methodology*

The years 1968–1980 were a period of Jerzy Topolski’s search for his own path, but not alone, rather as part of a collective, which was a community of scholars now known as the ***Poznań School of Methodology***.³⁵ It was formed by Jerzy Topolski (1928–1998), Jerzy Kmita (1931–2012), and Leszek Nowak (1943–2009), each coming with his own circle of students and colleagues. They were not a disjointed set, for the participants in the doctoral seminars that Topolski, Kmita, and Nowak led in the 1970s knew each other and often attended all three seminars together.

What did Topolski’s search consist of? Firstly, a reconstruction of the methodological assumptions of Marx’s *Capital*. Secondly, the treatment of science as social *praxis*. Thirdly, the historicisation of epistemology. And fourth, the idea of *homo historicus*, that is, an activist conception of history, where an individual viewed as a social being is placed at the centre of the “production of history”.³⁶

Each of these explorations is important and could make good material for a separate story. Working with and on Marx’s texts resulted, among other things,

in the “discovery” of the assumption of the rationality of human actions, the method of idealisation and modelling, humanistic interpretation as a procedure for explaining human action, or the subjective and objective sides of the historical process. Recognising the key role of social practice as the verifier of all theory led Topolski to recognise that science too is a type of social practice and that it also has its own *rules governing* the course of actions taken within that practice. In turn, rethinking the changes that occur within the social practice of science over time (i.e. in the history of science, including the history of historiography itself) made it possible to see that the very boundaries of scientism change historically and that all cognition is not timeless but historical.

It should also be added that during these years Topolski radically changed his approach to the methodology of history. The methodology, hitherto cultivated by him in an “analytical” spirit, **became from now on an empirical science: its subject was the actual research practice of historians.** It was the reconstruction of the assumptions governing it (most often unconscious) that was now placed at the forefront. In addition, it was a matter of **collectively shared assumptions**, as Topolski introduces – following the Poznań School – **the social** dimension of scientific practice into the methodology of history. In the next edition of *Methodology of History* (1984), he even replaces the previous *formulas* with the term paradigms of historical research, as better reflecting the social character of historical knowledge production. Topolski decisively rejects the thesis that the historian creates/researches in an individual manner! Every individual historian is immersed in some cognising culture, which *ex definitione*, is social.

By analogy, then, we should treat Jerzy Topolski himself: as a scientist/historian immersed in specific cognising cultures. He had such a developed methodological self-awareness that he was able to reflect on this immersion of his own (which I myself reflect with the thesis of *historiography as a self-reflection of cognising culture*) and thus was able to develop it as well as develop himself. I believe that this was also the result of Topolski’s rethinking of how they – as a community of scholars – practised science within the *Poznań School of Methodology*. Topolski had a special role there: because of his position in the world of science (since 1968 he has been a full professor, and since 1971 a member-correspondent of the Polish Academy of Sciences, editor-in-chief of the “Methodological Studies”, published since the mid-1960s) and his position in a communist party (since 1968 a member of the Science Commission of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party), he was able to perform (and in fact did perform), especially in relation to Kmita and Nowak (and often also their students), the role of an “institutional protective umbrella”, watching over their successive scientific promotions (habilitations: Kmita’s in 1968, Nowak’s in 1970, associate professorships in 1974 and 1976, respectively, with Topolski’s participation as a reviewer of their output), as well as “defusing ideological landmines”, that is, successive accusations of revisionism and departure from Marxism, which were formulated against the Poznań School of Methodology in the 1970s.³⁷ It should be added that neither at the very

beginning of the school nor later, in the 1970s and 1980s, was there any relationship of scientific subordination between those three scholars, any kind of master–disciple relationship, each of them going his own way, appreciating the others and being aware that they were partners in thought and giving something valuable to each other. They also expressed this *expressis verbis* in their publications, indicating the sources of their borrowings, of which there are many examples. Here, I will use a quotation of just one, from Topolski:

In many of my arguments – he writes in August 1976 in *From the Author to the Rozumienie historii* (Understanding History) – I have benefited from the research progress achieved by various authors in recent years. Here, first of all I would like to point to the work of J. Kmita, who developed the concepts of explaining human actions in the form of the so-called humanistic interpretation, and reconstructed the model of functional-genetic explanation concerning the matter of dissemination of given sets of beliefs and introduced the problem of nomological formulas into the discussion, describing the so-called framework regularities – very common in historical explanation. Those achievements of J. Kmita, having to do with historical explanation, with which I agree (which is generally the case), I have tried to include in the general picture of historical explanation outlined here.³⁸

The same was true of Leszek Nowak and the use of his research on the method of idealisation in both theory of history and subject of historical research. Topolski also greatly valued Nowak's non-Marxist historical materialism. In one of his last texts, already published posthumously by Krzysztof Brzechczyn, he wrote:

[T]he great attractiveness of Nowak's historiosophical system lies in the fact that, unlike many other systems of philosophy of history, it has no inbuilt finalism. Broadly speaking, the merit of Leszek Nowak's comparison with historical materialism is that it provides a theory devoid of eschatological overtones, that is, a theory that does not assume or predict the achievement of some end of history, some ideal state.³⁹

Naturally, each of the three had their own ambitions, including systemic ones: Topolski within the methodology of history, Kmita within the social-regulatory conception of culture⁴⁰, and Nowak the broadest, from idealising theory of science to non-Marxist historical materialism and to unitarian metaphysics.⁴¹ They met at a particular moment in the intellectual/scientific/philosophical development of each of them individually, and from these intensive meetings (in many ways and in many forms of realisation of their joint and individual research practice), especially in the 1970s (Topolski – Kmita – Nowak) and 1980s (Topolski – Kmita), something important emerged, not only for themselves and for us – the participants in these philosophical debates and methodological

disputes – but also – I am deeply convinced of this – for science itself. Topolski's merit was to provide the initial impulse, later, that is, in the 1970s, Kmita and Nowak's contribution to the joint work was objectively much greater in terms of the cognitive significance of the research results and the concepts presented. Topolski, on the other hand, possessed a rare and extremely valuable ability to adapt these concepts to the needs of the methodology of history, always trying to add something from himself.

Kmita came to philosophy and methodology through linguistics (he studied Polish philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University from 1951 to 1955) and through his interest in the theory of language and logic ended up at Giedymin's seminar. Nowak studied law at the Adam Mickiewicz University and additionally philosophy at the University of Warsaw (there were no independent philosophy studies in Poznań in those years). He also became interested in logic – he wrote his master's thesis and doctoral thesis (*Problemy znaczenia i obowiązywania normy prawnej a funkcje semiotyczne języka*, 1967 (Problems of the Meaning and Validity of a Legal Norm and Semiotic Functions of Language)) under the supervision of the theoretician and philosopher of law, Professor Zygmunt Ziemiński, author of the famous textbook *Logika praktyczna* (Practical Logic), on which several generations of lawyers were raised. Nowak would not come to the Institute of Philosophy at the Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM), directed by Kmita, until 1970, immediately after defending his habilitation thesis *U metodologicznych podstaw "Kapitału" Karola Marx* (The Methodological Foundations of Karl Marx's "Capital"). This dissertation would be the result of close cooperation in the Topolski – Kmita – Nowak triangle, which had already lasted for two years.

In the *Methodology of History*, Leszek Nowak could not yet be present for obvious reasons, but he was one of the first reviewers of this fundamental work.⁴² Kmita is quoted there several times, first of all as co-author, together with Giedymin, of *Wykładów z logiki formalnej, teorii komunikacji i metodologii nauk* (Lectures on Formal Logic, Theory of Communication and the Methodology of Sciences), and – in the section devoted to evaluations as a component of historical narration – as the author of an article in the 1964 edition of *Philosophical Studies, Problem wartości logicznej ocen* (The Problem of the Logical Value of Evaluations). Kmita's critical review of Celina Bobińska's book *Historyk – fakt – metoda* (Historian – Fact – Method) is also noted.

Once these vestigial presences in Topolski's 1968 work are juxtaposed with Kmita's (as well as Nowak's) presence in theory of historical knowledge, this juxtaposition alone quantitatively demonstrates how Jerzy Topolski's cognising culture has changed over the course of 15 years and how important this collaboration was for him. Obviously, Topolski towards Jerzy Kmita and Topolski towards Leszek Nowak are big topics, still not addressed, and certainly deserving a separate research project. Capturing what united and what divided these three eminent Polish scholars not only is important for the history of the Poznań School of Methodology but also provides an important philosophical context for showing the path that Topolski, as a culture cognising history, took between

the *Methodology of History and Theory of Historical Knowledge*. Let us try to note the most important points on this path.

In 1968, the year of the publication of *Methodology of History*, the script *Wykłady z metodologii humanistyki* [Lectures in the Methodology of the Humanities] was published at Adam Mickiewicz University Press by Kmita and Nowak, very important from the perspective of the genesis of the Poznań School of Methodology. It was then, on the basis of a discussion of Topolski's work, that the idea for a joint work of the three of them on a new reading of Marx's *Capital*, using the tools that contemporary methodology and philosophy of science can provide, was to emerge. The initiative came from Topolski, who published the article *Założenia metodologiczne "Kapitału" Marksa*. [On the Methodological Assumptions of Marx's 'Capital']⁴³ in "Studia Filozoficzne" [Philosophical Studies]. The discussion which it provoked resulted in a sharp polemic initiated by Seweryn Żurawicki and a response made by Topolski⁴⁴, who announced the undertaking of a collective study of how Karl Marx understood method and practised scientific research. The collective volume, published less than two years later (1970) under the editorship of Jerzy Topolski, *Założenia metodologiczne "Kapitału" Marksa* (Methodological Assumptions of Marx's 'Capital'), would be the first result of this collaboration. I consider the next milestone in the development of the *Poznań School of Methodology*, as a collective, to be *Elementy marksistowskiej metodologii humanistyki* (Elements of the Marxist Methodology of the Humanities), a collective work from 1973, this time edited by Jerzy Kmita and with very considerable authorial participation by Topolski and Nowak. In the *Introduction*, written jointly by Kmita and Topolski, they specify that they think of methodology as "a **certain system of norms or directives defining the scientific procedure, which consists of particular research activities** (emphasis – J.P.)"⁴⁵

Such an understanding of methodology, as a set of rules/norms/directives governing the research practice of scientists, regardless of whether they realise their existence at all, will become the hallmark of the Poznań School – just as the fact that the basic assumptions of historical materialism were subjected here to a logical analysis and confronted in the theoretical-cognitive layer with the requirements imposed on science by the neo-positivist philosophy of science. I consider the date of the publication of the first volume of the *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of Science and Humanities* (with the famous "introduction" by Topolski, Kmita, and Nowak *Against the False Alternatives*) as the next stage in the development of the *Poznań School of Methodology*, because it meant going outside, beyond Poland, and becoming directly involved in the international debate.⁴⁶

The school's intellectual work within the community is best illustrated by the record of the papers delivered and their discussion at the conference "Marxist Methodological Directives for Historical Research" held in Poznań on 7–9 October 1974, which was published in the form of the post-conference volume *Założenia teoretyczne badań nad rozwojem historycznym* (Theoretical Assumptions of Research on Historical Development).⁴⁷ It would be worthwhile for anyone who wishes to write about the Poznań School as a paradigmatic community to

look at this volume.⁴⁸ It was his own experience of these years that enabled the future author of *Theory of Historical Knowledge* to recognise both the social character of scientific research and the paradigmatic nature of science as such, with important theoretical implications.

The social research practice of historians – as a cognising culture – encompasses various spheres of human activity that change over time (the other types of social practices), including itself (it is a *self-reflection of cognising culture*). For Topolski himself, the object of cognitive reflection in the first period was in particular the history of social economic practice (the subject of economic history) or practices related to the creation, continuation, and change of social institutions (the subject of social history). In the case of cognitive self-reflection this was reflected in many statements and in the author's programme for the methodology of history and the history of historiography, sometimes going straight to the level of detailed directives, for example, when Topolski wondered how to write a synthesis of national history or regional history.

The 1970s saw Topolski's numerous trips to the West, including longer research stays in the United States and Canada. These provided opportunities for direct conversations and exposure to the latest developments in the methodology of history and in historical research. The gap between the imaginary world of the analytical philosophy of history and historians' work done in the world's top research centres and their publications in prestigious journals was so wide that Topolski had to reject the cognising culture of the *Methodology of History*. **It is necessary to make the theory of history more empirical**, that is, based on the analysis of historian's research practice.

This empirical approach manifested itself not only at the level of the program of the methodology of history itself but also at the level of Topolski's historical studies⁴⁹, and above all in the way he inspired his students and colleagues to follow this path of analysing specific research practices of historians when preparing their doctoral or postdoctoral dissertations. Studies on the research practice of German *Sozialgeschichte* (Bernard Perlak, 1977), on the presence of non-source-based knowledge in Lelewel's historical research (Zofia Sprys, 1975), on the presence of theory in historiographical narratives (Maciej Faliński, 1980), on Braudel's concept of global history (Wojciech Wrzosek, 1985), on the presence of historical materialism in the work of Polish historians (Andrzej Zybertowicz, 1985), on the Marxist paradigm in post-war Soviet historiography (Gwidon Zalejko, 1993) or, finally, my work on the research practice of American *New Economic History* (1985) are prime examples.

Another issue to be considered in the context of the *Poznań School of Methodology* is *Topolski's Marxism*.

3 Topolski's Marxism

The Marxism of the Poznań School is an "open work" (in the sense that Umberto Eco gave to the term – "opera aperta"), still demanding to be defined, what it actually consisted of and to what extent it still retains vitality in itself

today? Intentionally, what I mean here is to pose the problem analogously to how the vitality of Marx in today's world was asked by Derrida in his famous *Specters of Marx*.⁵⁰ This remark applies as much to the Marxism of the Poznań School as to the Marxism of Topolski. Because *cognitively* it is not conceptualised enough (in the sense of “sufficiently”). Zybortowicz stopped only at Topolski's historical materialism as a *research programme*, while Stobiecki and Domańska do not go beyond general statements that the Poznań methodologist was a Marxist, albeit a Marxist who “thought differently” because, for example, he was “anthropocentric”; that is, he conceptualised humans as the authors of history. Obviously, the question of who Topolski's *homo historicus* is is worth thinking about, but my point here is about something else, namely that the work is also open in the sense that it is unexplored in such a key area as Marxist *benchmarking*, that is, the comparison of Topolski's Marxism with the Marxisms practised at the time in Poland, in the USSR, or in the West. Without this comparison, it is difficult to see Topolski's uniqueness. The research of Andrzej Zybortowicz, Gwidon Zalejko, and Rafał Stobiecki can provide a good starting point for such a recognition when it comes to Poland and the USSR⁵¹, but a comparative work, when it comes to Western European Marxism: above all Italian (Antonio Labriola, Antonio Gramsci, and Benedetto Croce, just to stay with the most famous names cited by Topolski), French (here Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar in the first place), and British (Perry Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm) needs to be done practically from scratch. Relying merely on a mental recall/refreshment of an old reading of their most important works, without extended research, I would be tempted at best to hypothesise that Topolski resembles Gramsci in his understanding of *praxis*, seeing in it the verifier of all theory. He shares with Althusser and Balibar an approach to the importance of *Capital* in the emergence and development of the social sciences, although his reading of this work – in terms of Marx's methodology – is different: Topolski emphasises, above all, the importance of modelling (idealisation), while the French emphasise Marx's structuralism. In turn, I would see a similarity to Hobsbawm precisely in the fact that for both of them – as historians/scholars – Marxism was above all a cognitively fertile theory of social development. The political practice was based on Marxist ideology, in which they were directly involved. Hobsbawm, let us recall, was a long-standing member of the Communist Party and a member of the British Academy at the same time, while Topolski belonged to the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza [Polish United Workers' Party – hereinafter PZPR] from his student days until the party's self-dissolution.

How, then, should Topolski's Marxism be conceptualised in order to overcome the limitations of his interpretations to date? Let me remind you that these interpretations are based, on the one hand, on the so-called “accountability” model (accountability for personal involvement in the System, in the political practice of the Polish People's Republic, in the PZPR finally, where official Marxism was the official ideology of the ruling camp) and, on the other hand, on catching the differences between the “doctrine” and his individual way of practising Marxism. This is the case of Stobiecki, who, in the text *MarksiŃta*,

który miał odwagę różnić się od innych (Marxist Who Dared to Differ), already cited here, directly poses the problem of how such a serious scholar could participate simultaneously in the ritual culture of Marxism as ideology/discourse of power, practically throughout his adult life, from the 1950s to the late 1980s, writing occasional texts such as *Inspiracje myśli leninowskiej w historiografii* (Inspirations of Leninist Thought in Historiography, 1970) or *Inspiracje leninowskie w badaniach historycznych. W 105 rocznicę urodzin Włodzimierza Lenina* (Leninist Inspirations in Historical Research. On the 105th anniversary of Vladimir Lenin's birth, 1975), participating in commemorative academies, etc., and after the 1989 breakthrough he “gets it out of his mind”, with actually nothing to reproach himself with.

I think that Topolski was led to the party by conformism and pragmatism rather than by any ideology. The discovery of the virtues of Marxism as a social theory came much later than him joining the PZPR itself. In the 1950s and 1960s, until the establishment of the Poznań School of Methodology, his Marxism hardly bore the marks of a theory of social development, let alone any methodological specificity (since the works he wrote with Malewski in the late 1950s, we have been dealing not with a reconstruction of Marxian methodology but with a kind of cultural imputation, consisting in “reading” the so-called general theory of behaviour into Marxism). It is essentially doctrinaire in nature and functions as a collection of quotations from the classics and a repetition of commonplace theses. The gap between what Topolski does/writes and what he actually thinks about official Marxism at that time is most evident in the fact that when, during the period of the creation of the *Methodology of History*, he works mentally to solve the problems of both historical cognition and the pursuit of historical knowledge, he **relies on conceptual tools from outside Marxism**. The Marxism he knows then is intellectually helpless and can therefore appear in the text in a purely decorative, symbolic function. It is a different matter how Topolski (and whether he honestly) presents it years later, as Stobiecki writes about. The situation changes radically when Marx's social theory and his methodology themselves become, for Topolski and the Poznań School of Methodology, the object of study. The result is a new *cognising culture*, where under the same name – *Marxism* – we are confronted with a completely different ontology, epistemology, and methodology. It might as well not have been called Marxist any more, and if this was not done within the public scientific discourse, it was because of the “protective colours” it was disguised in for safety's sake. Years later, in 1998, Topolski put it this way:

From Marxism I tried to extract certain elements of it, so that later – together with the so-called Poznań School of Methodology – ideology and mythology could be discarded from it. [...] I tried to de-ideologise the Marxist theory, which was generally successful in Polish science. In other socialist countries of the time, Marxism remained a kind of ideological creed. In Poland we practised Marxism as a certain theory.⁵²

In order to properly conceptualise Topolski's Marxism, it is therefore necessary to seek an answer to the question regarding what constituted this social theory. Firstly, it is the activist conception of the historical process. Its brief description can be found, for example, in Chapter XII of Topolski's *Elements of Marxist Methodology in the Humanities*.⁵³ Secondly, the thesis of the *subjective and objective nature of the process of history production*, articulated, for example, in the volume *Marxism and History*.⁵⁴ Thirdly, Topolski's position was that historical development (the theory of social change) can be explicated and explained with the help of relations that occur between *ontological spaces* and *spaces of interactions* in the history-making process. These relations have the character of so-called *framework regularities*.⁵⁵ This is most fully presented in Topolski's book *Understanding History*. In a nutshell, one could say that his own reading of historical materialism as a theory was based on four foundations:

- 1 **autodynamism** – the mechanism of change lies within the system and is most often the result of some conflict of interest, rather than being the result of external intervention, such as the interference of supernatural forces or impulses flowing from the subconscious;
- 2 **activism** – it is people who make history by pursuing their goals, but the end result is made up of both these motivated actions and the environment in which these actions take place (including the actions of other people who may be pursuing competing goals), conditioning something – from the perspective of the subject of the action – to be historically possible and something historically excluded at a given point in time;
- 3 **holism** – people act historically within specific social structures rather than alone. These structures are relational systems, imposing social “rules of the game”. Therefore, each individual action must be considered holistically, in relation to the whole structure;
- 4 **essentialism** – it is not the case that all historical events are equally significant; on the contrary, in history, different factors affect others in different ways (i.e. with different strengths). Hence, individual social theories differ in the assumed essential structure of reality, finding in something else the essential difference that determines the change or persistence of a given social system.

Obviously, Topolski's “Marxism” differs from Kmita's “Marxism” (the so-called social-regulatory theory of culture) and Nowak's “Marxism”, which he himself called “non-Marxist historical materialism”. However, this is not the place to discuss these differences (although it is extremely interesting in itself), it suffices to say that Topolski's version is cognitively much poorer than the other two.

Summarising the achievements of the period of the Poznań School of Methodology in the development of Topolski's historical thinking, it must be said that the most valuable achievement of his cognising culture of the time was the recognition of the methodology of history as an empirical science. That is, its subject is not a speculative entity (as the philosophy of history wanted to see it), purely theoretical (like the subject of the so-called analytical philosophy of history

or, for example, the general theory of systems) or formal (as the logic of science saw it), but rather subject to normal empirical research. For Topolski this subject is henceforth the *social research practice of historians*, taking place in a specific time and (cultural) space. This is what he learnt from studying Marx: instead of exegesis, a reconstruction of his research practice (including the rules governing the concrete-historical analyses he presented in *Louis Bonaparte's 18 brumaire* or in *Class Struggles in France*). And attempts to understand what the uniqueness of this methodology is all about. And its continuing usefulness for the social sciences. Henceforth, the analysis of historical works would become Topolski's starting point for building his own theory of history, rather than the other way around, which frequently happens to many theorists of history. This was brilliantly captured and described by Ewa Domańska in *Historia egzystencjalna* [Existential History]:

The problem also lies in the fact that, unlike historians of historiography, theorists of history often do not analyse the work of historians, contenting themselves with instrumentally cited quotations or treating the name of the historian and the title of his or her work as illustrations of their 'invented' theses. Frank Ankersmit's reflections on micro-history, for example, illustrate this situation. Devoid of analysis and specifics, generalities about this type of historical writing use the names of Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie to demonstrate that their books are representations without reference and to present the more general thesis that there is a parallel between recent trends in modern art and historiography.⁵⁶ The Dutch researcher seems to be making historians aware of what – from a philosophical point of view – the phenomenon of micro-history actually consists of, as they themselves do not possess such knowledge. I am not saying, of course, that there are no traditional historians who adhere to a 'naïve positivism'. I just think that such generalisations and simplifications, dividing society into 'us' (modern, philosophically aware theorists) and 'them' (traditional, naïve historians) is an expression of the arrogance and paternalistic attitude of theorists.⁵⁷

Such arrogance and paternalism were alien to Topolski. He wanted to historicise the methodology of history (i.e. open it up to the history of historiography) just as much as he wanted to theorise the history of historiography, so that it ceased to be a simple description of the cumulative growth of knowledge of what successive generations of historians dealt with. This is most clearly demonstrated in the theory of historical knowledge.

II Jerzy Topolski's *Theory of Historical Knowledge* as the philosophical and methodological background of history practised as a social science

Theory of Historical Knowledge can be read in many ways, depending on what one expects from the reading. It will be read differently by a historian in search of his or her methodological self-awareness, by a representative of one of the social

sciences, and by a methodologist wondering how to practise his discipline and following Topolski in this respect. It can be read in the context of his previous works, following the development of the concept; it can be viewed through the prism of the current state of knowledge of the methodological foundations of historiography; and it can be read in the context of the world literature on the subject, weighing Topolski's contributions. It can be read from the position of a researcher reluctant to any methodological reflection or from the position of a philosopher (logician) of science, operating with only an idea of research practice, and without any closer knowledge of it. But what does Topolski himself suggest to his readers about the author's intention for this book?

He emphasises that "in this book he is primarily speaking as a historian", that it is devoted to historians, and that through his theoretical and methodological reflections he wants to "create new ground for discussion among historians".⁵⁸ A discussion on the rebuilding of historiography:

In this book, while constantly having the actual science of history as a point of reference, I nevertheless construct, because this must after all be the main task of methodology, a certain model of this science, a model in which the task of explaining and presenting the past holistically (globally) comes to the fore.⁵⁹

His methodological commentary is written from the perspective of this new model, for Topolski adheres to the thesis that it is not "indifferent to how conceived historical science conducts methodological reflection, i.e. what methodology is inoculated into their (i.e. historians' – J. P.) research practice".⁶⁰ *Theory of Historical Knowledge* is supposed to be such a "vaccine", a dose of a specific methodology, promoting

a historical research that is led by the desire to explain (and thus understand) the past and thus the present, that is, a research undertaken with the awareness of the fundamental role of theoretical assumptions in it, treated as hypotheses subject to infinite verification.⁶¹

The ultimate goal is to reach a state "when, for historians, the use of theory, the work of its application and concretisation become daily bread, just as the methods of source criticism have become so".⁶² With the task of remodelling historiography towards a social science, which is the essence of Topolski's approach to history in the 1980s, there is a need to remodel the methodological consciousness of historians in order to keep up with the changes in historical science. And such a reconstruction of the methodological consciousness of historians is supposed to be the aim of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*.

1 The specificity of Topolski's theoretical language

The reading of *Theory of Historical Knowledge* encounters numerous pitfalls due to the complex construction of the narrative and the peculiarities of the author's

theoretical language (the handling of several types of discourse in the work, the multiplicity of categories and their incommensurability, and the development of categories as the analysis deepens). The first pitfall is the very title of the work. Traditionally, in the literature on the subject, it has been accepted to use the term “historical knowledge” to denote the complete, final result of the historian’s work, presented to the audience in the form of some kind of narrative. Thus, if one were to stick to this understanding of it, theory of historical knowledge would be some theory of historical narrative, of the presentation of the results (structure) of the historian’s work. In the case of Topolski’s work, however, things are quite different. Contrary to the usual meanings, Topolski, starting from the otherwise correct thesis that “the process of cognition and the process of reporting its results are constantly intertwined”⁶³, analyses the entire *social research practice of historians*, from the *context of discovery* to the *context of justification*. And even more than that: he is cognitively interested in **what precedes the research itself**, what governs it, and has its origin in the methodological awareness with which the historian proceeds to the research. This approach is a significant *novum* in the world’s methodological literature. In fact, what we are dealing with here is a theory of the functioning of the social research practice of historians, precisely “social”, because Topolski is alien to any methodological individualism in his view of research practice. He is able to break out of the horizon of the individual researcher’s consciousness, to show to what extent and how it is conditioned by the prevailing paradigm of historical research at a given time and place. Let us also note that in his earlier works, above all in the *Methodology of History*, Topolski introduced the issue of the theory of historical process as a subject of methodological inquiry, here omitted as an independent section. The ontological issue appears only in *Theory of Historical Knowledge* in the context of its governing rules. On the other hand, the very important issue of the development of historical knowledge, which constitutes a theoretical component of research in the history of historiography, is not sufficiently emphasised in *Methodology of History*. Yet now Topolski emphasises its role: “The system of historical knowledge consists of three components: theoretical – images (theories) of the past, methodological – accepted principles of research, and historiographical – the place of a given system in the history of historical science”.⁶⁴ Thus, expanding the category of historical knowledge blurs the boundary between it and the methodology of history, which does not seem to be beneficial.

Reading Topolski’s work confronts the reader with the same complications as reading the writings of any thinker, who, wishing to express his theoretical position comprehensively and in a reasonably coherent manner, is forced, for other reasons, to operate in the narrative with different *types of discourse*. Well, first of all, we are dealing here with a *normative discourse*: the lecture is then conducted from the perspective of the prescribed model of historical science, the ideal of an explanatory and theoretical history, and with a *descriptive discourse*, reporting on the course of actual research practice. These two types of discourse, complementary to each other, are relatively the easiest to distinguish; it is difficult to misunderstand them here since it is enough to remember that Topolski appears

in *Theory of Historical Knowledge* in two roles: as an empiricist, reporting the results of his empirical research on the cognitive practice of historians, and as a normativist, promoting his ideal of science.

A further type of discourse is that conducted in the stylisation of *adaptive interpretation* and in the stylisation of *historical interpretation*. In the case of the former, interpretation is carried out from a present-day perspective, selecting from the past only those contents that continue today, excluding all the ballast of history. In the case of historical interpretation, it is precisely these historical stages of development, the now-forgotten meanderings of the historical path that become the subject of scholarly findings. These two types of discourse appear several times in *Theory of Historical Knowledge*; the section devoted to the description of conceptualisation in the historiography of the 19th century (Chapter II) and the 20th century (Chapter III) may be characteristic here.

Related to the type of discourse distinguished previously is the next type. This is a discourse conducted in the language of conceptual frameworks and moving away from it towards their concrete understanding. Let us analyse these two types using the example of the development of the category “traditionality of historical research”. Topolski introduces this category as follows: “We will understand traditionality as the adherence to writing (paradigm) inherited from the past and continuing despite various attacks from ‘new’ schools and directions”.⁶⁵ Note that the author here uses the notion of traditionality in a framework way, he does not equip it with specific content, and he does not say what specifically determined traditionality. In this way, he gives the concept a theoretical character; it does not refer to one specific case but can characterise something inherent in a situation of a given type or refer to a class of facts of this type. The trap is that immediately Topolski shifts imperceptibly from the language of conceptual framework to the discourse of the concrete and his category loses its theoretical power, becoming merely a description of an individual situation: “the main feature of this traditionalism is the search in the first instance for an answer to a question of the type: what was? (i.e. a question of factual type) and, at the same time, ‘producing’ fact-oriented historical writing”.⁶⁶ Determining, what at a given stage in the development of historical science, traditionality concretely consisted in means abandoning the theoretical character of this concept, and the author proceeds similarly with the categories of “standard” and “non-standard principles of historical research” (pp. 71–72). Clearly, the consequences of such an unobserved shift from discourse to discourse can be far-reaching. The question arises as to what extent the author himself was aware of them. These two types of discourse appear in the part of the work that is, as the author himself puts it, “an attempt at a historical perspective undertaken, among other things, to show the current state of historical science”.⁶⁷ Although Topolski writes that this part of the deliberations is “mainly descriptive” (p. 14), this statement can hardly be taken as an indication for the future reader to perceive it as a discourse of concreteness. His understanding of science itself, operating on the category of the “shifting frontier of scientism”, seems to testify strongly enough in favour of the admissibility of a framework interpretation of the categories

concerned. Moreover, the outcome of such an interpretation is a very interesting general theory of the development of historical science, in my opinion one of the most important achievements of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*.

Another peculiarity of Jerzy Topolski's theoretical language is that he operates an elaborate *system of categories* in which he conceptualises his object of study. Without recognising these categories, it becomes impossible to receive and seriously criticise the position of the author of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*. A few elementary remarks seem necessary here. As I have already said, the object of the study here is the *social research practice* of historians, so the first type of category is the one used by Topolski to create a "description" of historical science.

I consciously write "description" in inverted commas, because what we are actually dealing with here is not a simple description but a highly interesting theoretical model of science. I propose to call this type of category metahistorical or logological. It would include categories such as "historian's research practice (method of research procedure)" (p. 131), "paradigm of historical inquiry" (p. 19), "traditional history" and "modern history" (p. 24), "theoretical and explanatory history" (pp. 10, 109, 128, 181), "static" and "dynamic account of science" (pp. 21–22), "development of science" (p. 45), "external" and "internal system governing the development of historical science" (p. 55), "standard", and "non-standard principles of inquiry" (pp. 43–44). It is thanks, among other things, to the handling of these categories that we get a conception of historical science that is so modern, so different from the usual patterns.

The second type of category are those used to "describe" the complex process of arriving at historical knowledge. Let us label them as epistemological categories. At the forefront, here are the four categories corresponding to the successive phases of the research process: "controlling" (pp. 132, 131, 184–188), "modelling" (p. 258), "explaining" (pp. 373–375), and "checking" (pp. 437–438). The construction of these is extremely complex due to the richness of content carried by their object references, which are, after all, interlinked by numerous relations of interaction. Because these practices themselves and the categories corresponding to them "overlap", and the narrative is seemingly "fuzzy", the same problematic threads sometimes recur in several of its parts. This "fuzziness" is an advantage, not a disadvantage, of Topolski's analysis of science, because – as Thomas Kuhn also pointed out⁶⁸ – the striving for a precise, transparent account of science, which most methodologists strive for, is a relic of positivist thinking, but science itself cannot be put into objectivist frames. Typically, while Kuhn and Polanyi speak of the existence of non-verbalised, *tacit knowledge*, Topolski goes in the same direction and postulates

an analysis of the processes of research thinking, since no theoretical theories or entire theories 'work' in historical research in an autonomous way, merely touching consciousness or passively flowing through it. The researcher's consciousness is not a passive transmitter of content flowing into it from outside; permanent processes of information processing take place in it. (p. 164)

This is why the issue of control appears and is so elaborated upon in theory of historical knowledge.

Although the above four categories come to the fore in Topolski's work, I believe that the category of "conceptualisation of the object of study" (pp. 56–57, 133) and the category of "epistemological creation" (p. 256) are fundamental here. For without their recognition, it is impossible to assimilate the concept of the Poznań methodologist at all. Other more important epistemological categories include "the methodological consciousness of historians" (pp. 131–133, 136–137), "the context of discovery" (pp. 123, 124), "conviction preceding research" (p. 155), "the process of immobilisation (dogmatisation) of convictions" (pp. 153–154), "the process of algorithmisation of research activities" (p. 154), "the process of theorisation (nomotheticisation) of knowledge" (p. 164), "the process of mythologisation of knowledge" (p. 164), "theory" (pp. 178–180), "application" and "concretisation of theory" (pp. 188–199), "static" and "dynamic understanding of the historical source" (pp. 255–258), "information structures of the source" (p. 262), "historical truth" (pp. 479–480), "legitimacy of research" (p. 439), and "objectivity of research" (p. 490).

A set of other categories serves Topolski to "describe" the structure of static historical knowledge. Let us conventionally call them the methodological number 1, as opposed to the methodological number 2, reflecting dynamism, the development of historical knowledge, conceived this time not as relations between successive paradigms of historical research (here we reserved the term "development of historical science") but as relations holding between systems of historical knowledge (or between particular elements of these systems) concerning a particular object of cognition (field of research). Among the former, the following categories come to the fore: "system of historical knowledge" (p. 30), "historical narrative" (pp. 278, 289), "layers of historical narrative: factual I, factual II, theoretical" (pp. 482–483), "historical image" (pp. 305–306), "historical sentence" (p. 305), "binding in historical narrative" (pp. 299–300), "model" (p. 322), "factual claim" and "theoretical claim" (p. 179), "historical generalisation" (p. 175), "idealization law" (pp. 178, 364), "historical law" (pp. 361–364), "nomological formula" (p. 365), "historical hypothesis" (pp. 31, 445–447), and "methodological directives" (pp. 224–226).

The methodological categories are primarily "development of historical knowledge" (p. 31), "correspondence account" (p. 30), "generalising correspondence" and "significantly corrective (strict) correspondence" (pp. 31–32), "types of correspondence in historical narrative: cumulative, corrective, rejecting" (p. 47), and "cumulativism" and "anticumulativism" (p. 31). I would also include "confirmation" in this type of category, "disconfirmation" and "falsification" (pp. 437–438) understood here not as research procedures but as the respective relations between two systems of historical knowledge.

Finally, the last type of category to which I would like to draw the attention of readers of *Theory of Historical Knowledge* are the subject categories (i.e. relating to the historical process itself). The basic ones here are: "historical development (process)" (pp. 211, 215), "hidden (inner)" and "surface layer of the historical

process” (p. 11), “subjective” and “objective aspect of the historical process” (p. 213), “human action” and “human consciousness” (p. 215), “historical structures” (e.g. types of socio-economic formations) and “transformations of historical structures” (p. 216), “historical event (fact)” and “class of historical facts” (pp. 179, 184), “historical regularity” (pp. 375, 399–400), and “ontological spaces” and “spaces of interaction” (p. 372).

The richness of Jerzy Topolski’s theoretical language undoubtedly makes it easier for him to deepen his methodological analysis of the actual research practice of historians (in my opinion, it is unequalled in the world literature), but for the readers of his works, especially if they are not accustomed to the methodological apparatus of concepts, it is a serious handicap.

Now I would like to move on to present the core ideas of the theory of historical knowledge, to flesh out the essence of Jerzy Topolski’s theoretical position. In my view, it is most fully evident in his understanding of science itself, in his conception of theoretical and explanatory history, and in his way of practising methodology and seeing its function performed within the research practice of historians.

2 Science as an object of methodological reflection

One thesis is constantly present in Topolski’s thinking: the thesis of the primacy and primary character of ontological assumptions (conceptions of the object of study) over the course of the study itself. How one conceives of what is to be studied depends on the way epistemological and methodological problems are solved. Therefore, it will be legitimate to begin our interpretation of the essence of the theoretical position of the author of the theory of historical knowledge with an attempt to reconstruct his way of understanding science, as it is the primary object of study here.

Here are Jerzy Topolski’s key thoughts in this regard:

- 1 There is no single historical science; there is (was and will be) a multitude of parallel functioning systems of historical science (paradigms of historical research) – THK, p. 19. Operating with a general category of historical science without taking into account its paradigmatic diversity is an unacceptable simplification in scientific and methodological research. One should be aware, Topolski stresses, that – side by side, and not only in relation to a chronological succession, there may exist and function systems of methodological knowledge concerning formally the same science but assuming different models or systems having different denotations. Sometimes, it can be – and often is – also about different theoretical models assumed and related to the former, not only of science but of reality itself. In the context of different assumed object references, one has to speak of different, “logically incomparable, often competing systems of knowledge” (p. 8). Just as different, logically incomparable, and competing can be the paradigms of historical inquiry itself.

- 2 A given state of historical science is the result of the social research practice of a group of historians, taking place at a given time, guided by the same vision of the world and man (WSC), the accepted ideal of science (IN), that is, a vision of some desirable goals of science, from which only more concrete research objectives (CB) and methodological principles (ZM), accepted by them (even if not in a fully conscious way), flow – THK, p. 130.
- 3 In line with this view, science is a dynamic system, where the criteria of scientific inquiry are not something given once and for all but are dynamic, changing with the development of science itself. For Topolski, a search for the origins of “scientific” historiography is precariously burdened by the static nature of the approach to historiography itself.

This static character derives from treating historical science as somehow ‘immobile’, developing admittedly, but nevertheless having some fixed point of reference for assessments of this development, a point of reference in the light of workshop achievements or theories. Yet such a fixed point does not exist and it would be a mistake to assume such an existence. [...] What we consider ‘scientific’ today may turn out to be less scientific in the light of future developments.⁶⁹

The acuity at this requirement is constantly increasing, and Topolski therefore uses the category of the “shifting frontier of scientism” (THK, p. 22).

- 4 The states of modern science cannot be fully described and explained without reference to their earlier stages of development. “In the historical approach to the study of the state of a given science, two things are at stake: to situate the studied state of science in some paradigm (trend, direction, school, etc.)” and to “show the intellectual and social mechanisms that led to the formation of the state under consideration” (THK, p. 19).
- 5 The transition from one model to another model of historical inquiry in the development of historiography “is not a one-off act; it usually takes a longer period of time and is not completely parallel in different countries” (THK, p. 23).
- 6 According to Topolski, the reality of historical research could be represented in the form of a kind of *continuum*, limited by the model of factual history on the one hand and the model of explanatory and global history on the other. “For it is the case that concrete research is contained ‘in between’, fulfilling to a greater extent the assumptions of one or the other model” (THK, p. 25).
- 7 For the analysis of historical science at a given point in its development, it is useful to use the categories of “traditional history” and “new history”. “We shall rather understand traditionality as the adherence to writing (paradigm) inherited from the past and continuing despite various attacks from ‘new’ schools and directions” (THK, p. 24). According to Topolski, “the categorisation of historiography” (we should rather say here, of a given model of history – J.P.) “into ‘scientific’ and ‘traditional’ can be more or less subjective” (THK, p. 23).

8 Two systems govern the development of historical science

the external one, i.e. the political environment (historians as members of society expressed in their works more or less directly the ideology of this society and cooperated in their formation) and the internal one, i.e. a kind of logic of the development of historical science, prescribing, in order to fulfil cognitive tasks, the improvement of the workshop.

(THK, p. 55)

And so, for example, the latter mechanism brought into being the principle of objectivity of research, while the former was responsible for the way in which it was put into practice.

- 9 Within the logic of the development of historical science, there is a *correspondence at the level of historical knowledge* and a *correspondence at the level of methodological principles*. Correspondence can occur between entire systems of historical knowledge, or it can concern individual elements of these systems (THK, p. 31). Both types of correspondence can occur: *generalising correspondence* and *substantively corrective correspondence*. [Note 16]. Thus, at the level of sentences about individual historical facts, “one can generally speak of an accumulation of them throughout historical science” (THK, p. 41). When this happens within the same system of historical knowledge, the thing is simple – it is a generalising correspondence. The situation becomes more complicated, however, when a given system “closes itself off” to certain factual findings that do not raise objections to their empirical basis in the first system (THK, pp. 41–42). They are then incommensurable with each other. Substantially corrective correspondence, on the other hand, is said to occur when factual additions “result in changes to entire historical pictures” (THK, p. 42). Correspondence can also occur at the level of exploratory hypotheses (Topolski allows for both types here) and (also) theory.

Considering correspondences at the level of methodological principles requires the introduction of the notion of “standard and non-standard theoretical-methodological principles that govern (in a way more or less realized and articulated by researchers) historical research (description, explanation) and the way the results of this research are presented (forms of narration)” (THK, p. 43). “Standard rules are those rules which have been accepted by the community of historian-researchers in a given period, i.e. which, if not respected, would place the researcher in question outside that community”.⁷⁰ Non-standard principles, on the other hand, “represent” the search for new ways of developing historiography. “I call them non-standard for this reason”, writes Topolski, “because before they become standard” or before they are rejected altogether (as they can be anyway), they are not universally accepted. They are usually used by certain groups of historians, and fought by others as useless ‘novelties’.⁷¹ According to the author of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*, there has been (and still is) a steady process of accumulation of such standard rules in the development of historical science. “We are dealing here with an account of generalising

correspondence” – he writes (THK, p. 44). Methodological principles can “reformulate” and then their content scope changes (THK, p. 70). The “principle of objectivity”, for example, has undergone such transformations. They can also evolve (THK, p. 70). Sometimes two principles can fuse and, in effect, form another one. Thus, “the principle of describing the past more fully and the principle of explaining it gave rise to a new principle of striving for an explanatory and global history” (THK, pp. 70–71).

10 Any historical study

takes place in three perspectives: (1) in an ontological perspective (WSC – world and human vision), (2) in a methodological perspective (IN – ideal of science + ZM – methodological principles) and (3) in an axiological perspective, which has a part in the historian’s choice of both WSC, IN and ZM.⁷²

This is the mostly non-verbalised, “tacit” part of the work. However, it is impossible to agree with the author when he puts these two opposing purposes of correspondence as a *continuum* (THK, p. 411). They are completely disconnected cases, that is, there can be no gradualism here. Instead, it seems that it would be legitimate here to speak sometimes of “rejection”. Some principles, considered standard at a given point in the development of historical science, are sometimes subsequently abandoned by subsequent paradigms.

11 The governing takes place through the social methodological consciousness of historians (its content in the individual case may be more or less verbalised and individually realised). “The basic governing system of the research”, writes Topolski,

is the methodological consciousness of the researcher (IN + ZM + WSC), from which only the formulation of the concrete aim of the research, as well as the ways of reaching this aim, i.e. the ways of carrying out the research, flows.⁷³

Methodological awareness plays the role of an

epistemological ‘sieve’ through which the historian views the studied fragment of reality. It is not, of course, immutable. It can and does undergo changes in the course of empirical investigation, in the course of theoretical reflection, and in the course of a possible evolution of valuation.⁷⁴

12 The main

governing functions (i.e. internal, intellectual direction) of the historian’s research procedure refer to the following three elements of this procedure, in addition, of course, to the basic cognitive process in the course of which the recognition of the cognitive object itself, and thus also simply the naming of facts and relations between them, is carried out: (1) selection, (2) hierarchisation, (3) systematisation (binding).⁷⁵

- 13 The recognition of the cognitive object referred to in the previous point is its conceptualisation. Topolski strongly emphasises the importance of theoretical conceptualisation (THK, pp. 152–199). Indeed, he rejects the model of historical research as a simple reconstruction, carried out by means of a critique of the source material (THK, p. 78), and advocates the concept of epistemological creation.

The activity of the cognitive subject consists in the creation of this object in the cognitive (epistemological) sense, i.e. in the creation of knowledge about the cognised object for the cogniser and, if the results of his cognition are accepted by others (i.e. take on an intersubjective character), also for these other persons.⁷⁶

- 14 “The historian in his work (in researching and reconstructing the past) finds himself in a similar situation” (to the artist – J.P.).

On the one hand, he treats reality as a model (i.e. a model in the semantic sense), for it (or its representation) is the point of reference in his research and reconstruction, but at the same time he ‘paints’ ‘sculpts’ this reality. (...) In other words, it models this material it uses, this material at its disposal, in such a way as to produce a model of this reality that does not deviate from it as much as possible.⁷⁷

The main material here is, on the one hand, the empirical base of the research: the historical sources, and, on the other hand, the historical narrative as a form of presenting the results of the research.

- 15 A historical narrative is

any (mainly, after all, written) effect of the historian’s work intended to be communicated to third parties. It is thus a certain discursive whole addressed. A narrative is a sign when it communicates in the manner intended by the historian a certain content, and a sign when we consider it as a source revealing states of consciousness, his emotions and preferences, and, indirectly, the characteristics of the current of historiography he represents. In the course of constructing a narrative, the historian performs a specific modelling of the image of future reality, guided by his non-source knowledge and source basis, and communicates this model. A narrative is always a model, for it reflects past reality only in a selective way, i.e. precisely modelled in one way or another.⁷⁸

A historical narrative can have varying degrees of generality and varying levels of theoretical binding (THK, pp. 314–318). An essential component of the narrative is the indication. Topolski greatly expands the formula of explanation in relation to his position in previous works. He writes that historical explanation, in its broadest sense, should

already include everything that we proposed to call qualified description in the past, i.e. both answers to the questions: how did it happen? (giving sequences genetically linked by necessary conditioning), as well as questions about the place or function of some elements in certain wholes (so-called structural explanation).

(THK, p. 374)

This, of course, blurs the traditional boundaries between fact-finding (description) and fact-explaining, but – according to Topolski – “this seems, in the light of the historians’ practice usually treated as a unified process, fully justified”.⁷⁹ For “explanation should be understood broadly, understanding it as the totality of procedures contributing to the reconstruction of relations binding the elements (. . .) of a structure”.⁸⁰ Hence, in the case of history, one should speak of whole systems of explanation rather than isolated explanations.

- 16 Historical knowledge is subject to a continuous process of validation. Topolski draws attention to two stages of substantiation: (a) that performed by the historian himself and (b) that performed in the course of scholarly discussions. Verification includes both the typical verification of claims by confirming them (confirmation) and their undermining (disconfirmation) or refutation (falsification) by demonstrating their inconsistency (i.e. contradiction) either with source information or with extra-source knowledge, from which it must follow that the disputed claim is in some sense impossible to accept (due to the consequences it would have to entail), that is, that it is improbable or unlikely. An analysis of the research practice of historians shows that in the course of the verification procedure

they are guided by two main criteria: (1) methodological and (2) ontological. The former means subjecting assertions to checking in terms of the methods used that led to their formulation, while the latter means checking them in terms, generally speaking, of their conformity with past reality, i.e. testing their truthfulness.⁸¹

- 17 The truthfulness of a historical narrative does not merely boil down to the requirement of the truthfulness of all the sentences of which it is composed. Topolski correctly observes that, firstly,

the truthfulness of all the sentences constituting the historical picture (i.e. the truthfulness of all the parts of the historical narrative) does not guarantee the truthfulness of the picture; secondly, the historical picture may remain true even if it turns out that some of the sentences constituting it are false

and, thirdly, that “the proportionally higher share of true sentences in the historical picture does not guarantee its greater (i.e. closer to reality) truthfulness in comparison with other pictures concerning the same fragment of past reality”.⁸²

These Jerzy Topolski's thoughts on the essence of historical science, collected in the above 18 points, seem, in my opinion, to characterise his theoretical position most fully and allow us to see the distinctiveness and originality of the conceptual solutions of the author of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*. They also provide a good foundation to reflect on Topolski's assumed ideal of science – theoretical and explanatory history.

3 *The ideal of historical science: theoretical and explanatory history*

The ideal of historical science that Topolski arrived at in the course of his historical research and methodological reflection on the research practice of historians is the concept of *a theoretical and explanatory history*. The very name says a lot here. It is an **explanatory history**, for in this model

explanation is subordinated to fact-finding, conceived as a necessary preparation of the ground for explanation, and this in a double sense: as a basis to some extent, for it is not exclusive, inspiring exploratory questions, and as a procedure for clarifying what is to be explained, i.e. explananda.⁸³

It is at the same time a **theoretical history**, because adequate explanation is impossible

without having a picture of the past (in practice: a fragment of the past) that is as comprehensive and as coherent as possible; therefore, explanatory historiography appears to us as, at the same time, a historiography aiming at reconstructing history in its internal interconnection, i.e. history presented holistically and not in a simplistic way.⁸⁴

And only theoretical knowledge can provide such a picture.

Theoretical binding, which is, as we have shown”, writes Topolski, “the main feature of modern historiography and its main binding mechanism, is at the same time the main hope of this historiography wishing to be a ‘science’. It makes it possible to overcome the direct interference of the historian's worldview and his more concretised ideological convictions [...] in historical research and narration.⁸⁵

Thus, as a result of his research on the history of historical science, Topolski came to the conclusion that

the main mechanism shifting historiography away from the areas of description (i.e. away from such an ideal of historical science and the general cognitive goals that result from it) was the principle of conceptualising research – ZK [i.e. calling for conscious reference to theoretical concepts or constructs that facilitate binding – J.P.]. Its adoption steered the researcher

towards theory and awakened in him the need for it. For the model of theoretical and explanatory history, ZK is, it can be argued, a fundamental principle, and the main element influencing the formation of the historian's general knowledge (WSC). WSC can, of course, only work through the historian's general knowledge.⁸⁶

Topolski is also convinced that

in connection with the postulate of explanation referring to theory, special attention should be paid to the necessity of reaching (with the help of theory) to what one could call the hidden, invisible on the 'surface of phenomena' products of the historical process, so as to show this process in 'its increasingly visible totality,' and at the same time to make it possible to isolate the factors of change hidden there, usually occurring on the surface of phenomena in a way modified by the action of other factors.⁸⁷

Speaking about the genesis of the model of historical science he adopted, he stresses that

it is a model derived from the critique of positivist methodology and assuming as justifying claims an activist theory of historical materialism, i.e. combining the viewpoint of structure and dynamics and at the same time not considering historical change and historical development outside the actions of people (individuals, classes and social groups, institutions, etc.).⁸⁸

What, then, characterises the theoretical and explanatory history in particular? What principles can be considered standard for this model? Well, first and foremost, historical research is carried out here with full awareness of what drives it. Recognition of the convictions guiding the research, their "clarification is an indispensable condition for the realisation of the modern principle of conceptualisation, in the light of which, one should strive to control one's own research as consciously and as precisely as possible"⁸⁹ – Topolski writes. He emphasises this even more emphatically elsewhere:

theoretical history strives to make the control as conscious as possible, as precisely scientific as possible, and which at the same time would include the clarification of convictions (i.e. visions of the world and of man, value judgements, etc. influencing the study).

(THK, p. 128)

This striving for conscious control can be considered the **first standard principle** of theoretical and explanatory history (THK).

Second principle: conscious control requires continuous theoretical reflection on the becoming of the historical process, and the role of human beings in

this process (THK, p. 201) requires reliance on the results of primary research in the field of historiography, that is, research on the theory of historical development (THK, pp. 211–224). The postulate of the necessity of basic research is the **second standard principle** of THK.

The third standard principle is that of conceptualising the object of study. For “The most interconnected reality will not be reflected in the narrative if the historian does not have the right intellectual tools at his disposal to allow him to reflect it”.⁹⁰ Hidden here is the important idea that in order for theoretical exploration to be possible at all, there must first be a theoretical grasp of the categorial reality under study. Topolski distinguishes two types of conceptualisation in a historical narrative: partial conceptualisation, which occurs “when, for example, we look for some new concept for the fact we are describing, which, in our opinion, has so far been described inadequately or has not been described at all”⁹¹, and a more global conceptualisation, assuming “a certain philosophy of history (or a certain general theory) giving the historian’s view of the general mechanism of history”.⁹²

The fourth standard principle: the nomologisation (theorisation) of historical knowledge. Without theory, there is no modern research. These may be theories constructed by the historian himself or coming from the repertoire of other social sciences and appropriately adapted to historiography (THK, p. 184). Topolski’s understanding of theory is distinctive. For him, theory is

a certain totality of knowledge (in this case general knowledge), which can only partially and roughly be articulated through sentences. The sentence interpretation of a theory must therefore be supplemented by its other interpretation, i.e. by an interpretation that cannot refer to classical sentence logic.⁹³

This is a capital, completely novel thought on the ground of our methodology!⁹⁴ The non-sentence conception of theory, which is much more adequate to the actual research practice in the social sciences, makes it possible to conduct research on the correspondence of whole systems of historical knowledge and allows comparing different paradigms with each other in terms of the effectiveness of their exploratory procedures.

The fifth standard principle of THK is the postulate of the concretisation of theory. What Topolski means by concretisation is the interpretation of theory in points less developed on the grounds of a given theory or its extension, in the sense of introducing new theorems, concepts, and models that do not contradict the general theorems of the extended theory (THK, p. 191).

The postulate to use theory as knowledge conceived heuristically should be regarded as the **sixth standard principle**. “The historian in this case does not treat theory as a reservoir of premises in his reasoning (for example, in explanation)”. Indeed, he can also assume a given theory as a set of methodological directives derived from the relevant theoretical claims, and not only as a set of premises.

In the first case, the theory steers the research in the sense that it directs the historian's attention to what kind of information to gather and how to relate it ('consider this', 'this is important for you', 'put information a together with information b', etc.); in the second case, it either serves as a justification for less general claims formulated by the historian or for direct use, in both cases as explicitly formulated or assumed premises.⁹⁵

The seventh standard principle is the demand for the construction of realistically interpreted historical models. Modelling was recognised by Topolski as an essential feature of modern historical research. In doing so, he distinguishes between modelling at the stage of research and modelling at the stage of reconstruction of the object under study. In the first stage, there are as many as three levels of modelling: modelling 1 – by the senders of source information (authors of sources), modelling 2 – by the historian, by deciding what will be considered source information at all (i.e. creating his or her effective repertoire of sources for a given study) and modelling 3, taking place by selecting information from the repertoire of source knowledge selected by modelling (THK, p. 258). Stage two is two-tiered: the construction of the historical narrative can be regarded as modelling 2, and the process of verifying the research findings as modelling 3.

Among the standard principles of theoretical and explanatory history, the directive of integral explanation (**the eighth standard principle**) cannot be missing either. Topolski's proposal aims at "extending (expanding) the model of humanistic interpretation towards the deductive-nomological model and, on the other hand, extending the deductive-nomological model towards the model of humanistic interpretation".⁹⁶ It can be stated most generally that

the extension of the humanistic interpretation model consists in subjecting its elements to an additional explanatory procedure, which means that in the extended model, in addition to the existing elements, there will be an additional reference to other explanations.... In other words, we will now not only ask why X acted in the way he did, pointing to the objectives of the action, knowledge about the conditions of the action and the norms, but we will try to explain precisely the knowledge and norms from which the objectives of the action and the action strategies were derived. In other words, we could say that it is a matter of explaining the state of human consciousness active in the action being explained⁹⁷

On the other hand, it should be borne in mind, writes Topolski, that the deductive-nomological model

gives only a partial explanation, i.e. one that does not involve knowledge of the motivational structures of human action. It is only by extending the deductive-nomological model towards a rational model (i.e. a humanistic interpretation – J.P.), i.e. by simultaneously looking at the events or

processes being explained from the perspective of two models (i.e. from the perspective of both the subjective and the objective side of the historical process), that we get a more integral insight.⁹⁸

A standard principle of THK proclaims **the necessity of verifying formulated claims about historical reality** (THK, pp. 437–447). In doing so, verification can take place by any of the permissible verification procedures: confirmation, disconfirmation, and falsification (**the ninth standard principle**).

Finally, **the tenth standard principle** of theoretical and explanatory history can be considered to be **the postulate of reaching the correctness of the image of the past** (this means rejecting all instrumentalism and supporting the theoretical–cognitive realism) and the related **postulate of striving for the correctness of historical cognition**. At the same time, Topolski is fully aware of the fact that

there is not so much a comparison of research results with reality (because it no longer exists – J.P.), as with our knowledge of this reality, which we reached on the basis of a theory reflecting this reality, i.e. extracting its essential features from our knowledge in a structured way. And then it is important that the theory, which is to be the prism through which we are to learn about the world and thus increase our knowledge of it, is constantly checked as to the adequacy of its reflection of this constantly developing knowledge of reality. [...] A theory should be in constant contact with empirical material and, although it controls the cognition of this material itself, it should be constantly checked on the basis of this constantly enriching material.⁹⁹

These ten standard principles inherent in the model of theoretical and explanatory history, which I have reconstructed here, show clearly – at least in my view – how it is a model of interest, providing historians with an opportunity to conduct theoretical research into the foundations of history, to catch up conceptually with the more developed social sciences, and appealing especially to young scholars wishing their discipline to meet the contemporary demands of scientism.

One more question remains: how to practice the methodology of history as a research discipline? Here, too, Jerzy Topolski provided us with many valuable hints.

4 How to practise the methodology of history?

Jerzy Topolski's way of practising methodology is in close correlation with his understanding of the role of historians' methodological consciousness itself. In his view, methodological consciousness steers the research practice of historians; the quality of research depends on it. Thus, the object of research of methodology as a scientific discipline is social methodological consciousness. Its verbalisation, reconstruction and clarification of concrete content become the first of the goals of the methodology of history. The second is the construction of a certain

model of historical research that is optimal, at a given stage of historiography's development and with the specific demand towards it put forward by non-scientific social practice (THK, p. 16).

This way of framing the relations taking place between methodology-discipline and methodology-consciousness has further consequences. One of them is the rejection of the myth of a "neutral methodology" in the face of the multiplicity of competing paradigms of historical research, which does not notice this multiplicity programmatically and which operates with some naïve notion of the singularity of historical science. In Topolski's view, methodology can only be the methodology of a given model of history. He stresses that it is necessary here to be aware "for which model (or ideal) of science and historical knowledge one writes methodological commentaries".¹⁰⁰

Methodology cannot confine itself to the analysis of merely verbalised, ready-made historical knowledge put into narrative form. It is necessary to address the problem of "initial assumptions in the process of cognition and scientific investigation" (THK, p. 14), assumptions which only rarely become directly visible on the pages of historians' works but which, after all, steer the entire research process. The starting point for methodological considerations must be an analysis of the actual research practice of historians. "Unlike 'professional' methodologists or philosophers of science", writes Topolski, "my point of departure and reference is actual historical science, with its problems and the current way of solving them, and not some kind of internal logic of the development of such or other systems of philosophy of science".¹⁰¹ He also aptly notes that philosophers of science who have spoken about history have "presented their own philosophical views rather than attempting to reflect the essential problems of historians' practice arising from its study".¹⁰² The basic mistake of philosophers of science is that they assume the traditional, descriptive paradigm of historical science; it is then easy to attack historians using contemporary criteria of scientism. But, after all, the world of historical science does not end with the descriptive paradigm.

It is characteristic that already in the very posing of certain methodological problems, Topolski clearly cuts himself off from the analytical philosophy of history. An evident example of this is the question of explanation in history and our methodologist's statement, already appearing in the title of the relevant subsection (THK, p. 361), contrasting the philosophy of historical explanation with the *analysis* of the same in theory of historical knowledge. It thus overcomes the complex towards the findings of general methodology (philosophy of science) present to some extent in the *Methodology of History*. Methodology was born out of research and reflection on the research practice of the developed natural sciences, above all physics, hence its findings did not always "fit" with what historians do. It is obvious that if, in order to evaluate historical science, one uses the criteria developed on the basis of such a methodology, this evaluation cannot come out best, especially when it comes to explanation and theory (understood according to the spirit of the practice of, for example, modern theoretical physics). Now, this complex disappears completely. At one point,

reflecting on the understanding of theory in the methodological literature, Topolski even writes explicitly: one must

oppose the paradigm that is quite common in the philosophy of science, i.e. one must stop being afraid of this paradigm and not arouse feelings of inferiority simply because the concept of theory in history (and in many other empirical sciences) does not meet the conditions that philosophers of science impose on it. (THK, p. 158)

Thanks to this attitude, the source of which is to be found above all in basing the study on the analysis (very rich and extensive, by the way, for which *Theory of Historical Knowledge* provides plenty of excellent examples, of the actual practice of historians, we get a new account of theory, explanation, verification and the criteria of scientificity of the study, allowing us to better understand the essence of historical science. At the same time, there is nothing here of the attitude of the so-called Good Mr. Methodologist looking benevolently at toiling historians and giving them ready-made recipes for solving all research problems. Of course, there are no prescriptions here. There are, however, concrete methodological directives and heuristic recommendations:

- pay attention in the study to linking the viewpoints of dynamics, structure and human activity;
- pay constant attention to the two “sides” of the historical process – the objective and the subjective (the study of one does not exclude the study of the other) and try to combine the viewpoint of the creation of history by people and the viewpoint of the global results of this creation;
- pay attention to contradictions between elements of both the subjective and objective sides of the historical process (these contradictions ultimately manifest themselves as contradictions between people, including between classes in the form of class struggle). In this way, you increase the possibilities of explaining the transformation of social systems (THK, p. 225).

Such a sample of Topolski’s recommendations for historians can be further summed up by another of his remarks:

The historian can learn a great deal here but must remember that the methodologist will not solve the most essential research needs and problems for the historian. The historian, and this is what I would like to emphasise, remains essentially alone with his problems. However, since he will not be able to accomplish anything without either theory or methodology (however primitive), it would be better if this self-solving of issues were carried out by means of a somewhat more elaborate, conscious and precise self-knowledge. This is all the more important now, when such rapid and profound transformations (if only in terms of postulates and partial solutions) are taking place in historical science.¹⁰³

To conclude this review of meta-methodological issues, let us quote Topolski's statement on what the methodology of history should be concerned with:

Methodology of history, in my opinion, cannot be limited to the repetition of the problems of the general methodology of sciences; nor is its domain the technical side of the historian's work. In the field of its interest there must be, first of all, the following groups of problems: the genesis and structure of the current state of historical science, (from the point of view of conceptualization and methods), the theory of the historical process, the set of methodological rules (i.e. heuristic recommendations, directives, etc.) resulting from the adopted theory and from its developments, and the set of rules and algorithms of conduct resulting from more general methodological and logical theorems and models and concerning the use of sources, explanation, construction of models, construction of historical narrative, justification and verification, etc.¹⁰⁴

A work of such magnitude as *Theory of Historical Knowledge* appears so rarely in the history of reflection on the foundations of our science that the very fact of its existence is a sufficient invitation to serious reflection on the foundations of historical knowledge and the social research practice of historians. In my view, *Theory of Historical Knowledge* provided (still does?) an opportunity for a real, genuine reconstruction of our methodological self-consciousness – a necessary condition for the further development of historiography.¹⁰⁵ The problem, however, is whether and to what extent we have been able to take advantage of this opportunity.

III Topolski's cognising culture of the 1990s

History accelerated in 1989. The dynamics of the changes were so great, and their scope so large, encompassing all the spheres of social life, that, in the face of everyday challenges, methodology of history became secondary also in the historians' circles. Scientism, typical of the Poznań School of Methodology, was said to be associated with Marxism, which at that time was supposed to be thrown on the scrapheap of history. The scientific character of that history was deemed objectionable, and the objection led straight to postmodernism.

In January 1998, Jerzy Topolski in *Foreword* to his last book *Introduction to History*, sketched out its context:

It should be taken into account that a clear turn in thinking about history (understood as the past, also in terms of studying it and writing about it) could be observed during the last decades. With regard to the whole humanistic studies, it was termed as the linguistic turn. It opened up a new alley of thinking of a general character, yet, what should be stressed here, it does not undermine the previous considerations, focusing on logical models of historians' work, their work ethic, and many others. The new challenges

should be presented to those learning the history-related professions, lest they lose contact with world science. I wish my book, obviously in its preliminary form, could introduce the readers to the new, fascinating considerations on history, historical studies, historical narrative, so that, as was already mentioned, it could usher in a new way of thinking about history.¹⁰⁶

As could be inferred from the quote, Topolski was fully aware that 15 years after the publication of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*, the **cognising culture**, from the perspective of which he looks at and ponders on history today, would be different than the one he worked in the beginning of the 1980s. It was such a radical change that both cultures, the one whose assumptions I attempted to reconstruct in the previous section and the one described here, remain incommensurable to each other. Topolski's replacement of the notion of *historical science* with *scientific historical narrative* can be deemed symbolic.¹⁰⁷ It is not the *social research practice* undertaken by historians but their *social narrative practices* that have been at the centre of Topolski's attention for several years. As he writes:

What historians deal with is not real past but thinking, speaking or writing about history, i.e. the language itself. /.../ Such a take on history eliminates the opposition between the past and historical narrative. The past is external to us and remains so, and we are still in one single sphere, the world of language, and we cannot escape it. We do not talk (write) of past reality but frame it via language, and deem it as representative, as a substitute, of this reality.¹⁰⁸

Topolski thinks along the lines of White and Ankersmit from the era of narrativism, the same year that White publishes a significant text titled *The End of Narrative Historiography*¹⁰⁹, in a volume dedicated to the author of *How to Write and Understand History* to commemorate his 70th birthday, and Ankersmit has already taken another turn, known as *Experience Turn*.¹¹⁰ I regard such parallels on the part of my master as a sign of the time, quite telling in the context of the Polish theory of history at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Topolski in the 1990s rejects/shelves/abandons the cognising culture inherent in *Theory of Historical Knowledge* and, unfortunately, does so at the moment when it only began to demonstrate and prove its full explanatory potential in relation to historians' actual work. It is not Kmita (pitifully, since at that time he was still developing his philosophical system) who became his central source of inspiration but "the reflected light" of *A New Philosophy of History*, the volume edited by Ankersmit and Kellner.¹¹¹ The intellectual climate of narrativism and postmodernism of the 1980s and 1990s was greatly captured (which is also confirmed in the *Postscript* by Lynn Hunt) by Ewa Domańska in the interviews carried out over the period of two–three years with the intellectual elite regarding theory of history (Danto, White, Ankersmit, Kellner, Iggers, Rüsen, Gossman, Burke, Bann and Topolski).¹¹² After many years, Domańska returned to that experience in her book *Existential History* and not only aptly described

narrativism but also, which is even rarer, managed to approach it critically, together with a critical appraisal of her intellectual fascinations of that time.¹¹³ This exempts me from the obligation to present the narrative paradigm within the theory of history here and allows me to focus solely on the analysis of Jerzy Topolski's cognising culture at the time of writing *How to Write and Understand History: Mysteries of Historical Narrative*. Obviously, Hayden White, next to Frank Ankersmit, is the author most frequently referred to there. White's and Ankersmit's works, and the discussions surrounding them, became the major source of Topolski's inspiration in the 1990s. As is the case with Topolski, he tried to imprint his own linguistic style on these concepts, to place them in his carefully constructed system, where the methodology of history was supposed to be an empirical science. That is why, in *Introduction*, he writes:

What is of interest to me in this book is mostly the empirical context of historical narrative, i.e. its empirical study, in the course of which it is necessary to refer both to the achievements of analytical philosophy as well as to the inspirations of narrative philosophy (also postmodern one, including deconstructionism) as well as to theory of literature. Of particular importance for the empirical study (interpretation) of historical narrative are some results of narrative reflection. They opened up new perspectives of studies, previously absent in analytical philosophy.¹¹⁴

Topolski mentally discards all the assumptions, apart from empiricism, of the *Poznań School of Methodology* (not to mention Marxism), instead drawing inspiration from the *cognising culture* of analytical philosophy that he remained mentally in the 1960s only to confront it, and not the culture of the Poznań School, with narrativism/constructivism/postmodernism. What came of it? Firstly, he noticed the limitations (drawbacks, as he writes himself) typical of each of them:

The analytical philosophy of history was interested in extracting logical explanatory models out of historiographical texts. It treated the text as a reservoir to draw examples from, aimed at justifying various theses, for example those claiming that the historian refers (or not) to some general principles. Treating historical narrative as a textual (narrative) whole, not divisible into basic compositional elements without destroying the whole, helped to look at historical narrative in a completely new way. It opened up new theoretical alleys (including those in the area of rhetorics) and presented some unknown and yet undiscovered figures. It also created a demand for theory of historical narrative, which, as was mentioned before, had to find inspiration in various philosophical currents and in theory of literature (especially in rhetorics), logic, linguistics, semiotics, social science of knowledge, or historical anthropology.¹¹⁵

What Topolski wants to achieve, through exposing the drawbacks of each of these two approaches, is to draw attention to the fact that, contrary to what the

followers of narrativism and postmodernism claim, there is no theory of narrative available and, therefore, it needs to be developed, and he wants to play a substantial part in it. *Mysteries of Historical Narrative* was supposed to be the first step to achieve this goal. “This book, being more like a collection of studies dealing with the issue of historical narrative rather than a systematic lecture on theory of narrative, includes considerations facilitating such a holistic approach”.¹¹⁶

We deal here with a situation analogous to *Theory of Historical Knowledge*, which was also preceded by preparatory studies, published in the form of a few books. *Mysteries of Historical Narrative* prepares the ground for/heralds *Theory of historical narration*:

In the **yet non-existing theory of historical narrative** [emphasis – JP], there are two fundamental issues to be raised. Firstly, the issue of the relationship between historical narrative and literary narrative, and, secondly, the issue of the relationship between historical narrative and non-textual reality, i.e. the issue of historical truth.¹¹⁷

It is interesting to note that each of these issues is regarded as fundamental by Krzysztof Pomian, even though in his historical epistemology they are attributed with different conceptualisations and different solutions.¹¹⁸ For Topolski, the axis of his concept is a thesis claiming that **historical narrative is**, as a historian’s construct, **a persuasive message but also**, simultaneously, **a form of representing past reality**, informing about it:

Let us repeat that each rendering of the reality (whether past or current) in its narrative form assumes a fragment of the whole approach, which, in a historical narrative, expects the presentation of the beginning of a narrated event, its course, and ending (preferably, its conclusions). Obtaining such a narrative totality requires not only the scientific (i.e. done along the lines of scientific methods) interpretation of a described event but also the development of a proper form of linguistic expression, enabling an apt (i.e. culturally relevant) rendition of the event in terms of the narrative.¹¹⁹

For Topolski, the structure of historical narrative consisted of three layers: logical-grammatical, rhetorical (persuasive), and ideological-theoretical (*guiding*, deep). This entailed a departure from sentence-based concept of narrative in the direction of constructing something that could be labelled (in analogy to J.D. Sneed’s non-sentence concept of theory) *non-sentence concept of historical narrative*.

Let us note that, for Topolski, any narrativisation of the reality in its totality (and not in its isolated sentences) entails the reality being “tamed” and, simultaneously, promotes all sorts of historians’ beliefs.¹²⁰ For example, the belief that what is presented in the narrative is worth accepting (on the whole, because historians claim it to be true).

In this regard, another Polish history theorist, Wojciech Wrzosek, notices rightly that it was a kind of compromise that Topolski the methodologist made with Topolski the historian, pointing out that it entailed “the former capitulating to the latter”.¹²¹ Such an internal crack in Topolski’s historical thinking is clearly visible when the author of *How to write and understand history* analyses Leon Goldstein’s conceptual constructionism and attempts to attribute it with some realistic interpretation, referring back to some bizarre mental categories such as *base information* or *metaphorical (acognitive) contact with past reality*. For example, he writes:

Historians do not have access to past reality but can enter into metaphorical (acognitive) contact with it by means of declarative information. It is on this level that they can encounter direct observations and use them to construct historical narratives.¹²²

It is hard not to agree with Wrzosek when he states that Topolski:

As a practising historian, being under the illusion that as a methodologist he can uphold the agreement with historians, he takes the historians’ visions for the practice and, contrary to the logic of the developed epistemological concept, corrects it by means of the spontaneous realism of the practising historians.¹²³

Such a statement can be regarded as Topolski’s quintessential style of practising methodology of history in the 1990s. Let us now try to explicate the major theses included in *Mysteries of Historical Narrative*. Let us start with the axiological ones.

Topolski often comments directly on the need to refer to values in the course of scientific studies, on the ethical dimension of the historians’ work, and on those who defy the values “represented by the Republic of Letters, having been formed for centuries”.¹²⁴ He feels connected with the Republic, both in terms of the environment and profession, which is supposed to impose a blockade for “the excessive influence of external ideologies. What I mean is collective evaluation of the members of *republique des lettres*, the institution functioning more and more consciously since the 17th century”.¹²⁵ Respecting the socially accepted, general standards of scientific work is of a historical character and, naturally, does not entail a lack of paradigmatic diversity of science per se, however, Topolski refers to it for a different purpose in *Mysteries of Historical Narrative*. Having the generation-long experience of the “external pressure” of being a historian, he defends the relative autonomy of the world of science. The Republic of Letters is presented here in contrast to the politicisation of science. And when we look at this problem from the perspective of today’s disputes, it is presented in opposition to the current historical politics and instrumentalisation of history.

For Topolski, belonging to the Republic of Letters entails no approval of being in the service of “other gods”, especially no approval of treating their

point of view as the gospel. Presenting one's construct as the valid (or the only one) historical truth is subject to moral evaluation. Instead of stunning the audience with the discovery of another "historical truth", it is worth focusing on "studying the social process of truth construal".¹²⁶ The category of *truth* combines two orders: axiological and epistemological. Topolski demonstrates their interconnections, their being interwoven in the historical discourse, yet also reveals something more: "[...] reaching the truth in the process of its construction is a social process. /.../ a search conducted among many constructed truths for possibly the most distinct and most universal consensus".¹²⁷ Consensus is an autotelic value, a value in itself. Topolski claimed that an act of deep cognition can only be reached through a clash of point of view, an open and sincere dialogue. Reaching the historical circles with such knowledge is extremely important since a substantial part of it thinks magically about the *truth* as something directly accessible, almost "palpable", reachable by senses and not *conceptual*.¹²⁸ Replacing the classic understanding of the truth (as an agreement between a judgement and the reality) with its consensual understanding, highlighted explicitly in *How to write and understand historical narrative?* was of great importance for Topolski. He writes:

A historical narrative can be true or false, though not in terms of its correspondence to past reality, but rather in terms of it being granted particular status on the true-false continuum by a discourse community, i.e. people using the same language, employing similar conventions and possessing a similar understanding of the world, at least in the broadest sense.¹²⁹

Such a thesis had its heuristic consequences:

[...] the growing awareness of the fact that we construct the truth and that many truths may actually function next to each other on an equal basis strengthens the role of what has been called by analytic philosophers the context of discovery. Above all and in particular, it is a reflection on the conditions of the processes of cognition (research) and on the moral (ethical) qualifications of scholars.¹³⁰

Recognising that which stands behind specific "historical truths" is a task for methodologists of history or historians of historiography. They need to extract and demonstrate explicitly that which is implicit in the narrative, that which guides it. It should be mentioned in this context that at some point Topolski introduces the notion of **the degree of source information being saturated with interpretations**:

It would be a mistake to overlook these differences. Speaking metaphorically, it can be argued that sentences that demonstrate a greater degree of consensus, and as such sentences marked by a lesser degree of interpretation, are in some sense "closer" to the nonverbal reality that for people

using language (in practice always a common tongue) is a fairly obvious point of reference.¹³¹

And then he adds:

The movement from historical sources to a narrative, being the fundamental meaning of historians' work [...] is a movement not from the truth accumulated in the sources to the area of interpretation, but a movement within the area of interpretation. Due to a close connection between the sources, historians and their narratives, it is impossible to escape the circle of interpretation and to determine that we reached certainty at some point. Historians read the sources in the light of their knowledge and evaluations, however, simultaneously, they derive knowledge from these sources and rely on them, shaping their systems of value to some extent.¹³²

It is a kind of connection that needs to be taken into account on the level of a metahistorical analysis. Following the narrativists, Topolski acknowledged the rhetorical and persuasive side of historiography as reflecting its essence, especially when it comes to its relationship with recent history. An additional difficulty was in that, most often, the *persuasive* side of historical narrative has its source/genesis/power in some *ideology*. Topolski rightly claimed that it is enough "for a historian to make multiple use of a single term so that the ideological frame of their narrative become clear".¹³³ The essence of all ideologies is:

[...] thinking in terms of the future. Ideology is immersed in society and develops in line with its rhythm. In terms of the content, the notion of ideology contains, in my opinion – Topolski writes – above all, the category of identification (national, religious, professional, collective, etc.) of individuals and groups. Obviously, identification is something rooted in the present, constantly updated, shaped through the prism of future programs. The current situation is evaluated from the perspective of the preferred situation, i.e. that which one would like to realise.¹³⁴

Therefore, historical narrative is never neutral axiologically. Reaching the truth requires being open to a way of experiencing the world that is distinct from ours, overcoming the temptation of snap judgements, and listening to the story told by the other. A rapport between people is easier built on soft values as they do not lead to a divorce or exclusion, on the contrary: they promote agreement.... An approach towards national history in its politicised version may lead to exclusion and may also be a prerequisite for national and social reconciliation. In this sense, history has a great social power. For instance, *passing over in silence* is *historical killing*, and the so-called historical truth had the power to kill and the power to bring back to life. It is one of the mysteries of historical narrative.

Thinking about a deeper, more than ideological message/sense of historical narrative, Topolski noticed and repeated, after Robert Braun, that its aim is

[...] to constitute human solidarity, which is not dependent on the universal force of law appealing to the reason to discover ‘reality’ but is understood as a temporary consensus, achieved in the course of free and open exchange of opinions. It can relate to such morally, politically, or intellectually challenging facts like Holocaust.¹³⁵

Naturally, Topolski is aware that

[...] no historiography can escape ideology, even if historians want to be as “objective” as possible and even when they are convinced the most that they convey the truth, because even such an endeavor is ideology, and the endeavor is clearer when it is linked with historians’ conviction of the existence of a single truth that we are trying to reach, i.e. it is linked with following the so-called naïve realism.¹³⁶

Striving for objectivity in historical narrative is one of the standard messages of this environment. Topolski asks whether we can, in light of the contemporary knowledge of methodology, salvage the category of objectivity? “Only when it is described not in relation to past reality (in the sense that objective = true) but as a summary of a certain number of criteria that historians should follow”.

For instance, for M. Bevir, these criteria are accuracy, comprehensiveness, consistency, progressiveness, fruitfulness, and openness. Others could point to different criteria, however, what should be stressed is their community-based genesis:

As can be seen from the abovementioned arguments, objectivity is an element of historians’ collective ideology, which wants to be shared by as many historians as possible. Hence it is a category distinct from the concept of truth, which is understood either as the only one which should be sought, or one of many, which should be discussed. However, there should be one objectivity as it is hardly possible to imagine many objectivities. It is relativised not to the past but to historians. In order to provide objective narrative, historians need to be objective, and in order to be so, they should follow certain directives.¹³⁷

For Topolski, the most important directive is the one of openness. After Bevir, he repeated that

[...] objective historians are only those who are ‘open’ to other cultures and other ways of thinking. It is not tantamount to tolerance, excluding a more active approach to attitudes or actions standing in contrast to the values which are the values of “the republic of letters”. Objectivity is not neutrality, recommending to ignore that which does not agree with the values of “the republic of letters” or is in contrast with them. Thus, it is the opposition of all ideological violence (and persuasion), aiming at achieving the goals of only one social group or one nation, to the detriment of others.

Objectivity is understanding “others”, and, at the same time, it is solidarity embracing as many groups as possible.¹³⁸

Personally, I regard this argument as the most significant achievement of Jerzy Topolski’s *cognising culture* from the 1990s. The second most significant achievement is his acknowledging the fact that the *argumentation* in social narrative practices made by historians does not lead to demonstrate the truthfulness (necessity) of the conclusion derived from true premises (even though it may seem so) but leads to (through the program referral to rhetorical principles and cultural topoi) convince the collective addressee or/and single addressee of the statement of its validity. The status of the argument is not based on an ontological-epistemological basis but on utilitarian or emotional values. Scientific discussions, analysed on the META level, lose the character of clashing truths, of which the participating historians are fully convinced (as their sole valid “carriers”), and they become participants of a cultural game of history, whose “grammar” is only to be captured. This is what I deem an introduction/prolegomena/announcement of the future *culturally based methodology* of history.¹³⁹ It is all about stressing the *historicity* of history itself and the accompanying *historical thinking* (which is consequently developed by Topolski’s disciple, Wojciech Wrzosek in his book *History – Culture – Metaphor. The Facets of Non-Classical Historiography*), that is, something which I refer to as *historiography as a self-reflection of cognising culture*.

And what about Topolski’s postmodernism?

In a paper given on 7 December 1998, published by Ewa Domańska in the volume titled *Pamięć, etyka i historia* [Memory, Ethics, and History], Topolski said:

I do not think that we are now in the period of “post postmodernism”. I am also not convinced that in the context of understanding science we should absorb all the consequences of postmodernism. There is also the problem of how to recognize the refreshing influence of postmodernism in the area of historical studies and its influence of characterizing history as a science.¹⁴⁰

I treat this statement, on the one hand, as a specific declaration of loyalty to postmodernism, and, on the other hand, as a manifestation of my master’s awareness that something ends, that, from now on, the sheer understanding of *scientific character of history* may/must be different. However, I am not fully convinced by the direction of such scientific search as suggested by Topolski, who noticed progress in history (and the index of its scientific history) merely “on the level of interpretation, its accuracy, comprehensiveness, validity, etc.”¹⁴¹

IV Jerzy Topolski’s *New Methodology of History*¹⁴²

In the 1990s, Professor Jerzy Topolski (1928–1998), a member of the editorial board of *History and Theory*¹⁴³ and one of the most outstanding methodologists

and theorists of 20th-century history, abandoned the hitherto scientific cognising culture, through which he had analysed historians' research practice, and took up the intellectual challenge of facing the then-dominant trend in the theory of history, which placed the issue of historical narrative at the centre of meta-historical reflection. As we well know, it was represented primarily by Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit. And it is with them that Topolski creatively argued, trying to develop his own comprehensive theory of historical narrative, for which he looked for inspiration elsewhere than they did. The first step in this direction was the book *How to Write and Understand History: The Mysteries of Historical Narrative*, written in Polish and published in 1993. Another important publication was Topolski's extensive article from 1994, *A Non-postmodernist Analysis of Historical Narratives*.¹⁴⁴ It was followed by the book *Narrare la storia. Nuovi principi di metodologia storica*¹⁴⁵, published in Italian in 1997. However, the true culmination of Topolski's thoughts on the theory of historical narrative was *Nowa Metodologia Historii* [New Methodology of History] – a work on which he worked in the last months of his life. Unfortunately, the manuscript of this book is lost and what has survived is only the 12-page outline¹⁴⁶, which was found in 2020. It is this outline, treated as a historiographic source, that becomes the basis for the reconstruction of Topolski's theory of historical narrative. While being aware of all the risks associated with such a venture, I undertake it from the position of one of Topolski's students, familiar enough with his work and the philosophical/humanistic context in which it was created, to attempt such a reconstruction. It will therefore be an invitation to an intellectual journey along the path signposted by my mentor.

Let us proceed to the hermeneutic analysis of the outline of *New Methodology of History*. Topolski begins his Introduction to *New Methodology of History* (hereinafter – NMH) with terminological considerations, trying to juxtapose three terms, and at the same time three ways of approaching the reflection on history: *philosophy*, *theory*, and *methodology* added to the term “history”, each time opening a different door, a different cognitive perspective – it is what Topolski seems to be telling us here. We do not know to what extent this was an extension of what he wrote on this subject on various different occasions. However, in the course of this analysis, we will have to feel such uncertainty and get used to cognitively “suspended” judgements.

Next, Topolski presents the conceptual axis of the work. He makes **historical narrative** the **object** of his inquiry. To grasp the essence of historical narration, he builds a theoretical model of it. From the very beginning, he strongly emphasises that three layers should be distinguished in historical narration:

- **logical and grammatical**,
- **persuasive rhetorical**,
- **theoretical and ideological**

These are consequently transferred in the empirical (research) layer – to three aspects under which a specific historical narrative should be examined.¹⁴⁷ This

three-layer theoretical model of historical narration also served Topolski to reconstruct what happened in the last decades of the 20th century as part of his philosophical and methodological reflection on history. It directly indicates the observable shifting of these interests: from the first through the second to the third. I consider Point 4 to be an extremely important element of these preliminary considerations: the theory of historical narration must arise from empirical research, from research on a specific narrative practice of historians. I believe that the explicitly signalled attachment to *Aristotle's practical rationality* was supposed to serve this purpose.

The preserved table of contents illustrates the structure of the work: it consisted of 6 parts and 22 chapters (each of them, in turn, from 2 to 8 modules) – a division typical of Topolski. It also shows how elaborate this work must have been: there are 98 of these modules in total, and if we add the *Introduction* and *Conclusions* to it, it is an even hundred! Assuming that each of such individual modules was a study of a specific issue (and it was customary at the time to be, on average, six to eight pages long), it must be assumed that this work could have had a minimum volume of six hundred to even eight hundred pages! Let me remind you that *How to Write and Understand History: The Mystery of Historical Narration* (MHN) was 350 pages long, *Theory of Historical Knowledge* (THK) – 510, and *Methodology of History* (MH) – 575. The lost work could not have been shorter.

We should also note that *New Methodology of History* (NMH) turns out to be in fact *Theory of Historical Narration*, because in Topolski's opinion at the beginning of the 21st century, it could not be anything else. It is especially true if a theoretician of history wants to take into account the current research practice of historians, as well as the current ways of reflecting on it, and not live in isolation from them. That is why each of the six parts of the "Methodology of history at the threshold of the 21st century" (as Topolski called this book differently) is dedicated to/relates to historical narrative as such.

The first part, entitled "From the empirical explanatory (analytical) to the constructive narrative methodology of history: new figures of historiography at the end of the 20th century", is an attempt to outline the methodological and historiographic context from which Topolski's thought emerged. This is his original review of how the changes in historiography itself were accompanied by a change in metahistorical reflection, conducted differently than in MHN, where Part I was entitled "The rise and development of the narrative philosophy of history". The present approach is much broader, also better conceptualised, because it is guided by a philosophical perspective (mainly by the philosophy of language and philosophy of science). It is also worth emphasising – which results from the entire structure of NMH – that, although Topolski notices the reciprocal influence of philosophical metahistory on historians, he considers the fundamental relation occurring at the level of historiography, evoked – about which I will write further on – not by the methodology/theory/philosophy of history but through **self-reflection of historians**, created/caused by factors external to history, mainly of an ideological nature (which I myself call the politicisation and mythologisation of history).

The second part, entitled “Basic elements of narrative structures in history”, deals with the narrative understood as the end product of the historian’s work, but this time Topolski does not deal with the “structure of historical narrative”, as he did in Part II of MHN¹⁴⁸, but focuses on showing that the construction of narrative history begins with the work of the historian with a source.

The third part, entitled “Basic determinants of historical narrative”, focuses, in turn, on what drives the narrative. In the next two, Topolski deals with the “Logical and grammatical layer of narrative” (Part IV) and “Historical narrative as a complete persuasion” (Part V). Finally, Part VI, “Historical narrative as a ‘scientific’ and literary construction: the problem of historical truth”, consists of considerations at the level of metahistory and metamethodology. I will now try to go into detail about the contents of the work, chapter by chapter.

What is of interest in Chapter I: “Types of methodological reflection on history: The emergence of the analytical philosophy of history”? Firstly, Topolski gives primacy to the notion of the *methodology of history*. Again, as in his first famous work *Methodology of History*¹⁴⁹, it is the methodology and not the theory or philosophy of history that is the basis – the frame of his considerations. Secondly, Topolski distinguishes three types (but also phases) of metahistorical reflection: (1) **self-reflection of historians**, practitioners (from Herodotus to Braudel), (2) **reflection on historical writing, conducted casually by philosophers**¹⁵⁰ (from Voltaire to Ricoeur), and (3) **fully professional reflection**, conducted by history methodologists who emerged along with the cognising culture of analytical philosophy and who try to look at historians’ research practice holistically.

In Chapter II, “The correction of the empirical explanatory model of the methodology of history by its followers: the emergence of the empirical-narrative model”, Topolski shows the correction of the previously universally applicable model of the methodology of history as a result of discussions on the models of explanation present in historians’ research practice. Hempel’s rigid “corset” was then gradually loosened by the inclusion in the model of the explanation of *human actions* themselves (based on the assumption of the rationality of human actions) and their *understanding*, and over time also by the inclusion of narrative itself.¹⁵¹ In the 1970s, this ultimately led to the development of what Topolski calls the empirical-narrative model. The methodological conferences in Ottawa (1980) and Turin (1982), in which Topolski personally participated, finally confirmed his convictions. The first one, devoted to the philosophy of history, was organised by William Dray in April 1980, with the aim of bringing closer the analytical Anglo-American philosophy and the French way of thinking about history.¹⁵² The theme of the latter, which was organised by Pietro Rossi, was the question of the “scientific character” of history.¹⁵³

It is impossible to see all these changes in the professional methodology of history in isolation from what happened in philosophy itself, especially within the analytical paradigm – from the philosophy of language to the philosophy of science. And this is precisely the subject of Topolski’s attention in Chapter III,

entitled “Changes in the philosophical environment of historiography and reflection on it: The decay of analytical philosophy (from the late Popper to Rorty)”.

He begins it with a module on the evolution of analytical philosophy, the manifestation of which was the expansion of its field of interest to encompass language, and he mentions three names in this context: Ryle – Austin – Searle. It is worth looking briefly at them.

Gilbert Ryle was primarily the author of the book *The Concept of Mind* (1949), very important to the philosophy of the 20th century, in which he proves, on the basis of the philosophy of language, that the concept of mind is only a philosophical illusion which we “owe” to Descartes. His basic categorical error stemmed from assuming the duality of man: the independent existence of the psyche and the body, which cannot be proven by means of the analytical philosophy of language, because it is a typical *hypostasis* which is based on the inappropriate use of colloquialism. Consequently, as Ryle argued in *Dilemmas* (1954), not only the mind but *existence* itself is relativised to language: in practice, only linguistic reality exists, because there is no access to being other than through language.

John L. Austin, just like Ryle, representing the Oxford School in the philosophy of language¹⁵⁴, was, in turn, primarily interested in the contextuality of language in everyday use – *vide* his famous work *How to do Things with Words*?¹⁵⁵ I think that for Topolski it was particularly important that Austin was the first to notice the difference between a *performative* and a *non-performative statement*.¹⁵⁶ This, for example, in the case of the methodology of history, could have resulted in noticing an important fact for the theory of the historical source, namely that it is a witness to history – by giving a testimony – which establishes verbally that something happened, *performs the past for the historian*. It could also be significant that Austin emphasised that the *speech acts* encountered in everyday life may have the following character:

- locutionary: attributing meaning to something or someone,
- illocutionary: communicating information about something or giving orders to do something, and
- perlocutionary: **persuading** the recipient of a message to do something (a typical example may be the language of advertising).

Where did this conclusion come from? Firstly, its legitimacy stems from the fact that Topolski himself had been heavily involved in the **persuasive layer of historical narrative** since the early 1990s, as can be seen, for example, in *A Non-postmodernist Analysis of Historical Narratives*, not to mention MHN and *Narrare la storia*. Secondly, he referred to the performativity of language directly in his concept of the historical source, namely, the status of the so-called base sentences.

Finally, John Rogers Searle is mentioned only once in MHN in the context of the *linguistic turn* and research on metaphor.¹⁵⁷ Now there was going to be much more space devoted to him. I assume that Topolski not only must have regarded him as an intellectual successor to Austin, which he was in the early

stages of his work¹⁵⁸, but also must have known his two books: *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) and *The Mystery of Consciousness* (1997), in which he departs from *biological naturalism* and develops the thesis on the linguistic (social) creation of reality – a view also adhered to by the author of THK, who might have planned to also include Donald Davidson and Jaakko Hintikka in NMH as representatives of the next generation of language philosophers.

The next subsection (module) is devoted to various forms of, as Topolski calls it, “secession” from the analytical camp. As it is known, Wittgenstein himself broke with his earlier views in the late period of his work.

The neo-pragmatists, Willard V. O. Quine and Hilary Putnam, the methodological anarchist, Paul Feyerabend and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Bas van Fraassen are considered by Topolski in this context of discontinuation and the opening of new perspectives. I know that Topolski knew and liked Quine’s *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (he is quoted four times in MHN) and, like him, he was a supporter of *epistemological holism*. However, it was Putnam and his concept of internal realism (presented for the first time in Poland in the publishing series, which I co-edited, on the philosophy of science “Realizm – Racjonalność – Relatywizm” [“Realism – Rationality – Relativism”]), the subsequent volumes of which Topolski received) influenced him the most in the latter period. Putnam is mentioned in MHN as many as 11 times! Jerzy Kmita and the reading of his seminal book *Jak słowa łączą się ze światem. Studium krytyczne neopragmatyzmu* [How Words Connect with the World: A Critical Study of Neopragmatism] must have played a role.¹⁵⁹ Topolski was also pleased with the forthcoming Polish edition of Putnam’s works translated by Adam Grobler.¹⁶⁰

In his autobiography, Paul Feyerabend mentions directly the impact that Wittgenstein’s contextual theory of meaning¹⁶¹ had on him. As a result, it shows that Topolski aptly placed the author of *Against the Method* under the label of “secessionists”. Of course, one could write volumes about *methodological anarchism* in the philosophy of science, but it is beyond the scope of this essay. I presume, however, that Topolski did not focus only on *anything goes* this time, as he did in THK, but he went a step further, because two later books by Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* and *Science in a Free Society*, were more important for the methodology of the history of the end of the 20th century.¹⁶²

On the other hand, I am unsure about Fraassen, because I otherwise know that Topolski was familiar with his *The Scientific Image*¹⁶³, but it is really difficult to derive his *constructive empiricism* from the analytical tradition and treat it as secession.

Another philosophical context in which the methodological reflection on the history of the end of the 20th century should be perceived and analysed is, according to Topolski, the “questioning of positivist philosophy” by authors of hermeneutics and phenomenology – Benedetto Croce, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Ricoeur are thus the protagonists of this subsection. In order to avoid a misunderstanding, it should be emphasised that it is not about the more known anti-positivism from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries but about the trend from the second half of the 20th century, which

played a significant role in shaping the theory of historical narrative. Interestingly, Topolski starts with (and perhaps praises excessively) Croce, who died in 1952, leaving no followers, so it is difficult to talk about his influence on the methodology of the end of the 20th century – except for Hayden White whom Croce valued and reminded a wider audience of.¹⁶⁴ However, I am surprised that this chain of thinking about history in the hermeneutical and phenomenological spirit does not mention the name of Hans Gadamer, who was permanently involved in metahistorical reflection – in the opinion of many (including mine). For some reasons, however, Topolski omitted him, which remains a mystery to me, more so as he wrote about *Truth and Method* in TNH as “the second most important work of German philosophy of the twentieth century”.¹⁶⁵

Then Topolski moves on to postmodernism and deconstruction, symbolised here by the names of Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida, respectively. As Topolski referred to their views many times on various occasions (especially in MHN and *Narrare la storia*), I assume that they were given a more structured explication in NMH.

Let us move on to Chapter IV: “Changes in the humanities after the ‘linguistic turn’”. Topolski discusses here the changes that took place in linguistics, literary studies, anthropology, semiotics, and rhetoric, and in cognitive psychology, which, however, would be difficult to include in the humanities. Perhaps it was so because – unlike in THK – social sciences and what happened to them in the 1980s and 1990s are not the subject of his research/attention this time, although – in my opinion – they should be, if only taking into account what was happening within the sociology of knowledge, and yet, for example, economics had its rhetorical revisionist deviation (Deirdre N. McClosky¹⁶⁶).

Topolski begins with linguistics and Fernand de Saussure, which in itself deserves attention, because he was barely present in MHN, and – as Krzysztof Pomian showed in his analyses – his works were of fundamental importance for the 20th-century metahistorical reflection.¹⁶⁷ It can therefore be presumed that this time the views of the author of *Course in General Linguistics* were discussed in more detail by Topolski, including the distinction between *signifiant* and *signifie*, fundamental for the theory of historical narrative, and his thesis that the bond between the *signifier* and the *signified* element always has a cultural, not a natural, basis. Of similar importance is Noam Chomsky, and his concept of *linguistic competence*, which I also treat as an acknowledgement of Kmita’s socio-regulatory concept of culture, which in a sense is based on the achievements of transformative-generative grammar. Topolski was already able to prove the usefulness of the concept of the degree of grammaticalness of the author of *The Structure of Language* for the analysis of metaphors in MHN¹⁶⁸, and now he probably intended to present the *social methodological awareness* as a *common cultural competence* of a given community of historians, underpinning it with references to the achievements of semiotic linguistics (probably Robert J. Fogelin) and neostructuralism of Algirdas J. Greimas, whose research on the structure of the story (functional and action-causative models) must have become interesting to Topolski after writing TNH. I consider this comprehensive approach to various

inspirations, drawn to the methodology of history from linguistics to be a significant *novelty* in Topolski's reflection.

From the phenomenology and influence of Mikhail Bakhtin, through intertextuality and postmodernism, the module on poststructuralist tendencies in literary studies promises to be equally enthralling. In the case of Bakhtin, this means a return (probably inspired by Topolski's student – Wojciech Wrzosek, who was already very interested in the author of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*¹⁶⁹ and the *Tartus school*), because although he is absent in MHN, he appeared in THK in the context of *carnavalesque theory* and research on the representing structure.¹⁷⁰ This time the emphasis was probably placed on the issue of *dialogism* in Bakhtin, because this “puzzle” fits Topolski's system of “puzzles”. New Criticism and New Historicism were to be discussed separately in this subsection. Research on the *structure* and *texture* of a literary work, initiated by Ezra Pound and conducted within the framework of American formalism (this is another name for *New Criticism*) by researchers such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks or William K. Wimsatt Jr., must have been important for Topolski, for he himself proposed, in TNH, something that could be called research on the *texture of historical narratives*.¹⁷¹ New historicism, founded by Stephan Greenblatt, emphasised the opposite: it is not structure or texture that determines the essence of a literary work but the cultural context from which it arises. As we will see later, Topolski will try to take into account both perspectives.

Further inspirations were to come from anthropology. He begins Clifford Geertz's textualism.¹⁷² As is well known, the creator of the concept of *dense description* noticed an analogy between the search for the meaning of human activities and the interpretation of the text – he especially appreciated the interpretation by Paul Ricoeur, who skilfully combined phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation. I think that this was something that became interesting for Topolski: a historian looking for the sense of history-making activities resembles a researcher of cultural texts. The next step is the so-called critical anthropology (Michael M.J. Fischer and Stephen Tyler), and the next one is postmodern anthropology (James Clifford), which grew out of this critical one.

The next module is dedicated to Umberto Eco's semiotics. Topolski had previously used the Italian cultural semiotician's conceptual apparatus in TNH (seven references to this author), for example using the category of *uso del testo* (consciously using a text to elicit a desired reaction in the recipient) when analysing the sublimity of historical narrative.¹⁷³ However, unlike in NMH, Eco's concept had never been discussed separately in Topolski's oeuvre.¹⁷⁴ All the more so because the Italian semiologist returns in the lead role once more in Chapter XVII. It probably was to include a discussion of both the early concepts of Eco, from the times of *A Semiotic Landscape* and *The Open Work*, as well as the later ones, from the times of *Lector in fabula* or *Semiology of Everyday Life*.

Topolski aptly noticed that the end of the century also brought the end of the influence of psychoanalysis on the humanities, which was difficult to even

imagine from the perspective of the 1960s and 1970s! *Cognitive psychology* introduced by the famous book by U. Neisser in 1967, under this title, was entering the abandoned place more and more.¹⁷⁵ Obviously, from today's perspective, it is impossible to imagine a professional historical methodology without cognitive science and neuroscience, but I am very fascinated by how Topolski could predict it 22 years ago. Unfortunately, we can only speculate.

There is no such problem with the next section, "New research on discourse and narrative (Foucault, Ricoeur, et al.). Influences of rhetoric in the humanities", because these issues had been discussed by Topolski many times before, and they are also present in TNH, in which he, while reconstructing the world of Foucault's thoughts, invokes the metaphor of *driving the author out of the discourse (narrative)*.¹⁷⁶ It should be remembered, however, that at the stage of writing TNH, he programmatically dissociated himself from constructivism and narrativism in philosophy, writing: "It is possible to investigate historical narrative without delving into the philosophical trend represented by Michael Foucault, Roland Barthes, Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, Dominick LaCapra or Jacques Derrida".¹⁷⁶ A few years later, he did not think so anymore, and he was much better prepared for analysis from the perspective of the philosophical works he reviewed and also other ones!

This is also evidenced by Chapter V, "The development of the constructivist narrative model of the philosophy (methodology) of history". It consists of six modules devoted to Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit, Hans Kellner, Dominick LaCapra and which may surprise many – Ewa Domańska. So let me start by clarifying this last point. I wrote recently¹⁷⁷ that it was thanks to Domańska that Topolski gradually opened up to narrativism in the 1990s, and I think that he decided to take this step because he valued her *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism*, which appeared in the same year,¹⁷⁸ and promoted dialogue as a form of metahistoric narrative. After all, he was one of the heroes of this dialogue-based story in the form of ten, or actually 11 (because at the end the author looks at herself in the mirror of her self-awareness) conversations. And perhaps it was also influenced by another book by Domańska – *Mikrohistorie* [Microhistories] – dedicated to "three masters and intellectual guides": Ankersmit, White, and Topolski, which – as its author assured me – was read by Topolski before its release. One thing is certain for me: Topolski respected the attitude which Domańska herself described in the introduction to *Mikrohistorie* as "thrashing in the cage of modernist thinking" and an attempt to "jump beyond herself". This *beyond herself* meant beyond the triad of Reason, Science, and Logic, proper to the analytical philosophy of history. It is a leap towards something unknown, stretching **between** worlds (hence the title *Spotkania w międzyświatach* [Meetings in the Interworlds], the horizon of which is determined by the new triad: "The Other" – Dialogue – Meeting. As Domańska writes:

The category which constitutes the basis for an interesting look at the relationship between 'Self' and 'other' is the dialogue, which for me is the

fundamental metaphor defining the way of looking at the present-past relationship (contemporary and past culture).¹⁷⁹

And Topolski probably wanted to tell us about this dialogical paradigm/approach towards the theory of historical narrative in this subsection.

The rest of this chapter is simple to interpret. Hayden White's rhetorical model of metahistorical reflection, Ankersmit's narrative logic from his first book (including his discussion with Perez Zagorin¹⁸⁰), Kellner's narrativism¹⁸¹, and LaCapra's deconstructionism¹⁸² are all discussed here. A separate module is dedicated to the turn towards experience in the theory of history, initiated in the 1990s by Ankersmit.

Chapter VI takes us to the ground of historiography and what Topolski calls "The second coup in twentieth-century historiography", namely the turn to anthropology, which took place largely (though not exclusively) under the influence of postmodernism.¹⁸³ It begins – because it would be difficult otherwise – with the changes that took place within the Annales school, most often under the slogan "research on *mentalite*". It was with the description of these changes that Topolski's student, Wrzosek, ended his 1995 book *Historia – kultura – metafora. Powstanie nieklasycznej historiografii* [History – Culture – Metaphor: The Facets of Non-classical Historiography]. He emphasised that this was a discontinuation – significant not only for French historiography but for historiography in general.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, it can be assumed that it had been discussed by them many times. Further on, we have a similar situation when Topolski discusses, in the next module, the classic works for this genre of historical writing, and then ones considered highly heretical for modernist historiography: Georges Duby (*Le dimanche de Bouvines*), Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (*Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village 1294–1324*), Natalie Zemon Davis (*The Return of Martin Guerre*), or Robert Darnton (*The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*); Domańska and her above-mentioned *Mikrohistorie* played a significant role here as well.

New types of historiographies of the end of the 20th century also include *women studies* and *gender studies*, which Topolski also discusses in this chapter. Focusing on man also means being interested in the "Other", studying "margins" and various "minorities". Historical anthropology has many faces, and he tries to outline the most important ones. By the way, he simultaneously wants to show that postmodern historiography systematically aims to *distract narrative* (distraction of narrative), to "cross borders" (in this context, the American historian and theorist, of British descent, Simon Schama, is evoked).¹⁸⁵ There is also a subsection for *New Intellectual History*.¹⁸⁶ We do not know whether he started it with a reaction to Arthur O. Lovejoy's achievements in the United States, or rather with the Cambridge School (Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, et al.)¹⁸⁷; however, I am sure of one thing: that it is precisely the postulate to link historical writing with literature, which is present in both currents of the *new intellectual history*, that drew Topolski's interest. He will refer to it in Parts III and IV of NMH.

I consider the next module to be important, because Topolski presents critical reactions of the historian community to narrativism and postmodernism, thus showing that “the game is not over yet”. In this context, he discusses two books: the famous *Return to Essentials* by Geoffrey R. Elton¹⁸⁸ and *Traktat o nowej historii narracyjnej* [A Treatise on a New Narrative History] by Peer Vries, which, according to the Dutch researcher, was born “out of irritation”. Because Vries means drifting here and not ascending, I translate its title from Dutch into Polish as *Narratorzy dryfują* [Narrators Drift], Topolski’s version is *Narratorzy (Opowiadacze) na fali* [Narrators (Storytellers) on the Wave].¹⁸⁹ In practice, it is a book completely unknown in the community (maybe apart from a critical and brief discussion of it by Ankersmit, also in Dutch, who considered Vries’s criticism quite shallow), but Topolski mentioned it in TNH¹⁹⁰ and since he referred to it so often, he apparently had some fondness for it. On the other hand, it is perfectly understandable to include three more names in this context, namely three American female historians: Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. It is, of course, the famous *Telling the Truth about History*¹⁹¹ and the authors’ postulate that the choice of the paradigm in the era of postmodern changes in historiography should be determined more by the historian’s “practical” realism than by succumbing to fashion. There is, however, the danger of such a blurring of “historical truth”, whatever this concept means today, that historical narrative will be subordinated to politics. In *Telling the Truth About History*, they write:

History is a disciplined inquiry about past events, separate from what the guardians of nationalism might want its citizens to believe. [...] A democratic perspective includes far more than the government’s point of view, embracing as it does all the different groups with their divergent opinions within the society. The idea that nations control the memory of their citizens pushes to the fore the question of which persons are in charge of the nation. They may be virtuous leaders, cultural elites, locally powerful minorities, pluralistic coalitions, triumphant interest groups, or the winning competitors in the latest electoral donnybrook. Whichever they are, they are manifestly not the whole people. So to speak of the nation as an institution working assiduously to forget experiences incompatible with its righteous self-image is to fudge the issue of whose experiences must be forgotten and for which group’s benefit.¹⁹²

Topolski refers to this idea in Part V, in which he analyses the persuasive function of historical narrative and the introduction of various beliefs of the historian into it.

Topolski starts Part II, Basic elements of narrative structures in history, with the concept of the historical source, very important for him, thus in fact undermining the (modernist) status of the source as something existing separately/independently of the historian (*vide*: a collective of researchers of the past). In his opinion, the metaphors of “trace” or “mirror” used by historians obscure rather than facilitate the understanding of the historian-source relationship. He

examines these issues in Chapter VII, “The historian and sources”. Looking at the individual modules of this chapter, it is easy to see that we are dealing here with a certain compromise between Topolski’s cognising culture from the times of MH and THK, and the cognising culture in which he remained while writing NMH. On the one hand, we have a reference to Jerzy Giedymin’s works from the early 1960s¹⁹³ (module 2) and to the division of sources into addressed and unaddressed (module 3) and their informative power (module 5); and, on the other hand, there is the issue of archaeological sources (module 4) and what Topolski used to call “base information” contained in the source (module 4); and finally (module 5) he goes straight to the thesis known from the postmodern/constructivist theory of history that the cognitive value of information source depends on its contextualisation and, consequently, on narrative procedures.

Chapter VIII presents “Characteristics of historical narrative” understood as the *result of the historian’s work*. Storytelling becomes the basis for the structural analysis of the historical (historiographic) text: the separation of narrative, description, and text. Referring to specific historical works, Topolski probably showed how starting with scattered base information one reaches the level of a story (module 1). It is this chapter that introduces (in module 2) the division of historical narrative into three layers (three components): logical and grammatical, persuasive rhetorical, and theoretical and ideological, which is fundamental to Topolski’s entire MHN. Fortunately, these are the categories we already know from *Historiography between Modernism and Postmodernism, Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, and *Wprowadzenie do historii* [Introduction to History], so I do not need to discuss them separately here.

It is the differentiation of the presence of each of these three components in the process of creating (producing) a historical narrative that ultimately determines which type (model) of narrative we eventually end up with, for example, more persuasive and rhetorical or perhaps more logical and explanatory. A historian of historiography or a methodologist of history who studies specific historical literature should be able to carry out such a stratigraphic (layered) analysis.

In the next chapter – IX, Topolski introduces two elements to the “narrative game”, namely *time* and *space*. (The title of this chapter is “Time and space as elements of the narrative game”). I consider the use of this frame –narrative game – as new and important (in the sense of Gilles Deleuze), because at least the first three modules, devoted to the understanding of time in historiography, provide a traditional exposition: linearity, cyclicity, punctuality, rhythmicity, dated and universal time, annalists’ time, chroniclers’ time, and strictly historical time, the last two – dedicated to space – clearly abandon the approach that is characteristic of the traditional methodology of history. Indeed, space appears here as the subject of the narrative game in history: it is not only constructed and conceptualised differently by historians but also – appropriately *transfigured* (e.g. in the form of the centre–periphery relationship) – becomes an important factor in this narrative game.¹⁹⁴

After analysing the structure of historical narrative in Part II, Topolski asks in Part III a question about its basic determinants. The cognitive horizon is determined by the question of what drives historical narrative. The three chapters

that make up this part are devoted to ideology, theory, and fundamental myths when they have the function of giving direction. I will briefly discuss the contents of each of them, following the clues preserved in the *Table of Contents*. Chapter 10 is called “The functioning of ideology in historical research and narrative”. Topolski starts it with a question about the purpose/purposes of historical writing and the ways of answering this question in the literature of the subject. This review of positions shows, as I postulate, that goals are closely related to the historian’s ideology. It is therefore necessary to look at ideology and, to be more precise, at different understandings of ideology. As we know it, Topolski believed that there is also something like the researcher’s professional ideology, and he attributed this role to the *professional ethics of the historian*, that is, what the historian may and may not do. It is not an individual ethic but a collective one: it is a community of professional historians that defines the applicable standards in this matter. Of course, they do not have an absolute character; on the contrary, they are historical and change over time. He focuses in this chapter on the tension between the professional ideology (ethics) of researchers and other types of ideologies functioning in the society (module 4). In this context, at the end of this chapter (module 5) he raises an interesting question/issue: *ideology as a form of violence*. We can imply that he probably meant *symbolic violence*, which, in the context of attempts to embroil history in historical politics, being contented today, takes on additional significance, but for Topolski himself it was also a confrontation with personal experience.

“Since always” had Topolski been interested in and occupied with the role of theory in historical research. It was one of the central topics in *Teoria wiedzy historycznej* (THK). In MHN, theory disappeared only to reappear again (and in several versions) in *New Methodology of History*. Chapter XI “The functioning of theory in historical research and narrative” is the first instance of it. He discusses various approaches to the issue of theory in historiography. It should be noted that it is done within historiography, and not within the methodology of history – one has to remember that this is a fundamental difference! The *theory* in the sense of the term as used in the methodology or philosophy of science is not included here. Topolski’s attention is focused on what historians call theory and what role it then plays in their narrative constructions (modules 1 and 2). Then he shows that in historical narrative one can find both theoretical terms created by historians themselves and those borrowed from other disciplines (module 3). I have difficulty in “fitting” the fourth module, entitled *Operational vision of a historical process in standard historiography*, with this line of thinking, unless “operational” means here the same as “mainstream”, that is, common. Then, he actually agrees that historians usually do not use (to put it mildly) a vision of the historical process based on theories developed within other social sciences but a common vision of what history is and how it emerges – a general idea about it. And this general idea is what they call “theory”.

When his disciple Wojciech Wrzosek introduced to the Polish theory of history the concept of *fundamental metaphors*, Topolski answered with *fundamental myths*.¹⁹⁵ However, he never fully clarified the difference between *fundamental*

metaphors, that is, the metaphors of *development*, *genesis*, or *revolution* analysed by Wrzosek, and their *fundamental myth*. I assume that he could have done it in Chapter XII “Fundamental myths in historiography”. You may ask what gives me the right to make such a claim: expanding the field of observation in relation to TNH and regarding not only the old categories (evolution or revolution) but also the new ones: sublimation, coherence, or causality as fundamental myths; and, on the other hand, recognising *agency* or *determinism* as a fundamental myth, which had to require an in-depth conceptualisation of metaphor and myth. By the way, it meant a significant *categorical drift* and a concession to the postmodern orientation on the part of the author of THK. I view it as unfortunate because how else one can comment on the fact that the thesis of *agency* (historical agency), so important in Topolski’s overall system of thought about history, is considered a kind of myth, be it fundamental but still a myth.

The subsequent parts of *New Methodology of History* are dedicated to its three layers: logical and grammatical, persuasive rhetorical, and creative (history as an object of construction¹⁹⁶), in two of its varieties: literary and scholarly (scientific). Starting the analysis of the first of them – Part IV, “Logical and Grammatical Layer of Historical Narrative: Argumentation in Historical Narrative” – Topolski, in Chapter XIII entitled “Historical narrative sentences, their sequences and narrative wholes”, considers firstly the logical and grammatical status of the *historical sentence* (module 1), and then he proceeds to analyse the relationships which can occur between such single sentences in grammatical (higher-order narrative structures) as well as logical order (from factual sentences through generalisations to historical theories). It is a direct reference to what he had already examined in THK (especially module 2), but this time the analysis seems to be much more in-depth, because it additionally covers what I once called the *architecture of historical narrative*, and a conceptual grid for research on historical discourses is proposed here.¹⁹⁷ Topolski speaks here of “multiple belonging of historical sentences to narrative wholes of even higher orders” (module 3) and the fact that the narrative whole can have destructive power on individual historical sentences (module 4), which means that a complete picture created by the historian may be inconsistent with (undermine the status of) an individual finding.

Chapter XIV, “Argumentative structures in historical narrative in the process of formulating sentences about historical facts”, seems very interesting. As we know it, in analytic philosophy, the philosophy of justification is very carefully distinguished from the philosophy of argumentation. Topolski became more seriously interested in argumentation while studying the narrative structure of the historical source at the time of writing TNH. Analysing the way historians work with a source, he came to the conclusion that their practice shows that it is customary to make an attempt to convince the collective about the accuracy of their own “reading” and not to provide some justification arrived at by referring to the logic of the argument itself (deduction from premises). He wrote:

In my opinion, it is, therefore, necessary to abandon the philosophy of justification in historiography in favor of the philosophy of argumentation and – as far as sources are concerned – to consider what can be “drawn”

from them in terms of the latter philosophy. The philosophy of argumentation rests on two pillars. The first is the rejection of the belief that there is one truth that we approach in the course of exploring the world and the adoption of the point of view of pluralism of truths; and the second is the realization that argumentation is not only logic (which Stephen Toulmin examined in the sense of argumentation), but also argumentation in the sense of Aristotelian topics (fully presented in the book by [Chaim] Perelman and [Lucie] Olbrechts-Tyteca)¹⁹⁸

Argumentation becomes one of the possible *narrative strategies* (Chapter XV). Properly constructed, it can serve as an *argument* both in descriptive narratives and in explanatory or evaluative narratives. And even – in the form of a counterfactual argument – it can become the basis for alternative stories. Of course, Topolski had always been most intrigued by argumentation in explanatory narratives, so it is no wonder that he devoted a separate chapter (XVI) to it, “Argumentation in the course of explanation”. He begins it with general remarks on the place of explanation in the historian’s work and with a reminder of how the explanation procedure differs from the simple construction of factual descriptions (module 1). Then, he presents us with the so-called general model of explanation, known to us from the fourth part of *Theory of Historical Knowledge* (THK). What caught my attention in this section is the thesis that explaining in some way “breaks”, as Topolski puts it, the nature of historical narrative itself. I would interpret it this way: in Topolski’s opinion, searching for an answer to the question *why?* still is not a standard rule of narrative practice in the historian community, because they are mainly (only?) interested in describing what happened in the past. It is especially true because “[t]he recipient wants the obvious” and scientific explanation surpasses the cognitive horizon of “blatant obviousness” (module 2 “When do we explain?”). Further considerations lead us clearly in the direction of THK (and not to what Topolski wrote about “explanatory threads in historical narrative” in Chapter IX of TNH), because the following are considered: models of explaining human actions¹⁹⁹ (module 3), models of explaining facts and historical processes (module 4), and the model of integral explanation (module 5), which, in my opinion, clearly proves that we are dealing here with another turn in Topolski’s cognising culture. However, that it is not a simple return to the world of THK is proven by the last module – *The myth of “complete” explanation*. Topolski stopped believing in the optimism of *naive Marxism*, which still echoes in THK, and in that its *theoretical and explanatory history* would give us the opportunity to easily verify (prove) historical statements. Now he considers it a myth (this time in the sense of an illusion).

I consider Part V, “Historical narrative as a persuasive whole: the rhetorics of historical narrative”, mainly owing to its first two chapters, as innovative in relation to what we have seen so far about Topolski’s (concept of) cognising culture. The title of Chapter XVII, “Functions of historical narrative: informative and persuasive”, however, does not reflect its contents accurately. In fact, it is not about the functions but about the issue of the *intentionality* of narrative. It is not

the *informative content* of narrative nor its *persuasive power* that is studied here. Topolski examines historical narrative from two perspectives: (1) of the historian who consciously creates it, and (2) of the recipient of the narrative (the reader); or more precisely: from the perspective of the game, they play with each other. But at the same time, he distances himself from each of them and enters the meta-level. The external expression of this is the use of the “neutral” category of *carrying* (information and the historian’s *beliefs*) in the first three modules, and the category of *evoking* in the next two modules (sensuous feeling/seeing of the past – *sensualisation*, or feeling *comfort* or *cognitive dissonance*). Topolski was inspired by the distinction between *intentio auctoria* (the author’s intention) and *intentio operis* (the work’s intention) introduced by Umberto Eco.²⁰⁰ As is well known, the Bologna semiotician believed that the work’s intention is irreducible to what the author intended, but it is also something different from *intentio lectoris* – what a specific recipient (the reader) tries to “read” into the work. In his opinion, every literary work has its own – existing independently of the work’s author and its recipient – hidden *deep structure*. The cognitive comprehension of it is the task of the literary critic/theorist who must become the *model reader*. It is in this sense that a masterpiece (Topolski classifies narratives according to a *continuum*: from primitive craftsmanship to artistry²⁰¹) remains open:

A work of art, therefore, is a cornpiece and *closed form* in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole. while at the same time constituting an *open product* on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unalterable specificity.²⁰²

This openness is an invitation to interpretation. It can take place at the level of the “surface” of the text (the domain of “naive” readers) or touch its deep structure (“critical” reader) – module 7. Topolski clearly refers to Umberto Eco’s concept and terminology from the 1990s.²⁰³ Eco introduced then, *inter alia*, the concept of *overinterpretation*, which, according to the Italian semiotician, is omnipresent in interpretative practices of deconstructionists, who *overinterpret* a work in accordance with the principle that everything is permissible (Feyerabend’s *anything goes*) – the context in which it was created does not matter/does not impose a limit. Eco maintained that not everything goes. Interpretations cannot be arbitrary; they are subject – similarly to Karl Popper’s scientific theories²⁰⁴ – to falsification. The fact that narrative is about something (it has its topic) cannot be ignored – which is what the post-structuralists tried to do. The author of *Lector in fabula*²⁰⁵ combines epistemological realism with methodological realism in the vein of Greimas (his famous *semiotique de l’action* or *semiotic square*). It is in *isotopy* (this is Eco’s concept which means compliance of the interpretation with the assumed semiotic strategy of the work) that he sees consensus (of course, he means a community of “critical” readers and not “naive” readers) on an acceptable pool of possible interpretations of a text. A text must be considered as a whole (as *intentio operis*), and not fragmentarily, which resembles Topolski’s beliefs rather closely.

I focused on the views of the Italian semiotician, because – in my opinion – the table of contents of this chapter (and this is the only historiographic source we have at our disposal) proves that Topolski, generally sharing Umberto Eco's views, tried to adapt them to the theory of historical narrative he was developing. This conclusion is all the more justified when we recall what he wrote about the historical source: not only does it allow for a multiplicity of potential readings but even implies this multiplicity. The same applies to historical narrative, which by its nature is simultaneously open and about something. Analysing it at the meta-level, in module 8, Topolski introduces the concept of a *radical (hypothetical) reader* and then from this point of view he looks at what deconstructionists do with historical narrative. This actually completes this exposition – an overview of different approaches. Such issues as the programmatic “destruction” of narrative structure, its *palimpsestic* nature, the concept of *misreading* (not reading the meaning of a work, because the very longing for this illusion is harmful), “shifting meanings” (Derrida), or “infinity” of reading (Tzvetan Todorov) are discussed here. It is difficult to recognise Topolski's attitude towards them from this simple list of issues in the table of contents. I do not think that – when it comes to history – he agreed with the famous statement uttered by deconstructionists in the context of literature: “truth is an illusion!” He was too much attached to ontological realism to subscribe to this thesis, even at the time when he was influenced by postmodernism (“he smoked, but he did not inhale”, as I once called it). Topolski struggles with the issue of truth in history and the truthfulness of historical narrative in Part VI (so there will be time to come back to it); however, before that he deals with the issue of “non-anthropological forms of persuasion in historical narrative” in the next chapter (XVIII).

The term “non-anthropological” used here by Topolski would suggest that there are also some anthropological forms of persuasion. This requires some explanation. In MHN, Topolski wrote that “the persuasive effect can be obtained through many narrative and other measures”.²⁰⁶ Let us recall that Topolski distinguished three layers of the narrative: logical and grammatical, theoretical and ideological, and persuasive rhetorical. They corresponded more or less to what is called syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of discourse in the philosophy of language. Pragmatics examines the attitude/relation of the speaking subject to the linguistic utterance/message, with an emphasis on the subject itself. In this sense, pragmatics is subjective and anthropological. *Anthropological persuasion* is therefore a three-way pragmatic (and rhetorical) relationship that takes place between the sender of the message, the message, and its recipient. On the other hand, the *non-anthropological persuasion*, which is of interest to Topolski, includes the use of various forms of cultural violence in order to obtain the desired effect (module 1), persuasion with the programmatic use of different forms of communication for different groups of recipients in order to obtain the desired behaviours (module 2), the use of text composition for persuasive purposes (module 3), persuasion through the appropriate selection of vocabulary (module 4), and rhetorical argumentation in the vein of Perelman (module 5).

In TNH, Topolski referred only to the book by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l'argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique* from 1956²⁰⁷, which was published in Italian in 1976, in the context of what he called *rhetorical argumentation* (and not in the context of the *philosophy of argumentation*), which he illustrated as follows: “[...] for example, invoking authority to strengthen one’s own argument, ridiculing the defenders of theses other than the one we support, etc”.²⁰⁸ I am unsure whether his knowledge of Perelman’s research went beyond the phase of *La nouvelle rhétorique*, and his interest in *topical schemes* must have played a very significant role in Topolski’s cognising culture in the late 1990s. There is insufficient evidence for this.²⁰⁹ It should be noted, however, that in NMH, Perelman’s name appears only in the context of *rhetorical argumentation*, and not in the later development phase of his concept, referred to in the literature as *critical thinking*. And when he finishes writing about Perelman, Topolski goes straight to the analysis of “The functioning of rhetorical tropes in historical narrative” (Chapter XIX), which is indicative of something.

Chapter XIX consists of four modules. In the first one, Topolski analyses the rhetorical framework of narrative: ironic, apologetic, approving, disapproving, quasi-neutral, etc. As it usually happened with Topolski, each of these frames must have been illustrated with historical exemplifications. The second and third modules are dedicated to metaphors and their role in historical narrative. Due to the fact that the titles are laconic, it is difficult to see anything new in relation to what Topolski wrote on this subject in TNH (Chapter X) or in his *Introduction to History*. He concludes with a reflection on the role of metonymy, synecdoche, and other rhetorical tropes that can be found in historians’ narrative practices (module 4).

Part VI, which is the last, “Historical Narrative as a ‘Scientific’ and Literary Construction: The Problem of Historical Truth”, consists of three chapters. The first of them (XX) considers the issue of mutual relations between *historical narrative and literary narrative*. This issue was not raised in THK, and it also engages Topolski infrequently in TNH. However, we know a few of his texts in which he dealt with this topic. Now he clearly expatiates on it. He sees the basic difference between historical and literary narrative in the fact that the former lacks “consciously introduced fictional sentences as base ones” (module 1).²¹⁰ The role of the narrator in both types of narratives is also different (module 2). Topolski also draws attention to the fact that the boundary between historiography and literature is created by historical sources themselves: in literary narratives, the description of the internal experiences of characters is commonplace; it is a standard, while historical narrative is limited in this respect by the contents of sources themselves (module 3). The limits of description in historical narrative are also created by the currently valid socio-linguistic conventions. For example, any attempt to narrate the Holocaust must take into account the so-called political correctness (module 4).

In the next, fifth module, Topolski touches on a very important issue: historians constructing their narrative pictures exceed the level of factual knowledge in their interpretation. Therefore, they can be accused of presenting fiction. In

fact, it is a question of the ontic status of constructs such as ideal types, or models, or general concepts such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and feudalism. Then (in module 6) he reviews the various types of historical interpretations and underlines structural, explanatory, ideological (ethical), and literary (aesthetic) interpretations.

Chapter XXI, “New approaches to truth in philosophy and the problem of historical truth”, takes us to a metahistorical reflection of the end of the twentieth century. Topolski discusses the questioning of the classic (correspondence) concept of truth by neo-pragmatists and postmodernists (module 1), and presents the approach to truth on the basis of Hayden White’s and Frank Ankersmit’s concepts, and the once-famous dispute between Leon J. Goldstein and Patrick Horace Nowell-Smith (module 2).²¹¹ He left to himself as the last one (module 3), his favourite²¹² concept of Putnam’s *internal realism*, which he had been trying to adapt to history for years. This time we get a hint that Topolski followed the path of Chris Lorenz (already in WHN he considered his article in *History and Theory* from 1994²¹³ as “particularly successful”²¹⁴), which I am particularly glad about, because I consider the author of *Braking up time: Negotiating the Borders Between Present, Past and Future*²¹⁵ to be the most eminent living methodologist of history. This is another proof that Topolski in NMH freed himself enough from “White’s and Ankersmit’s thought”²¹⁶ to return to the path of building his own non-White’s theory of historical narrative.

But then how does one comment on the fact that the last (XXII) chapter of NMH “Does the historian have access to past reality?” has the same title as Chapter XXIII *How are stories written and understood? Mysteries of historical narrative?* The table of contents of this chapter clearly shows that Topolski remains here engaged in his earlier entanglement in “base sentences” and searches for a realistic “alibi” for historical narrative (modules 1 and 2). He tries to find the right metaphor to describe the “contact” of historical narrative with the past reality (module 3) and emphasises the “multiplicity of human truths” (module 4). The key to explaining this puzzle seems to me to be the final fragment of *Introduction to History*, written several months before Topolski’s lost book was written. Here are some particularly important passages:

In this situation, the concept of truth in history must be understood pragmatically, i.e. in such a way as to serve well in our understanding of the study of the past, which – as I have already mentioned – was not a phantom, but something real, but for the researcher it was something conceptual and linguistic from the very beginning of the study.²¹⁷

From what has been said, the directive of pursuing truth in history is valid regardless of whether or not we have realized that different interpretations, and therefore different supra-individual truths, are possible. This rule can be formulated as follows: pursue the truth, i.e. develop source base, improve the method of research and narrative practice, prioritize evaluation

based on a group of scholars' ethics, and, in addition, do not avoid bold concepts that expand the field of discussion. At the same time, do not think that your truth is the right one (I call this kind of truth a selfish truth), fight the pressure of only one truth, because behind such truth there are always someone's interests.²¹⁸

As can be seen, Topolski returns to the thesis about the *social* character of research practice, historical knowledge, historical narrative, and historical truth, which we know well from *Teoria wiedzy historycznej* (THK) and ... the Poznań School of Methodology. Only in this collective (paradigmatic) approach to historical science can one understand how history is written and what historiography is.

Whether my reading of the meaning of the last book by Jerzy Topolski is correct/proper (and not *selfish* – to use Umberto Eco's term) will also ultimately be decided by the collective.

Notes

- 1 Jerzy Topolski, *Metodologia historii* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1968). English edition: Jerzy Topolski, *Methodology of History*. Translated from the Polish by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (Warsaw and Dordrecht – Holland/Boston, MA: PWN – Polish Scientific Publishers and D.Reidel Publishing Company, 1976). Reviews: Dray, H. William. "Review of Jerzy Topolski, Methodology of History", *The Journal of Modern History* 50, no. 3 (1978), 493–494; Tannenbaum, Edward R. "Review of Methodology of History by Jerzy Topolski", *History and Theory* 18, no. 2 (1979), 243–250.
- 2 Jerzy Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej* [Theory of Historical Knowledge]. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1983).
- 3 Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
- 4 Jerzy Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej* [How to Write and Understand History: The Secrets of Historical Narrative]. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo RYTM, 1996). All quotations from this book appearing further on refer to the 2008 edition, which was published by Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.
- 5 Jerzy Topolski, *Od Achillesa do Beatrice de Planissolles. Zarys historii historiografii* [From Achilles to Beatrice de Planissolles. An Outline of the History of Historiography]. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo RYTM, 1998).
- 6 Jerzy Topolski was the supervisor of my doctoral thesis, defended in 1980, which I later published as a book – see Jan Pomorski, *W poszukiwaniu modelu historii teoretycznej* [In a Quest for the Model of Theoretical History]. (Lublin, Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1983), and also a reviewer of my habilitation – see Jan Pomorski, *Paradygmat "New Economic History". Studium z teorii rozwoju nauki historycznej*. [The New Economic History Paradigm. A Study in the Theory of Development of Historical Science] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1985).
- 7 This outline, together with an analytical commentary on it, has been published in: Jan Pomorski, "Jerzy Topolski's Theory of Historical Narrative. On the Trail of Professor's Last Book", *Historyka. Studies in Historical Methods* 51 (2021), special issue, 167–193.
- 8 Jerzy Topolski. *Theory and Methodology of Historical Knowledge: An Anthology*, edited by Ewa Domańska and Anna Topolska (Poznań: Faculty of History Press, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2022), 432.

- 9 Ewa Domańska also points out of this, see her “Jerzy Topolski’s Theory and Methodology of Historical Knowledge” in the book mentioned in the footnote above, 17–43.
- 10 Idem. *Świat bez historii* [World Without History] (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1972).
- 11 Idem. *Wolność i przymus w tworzeniu historii* [Freedom and Coercion in the Making of History]. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1990), quoted after the 2nd edition (2004), 7.
- 12 Many years later, Topolski wrote a book about him: Jerzy Topolski, *O nowy model historii. Jan Rutkowski (1886-1949)* (Warszawa: PWN, 1986). See also his: “Jan Rutkowski (1886-1949) and His Conception of Synthesis in Historical Science.” *Storia della Storiografia* 3 (1983), 44–60.
- 13 About the Lvov-Warsaw School see the appropriate note in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu> or visit <https://slw.uw.edu.pl>, provided by The Lvov-Warsaw School Research Center. In Polish see also: *Fenomen Szkoły Lwowsko-Warszawskiej*, edited by Anna Brożek and Alicja Chybińska (Lublin: Academicon, 2016).
- 14 Andrzej Malewski, Jerzy Topolski, *Studia z metodologii historii* [Studies in the Methodology of History] (Warszawa: PWN, 1960). Part of this book is available in English, see: Malewski Andrzej, Topolski Jerzy, “On Casual Explanation in History”, in: *Idealization XIII. Modeling in History*, edited by Krzysztof Brzechczyn. *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2009), vol. 97, 351–381.
- 15 *Studia Filozoficzne* [Philosophical Studies], 1959, no. 6, 129–156.
- 16 See: Edward M. Swiderski, “Humanistic Interpretation and Historical Materialism: The Methodology of the Poznań School.” In *Contemporary Marxism. Essays in Honour of J. M. Bocheński*, edited by James J. O’Rourke, Thomas J. Blakeley, Fridrich J. Rapp (Dordrecht: Springer, 1984), 97–108.
- 17 See: “On narrativist and postmodern turn in the understanding of history. (Conversation between Ewa Domańska and Jerzy Topolski)”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* [Humanistic Review], no. 1, (1995), 1–12.
- 18 In the context of his collaboration with Malewski, two publications are relevant here: Jerzy Topolski, *O tak zwanym kryzysie gospodarczym XVII wieku w Europie* (On the so-called economic crisis of the seventeenth century in Europe), *Kwartalnik Historyczny* R. 69 (1962) no. 2, 364–379, and Jerzy Topolski, *Czy szlachta była twórcą kapitalizmu w Europie w XVI w.?* (Was Nobility the Creator of Capitalism in Europe in the Sixteenth Century?), *Prace Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk* [PTPN Reports], no. 3 (1963).
- 19 Topolski’s collaboration with Malewski was ended by his untimely death in 1963. He was an extraordinary figure (the youngest soldier in the “Zośka” battalion in the Warsaw Uprising) and a fantastically promising scientist, who passed away at the age of just 34. In 1975, Topolski has edited (and preceded an introduction) an anthology of Malewski’s most important studies: Andrzej Malewski, *O nowy kształt nauk społecznych. Pisma zebrane*. Edited by Jerzy Topolski (Warszawa: PWN, 1975).
- 20 Jerzy Topolski, *Narodziny kapitalizmu w Europie w XIV-XVII wieku*. [The Birth of Capitalism in Europe in the 14th–17th centuries] (Warszawa: PWN, 1965), quoted after the 2nd edition (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 7–8.
- 21 George C. Homans, *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961) and Andrzej Malewski, *Stopień rozbieżności czynników statusu i jego następstw* [The Degree of Divergence of Status Factors and its Implications], “*Studia Socjologiczne*” [Sociological Studies], no. 2 (1963), 67–84.
- 22 Topolski, *Narodziny kapitalizmu w Europie...*, 181.
- 23 Topolski would return to the theory of behaviour (in Malewski’s version) in his article: “*O znaczeniu teorii zachowania dla wyjaśniania historycznego*” [On the

- Importance of the Theory of Behaviour for Historical Explanation], in his book *Markszizm i historia* [Marxism and History] (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), 92–107.
- 24 On the deductive model of historical explanation see: Carl G. Hempel, “The Function of General Laws in History”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1942), no. 2, 33–48.
 - 25 Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (1890–1963) was one of the co-founders of the Lvov-Warsaw School in philosophy and logic of science. In *Pragmatic Logic* (Dordrecht/Boston/Warsaw: D. Reidel Publishing Company & PWN, 1974), he presented his views on a methodology and logic of science.
 - 26 Wiegner developed “conception of holistic empiricism”, which anticipates some of the ideas of K. R. Popper and W.V.O. Quine. See: Jerzy Kmita, “Adam Wiegner’s Conception of Holistic Empiricism” in *Adam Wiegner. Observation, Hypothesis, Introspection*, edited by Izabella Nowak (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2005), 219–230.
 - 27 Krystyna Zamiara, “Jerzy Giedymin (1925–1993)”, *Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Warszawskiego* [Yearbook of Warsaw Scientific Society], 56 (1993), 44. It is worth recalling that Giedymin’s theory of questions is reflected/applied in Topolski’s theory of non-source knowledge, considered by many to be the most important achievement of the *Methodology of History*. Traces of these inspirations are encountered, for example, in Topolski’s article “O pojęciu i roli wiedzy pozaźródłowej w badaniu historycznym” [On the Concept and Role of Non-Source Knowledge in Historical Research] in *Studia Metodologiczne* [Methodological Studies], (1967), no. 3, 19–32. This journal itself is also a visible fruit of their collaboration. In 1995 it was published a book dedicated to the memory of Jerzy Giedymin: *O nauce i filozofii nauki* [On Science and on the Philosophy of Science], edited by Krystyna Zamiara (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, 1995), which included a text by Jerzy Topolski, “Mit źródła historycznego (źródło historyczne w filozofii argumentacji)” [The Myth of the Historical Source (Historical Source in the Philosophy of Argumentation)].
 - 28 As is well known, he chose to remain there and refused to return to Poland in 1968.
 - 29 *Methodology of History*, op.cit., 6.
 - 30 Cf. Jerzy Giedymin, “Authorship hypotheses and reliability of informants”, *Studia Logica* 12 (1961), no. 1. See also his “Reliability of Informants”, *British Journal for Philosophy of Science* XIII (1963).
 - 31 Topolski even supervised Kmita’s postdoctoral procedure (habilitation) in 1967, replacing Giedymin. After Giedymin’s refusal to return to Poland, Kmita took over the Chair of Logic from him in January 1969, and on 1 September 1969 became head of the then established Institute of Philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. About Kmita’s approach to epistemology and methodology of history see: Jerzy Kmita, *Problems in historical epistemology* (Warsaw / Dordrecht: PWN, 1988), and his *Essays in the Theory of Scientific Cognition* (Dordrecht / Warsaw: PWN, 1989).
 - 32 English translation was published in 1974, see footnote no. 25.
 - 33 On the essence of the approach inherent in analytical philosophy of history, see a famous article by the one of its main contributors: Arthur C. Danto, “The Decline and Fall of the Analytical Philosophy of History”, in: *A New Philosophy of History*, edited by Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 70–85. Danto’s 1965 book, *The Analytical Philosophy of History* is still regarded today as paradigmatic for analytical thinking about history.
 - 34 Some sort of substitute for a study on the relationship between analytical philosophy of history and the Poznań School of Methodology is Krzysztof Brzechczyn’s work, “Analityczna filozofia dziejów w poznańskiej szkole metodologicznej. Próba falsyfikacji Popperowskiej krytyki historii teoretycznej” [Analytical Philosophy of History in the Poznań School of Methodology. An Attempt to Falsify Popper’s Critique of Theoretical History]. See also: Brzechczyn, Krzysztof. “Do Narratives

- Explain? A Comment from the Point of View of Poznań School of Methodology.” In *Towards a Revival of Analytical Philosophy of History: Around Paul A. Roth’s Vision of Historical Sciences*, edited by Krzysztof Brzechczyn, 148–165. *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities*, vol. 110 (Boston, MA/Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2020).
- 35 On the publishing achievements of Poznań School of Methodology, see: “Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities”, which in 1982 took on the form of a book series of a monographic nature, which still continues to be published by Rodopi, Amsterdam. See also the monographic study of School’s history: Grażyna Musiał, *Poznańska Szkoła Metodologiczna - jej rozwój i znaczenie* [Poznań School of Methodology – Its Development and Importance], *Przegląd Filozoficzny - Nowa Seria* 25 (2016), no. 2, 1230–1293.
- 36 Topolski, Jerzy. “The Activistic Conception of Historical Process”, *Dialectics and Humanism* (Poland) 2, no. 1 (1975), 17–30.
- 37 Jarosław Ładosz and Stanisław Kozyr-Kowalski – two orthodox Polish marxists – particular excelled at this. They did not cease, and indeed intensified in the 1980s, the best testimony to which can be found, for example, in Jacek Titenbrum’s book, *Dialektyka i scholastyka. O pewnej próbie obalenia Marksa* [Dialectics and Scholasticism. On a Certain Attempt to Refute Marx]. (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1986).
- 38 Jerzy Topolski, *Rozumienie historii* [Understanding History], (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), 6.
- 39 Jerzy Topolski, “Refleksje o systemie historiozoficznym nie-Marksowskiego materializmu historycznego” [Reflections on the Historiosophical System of Non-Marxist Historical Materialism] *Poznańskie Studia z Filozofii Humanistyki* 6 (19): “Ścieżki transformacji. Ujęcia teoretyczne i opisy empiryczne” [Paths of Transformation. Theoretical approaches and empirical descriptions]. (Poznań, 2003), 280.
- 40 See: *Epistemology and History. Humanitis as a Philosophical Problem and Jerzy Kmita’s Approach to It*, edited by A. Zeidler-Janiszewska (Rodopi: Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1996) *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 47, 630.
- 41 Leszek Nowak, *The Structure of Idealization. Towards a Systematic Interpretation of the Marxian Idea of Science*. (Dordrecht, 1980); idem, *Property and Power. Towards a Non-Marxian Historical Materialism* (Dordrecht, 1983); idem, *Power and Civil Society. Towards a Dynamic Theory of Real Socialism* (Dordrecht, 1991). On Nowak’s philosophy see also: *Scienza, marxismo e metafisica. Leszek Nowak e la Scuola Metodologica di Poznan*, edited by G. Barbone (Limina: Mentis, 2013).
- 42 Leszek Nowak, *Jerzego Topolskiego model metodologiczny historii* [Jerzy Topolski’s Methodological Model of History], *Studia Filozoficzne* [Philosophical Studies], R. (1969), no.5, 195–204.
- 43 *Studia Filozoficzne* (1968), no. 3–4, 3–33. Topolski clearly refers here in thought to the article by the late Andrzej Malewski, “Empiryczny sens teorii materializmu historycznego” [Empirical Sense of the Theory of Historical Materialism], *Studia Filozoficzne* (1957), no. 2.
- 44 Seweryn Żurawicki, “Miejsce Kapitału Marksa w rozwoju metodologii historii” [The Place of Marx’s “Capital” in the Development of the Methodology of History], *Studia Filozoficzne* (1969), no. 3, 133–143; Jerzy Topolski, “O metodach badania marksistowskiej metodologii (W odpowiedzi prof. S. Żurawickiemu)” [On the Methods of Studying Marxist Methodology (In reply to Prof. S. Żurawicki)], *Studia Filozoficzne* (1969), no.4, 147–151.
- 45 *Elementy marksistowskiej metodologii humanistyki* [Elements of the Marxist Methodology of the Humanities], collective work edited by Jerzy Kmita (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1973), 5.
- 46 By the death in 2009 of Leszek Nowak, who was the initiator and editor-in-chief of this prestigious publishing series, 97 volumes had been published, usually

- excellently received and widely discussed, which was the best calling card for the Poznań School of Methodology.
- 47 *Założenia teoretyczne badań nad rozwojem historycznym* [Theoretical Assumptions of Research on Historical Development], edited by Jerzy Kmita (Warszawa: PWN, 1977).
 - 48 Unfortunately, this aspect is not taken into account at all, for example Grażyna Musiał, “Poznańska szkoła metodologiczna - jej rozwój i znaczenie”, *Przegląd Filozoficzny. Nowa Seria*, 2016, no. 2.
 - 49 Other important books were then written by Jerzy Topolski most notably are: *Marksizm i historia* [Marxism and History], 1977; *Rozumienie historii* [Understanding History], 1978; *Nowe idee współczesnej historiografii* [New Ideas in Modern Historiography], 1979 and *Prawda i model w historiografii* [Truth and Model in Historiography] 1982.
 - 50 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York - London: Routledge, 1994).
 - 51 Gwidon Zalejko, *Marksistowski paradygmat badań historycznych. Powojenna historiografia ZSRR o powstaniu kapitalizmu* [Marxist Paradigm of Historical Research. Post-War Historiography of the USSR on the Rise of Capitalism], (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1993); Andrzej Zybortowicz, *Między dogmatem a programem badawczym. Problemy stosowania teorii materializmu historycznego we współczesnej historiografii polskiej* [Between Dogma and the Research Programme. Problems of Applying the Theory of Historical Materialism in Contemporary Polish Historiography], (Warszawa-Poznań: PWN, 1993); Rafał Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem* [History under Supervision] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1993); *ibid: Historiografia PRL. Ani dobra, ani mądra, ani piękna..., ale skomplikowana* [Historiography of PRL. Neither good, nor wise, nor beautiful..., but complicated] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007).
 - 52 “Historia – moje życie. Z profesorem Jerzym Topolskim, historykiem, rozmawia Zygmunt Rola” [History – My Life. With Professor Jerzy Topolski, Historian, Interviewed by Zygmunt Rola], *Trybuna*, 1 December 1998, no. 281.
 - 53 Jerzy Topolski, “Aktywistyczna koncepcja procesu dziejowego” [The Activist Conception of the Historical Process], in *Elements of the Marxist Methodology of the Humanities*, *op.cit.*, 255–273.
 - 54 Jerzy Topolski, “O przyrodniczym i humanistycznym charakterze procesu historycznego” [On the Natural and Humanistic Character of the Historical Process] in his *Marxism and History* (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), 151–173.
 - 55 This was a concept introduced by Jerzy Kmita, *Szkice z teorii poznania naukowego* [Sketches from the Theory of Scientific Cognition] (Warszawa: PWN, 1976), 54.
 - 56 Frank R. Ankersmit, “Historiography and Postmodernism,” *History and Theory* 28 (1989), no. 2.
 - 57 Ewa Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna. Krytyczne studium narratywizmu i humanistyki zaangażowanej* [Existential History. A Critical Study of Narrativism and Engaged Humanities]. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012), 99.
 - 58 Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, *op.cit.*, 15.
 - 59 *Ibidem*, 16.
 - 60 *Ibidem*, 8.
 - 61 *Ibidem*, 109.
 - 62 *Ibidem*, 74.
 - 63 *Ibidem*, 251.
 - 64 *Ibidem*, 30.
 - 65 *Ibidem*, 24.
 - 66 *Ibidem*.

- 67 Ibidem, 14.
- 68 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, chapter I: "Introduction: the role of History". Second edition, enlarged (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 1–10.
- 69 Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, op.cit., 21–22.
- 70 Ibidem, 43.
- 71 Ibidem, 44.
- 72 Ibidem, 132.
- 73 Ibidem, 131.
- 74 Ibidem, 133.
- 75 Ibidem, 132.
- 76 Ibidem, 256.
- 77 Ibidem, 254.
- 78 Ibidem, 278.
- 79 Ibidem, 414.
- 80 Ibidem, 419.
- 81 Ibidem, 438–439.
- 82 Ibidem, 480.
- 83 Ibidem, 181.
- 84 Ibidem, 181.
- 85 Ibidem, 318.
- 86 Ibidem, 131.
- 87 Ibidem, 11.
- 88 Ibidem, 10.
- 89 Ibidem, 152.
- 90 Ibidem, 283.
- 91 Ibidem, 56.
- 92 Ibidem.
- 93 Ibidem, 179.
- 94 In the philosophy of science, such a non-diagnostic conception of theory is formulated by Joseph D. Sneed, *The Logical Structure of Mathematical Physics* (Dordrecht - Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1971); see also: Jan Pomorski, *W poszukiwaniu modelu historii teoretycznej* [In a Quest for the Model of Theoretical History] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1984), 23.
- 95 Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, op.cit., 199, see also ibidem, 222–223.
- 96 Ibidem, 420.
- 97 Ibidem, 421.
- 98 Ibidem, 428.
- 99 Ibidem, 489.
- 100 Ibidem, 8.
- 101 Ibidem, 15.
- 102 Ibidem, 279.
- 103 Ibidem, 16.
- 104 Ibidem, 14.
- 105 It is interesting that similar ideas to Topolski's type of thinking are developed in the theory of history only 30 years later by Paul Roth and Juoni-Matti Kuukkanen. See: Paul Roth, *The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020) and Juoni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2015).
- 106 Jerzy Topolski, *Wprowadzenie do historii* [Introduction to History] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1998), 8.
- 107 Ibidem, 31.
- 108 Ibidem, 30–31.

- 109 Hayden White, *The End of Narrative Historiography*, in: *Świat historii* [World of Histories] op.cit., 393–409.
- 110 Frank Ankersmit, “Can we Experience the Past?”, in *History-making. The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline*, edited by Rolf Torstendahl and Irmine Veit-Brause (Stockholm: Coronet Books, 1996), 47–77. Best discussion on Ankersmit’s theory is: Peter Icke, *Frank Ankersmit’s Lost Historical Cause. A Journey from Language to Experience* (New York – London: Routledge, 2012).
- 111 *A New Philosophy of History*, edited by Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 112 Ewa Domańska, *Encounters. Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998).
- 113 Ewa Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna. Krytyczne studium narratywizmu i humanistyki zaangażowanej* [Existential History. A Critical Study of Narrativism and Engaged Humanities] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012).
- 114 *Jak się pisze i rozumie...*, op.cit., 6.
- 115 Ibidem, 7.
- 116 Ibidem, 10–11.
- 117 Ibidem, 7. It is yet another piece of evidence supporting the thesis that Topolski would plan to write the *New Theory of Historical Narration*, and his earlier book – *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię* – ought to be treated as *incomplete*.
- 118 See more on this: “Historicity of the Being. Krzysztof Pomian’s Theory of History” – the second chapter of this book.
- 119 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 327
- 120 Ibidem, 327.
- 121 Wojciech Wrzosek, *Źródło historyczne jako alibi realistyczne historyka*, op.cit., 23.
- 122 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 321.
- 123 Wrzosek, *Źródło historyczne jako alibi realistyczne historyka*, op.cit., ibidem.
- 124 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 304.
- 125 Ibidem, 308–309.
- 126 Ibidem, 304.
- 127 Ibidem, 302–303.
- 128

In a historical study, even in order to reach one’s own truth, it is not enough to refer to base information and the logic of the proposed narrative whole since it is (i.e. the proposed narrative) merely a candidate to reach a consensus of varying kinds of clarity and universality.

Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 303

- 129 Ibidem, 321.
- 130 Ibidem, 304.
- 131 Ibidem, 319.
- 132 Ibidem, 282–283.
- 133 Ibidem, 309.
- 134 Ibidem, 307.
- 135 Ibidem, 335.
- 136 Ibidem, 305.
- 137 Ibidem, 311.
- 138 Ibidem, 311–312.
- 139 We may successfully practice methodology of history and theory of historiography only if we consider these two disciplines as branches of culture.
- 140 Jerzy Topolski, “Historia jako nauka po postmodernizmie” [History as Science after Postmodernism], in: *Pamięć, etyka i historia. Anglo-amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych (Antologia przekładów)* [Memory, Ethics and History.

- Anglo-American Theory of Historiography of the 1990s (Anthology of Translations)]. Edited by Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2002), 33.
- 141 Ibidem, 36.
- 142 Translation of the text presented in this part of Chapter 1 was made by Paweł Hamera and published in *Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne* 51 (2021), 167–193. The text was reviewed and changed by Karol Kasprówicz and Konrad Zysko, relating to the terminology used by Jan Pomorski in *Polish Theory of History and Metahistory*.
- 143 In the years 1990–1998.
- 144 Jerzy Topolski, “A Non-postmodernist Analysis of Historical Narratives,” in *Historiography between Modernism and Postmodernism. Contributions to the Methodology of the Historical Research* (Amsterdam–Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), 9–85, series: *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of Sciences and the Humanities*, vol. 41.
- 145 Jerzy Topolski, *Narrare la storia. Nuovi principi di metodologia storica. Con la collaborazione di Raffaello Righini* (Milano: Bruno Mandadori, 1997).
- 146 I have published it in 2020. See: *Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne* vol. 50 (2020), 39–45; <https://doi.org/10.24425/hsm.2020.134796>.
- 147 This theme was already present in *A Non-postmodernist Analysis of Historical Narratives* from 1994 and was developed in *Narrare la storia*.
- 148 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., part II “Struktura narracji historycznej”, 83–166. It was in this part that Topolski introduced for the first time the division into three layers of narrative: logical and grammatical, persuasive rhetorical, and theoretical and ideological, used later in NMH.
- 149 Topolski’s consistent use of the term “methodology of history” is remembered and referred to in literature up to this day.
- 150 This is important: philosophers do not reflect on historical research but only see its final effect in the form of a written text, hence they unjustifiably reduce all procedures appropriate for historical research only to the study of a discourse / text.
- 151 Jerzy Topolski, “A Non-postmodernist Analysis of Historical Narratives,” in *Historiography between Modernism and Postmodernism. Contribution to the Methodology of the Historical Research*, edited by Jerzy Topolski (Amsterdam–Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), 9–85, series: *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of Sciences and the Humanities*, vol. 41.
- 152 The materials from the Ottawa conference were published in French: *La philosophie de l’histoire et la pratique historique aujourd’hui*, ed. by David Carr, William Dray, Theodore F. Geraets, Fernand Quellet, Hubert Watelet (Ottawa: The University of Ottawa Press, 1982).
- 153 The materials of the Turin conference were published in Italian: *La teoria della storiografia oggi* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1983), and in German: *Theorie der modernen Geschichtsschreibung*. Hsg. P. Rossi (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1987).
- 154 Unlike the one at Cambridge, which was initiated by Ludwig Wittgenstein.
- 155 John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).
- 156 *Performative*, that is, functioning only through the act of utterance itself, for example, a marriage oath as confirmation of a legal act of contracting a marriage.
- 157 *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię...*, op.cit., 153. There are two works by Searle: John R. Searle, “Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, edited by Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- 158 It is about Prince J. Searle’s *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* from 1969, in which he argued that “the philosophy of language is one of the branches of the philosophy of the mind.”
- 159 Jerzy Kmita, *Jak słowa łączą się ze światem. Studium krytyczne neopragmatyzmu* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe IF UAM, 1995).

- 160 Hilary Putnam, *Wiele twarzy realizmu i inne eseje*, transl. by Adam Grobler (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1998). This is the Polish translation of his famous book *Many Faces of Realism* (La Salle: Open Court, 1987).
- 161 Paul Feyerabend, *Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 162 Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society* (London: New Left Books, 1978) and his collection of texts from the 1980s: Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London - New York: VERSO, 1987).
- 163 It is mentioned by Topolski in MHN, s. 295, footnote no. 18.
- 164 Hayden White, "The Abiding Relevance of Croce's Idea of History," *The Journal of Modern History* 35, no. 2 (1963), 109–124.
- 165 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię...*, op.cit., 17.
- 166 His most famous book is Deirdre McClosky, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
- 167 Krzysztof Pomian, *L'Orde du Temps* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984), 165–170.
- 168 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię...*, op.cit., 156–158.
- 169 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- 170 Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, op.cit., 270–271.
- 171 Cf. Topolski, *Narrare la storia*. It is worth noting that even with its structure, this book, published in 1997, most closely resembles the table of contents of NMH.
- 172 At the time of writing *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, Topolski knew him rather "indirectly" through the book by Wojciech J. Burszta, discussing the concept of the creator of the "dense description", which book he directly refers to here. See: Wojciech J. Burszta, *Wymiary antropologiczne poznania kultury* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1992). Geertz's books were translated into Polish after Topolski's death.
- 173 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 200. Topolski refers to Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (Milano: Bompiani, 1990).
- 174 Violetta Julkowska drew my attention to the following little-known text: Jerzy Topolski, "Problem transmisji wiedzy historycznej w edukacji szkolnej" in *Nauczyciel historii. Ku nowej formacji dydaktycznej*, edited by Maria Kujawska (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 1997), 107–119, in which there is a direct reference to Umberto Eco's *Lector in fabula*.
- 175 Ulric Neisser, *Cognitive psychology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967). See TNH, 33–50.
- 176 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 6.
- 177 Jan Pomorski, "Hayden White a polska metodologia historii i teoria historiografii" in *Hayden White w Polsce: fakty, krytyka, recepcja*, edited by Ewa Domańska, Edward Skibiński, Paweł Stróżyk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UNIVERSITAS, 2019), 67–102.
- 178 Ewa Domańska, *Encounters. Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998).
- 179 Ewa Domańska, *Mikrohistorie. Spotkania w międzyswiatach*. 2nd edition (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2005), 35–36.
- 180 It is about Frank R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983) and the heated exchange of views between Ankersmit and Zagorin in *History and Theory*. See Perez Zagorin, "Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsideration," *History and Theory* 29 (1990), 263–274; Frank R. Ankersmit, "Reply to Professor Zagorin," *History and Theory* 29 (1990), 275–296.
- 181 Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the History Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
- 182 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, NY-London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

- 183 This was Ankersmit's thesis, see Frank R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," *History and Theory* 28, no. 2 (1989). This article, translated by Ewa Domańska, appeared in *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, edited by Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszczyński, 1998), 145–172. Its practical implementation was Topolski's book *Od Achillesa do Beatrice de Planissoles. Zarys historii historiografii*, op.cit.
- 184 Wojciech Wrzosek, *History – Culture – Metaphor. The Facets on Non-Classical Historiography*. Translated by Przemysław Znaniecki (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1997), 12–13.
- 185 This is probably a reference to the title of the article by Cushing Strout, "Border Crossing History. Fiction and Dead Certainties," *History and Theory* 1 (1992), 153–162, which discusses "Dead Certainties" by Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).
- 186 The editors of the *American Historical Review* organised a discussion forum devoted to new tendencies in the history of ideas (hitherto explored in the "spirit" of Lovejoy), see Russell Jacoby, "A New Intellectual History?" *American Historical Review* 97 (1992), no. 2, 405–424 and Dominick LaCapra, "Intellectual History and Its Ways," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992), no. 2, 425–439.
- 187 It, in turn, was born out of opposition to Isaiah Berlin.
- 188 Geoffrey R. Elton, *Return to Essentials. Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 189 Peer H. H. Vries, *Vertellers op drift. Een verhandeling over de nieuwe verhalende geschiedenis* (Hilversum: S. I. Verloren: Nederlandse Vereniging tot beoefening van de sociale geschiedenis, 1990). Topolski probably knew this book from a review by Ankersmit, and he translated its title as *Storytellers on the Wave* and it appears under this title in *New Methodology of History* "Table of Contents".
- 190 See Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, op.cit., 69.
- 191 Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York – London: W.W. North and Co., 1993).
- 192 Appleby, Hunt, Jacob, *Telling the Truth*, 164.
- 193 It was primarily about two books by Giedymin: *Z problemów logicznych analizy historycznej* from 1961 and *Studia nad logicznymi podstawami nauk społecznych* from 1964.
- 194 That my assumptions as to the direction of Topolski's thoughts about it are correct may be indirectly proven by his argument in MHN. See Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, Chapter VIII "Transfiguracje przestrzeni w narracji historycznej", 119–130.
- 195 TNH, "Charakterystyka mitów fundamentalnych", 171–179.
- 196 This should not be confused / equated with constructivism.
- 197 Jan Pomorski, "Rozważania wokół narracji historycznej" [Reconsideration on historical narration] in Jan Pomorski, *Historyk i metodologia* [Historian and methodology], (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1991), 124–148.
- 198 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, 289.
- 199 In the period of "postmodern bite", Topolski even avoided using the term "model" (similarly to "theory," which he replaced with "theoretical concept" – see Part III of TNH "Mity i koncepty teoretyczne w narracji historycznej", because it was associated with science, and science was, after all, *passé*...
- 200 These terms are also used by Topolski in his, *Wprowadzenie do historii.*, 93–95.
- 201 See module 1 in Chapter XVII *New Methodology of History*.
- 202 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, transl. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.
- 203 See: *Interpretation and Overinterpretation. Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler and Christine Brooke-Rose*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

- 204 *The Significance of Popper's Thought*, ed. by Stefan Amsterdamski (Leiden: Brill, 1996).
- 205 Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979).
- 206 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, 91.
- 207 Chaim Perelman, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l'argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958).
- 208 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, 91.
- 209 In *Introduction to History*, intended as an academic textbook for students starting their adventure with history, written about a year before his death, Topolski uses the term "argumentation" as a synonym for *inference* and discusses inductive argumentation and deductive argumentation.
- 210 Here, "base" means as much (and only as much) as "basic," that is, fiction as a necessary condition for the emergence of literary narrative. Not to be confused with base sentences, which for Topolski's concept have a significant, albeit completely different, meaning.
- 211 See "The Constitution of the Historical Past," *History and Theory* XVI, no 4 (1977).
- 212 Hilary Putnam is referenced in *How to Write and Understand History: Mysteries of Historical Narrative* (MHN) eleven times and always with flattering commentary.
- 213 Chris Lorenz, "Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A plea for 'Internal Realism'", *History and Theory* 3 (1994), 297–327.
- 214 Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię*, 313.
- 215 Chris Lorenz, *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between Present, Past, and Future* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).
- 216 It is visible not only in *How to Write and Understand history* or *Narrare la storia* but also in his *Od Achillesa do Beatrice de Planissolles*.
- 217 Topolski, *Wprowadzenie do historii*, 158.
- 218 *Ibidem*, 160.

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2 Historicity of the being

Krzysztof Pomian's theory of history

Just like the theory of history developed by Jerzy Topolski grows from the analytical tradition of philosophy of history (**Poznań School of Methodology of History**), being open to narrativism by Hayden White, the source of inspiration for Krzysztof Pomian – born in to a polonised Jewish family with leftist and humanistic traditions – is Leszek Kołakowski, under the supervision of whom he wrote and defended his PhD dissertation (1965) titled *Przeszłość jako przedmiot wiedzy* [Past as an Object of Knowledge]¹, and with which it carries theoretical dialogue. The inspiration was also drawn from a circle of seminar students of Kołakowski, with whom he co-authored something which today's history of humanities describes as **the Warsaw School of History of Ideas**.² This intellectual context is extremely important since it constitutes a cognitive frame of reference for Krzysztof Pomian's theoretical thought, which he seems to confirm in his partially autobiographical book *Wśród mistrzów i przyjaciół* [Among Masters and Friends] published in 2018. Pondering how to neatly describe his scholarly journey, he contends:

At the beginning of my scholarly work I was intrigued by an epistemological question: how to legitimise a desire to get to know the distant past, i.e. the one which cannot be recollected by any of the living people? It is exactly this issue that urged me to take up studies over the history of constructing knowledge of the past, i.e. philosophical history of history. It is in this context that I showed interest in institutions of history, especially museums, archives, and collections.³

The works of Krzysztof Pomian published within the field of philosophy of history, history of historiography, and theory of history are impressively numerous, also in other subdisciplines. Suffice to say, his notion of *semiophor* has managed to make its way into history of art and history of culture, and his studies on collections and collecting, in general, are regarded as paradigmatic. An international conference was held on 4–6 April 2019 at Université Paris Sorbonne, titled: “Parmi les hommes, les objets et les signes/Among Humans, Objects and Signs”, summing up his unique and interdisciplinary scholarly heritage. I had the privilege to attend it and present a paper on Krzysztof Pomian's contribution

to theory of history. In this text, I will be referring back to the thoughts presented at the conference.

I *Depositary of European values: Sketch for portrait*

“Europe is a fragment of my biography and an intellectual adventure for me”, wrote Krzysztof Pomian in 1990 in the “Preface” to one of his most famous books, *Europa i jej narody (Europe and Its Nations)*⁴, and this statement became for me a hermeneutic key, a hint to the proper interpretation of his life and works, to presenting them at least in several contexts, as much as allowed by the convention of laudation, which I had the opportunity to deliver on 23 October 2003 at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin during the ceremony of awarding an honorary doctorate to him⁵. I would now like to come back in more detail to the threads that were signalled at that time.

On this occasion, I called Pomian a **depositary of European values**, because reading the meanings of Europe, its culture, and value system had become somewhat a way of the Professor’s existence and activity as a scholar and citizen, also in the context of perceiving Poland and its place in Europe. I reminded that for Professor, Europe is not only a political creation/being but also – and perhaps above all – something more:

Europe was the name of the republic of literature, sciences and arts (*Respublica Litteraria*), in which particular nations were represented by their scholars, writers, and artists.⁶

If we maintain this understanding of Europe and transpose it into the 20th century, Krzysztof Pomian is undoubtedly one of the last citizens of the *Respublica Litteraria Nova* of the 20th century, European intellectuals of such eminence as Isaiah Berlin, Karl R. Popper, Leszek Kołakowski, Michael Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jurgen Habermas, or Umberto Eco, who seeks the foundations of the European cultural identity. The fact that Krzysztof Pomian belonged to the Parnassus of European humanities and simultaneously was an ambassador of the Polish culture was pointed out many times, while the uniqueness of his work was also emphasised⁷. In this case, we have to deal with a phenomenon which is unique in the area of science. Krzysztof Pomian is a polyhistor whose reflections concern several centuries and the entire European continent: (1) from Russia through Central and Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean world; he is a great erudite, an expert on archives and historical sources, successfully engaging in several historical disciplines and (2) from the history of culture and art to the history of collecting and museology; he is a researcher who does not shy away from syntheses and at the same time is a master of historical miniatures, a historian of historiography, and theoretician of historical cognition. But Pomian is not only a historian; he is also a true philosopher (not only by education): having debuted with a work on existentialism, he writes with the same verve about Descartes and Kierkegaard as about Witkacy or Levi-Strauss. He is

a well-known political scientist, an insightful observer of the 20th century, and a commentator of our Polish and European modernity – the opposite of a cabinet scholar who as a rule separates himself from “street” voices. Krzysztof Pomian, with all his life and with all social involvement and political choices, shows how he cherishes the European world of values: human rights, social solidarity, tolerance, and opposition to harm that affects his neighbour.

Born in Warsaw in 1934, deported after the outbreak of the war from Lviv to Kazakhstan, he returned to Poland with his mother in 1946 (his father died in December 1941, just after his release from a gulag under the amnesty for Poles). For young Krzysztof, this return was his first experience of what Europe was. Years later, he wrote about it:

I met Europe for the first time in April or May 1946. A cattle train – adapted to transport people – crossed the Volga on the way from northern Kazakhstan. The train rolled slowly along the newly rebuilt bridge. The adults were moved. Someone said, “We’re finally in Europe”.⁸

After this first meeting with Europe, crossing its geographical border, subsequent meetings came in many dimensions and on many levels.

A representative of the ‘56 generation⁹, which entered the politically conscious life in Poland with the turn of “October” and de-Stalinisation, he forged his civic stance in March 1968¹⁰, in the leftist opposition circles. Forced to leave the country, he joined the circle of Jerzy Giedroyc and the Parisian “Kultura”¹¹, becoming, in the course of time, one of the Editor’s closest associates. Few people know how much he contributed at that time to inform the European public opinion about Polish affairs and about “Solidarity”. Publications in the French, Italian, and English press; constant cooperation with “Le Monde” and “Le debat”; editing of anniversary publications and exhibition catalogues, essays, and studies on the most recent history and current political analyses, published in emigration publications, first of all in “Kultura”, and in Poland in the second press circulation, were all part of the enormous patriotic and civic activity of Pomian in those years. An ambassador of culture becomes also an ambassador of the Polish cause, a voice respected by the European intellectual and political elites.

Krzysztof Pomian’s intellectual and scientific adventure with Europe began in earnest at the University of Warsaw¹², where during the seminars with Leszek Kołakowski and Bronisław Baczko he acquired the basics skills of a historian of philosophy, with the intellectual culture of Europe, from the Middle Ages to the modern era and the 20th century, as the main field of his research. After being forced to leave the University in 1968, he continued his studies in Paris in 1973, at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (since 1984 as a professor), where he worked for almost 30 years. Being a university man, he taught and gave guest lectures in dozens of academic centres in Europe and America. And what an excellent lecturer he is, something that Polish students could also witness since for many years Professor Pomian taught history of culture and philosophy

at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń during the summer semester. Pomian has a rare gift of beautiful narration, where intellectual brilliance is artfully intertwined with erudition and accurate remarks. He is also a true master of the “living word” who can, if necessary, enchant the listener not only with his vast knowledge but also with anecdotes, wit, and a subtle sense of humour. Professor is a true amateur of history, in this metaphorical sense (as we know, Krzysztof Pomian is particularly fond of metaphors), just as one can be an amateur of wine (which, let us add for the sake of fairness, he knows equally well).

History has not ceased to amaze me for over forty years. Although I have practiced its most varied forms: from the catalogue of manuscripts to the synthesis of many centuries of a continent, through the publication of sources and local monographs; although I have studied the history of history itself from the Middle Ages to our own time, to reveal breakthroughs in the constant effort to speak truthfully about the past and to make claims about it that can be supported by evidence – history remains for me a problem and a challenge.

– wrote the Professor in 1999 in *Sur l'histoire*.¹³

This amazement proved to be so inspiring, so intellectually fertile that it resulted in works of a great measure, and was reprinted and translated into many languages. For the purposes of this portrait, let us mention just a few of the most remarkable ones.

The diptych *The Past as an Object of Belief* and *The Past as an Object of Knowledge*, written in reverse order, as a doctoral and postdoctoral dissertation, in which the author, having laboriously dug through many hundreds of historiographical texts, has accurately captured the turning points in the history of medieval and early modern historiography, assuring himself with these findings a permanent place in the then emerging new discipline – the history of historiography. The literature considers these two studies to be of a model value, paradigmatic, especially for the Warsaw School of History of Ideas of which Krzysztof Pomian – along with Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko, Zygmunt Bauman, Andrzej Walicki, and Jerzy Szacki – is the leading representative.

L'ordre du temps (1984) is a great treatise on the understanding of time in European culture, published by the prestigious *Editions Gallimard*. From Saint Augustine to Poincaré and Einstein; from philosophy to physics and metaphysics; from the sacred to the profane; from chronicle to metanarratives; from the event recorded in the chronicle through cycles, conjunctures, and epochs to the understanding of structures as timeless entities; from biological rhythms to historical rhythms; from chronography to chronology, and chronometry to chronosophy.¹⁴ It is considered a classic study in the history of ideas and is one of the most complete philosophical monographs on the topic of time, translated into Polish and published in *slowo/obraz/terytoria* in 2014, which will become the main character within the framework of this dissertation – the subject of my analyses and meta-metahistorical reflection – because in fact it is also (or perhaps above all) a great philosophical treatise on historical cognition.

Collectors and curiosities. Paris and Venice 1500–1800 (French first edition 1987) is a philosophical–historical story about the culture of curiosity: about the birth of private and public collecting in Europe and about specific people, collections, and museums, but also about mentality and social historical consciousness, which makes it unique. Only the most eminent of cultural historians, such as Jacques Le Goff or Aron Guriewicz, have been able to move from the individual experience of the past to the level of reconstructing mental structures; no one has made the history of collecting a subject of research. Krzysztof Pomian is a pioneer and a master at the same time, because, according to his principles, he combines here a historical approach with the very theory of the object, searching for an answer to the question about the functional reason for the very existence of collections/semiophors and the rules underlying the social practice of collecting.

Famous *L'Europe et ses nations* (1990), the Professor's most frequently translated book, a panoramic study of European history, the author's vision of European identity, which, as Jerzy Kłoczowski writes:

was published at an excellent time when the division of Europe was coming to an end and when the nascent European Union could be enlarged. The clear presentation of the whole of Europe, of all its countries, with strong emphasis on the significance of the eastern countries, so far necessarily excluded from the current unification processes, is the author's great merit.¹⁵

We will have to come back to this work, because Krzysztof Pomian presents Europe's becoming in the spirit of sedimentation, as the overlapping of successive layers. These are the layers of historicity which do not destroy each other but build up, which not only were active in the past but are also active in our present. I will return to this issue (and to the book itself) at the end of this part of my deliberations.

Sur l'histoire (1999), on the other hand, is a record of methodological self-consciousness of an outstanding historian, who takes up fundamental questions of historical cognition in reference to the discussions of the 20th century and shows their familiar, historiographical, and philosophical context. An extremely important work, the Polish edition of which was published by Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, Lublin 2006, under the title *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, has given a new impulse to Polish research and reflection on historiography.

The list could go on and on (Professor bibliography numbers well over 400 works, and new ones keep coming – see his excellent three volumes of *Le musée, une histoire mondiale*¹⁶), but let me end with a real gem of historiographical narration – *Wenecja w kulturze europejskiej* [Venice in European Culture] (Lublin 2000) – to give a sample of Pomian's style to those who have not yet had a chance to become acquainted with his works. This work is a beautiful “historiographic engraving”, painted by a historian of culture, an aesthete, and a master of the Polish word in one person. I say “engraving” deliberately, because the vividness of the narration, the graphic quality of the historical images drawn in successive scenes, which make up the author's vision of the history of Venice, is the first

striking feature of this book, additionally enriched by the sophisticated editorial setting, so as not to spoil this meaningful perception. As we listen to the words, let us look at Venice through the eyes of Krzysztof Pomian:

The lagoon. Here, a greenish or yellowish shallow, through which the bottom shines, and there, a deep of varying shades of grey or blue, depending on the weather, time of day, and season. [...] Today's lagoon is a work of art. A work of Venice. [...] And yet it is precisely to the lagoon that Venice still owes its uniqueness to the city suspended between the sky and the sea and doubled, as it were, by the play of water reflections and reflections which overlap one another, flow one into the other, change outlines and shades, break up and concentrate, altogether creating, especially on a sunny day, a moving tangle of luminous spots of color, preserved, as probably nowhere else, on Turner's canvases.¹⁷

From this point of view, **Venice** becomes a mirror of Europe which focuses on the quintessence of its historical dramas: ups and downs. It is, as Pomian brilliantly puts it, a **Metaphor of Europe**. But it is not on the event layer, the political history, that the author concentrates his attention on. It is merely a background, drawn in a swift, hurried narration, just as a painter uses perspective and counterpoint only to better expose with his brush what is most important. And what is most important for our philosophical historian is Braudel's *longue durée* – long duration, and he finds it in the culture-forming function of the City, performed for centuries. The true role of Venice in the European civilisation stems from what it has contributed to our cultural heritage, Pomian claims. This is architecture and art, the contents of the legendary Arsenal and Cardinal Bessarion's magnificent library, the museum and collections of relics, collections of antiquity, the famous Venetian glass and goldsmith's wares, painting that radiated across Europe at least twice, Vivaldi's music and Goldoni's theatre, and finally Casanova, who could make even the simple prison next to the Doge's Palace famous with his escape. Before the reader's eyes move successive images, historiographic miniatures, and shots frozen in a frame: St. Mark's Square with the Byzantine basilica towering in the middle and the Gothic Doge's Palace; St. Mark's procurators – the first art experts and ministers of culture in history at the same time; and pilgrims, merchants, travellers and diplomats going in a great crowd to unveil the relics, to name but a few.

And what is Venice for us today? – asks the Professor. And answers:

An object of admiration, which habit cannot weaken. It is an object of concern for its survival in the conditions of mass tourism, and thus for reconciling the democratic right of each individual to see it, to absorb it, and to preserve it in memory with the requirements of passing it on to posterity in an unchanged form, while maintaining a living city, port, and industry. A challenge we must meet if we are not to lose an important component of our identity.¹⁸

And here again in this statement, all of Krzysztof Pomian is revealed to us in his role as a depositary of European values, of what historicity has given us, contemporaries, as a precious gift of the past. Depositary, concerned about the future of our material and spiritual past. The metaphor of sedimentation, which Pomian has been developing in his theory of history¹⁹, shows its power also as a philosophy of life of an inhabitant of Europe: Venice as a Metaphor of Europe, Europe as our collective autobiography.

In the spirit of sedimentation, *Europe and Its Nations* can also be read as a kind of an autobiography of Europe²⁰. This book is unique in many respects. First of all, its origins: Krzysztof Pomian presented the outline of the work already in 1987 at a symposium in Castel Gandolfo, in the presence of Pope John Paul II.²¹ In the discussion on the past, present, and future of Europe participated then, among others, such outstanding eminent intellectuals as Rainhard Koselleck, Ernst Gellner, Charles Taylor, and Edward Shils. The goal Pomian set himself in *Europe and Its Nations* was to make contemporary Europeans aware of their roots: the cultural heritage from which they descend, to show Europe as a value which has been fought for and built over the centuries in many dimensions and in many aspects, all that in accordance with the postulate of integral and humanistic history, to which “nothing human is alien”. And at the same time, it was about reminding the Western readers about the second, forgotten Europe – what had happened over the centuries in the central and eastern parts of the old continent; about showing what the Pope captured in the metaphor of “two lungs with which Europe breathes”.

The meaning hidden in this metaphor was also close to Jerzy Giedroyc, with whom Krzysztof Pomian worked closely in those years. “What *Kultura* [Culture] wants to look for in the world of Western civilisation is this ‘will to live’ without which the Europeans will die just as the ‘ruling classes of ancient empires’ have died” – wrote Jerzy Giedroyc in 1946 in his manifesto, opening the first issue of *Kultura* – the most important Polish emigre journal, published in Paris, of which he was the editor-in-chief for 54 years. The realisation of Poland’s belonging to the Western world was so obvious to him that it actually did not require to be developed any further. At the same time, he was aware that post-war Europe faced completely new challenges that would determine its future. As usual, he did not want to maintain an attitude of a passive observer; he considered it his duty as a “European from the canton of Poland” to edit the behaviour of the Polish and, more broadly, Central European political elites in the most important discussions on this subject on the Old Continent. I also find this style of thinking in Krzysztof Pomian’s *Europe and Its Nations*.

Eventually, the work on the book was concluded in 1989. The main difficulty was to present the history of Europe “so that it could be seen with a single glance”. This meant a complete break with the perspective characteristic of a history of events and operating with a time interval of no less than a decade. This methodological and constructional approach freed the author in his narrative from the compulsion to keep up with the current events, thus enabling him to focus on highlighting the basic lines of historical development of Europe:

from Roman and Christian roots to World War II. He presented it all in 20 chapters – from a few to about a dozen pages long – historical miniatures. Each of them contains a particular hypothesis – an attempt to read the “logic” of a process or a historical phenomenon of a sufficiently “long duration”²². These are phenomena belonging to all spheres: from geographical or, more broadly, environmental determinants, to demographic, health, economic, legal, and systemic foundations of social history in its political, religious, and mental dimensions. All miniatures are metaphors of something bigger; they refer to specific layers/time intervals of history in which they were formed/in which they functioned. But at the same time, Pomian chooses such histories that had “causative power” in their “afterlife”, both in the past and because they have preserved this power also in relation to our present time. The present of Europe cannot be understood without indicating what portion of its past is still active. That is why I believe that the metaphor of *the sedimentation of history* was always present as the guiding principle when Pomian was writing *Europe and Its Nations*.

Pomian emphasises that

Europe’s history is the history of its borders. And the history of content that was given to it by word or deed. And also of forces that consciously or unknowingly acted for the unification of the once segmented territory – and of the opposing forces that destroyed what the former had built. It is therefore a history of conflicts. Conflicts between Europe and what inhibited or rejected it from outside. And the internal conflict between the endeavours to unite and unify Europe and those that divided and polarised it.²³

Therefore, the Professor takes his readers on a journey in time to show how Europe was forged and how our continent has always had to struggle with the unexpected results of subsequent integration projects. Uniting through faith is the period from the 10th century, that is from the end of the great migration of peoples, to the beginning of the 16th century. The period from the beginning of the 16th century to the beginning of the 18th is the time of religious wars. The Enlightenment brings the second unification project. However, this is not a political but a mental union: Europe is then the name of the republic of literature, science, and arts (*Respublica Litteraria*), in which individual nations were represented by their scholars, writers, and artists. Unification through Enlightenment takes place from the beginning of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. It is followed by ideological wars, which end with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR. The period of unification by the joint project of the European Union begins in 1951, although actually a bit earlier, along with the Marshall Plan. This is a concise summary of Krzysztof Pomian’s vision of the history of Europe. This vision is depicted very vividly, using economical means of expression (it is Pomian’s principle not to inundate readers with excessive facts). He provides his readers with an outline of a building rather than its details. But the language of the story is refined, truly beautiful, drawing attention with the accuracy and freshness of metaphors²⁴. Thanks

to this, the 20 historical miniatures which make up *Europe and Its Nations* provide many additional pleasures. But most important is the final conclusion, which the author presents to his readers as a kind of history lesson from her centuries of European history:

For Europe, the conclusion is clear: its worst internal enemy, transmitted like a virus from generation to generation, and like a virus capable of being subjected to the strangest mutations, is national, state and ideological particularism, which, although variously justified, always causes either autarchy or the pursuit of hegemony. Nothing indicates that this virus has become harmless. Everything rather points to the fact that it only lurks and waits until it regains its former venomousness. Only creating a vaccine against its future, at the moment unpredictable forms will enable the implementation of the third European unification.²⁵

These words of Krzysztof Pomian from 1990, as the final message of one of his most famous books, *Europe and Its Nations*, today – from the perspective of nationalism reviving in Europe – reverberate even stronger today; they are painfully up to date. The faces of the 20th century which we recall in our memory cry for mourning²⁶. Will the experience of Europe prove to be traumatic, or is there a chance for purification, a truly shared future? How should people be educated to become citizens of Europe, retaining their own national identity? How to define the *Polish raison d'état* in the altered circumstances, and what does it mean today *to be a Pole in Europe*? And what should we do when various administrators of national “truths” and “laws” appear around us, oblivious of the lessons of the past century’s history?²⁷

These are questions that Krzysztof Pomian, an eminent humanist, depository of European values, cannot fail to ask his fellow countrymen. He was addressing them to us now in 1990, he is addressing them still. In an interview for *Kultura Liberalna* from 15 December 2015, he says:

The EU in its current state is very imperfect, but you can say about it what Churchill said about democracy: it is a bad form of European integration, but others are incomparably worse. The Union needs to be repaired and not demolished. The Union needs to be strengthened and not weakened. Poland needs politicians who will be able to convince Poles that our future is unconditionally connected with the European Union, that it is in the interest of Poland and Poles that the Union is strong, both economically and politically. The choice is simple: either the EU or Russia. Those who reject the Union, choose Russia. [...] In Central and Eastern Europe, the most important problem today is the attitude to European integration, which is directly related to the attitude to democracy. The Visegrad Group states – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – are still unable to mentally come out from the closed world in which they have lived for a long time, even before the introduction of communism. The

problem of these countries lies in the fact that significant proportions of their populations are unable to come to terms with the existence of democratic mechanisms. There remained, at least in a large part of public opinion, a nostalgia for dictatorship – for a wise, great politician.²⁸

When I recall this quote in March 2022, on the tenth day of the war unleashed by Putin's Russia in Ukraine, it gains additional context. The nationalist ideology of "Greater Russia" has stained these lands again with blood. History has the power to enslave minds. Timothy Snyder wrote about this in *The Road to Unfreedom*²⁹, analysing Putin's philosophy of history, among other things. In the name of historical *raison d'être*, Putin invaded Ukraine without backing down from genocide! And Russian children were given a history lesson. The one, proper, the Great-Russian one. Krzysztof Pomian, the depositary of European values, warned against such use of history.

II *Abrasion and sedimentation in the role of roots metaphors in history*

Krzysztof Pomian has been reflecting on h(H)istory for more than 50 years now. Tangible fruits of his *pondering* on historicity of the being, as he tends to call his approach, are his monographs, where Aristotle's principle *Τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά* finds its manifestation as a metareflection on history preceding its practical applications.

Let us commence the presentation of Pomian's historical studies of "first philosophy" with a reflection on his *Lectio doctoris*. The brief yet meaningful text of the lecture, delivered on the occasion of Pomian being awarded the doctorate *honoris causa* degree at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin³⁰, will become a starting point for an analysis of a metahistorical reflection as proposed by a *depository of European values*, as I described the author of *L'Orde du Temps* [Order of Time]³¹, a book that fascinated Hayden White so much that he hailed Krzysztof Pomian, alongside Gadamer, the greatest theoretician of historical cognition in the 20th century.

Pomian, in the beginning of *Lectio doctoris*, raises a fundamental question of the meaning of the historical being. In several dozen sentences, he explains that there is no single correct answer to this question since these sentences and suggested outcomes are an effect of historicity, it being practised here and now. In other words, all familiar remarks stem from/are imbued with a historical context in which they were "begotten". A philosopher-historian or historian-philosopher (depending on the hierarchy of this arbitrary duality, especially in the case of Krzysztof Pomian) draws attention to the fact that today:

For us, citizens of modernity, to be means to be consciously leaning towards the future. It means to cross the borders of one's heritage: to enrich it, to complement it and process it. It means to shift spatial and other boundaries. It means to consider the past from a future perspective and to make choices.³²

What is now obvious to us made cognising culture go a long way, reflecting on the order of time. What proved really significant was

“going beyond the barrier of senses in the course of the scientific revolution started in the 16th century, and especially the overcoming of various inherent limitations, observed two centuries later, thanks to the developments of industry, transport, hygiene, and medicine,

which, as a result “placed the modern way of being in the world in a temporal and historical context”, and in a self-reflection, says Pomian,

made the future a distinct dimension of time: a complementation and integration of the history of humanity and reality, and aroused a reflection on issues discussed by philosophers and scholars since the times of the ancient Greece. What stands at the dawn of this revolution of the mind are two works of two emblematic Enlightenment figures, i.e. Hume and Kant.³³

What does it mean that the awareness of historicity is required to go beyond the barrier of senses? Senses have been a barrier to cognition for centuries. They set the border between the visible and invisible, equal to a distinction between that which existed and that which did not. The object of direct cognition/study was the sensual world, that is, the world that we can get to know through our senses. Going beyond this barrier, crossing the limits of visibility, since the past seems invisible, must entail facing the problematic nature of that which has happened, the kingdom of the past, regardless of whether it was given a sacred or secular dimension. Even though Christianity introduced the linear understanding of time: the past – the present – the future, Pomian regarded the past as the object of faith rather than knowledge; it did not require proof but belief in witnesses/authorities.

Thus, Pomian believes that

the historicity of man and all his creations is the most difficult challenge for philosophy [and for a historian, we shall add – JP]. It is made even more difficult because for over two hundred years, the mere understanding of historicity has been the focus of disputes which were not only academic in their nature. Because the displacement of time, the shift of its centre of gravity from the afterlife and the mythical past into the earthly future, was also expressed in the birth of a new type of collective beliefs – ideologies – based on the conviction that it is possible to programme and realise a future that is better than what is and what has been; in extreme versions – even perfect, because the reconstruction of the foundations of collective life, or the very creation of a new man, will limit the range of social evil, otherwise understood in various ways by various people, or will ultimately remove its sources.³⁴

This is yet another extremely important thought on the man dealing with historicity. *Centralisation of time*³⁵ as an effect of the emergence of ideologies.

Pondering on human historicity, as Krzysztof Pomian calls the *self-reflection of the cognising culture*, has accompanied us from the end of the 18th century in a form intertwined with a new type of collective beliefs, no longer religious, but still teleological – ideologies, which, in principle, are oriented towards the future.³⁶ And in most cases, it is obviously a very bright future. Ideologies have the power to bond the community and to build its identity which is strong enough to make the *homo historicus*, the maker of history, who is entangled in them, no longer reflect on historicity but focus on the future. Therefore, Pomian writes,

Pondering on the historicity of man was in many cases – this applies to me as well – in conflict with the professed ideology; a liberation from it; opposing to its unfounded claims of the autonomy of philosophy and knowledge.³⁷

What is crucial here is not the autobiographical thread but the thought that ideologies auto-represent themselves to a given community as ultimate truths, dogmas which are ahistorical and unshakable. Philosophies and systems of knowledge, employed by ideologies, are equally universal, beneficial, and atemporal as religious beliefs prior to them. Hence, Pomian speaks of their “groundless claims” to autonomy from historicity, an urge to be regarded as an objective truth, freed from historical roots (the context of their origin) and from historicity of their semantic references/designates. Having pondered over this issue, Pomian reaches the conclusion of the groundless nature of such claims and of the need to “acknowledge philosophy itself as historical: together with its notions, questions, logic, something that traditional philosophy of history is not characteristic of, limiting itself to arranging philosophers in a time order, as if historicity could be reduced to chronology”.³⁸

It is another important statement. For Pomian, all knowledge, all philosophy, is a product of history, it cannot be approached in a “pure”, ahistorical form. To understand the historicity of philosophy entails more than to arrange philosophers or their works in chronological order. It means much more:

To acknowledge philosophy itself as historical requires /.../ to ponder on everything from scratch. It forces philosophy to recognize the fact that no one can be placed in such a process of history, whether in its beginning or at its end, that would allow for objectivity and an external perspective. In other words, it forces us to acknowledge that a manifestation of our inalienable finitude is the fact that we are always inside history, which makes it our perspective since there is no other one [emphasis – JP]. And we need to draw conclusions out of it.³⁹

Pondering on everything from scratch is tantamount to a cognitive/philosophical/scholarly revolution. Philosophy, similar to historiography, is/turns out to be a self-reflection of cognising culture. However, as long as historiography reflects/ponders mostly (if not solely) on historicity of the human world, philosophy treats historicity merely as one of its many main objects of interest. I deem such

an awareness of being in the centre of history, the inalienable historicity of the human being in all its forms, including a mental form as a self-reflection/pondering on cognising culture, as a particularly valuable part of Krzysztof Pomian's metahistorical views. I am just signalling this important issue; however, I will seize the opportunity to thoroughly justify my opinion in this regard later on. I would like to add that a similar approach to reflexivity as the greatest form of agency can be found in the works of the eminent British sociologist Margaret Archer.

Another issue raised in *Lectio doctoris* is the relationship between the cognitive recognition of experiencing historicity and its epistemological consequences. Semantic/ontic historicity can lead to a conclusion that historical fluidity of object-related references to formulated theorems implies a hypothesis of their relativity, whether partial or absolute. Pomian comments on this:

For some it is an excuse to justify a need for skepticism or even nihilism, disabling to distinguish the truth from deceit, knowledge from doxa, cognition from illusion. Since, as they assume, the course of history inevitably undermines the significance of all sorts of things that used to enjoy it, since it inevitably changes the old truths into deceit, it will be a part of these beliefs that today are deemed true and which we have no right to evaluate in such a way. It applies not only to us but to everyone, and it applies not only to the truth but also to other values. Awareness of the historicity of our being in the world makes us settle with deconstruction: with denouncing groundless claims to knowledge or presentation of one's statements as true as it only serves to convince others of one's cognitive or moral superiority, and consequently to justify supremacy over them.⁴⁰

The model of practising history as deconstruction may not seem to be worthy only to those who make their case through their works to promote historical studies conducted within the paradigm of historical semantics⁴¹, analysing the changing concepts of history⁴², time⁴³, Europe⁴⁴, memory, and remembrance⁴⁵, or collections and collecting⁴⁶, and recently also museums as cultural phenomena and institutions⁴⁷. Pomian rightly recognises that

what fits the contemporary varieties of skepticism and nihilism is the understanding of historical processes according to which changes brought about by the future becoming the present defy the past: they nullify it, erase it, delete it, scatter it and crush it, until what is left are homogenous, meaningless decayed remains.⁴⁸

When today's future will one day become the present (from the perspective of a cognising culture, it will no longer be referred to with a future tense, but with the present perfect tense, though not yet past perfect), this categorial drift can be recognised in two ways: as a destructive process – as described above – or as a constructive process when the past makes itself present today in many forms

and in different ways, and tends to be a causative factor in it, an “active past” that is involved in the history-making process. These two ideas find their mental imagery in the form of fundamental (roots) metaphors of historical thinking. As Wojciech Wrzosek writes, whose view on this matter I fully share and respect,

every intellectual representation of the world is made within a culture (or on its behalf), and therefore becomes a metaphor of the world. A culture uses constitutive metaphors to perceive the world. These fundamental metaphors are irrevocable and historically intranscendable. By rejecting them we would become unable to communicate within and with the culture.⁴⁹

For Wrzosek’s cognising culture, such metaphors which are fundament⁵⁰ to historiography are the metaphor of genesis and development, while for Pomian’s cognising culture – the metaphors of *abrasion* and *sedimentation*. Let us take a closer look at them.

The historian-philosopher searched for inspiration in natural history and in geology. *Abrasion* is the phenomenon of

the destruction of the shores of seas and large lakes caused by continuous crashes of waves and the rubbing of boulders, gravel and sand carried by them. Such an understanding of the historical process as abrasion can coexist with both the conviction of the progressive character of history and with that which sees it as regression. The first one considers the past to be inferior in some or all respects from the present, and the present – to be worse than the future; the second is its polar opposite. But both agree that **the past** – excluding the recent events which still live in people’s memory – **has disappeared in the sense that it has ceased to be active**, because what is left of it are only passive and shapeless crumbs.⁵¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

Recognising the past as dead and inactive, the cognising culture suspends the validity of claims about the influence of history on our lives, immobilises, and mythicises it. Even if there are some traces of it left – the remains of what was, and what no longer is; these *shapeless crumbs* perceived by it – they are taken out of the context in which they were active. It changes radically when **the metaphor of abrasion** is replaced with **the metaphor of sedimentation**, as it does not force us

[...] to guide ourselves in our thinking about history with the image of waves that change the rocky coast into a sandy beach, or a glacier that grinds everything in its path. There are numerous facts with which such an understanding of history cannot cope, because they show that the past still remains even after it became the past, although in shapes other than those it used to have when it was the present; this applies to both the recent past

and, sometimes, to a very distant past. At the same time, the past is present not only in visible monuments, and not even mostly in them. It is embedded in our corporeality and sensitivity as well as in our endeavours, behaviour, habits, beliefs, assumptions, concepts, reasoning, and imagination, and therefore exerts influence on our present actions, an influence of which those who are affected by it are usually not aware.⁵²

The past does not have to be doomed to oblivion. It can be an active agent element also in the present, affecting the future states. *Homo historicus*, the human being as an agent of history, has/can have the past embedded in their corporeality and sensitivity, Pomian claims. To be more specific, I would say, following neuroscience and Daniel C. Dennett⁵³, that the agent has it all embedded in their mind as a result of **cultural evolution** that their brain has undergone so that they could become who they are today. In order to become aware of such facts, Pomian observes that

one must replace the involuntary perception of history as abrasion with **consciously** equating it with another phenomenon equally well known to geologists: with **sedimentation**. It must be regarded as the process of successive layers growing on top of each other, in which the newer ones press against the earlier ones, they destroy them to a certain degree and transform them, and, at the same time, are subjected to their reciprocal effect.⁵⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

Before we proceed to the analysis of this fundamental metaphor, let us note that this statement perfectly captures the essence of what *historical metareflection* is: **replace the involuntary with the voluntary!** *Homo historicus* is an involuntary user of historicity, while *homo metahistoricus* is its conscious user. Reflexivity is not a native/emergent feature of the human person; it is the fruit of mental work which is yet to be undertaken.

A simple, if not downright simplistic understanding of historicity characteristic of the treatment of history as abrasion is replaced, when it is identified with the process of sedimentation, with an extremely complex picture, which cannot be described with a single maxim. This is because the former determines the relations between the future, the present and the past a priori, while according to the latter, they must become an object of empirical research, first and foremost of historical research, because they depend on what kind of past is referred to: on its nature, location, distance that separates us from it, and probably on other factors.⁵⁵

Let us consider this distinction: **abrasion** is a priori, assumed beforehand, without any prior examination of evidence, while **sedimentation** stands for asserting something *a posteriori*, after conducting empirical/historical research. Its object of reference is a reality so complex that it hardly can be described with a

single maxim, Pomian tells us. It requires research; it requires cognition to go beyond what is visible in the direction of the conceptual and theoretical. The conceptualisation of history based on sedimentation entails noticing **the layered structure of historicity** which must be revealed, just like an archaeologist slowly takes off one layer of soil after another, reaching deeper strata, in order to gradually, layer by layer, recognise the material traces left by man in the subsequent periods of time. Any hurried vertical movement down can disturb and destroy this layered structure. These are the rudiments of excavation work, of this archaeological geology, conscious, layered-temporal, and stratification structure of the soil. The work of a historian directed by the metaphor of sedimentation is a similar process of the unhurried revealing of the layers of historicity – the intervals of the past time. It is the **stratigraphy of historicity**. It is a cognising culture revealing how a particular past has lived/has been active in subsequent presents, up to our own: active – because sedimentation, in contrast to abrasion, does not focus on the *sediments* of the past, but on what of it is still active in the current process of history-making.

The abrasive and sedimentational conceptualisations of history differ from each other with how they determine the significance and role of history as a branch of knowledge – then says Pomian – **If it is believed that the past – apart from the recent one which still lives in memory – does not co-shape the present, as it has been erased, then interest in it has no important consequences whatsoever for the present and the future.** The individuals whose attention is drawn more to the invisible than to what they have in their field of vision are given an opportunity by history to cross the boundary of time. History satisfies their curiosity and this is the reason why it is popular with them. It is a kind of entertainment and does not serve any other purpose. **However, if the past makes itself present in the modern times in various ways and, what is more, it tends to be active in them, then the role of history as a discipline turns out to be fundamentally different.** It involves studying the past from the moment when it became the past, leaving traces, documents and narratives through which it can be examined. It is the determination of how the past functioned during the time interval that separates us from it and how it functions in our present. It is describing different varieties of its presence and studying their mutual relations, as well as revealing those which are beyond the reach of conscious control. For the sedimentational approach, **history is therefore a way of thinking, and at the same time knowledge of man as existing historically,** and thus it is the basis of all anthropology, which wants to talk not only about the so-called primeval societies – which is quite the wrong term, in fact, because they also have a long past – but also about the contemporary world in all its diversity and complexity [emphasis – J.P.].⁵⁶

The fragment of Pomian's reflections quoted above includes at least two original ideas. The first one is the thesis that history as a discipline is only realised when

it deals with the study of the past, but ... **only from the moment when it became the past!** Not earlier, when it was a certain present; neither is it a study of what preceded that present, but of the “afterlife” of that present. The historian’s cognitive perspective as a cognising culture consists of, for example, the fact that they have knowledge of the aftermath of events; they know what happened not only *ante* but also *post factum*. For Pomian, this “afterlife” of some fragment of the present examined by the cognising culture and showing its causative function in the successive “presents” sometimes up to the present which is contemporary to the cognising culture itself is the essence of any historian’s work.

In turn, I would describe the other idea as follows: what is of fundamental importance to Pomian is a distinction between history understood as a simple satisfaction of curiosity from history as **an examination of the past**. It sets a new standard for historical cognition and marks the boundary separating historical science from the colloquial knowledge of History. In this process of maturation of historical cognition, the simple question: “What happened?” must be replaced with a much more complex question: “How did the past function/how does it function?” The use of the past tense and the present tense is cognitively significant in the case of the latter question. Pomian distinguishes between two time intervals in which historicity works: *the time interval of the past*, that is, the one that has passed (or better: divides us) from the moment in the past (whose temporal and spatial coordinates are indicated), on which the cognising culture is focused, and *the time interval of the present* (more precisely: of what we consider to be the present), in which this past still works (in what is materially left of it). In each of them, historicity of the past can be active in a different way. Recognising this **pressure of the past on our present** is an advantage of thinking according to the metaphor of sedimentation. As Pomian writes:

The influence of this past is sometimes visible to the naked eye. It is impossible to understand Polish political life when one overlooks the fact that for over one hundred and twenty years we did not have our own state, and even before, when we had had it, we had not treated it with excessive respect. This is a trivial remark, and if we stop here, we will not get far. What would be quite interesting, however, are the results of research on the deep sources of Polish inability to compromise, which is a serious obstacle to the formation of a real democratic culture, or on the roots of Polish thinking about international issues less in terms of interests and more in terms of prestige, as well as of politicians and public opinion attaching importance to often empty gestures and rhetorical performances that lead to another disappointment. It would also be interesting to take a closer look at **the pressure of the distant past on our present**, starting with the language of administration – ‘lands’, ‘sejmiks’, ‘marshals’ – and ending with lawlessness and disorderliness, so familiar to us, though today it is no longer associated with the nobility. And the last example: the attitude to the law expressed in the way of making and especially – enforcing it; does it not sometimes resemble the times when *kondemnaty* [in old Polish law, copies

of default judgement – translator’s note] were used to line cloaks? Anyone can easily extend this list.⁵⁷

In this way, what the metaphor of the pressure of history – sedimentation – triggers is thinking not only about history but also a research programme; it generates a whole range of important questions that a historian can/should ask. I do not have to add that Pomian successfully brings this programme to life. It, or rather what it semantically alludes to, is also an argument against historical scepticism.

As long as the structure of being is multi-layered, similar to the structure of time and cognition, and many others, since it is an effect of sedimentation going on for thousands of years, imposing upon itself new settlements, while the old ones remain, even though in an impoverished and modified way, it does not mean that in the course of history the old truths prove to be false, Pomian concludes.

Hilbert does not negate Euclid, Einstein does not undermine Newton, the same applies to Kant and Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Spinoza. **Some of the old truths turn out to be discarded, others** are integrated to form new wholes, being subject to limitations and reinterpretations, and **despite losing their global significance, they maintain their status of truths.** Still, each case deserves an individual treatment. This is because objects that philosophers and scholars deliberated on did not disappear without a trace. They changed their appearance, meanings and roles, with new ones building upon them so that the former cannot be recognized anymore and it takes a great effort of both thought and imagination to reach the depths of the past and represent them in a pure form.⁵⁸

[emphasis – J.P.]

What the philosopher-historian touches upon here is the fundamental issue of ontological commensurability and incommensurability of universal theories⁵⁹ that I studied in the middle of the 1980s in the context of theory/philosophy of science. Just like Pomian, I noticed a fundamental difference between the presumed “stability” (unchangeability) or (treated here as exclusive disjunction, as an alternative) historicity of the object of cognition itself, that is, social scientific practice. I wrote:

The norm of *rational criticism* by Popper, *methodology of scientific research programmes* by Lakatos, *theory of normal science* and *scientific revolutions* by Kuhn, *methodological anarchism* by Feyerabend, *idealization theory of science* by Leszek Nowak are in essence **ahistorical** (even though they initiated the so-called historical school of philosophy of science), and may as well serve their authors to solve “the puzzles of history” of contemporary science as well as those typical of the times of Newton or Aristotle. In contrast, theories of science developed by Kmita and also Pomian, are of a *historical*

character. (...) A historical development of scientific studies (and historiography per se) entailed going through various “worlds of science”, with corresponding ideals of science, objectives and methodology.⁶⁰

The overlapping of these following interpretations of science/past means that one needs a *great effort of thought and imagination*, as Pomian asserted, in order to reconstruct the long way of cognising culture. It is needed because then **“it turns out that the full recognition of the historicity of human being in the world does not need to lead to skeptical or nihilistic conclusions”** [emphasis – JP].⁶¹ It is the best method to get rid of postmodern scepticism that the humanistic and social studies were soaked in and was regarded as witchcraft, to use the words of Jerzy Kmita, who predicted the bad times coming for science at the end of the 1970s.⁶²

There is yet another road, the outline of which can be found in *L'ordre du temps*, Krzysztof Pomian's book published in French in 1984:

Sceptics draw a conclusion that it is impossible to know anything that happened in the past with reasonable certainty. The only way to convince them they are wrong lies in justifying the credibility of such narrative sources through them being confronted with documents and relics coming from the same country and time of origin so that they could be verified or at least not falsified.

The issue of justifying the discourse concerning the past is transformed into the issue of validity of strategies and methods, which should make it able to be cognised through documents and relics to which it applies. The balance point of historians' work is shifted from narration to studies, since it is upon their quality that the evaluation of the work relies, carried out by the circles of professional historians, being in the process of institutionalization since the 17th century. However, such studies do not lead directly to the image of the past similar to the one provided by anyone who lived the past as their presence, or by those who attempt to describe the past on the basis of narrative sources in such a way as if they had lived at that time, being synthetic and fictitious individuals, taking into account a multitude of testimonies and the contemporary readers' expectations, thus being situated both in the past and beyond it. For studies focused on a critical analysis of documents and relics lead automatically not to descriptions of events but to a critical appraisal of the documents and relics, which is not the same.⁶³

It is a means of suspending the legitimacy of judgements concerning history and of attaining the level of meta-reflection on the legitimacy of cognitive procedures and research methods involved in discovering the past. It is a proper means, suitable for the methodology applied in studies of history or adequate for history of historiography, cultivated along the recommendations proposed by Krzysztof Pomian, where the balance point is shifted from basic data collection to demonstrating how these cognitively isolated fragments/remains of the past

may efficiently work, in their “afterlife”, in *their primary presence*, modifying the subsequent presences up till the contemporary one. Such a way of historical/historiographic studies is a trademark of Krzysztof Pomian’s works. The professor himself acknowledges the innovative character of his approach:

We think about the invisible in terms of metaphors and images borrowed from the visible world or the world accessed through observation. We are not always fully aware of the exact images and metaphors that underpin our thoughts. The same applies to thinking about history; if I am not mistaken, no one has revealed and no one has studied differences between it being viewed as abrasion and it being viewed as sedimentation. Yet, each of them shapes a different approach towards the presence and each has different consequences for history as a scholarly discipline, for social studies, for philosophy.⁶⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian recognises (he becomes aware of it, to use his stylistics) the role of these fundamental metaphors, that is, of abrasion and sedimentation, in the self-reflection of cognising culture on the long road that historiography had to go over the centuries. The metaphorical way of thinking accompanied his intellectual endeavours with history for years, guiding his philosophical-historical studies. My ambition is to showcase how Krzysztof Pomian makes mental use of these metaphors. I undertake this goal being aware of the confluence between his central thesis, that is, that **history is a way of thinking and, at the same time, constitutes knowledge of a man as a historical being**, and my own thought: **history is a self-reflection of cognising culture**⁶⁵.

III The order of time – the order of history (Pomian’s reflection on change in historiography)

If the history of historiography tells us that history was (and sometimes still is) an object of belief, knowledge, science, or memory, then our attention, our optics, shifts naturally from the object to the subject, to the cognising culture. It is this culture that makes the past an object of belief or an object of knowledge. It is this culture that attempts to introduce a specific “order of time” into history, says Krzysztof Pomian. In his opinion, history was born out of an attempt to transcend the horizon of the present and what is “visible”, because the past seen from the perspective of the present is non-being and as such could not be “seen”. Past events required evidence stronger than memory if they were to become objects not of belief but of knowledge. In *Sur l’Histoire* he writes:

If the requirement of recalling evidence distinguishes history from fiction, then the nature of the evidence that history recalls distinguishes it from memory. For the evidence which history recognizes as valid today appeals to remains remaining from the past and such that their origin and dating

can be determined; thus it becomes a source through which to learn about those who created it, and often those who used it in their time. The evidence recognized by memory is entirely different. “I was there, I saw it with my own eyes” – is an irresistible argument for memory. “He told me this, I know him, I believe him” – is also an argument for it. As long as history was only a record of memory, such evidence was sufficient for it. Beginning in the fifteenth century, history has distinguished itself as a branch of knowledge which defies memory and begins to employ more and more subtle means for learning facts which not only the historian who deals with them cannot remember because they took place long before he was born, but which no one has ever retained in memory because no one noticed them when they happened.⁶⁶

Krzysztof Pomian devoted practically his entire academic life to pondering this path followed by historiography, from its beginnings to the end of the 20th century.

Despite appearances, *Order of Time* is not a treatise on time, although, as the author puts it: *Time is the object of history in this book.*⁶⁷ And one cannot deny it. Just like, for example, the fact that in another work he made the world of collecting the protagonist of the story. But both of these books are also, or perhaps above all, great philosophical treatises on the historicity of historical cognition. About how cognising culture has changed, and with it, how the very understanding of both histories – the one spelt with the capital “H” (synonymous with history/past reality) and the one spelt with the lower case “h” (synonymous with knowledge/science/talk about the past) – has changed. And these two works are at the same time a lecture on the methodology of history in practice – applied methodology. Methodology is shown in concrete application and not as an object of theoretical divagations of a methodologist who knows the practice of the profession of historian only from reading. After all, no one can reasonably accuse the author of *Przeszłość jako przedmiot wiary* [Past as an object of belief] and *Przeszłość jako przedmiot wiedzy* [Past as an object of knowledge] of such detachment from the practice of historical research.

Krzysztof Pomian labels his way of practising science “**philosophical history**” because of the questions which guide his research. They are of a more philosophical (theoretical) nature than the questions that historians usually ask about: what, where, when, and to whom happened. Here is an example of some of them coming from the very beginning of the considerations of the treatise on time. First, the problematic situation is outlined:

Our first chapter, devoted to the problems of chronography, attempts to explicate why a reportedly event-based history has been regarded from antiquity to our own day, as inferior to one that has abandoned the identification of time with a succession of disconnected and diverse episodes that form no overall picture, in favour of a cyclical or linear topology. The

point, in other words, is to show the limitations inherent in chronography and to demonstrate that it must be complemented by some kind of chronosophy if it is to become intellectually satisfying.⁶⁸

From the problematic situations

emerge questions that will rule the remainder of this chapter. What is the mechanism that reproduces the opposition between event-telling and the “true story”? Why is the event-telling both unsatisfactory and inevitable? What gives weight to the problem of the relationship between events and that which is not event-related? Only by answering these questions will we return to the present to see if they are still relevant and in what form they appear today.⁶⁹

We will return to the art of asking questions of the past. But now I would like to emphasise something else: Pomian, as a historian-philosopher, points out to us that the problem that historians and theorists of history have with event-based historiography has its more fundamental basis in the form of problems that have been the subject of philosophical inquiry for centuries. As he writes:

The problem of the relation between the eventual and the non-eventual owes its importance to a much more fundamental problem, of which it is a special case, and which concerns the relation between appearances and essence, the realm of the visible and the realm of the invisible, the part and the whole. Thus, both the implicit ontology of history and its epistemology depend on how it is resolved, the only difference being that in the latter case it concerns the relationship between perception, openness to the visible, and language, the sole bearer of information about the invisible. Forced to take account of both, **history can neither do without an account of events – a simple description of what happened in the realm of the visible – nor be content with it, since such an account, if it were really only a description, would say nothing about the connection between events and the invisible, and thus would make it impossible to explain or understand them.** There is, therefore, a certain mechanism that continually reproduces the opposition between the account of events and the “true history”. It is the same mechanism that tells people to draw, moving it according to epoch and country, the boundary between the realm of the visible and the realm of the invisible, between the data of perception and what can only be learned about through language.⁷⁰

[emphasis – J.P.]

Let us remember that for Krzysztof Pomian, a change in historiography means that a new cognising culture has emerged, which while trying to **explain and understand some historical event/s tries to link them with the**

invisible, casting something new in this role. And now an example of a *strictly* methodological lecture:

Let us carry out an experiment which consists in writing down everything we have been able to perceive in one day, Thus we shall note our movements and the movements of the beings which pass through our field of vision, our encounters, the scenes which have taken place in our presence, the words we have heard, the objects, the animals and plants we have seen, the changes in the sky, in a word: everything except our inner states. Moments in which nothing happened in our direct environment will remain unfilled or simply silent. The day will thus be decomposed into a collection of disconnected units whose density depends – assuming all other elements remain the same – on the degree of concentration on the external and on the acuity of the perceptual apparatus. These disconnected units – individualized by their position on the axis of time and space, as well as by the entities that appear, variable at different times and places – are arranged in a certain sequence, with any two units being either simultaneous or one later than the other. An important property of a set of such units is that it results from a choice over which the will of the individual has little influence. No matter how hard we try, we remain unable to grasp everything that happens around us: perception is selective, attention wanes, and habituation to certain phenomena means that we no longer even notice them. So we involuntarily choose even when we would like not to miss anything. Therefore, any set of entities that we have registered is always only a subset of what actually happened.⁷¹

Pomian wanted to convey here a simple thought: that what actually happens exceeds our species' perceptual capabilities, and even more so cannot be reduced to what is contained in the sources, which are after all based on perceptual data. But this is not to be another "truth revealed" by the Authority ("the truth of belief" in its linguistic style), but the final effect of specific reasoning – knowledge about the nature of historical cognition gained through thought experiments. Walking the same path of logical inference/argumentation that the author followed is supposed to be the best method of learning for his readers. This invitation to reflect together is a form of discovering and assimilating "truths" that transcend the horizon of individual experience. To realise that my doubts/questions can be/were shared also by others, that they belong not only to the history of myself but also to the history of other people. Professor writes:

The experiment we have just imagined and analysed has been repeated thousands and thousands of times over the centuries. A diary, even at times when it becomes a personal journal, almost always devotes a great deal of space to describing what the author supposedly saw or heard. The same is true of memoirs, which differ from a diary only in that they are written down not in the heat of the moment but after some time. Admittedly, a

chronicle sometimes contains only one record per year, whereas a diary adds new sediments essentially every day, and memoirs contain a narrative constantly. Moreover, a diary notes only what concerns its author.⁷²

The variation in form does not change the essence of the phenomenon. By the way, one cannot help but notice the ease with which Krzysztof Pomian switches from methodological discourse to philosophical discourse and vice versa. Actually, it should not surprise us, or at least those who are at least a little familiar with the Professor's works. However, the impression of surprise and admiration for "playing the two pianos" – methodology and philosophy at the same time – remains. Even if one knows that Pomian can write "four-handed pieces".⁷³

How does Pomian work mentally? Let us see how the already familiar fundamental metaphor of sedimentation manifests itself in its function of controlling the research practice of the philosophical historian in *Order of Time*. Time – the protagonist of this story – is a theoretical variable, not a dimension in which events are immersed:

An important epistemological conclusion follows from this. In the practice of historians, just as in that of economists, time is no longer identified with some kind of uniform flow in which the phenomena under study would be submerged like bodies in a river whose current carries them further and further. The topology of time is not predetermined, given once and for all. It is the studied processes that impose a certain topology on time by their course. Uniform and rectilinear "time", represented by the axis of abscissa on our charts or columns of dates in our tables, in reality plays only the role of a tool which allows us to observe and measure changes of one or another quantity and to compare these changes with one another. This "time" determined by the cyclic motion of celestial bodies or oscillations of a certain atom is not the time of history. History has its own time, or rather times – the internal times of the processes studied by historians and economists, the rhythm of which is determined not by astronomical or physical phenomena, but by the peculiarities of these processes themselves, the points at which they change direction, at which growth, decline and stagnation follow one another. Thus the very content of the concept of the time of history has been transformed in the last half-century.⁷⁴

It is each time constituted by the culture/cultures of the knower. Pomian begins here with a philosophy-based history of historiography, which he had already practised in his diptych leading the lecture of history as an object of belief/knowledge to the Enlightenment, this time encompassing, by means of metareflection, the continuation of the history of the cognising culture's realisation of

the historicity of human being. Also, French historian François Hartog draws attention that Pomian's approach to the problem of time in history is unique and innovative.⁷⁵ Gradually, just as it occurred in the history of science, he introduces further perspectives of philosophy itself with its historical varieties, from the Enlightenment and Kant to the 20th-century philosophy, through the perspectives of "looking" at the time of the emerging modern natural sciences, and then he demonstrates the cognising cultures of the other social sciences emerging successively from the "historiographic trunk": economics, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, showing the paradigmatic role of the latter in relation to any 20th-century metareflection on historicity and time as its (i.e. this historicity's) form of self-representation. It is worth noting the very manner of every approach to the *considerate* topic. Pomian does not tell it like it is, but he studies how a given problem has been perceived by historians over the centuries and this *perception*⁷⁶ is being analysed by him; it becomes a starting point, a basis/foundation for the formulation of his own opinions, his own theory of history.

In his opinion, in order for the history of historiography to be at all sensible (not to mention comprehensible), and not merely a collection of historiographic events ordered in time, it is **necessary to go the same way it did**. It is necessary to show how, in the process of self-reflection on the historicity of being and the possibility of its cognition, the cognising culture itself (historiography) was born and then changed until it reached the culture we know today. How, in its successive historical scenes ("presences"), certain properties/metaphors/methods/approaches inherent in cognising culture became mere epistemic "sediment" and which remained cognitively active at this new stage of self-reflection on history. Through this, Pomian discovers abrasion and sedimentation in the history of historiography. "Like the philosophical history of history, the history of time **is a stratigraphic analysis** – the study of a cross-section through the temporal thickness of its subject" [emphasis – JP].⁷⁷ The metareflection on the phenomena hidden under this metaphor must of necessity have the character of a model approach. Here is how Krzysztof Pomian articulates its essence when discussing the problem of periodisation:

In reality things never appear with the sharpness and purity that we have ascribed to them here. **Looking at the works of historians**, we sometimes discover in them the coexistence of scientific notions with the most traditional events, and of theological notions with recurring facts. Cases in which the factual aspect and the conceptual aspect of a given history – for in a sense every history is a periodization of some kind – are compatible, are probably rarer than those in which a little subtler analysis would reveal inconsistencies or even contradictions. One may wonder, then, why we should privilege, as we have just done, the rare coherent texts and construct ideal types that have only a fairly remote relationship to what we find in experience. Answer: because otherwise we could not construct a periodization of periodization. Then what is the point of constructing a

periodization of periodization or anything else? Answer: to make facts, if not intelligible, at least thinkable.⁷⁸

[emphasis – J.P.]

This transgression of the event level of the history of historiography, or the history of any science, or the history of science as such, entails introducing facts into the narrative that are *ideal types* – models/constructions of the culture being studied, something that has a *rather distant relation to what we find in experience*. In his works devoted to the history of historiography, from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, Krzysztof Pomian constructs a whole range of such ideal types (models), from the most general ones, like (1) history as *an object of faith* or (2) history as *an object of knowledge*, which, thanks to him, entered scientific discourse and commonly function in historians' consciousness, to subsequent models covering the experience of historiography of the 19th and 20th centuries, which he reflects on and conceptualises into ideal types on analogous terms in three subsequent metahistorical books: the above mentioned *L'ordre du temps*. Editions Gallimard: Collection Bibliotheque des Histoires, Paris 1984; *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux*. Paris, Venise: *XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*. Editions Gallimard 1987; and *Sur l'histoire*. Editions Gallimard, Paris 1999, which is a collection of treatises already published. These models are extremely interesting and cognitively fruitful constructs and have not been given due attention by historians and theorists of history, except perhaps for the ideal type of *history as a clash of two discourses: of the victors and the vanquished*, formulated a little later⁷⁹, which was often referred to when discussing the politics of memory. Let us therefore recall the relevant fragment of Krzysztof Pomian's reflections on the subject:

The memory of the victors appears in the form of history when the stories of past conflicts are made available under this title, written in the third person and provided with signs of historicity such as references to archives, while remaining, however, the work of authors, who, although they do not admit it, identify themselves with the victor camp and only with it. Such history almost automatically becomes state history, recognized and disseminated by state institutions. It is introduced into education, it determines the direction of research and publication of sources, it suggests topics for exhibitions in museums, anniversary celebrations, monuments. In this state of affairs there is nothing left for the memory of the vanquished but to make itself available in the form of history, which, however, can only be done in the mode of undermining official history: confronting its judgments and sentences with the perspective derived from identification with the camp of the vanquished. When the memory of the victors becomes official history, the memory of the vanquished constitutes itself as revisionist history. The dispute of these two histories is therefore an extension of the conflict which initiated the formation of both memories: the memory of the victors and the memory of the vanquished. It is a transfer of the conflict into the sphere of statements and symbols, which by no means removes the powerful

emotions it evoked and fed upon, above all – hatred. Now, on the part of the vanquished, there is resentment, a sense of injustice and a desire for revenge, while on the part of the victors there is an increased conviction that they have brought about the triumph of a just cause, because the law and morality are on their side. All these feelings remain alive, although they are expressed only in speech acts with their inherent charge of symbolic violence, and not in deeds that would embody physical violence.⁸⁰

Before we move on to present other ideal types – models of development of historiography, we must stop for a moment at a certain *turning point* in the history of historiography and explain what, according to Krzysztof Pomian, it consisted in. For many centuries, the only link between the past and the present times remained memory, and historiography was only “memory recorded in writing”. The turn-on scale of the *scientific revolution in historiography* consisted in allowing for *indirect cognition* in historiographic practice:

History’s mastery through indirect cognition is its cognitive independence from memory, which ceases to be what it has been for millennia: the only link between past and present, and therefore the only passage from this to that. Henceforth, another way is also available that does not depend in any way on memory. It consists in recognizing certain objects present in the environment as remnants of the past on the basis of examining their visible features or on the basis of observing their properties that escape our gaze, and – when it comes to texts or paintings – on the basis of interpreting their contents and drawing conclusions from the results of these operations as to the circumstances of producing the original objects of which these remnants are fractions.⁸¹

If historians’ mastery of indirect cognition is such a revolutionary change that it has since become a hallmark of historiography and often a synonym of historical cognition in general, then it must be the subject of constant community reflection:

All this is tantamount to accepting tacitly that the distant past can be known by means of texts, images, and material objects derived from it, the examination of which, taking into account the slightest differences in their visible shape and, if necessary, in their content, provides statements that allow conclusions to be drawn about the circumstances of them being written or produced. Such nondirect or indirect cognition of the past makes use of perception only insofar as it is a necessary condition of all viewing and all reading. But it is impossible to identify it with perception, for that by its own power is not even able to read; what, then, to speak of the much more complex operations that require knowledge of languages, writings, styles, realities of all kinds, and mastery of logic. Indirect cognition of the past is a *sui generis* cognition that appeals to comparison and reasoning. Comparison is necessary because only juxtaposition of documents and monuments from

different epochs and different places allows us to recognize features that are specifically related to specific dating, localization and attribution. It is useful for reasoning because a correctly read, located and attributed document allows to deduce from its visible shape and content conclusions about social and cultural identity of its authors, about circumstances in which they created it and even about their motivation. Knowledge about the past based on such cognition, as independent from perception, differs in its very essence from memory.⁸²

That is why from now on historians will prefer to study distant epochs and not what they themselves witnessed, because only then the past does not have to be confronted with memory, its own or others', but becomes an object of research and knowledge based on indirect cognition. Pomian calls this conviction **a dogma of professional historians:**

With the adoption of the fundamental dogma, a demarcation of principle was established between the past and the present. The first is only knowable through the agency of the sources; the second is only knowable thanks to the perception which appears to grasp it without any mediation. A history of present times is therefore inconceivable, unless it is a history which does not respect the fundamental dogma and which sets itself therefore in opposition, epistemologically, to scholarly history. The same applies to the history produced by writers, journalists and amateurs who claim to be historians of the contemporary, a quality that the champions of scholarly history can only deny them because of the difference in cognitive practice between the one and the other, and the demands, not easily reconcilable, which this entails in respect of research and writing.⁸³

Professor situates this turning point in the mastery of indirect cognition in the 16th century, when a rupture occurred, a division of the hitherto (at least in Europe) relatively uniform path of historical development into three paths/thrusts, from then on running/flowing side by side (although sometimes they came into contact with each other) until our times, as different cognising cultures coming to know and being for each other a source of challenges, cognitive anxieties, and sometimes opportunities for a fruitful dialogue. Here is an appropriate description of that path:

Perception-based history had an unambiguous cognitive status in the Middle Ages. Only since the sixteenth century has its path begun to fork. One branch leads towards narration, the other towards research. The former's starting point is history as art, the latter history as science. Those who consider history as hermeneutics try to follow this third path in order to avoid choosing between the two extremes. In a word, the epistemological status of history becomes ambiguous and thus controversial. Well, this ambiguity stems from the fact that the cognition of the **present is always**

identified with perception, while the cognition of the past is henceforth possible only as an indirect cognition: reconstructing on the basis of sources. To identify cognition of the present time with perception is to assume that it can only be described as a sequence of events. Consequently – and by force of a certain inertia – the past is described in the same way; in order to make it intelligible to himself and his readers, historian cannot treat it differently from the present. The past, however, is accessible only to indirect cognition. It should therefore be described not as if it were visible, but precisely as the past, in the form of a critical analysis of the sources, that “history of history” which Hegel contrasts with history proper and which, resented by the public, did not satisfy the historians themselves. It is precisely this incompatibility – not to say contradiction – between the implicit epistemology of the historian-writer and the epistemology, sometimes openly expounded, of the historian-researcher – that lies at the root of the ambiguity of the status of history from the sixteenth century until today.⁸⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

Behind each of these three epistemologies: the historian-writer, the historian-philosopher of history (hermeneutics), and the historian-researcher, there were different cognising cultures that determined the circle of problems/questions/tasks posed by historiography. In each of these cultures, history was practised differently. The former developed social narrative practice, exposing rhetorical, persuasive, and emotional qualities of historiography; the latter searched for some deeper sense/significance/inevitability of historical events (by means of referring to myth, religion, philosophy of history or ideology); and the third focused on the development of intersubjectively controllable research techniques and methods.⁸⁵ Pomian argues that when historians assimilated the conviction that knowledge can be attained not only through perception but above all through indirect cognition, which dates back to the 16th–17th centuries in Europe, history as a cognising culture develops within three parallel (and sometimes intertwined), morphogenetic sequences⁸⁶, namely:

- 1 history as art;
- 2 history as hermeneutics;
- 3 history as a science.

Thus, in order to be where we find it today, historiography had to travel a long way, and not one way at all, but rather it was an intertwined chain of three parallel morphogenetic sequences, forming something like a “triple” helix, like the DNA discovered by James D. Watson. Here is an abbreviated description of this complex process as found in *Porządek czasu*. Firstly – the “double helix”:

Ever since the view took root – which was above all the work of the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – that knowledge

does not coincide with perception, the problem of justifying the history of the past has been posed in a different way, since indirect cognition now becomes acceptable: a set of codifiable ways that allow us to reach certain elements of the invisible realm through objects included in the sphere of visibility. Thus, techniques and methods began to be developed to open a new way of access to the events of the past thanks to the traces they left behind, which persist in the present in the form of documents and monuments: writings and artifacts produced in past eras, with the conscious intention – or not – of transmitting their image to posterity. However, the past has also left narrative sources where it is described as it was for those for whom it was the present: chronicles, memoirs, diaries, contemporary histories, etc. The distinction between the non-eventual and the events turns out to be embodied in the very material on which historians base their reconstructions of the past, the two main categories which remain in different relations to it and thus do not have the same status. Indeed, unlike documents and monuments, each narrative source brings some sort of retelling of events and thus allows us to relive them, to make an imaginative identification with those who were participants or eyewitnesses. Therefore, while being attractive to audiences, as well as to historians themselves – especially if they are trying to narrate what happened – narrative sources are at the same time suspected in the eyes of others. For one cannot, without justifying it, repeat on one's own account the kind of picture of eras and countries from which they are supposed to come, that they bring. The traditional justification, which appeals to the belief that the words of an authority are deserved, is no longer acceptable wherever the old authorities are no longer recognized as such. And this is an increasingly common attitude: for example, Protestants and Libertarians question the authority of the Church and the chroniclers in her service; humanists the authority of medieval authors; moderns the authority of the ancients.⁸⁷

Let us now superimpose a third sequence on these two sequences outlined above, that is, sense-making of events/sensitisation of events in the sequence of morphogenesis (sedimentation) of history identified with hermeneutics:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, event-based history acquires meaning through the theology of history, when the events it treats touch the Church, and through the psychology of historical subjects, when they act in the field of politics. In the latter case, the realm of the invisible, the source of meaning, is not transcendent to the world but exists immanently in the individuals (kings, princes, and the mighty) recognized as the real actors of history; to find the causes of events is to relate them to the play of the forces that operate in this realm [...]. However, just as the development of nation-states and their growing influence on social life have made it, if not impossible, at least very difficult to inject political events into some providential plan, so the growing role of the economy, the arts, and the

sciences, aided by the criticism of philosophers, leads us to question the psychology of historical subjects.⁸⁸

Note the thought in the first sentence: **meaning is brought into event-based history by a cognising culture** (this role is performed by “theology/philosophy of history” and “psychology of historical subjects”). By itself, history as a sequence of events does not have this meaning but only “acquires” it through some proposed chronosophy, that is, through the imagining of something invisible that intervenes in the visible world and thus **makes it meaningful**.

What then about the time of history? – Pomian asks – Is there any instance that would coordinate its past, present, and future according to some pre-determined program and that would be in relation to history what a conductor with his score is in relation to the work that is performed under his direction? For centuries, as we have seen, this question has been answered in the affirmative. The theology of history identified its coordinating authority with God, with his providential plan, or with nature, with its determinations. The psychology of historical subjects added to them, as far as secular history was concerned, protagonists capable of transforming their projects into real entities. The philosophy of history attributed this role to the human Spirit, programmed to always rise higher and go further, or to the productive forces, animated by an uncontrollable urge to transcend all limits.⁸⁹

Treating Marx’s theory of history and Marxism itself as yet another historical incarnation of the *philosophy of history*, this time in the development of productive forces and in the class struggle which seeks the meaning of history, may seem to someone a surprising intellectual departure, but Krzysztof Pomian has deeper reasons for doing so than, for example, Karl R. Popper in his famous critique of Marxism as historicism. Because, in Pomian’s opinion, we can also speak of a higher, more basic dependence, which is cognitively recognised within the framework of the third developmental path of historiography, the one oriented towards science. It is assumed here that it is the **change** itself on **the level of historical being, its morphogenesis** (e.g. the development of nation-states or the growing role of economy, arts, and sciences) that forces/leads us to question the successive chronosophies with their fundamental metaphors. The cognising culture based on these metaphors turns out to be dysfunctional in relation to current social practice. Here again, Krzysztof Pomian’s cognitive realism comes to mind. In his opinion, the **replacement of some cognising cultures by others in historiography has its source in historicity as an immaterial feature of current praxis**. Here is the Professor’s scientific metahistorical discourse, which illustrates this thesis:

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, the social sciences have slowly displaced the philosophy of history as a complement and extension

of historical research. They developed techniques and methods for studying the present, **which ceased to be described on the basis of perceptual data alone**. In books written by scholars at universities or specialized institutes, **a picture of the present is constructed** using statistics, survey results, and various documents that are collected and analysed. And it is no longer the whole picture, but always a **partial one** – it is the present of the economy, of social relations in this or that sector, of the views held by different categories of the population on this or that subject, of collective or individual behaviour, etc. **This break with life experience**⁹⁰, which is replaced by indirect knowledge, leads the social sciences to reject the idea of a single time covering all areas or levels of society and history, replacing it with a multifaceted temporality, each of which is characterized by a peculiar rhythm.⁹¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

The impulse for the emergence of further forms of scientifically based historiography is the renewed focus of cognising culture on the present, but now it is conceptualised (*constructed*, as Pomian puts it) with the help of cognitive tools provided by other emerging social sciences, thanks to which the historian not only crosses the threshold of what is directly observable but can also suspend the legitimacy of accumulated historical experience (factual, everyday knowledge about what might have happened) in favour of preferring scientific knowledge. The historian not only crosses the threshold of that which can be directly observed but can also suspend the legitimacy of accumulated vital historical experience (factual, everyday knowledge about what could have happened) in favour of scientific knowledge based on sociology, psychology, demography, economics, or linguistics. It also becomes extremely important that this new scientific knowledge is/must be intersubjectively controllable. For as Pomian writes:

[...] the discourses of the social sciences on the invisible must derive their legitimacy from the used documentation and from the more or less codified rules that make it possible, on this basis, to reconstruct this invisible – whether it's about past, present or future – to create a picture of it that could be obtained by anyone using the same documentation and applying the same methods. Theories reached by this route, however ambitious, do not aim at presenting the whole of human history, past, present, and future of the humanity; they are always correct with respect to some more or less limited area. The shift from perception to indirect knowledge of the present therefore deprives philosophy of history, as an intellectual approach, of much of its authority, exposing cruelly the irreproducibility of the results it claims to produce. **Since such practices are no longer considered scientific, historians, especially those who pretend to a certain scientificity, are now forced to turn to the social sciences and to transpose into the study and description of the past the methods they apply to the present.**⁹²

[emphasis – J.P.]

Krzysztof Pomian began his model lecture on the history of historiography by recalling the metaphor of the *crossroads* at which history as a cognising culture found itself, along with the suspension of the legitimacy of perceptual data, the hitherto epistemological basis of historiography. It is significant that the *crossroads* metaphor, used as a symbol of the situation in which history found itself at the beginning of the 1980s, also appeared in a famous book *Which Road to the Past?* in which the eminent British historian Geoffrey Elton, a proponent of the classical model of narrative history, debated with Robert Fogel, a rising American star of history, practised not as humanities but as a hard *social science*⁹³. Elton defends here the concept of history as a representation of the past, where beautiful narration is the highest form of its representation, while Fogel points to the opportunity brought by the development of social sciences that provide the historian with cognitive tools and methods allowing to make this *mediation*, constitutive for historical knowledge, an asset rather than a drawback. Pomian also speaks in a similar vein as Fogel:

We understand, then, why the emergence of the social sciences – sociology, economics, geography, ethnology – had such great significance for history. It was in fact a widening of the sphere of indirect cognition, which has become capable of grasping the present, which is now being studied⁹⁴, so far only the past, through documents and using techniques and methods of reconstruction based on sources which are increasingly numerous, better adapted to their objects and carefully substantiated. Perception thus ceases to be the foundation of knowledge concerning the present and pretending to be scientific. In other words, as the object of science, the present is henceforth, like the past, situated in the realm of what can be reconstructed. Although everything in the realm of the visible is present, everything present is no longer considered to be in the realm of the visible. In history practiced according to university standards, this leads to the questioning of the event and then, gradually, to its elimination, since the **fate of the event is inseparable from the fate of perception**. The fact that the past is no longer described as if it were perceived⁹⁵, therefore, leads naturally to the abandonment of the traditional historical narrative in favour of a new type of writing, adapted to the description of the non-eventual. And also to a new definition of the status of history: being neither art, nor science, nor hermeneutics in the sense these terms were given in the nineteenth century, it now wants to be a full-fledged social science. However, this applies only to the history of scholars. Next to it thrives the history of journalists and writers, faithful to the story and the event.⁹⁶

[emphasis – J.P.]

Thus, we can speak here of yet another theoretical turn that occurred in historiography with the emergence/separation of other social sciences. At the pre-theoretical stage, the history of the present was based on direct cognition, on data derived from perception. The present was not an object of study but an account,

the foundation of which was the status of the narrator as an observer of the events he tells about. “[...] [P]eople obtain information about the world by two fundamentally different routes: through perception and language”, Pomian notes in this connection.⁹⁷ Now this certainty of judgements based on perceptual data has been questioned by social sciences. The focus has shifted to the invisible. The distinction between what is visible and what is invisible from the perspective of cognising culture has always played an important role in the history of historiography, even marking at one time the demarcation line between *history as an object of belief* and *history as an object of knowledge*, but of course it has its source primarily in the philosophical reflection on perception, on what sensory impressions are and what they refer to. This reflection has a tradition dating back from Plato to the 20th-century empiriocriticism. The reign of perceptual data in science as the basis of cognition was not the affliction of historiography alone. “Only recently and only in some places have other ways of cognising overlapped them: observation with instruments in increasingly sophisticated forms on the one hand, reconstruction on the basis of sources on the other”.⁹⁸

To sum up, the developmental path of historiography, initiated/determined by the first turn, dated back to the 16th century, can be, according to Krzysztof Pomian, presented/characterised – again, up to the 20th century – as a constant oscillation between three ideal types: (1) *history as art*, (2) *history as hermeneutics*, and (3) *history as science*, being aware, of course, that the semantic fields of all three: art, hermeneutics, and science, have been repeatedly redefined historically during their *long duration*, thus changing at least their scope, if not their object references.

We also owe something else to the hermeneutic current in historiography. In *History. Science Towards Memory* Krzysztof Pomian notes:

The great contribution of hermeneutics to history was the discovery that every text – later this was extended to images as well – has a hidden content, peculiar to it alone, inscribed in its explicit content and attainable through it, provided one reads and interprets this explicit content according to certain rules. Regardless of the philosophical justifications of hermeneutics, which have sometimes referred to intuition, it has long been clear that this is a special case of indirect cognition. It makes it possible to uncover content that has found its way into the text without the author’s knowledge, and which therefore cannot be suspected of having been introduced in order for the reader to identify with it. This opens the way to such a use of narrative texts that, although we do not trust what they say openly, we can legitimately extract from them information about the circumstances of their writing, their authors and the environments in which they lived.⁹⁹

The thesis on the interpretative character of historical cognition is one thing, but this emphasis on the textuality of history was also a source/inspiration for narrativism and postmodern thinking in historiography, the captivity of which it found itself in the 1980s and 1990s, programmatically distancing itself from other social sciences. Rhetoric and literary studies then replaced the sociology

of knowledge and linguistics, which caused Krzysztof Pomian's justified anxiety. His epistemology of history grew out of completely different sources.

IV Krzysztof Pomian's epistemology of history

The lecture on Krzysztof Pomian's epistemology of history should begin with the fundamental categorical distinction for it: "visible" – "invisible". He returns to this problem in many texts and analyses it in many ways. The key question, however, is always the same: **how does the "visible" meet the "invisible"?** And the related thesis of **cognition as the constant shifting of the boundaries between the "visible" and the "invisible"**. Successive *cognising cultures* that we encounter in the history of historiography struggle with the issue of "the visible – the invisible" and provide different answers, shifting the boundaries that separate these two worlds.

To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be emphasised straightaway that the opposition between the visible and the invisible can take many and diverse forms. The invisible is spatially distant, not only beyond the horizon but also very high or very low. It is also temporally distant, either in the past or in the future. In addition, it is beyond all physical space and every expanse or else in a space structured totally differently. It is situated in a time of its own, or outside any passing of time, in eternity itself. It can sometimes have a corporeity or materiality other than that of the elements of the visible world, and sometimes be a sort of pure antimateriality. At times it will be an autonomy vis-à-vis certain or even all the restrictions placed on the visible world, at others it will be an obeying of laws different to our own. **Even so, these are, of course, merely empty compartments** capable of containing the most diverse of beings, from ancestors and gods to the dead and to people different to ourselves, as well as events and circumstances. The objects going from one exchange partner to another between the visible and the invisible vary greatly according to the identity of these partners. Just as the ways of transmitting messages to the invisible can take varying forms, such as human and animal sacrifices, offerings, libations and prayers, so the phenomena representing the invisible can greatly vary, including heavenly apparitions, meteors, animals and plants (sacred cows in India, and the Romans' sacred forests), striking changes in the relief, such as mountains, and rivers.¹⁰⁰

[emphasis – J.P.]

Visibility or *invisibility* – let us note – is here relativised to a historically given *cognising culture*. It is this culture that determines the ontic status, or mode of existence, of phenomena, allowing that something is visible or not from its perspective, and in what relation these two spheres – two worlds – remain. The realisation by a *cognising culture* that there exists some other world beyond the horizon of what is directly (sensually) perceived necessarily raises the question

of the possibility of communicating with that other, “not our” world. And another issue is raised: whether the practices of exchange between these presumably incommensurable worlds are cognitively acceptable – on the grounds of the said *cognising culture*. And if so, then what form do they take and how can they be cognitively captured? *Cognising culture* may assume, for example, the existence of a *virtual spectator/viewers*, and it is they who are/are supposed to be the addressees of semiotic/symbolic activities. This is how Pomian writes about this possibility in *Collectors and Curiosities* in the context of making gifts to the “invisible world”:

However, funeral objects and offerings should, in our view, be considered as collections, as the important factor is not that they were intended for gods or for the dead, but the acknowledgement of the existence of a virtual spectator, in another temporal or spatial sphere, implicit in the very act of placing the objects in a tomb or temple. This is the belief, which could be expressed in actions alone, but which words have often been used to describe, that another kind of observer can or does exist, who should be allowed to rest his eyes on objects belonging to us.¹⁰¹

These virtual spectators are the addressees of practices of exchange in which the donated objects lose the usefulness they had in their “previous life” (in the concrete “visible world”) and become something that makes them similar to works of art – objects (collections) devoided of utilitarian purpose.

In spite of their apparent disparity, all these collections consisted of objects which were in certain respects homogeneous. This homogeneity sprang from their involvement in the exchange process which took place between the visible and invisible worlds. While funeral objects and sacrificial offerings moved from the first to the second of these worlds, other objects moved in the opposite direction, sometimes directly, sometimes by depicting elements of the invisible world in sculpted or painted images. It will be shown later on that it was the role forced upon them, the role of guaranteeing communication between the two worlds into which the universe is cleft, which kept these objects out of the economic circuit. Yet it will also be seen that it was this very same role which caused them to be attributed such a high value and meant that there was always a considerable temptation to reintroduce them into the circuit, in return for usage values and goods, which is why they had to be afforded special protection.¹⁰²

An analysis of this phenomenon cited above – **the homogeneity of objects provided by their participation in the exchange between the visible and invisible worlds** – will allow us to better/fully understand a more fundamental issue, namely, the cognitive status of the historical event/fact in Pomian’s epistemology of history.

1 *The cognitive status of historical event and historical fact*

Analysing the problem of justifying facts from the past, Pomian reflects on the cognitive status of a historical event as such. An event is always a result of someone's perception, of a *change that a spectator notices in his environment*, as Professor Pomian puts it. In other words, every event presupposes a spectator, which French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty expressed with the formula that "there are no events without someone to whom they happen and whose finite perspective grounds their individuality"¹⁰³, thus emphasising the active role of the cognitive subject. Pomian, in turn, does not reject the thesis on the active role of the historian, but he immediately adds that the existence of a spectator/observer/witness is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one, for the existence of event-based history¹⁰⁴. He writes:

Unlike Merleau-Ponty, however, we do not think that events come into being merely by being 'carved out of the spatio-temporal totality of the objective world by a finite observer'¹⁰⁵. For an event to occur, the presence of a spectator is indeed necessary, but not sufficient. Standing in front of a screen illuminated by a uniform light and on which no image appears, the spectator will see nothing on it. If he projects his fantasies or hallucinations onto this screen, he will discover that they were fantasies or hallucinations as soon as he is confronted with another spectator, placed in the same conditions, whose report will necessarily be different from his. **In order for an event to occur, therefore, it is necessary that there be some change in the world itself, and that it would be available to many virtual spectators, capable of communicating the results of their perceptions to each other.**¹⁰⁶

[emphasis – J.P.]

Thus, first a change must occur on the ontic level (in the world itself); only its occurrence creates the possibility of cognitive grasping of the phenomenon as an event, Pomian claims. What is more, it cannot be a perception of an individual subject but an intersubjective one, repeatable also by others. Only the fulfilment of both conditions at the same time makes it possible for a historical event to occur.

To this comes a second consequence: **in order to be noticed, change must be perceivable**. And perceivable is only that what happens in the space accessible to the eye, within the horizon, and in a time interval coextensive with the presence of the spectator, and which is of a certain order of magnitude that can be most briefly characterized as macroscopic. (This assumes, of course, the absence of any observational instrument). These conditions taken together determine the dimension of the sphere of visibility, corresponding to each spectator and within which events take place. At the same time, they delineate the boundary of the invisible realm, which

includes the visible sphere and about which information can be obtained only through language. **The past, the period preceding the appearance of the spectator, is situated precisely in this area.**¹⁰⁷

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian can therefore be regarded as a philosophical realist, because he claims – in opposition to, for example, postmodernism or constructionism in the theory of history – that historical cognition aims at gaining knowledge about the reality existing regardless of our suppositions as to its nature or historiographical representations about it, which is undoubtedly a realist thesis. At the same time, one can notice the convergence of his thinking with what in contemporary philosophy of science is called *critical realism*¹⁰⁸, because – just like its leading representatives Roy Bhaskar or Justin Cruickshank – Pomian’s position is that only through the clash/confrontation of cognising cultures proposing alternative social ontologies (including different entities cast in the role of real agents of history), we are able to achieve through dialogue a real cognitive progress in understanding events from the past. However, unlike many critical realists (e.g. Margaret Archer), who claim that the task of research is to enable the transition from facts to values, Pomian believes that what is at stake here is not axiology but semiotics: the transition from facts to meanings (semiophors). It is in this transition that he sees the source of the breaking of the paradigm of sensory perception and the birth of conceptual thinking/action, that is, culture itself and the trans- or counter- eventual history associated with it. Event-based history *merely fills the memory* and

it should be seen in it only as a kind of prelude, necessary but not sufficient, to a real history which, by recording events, would attempt to understand, explain or equip them with meaning. **An event-based history always summons another, capable of giving it meaning; a history enclosed in the visible summons another, capable of including it in the invisible.** The disjunction of history, of which we have just described a few symptoms, is therefore not a characteristic peculiar to modernity; its source lies in the ubiquitous dichotomy, and we should be able to discover it wherever people have written history, although in other cultures it may take different forms from those we know.¹⁰⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

According to Pomian, this discernible split in historiography into event-based history and sensitisable/semiophorical history is not an invention of the 20th century but was present – albeit in a different form – wherever people talked/wrote about their past. However, the real challenge for cognising culture has always been to transcend the horizons of everyday experience, to go beyond the sphere of current “visibility”.

It is also evident that the criteria for selecting and prioritizing events according to their significance depend on the ideas one has about the invisible realm. Whoever regards history as the realization of some providential

plan chooses different events and hierarchizes them differently from those who identify their causal mechanism with the development of productive forces. The same is true of the language used to describe events. Take a celestial phenomenon, such as a comet. The meaning that someone gives to it, who sees in it a sign of divine wrath and describes it accordingly, is completely different from the meaning that it acquires when it is presented as explainable by the laws of nature. This means that no one has ever succeeded in writing a strictly event-driven history. Every historian, whether he is aware of it or not, always relates events to something that he places in the realm of the invisible, so that the aforementioned split appears not only in the historical work of a given epoch as a whole, but also, in a way that is sometimes more difficult to discern, within every work, no matter how event-based by definition. Therefore, the transformations of event history, before they can be explained by social, economic, technical, political transformations, must be referred to the changes in the course of the boundaries between the realm of the visible and the realm of the invisible and the very content of these two realms.¹¹⁰

In the 20th century, this crossing of boundaries meant that historical science had to construct, for example, an entirely new object of study/cognition:

Particularly through the establishment of sequences and operating over long periods of time, the historian deals with an object which has no counterpart in life experience, and of which he investigates the properties: its immutability, if immutability exists, and the factors which sustain it, or, on the contrary, the fluctuations which it exhibits, and the undercurrents of its mechanisms, the historian thus reconstructs objects which belong for the most part to two classes. The first, the class of structures, includes everything that remains stationary over very long periods. The second class, conjunctures, includes the various fluctuations that occur within the framework defined by structures. **In both cases, the historian's perspective does not and cannot correspond to that of a spectator who actually existed.** It is rather similar to the perspective of an observer who uses instruments that allow him to make present, through images, objects that are very distant, very small or that emit only invisible radiation. Events, in the traditional sense of the word, remain invisible from such a perspective, just as the flowers blooming at the foot of the observatory remain elusive to the telescope that is there. And yet, it is precisely by examining structures and conjunctures in depth that we inevitably encounter something that we are accustomed to call an event, and which indeed resembles in some respects what was thus termed in past centuries.¹¹¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

This is undoubtedly an apt and highly illustrative comparison of the spectator's perspective and that of the historian to the situation of the flowers growing at the foot of the observatory, invisible to the telescope, but should it also prove

insufficient, Pomian uses a specific *case study* from the twentieth-century historiography:

Let us take a curve that represents the fluctuation of wheat prices in some market over a period of time. We can see the points where it changes direction – from increasing it becomes decreasing or vice versa. Therefore, the curve can be divided into segments, inside which its direction is constant, and separated by points where something happens, where a reversal of the trend takes place. Why not equate such points with events? Why not say that we notice a change in the movement of prices? This is what we often say, using one of those shortcuts that suffice in everyday communication, but which we should not fall for. For what we perceive, looking at our drawing, is neither a rise nor a fall in prices, but only a curve drawn on a piece of paper. And what we perceive happening at a given point in the drawing is not a reversal of the trend of price movement, but a change in the direction of the curve. What we perceive, then, is quite different from what sellers or buyers perceived in a market where there were supposedly price fluctuations, represented – as we think – by our curve. And yet we so “see” because we know the rules which governed the construction of the curve and which we recognize as correct. In a word, if nothing even forbids the use of the word “event” to designate the point at which the curve changes direction, yet we must be aware that the word thus acquires a new meaning. It means henceforth not the changes seen in the surrounding world, but the discontinuity found in the model. With the exception of a few details, all this applies not only to the study of economic trends but also to the study of structures. For every structure, no matter how immutable, goes through a period of formation and another period during which it decays to make way for some new structure. Periods in which similar disruptions of structures occur are called “revolutions” in historical literature. There is therefore a close link between the study of structures and the study of revolutions; Pierre Toubert’s book provides a notable example. Well, a revolution is nothing but a cascade of events, a shockwave that propagates through space and time. However, as with conjunctures, the event here is not a change perceived in the surrounding world; it is a discontinuity, a rupture from the previous state. And as in the case of conjunctures, one discovers such discontinuities by examining tables, maps, and charts, the starting point of which is a compilation of documents that relate particular facts.¹¹²

Note that historical documents/sources here are only the **starting point of** historical inquiry. It is on the basis of data analysis (*studying tables, maps, and charts*) that the historian constructs historical facts. They could not be known to the observer of events (witness) because they were beyond his cognitive horizon, simply invisible to him. But this does not mean that they did not exist. What was needed was a new cognising culture, a new historiographic paradigm

to make these facts known/visible. As Pomian aptly notes, “we ‘see’ this way because we know the rules that governed the construction of the curve and that we recognize as correct”.¹¹³ Historical knowledge, in the sense of arriving at it, is paradigmatic and social at the same time. And in the cognitive sense, it is the discovery of some ontic emergent property, which the researcher describes, for example, as the *discontinuity found in the model*. It can be put in yet another way: cognising culture, coming into contact with records of different forms/ways of experiencing continuity – discontinuity of time, preserved in source materials, aims at cognitive recognition of the very nature of this historicity.

On the occasion of his metareflection on the experience of history recorded in historical sources, Pomian formulates another important thesis: **the choice of the type of sources may imply/predetermine the type of historiography practised.**

Consciously or not, the choice of sources answers the question: what kind of history – in this case: what kind of price history – does one want to do? If it is a history designed to reproduce unitary facts, then one should choose accounts. If, on the other hand, it is a study not of individual phenomena but of those which recur, then one must choose official price lists. It is therefore quite logical that the great proponent of the use of account books, Henri Hauser, at the same time criticizes averages, however authoritative. ‘In the days before the spread of industrial civilization’ he writes, ‘economic life is dominated by the casualness of place or time. Man does not live by averages; he lives by real bread, sold for a given price at a given weight, at a given moment’.¹¹⁴

This is why the history of everyday life operates with different facts than economic history, their objects of cognition are different, they need different data for their data, and they must rely on different types of sources. These historiographies also rely on a different conception of historical time.

2 On the way theoretical subjects exist in history

In his discourse, Pomian shifts from the mode of referring, that is, describing how successive cognising cultures understood and wrote history (the historical approach, proper for the history of historiography), to the mode proper for the theory of history, that is, reflecting on its very subject matter. The distinction between the two modes is particularly important from the perspective of my metahistorical reflections. For example, in the mode of the theory of history, Krzysztof Pomian considers three types of objects of historical research/cognition, namely:

- 1 perceivable objects,
- 2 reconstructible objects,
- 3 theoretical objects.

Perceivable objects (which he consistently calls **historical events**) can be studied/cognised by means of perception – direct cognition – they are *visible* in a literal sense. By a historian or witness to an event – a direct observer who reports: (1) what he sees and experiences and/or (2) what he remembers. The issue of the witness's/historian's distance in time from the event is cognitively and methodologically important because *cognising culture* is then confronted either with data observable in the present time or with the *culture of remembrance*.

Reconstructible objects (called **historical facts** by Pomian) require indirect, conceptual cognition (we get to know them through a source/text/language). Their epistemological status is based on research, not observation, and they are always **cognitive constructs of the historian**.

Finally, there are *theoretical objects* with a status distinct from that accorded to *historical events* and *historical facts*, but permissible under the ontological assumptions of certain *cognising cultures*. These are the subjects of much recent history of science, reflecting on how the social practice of scientific inquiry has developed over the past two centuries.

This history – Pomian writes – is very much a history of discovering-finding objects that, while different for each discipline, are all precisely theoretical objects. It means that, first of all, they are not given as such either in the perceptible behaviours of people or in their behaviours reconstructable from sources, which may be documents and monuments, artefacts of all kinds, from masterpieces of art to the most ordinary tools, audio or audio-visual recordings of rituals, dances, worlds, celebrations, results of surveys, reports of visits among more or less distant peoples, records of myths, tales, stories, legends and religious, literary, philosophical, scientific texts, etc. Without being given in the sense that they are in no way seen, perceived or observed, and that, moreover, in order to form an idea about them, it is not enough simply to understand the language of informants or the language of sources, theoretical objects are nevertheless considered to exist or to be real. Although there will always be specialists – especially philosophers – who claim that they are merely fictional entities produced in order to be able to impose some order on the chaos of facts, all indications are that **in research practice they are ascribed reality at least as much as historical objects**. The attribution of reality or existence – the two words are synonymous here – to theoretical objects is justified by the conviction that certain reproducible and therefore codifiable procedures make it possible to prove them, just as one proves the existence of a mathematical object, but in a less rigorous way and adapted to the nature of the data, the corpus of which must first be subjected to a critique to ascertain its authenticity and to an analysis to identify its relevant and permanent features.

The conviction that it is possible to prove the reality of objects which, by definition, cannot and could never be seen or observed, and which in this respect are fundamentally different from reconstructible objects that, it is

claimed, can be seen or observed under certain circumstances, marks a break with a tradition that had long prevailed not only in the human and social sciences but also in the natural sciences. Ever since Kant criticized any conceivable proof of the existence of God, it has been assumed that existence is not proven; in order to be able to legitimately claim that an object exists, it must first be affirmed. The only exception to this rule was mathematical objects, whose reality is in every case based on proof; Kant accorded them a privileged status and offered an explanation, but many philosophers questioned this privilege and treated them as fictitious products of the human mind. This view became almost universal after the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries, which seemed to eventually undermine the very foundations of Kant's doctrine.¹¹⁵

[emphasis – J.P.]

In the social sciences and humanities, these new *theoretical objects*, whose discovery was brought about by the *cognising cultures of the 20th century*, were customarily/most often given the term “structure(s)” when presented.¹¹⁶ Pomian defines *structure* as

a set of rational and interdependent relations whose reality is proven and whose description is given by a theory (which constitute, in other words, an evidential object), and such that their realization is some visible, reconstructible or observable object, whose stability and comprehensibility they condition.¹¹⁷

Structures function within individual social systems/social practices, interacting with each other. In certain situations, this interaction may take the form of structural coupling, resulting in changes (disruptions or developments) within one of the coupled systems due to actions taken within the other social practice. Pomian will be particularly interested in those structural couplings which are responsible for/ensure communication between systems. Here, the role of language (social linguistic communication) is crucial. From the perspective of cognising culture, these communicative structural couplings are of particular interest because it is here that the negotiation of meaning takes place. Studying what Bruno Latour called the process of translation, and what Krzysztof Pomian calls the semiphornication of culture, is a challenge in itself. Both assume that these semiotic structures are situated between two systems and that communication is the ability to translate the categories of one system into the language (and system of meanings) of the other.

The “discovery” of structures also had the consequence that in the 20th century humanities and social sciences split into theory and history of a given field (the theory of the very object of research and its history/changes over time). Henceforth, the object of research/cognition was approached by the *cognising culture*, not only from the historical point of view (as the history of language, economy, literature, etc.) but also from the theoretical perspective, striving to

identify the rules governing the activities undertaken within the framework of particular practices (linguistic, economic, literary communication, etc.). Here is the Professor's statement exposing this idea:

The most important change among those affecting the humanities and social sciences in the twentieth century has been the bifurcation of each of them – barring a few rare cases – into theory and history, the emergence of explicitly formulated theories dealing indirectly with objects that were previously considered only from a historical point of view. This is true of language, economics, kinship systems, mythology, or literature, to cite only cases in which the theoretical approach can show itself to be unquestionably successful.¹¹⁸

The professor then illustrates this thesis of the bifurcation of science with an erudite argument on the emergence of theoretical linguistics from the historical linguistics practised so far, recognising this model as paradigmatic also in relation to what we are dealing with, for example, in modern biology:

Interestingly, the humanities and social sciences seem to have overtaken biology in this regard, where theory has only recently begun to gain some autonomy over experimental work, although the first attempts in this direction were made more than half a century ago. The constitution of theoretical biology as a full-fledged discipline, comparable to theoretical physics, is not yet complete, and its very possibility is still being challenged. Biologists cope with this shortcoming in a variety of ways, not least by borrowing the models they need from outside, including linguistics and anthropology. The history of these sciences in the 20th century thus takes on the value of a model.¹¹⁹

In addition to the discovery of structures, the second revolutionary change within 20th-century historiographic cognising culture was the large-scale introduction of the model method:

But even when they posed the problem of the relation between the discontinuous and the continuous, historians, like philosophers, formulated and solved it in a literary manner, so to speak. And it could not be otherwise so long as the two elements whose relations constituted the problem were conceived as immersed each in its own substrate. In this respect, history was no different from other disciplines, especially biology. The learning to abstract, to disregard the substrate while examining the forms that take root in it, has taken place over the past four decades in parallel with the realization of the essential role of modeling in all scientific research. For modeling is nothing other than the transfer of a form (or only its relevant features) to a substrate other than that which was its initial substrate; it is the abstraction from the substrate that is realized in practice. We shall yet have occasion to

speak of the general theory of models formulated by Rene Thom. It will suffice to note here that Thom's theory, precisely because it abstracts forms from their substratum and creates their geometrical representation, makes intelligible under certain conditions the link between the continuous changes of causes and the discontinuous characteristics of effects. In doing so, it rehabilitates event-discontinuities, which become once again a legitimate object of study insofar as they can be treated as undergoing continuous evolution. It is to be hoped that Thom's theory will make modeling in history more rigorous and extend it to areas currently lying fallow, especially on political history.¹²⁰

If this is the case, it will be possible to rehabilitate event-based history, although it will be a different story, because for this new historiographic cognising culture, the historical event means as much as *discontinuity in the model*¹²¹. Needless to say, **a historical event understood in this way is a historian's construct**. Thus, in our analysis, we have reached the key issue of Krzysztof Pomian's epistemology of history, and at the same time the third, perhaps the most important, idea that the 20th century brought to our understanding of the historicity of being. To the discovery of morphogenesis.

3 *Thinking about periodisation as a key to discovering morphogenesis*

I would now like to focus on this fragment of *Porządek czasu*, in which Krzysztof Pomian considers the problem of *periodisation in history*, because I consider it extremely important in the context of understanding his epistemology of history. Again, we will begin with an extensive quotation in order to analyse the theses put forward here and to extract the assumptions behind them. Pomian writes:

The same principle governs the establishment of any periodization, the only difference being that instead of material objects we are dealing in history with texts which – directly or indirectly – provide information about facts, and these take on meaning as soon as they are juxtaposed with some continuous, invisible or reconstructible reality but which always remains inaccessible to sight, as soon as they are recognized as its discontinuous manifestations. **The differences between facts** – and between texts – **then correspond to real discontinuities**, caesuras separating epochs. All periodization thus belongs to a family of operations that establish connections between the visible and the invisible, what is inaccessible to sight: the reconstructible, the observable, or – if one prefers – between the actual and the conceptual. Within this family, however, it occupies a particular position that is related to the status it accords to time: to construct a periodization **is to recognize that the succession of facts or objects is not a mere appearance, that it refers to something real**; it is assumed then, that realities inaccessible to sight are continuously, directly, separated by zones of discontinuity that nevertheless preserve something that lasts, and that they

are arranged in the order of succession; in a word only: they are inscribed in time and endowed with every kind of temporal consistency. And **if it is precisely the establishment of a connection between what is visible and what is inaccessible to sight that makes facts possible to think about, then the reference to time gives the way of thinking about them a direction which it would otherwise be lacked.**¹²²

[emphasis – J.P.]

As you can see, Pomian assumes that both representations of the past in the form of historical facts and texts (historical discourse) have their kind of references in the ontology (in the past reality). Let's look at his further argument:

Let us take some list of facts that were supposed to follow one another sequentially. It is extendable in both directions; and certain elements may be added to it, or others cut out of it. As long, however, as we assume that we know only this sequence of facts and nothing else, we cannot draw any conclusions from it. Is there any relationship other than a conjunction relationship between two facts that follow in our list immediately one after the other? Even to this – simple after all – question there is no obvious answer. The only possible discourse on our facts is a paratactic discourse: an enumeration that admits of only one conjunction – ‘and’. But when the same facts are subjected to some periodisation, everything changes. It is now possible to grasp their sequence, even a very long one, with a single glance, or – better still – to subordinate its elements, having first grouped them, to a number of concepts, each of which corresponds to a form considered real (in a sense that needs to be specified). The sequence of facts then appears as a visible part of a certain succession of forms, a certain morphogenesis, which must be presented in writing or in some other way and made comprehensible. **Precisely because periodisation seeks to discover behind the sequence of facts a certain morphogenesis,** the discourse that introduces it so often invokes a comparison to the development of an organism. Even when this is not the case, the utterances of the discourse of periodisation are always connected by a syntax that expresses the connection of forms. For it is a discourse that answers many questions, that speaks of the causes of the appearance and disappearance of forms and of their evolution, of coming from one form to another, of the general orientation of processes, of the relations between permanence and change, continuity and discontinuity, etc. Facts, then, can be thought of as included in a certain morphogenesis; it is no longer necessary to burden one's memory with them, because a dynamic has been set in motion in which the analysis of forms leads to conclusions about facts, then confirmed or undermined, and in which the discovery of new facts, often accidental, forces one to modify the notion one has about this or that form, and even about the process of morphogenesis as a whole.¹²³

[emphasis – J.P.]

Let us try to present the reflections contained herein on the mutual relation between an event and a historical fact, an object of cognition and a cognising culture in the form of 12 points/theses:

- 1 Pomian calls *a historical event* something that is (or could be) sensually perceived/recorded by a spectator/observer. In this sense a historical event is “visible” for a contemporary observer – a witness of history happening here and now.
- 2 *A historical fact*, on the other hand, is not directly “visible”. It is a historian’s construction – an effect of indirect cognition (e.g. a historian’s work on a text – a historical source).
- 3 *Event-based history/historiography* occurs when the cognising culture imposes some order of succession on the facts (e.g. by dating them or narratively “telling them one by one”).
- 4 When a cognising culture additionally imputes meaning (semiophoricity) to the culture under study (and/or to itself), in a semiotic metadiscourse in relation to the event discourse, it becomes *an event/semiotic-based historiography*.
- 5 With *event/semiotic-based history*, according to Pomian, we have to deal with when a cognising culture associates events with invisible beings of causal function (i.e. as factors causing/responsible for changes) whose existence and causal power is assumed *a priori*, thus giving history some direction or meaning.
- 6 *Periodisation* is a cognitive procedure *that* belongs to “a family of operations that establish connections between the visible and the invisible, what is inaccessible to sight: the reconstructible, the observable, or – if one prefers – between the actual and the conceptual”.¹²⁴
- 7 The thesis of historical/ontological realism: “[...] to construct a periodization **is to recognise that the succession of facts or objects is not a mere appearance, that it refers to something real**”.¹²⁵ For Pomian, recognising the reality of the historical being is a necessary condition for the meaningfulness/indisputability of experiencing various forms of manifestation of continuity and discontinuity of historicity itself.
- 8 **Facts correspond to real discontinuities** and are not just a creation of the historian’s imagination. Of course, they are historian’s constructs because they correspond to the current level of development of cognising culture – how it “sees” the “invisible”, that is, the emergent dimension of ontological structure, which always has the character of historical and not absolute knowledge, if only for the reason that social reality/history is constantly changing and cognising culture always has to stay “one step” behind this change.
- 9 **What then is assumed about reality itself?**
[I]t is assumed then, that realities inaccessible to sight are continuously, directly, separated by zones of discontinuity that nevertheless preserve something that lasts, and that they are arranged in the order of succession; in a word only: they are inscribed in time and endowed with every kind of temporal consistency.¹²⁶

There is no single reality, Pomian operates with a plural form.

- 10 **Historical scientific discourse** is more than a historical narrative that tells about events and facts. The discourse goes beyond the level of historical story, introduces a research and cognitive perspective, and has its domain. For example, statements of a periodisation discourse are always connected by a syntax that expresses the connection of forms. For it is a discourse that answers many questions, that talks about the causes of the appearance and disappearance of forms and their evolution, about coming from one form to another, about the general orientation of processes, about the relations between permanence and change, continuity and discontinuity, etc.¹²⁷
- 11 History in the role of *cognising culture* means the necessity to break with the *culture of remembrance*. For Krzysztof Pomian, history created in the paradigm of knowledge/research/science is the case when its subject is that which eludes individual perception or memory:

History-narrative is henceforth opposed to history-research, events to facts which are not them. Changes occurring in the arts or crafts, the flourishing of trade, the progress of civilization, the substitution of 'world historical' peoples for another, transformations in the mode of production are presented as facts. But if they are facts, they are certainly not events, for no one has ever seen them and no one could ever see them. This difference in cognitive status between the two categories of facts with which the historian has to deal was realized very late. However, they began to be distinguished and contrasted much earlier, as early as the XVIII century; non-event facts are considered to be more general and more important than events, they are also supposed to be endowed with a higher degree of certainty because they are **stated without reference to individual perception and memory**. They are reconstructed on the basis of documents and monuments, submitted to various procedures which we will not discuss here, **except to emphasize that they are considered reproducible: any historian who competently uses them should in principle obtain the same results as any other, as long as they both work on the same sources**. History-research, for which history-narrative is not real history, leads ultimately to a program of studying repeated economic, demographic, social, and even cultural facts in such a way that statistical techniques can be applied to them; the practice of history then becomes primarily the establishment of curves, and only in a second stage the commenting on them.¹²⁸

[emphasis – J.P.]

Historical research does not end with establishing facts. **It is about discovering what is behind a sequence of facts**, what Pomian calls *morphogenesis*, that is, a succession of forms of manifesting the very historicity of being in the world. **We study facts and we get to know the structures/**

morphogenesis behind them. The relation between research and historical cognition has for Pomian the character of feedback:

Facts can thus be thought of as included in a certain morphogenesis; it is no longer necessary to burden one's memory with them, since a dynamic has been set in motion in which the analysis of forms leads to conclusions about facts, then confirmed or undermined, and in which the discovery of new facts, often accidental, forces one to modify the notion one has of one form or another, and even of the process of morphogenesis as a whole.¹²⁹

The above quotation shows how morphogenesis plays an enormous role in Krzysztof Pomian's thinking about history. The metaphor of sedimentation used in historical narration refers to it, it is its *signifier*. That is why Professor Pomian can be rightly regarded as a precursor of the *Morphogenetic Approach*, which developed in the social sciences at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Its leading representative is considered to be the British sociologist Margaret Archer, who popularised the concept of morphogenetic approach within the paradigm of humanistic sociology. Because of the similarity of her views to Krzysztof Pomian's morphogenetic approach to the historicity of being, it is worth considering it in greater detail.

Archer is interested in the relationship between the structure (the existing system) and the actor (agent). Already in her first book from 1979, *Social Origins of Educational Systems*, she compared two types of contemporary educational systems: (1) centralised, characteristic of France and Russia, with (2) decentralised, as prevails in England or Denmark; she shows their historical becoming as transformations within two morphogenetic cycles. In the first, two systems (centralised and decentralised) controlled by the state emerged from the educational system controlled by the church. In the second cycle, educational innovation resulted from social change, either as a top-down systemic transformation (France) or as an evolutionary change (England), where the driving force appeared to be the actions of local "educational entrepreneurs" who attempted by their example to influence the evolution of government policy in this area. Archer draws a general conclusion: **existing structures condition (but do not determine) the making/creating of history by people in the course of social interaction.** As a result of the collective actions of *homo historicus*, either a reproduction (morphostasis) of the existing structure or its transformation into another structure may occur in the next phase of the morphogenetic cycle. This frame regularity may be regarded as the main thesis of the morphogenetic approach in general. In Margaret Archer's work, there is also another thesis: the issue of the self-consciousness of the agent as the subject of change. As it is known, the British sociologist sees the highest form of action in reflexivity. Reflexivity, both of an individual and a social group, may lead either to submission to situational logics coming from the environment (i.e. the existing system/structure/culture) or to their contestation/resistance and desire for a change of the existing state. In the latter case, it is a matter of questioning the

hegemonic status quo in a given field, which entails the necessity of revising/negating this situational logic itself, and the mental, *cultural elaboration* (in Archer's terminology) by the agent of doing something about its place/role/interest in the current and future structure/system. Therefore, in her subsequent books, *Culture and Agency. The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (1995), *Realistic Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1996), and most importantly *Structure, Agency and Internal Conversation* (2003) and *Making our Way through the World. Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (2007), Archer has addressed the issue of the feedback that occurs between motivation and action, culture and agency, and idea and social change/history. The British sociologist opposes both rational choice theories and Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, proposing instead her own stratification (three-layered: self-identity, personal identity, social identity) ontology of the human subject. Just like contemporary cognitive neuroscientists, Archer believes – following Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Piaget whom she refers to – that the self-identity emerges not from language/culture or socialisation but from the direct interactions of human corporeality (including the brain) with the material world and regards the ability to reflect as the highest form of human action. Therefore, analysing the influence of social structures on the actions of social actors – the agents of history, it is in mental mechanisms, recognising the “environment” in which one needs to act, that Archer sees the way through which knowledge is transformed into action.

And what does the same process look like for Krzysztof Pomian? It can be reconstructed on the basis of his interpretation of history of historiography. In Pomian's opinion, history practised as a philosophy of history, that is, searching for some kind of coordinator of the changeability of the human world ascertained empirically, gives way in the 20th century to a cognising culture that doubts the existence of such a coordinator or removes him from history altogether. Therefore, historicity (changeability) is not the realisation of some pre-written/existing plan, programming of development in a given direction, but is the effect/result of the very process of history being made by people acting here and now, that is in the circumstances found, cognitively recognised – within a given paradigm – as, for example, a structure, system or social arrangement. In another of his books, he adds:

Human beings believe that they are making history, which through feedback influences their behaviour. To be more precise: only some human beings think so, fewer in number, of course, than those who have no conception of it at all – and they have been thinking so for some time, not very long in comparison with the time homo sapiens has been on earth. But this is enough to make history an object of struggle, which is intended to enable one or another to dictate to his or her contemporaries the direction in which they should go. History, therefore, is never just a scientific discipline. It is expected to explain the past in a way that shows, even if not directly, the outlines of the future. And historians have tried, more or less zealously and with varying success, to meet this expectation.¹³⁰

This does not mean, of course, that the problem of morphogenesis ceases to be cognitively relevant. On the contrary, the issue of belief/disbelief in the forces that control history continues to absorb cognising culture. Let us take a closer look at Pomian's argument:

As long as such beliefs were shared, history was implicitly identified with morphogenesis. Since the coordinating instance was assumed to be known, it was a matter of reconstructing the program it was carrying out, and of determining the place of the present in the overall trajectory of the human species; this was the subject of speculation about the global time of history: its topology, its direction, its division into eras, periods, or epochs. The entry of the social sciences into the role of chronosophy went hand in hand with the gradual abandonment of the belief in some coordinating instance of history, and thus the idea of its global time. Henceforth, the historian is not only the only one to coordinate the changes that constitute history, but most often he knows it. He also knows that he is not able to reproduce the program of the work he has described. Not because of his internal limitations. But because the **program of a work that creates itself during its execution has never been written**. Local morphogenesis, however, exists in history or, perhaps, at a subhistorical level; for example, as the utterance of words or as the speech acts by which marriages are contracted. The coordinating instance in such cases has received the old name of human spirit, but in a profoundly renewed sense, and the program is known by the name of structure. Attempts to extend the same approach from the local to the global have so far failed. **And all indications are that between history and morphogenesis the difference is not one of degree but of nature.**

Any coordinating instance functions according to some program. In this sense, time is possible only because there is something that is external to it and that remains invariable – for example, the genetic program in the case of morphogenesis or the laws of physics in the case of the universe. But every program, except perhaps the laws of physics, appears as a linear sequence whose elements are all given in advance. And the coordinating instance transforms such a sequence into a sequence of actions or operations, because, unable to exhaust it all at once, it can only run along its length, just as a head runs along a magnetic tape. In other words, any coordinating instance is finite. Similarly, change is characterized by a finite speed; otherwise it would no longer be change, but instantaneous explosions that nothing could coordinate. A subject for whom everything would be present at once would have no concept of time, since any coordination of change would be alien to him. It would contemplate eternity. But all the entities with which we deal, and which we ourselves are, are finite. Hence time, which – as metaphysics and physics exceptionally agree – is a child of finitude.¹³¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

The basis of morphogenetic analysis here, as we can see, is the assumption of ontological realism. According to it, in the very being, in the very historicity, there exists some emergent structure whose cognitive reflection/representation in cognising/research cultures are heuristic descriptive hypotheses about features/properties of this structure, often treated by itself as “real”. If, however, one can legitimately speak in this sense about the existence of, for example, an immutable genetic code external to living organisms or, perhaps, also to the laws of physics, then in the case of the social world/History – Pomian says – such **invariables**, external to itself, from the nature of this being, that is, its emergent changeability, cannot exist, because allowing for such a possibility would be a contradiction in itself, since then a cognising culture *would contemplate eternity*, not *changeability/History*. That is why Pomian remains sceptical about all forms of theoretical history which operate on the level of general regularities of the historical process:

It is a trite and indisputable fact that human societies change and that their political institutions, economies, techniques, languages, ideas, etc. also change. And yet it has never been possible to develop a theory – not even a general theory, but a theory limited to one field or another – of these changes. The pretensions of those who claimed to have succeeded have always proved illusory, while their “theories” have regularly shown themselves to be merely different incarnations of a philosophy of history. Theoretical history contains even less content than theoretical biology.¹³²

He will expand on this thought by writing elsewhere:

There is no general theory of history and there will not be one. But we do have partial theories that apply to specific fields; these are likely to become more numerous and more insightful than they are today. It is also to be hoped that historians will one day be able to refer to a renewed psychology, which will provide them with a more useful picture of the inner life of people than that offered by psychoanalysis, which will make it possible to understand behaviour that is currently incomprehensible.¹³³

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian also adds that if, however, “[...] **the identification of history with the process of morphogenesis could be justified, which is not at all obvious, then something would change in the perspective of theoretical history** [emphasis – JP]”¹³⁴, which as the author of *W poszukiwaniu modelu historii teoretycznej* [In a Quest for the Model of Theoretical History]¹³⁵ I must/should take note of.

While rejecting morphogenesis on the level of the totality of historical being, Pomian allows for its occurrence on the level of particular social practices, that

is, the morphogenesis in its concrete temporal-spatial version as an *evolution of a phenomenon*. This is what, in his opinion, history practised as a social science is supposed to deal with:

Social science, if practiced consistently, sidelines events – and even facts not eventual but singular – in favour of mere repetition, what goes hand in hand with the rejection of the concepts of theology and philosophy, henceforth useless. Reconstructing in social science means not practicing hermeneutics, since **history is not a book** whose words would be facts, and there is no author whose intentions can be revealed. **Reconstructing the past or, in general, all that can be reconstructed, means first of all selecting the corpus of sources to be used and determining what can be legitimately deduced from them, or rather for what purposes they absolutely cannot be used; hence the importance of criticism.** In a further stage it is paying special attention to everything that is repetitive and finding an adequate way of presenting it. And finally it is an inference, not from facts, but from their representations; for example, drawing conclusions from the qualitative features of the curves which represent the evolution of a phenomenon.¹³⁶

[emphasis – J.P.]

For instance, some of such cognitively tractable trends in the modern world

[...] seem to impose a linear, cumulative, and irreversible character on history. These include demographic growth, the increase in the amount of available energy per capita, and the increase in the amount of information stored in collective memory in the form of objects that carry images and texts.¹³⁷

I consider this statement to be an element of the Professor's own chronosophy, so introduced to scientific discourse in the further part of this argument:

Taken together, these three tendencies seem to impose a linear, cumulative, and irreversible character on the time of history, as if the good old idea of progress were, on the whole, not too bad. And yet this is not the case at all. The idea of progress tended to conceive of history as the realization of certain values, since it assumed that humanity acquired more and more wisdom, knowledge, happiness, and virtue over time. And yet, even if demographic, energetic, and informational growth were sufficient to define history as linear, cumulative, and irreversible, it would not follow that these values are being realized more and more, or that they are being realized less and less. The kind of time of history that professional historians characterize in their practice today is neutralized with respect to values. The direction of the time of history is, thus, determined not by recalling some ideal state, situated outside it or at its goal, and towards which it should strive, if

not to achieve it, then at least to come asymptotically close to it. It is established on the basis of the evolution of certain indicators, measurable quantities, such as population, cultivated area, agricultural or industrial production, degree of urbanization, degree of literacy, etc. Determined by the historian himself for the pre-statistical epoch or by the competent institutions for later periods, the numerical value of one or another indicator in successive years provides a sequence of numbers which makes it possible to speak with knowledge of things about the temporal orientation of the process under study. If the elements of this sequence are constant, then time stands still. If repetitions are observed in it, then it is cyclical. If the sequence is uniformly increasing or decreasing, then time is linear and cumulative or linear and subtractive. In a word, the direction of time is no longer determined a priori by some chronosophy, adopted consciously or tacitly. The direction is not assumed. The direction is stated.¹³⁸

Especially this last statement is extremely important for Krzysztof Pomian's theory of history. Recognition of the direction of change occurs as a result of historical research and not as a consequence of top-down assumptions. If we descend in our analysis to the level of particular social practices, then the morphogenetic approach may consist, as is the case, for example, in linguistics, in the recognition of historical "grammars" that control social communication in a given language. Here is how Krzysztof Pomian has modelled the essence of this approach on the example of the cognising culture of structuralism/theoretical humanities:

For the first requirement of this program is to regard the object under study not as a series of events connected by some medium, but as a system – a set of interacting elements. **Some elements, unique, unrepeatable, are therefore omitted.** Others, recurring, recursive, make it possible to fulfill the second requirement of the program: to show **that the system contains logical and interdependent relations, that – in other words – it is equipped with a certain structure to which a description is thus formed, which is a theory of the object under study.** Therefore, such an object as appears initially is replaced in the course of this work by two others **that differ from it and from each other in their ontological status:** individual speech [parole] and language [langue] (Saussure), sounds and phonemes (Jakobson, Trubecki), substance and form (Hjelmslev), the kinship system and its elementary structures (Levi-Strauss), realization [performance] and competence (Chomsky), empirical morphologies and hidden dynamisms (Thom) are examples of this.¹³⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian adds also, that:

All the **first members of these pairs, let us call them 'realizations', are accessible to sensory experience, reconstruction or observation;**

this is their reality. The relations between realizations and structures are changeable, but it is always the latter that gives stability and comprehensibility to the former.¹⁴⁰

[emphasis – J.P.]

How do you reach them cognitively? By posing relevant questions.

Only individuals ask questions. But not individuals invent them. For before they are openly posed they already exist in a latent state in the variety of institutions and practices in which one discovers them, realizing the puzzling, problematic nature of things generally taken for granted; it is well known that this art of posing relevant questions is the most difficult of all. Thus, in any given era, a temporal architecture potentially contains questions about time, for the interconnectedness of the elements of that architecture, however perfect they may be, is never perfect, always posing problems for practitioners and thinkers.¹⁴¹

This is another very inspiring thought: *art of posing relevant questions is the most difficult of all.* What does it mean, however, that *only individuals ask questions, but they do not invent them?* I suppose what Pomian wants to tell us here is that before such a question is *openly posed*, its counterpart is in a *latent state in the social practice or institution of social life itself.* Cognising cultures, clashing with each other, make their *discoveries* in the sense in which one can speak here of a socially agreed *consensus* as to the nature of the object of cognition. One such discovery for historical science is/can be, for example, the conviction shared by *cognising cultures* (paradigms of historical research) that historiographic discourse is not fictional. But before we get to that, it is time to face the basic problem once again: **what exists for Pomian as a historian brought up in the tradition of reism?**

Well, my thesis is that **the author of *Order of Time*, in his view on the historicity of being, represents a position close/identical to the authors associated with the so-called critical realism,** for whom the object of scientific knowledge is not empirically observable phenomena but that which generates these phenomena and exists independently of knowledge about them.¹⁴² One of them, Roy Bhaskar, distinguishes, for example, three overlapping domains of reality: *real, actual,* and *empirical*¹⁴³, which is very similar to Pomian's stratification of historicity: events, facts, and theoretical objects. Likewise, also for the author of *Order of Time*, the criterion of "reality" of the researched phenomena is not empirical (observational) but causal: there is some connection (morphogenesis) which is the foundation/support for reality. That is why we can legitimately say, using terminology from the philosophy of science, that the domain of reality contains the domains of facticity and empiricity, as well as structures, forces, and causal mechanisms which we cannot observe empirically (in Pomian's work they have the status of *theoretical objects*) but whose existence we know about through the observed effects of

their manifestation. Very clearly the presence of these assumptions governing Krzysztof Pomian's epistemology of history becomes – *nomen omen* – “visible” when the Professor moves to the analysis of dependencies on the level of sedimentation or on the level of semiophors and cultural grammars related to them.

4 Pomian on the presence and role of fiction in historiographical discourse: between ontological realism and critical realism

Reflecting on the presence of fictional beings in historiographical discourse, Krzysztof Pomian begins with this remark/observation:

The demands which the public makes on history, and which historians have assimilated, i.e. to provide knowledge, to cause understanding, to stimulate feelings, lead historians to introduce fictional objects into their works and to speak of them as if they were real. Superimposed on this are certain effects of the narrative itself. Each historical work gives its subject its individuality: it marks a beginning and an end for it, draws boundaries around it, removes everything that does not connect with it. It marks the transitions between beginning and end and therefore creates appearance of continuity in a matter that is always incurably flawed. As soon as one goes beyond describing the sources themselves, the methods of reconstruction used and the deliberate and implicit designations, when, in other words, one does not stop at the ascetic prose of catalogues, inventories, yearbooks, dictionaries, chronologies or excavation reports – then certain elements of fiction are introduced simply because the requirements of narrative are observed. Historians were unaware of all this for a very long time. Only the criticism to which they have been subjected for a century has made them realise the necessity of tirelessly tracking down the fictions hidden in history and the impossibility of removing them completely and once and for all.¹⁴⁴

A cognising culture subjecting the products of social historiographical practice to critical reflection must suspend their cognitive legitimacy in order to consider/verify/check the markers of their historicity on a meta-level and separate fiction from fact-based narrative:

All marks of historicity must open up a path for the reader which, if he so desires, will lead him from the historical work he is reading to the ultimate proof of the claims which that work contains: that is, to texts, images or objects external to that work because they are held in libraries, archives, museums, laboratories or archaeological sites. **In other words, the hallmarks of historicity should refer to books that are actually on the shelves of libraries and quote passages from them that are actually on the pages indicated, quote references that actually correspond**

to archival collections, describe landscapes that can be seen in a given place, exhibits that can be seen in a given museum, and so on. One can naturally, and it happens to everyone, make a mistake in the footnotes, quote from memory, change the order of references. **But if an author describes events or people and is the only one to have heard of, if systematically refers to publications that cannot be found, to documents that do not exist in any archives, to artefacts that are not stored in any museum – then is outside the domain of history.** It enters the realm of fiction and must be judged according to criteria appropriate to this field.¹⁴⁵

[emphasis – J.P.]

History must also be opposed to fabulation.¹⁴⁶ This is a radical opposition to what Hayden White wrote around the same time, launching his crusade against history practised as science.¹⁴⁷ In his view the term ‘history’ is not a *reference* to a material thing, but is the *signifier* [signified] of a concept. As its signifier [signified], ‘history’ can have either a ‘past’ or a ‘temporal process’, but these too are concepts, not things, and neither of them has a material existence. They can be known through ‘traces’ or material entities that indicate not so much what the things that produced them were, but that ‘certain things’ happened in a certain place or were done in a certain place. However, ‘what happened’ or ‘what was done’ will remain a mystery, the nature of which is presumed, and its discovery – condemned to inference or premonition – must remain a mere possibility and therefore a fiction. “... The belief that relations between things (not concepts) are logically consistent and *reflect* material reality and relations between objects is too idealistic in a metaphysical way to be trusted in the modern age”.¹⁴⁸

Krzysztof Pomian’s epistemology of history is a reversal/rejection of Hayden White’s theses. For him, the fundamental issue is not the problem of historical truth as the correspondence of judgements uttered by a historian with (past) reality, but historiographical truth as the distinction between fact and fiction. It is precisely **respecting the assumption of the non-fictionality of historical narrative**, that – in his view – is supposed to be what distinguishes historiographical narrative about the past from historical literary/artistic narrative. Of course, Pomian is aware that the status of history as a scientific discipline, to which professional historians have been very attached since at least the 19th century, is constantly challenged within the reflection on historiography. He wrote, after all:

One of the strangest, most problematic and most contested qualities of history is precisely the status of a scientific discipline granted to it in modern times. And with it – the claim of professional historians to practise it not as a literary genre but as a field of knowledge, to do without the aid of memory, to make the past the object of knowledge, to be able to reconstruct what happened in times or places where they themselves were not and could not have been present, or even what no one was aware of before, and,

moreover, to have arguments for considering statements about it as statements and not as inventions. An exorbitant claim, contradictory to our everyday relations with the past established either by the memories we ourselves have retained or by the accounts passed on to us by the memories of others. **History is not self-evident.** It is not unlike other scientific disciplines in this respect, one of which maintains that two parallel lines can meet at infinity, another tries to convince us that what we see with certainty as a chair is in fact a cloud of atoms, and yet another ultimately reduces us to molecules. Unlike history, however, these disciplines can invoke their applications to obtain if not a considered acceptance of their picture of the world and of ourselves, even though it defies common sense, then at least a tacit acceptance of that picture in the name of its supposedly beneficial effects. History is not given this. **It is accused time after time of being the opposite of what it claims to be: not cognition but rhetoric.**¹⁴⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

For Pomian, however, the essence of historiography boils down precisely to the fact that it is a *cognising culture* that constantly has to face the challenge of the historicity of being, including itself. From this perspective, the issue of the *non-fictionality of historical discourse* is of fundamental importance.

[...] fictions are not just inert interjections that history could dispense with without losing anything. They play a heuristic role: extrapolations or imaginative variations of cognitive data raise new questions, lead to the questioning of findings considered indisputable, arouse disputes that may prove fruitful. They therefore happen to trigger the investigation of new facts and are the source of new statements – valid, because obtained by reproducible methods, although genetically dependent on fiction. The role of fiction is even greater when attempting to make history comprehensible. Attempts to uncover by the means inherent in history the creations otherwise considered real by philosophies, ideologies or social sciences – one after another and one in spite of the other – have led to it being populated with fictions, from the Spirit to the episteme. **Before they were unmasked and discredited, these creations considered as real beings satisfied the need for a history that would be more than a collection of facts. A history that one knows where it is going. Or, more modestly, about which one is able to say why it had such and not such a course. Or, even more modestly, a history consisting of facts of which one understands the distinguishing features.** These different explanations also had a heuristic role: they inspired new questionnaires, highlighted overlooked areas and periods and led to the formulation of hypotheses, the testing of which moved knowledge forward. It is no different today. For these reasons, which, as we have seen, are not the only ones, history cannot do without fiction. **But it cannot do without it, just as the erection**

of a building cannot do without scaffolding being dismantled when the work is finished and the building stable for the long term thanks to its own foundations. The only difference is that in history – a building always unfinished – the old scaffolding is taken down only to have new scaffolding erected without delay.¹⁵⁰

[emphasis – J.P.]

It is worth pausing at/reflecting on this concluding passage of the quote cited above for at least a moment. What a wonderful pictorial metaphor it contains: successive *cognising cultures* erect their *cognitive scaffolding* on which the “human mind” as a social being climbs, dismantling/deconstructing the previous ones, in order to perceive and understand the world in which it is given to live.

Let us note that the issue of fictionality is, for Pomian, something different and separate from the issue of the veracity of historical narrative. Fictional beings are beings that do not exist in reality. Fictionality **is a strictly ontological question and not an epistemological one**, like truth. It is a question of what exists in history, of the designations of concepts that appear in historical narrative. Let us look at the way Pomian approaches the analysis of this issue:

The visible and experiential dimensions of the past are, it seems to us, the only ones that cannot be reconstructed without the help of fiction. Everywhere else, reconstruction can do without it. However, it does not at all follow that the very fabric of historical narratives is free of other fictional additions. The deep-rooted conviction that human individuals are not the demiurges of history and that other impersonal powers or forces chart its course or at least contribute to shaping it has always inspired research aimed at identifying them, penetrating their intentions or modes of action and thus making the past comprehensible and the future – predictable. However, these superhuman historical factors were for a very long time considered to be doubly external to history: they were believed to reside in the hereafter or in nature, and the knowledge they were the subject of was drawn initially from theocentric theology or from that cosmocentric theology which is astrology, and later also from mechanics, if not combined in very different proportions and combinations.¹⁵¹

Historicity of the being in the passage quoted above, as well as in the subsequent quotations below, Pomian looks at the historically recorded *cognising cultures* from the level of meta-. He shows that from their perspective, the human was surrounded by worlds/beings external to it, which were assumed to be fictional by no means. In the history of social cognition, the replacement of one cognising culture by another meant a change/expansion of the permissible ontology:

Since the second half of the eighteenth century, as a consequence, among other things, of the reorientation of time towards the future, these powers or forces, the causers of facts and therefore the principles of their ultimate

explanation, have been regarded as immanent to history. Henceforth, in order for historians to recognise them as real, it is necessary to prove that they are such within history itself by the means inherent in it. This means that they have to be reconstructed, as one reconstructs the facts of the past, using the **only procedure that seems to make this possible – the uncovering of hidden content.**¹⁵² Adapted to his new role, he has to **recognise in the sources the immaterial traces of the superhuman agents of history, describe them as if they were other facts reconstructed in the same way and, if possible, understand them.**

Many varieties of uncovering hidden content have been developed for this purpose. None of these has been considered unanimously legitimate by historians' opinion. [...] At one time they were considered legitimate; today, in most cases, this is not the case. This is most obviously the case with those methods that allegedly reconstruct objects in the past that are, by definition, invisible, making it necessary to prove their existence, as one proves the existence of God. This is so with the spirit of the age, the human mind or culture or civilisation in the sense that all these terms were given in the 19th century. If the present reality of their corresponding objects cannot be ascertained by reproducible procedures – unless one makes philosophical assumptions equivalent to introducing it by stealth beforehand – one applies this a fortiori to their past reality, which therefore, contrary to appearances, is not reconstructed but merely postulated. All such invisible entities and others like them are thus fictions whose action in history is a creation of our imagination.¹⁵³

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian speaks here from the position of pure *reism* – let us remember that one of his philosophical masters was Tadeusz Kotarbiński, the lectures of which he attended. What existed for Kotarbiński were only temporal-spatial beings. The rest was brought about by *cognising culture*.¹⁵⁴ It is to semantic mistakes that we “owe” a common belief that there is something “extra” beyond things/objects. For a philosopher, an advocate of reism, these are “substitute sentences”, seemingly suggesting that they have any real designates while in fact they refer to *fictional/abstract beings*, and those expressing them intentionally wanted to speak using mental shortcuts or speak metaphorically of a given object, which has its temporal-spatial parameters.¹⁵⁵ Let us see how Krzysztof Pomian makes use of this inspiration:

Objects such as nations, classes or other groups only **apparently** [emphasis – JP] do not seem to be subject to such criticism. Morphological features and the way people dress accentuate gender identity just like skin colour accentuates race. A hundred years ago one could easily distinguish between a blue collar worker and a white collar worker, or these two from a peasant; one could see a spectrum of social classes. Today such a division is not so conspicuous but is rather done in line with economic statistics. Once visible in their intrinsic way of using space, building, dressing, or fighting,

today's nations are different mostly with regards to the prolific texts emblazoned along the roads and in cities, and with regards to a particular character of monuments, and excessively in terms of the level of production and per capita income, revealed by statistics. In other words, one can provide reproducible procedures for all the above mentioned groups, perhaps except for generations, allowing to determine their present reality.¹⁵⁶

Let us note that literal visibility (i.e. based on the sense of sight) was replaced by another cognising culture with *observable indicators*, which indirectly “speak of that which is invisible”. We remain here within the area of scientific cognising cultures. However, a question arises as to when a scientific discourse in history becomes a fictional discourse.

As long as we try to reconstruct the past reality of groups determined in such a way, we deal with real objects and remain within the area of cognition. **By treating these groups as major, or even sole makers of history, and using their conflict as an explanation of facts, we leave this area and embark on the road of imagination.** For classes, the struggle of which has set universal history in motion, are not, despite the same name, those which they used to be. **They are now ascribed consciousness which unities them and makes them collective individuals. They are assigned a role or a mission. This entails being replaced by invisible beings or qualities.** Similar to racist doctrines, race does not boil down to groups of human beings which share a couple of visible inborn features. These are groups endowed with charitable qualities or vices, which grant them a place among heroes or villains. **Biological or social groups as carriers of invisible beings or values are fiction.** It is precisely because of that that they are promoted to the rank of makers or co-makers of history.¹⁵⁷

[emphasis – J.P.]

It is an incredibly important and incisive thought. The process of hypostasis of beings can directly lead to granting them the power to make history. However, this makes us leave the area of science and maintains the false belief that people do not make history (*res gestae*) but are merely subject to its inevitable rules¹⁵⁸. We are not subjects in the process of social history-making but solely the audience in a spectacle “programmed” by some external force, which cannot be affected by us. The ontological reism of Krzysztof Pomian's *cognising culture* is substantial in the case of the abovementioned approach. However, he is aware of a possibility of an epistemological mistake of equalling statements on reality with statements on our/someone's knowledge of reality. Still, Pomian is inclined to accept the assumptions of *fallibilism* (as proposed by Cruickshank¹⁵⁹), according to which social scientific practice (historiography) develops through formulating critically reviewed statements on historical reality. This helps him stay within the area of the critical-realistic program.

Still, what happens with objects such as *structures, paradigms, episteme, or mirror neurons*, which have become objects of study for 20th-century social and humanistic sciences? Pomian claims that some of them enjoy the status of well-known *theoretical objects*, while the status of other objects, subject to an intersubjective check, turns out to be close to fiction since the proof of their existence is based on:

- 1 statistical inference on the basis of poverty of data,
- 2 evident non-representativeness of data or,
- 3 inability to repeat the study (a lack of its intersubjective controllability).¹⁶⁰

If people, whose good will and intelligence we cannot doubt, regard unconvincing arguments as irrefutable, it is logical to infer that they blindly accept the presumptions leading to such conclusions. **However, doubts appear when we shift from the statement that certain people unwittingly adopted certain presumptions to acknowledging the reality of episteme or the zeitgeist of a given epoch.** To validate such a shift, we would need to be equipped with a whole list of presumptions lying at the foundation of inferences and classifications regarded as acceptable in a given epoch. Usually, we are equipped with just a few. Such a limited sample of a dubious representative value does not allow us to formulate conclusions of the epoch, which are supposed to accentuate its deep unity. **The validity of particular arguments does not extend on their generalization.** Because objects such as episteme or worldview attribute the ascribed reality to theoretical arguments, which are supposed to justify it irrefutably, their nullification entails the rejection of reality. **It can be concluded that we are dealing here with objects reconstructed with reproducible methods, on the basis of sources yet with fictions mapped onto history by imagination.**¹⁶¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

Krzysztof Pomian's critical realism will become even more visible when we consider **the issue of representation in history**. Pomian reflects upon it in the context of what ethnologists (and cognitive scientists) call *linguistic worldview*, and of the role of language as a medium between the *visible* and *invisible* world. He writes:

[...] two moments have special significance in the passage in time of each phenomenon: the moment of its appearance, when it crosses over from the invisible to the visible, and that of its disappearance, when it moves from the visible to the invisible.¹⁶²

It is only when language appears in the role of the creator of the invisible, the past or the future, that temporal homogeneity of the being is broken, based on perception (perceptual cognition, realised "here and now").

The origins of language, Pomian writes, remain a mystery. Specialists situate its advent at widely differing dates which range from the period of the australopithecines to a period some hundred thousand years ago, or even later. Whatever the case may be, without the medium of language, the notion of assigning to any entity the unique role of representing a second entity which was, and always had been, invisible would be utterly inconceivable.¹⁶³

In philosophy, studying how words refer to objects is labelled as the reference problem, while in the methodology of history it is labelled as representation problem. What does it mean, then, that “A” is a representative of “B”? What it means for Pomian is the following alternative (but not disjunction):

(...) ‘A is a part of B’ or ‘A is close to B’ or ‘A is a product of B’ or ‘A resembles B’. There are unlikely to be other equivalents than these to ‘A represents B’, and in any case, the objects which were discussed during the descriptions and analyses of collections each have at least one of these four types of relationships with elements of the invisible world. It should be noted that ‘A represents B’ is only a convenient form of shorthand, and that it would be more accurate to say ‘A represents B according to C/in C’s eyes’ or something similar, as **the exact representative role always depends on the individual observer.**¹⁶⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

Such an exposition of the necessary relativity on the part of the observer, that is, *cognising culture*, is the distinctive feature of Pomian’s historical epistemology. *Cognising culture* is for him a form of social (group) practice, for he asks at one point: “[...] which conditions are required in order that **a group** accepts that A represents B, given that B is invisible [emphasis – J.P.]?”¹⁶⁵ We are not dealing here with an individual’s act of cognition but cognition on the part of a community, which collectively “guarantees” adequate reference. That is the essence of the paradigmatic character of particular *communities of experts*, imposing their *visions of the world and humans* (a category proposed by Jerzy Topolski) to the members of their community. However, *representation* requires more than *consensus* on the part of a community. Pomian points out that it requires to go BEYOND language:

The presence of language alone cannot, however, explain the way in which objects and phenomena in general on the one hand and elements of the invisible world on the other come to represent each other. Relationships of this kind can only be formed and become long-lasting if some sort of permanent force drives mankind to interest itself in phenomena which are not necessarily vitally important to it and compels it, to return to our particular case, to amass, care for or even produce objects representing the invisible. A clue to the exact nature of this force has already been given. We have seen how the use of language inevitably causes the visible and the invisible to be set in opposition to each other, **language functioning as a link**

which creates one of the two terms it both places in opposition and unites. The speaker himself is completely unaware of this operation, and only perceives its result, namely the cleavage of the universe into two domains, the first of which is only accessible via speech, the second above all via sight. If the visible were to be subordinated to the invisible in every aspect, any element of the visible, which appeared to be linked to the invisible through participation, proximity, descent or similarity, would automatically be favoured more than those which seemed bereft of such a link. **The belief that the visible is, in some way, subordinated to the invisible, seems to be a constant and well-documented feature of all mythologies, religions and philosophies, as well as of science.** It would, in fact, be surprising if this were not the case, as the invisible is, by definition, that which cannot be reached and cannot be mastered in the way the visible normally is. What is more, the most banal of experiences leads one to attribute a certain power of fertility to the invisible: it is the source of all phenomena, as well as their ultimate destination.¹⁶⁶

[emphasis – J.P.]

It turns out that it is in history where Pomian finds a *sine qua non* of such a situation, that is, from the perspective of a given *cognising culture* “A” represents “B”, is the establishment of the “superior”–“inferior” relations, which favours the “invisible”. One of its manifestations, of a fundamental significance for culture, is *semiophoricity*, where the primary superiority based on *usefulness* becomes displaced and replaced by *meaningfulness*. Therefore, Krzysztof Pomian’s *historical epistemology* meets/becomes his *historical anthropology*.

V Practising history: a distinction between *useful* and *meaningful* as the foundation of historical anthropology

The sources of the notion of semiophors as proposed by Krzysztof Pomian could be found in de Saussure’s thought:

Recommending a semiological approach in the study of language and in the study of culture, even though cautiously, Saussure gives an ontological superiority to a sign. The sign relation is dyadic, consisting of a form of the sign (signifiant) and its meaning (signifié), the latter constituting the sign, ‘a whole in itself’, by means of the relation holding between them, according to the phrase that Saussure applies to language. The relation cannot be broken without any damage to the sign in order to compartmentalize its components. Signifiant forms a phenomenal component of the sign and signifié is a conceptual component: which leads to a conclusion that the sign, an integral relation between the components, is not a phenomenon or an object in itself. And consequently, that any division of conceivable objects into these two categories is not exhaustive.¹⁶⁷

Having pondered on de Saussure's thoughts, Pomian, in *Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, presents his pioneering view of the world of semiophors, a semiotic link between the visible and the invisible.

In his voluminous work, Krzysztof Pomian emerges not only as a historian of collections and an expert in the history of art, which is usually underscored while discussing his outstanding work, but he also cultivates and develops **the theory of collecting and collections as a social practice** (*the theory of the object of cognition*, as we would call it in the nomenclature of methodology of history), which is not explicated well enough in those discussions. Hence, as a historian, he fits the trends of 20th-century science, which, as he describes himself, apart from pondering on the historicity of its disciplines, acknowledges a need to identify them theoretically. Pomian's theoretical pondering on *objects bearing meaning*, that is, semiophors, and social practices relating to collecting semiophors, became the foundation/inspiration for a paradigm of historical anthropology, and his way of understanding and analysing artefacts of culture rests upon a distinction between the *useful* and *significant*. He is concentrated on "semiophors", or objects bearing meaning, on their production, their circulation and their 'consumption', which most generally takes the form of mere viewing and does not, as such, involve any physical destruction".¹⁶⁸ That is how Krzysztof Pomian set the horizon of expectations for cognising culture in his area of expertise.

It should be pointed out that *semiophor* can be an object, a human being, or any action *bearing meaning* for a given community. Humanity has been engaged in practices of collecting semiophors for ages, which is neatly summed up by Pomian claiming that a collection of semiophors is an institution "coextensive with man both in terms of space and time".¹⁶⁹ Its *functional rationale* of being (in the understanding of Jerzy Kmita¹⁷⁰) is "an attempt to create a link between the visible and the invisible".¹⁷¹ What is important, a collection is defined as "set of objects ... put on display"¹⁷², therefore visibility is its constitutive element. As can be observed on the basis of the abovementioned analyses, the *visible* and the *invisible* are two categories which are extremely important in Krzysztof Pomian's historical epistemology. A distinction between these two "**constitutes first and foremost the cleavage between that of which we speak and that which we see, between the universe of discourse and the world of visual perception**", Pomian states¹⁷³ since the invisible is a product of language.

[...] in the sense that it is language which allows individuals to communicate their separate fantasies to each other, turning into a social event their innermost convictions that they have been in contact with something concealed from the human eye. In addition, simply by shuffling words around, utterances can sometimes be formed which, though understandable, nevertheless designate something that nobody has ever glimpsed. Most important of all, talk of the dead as though they were living, of past events as though they were present, of the very distant as though it were nearby and of the

hidden as though it were visible all becomes possible, or rather inescapable, as language seems to induce this in a most natural and spontaneous way. Because of the need to safeguard the passage of linguistic communication from one generation to the next, the old transmit all their knowledge to the young, and this includes a whole set of utterances which inform the next generation of things they have not yet and may never witness. In a world alive with fantasies, where deaths and transformations constantly take place, **language constitutes the source of the invisible, since the very way it functions forces the belief upon us that we only see part of that which actually exists.**¹⁷⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

What does the last statement mean? Pomian's *cognising culture* assumes a distinction between an object of study, accessible through observation (primarily through the sense of sight), and an object of cognition, accessible through a historical reconstruction (indirect cognition, through language). Language imposes a belief that the world is not limited to perception; there are other modes of cognition. Pomian refers us to something which goes beyond the horizon of individual experience, arguing that:

Clearly, collections and collectors cannot be studied solely from the standpoint of individual psychology, which uses notions such as 'taste', 'interest' or even 'aesthetic pleasure' to explain everything. **What actually needs to be explained is why the question of taste is only relevant to certain objects and not others, why interest is taken in this but not in that object, and why only certain works give pleasure.** Individual personalities and varying degrees of sensitivity only come into play if the organization of the society **allows** opportunities for expressing individual differences¹⁷⁵. Before assessing this aspect, it is first of all necessary to clarify the way in which the society in question, or the groups which go to make it up, draws the line between the visible and the invisible. Once this has been accomplished, it is possible to establish exactly what that society sees as meaningful, which objects it prizes the most and what type of behaviour these demand from collectors. When this has been accomplished, it is possible to draw up a 'map' indicating the places where the invisible meets the visible and which are inhabited by those who, because of their roles as representatives of the invisible, amass and display semiophors.¹⁷⁶

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian clearly assumes a distinction on the level of social practice of collecting, which determines the repertoire of possible behaviour patterns on an individual level. It is these patterns that are an object of empirical studies (observation) and require an explanation. However, in order to account for the fact that *an individual taste chooses this and not that* (explanandum), one needs to go beyond the

level of the study itself and reach the level of getting to know what governs a given social practice. As Pomian writes: *one needs to show ways by means of which a given society draws a line between the invisible (a real object of cognition) and the visible (an object of study accessible through perception)*. *Explanance* refers to that which can be called **grammar of the invisible**, thus alluding to the understanding of *grammar of culture* introduced to the academic lexicon by Anna Pałubicka.¹⁷⁷

In her introduction to *Grammar of European culture*, where she uses it for the first time, Pałubicka points out that grammar is

[...] a sort of order on the meta level in relation to all possible artefacts, including beliefs shared by members of a given culture. The meta level of the culture, by analogy, is like grammar of a given language in relation to its specific expressions. Each cultural activity, apart from possessing its content, would maintain and cultivate, to a greater or lesser degree, the grammar of its culture.¹⁷⁸

My first thought is that by referring to each set of cultural activities, I will use the term “cultural practice” of a given community, which assumes not only the existence of its content (a collection of artefacts, including shared beliefs) but also the existence of something on a meta-level (by drawing a parallel to the relation between metalanguage and language), and what is labelled as “order” or grammar.

Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out that “Grammar of a given culture is a spontaneous product on the part of subjects participating therein, and is of a contingent character. It is made up of active subjects who maintain it through their participation”¹⁷⁹. It means that, from a historical perspective, grammar is not imposed externally by a given culture but it is created spontaneously rather than designed consciously by the subjects of a community. It should be stated clearly: spontaneity lying at the basis of grammar of culture is of great significance since the fact of its existence does not entail being aware of such grammar. In particular, such awareness is no *sine qua non*, in a logical sense, of an effective participation in culture. Still, each individual participation in culture is a confirmation of the existence of grammar of culture. And it being respected is a prerequisite of an efficient participation in a given culture. It can be assumed then that, from a historical perspective, **each type of social practice is associated with its proper grammar which one needs to respect, even though not necessarily be conscious of, as long as the object of cultural activity carried out within a given community is supposed to be effective**. It is epitomised by social communication achieved by means of language, where the child functioning properly and using their native language does not need to be aware of the grammar used (understood as a collection of rules guiding a particular instance of communication). That is why Pałubicka points towards “two ways of participating in the culture of a given community. It is participation requiring the respect of cultural beliefs and participation relating to a conscious acceptance of beliefs [emphasis – JP]”¹⁸⁰.

It should be noted that the use of *grammar of culture* may have different contexts, for example, grammar can be identified with “rules guiding” a given social practice but also it can denote “cultural patterns” (e.g. page 205). Let us have a closer look at the rules since their constitutive feature is *regularity of their occurrence* within a given cultural practice, **manifesting itself in that they lead to taking the same actions** by subjects forming a given cultural community:

I assume, even though I am aware of the oversimplification here that cultural awareness of a given community is identical with a range of the product of set-theoretic beliefs shared by subjects of a given community. Therefore, I will be interested in the form and content of beliefs constituting this product, respected and accepted by members of a given community. In other words, I will be interested in types of tools that are used by them, as well as in regularities of prevalence and performance of the actions belonging to the same class. Behind all sorts of regularities there are, as can be assumed, shared beliefs, inspiring the same actions to be taken by subjects.¹⁸¹

What is a cultural pattern?

A cultural pattern is a part of a given view of the world, developed by a given cultural community. Its authors and actors are individual subjects and communities. A double role is given to subjects who are both authors and actors of thought patterns.¹⁸²

It is such thought patterns, typical of the European culture, that are the object of study in *Grammar of European culture*. Similar thought patterns, observed in the area of social practice of collecting, were attempted to be captured by Krzysztof Pomian. The convergence of the two authors' approaches is accidental since Pałubicka does not refer to Pomian as most probably she did not have a chance to analyse his works in depth (at least she did not leave a trace of his works in her publications). Pałubicka's tradition stems from the theory of culture as proposed by Jerzy Kmita, yet in my opinion, they have much more in common than one can expect.

For Pomian, a distinction between technological-useful and symbolic-cultural actions (together with their products) is made already in the area of “the visible”. As Pomian writes:

On one side, there were things, objects which were useful in that they could be consumed, could provide a means of subsistence, render raw materials fit for consumption, or even act as protection from the vagaries of the climate. All these objects were handled, all underwent or other side were ranged the semiophors, objects which were of absolutely no use, according to the above definition, but which, being endowed with meaning, represented the invisible. They were put on display instead of being handled, and were not subjected to wear and tear. The production effort therefore now had two very different goals, one situated in the visible, the other in the invisible, the aims being to maximize either usefulness or meaning. Although these two

goals did draw nearer to each other in certain very special circumstances, more often than not they were located at opposite points of the compass.¹⁸³

In the case of products, we may talk about at least three types of situations:

- 1 objects are useful yet not meaningful;
- 2 semiophors is attributed with meaning, of which it is a bearer, offering no usefulness;
- 3 objects, which perform both the function of an object and a semiophor, however not for the same subject, since it is not the subject but the *rules guiding* a given social practice that determine the functional right for an object to perform both roles.

According to Pomian:

An object fulfils its role as an object, transforming that which it is used for, and wearing and tearing itself. A semiophor reveals its meaning once it is subject to a review. This leads to two conclusions; firstly, a semiophor fully becomes a semiophor when it belongs to a collection; secondly, and more importantly, usefulness and meaningfulness are contradictory: the more meaningful an object is, the less useful it becomes, and vice versa. An object is attributed with value when it is protected, maintained or reconstructed. What conditions should be fulfilled by an object so that it could be attributed with value? What we have established so far helps to address this question: **in order for a group or an individual to attribute an object with a value, it is necessary and sufficient to make it useful or meaningful.** Objects which do not fulfil any of these criteria are useless: in fact they are not objects but waste.¹⁸⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

In effect, if an **object is to be attributed value by an individual or group, it needs to be useful or have meaning, nothing more, nothing less.** This is the foundation for Pomian's historical anthropology. A distinction between *useful* and *meaningful* does not apply merely to objects but also to human actions:

[...] which are themselves classified according to the rung they occupy on the ladder stretching up from utilitarian activities to those which uniquely produce meaning. Man himself thus finds he is placed in a hierarchy or in one of a number of hierarchies. At the top there is inevitably a man or semiophor-men who represent the invisible: gods, God, ancestors, society taken as a whole, and so on. At the bottom, on the other hand, are thing-men who have at the most only an indirect link with the invisible, while between the two extremes are those in whom meaning and usefulness are to be found in varying degrees. This hierarchical organization of society is

projected onto space, as the residence of the semiophor-man, be he king, emperor, pope, grand pontiff or president of the republic, is seen as a centre from which one cannot move without also being increasingly distanced from the invisible. It goes without saying that although attention is drawn in these pages to one aspect of social hierarchy no attempt is made to ascribe every other aspect to it, while all the problems associated with the exercise of the monopoly of violence or of economic constraint are deliberately left to one side.¹⁸⁵

The objective of *cognising culture* is to identify *the rules guiding* the course of technological and symbolic activity, undertaken within the area of a given culture, and to indicate the associated *cultural patterns*, determining the patterns of individual behaviour. Let us see how it is approached by Krzysztof Pomian:

Let us consider the case of an individual whose role is to represent the invisible sphere. How does a man allotted the role of representing the invisible carry it out? By abstaining from all utilitarian activities, by distancing himself from those who are forced to carry these out, by surrounding himself with objects which are not things but semiophors and by displaying them. In general, the higher a representative of the invisible is placed in his hierarchy, the greater the number of semiophors he surrounds himself with and the greater their value. In other words, it is the social hierarchy which necessarily leads to the birth of collections, those sets of objects kept out of the economic circuit, afforded special protection and put on display. These sets of objects are, in fact, quite simply manifestations of different centres of social importance where the invisible is transformed into the visible to various and hierarchized degrees. This is true even in so-called primitive societies, where the social hierarchy is reduced to criteria of age and gender; thus the initiated have exclusive right to the *churinga*. This explains why *collections* in extremely hierarchized societies accumulated in the tombs of those who had occupied a place at or near the top, in temples or palaces, during their lifetime.¹⁸⁶

What happens next is the exemplification of this thesis in the form of referring to an extensive comparative material coming from various cultures all around the globe. It is supposed to support the argumentation. Then, Pomian usually proceeds to discuss the level of *grammar of culture*, allowing to draw general remarks on the basis of individual cases. Here is an example of such a procedure:

‘The social hierarchy is inseparable from the hierarchy of values.’ Obviously, a system of this kind can only be maintained if things cannot be exchanged for semiophors, nor semiophors of greater value for those of lesser value. In places where these exchanges are authorized, access to elevated social positions is possible if things, or the currency representing them, are sacrificed

in order to obtain semiophors. **Violent or coercive means in these circumstances can be employed to obtain objects whose possession enables someone to occupy a coveted position.** The greater the sacrifice in terms of usefulness, the higher the position to which one accedes.¹⁸⁷

[emphasis – J.P.]

It is from the level of *grammar of culture* that one can discern that in certain situations **waste is transformed into semiophors.** Here is another instantiation of the thesis:

For many centuries the remains of antiquity had been regarded as rubbish, except for one or two exceptional works which had been held as relics and had, as in the case of ancient cameos, found refuge in the treasure-houses of churches or princes. Formerly, therefore, these remains had been neither meaningful nor useful, and more often than not did not have a place in the daily affairs of man but languished somewhere beneath the earth. Now, however, they were given meaning, as they were seen in relation to the texts which had come down from antiquity, texts to which they were meant to provide the key, and as such they ceased to be relics and mimbilia and became objects of study instead. The vague meaning they possessed because of their origins became more concrete thanks to research where they were compared and contrasted with each other and examined, without exception, with reference to texts dating from the same period.¹⁸⁸

Let us observe that, apart from a specific, historical solution, we received an answer to another major philosophical question concerning sedimentation: **when, and under what conditions, can the past become “alive”, be active in the present?** Pomian’s response is unequivocal: **when the waste becomes a semiophor!** This changes everything. In the analysed example a new class of semiophors emerges, next to the already existing ones, and with time a new social group appears (known since the end of the 15th century as humanists), interested in collecting them. According to Pomian, it is cognising culture that provides them with meaning and facilitates their collections!

What is the general conclusion out of all of this? Pomian claims that from now on, **invisibility manifests itself in the form of the past, and not, as it has been so far, in the form of eternity.** And this entails a real revolution in the studies on historicity of the being: **the past, becoming a substitute for eternity, replaces sacrum!** Here is another important comment:

Throughout the whole of this account, we have seen that any discussion of collections must touch on political, economic and social problems. Moreover, one of the examples quoted earlier shows that collections are also linked with the natural sciences just as they are with history and art. If,

instead of studying one collection in particular, one examines the phenomenon of collecting in a specific country during a well-defined period, one is forced to admit that this activity is not restricted to any one domain in particular. Rather, it is characterized by its position at the intersection of various different domains, by its multi-disciplinary nature. In other words, the collections of a given country at a given time are, taken as a whole, the coextension of that country's culture at that particular time. **They incarnate this culture and make it visible to us.**¹⁸⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

It should be highlighted that **culture becomes visible by ways it manifests itself in social practice**. Similar to grammar (“invisible” by default), it becomes visible only on the level of *parole*.¹⁹⁰

VI On three ways of experiencing time and on the corresponding historiographical discourses

What Pomian notices in *Order of time* is that our individual (but also social) experience of time variation relating to historicity per se (historical being) entails that we attempt to convey/verbalise it by means of distinct discursive units. He points out that:

[...] in every moment of time and in each and every society we can distinguish three types of **the discourse on events**. The first one concerns those events that take place in the sphere of the visible shared by the author and the reader-listener. The second one concerns those events that belong to the visible sphere on the part of the author but remain invisible for the reader-listener. Finally, the third one concerns those events that belong to the invisible sphere for both the author and the reader-listener. **These three types of discourse are also three types of history: the recent history, the history of not too distant past, and the history of distant past.**¹⁹¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian treats the historical discourse as distinct from historical narration, that is, a story of events (“the visible”) and facts (“the invisible”), guided by four basic questions: who, what, when, where? The historical discourse exceeds the level of a story of events, introducing a unique set of questions/issues. For instance, statements coming from the periodic discourse

are always linked by the syntax which expresses bound forms. It is a discourse which addresses many questions, which explains why forms appear and disappear, and evolve, speaks of transformations from one form into another, of general directions of the processes, relations between constancy and change, continuity and non-continuity, etc.¹⁹²

Pomian claims that the distinction between the three types of discourse plays a fundamental role in the theory of historical cognition and methodology of history. Pomian, raised in the philosophical tradition of Tadeusz Kotarbiński's *reism*, whose lectures he attended as a student, and to whom, as he admits himself, he owes a lot in the intellectual sense, introduces the gnosiologic tradition of pondering on the visible and invisible into the theory of history in *Porządek czasu*. He raises the question of whether there can be something which refers us to what has (already) been invisible. In his previous works on history as an object of faith, and history as an object of knowledge, Pomian used the issue of direct cognition, exceeding the sphere of "the visibility" (sensory perception) as a key to demarcate two distinct cognising cultures of historiography. Now he takes yet another step in his pondering on the issue: each of the three perspectives of experiencing historicity of our human being leads to separate epistemological and methodological issues:

The recent history can be easily controlled by those experiencing events which are broadly discussed: it is enough that they compare it with their memories of it. The history of not too distant past, not to mention the history of distant past, cannot be controlled in such a way by the reader-listener. Yet these two cannot be shunned and we cannot be satisfied only with the recent history. This is for purely intellectual reasons, since the visible sphere is not self-sufficient but instead refers us back to the invisible, from which it emerges, in which it is immersed, and which it embraces. This is also because of reasons of a social nature as it would entail breaking the intergenerational bond and hence destruction of society. The history of not too distant past, and distant past, cannot be shunned or accepted just like that as if it was obvious.¹⁹³

It is not that obvious since it eludes direct cognition, the realm of obvious judgement represented in the informal discourse by statements of the sort known from Benedykt Chmielowski's *Nowe Ateny* [New Athens], for example, "*jaki koń jest, każdy widzi*" ("What a horse is like, anyone can see"). Even when we have contact in the present with material remnants/sediments of the past, which could be seen and touched (experienced by senses), these situations make us question the identity of their current and past ontic status, they provoke us to ask further questions concerning their being in the past rather than make us formulate categorical judgements. "In order to achieve a level of certainty equaling the one which is attributed to perceptual data in everyday life, it needs to be justified", Pomian observes at a certain point.¹⁹⁴ It should be pointed out that it was Herodotus that raised the question of the right to speak of events which one did not attend. Hence, there has been a need to reflect upon the role of the audience/witness of history in the process of the construction of historical narratives from the very early beginnings of historiography. Pomian notices that

/.../ the situation is totally different when historians speak of events they could not attend. Most probably we deal here with a statement concerning the past. However, the author does not require from us to accept it only because they saw or heard that which they describe. To the contrary, the author informs us that it is not the case, which, at first glance, makes the statement devoid of any credibility. After all, how can one aspire to have knowledge of events that happened in the times and places one did not attend? We are so accustomed to history that we lost our ability to question historians' claims to have knowledge of the distant past. Yet, it has raised doubts and stimulated puzzlement over the centuries. Was Herodotus a liar?¹⁹⁵

[emphasis – J.P.]

That he described that which he had not seen is a common accusation, which could be found in many ongoing discussions today, where one's perception and memory are juxtaposed with historians' narration. Pomian speaks explicitly of the suspension of epistemological validity of memory in the context of credibility of memory data, which form the foundation of the so-called oral history:

Historians even become, at least sometimes, critics of memory, able to prove that a given witness was not in a place they claimed to have visited, or that they were there at a different moment of time, or that the real course of events differed from the one described, etc. They are able to put data to such criticism by confronting witnesses' testimonies and revealing inconsistencies in their recollections. They can get knowledge of the past that is fully independent of the obtained testimonies, i.e. of individual memories, relying on documents that retained traces of the past, even when no one was aware of it. **This is an epoch-making revolution in the relations between memory and the past. The time of the superiority of memory over history, and spoken word over written word, comes to an end.**¹⁹⁶

[emphasis – J.P.]

Pomian believes that history is constituted by **distancing oneself towards the past**. In *cultures of remembrance*, memory is tantamount to the past itself, it is a reflection of the past.

A shift from a memory-based approach to a historical approach, from memory to history, hinges on the intersection between identity and the past. **In an ideal case, historians become historians when they do not identify themselves with any side of the conflict, the history of which they study, or they do not identify themselves with any protagonist of the events they describe. They should identify themselves only with a community of historians they belong to, applying to the rules which are deemed important, and in line with which they subject documents to criticism. It is through these documents that they learn of the past:** they place the documents in the context of time and space, they assign the documents to authors when needed, and in the

special case of narrative sources, they bring to the surface all the values, judgments, fears, distortions, prejudices, and expectations that the documents contain, even though they do not admit it. Such an approach allows historians to avoid placing all the burden on their shoulders and to avoid identifying with protagonists of the past events. It does not mean that historians are beyond history and take a position that is ascribed to God. Historians are always within history since an ideal is out of this world. **Each historian is subject to, even though to a varying degree, depending on the time, place, and character, their own tendencies, their implications, views, dislikes. A collective of historians they identify themselves with is both a creation and an agent of history.**¹⁹⁷

[emphasis – J.P.]

What we deal with here is a situation analogous with a community of collectors: **is social cognising culture of history that forms historiography, and the latter is a self-reflection of that culture!** What does self-reflection look like in the case of experiencing the reality of the present? First and foremost, within the area of recent history (history of the present), historical culture meets and is confronted with the culture of remembrance.

What is the present time, if not a period that has been experienced by the living generations? In the developed countries life expectancy has been extended to such a considerable degree that those who started to be professionally active more than half a century ago are still with us, while the time for sharing archives has been reduced to 30 years, with the exception of particularly sensitive data. **Thus, a confrontation between historians' work dealing with the present and still painful memory and passion-stirring, ideological biases seems inevitable. It is a dramatic confrontation since history cannot be reduced to a recording of memory, therefore there is a conflict between them when they share the object of study. Historians' role is not to take the perspective of victims, no matter how much the former sympathise with the latter.**¹⁹⁸

Their role is first and foremost

[...] **to establish facts in accordance with the principles of historical criticism, and then to attempt to understand them**, which inevitably leads to the development of a perspective differing from the one adopted by the protagonists of the described events, hence evokes a general feeling of discontent.¹⁹⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

In the case of experiencing the present, cognising culture of historiography is in this fortunate position as it is accompanied cognitively (and shares the same discipline related to the object of study) by the cognising cultures of other social

and humanistic sciences. Pomian maintains that it is, thanks to the crossing of one's limits and being open to perspectives represented by other cognising cultures, that:

[...] history of the present has bloomed over the recent decades, which made it a more dynamic and novel discipline of historical knowledge. It is history of the present that started producing sources, referring on a massive scale to oral accounts, easily recorded by means of a light and cheap cassette recorder. It is also history of the present that started to use images on a massive scale: posters, pictures, film documents, video recordings. Such a catalogue of potential sources allowed history to give voice to social categories which, even in the era of mass literacy, create few written documents expressing their point of view, way of thinking, and lifestyle.²⁰⁰

This helped to break with the thesis accepted throughout the 19th-century theory of history (and historiographic cultures associated with it) that historical events are individual and unique. Pomian claims that this has had its consequences:

Such a way of defining history had its proponents. These were mostly those people for whom Clio was a Muse. Also those who tried to show that the scientific understanding of single facts is possible as long as apt hermeneutic methods are developed. The old theory of history, criticized by the advocates of idiographic, was also criticized by supporters of nomothetic history, who urged to break with the exposition of single facts or phenomena. **The discussion concerned not only the ways of practising history but also the status of history, its place in the world of knowledge, its relations with social sciences, which were in the process of being constituted and introduced to academic curricula.** Yet social sciences have nothing in common with the history that aspires to be idiographic since they study recurring facts: at the turn of the century this was evidenced especially by economics, and sociology.²⁰¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

The new, 20th-century theory of history saw that the future of history resides in close contact with social sciences. In order to interconnect events, facts, and historical processes, a lot more was needed than what historiographic cognising cultures, based on classical chronosophy, could deliver. Therefore, the French historiography of the 1920s evolved in the direction of studying recurring facts, relying on the history of prices.²⁰²

Krzysztof Pomian views history of historiography as a morpho-genetic sequence, where the subsequent stadia of development of pondering on historicity of the being are shaped by the phenomena of abrasia and cultural sedimentation. The latter is especially important. It should be pointed out that cognitively it means that cognising culture reveals how the specific past has lived/has been active in the following presences, till the presence we are now in. It has been *active*

indeed, since sedimentation, contrary to abrasia, does not focus on *sediments* of the past but on what is active in the currently ongoing process of history-making. It is only from such a perspective that it is possible to understand that **history** (just like any other science) is **historical in its essence**. As Pomian writes:

The word *history* embraces today an inhomogeneous set of cognitive practices, jointly covering most traditional and modern procedures and techniques, and a stylistically diverse set of writing practices: from a literary novel to a retrospective econometric model. Such an inhomogeneous character, shared by history with all other disciplines of knowledge, and inseparable from almost all the concepts used, expresses most of all, but not only, properly inalienable historicity. It shows that they are a temporary ending to thousands-year long consequences of sedimentation, where each of sediments leaves its own layer of questions, procedures, documents, monuments, works written by historians, which leads to the layers being stacked one upon another. The subsequent layers, in the form of feedback, change the meaning and even the looks of the previous layers.

To speak of history without acknowledging its historicity means to end up not understanding a thing of it.²⁰³

I conclude this attempt to expound/interpret Krzysztof Pomian's views on historicity of the being by being aware of many limitations of my own cognising culture. I put down all the shortcomings and imperfections to these limitations when it comes to making the "invisible" "visible", which constitutes the uniqueness of cognising culture, one of the most eminent cultures within the area of theory of history that I have ever dealt with. Its quintessential character is expressed by a thought produced by the author of *Sur l'Histoire*: "**Whatever exists, is historical. That is why not only historians need history. Everyone needs it!**"²⁰⁴.

Notes

- 1 The monograph, even though set to be printed in 1968, was not published until the Breakthrough of 1989. See on the circumstances of this: Krzysztof Pomian, "Od autora – 1989", in: idem. *Przeszłość jako przedmiot wiedzy* [The Past as an object of knowledge] (Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia, 1992), 5.
- 2 The key figures of the seminar were the well-known international scholars such as Bronisław Baczko, Andrzej Walicki, and Jerzy Szacki, among others. For more on this School see: <http://www.archidei.ifispan.pl/> (21.04.2023)
- 3 Krzysztof Pomian, *Wśród mistrzów i przyjaciół*, op.cit., 526–527.
- 4 Krzysztof Pomian: *Europa i jej narody* [Europe and its Nations]. (Warszawa: PIW, 1992), 6. It is a Polish translation of the famous Pomian's book *L'Europe et ses nations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) that has been translated into many languages, unfortunately not into English.

- 5 Jan Pomorski, “Laudatio: Depozytariusz wartości europejskich” /in:/ *Krzysztof Pomian doktor honoris causa Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2003).
- 6 “Poland’s attitude towards Europe (17th–18th century)”, a lecture delivered by Pomian on 26 May 2000 as part of the series of lectures on *Ideas and problems of the history of Polish culture*.
- 7 An excellent confirmation of these opinions is a book dedicated to the Professor on the occasion of the renewal of his doctorate at the University of Warsaw after 50 years: *Wśród ludzi, rzeczy i znaków. Krzysztofowi Pomianowi w darze* [Among People, Things and Signs. For Krzysztof Pomian as a Gift], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), 604.
- 8 Krzysztof Pomian, “Lectio doctoris” in: *Krzysztof Pomian-doktor honoris causap Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej* op.cit., 5.
- 9 It is a reference to the young generation who entered adult life protesting in October 1956 against the Stalinisation of Poland.
- 10 In March 1968, student protests broke out in Poland, which the state authorities used to campaign against Poles of Jewish origin. Pomian also became their victim.
- 11 It was one of the most important Polish emigre circles after the World War II.
- 12 Pomian has studied at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Warsaw in 1952–1957.
- 13 Krzysztof Pomian, *Sur l’Histoire* (Paris: Folio Histoire, 1999), 11.
- 14 François Hartog has a similar high opinion of the importance of *L’ordre du temps*. See his, *Regime of Historicity. Presentism and Experience of Time* (Columbia University Press, 2016).
- 15 Quote from *Krzysztof Pomian – doktor honoris causa Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej*, op.cit., 43.
- 16 Krzysztof Pomian, *Le musée, une histoire mondiale: I. Du trésor au musée; II. L’ancrage européen, 1789-1850; III. A la conquête du monde, 1850-2020* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020, 2021, 2022).
- 17 Krzysztof Pomian, *Wenecja w kulturze europejskiej* [Venice in European Culture] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2000), 7–8.
- 18 Ibidem, 47–48.
- 19 More about this metaphor in the second part of this chapter.
- 20 The first edition was published in France in 1990 in the prestigious publishing house Gallimard, in the series “Le Debat”. Polish translation by Małgorzata Szpakowska was published in 1992. I used in my analysis the extended edition of *Europa i jej narody* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowa/obraz terytoria, 2004), with four additional essays, concerning the recent history of Europe and the problems of European integration, as well as Poland’s membership in the European Union.
- 21 The text of this speech was published in: *Europa i co z tego wynika*, edited by Krzysztof Michalski (Warszawa-Kraków: Centrum Myśli Jana Pawła II – Wydawnictwo Znak, 1990), 83–130.
- 22 Pomian consciously refers here to an idea by the eminent French historian, Fernand Braudel.
- 23 *Europa i jej narody*, 7.
- 24 For the sake of illustration, I would like to mention at least one: the Gothic cathedral is “a collective prayer turned into stone, which is still under construction, as if its eternal incompleteness was to prove that human works cannot achieve perfection”. Ibidem, 38.
- 25 *Europa i jej narody*, 248.
- 26 *The Faces of the Twentieth Century* is also the title of a collection of historical and political essays by Krzysztof Pomian published in 2002 by Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- 27 The lessons we can learn from the history of the 20th century in the current context of the challenges we are facing today are also the subject of Timothy Snyder’s *On tyranny: twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. Tim Duggan Books, New York 2017. Cf.:

Until recently, we had convinced ourselves that there was nothing in the future but more of the same. The seemingly distant traumas of fascism, Nazism, and communism seemed to be receding into irrelevance. We allowed ourselves to accept the politics of inevitability, the sense that history could move in only one direction: toward liberal democracy. After communism in Eastern Europe came into an end in 1989–1991, we imbibed the myth of an ‘end of history.’ In doing so, we lowered our defenses, constrained our imagination, and opened the way for precisely the kinds of regimes we told ourselves could never return.

Ibid., 117

- 28 *Twierdza-Europa, Front Narodowy i PiS Z Krzysztofem Pomianem rozmawia Jarosław Kuisz* [Fortress–Europe, National Front and Law and Justice party. Krzysztof Pomian interviewed by Jarosław Kuisz] online: <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2015/12/15/twierdza-europa-front-narodowy-i-pis/> 10.03.2022.
- 29 Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America* (London: The Bodley Head, 2018).
- 30 Krzysztof Pomian, “*Lectio doctoris*” in: *Krzysztof Pomian – doktor honoris causa Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2003), 21–28.
- 31 Krzysztof Pomian, *Porządek czasu* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, 2014). Translation in Polish based on the French edition *L’Orde du Temps* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1984) by Tomasz Stróżyński.
- 32 *Lectio doctoris*, 22.
- 33 Ibidem.
- 34 Ibidem, 23.
- 35 It is a kind of epistemological categorial drift: placing of the cognitive perspective in the future and viewing two other time dimensions from this vantage point.
- 36 On the teleological and anti-teleological views of history, see: David Carr, *Historical Experiences. Essays in the Phenomenology of History* (New York – London: Routledge, 2021), especially part 2 “Teleology and History”.
- 37 *Lectio doctoris*, 23.
- 38 Ibidem, 24.
- 39 Ibidem, 23–24.
- 40 Ibidem, 24.
- 41 The notion of historical semantics, as proposed by K. Pomian, is closer to the notion adopted and developed by Reinhart Koselleck. See: Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Translated and introduction by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Let me add that the German historian discusses the notion several years after the author of *Order of Time*.
- 42 Krzysztof Pomian, *Historia jako przedmiot wiary* [History as an objects of faith] (Warszawa: PWN, 1968), and idem, *Historia jako przedmiot wiedzy* (Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia, 1992).
- 43 Krzysztof Pomian, *L’ordre du temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).
- 44 Krzysztof Pomian, *L’Europe et ses nations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
- 45 Krzysztof Pomian, *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2006).
- 46 Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVI-XVIII siecle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). English edition: *Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, translated by Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
- 47 Krzysztof Pomian, *Le musee, une histoire mondiale* published in three volumes by Gallimard: I. *Du tresor au musee* (Paris 2020); II. *L’ancrage europeen, 1789-1850* (Paris 2021) oraz III. *A la conquete du monde, 1850-2020* (Paris, 2022).
- 48 *Porządek czasu*, 24.
- 49 Wojciech Wrzosek, *History, Culture, Methaphor. The Facets of Non-Classical Historiography*, translated by Przemysław Znaniecki (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1997), 28.

- 50 In the sense of providing the foundations of historical thinking.
- 51 *Lectio doctoris*, 24–25.
- 52 *Ibidem*, 25.
- 53 Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Little, Brown and Co., 1991).
- 54 *Lectio doctoris*, 25.
- 55 *Ibidem*, 27.
- 56 *Ibidem*, 25–26.
- 57 *Ibidem*, 26.
- 58 *Ibidem*, 27–28.
- 59 See: Jan Pomorski, “O dwu poziomach niewspółmierności ontologicznej teorii uniwersalnych” [On two levels of the ontological incommensurability of universal theories], in: *Czy sprzeczność może być racjonalna?* [Can the contradiction be rational?], edited by Kazimierz Jodkowski (Lublin: “RRR” series/Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1986), 131–143.
- 60 *Ibidem*, 142–143.
- 61 *Lectio doctoris*, 27.
- 62 A similar belief concerning the dangers of “the new fashion” when it comes social sciences was shared by a sociologist of a Polish descent, Stanislaw Andresky (Stanislaw Andrzejewski), who published *Social Science as Sorcery* (London: Andrew Deutsch, 1972).
- 63 *Porządek czasu*, 31–32.
- 64 *Lectio doctoris*, 27.
- 65 Jan Pomorski, “Historiografia jako autorefleksja kultury poznającej”, in: *Świat historii*. op. cit.
- 66 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 233.
- 67 *Porządek czasu*, 16. The latest book on time by the French historian, François Hartog, carries an equally profound philosophical message. See his *Chronos. The West Confronts Time*, translated by S. R. Gilbert (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).
- 68 *Porządek czasu*, 16.
- 69 *Ibidem*, 26.
- 70 *Ibidem*, 40–41.
- 71 *Ibidem*, 27.
- 72 *Ibidem*, 27–28.
- 73 It is a my reference to the title of one of Pomian’s book *Jerzy Giedroyc. Autobiografia na cztery ręce* [Jerzy Giedroyc. Autobiography For Four Hands]. Edited by Krzysztof Pomian (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1999).
- 74 *Porządek czasu*, 99–100.
- 75 François Hartog, *Regime of Historicity. Presentism and Experience of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
- 76 To some extent, this corresponds to what Jerzy Topolski was doing in his search for answers to the question *how does one write and understand history?*
- 77 *Ibidem*, 18. Again, we are dealing here with a geological metaphor.
- 78 *Ibidem*, 158–159.
- 79 In 2001, during a symposium in Rimini, Italy.
- 80 *Idem. Historia. nauka wobec pamięci*, 194.
- 81 *Ibidem*, 174–175.
- 82 *Ibidem*, 172.
- 83 *Idem*. “History: From Moral Science to the Computer”, *Diogenes* 46 (1998), 35.
- 84 *Porządek czasu*, 32–33.
- 85 In *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, Pomian expresses this idea in the following sentence: “*The writer becomes a historian only when he assimilates the requirement to prove what he says and when he tries to fulfil this requirement*”, 157.
- 86 In the history of historiography, it is customary to speak rather of the “developmental paths” of history.

- 87 *Porządek czasu*, 31.
- 88 *Ibidem*, 38–39.
- 89 *Porządek czasu*, 336–337.
- 90 It is worth noting the convergence of Pomian's thinking with the epistemology of history by Jerzy Kmita, who was the first to distinguish colloquial social experience from its scientific-theoretical complement.
- 91 *Ibidem*, 39–40.
- 92 *Ibidem*, 40.
- 93 Robert W. Fogel and Geoffrey R. Elton, *Which Road to the Past? Two Views of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).
- 94 In the classical model, the present did not require study; after all it belonged to the realm of the visible, so it was an object of perception rather than study.
- 95 In the pre-theoretical stage of the development of historiography, the past is an object of perception rather than study. That is, it is described from the perspective of an observer, watching events. At this stage of cognition, the question of the "visibility" of events is fundamental.
- 96 *Porządek czasu*, 33–34.
- 97 *Ibidem*, 34.
- 98 *Ibidem*.
- 99 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 178.
- 100 *Idem. Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, translated by Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 24.
- 101 *Ibidem*, 21; Translation note: the translator of "Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500–1800" rendered the French phrase *spectateurs virtuels* as *potential audience*, while a faithful rendition, as we claim, would suggest *virtual spectators*.
- 102 *Ibidem*, 23–24.
- 103 Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes (London-New York: Routledge, 2012), 433.
- 104 In *Collectors and Curiosities* Pomian even introduces the concept of the "virtual spectator", and visibility and invisibility themselves become cultural categories, historically variable depending on the tool/laboratory equipment of the cognising culture.
- 105 *Ibidem*.
- 106 *Porządek czasu*, 28–29.
- 107 *Ibidem*.
- 108 See Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie (eds.), *Critical Realism. Essential Readings*, (London-New York: Routledge, 1998).
- 109 *Porządek czasu*, 35
- 110 *Ibidem*, 36.
- 111 *Ibidem*, 42.
- 112 *Ibidem*, 42–43.
- 113 *Ibidem*, 43.
- 114 *Ibidem*, 84.
- 115 *Ibidem*, 163–164.
- 116 *Ibidem*, 165.
- 117 *Ibidem*, 208.
- 118 *Porządek czasu*, 163.
- 119 *Ibidem*.
- 120 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 45.
- 121 *Ibidem*, 43–44.
- 122 *Porządek czasu*, 160.
- 123 *Ibidem*, 160–161.
- 124 *Ibidem*, 160.
- 125 *Ibidem*.

- 126 Ibidem.
- 127 Ibidem.
- 128 Ibidem, 151–152.
- 129 Ibidem, 160–161.
- 130 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 9.
- 131 *Porządek czasu*, 337–338.
- 132 Ibidem, 191.
- 133 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 223.
- 134 *Porządek czasu*, 191–192.
- 135 Jan Pomorski. *W poszukiwaniu modelu historii teoretycznej* [In a Quest for the Model of Theoretical History], (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1984).
- 136 *Porządek czasu*, 158.
- 137 Ibidem, 98–99.
- 138 Ibidem, 99.
- 139 Ibidem, 207.
- 140 Ibidem.
- 141 The vast majority of historians believe that “*history distinguishes between fact and fiction and concentrates on the former, leaving the latter to the imagination of artists with a pen or brush*”, *ibid*, 248. This conviction may be a good starting point for considering the problem of *non-fiction of historiographic discourse* as an important component of Professor’s epistemology of history.
- 142 See *Critical Realism. Essential Readings*, edited by Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Allan Norrie (London: Centre for Critical Realism, 1998).
- 143 Ibidem, 39–41.
- 144 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci.*, 46.
- 145 Ibidem, 233–234.
- 146 Alun Muslow shows brilliantly the various nuances of this relationship; see his *Aesthetics of History* (New York-London: Routledge, 2020).
- 147 It is significant that Hayden White is one of the few historical theorists (the second is François Hartog) who has been able to appreciate Pomian’s *L’Ordre du temps*. See White’s comment in: Hayden White, *Proza historyczna* [Historical Prose] (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), footnote on 258.
- 148 *Porządek czasu*, 11–12.
- 149 Ibidem, 7–8.
- 150 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 47.
- 151 Ibidem.
- 152 What Pomian is referring to here is probably what he elsewhere called *the sensation-alisation of history*, practised within its strand called *hermeneutic*.
- 153 Ibidem, 41–42.
- 154 Cf. Marta Zaręba, *Reizm Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego a prakseologiczna koncepcja sprawstwa*, “Przełęcz Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria”. R. 21: 2012, No 3 (83), 559–575.
- 155 Cf. his understanding of *objects and things*. *We use the term “object” assuming it is the most general term, semantically equalling “something”, and we understand the term “thing” as an equivalent of the description: “an object situated in time and space of some physical quality”. (...) “situated in time” means as much as “existing at some point”, and “situated in space” means as much as “existing somewhere”* (Tadeusz Kotarbiński, *Fazy rozwojowe konkretyzmu* [1958], /in:/ id.: *Dzieła wybrane*. (Warszawa: PWN, 1993), 201.
- 156 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 43–44.
- 157 Ibidem, 44.
- 158 Timothy Snyder speaks of this type of *historical captivity*, characteristic of the contemporary world, in *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europa, America*. (London: The Bodley Head, 2018).

- 159 Justin Cruickshank, "Introduction", in *Critical Realism. The Difference It Makes*, edited by Justin Cruickshank (London: Routledge, 2003), 1–13. See also: Chris Lorenz, "Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A plea for «Internal Realism»", *History and Theory* 3 (1994), 297–327.
- 160 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 44–45.
- 161 *Ibidem*, 45–46.
- 162 *Collectors and Curiosities*, op.cit., 27.
- 163 *Ibidem*, 26.
- 164 *Ibidem*.
- 165 *Ibidem*.
- 166 *Ibidem*, 27.
- 167 *Porządek czasu*, 168.
- 168 *Collectors and Curiosities*, 5.
- 169 *Ibidem*.
- 170 Jerzy Kmita, *Problems in Historical Epistemology*, translated from the Polish by Michael Turner. (Warsaw: PWN, 1988).
- 171 *Collectors and Curiosities*, 5.
- 172 *Ibidem*, 21.
- 173 *Ibidem*, 26.
- 174 *Ibidem*.
- 175 What is explicitly manifested in this sentence is Krzysztof Pomian's methodological anti-individualism.
- 176 *Ibidem*, 33–34.
- 177 Anna Pałubicka, *Gramatyka kultury europejskiej* [Grammar of European Culture]. Oficyna Wydawnicza Epigram, Bydgoszcz 2013; see also: Jan Pomorski, *O dwóch postawach wobec rzeczywistości historycznej (kilka refleksji nad "Gramatyką kultury europejskiej" Anny Pałubickiej)*, "Filo-Sofija", no. 36 (2017/1), 309–327.
- 178 *Gramatyka kultury europejskiej*, 14.
- 179 *Ibidem*, 15.
- 180 *Ibidem*, 50.
- 181 *Ibidem*, 96.
- 182 *Ibidem*, 200.
- 183 *Collectors and Curiosities*, 30.
- 184 *Ibidem*, 47–48.
- 185 *Ibidem*, 32.
- 186 *Ibidem*, 50–51.
- 187 *Ibidem*, 50.
- 188 *Ibidem*, 53.
- 189 *Ibidem*, 375–376.
- 190

What we can observe here is the dichotomy relating to the object which only apparently belongs to the domain of linguistics, that is, language, and we observe its disintegration accompanied by a simultaneous formation of two new objects: *longue*, the language as a system, and *parole*, its individual use, the opposition of which has become one of the most disputed and contested issues of de Saussure's exegesis,

as Pomian states in *Porządek czasu*, op.cit., 166–167

- 191 *Porządek czasu*, 29.
- 192 *Ibidem*, 161.
- 193 *Ibidem*, 30.
- 194 *Ibidem*.
- 195 *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, 154.
- 196 *Ibidem*, 175.

- 197 Ibidem, 193.
198 Ibidem, 219.
199 Ibidem, 220.
200 Ibidem, 219.
201 *Porządek czasu*, 80.
202

To study recurring facts, to abandon the political sphere for the sake of the economic and social sphere; to break the mould of the fossilised frame of periodisation, which divided history into arbitrary sections – at the end of the 1920s entailed a turn towards the history of prices.

Ibidem, 83

203 Ibidem, 181.

204 Ibidem, 235.

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3 The historical imagination in 21st-century Central and Eastern Europe

The case of Olga Tokarczuk

This text offers an invitation to get to know Olga Tokarczuk as a “historian”.¹ In particular, to get to know the cognising culture that she developed and through which she experiences the past and tries to understand the surrounding world. “I – the world” as a primary experience. Leszek Kołakowski labelled such an approach as *reading of the world*.²

The world carries a message, as he wrote in *Metaphysical horror*, a secret code of sorts, that philosophers, poets, rabbis, and theologians have been trying to decode for centuries. Believing in its presence, they are *reading the world*.³

This text will be thus a story of how Tokarczuk reads the world, and how she seeks “historical reason”, to use Ortega y Gasset’s term, therein.⁴ The feeling of *history* and ways of coping with one’s own history are the distinctive features behind such a reading. Actually, all Tokarczuk’s novels (and many short stories) describe stories of the past, beginning from *Podróż ludzi Księgi* [The Journey of the Book-People] published in 1993, where the readers are transported into the times of Louis XIV and Huguenots, to *The Books of Jacob* published in 2014 and *Empuzjon* [Empusion] – the first post-Nobel Prize novel, published in 2022. Even when the narration is presented in the future tense, Tokarczuk is aware of the double character of these roots: **in “The Tender Narrator” she speaks to the readers from the “meta” level**, asserting that her cognising culture stems from this world, its contemporary times, and past heritage. It is an emanation of the specific *here and now*, yet at the same time it testifies to the *history* of cognition. Andrzej Mencwel, commenting on Olga Tokarczuk’s works, is partially⁵ right when claiming that:

A historical writer, faithful to their vocational call, is much more than a historiographer. A historian, even when aware of their cognitive limitations, describes in detail that which happened and how it happened; a writer also needs to know that but must investigate all sorts of human, humanistic meanings, also related to peculiar or marginal events. Olga Tokarczuk is a historical writer of the greatest sort – not only does she know what needs to be known about the world portrayed by herself but also she is able to present it in detail, and guides the attentive reader into thinking about her stories. And the stories are complex since they are polyphonic and multicultural.⁶

Tokarczuk sees herself as a link in the long chain of her predecessors and followers, who, on their *pilgrimage*, and this category is of an epistemic value, reflect upon the world, human history, and nature, looking for meanings. She treats literature as a method of cognition, as a means of telling and creating a story reflecting on what she has experienced while travelling through times and cultures, **Reading of the world**, as Kolakowski would put it. I suppose Olga Tokarczuk would agree with Jorge Luis Borges, who treats Universe as a synonym for Library, when he poses a question: “You who read me, are You sure of understanding my language?”⁷

I have been fond of Olga Tokarczuk for some time now. The author of *The Books of Jacob* was supposed to be an honorary guest at the jubilee 20th General Congress of Polish Historians in Lublin (2019). Even though she accepted my invitation, eventually the long-planned discussion over her historical meta-novel did not come into fruition since it coincided with the promotion of the German edition of *Die Jakobs Bücher*. Then the Nobel Prize came, and the world was in a whirl. I come back now to some reappraised hypotheses and issues that could not be addressed back then. This is mostly done in the context of Tokarczuk’s **Nobel Lecture** and the reading of her first post-Nobel novel, *The Tender Narrator*. And although I am not sure, to quote Borges, of *understanding of her language* (I am not sure whether such a full understanding is possible at all), the cognising culture that she co-creates (as we owe it also to Others, including the authors we read) is so fascinating and enticing to a historian and methodologist that I could not resist the temptation to do it justice by giving an account of it.⁸ In line with Tokarczuk’s motto –“giving a foretaste of something that could exist, and thus causing it to become imaginable. And being imagined is the first stage of existence.”⁹

Hence, Olga Tokarczuk will be presented here as the imagined cognising *culture of history*. It is this role that will be subject to an analysis,¹⁰ with an emphasis on epistemology and theory of history, historical agency, and philosophy of history, which all contribute to a personal understanding of the historical world.

Bronisław Baczko claimed that

personal vision of the world becomes culturally momentous depending on whether it is focused on issues which are not only personal; whether it refers to networks of issues, notions, values, which embrace and organise structures, needs, aspirations, attitudes, conflicts on a massive scale into wholistic, meaningful thought structures; whether it sanctions them and thus becomes an element of self-knowledge of epochs, layers, social classes.¹¹

Undoubtedly, it is the case with Olga Tokarczuk’s cognising culture. This gives ample reason and justification for the lecture to be delivered and the text to be written.

“History needs heresy”, as Tokarczuk claimed in an interview for “Tygodnik Powszechny” in 2014, and it seems one cannot disagree with her.¹² As a methodologist, I feel somewhat like a heretic among historians.... I then think that Alun Munslow was right when he wrote:

The reason for this situation is that historians deal with the nature of the past rather than engaging with the literary aesthetics of what they are doing, which is the process of turning the past into history/historizing.¹³

I *Knowing as a historical process*

We know through collecting experiences:

[...]it all started to roll in my mind like a sticky snowball, and everything that it caught on its way made it bigger and more dense”, as Tokarczuk writes, using the metaphor of a snowball to express/describe/capture a philosophical truth that the final brightness – *illuminare*, a state of the enlightened mind – requires from us to collect a sufficiently great deal of life’s experiences. It is only afterwards that “the things become clear.¹⁴

The history of literature holds many instances of such an enlightenment in its massive archives since it is a record of people experiencing the world and a training of the imagination. Tokarczuk also demonstrates the skill of making good use of indigenous knowledge.¹⁵ Following cultural archetypes, myths, and symbols, some of the traces of this kind of looking can be found in her *Flights*:

Suddenly he realizes: there are different kinds of looking. One kind of looking allows you to simply see objects, useful human things, honest and concrete, which you know right away how to use and what for. And then there’s panoramic viewing, a more general view, thanks to which you notice links between objects, their network of reflections. Things cease to be things, the fact that they serve a purpose is insignificant, just a surface. Now they’re signs, indicating something that isn’t in the photographs, referring beyond the frames of the pictures. You have to really concentrate to be able to maintain that gaze, at its essence it’s a gift, grace.¹⁶

Looking and knowing, artefacts and semiophors, nature and culture, reason and emotions, and metaphysics and insight are many paths to the knowledge of the world. Why should pure reason be given priority? It was imagination that was made a central category of the philosophical system by Kant, who criticised reason. For the cognising culture, as proposed by Tokarczuk, it is equally important.¹⁷ It performs the role of a laboratory, a ground for experiment. Also on people. Without any consequences and with no need to respect high bioethical standards which can be observed in psychology, her professional area of expertise. What is of essence is for the spectrum of experience to be constantly broadened. Also, to ensure the panopticom with viewpoints through the activation of various paths of knowledge. Science is only one of them. And it often fails, for example, when confronted with *Góra Wszystkich Świętych* [Mountain of All Saints]. The main character in this bizarre tale is a professor of psychology, an author of the *Test Tendencji Rozwojowych* [Test of Developmental Tendencies], of

“extraordinary powers of prediction”, thanks to which she could “predict, with great accuracy, what will become of a person and what will be their personal and professional development”.¹⁸ She is a declared scientist, who, travelling around the world and giving lectures on the Test of Developmental Tendencies, starts her presentation with: “Yes, you know it is going to unnerve you and annoy you but the course of human life can be predicted. There are tools available for that end. A tense silence fell upon the scene.”¹⁹ The professor believed that

it is rationality which marks the boundaries of cognition; in order to cross these boundaries, rationality needs to be put aside and one needs to throw themselves into dark depths of the unknown, precisely to make it, step by step, rational and understandable.²⁰

Being aware of the fact that she is dying (diagnosed with an incurable cancer of the brain), she tries to practise what she preaches, only this time facing a totally new, intriguing experience of meeting Oxi,²¹ as if borrowed straight from *Nekros* by Ewa Domańska.²² Tenderness becomes an attitude towards a dead body and, simultaneously, the highest form of love. A real gem. That is the secret/truth revealed gradually by Tokarczuk in her tale.

It can be arrived at, just like any other *truth* (whatever this word means), not by a singular act of perception but **always** as a result of a long-term cognitive process. In *Lalka i perła* [The Doll and the Pearl] she writes:

It is recommendable to express the process with symbolic and metaphorical language – perhaps only then one can avoid the analytical ordering of something which is fluid and devoid of rigid structure. Hopefully, symbol and metaphor, however vague and unclear for the habits of the mind, carry their great meanings contrary to those habits.²³

History is a process, human development is a process, and understanding is also a process.

I will allude repeatedly to the symbolicity and metaphoricity of the language used by Tokarczuk, in the context of the cognising culture. It is understanding through *interpreting*, where **metaphor is an initial hypothesis**. It triggers a process. In *Flights*, she provides more detail: “It would appear that the only option is to get in even deeper.”²⁴

Getting in deeper entails a multitude of interpretations. The metaphor provides only some possible clues needed for interpretation. Knowing means following these clues, similarly to Derrida’s views. Being in this process means moving all the time, being on the move. Hence, the metaphorical interpretation of knowing as a journey. The word *process* encompasses the concept of space-time. It may be visualised as a path that we take when we travel in time. According to Tokarczuk, it is not the destination, the finishing line that is important when travelling (*nota bene*, destination-related questions are always of a metaphysical

character for her). What is really important is that taking that step, one must give up all that is well known and comfortable. Break up with the old; open up for the new. In *Lalka i perła*, the Nobel prize winner writes: “A pilgrimage is setting out on a journey, a symbolic act, a great decision. It involves a change of the viewpoint, adopting a new perspective, a try to make yourself anew, readiness to renew oneself.”²⁵ Less than two decades later, on the level of meta-reflection in *The Tender Narrator*, she would illustrate her point with the figure of a traveller from Flamarion’s engraving, the one who reached the boundaries of the world, looking beyond the visible with delight, with the world, its nature and culture behind his back.²⁶ Tokarczuk notes that it is “an excellent metaphor of the moment we are all in”, raising the most important question: **What now?**²⁷

Zygmunt Bauman may have been right claiming that we already live on borrowed time.²⁸

The process we are subject to is something autonomous in relation to people’s conscious choices; it is separate from them. Being in the process means being carried.

It is not given to people, but people are given to it. It is driven to a great extent by chance, or perhaps by something that people habitually call coincidence, sudden insights, unexpected twists, synchronicity, striking similarities – all of its unexplained logic.²⁹

In terms of cognition and narration, *The Books of Jacob* rely on the logic of such a process: the logic of history and the logic of narration. *How to write and understand history*, this time told not from the perspective of historiographic practice, as used in Topolski’s works,³⁰ but from the perspective of literary practice. Tokarczuk’s meta-novel has its beginning and end. Just like any other **great journey**, it has its path-breaking points, with “one leading to another”; it has its *turning points* and its *crises*. However, it is not the plot or factual layer of this great epic tale about A Republic of Many Nations coming to an end that I would like to focus on. In my research, I am solely interested in *the cognising culture* incorporated by Olga Tokarczuk into a work on the understanding of History.

A starting point is to meet a historical source of the bizarre. In order to create *Montaillou, village occitan* – a masterpiece of 20th-century historiography, the French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie must have come across the inquisition register of 1326, including the accounts of the inhabitants of a mountain village lying at the foot of the Pyrenees, interrogated by the heresy-combating bishop of Pamiers – Jacques Fournier, who would later become Pope Benedict XII.³¹ The Polish writer found the source materials in an antique shop in Toruń in autumn of 1997 or 1998. As she recalls, it was an unusual book since “actually, these were two notebooks, unwieldy, with blue, varnished covers”. It was *Book of the Words of the Lord* by Jacob Frank.

I was reading it carefully, a paragraph after a paragraph, throughout winter, with an ever-growing astonishment. By Christmas Day I had collected a whole pile of similar books. In the spring I had a new shelf fitted, which was only to grow and bloom in the years to come.³²

As historians, we all know too well such a rhythm of research. A source sheds light on the literature: opens up possibilities of building one's own extra-source of knowledge, with which we approach it again. *The Books of Jacob* end with a bibliographical note. The author states there:

It's a good thing the novel has traditionally been understood as a fiction, since that means its author is generally not expected to furnish a complete bibliography. In this case in particular, that would take up entirely too much space.³³

However, traces of the books that Tokarczuk read can be found not only in the note as they are scattered all over *The Books of Jacob*. Such a peculiar library astonishes us with its variety and extensiveness, undoubtedly requiring years of studies. We, historians, have first-hand experience in struggling with flashcards, genealogy, or cartography. It is with personal sympathy that we approach the confession made by the author of *The Books of Jacob*:

First I tried to tackle the vastness of the material. Since I am equipped with a spatial and visual memory, I would spend evenings on drawing maps and ladders, genealogical trees, routes. I wrote names on hundreds of post-it notes and tried to recreate or create correlations and links between my characters-to-be. It was like building up scaffolding around a phantom of something which does not exist yet, and it took an unproportionally long time.³⁴

Then came a time for field research: along the trail of places visited by Jacob Frank, "through seven borders, five languages and three major religions, not counting the small ones", according to the subtitle of this great historical prose – A time for relentless searching/accumulating details of the past, both artefacts and records of experiences and experiencing of the world. A time for a kind of *historical collecting*, so close to many researchers of the past. Here is how Tokarczuk comments on it:

Getting prepared to writing, studying documents and accounts, handbooks and memoirs, I desperately looked for details. I am convinced that the world is made of details. At the same time, it is most often described by means of generalisations so that we need to deduce how it is constructed. What I lack in some stories is tastes and smells, fractures of the materials, furniture, tools, colors, and touches. I want to know what people eat (it is quite common that voluminous novels never present characters having

breakfast, they must be living on air then), what they wear, how they dress to sleep, what their shoes look like, and what they can see out of the window. Whether they wash in the evening or whether they wash at all, whether they sit their kids on the laps, and how they treat a cold. I am also interested in landscape, flora and fauna. You cannot describe the world not being familiar with the local flora. You cannot describe the world without the knowledge of the vastness of the sky or the colour of water in a river.³⁵

Another step is to consider the construction of the story itself since the history of the Frankists is such that Tokarczuk claims it “must be told and it is only waiting for a proper time and place, for its knight that will shatter the glass prison to pieces.”³⁶ And finally, something which was most difficult: a choice of the narrator, actually a number of narrators, a fourth-person narrator, Yente, who *sees everything*.³⁷ Then, all that had to be done was to write, and write, and write ... until **the end**.

A model observer (it will turn out to be a key notion in Tokarczuk’s cognising culture), Yente

makes out a sitting figure, her face lit up by some white glow, hair peculiar, attire eccentric – yet nothing has surprised Yente in an awfully long time; she has lost that ability. She just watches letters appear out of nowhere from under this figure’s fingers on a bright flat rectangle of light, lining up obediently in little rows. The only thing Yente can think of are tracks in the snow – since the dead lose their ability to read, one of death’s most unfortunate consequences.... And so poor Yente is unable to recognize her own name in this YENTE YENTE YENTE displayed now on the screen. She therefore loses interest and vanishes somewhere up above.³⁸

It is a literary review of the vastness of work that accompanied the creation of this masterpiece of 21st-century historical prose.

Le Roy Ladurie may have worked in the same fashion 30 years before that or so. As he notes in the opening chapter of his book, *From Inquisition to ethnography*, he looked for

even more detailed and even more introspective materials [...] related to real peasants, flesh and blood. Fortunately for us, yet unfortunately for them, a man living in the 14th century /... gave them voice, even to the whole village. [...] This man was Jacques Fournier, the bishop of Pamiers in 1317-1326. [...] During his episcopacy, this ethnographer and police officer would listen to the peasantry from the County of Foix, especially those from the upper parts of Ariège. He would oppress them with bread of pain and water of mortification. However, only few were tortured. In order to expose heresy or a deviation from the official doctrine of the Church, he interrogated them carefully and thoroughly, taking his time. The ‘interrogation’ arrived to us in a lengthy manuscript in Latin.³⁹

Experimenting with narration, the French historian broke the classical convention of historiography: he plucked the community of Montailou from obscurity and brought the characters of Pierre Maury, Beatrice de Planisolles, and Pierre Clergue back to life (also catapulting them to the contemporary imagination). Most of all, however, he allowed them to engage in a dialogue with him in front of the reader. It was a genuine revolution in the scholarly historical narrative.⁴⁰ Tokarczuk, as we are yet to see, will go one step further.

Both historical sources, *Book of the Words of the Lord* and *Inquisition Register* from 1326, sparked the historical imagination. They became objects of extensive interpretations and *narration experiments*, led by the Polish historical writer and the French historian. There are many similarities and coincidences between these two flagship examples of historical narrative, and I shall come back to some of them, just as there are similarities to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and the author himself from the period of writing *Lector in fabula*.⁴¹ Likewise, Tokarczuk considers the reader-narrator cooperation in interpreting a text as a *sine qua non* for the emergence of *cognising culture*. *The Tender Narrator*, an account of Tokarczuk's self-conscious methodology used by a researcher-observer, plays a vital role in the deconstruction of this culture. I deem *Lalka i perła*, though small in size, equally important, and a telling demonstration of the power of the methodology applied in interpreting a particular literary work. Naturally, *Prawiek i inne czasy* [Primeval and Other Times], *Dom dzienny, dom nocny* [House of Day, House of Night], *Gra na wielu bębenkach* [Playing on a multitude drums], *Szafa* [The Wardrobe], *Ostatnie historie* [The Last Stories], *Anna In w grobowcach świata* [Anna In in the Tombs of the World], *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* [Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead], *Bieguni* [Flights], or *Opowiadania bizarne* [Tales of the Bizarre] also provide valuable material since they are a recording of Tokarczuk's given moment in life, state of the imagination/mind. Sometimes they themselves are becoming/become an inspiration, a cultural matrix to read historiography.

I must admit that since I read *Opowiadania bizarne* [Tales of the Bizarre], I cannot stop thinking about the works of the renowned Polish medievalist Jacek Banaszkiwicz as historiographic tales of the bizarre. His *Takie sobie średniowieczne bajeczki* [Such-so Medieval Fairy Tales] is a showcase for his hermeneutic skills, literary artistry, and narrative imagination, all presented in 16 historical-historiographical studies, dedicated to medieval chroniclers. I have been seduced by them for years now, yet it was only thanks to Tokarczuk's notion of the bizarre that I was able to notice (and label) their uniqueness on a European scale. For instance, the juxtaposition of Wincenty Kadłubek, Bruno of Querfurt, Richer of Reims with... Quentin Tarantino must be labelled bizarre.⁴² Similarly to the following analysis of medieval narration practices related to Bolesław II the Bold:

Undoubtedly, thanks to Długosz's presentations, the ambiguous information of Bolesław's impure tendencies, somewhat veiled behind the king's eccentric ideas, becomes clear, it attracts attention and begins to be the chief cause of the king's dishonour. In the breviary lessons devoted to

St. Stanislaus, we can read a description of his enemy: “cum iumentis equarum habitabat”. At the end of the 15th century, Kallimach openly points out that he “lived like an animal” and talks, in no ambiguous terms, about the ruler’s “intercourse with a mare”. Born with the pen of Wicent from Kielce, another bad image of Bolesław emerges: a sexual deviant, libertine, and tyrant oppressing his subjects.⁴³

What Banaszkiwicz finds interesting in *The Gesta principum Polonorum*, written by Gallus, contrary to other previous historians, is its sheer narrative structure: the role of Gallus as an observer and a narrator,⁴⁴ as well as the conscious act of plucking the characters from obscurity, oblivion.⁴⁵

This is what Tokarczuk talked about in *Wykłady łódzkie* [Łódź lectures]⁴⁶ when she elaborated on restoring memory as a process of turning back time. Yente, since the moment she swallowed the amulet of immortality, “has been looking through time and seeing everything from above”.⁴⁷ The Nobel laureate also talked about a need to look for/recognise signs that give a meaning to the meaningless, the random. Sometimes it can lead to psychology and Freud, sometimes to discovering gnosis and Hans Jonas (the writer valuing her freedom so much that she rejects any “thought dogmas”). It always happens as a process of understanding, most often divided into stages. “Such stages”, Tokarczuk says, “are like words in a sentence or paragraphs in a difficult text.” In order to understand it, it has to be chunked. Periodisation, for instance, is an attempt to embrace and to understand History. It is an exploration done through a division into periods and epochs, viewed *post factum*. She notes that history becomes clear *post factum*. However, people, the actors of History, are not equipped with such knowledge, they act *a priori* rather than *a posteriori*. Perhaps that begets opposition and disagreement with the surrounding reality.⁴⁸ Because they do not know the consequences of their actions. Tokarczuk raises a question: what would happen if we reversed the situation? What would be the course of history if people knew the future? I must admit it is an intriguing philosophical question.

Tokarczuk’s cognising culture has a methodological background, revealing, layer upon layer, all aspects of reality. It is all about cross-section, stratification as a means to get to the core. She learnt it from Freud.⁴⁹ It is a method of “an interpretative peeling of layers, the existence of which we never predicted in the first place. They are revealed thoroughly, one after another... Not through acts of perception or insight but through series of never-ending interpretations.”⁵⁰ Even when the interpretations contradict each other, since contradiction is a type of complementation, she observes. An interpretive understanding is all about giving meaning, many meanings.

A text is incomplete, just like Torah, read by yeshiva students, dipping their fingers in bowls full of salt – there are as many versions of it as there are

arrangements of letters. Each version is a name of God, the one who is able to count them all and pronounce them will close the history of the world, will bring time to an end.⁵¹

Knowing by reaching layers of the ontic/historicity. It is not about an act of imputing performed by the cognitive subject, but it is about an act of revealing. Such is the morphological structure of being itself, taken for granted here. In *Flights*, Tokarczuk writes:

[...] each layer is only vaguely reminiscent of the next or of the previous; usually it's a variation, a modified version, each contributes to the order of the whole, though you wouldn't know it looking at each one on its own, cut off from the whole. Each slice is a part of the whole, but it's governed by its own rules. The three-dimensional order, reduced and imprisoned in a two-dimensional layer, seems abstract. You might even think that there was no whole, that there never had been.⁵²

Such reflections bear resemblance to Pomian's notion of historical being. Similarly to the author of *Porządek czasu*, Tokarczuk assumes that we have a capacity to reveal its structure, to obtain knowledge about it. I am only signalling this issue here as I shall come back to it in the part devoted to philosophy of history incorporated in *The Books of Jacob*.

We can raise a more general question: what knowledge do we look for? What kind of knowledge does Olga Tokarczuk mean? Her books give us some clues. One can find a fascination with *pansophism* and *gnosis* there. What also permeates there is the tradition of *paideia*, which at times can morph into a strongly felt (similarly to Wokulski's case) need for *autopaideia*. What can be also observed is the attachment to the heritage of Jan Amos Komeński, to open access, expressed by the formula: "so that everyone knows everything about everything". Hence, references to those who wanted to provide humanity with omniscience, such as a Catholic priest named Benedykt Chmielowski and his *New Athens*. She read about it in Maria and Jan Józef Lipski's edition, which she "read throughout her childhood and youth".⁵³ In *Flights* she wrote fondly of the priest: "He was a kind of Josephus cloaked in a provincial fog, a Herodotus on the outermost outskirts of the world",⁵⁴ and in *The Books of Jacob* she made him one of the main *dramatis personae*. Some other links in the history of open access are the Enlightenment's *Encyclopédie*, of which Aszer Rubin finds out for the first time in a café in Vienna, wondering *Was ist Aufklärung?*,⁵⁵ and Biblioteka Braci Załuskich [The Załuski Brothers' Library],⁵⁶ the tragic fate of which provokes Tokarczuk to reflect:

If human beings had only known how to truly preserve their knowledge of the world, if they had just engraved it into rock, into crystals, into diamond and in so doing, passed it on to their descendants, then perhaps the world would now look altogether otherwise.⁵⁷

That is why it was with joy and hope that Tokarczuk welcomed the advent of *Wikipedia*, mankind's most honest cognitive project, as she described it in *Flights*.

People bring to Wikipedia everything they know. If the project succeeds, then this encyclopaedia, undergoing perpetual renewal, will be the greatest wonder of the world. It has everything we know in it – everything, definitions, events, and problems our brains have worked on; we shall cite sources, provide links. And so we will start to stitch together our version of the world, be able to bundle up the globe in our own story. It will hold everything. Let's get down to work! Let everyone write even just a sentence on whatever it is they know best.⁵⁸

It is Benedykt Chmielowski's dream come true and New Athens 2.0 all in one. What is also enticing, for Tokarczuk, in Wikipedia, is its structure, and intrinsic form, which imitates the nature: sometimes it is like a *sponge*, which soaks up everything, and sometimes it resembles

deep-sea corals growing over years until they started to create the most fantastic forms. This was knowledge that had already attained critical mass and had since crossed over into some other state – it appeared to reproduce, to multiply, to organize in complex and bizarre forms.⁵⁹

She knows, however, that this communal encyclopedia of the 21st century must have its “end of the world”, just like the Wanderer from Flamarion's engraving, and needs to look beyond the horizon to see what is there. Wikipedia offers only that “which can be expressed verbally, which is described by words.” Yet it cannot be “the end of the world” because then what shall be done with the verbally inexpressible? With our non-verbal experiences, anxieties, feelings, and emotions, which can “be transmitted directly, without recourse to the printed word.”⁶⁰

And what to do with those, for whom words have not been invented yet ...

In this sense, such an encyclopaedia will not include everything, [Tokarczuk notes]. **For the sake of balance, there should be another body of knowledge – all that we are not familiar with, the other side, the inside, not ready to be subsumed with a table of contents, the one that cannot be dealt with a search engine; one cannot tread on words through their vastness but one sets foot between words, into a great abyss of meanings.** Time after time we stumble and fall.⁶¹

[emphasis – J.P.]

That which exists/happens/takes place **between** is of paramount importance for *cognising culture*. It is the world/ontology of **metaxa**, according to Tokarczuk.⁶² We shall come back to this issue when discussing her view of philosophy of history.

The internet proved to be equally great, just like the abyss of meanings, and also pulling towards terraces of the 21st-century hell (hell 2.0):

Instead of hearing the harmony of the world, we have heard a cacophony of sounds, an unbearable static in which we try, in despair, to pick up on some quieter melody, even the weakest beat. The famous Shakespeare quote has never been a better fit than it is for this cacophonous new reality: more and more often, the Internet is a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,⁶³

she concluded in her Nobel lecture.

Living in the era of the internet and Wikipedia, we believe that Open Access and Free and Open Source Software (F/LOSS) are a golden means to any problem.⁶⁴ It proved to be an illusion. The sad truth is that “life of those living in the Mount Olympus shifted to the *Dynasty*, and the heroic deeds are guided by Lara Croft”.⁶⁵ We forgot about the Pearl that gnostics looked for. The world of the Anthropocene urgently needs salvation. *Matrix* offers no therapy for this affliction.

Tokarczuk believes that just as there is matter and anti-matter, and information and anti-information, there must exist two worlds of knowledge: the world of *conceptual knowledge* and its *other side*, its opposite side, the world of *aconceptual knowledge* – something inexpressible by the logic of the West. I East and West as two sides of knowledge of the world, both of which Tokarczuk’s cognising culture tries to reach by default, discerning the limitations of the European and anthropocentric thought about nature and culture. In *Czuty narrator* [The Tender Narrator] Tokarczuk indicates a need for a paradigm shift. She came up with this idea even earlier: Karin, one of the third-person narrators in *Flights*, visualised it in such a way:

Associations travelled down unusual routes, likenesses were found in the least expected versions – like kinship in Brazilian soap operas, where anyone could turn out to be the child or husband or sister of anybody else. Well-trodden paths turned out to be worth nothing, while those thought untraversable proved convenient routes. Something that meant nothing for years suddenly – in the professor’s [Karin’s husband] mind – became the departure point for some great revelation, a real paradigm shift.⁶⁶

The elaboration of these ideas can be found in the Nobel lecture:

All my life I’ve been fascinated by the systems of mutual connections and influences of which we are generally unaware, but which we discover by chance, as surprising coincidences or convergences of fate, all those bridges, nuts, bolts, welded joints and connectors that I followed in *Flights*. I’m fascinated by associating facts, and by searching for order. At its base, as I am convinced, the writer’s mind is a synthetic mind that doggedly gathers up all the tiny pieces in an attempt to stick them together again to create a universal whole.⁶⁷

Those words can be regarded not only as an autobiographical comment but also as an influence of Derrida, a written trace that we should follow in order to make sense of Tokarczuk's cognising culture, and her view of the world. "Our world emerges out of the inertia of thought", she wrote earlier.

It can be assumed that there are many ways of understanding the reality, perhaps even an infinite number. Yet only some are the dominant ones, stubbornly implanted into our minds, perpetuated due to inertia. The game is about choosing a couple of statements about the world, which seem obvious and irreducible. Next they should be subject to a scrupulous search, looking for cracks and holes. One must try to stay wary and let the imagination work. And remember Blake's words: Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth.⁶⁸

Another trace can be found in the analytical study of *Lalka i perła*:

Yet the perception of the world as composed of various realities, more or less real, more or less distant, is a feeling that accompanies a more general metaphysical reflection. **It is the simplest attempt not only to account for the complexity of the world but also to understand its intrinsic mechanisms.** This is the purpose of most intellectual speculation. Answers are sought to psychological and ethical questions: why are people different? Why are some people better at communicating with others? Why is there injustice in the world? Why do some people come to this world rich and beautiful, and others ugly and bad? **A vague feeling that there may be many realities we live in can be a source** and a foundation of all psychological typologies, which gives rise to myths or even whole religious systems.⁶⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

I am not certain whether Olga Tokarczuk knows the studies by Richard E. Nisbett or whether she read his *The Geography of Thought*,⁷⁰ however, the spirit of cultural psychology manifests itself not only in the above-mentioned self-reflexive text but also on the pages of her most recent books. It also resonates in the Nobel lecture. Cognition is a function of place and time. It depends on the cultural context it is embedded in. We believed too strongly, as Europeans, in the enlightened modernism as a panacea for all problems, in the unrestricted power of knowledge, science, and technology. Nature sends us signs that there is something wrong with us, with the West. We do not want to notice that the world is not an object "that can be cut into pieces, used up and destroyed", as she points out at the end of her Nobel lecture. "That is why I believe I must tell stories as if the world were a living, single entity, constantly forming before our eyes, and as if we were a small, and at the same time, powerful part of it."⁷¹

Now comes a time to have a closer look at the context of the cognising culture of the author of *Lalka i perła*.

II The role of self-reflection, that is, looking for the pearl

Everyone can look for a pearl, yet in order to realize that, one needs to transcend the hidden sense of one's wandering off and to understand it as a series of initiatory attempts, and a series of obstacles on the road home,

Tokarczuk notes in *Lalka i perła*, a text crucial for making sense of cognising culture.⁷² "Wokulski does not know himself, he just begins to get to know himself, step by step. The story told in *Lalka* is a story of knowing oneself", she notes.⁷³

Self-reflection is a path of knowledge, with meta-reflexivity being its highest level, the level of humanity and historical agency at once.

People are different, and what is more, since some are aware of this fact and others are not, the former are more conscious, higher in the rank. If so, there are real people, aware of their place in the world, and apparent people, not knowing, living in chaos. The former feel strange among the latter. If anything, the former, for their own safety, try to become similar to the latter, to hide among them. One group is awoken, the other group is asleep.⁷⁴

Apparently, these are not Margaret Archer's words, a British sociologist, the author of *Being Human*,⁷⁵ presenting the result of her detailed studies but Tokarczuk's autonomous reflections, based on the reading of *Lalka* [The Doll] by Bolesław Prus, together with its characters. She is not interested in the author, whatsoever. What really matters for her is the novel's cultural context, which accounts for its characters. She is into reconstructing their world, their struggles with fate, Chronos and Kairos, two dimensions of time, experienced by Tokarczuk's characters, and struggles viewed from the perspective of a researcher of human issues.

Literature offers prototypes of people such as the main character of *Lalka*. He is a gnostic pearl seeker, the Other in the world, a wanderer, someone with his roots belonging to a different order that he forgot about. In fact, Wokulski is guided by a religious instinct – a strong need for transcendence, which distinguishes him from "hollowed people" of his time. If he had been born earlier, he would have been a mystic, blessed with "a flicker of the spirit". Yet even in his time, we come short of words to describe such a person. What is worse, even he himself does not know who he is.⁷⁶

The three themes analysed in *The Tender Narrator* are: to know who we I the truth and post-truth, heads and tails of cognition. Tokarczuk's characters often find themselves in an existential and cognitive dilemma. They send out a message to us. This opens up some room for knowing through interpreting. The room to cooperate with them in their self-cognition as a path towards

autopaideia. Tokarczuk repeats, after Mircea Eliade, the recommendations for the cognitive subject:

That means: seeing signs, hidden meanings, *symbols*, in the sufferings, the depressions, the dry periods in everyday life. Seeing them and reading them even if they aren't there; if one sees them one can build a structure and read a message in the formless flow of things and the monotonous flux of historical facts.⁷⁷

It is an ultimate summary of Tokarczuk's work on *Lalka*. She relied on her own cognising culture in order to figure out a specific case study. Then she realised (as did we, the readers) that the case study is merely a beginning, a prolegomenon to ever more complex cognitive challenges: exercises in imagination, including these in reading history.

Reading histories. The ones from *The Books of Jacob* or from *Montaillou*. What is it? It is a narrative realisation of how people used to deal with their past and how they experienced history in their time, together with its driving force. The past does not fade into oblivion, it lives its life after life, acts in the present, and shapes the future, as can be seen in *Podróż ludzi Księgi* [The Journey of the Book-People] or *Anna In z grobowców świata* [Anna In in the Tombs of the World]. The mysterious *Book* kept in a monastery in the Pyrenees has the power to change the future, the Sumerian deity gets a second life, and Jacob Frank lives a multiple life: historical narrative becomes, in each and every case, a kind of self-reflection on cognising culture, which does not discover its timeless character but rather its historicity and fluidity.⁷⁸ A starting point for such a reflection is a **back question**.⁷⁹

Humanity has gone a long way in communicating and sharing experiences. Historiography, naturally, did not have a monopoly here. For years it has been relying on experience preserved in literary texts. That is why metahistorical reflection owes so much to meta-literary reflection in line with Hayden White's inspiration for historical poetics (Michał Paweł Markowski captured it perfectly as *poetics of tenderness*). His *Metahistory: The Historical Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, a fundamental work for the theory of history of the second half of the 20th century, relied on the assumption that historical narrative is unified, that is, it does not distinguish between disciplines each author belongs to, since particular historical genres, beginning from historiography, through literature, to philosophy of history, are secondary to historical imagination and deep mental-linguistic structures, which inspire particular statements. And it is these that are the objects of study for theory of history. Therefore, a methodologist, writing in 2022 about Tokarczuk's theory of historical knowledge, something which I am attempting to do, should not be a surprise but rather something natural. It is also my commentary and reply to the critics claiming that writing about history-sensitive film directors such as Andrzej Wajda, Oliver Stone, and Agnieszka Holland, for example, or about historical novelist like Tokarczuk as historians is a cognitive exaggeration. The opposite is true: we, historians, look

for pearls and ... sometimes we do find them! Not only where they are usually to be found within our discipline.

What kind of pearl is Olga Tokarczuk looking for? To what extent do her expectations converge with the searching done on the part of her characters, with Jacob Frank in the leading role? **To understand oneself and to develop the ability to feel the spirit of the world** – that is their goal. The finale of understanding is naming all that surrounds us:

All the tiny pieces of the world that are represented by human experiences, the situations people have endured and their memories. Tenderness person-alizes everything to which it relates, making it possible to give it a voice, to give it the space and the time to come into existence, and to be expressed. It is thanks to tenderness that the teapot starts to talk,

she writes, expressing her literary and cognitive credo in such a novel way. In Tokarczuk's cognising culture, tenderness entails a need to subjectify everything! Not only people. In this sense, Olga Tokarczuk's world is spiritual. Its equal members are a teapot, a forest full of green people, a bat,⁸⁰ Yente, Jacob Frank, and Wokulski.

Once we assume that Wokulski's struggling is in fact him struggling with himself, to save himself from the superficial and banal "world of form", we need to ask what it means to save oneself. In his conversation with a stone, in a state of delirium, in Skierniewice, Wokulski experiences a new hierarchy of values. Being human is a great opportunity as only humans are able to transcend and consciously free themselves from suffering. To save oneself thus means to find and save one's internal essence, the spiritual "self", eternal ego, free from desires which drag oneself into a treadmill of suffering and into escapes from suffering. The pearl is thus a metaphor of the soul.⁸¹

A life with no soul is broken, incomplete. In the philosophically oriented *Zagubiona dusza* [Lost Soul], published in 2017, with Olga Tokarczuk's text and Joanna Concejo's illustrations working in tandem, it was portrayed with a minimal means of expression:

There was once a man, who worked a lot and fast and lost his soul, leaving it far behind. He lived quite well without a soul – he slept, ate, worked, drove his car, even played tennis. Sometimes, however, he thought that everything is so flat around him, as if he moved on a smooth maths note-book page, laid out in a grid pattern.⁸²

This sense of *flatness* of the world and one's own *flatness* may prove to be a turning point, a new beginning. Telling stories about it equals saving the world. It is a life saved by means of a word/text/print/multimodal story, snatched out of

nothingness, and saved for the sake of history. Its condition is subjectification: giving voice to oneself for one's own sake.

Subjectification is understood in opposition to objectification. It is a natural consequence of the fact that the experience of *representation* is primary to the experience of *reality*. In order to realise that, cognising culture had to go a long way and become a pilgrim looking for a pearl. Cognition requires patience, it is all about reflecting carefully. As Olga Tokarczuk observes, through the words of Nachman ben Lewi from Busk: "To be impatient means not to live, to be always in the future, in what is going to happen, but not yet here".⁸³ In other words, it means to live in a void, beyond time, to occupy a black hole. Isn't it true that

impatient people resemble ghosts, which are never here, in this particular place, and now, in a given moment, but instead stick their heads out of life, just like the travelers, who apparently, when reached the world's edge, looked beyond the horizon. What did they see? What can the impatient see?⁸⁴

Nothing important, since they never truly lived. To live truly means to be aware of one's **now and here**. To live truly means a lot more: **to live a multiple life**. It leads us straight to questions about literature and its cognising role.

III Literature as *representation, cosmos of experiences, and driving force all in one*

Let me start on a philosophical note. Ian Hacking in his *Representing and Intervening. Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* claims that it is not rationality that makes humanity distinct, nor is it language, or an ability to make tools but a human ability to represent what we have possessed as a species. According to Hacking, representation is primary to the reality that it represents, even though it seems like a reversal of the natural order. In the early stage of human development, representation manifested itself first in the form of a material practice (taking the form of an artefact), and only then it took a form mediated through language/text. As Hacking notes: "The first peculiarly human invention is representation. Once there is a practice of representing, a second-order concept follows in train. This is the concept or reality, a concept which offers content only when there are first-order representations."⁸⁵ As long as we assume that Hacking is right, we **do not need** to look for ontological foundations of epistemology (a *concept* of reality, the representation of which constitutes a reflection) because reality, in such a case, would be a property of representations. I believe such a view of literature understood as a representation would be close to Olga Tokarczuk's cognising culture, even though she does not work solely within the so-called paradigm of representing.⁸⁶ In *The Tender Narrator*, she writes:

"Literature, creating worlds of an ontologically astonishing status, introduces us to go beyond ourselves, and enables us to participate in the experience which

otherwise would be unavailable to us.”⁸⁷ It is very similar in scope to Markowski’s analysis in the previously mentioned *Poetyka wrażliwości* [Poetics of tenderness]. It is not about facts but about how richly they can be and are experienced. Both Markowski and Tokarczuk draw attention to a need to constantly broaden one’s horizons, to interpret possible worlds as a necessary training for all humanists.

Literature is all about conveying the full experience, not facts. It is a game of worlds and possibilities, a wonderful, breath-taking sleight of hand, which sweeps away and dismantles our meticulous and pragmatic orders, our divisions “here there”, carefully categorised content of our mental pigeonholes.⁸⁸

It is a metaphor related to psychology. It is all about going beyond one’s *ego*, no matter how it is/has been conceptualised from the perspective of science/philosophy/psychology.⁸⁹ It is all about opening up to experiment, to a shift of perspective, to working in a laboratory of the mind, which is facilitated by literature:

When we read a novel, we have an impression of participating in another life, in which we suffer, love, experience anxieties and disappointments, become ill and recover. On the other hand, being engaged in such a virtual world, we are aware of its conventional character – the experienced emotions are not radical, in a sense they are real and unreal. **The reader can distance themselves from the textual world since they have power over it.** The captured imagination reads a novel with its own pace, following images. It remains active yet allows to be guided. It comes across the novel’s characters, which it treats as roles written in order to identify with them. What comes up is an opportunity to experience a cathartic fear, all safe (virtual) reactions. **We experience the events for which there is no room in our life.** Death and resurrection. Being an animal and an object. Conversations with gods. Multiple dying. Various kinds of love and possession. Being locked up in all sorts of confinements and going beyond each and every limitation. Ignoring the time. Lifting off the ground and exploring space.⁹⁰

Literature covers the whole spectrum of possible experiences. If we have not experienced a given phenomenon, the virtual literary laboratory can facilitate it, inviting us to join a shared experiment. That is how Umberto Eco experimented with the readers of *The Name of the Rose*, inviting them to solve the riddle of the medieval story with a criminal twist. By analogy, Olga Tokarczuk performs a similar operation on the readers in *The Books of Jacob*. She is aware that

every fictionalization involves a transition from the question *what happened next?* to an attempt at understanding it based on our human experience: *Why did it happen that way?* Literature begins with that *why*, even if we were to answer that question over and over with an ordinary *I don’t know*.⁹¹

Historiography can be described in a similar fashion. Also here, a fundamental Question, why? remains unanswered, yet it rouses a historian from cognitive stagnation, from the cult of facts. One thing is certain: we need to tell stories of our experience so that it does not die alone and forsaken:

A thing that happens and is not told ceases to exist and perishes. This is a fact well known to not only historians, but also (and perhaps above all) to every stripe of politician and tyrant. He who has and weaves the story is in charge.⁹²

That is **the power of history** that I talked about in an inaugural lecture at the 20th General Congress of the Polish Historians in Lublin, warning against using it as a tool to oppress/enslave minds.⁹³

How can historians benefit from their contact with literature? Methodologists and theoreticians of history (and literature) addressed this question many times, underscoring, above all, the significance of literature as a historical source of a given epoch.⁹⁴ However, Bronisław Geremek, over 40 years ago, noticed something else: “[...] a transition in the interests of history of culture – breaking up with studies of the results of the human spirit, an increase in the interest in collective mentality – revalues a literary work studied by modern historiography” since it becomes a point of reference for the construction suggested by a historian, its specific verifier.⁹⁵ It offers a chance to compare the two worlds: a fictional one, based on historical imagination of a given epoch with a non-fictional, full of cultural suggestions taken straight from contemporary times, a historian’s *construct*.

In Tokarczuk’s works I can find a continuation of this issue, extended by the sum of human experience: for a historian, reading literature has the power of opening historians to viewpoints different than their own or those of witnesses of history: “In its broadest sense, literature is above all a treasure of viewpoints of other people, visions of the world filtered through a unique mind of every individual. Nothing compares to it” – Tokarczuk notes.⁹⁶ It is the best possible training of historical imagination, a prerequisite of good historiography.

Of particular importance is the novel, not necessarily read but studied, which has a deeper meaning, requiring from a reader to engage all their hermeneutic skills. Especially in the case of masterpieces such as *Lalka*. The novel works then

through its magic duality, an inherent part of masterpieces. It tells the story of a detailed, historical, specific time of the 19th century and the stories of people living at that time. It is thus a time, for those living over a century after, which is a historical fresco, a chain of genre scenes threaded onto a linear time axis. It tells us “how it was” or rather “how it could be” since it is a novel, an internal experience, not a recording of facts. On the other hand, it tells us “how it is”, relating to fundamental psychological truths, which grow old in a slower fashion than the external world. Actually, all that is of essence in *Lalka*, would be possible to happen today. Wokulski could earn his fortune, let’s say, in Germany, and come back to Poland,

missing Izabela, a daughter of the ambassador Łęcki, rich and educated abroad. Rzecki's diaries would concern the ups and downs of a politically disillusioned idealist – history would provide multiple causes of that, and Geist's discoveries would be related to quantum physics. Novels are “modern” only by appearances – in fact, they are attractive by an enticing constancy of characters, independent of history. Wokulski is both a contemporary and eternal character.⁹⁷

I am delighted not only by a wonderful metaphor presenting an epic novel as *a chain of genre scenes threaded onto a linear time axis* but also by the suggested kind of training of historical imagination, which sparks a question, “how could it be?”. The things that happened (perfective aspect of the past simple tense is a domain of a classical historian), from the perspective of philosophy of history are a realisation of merely one of many alternative scenarios that could have happened. They were potential, from the perspective of those living today (the term “potential history” can be found in the contemporary theory of history, denoting a potential *driving force of the past*, in relation to the present that is yet to come). It is only in the context of their potential alternatives that they can be understood. Literature *presents* such alternative scenarios, and, in that sense, *factuality* is a representation/reflection of this presentation, not the other way round. Another thought: “Time treats literature differently than people. *Lalka* has not been touched by time”.⁹⁸ The novel operates with *ideal types*, in Weber's sense. They are “eternal” since they maintain their cognitive value in different historical contexts. They can also be proactive towards history:

“**Literature** – according to Tokarczuk – including its oldest, oral forms, **creates ideas and sets perspectives which get embedded in the mind and get to format it, whether we want it or not** [emphasis – JP].”⁹⁹ It is an ontological thesis, relating to historicity, and to the construction of History. Stories that we keep within ourselves “format our mind”, affect directly the actors of history, spurring them into action. In this sense, according to Tokarczuk, Coetzee was right when he stated that views cannot be separated from their holders because they push them into action or prevent them from acting. Beliefs and ideas do not exist on their own; they are like viruses and can survive only, thanks to their carriers, hence can be discussed only in the context of their hosts: their relationships with the world, emotions, and actions.¹⁰⁰ It is an indirect power to change the world, to make history.

Literature has the power to do this. We should drop the simplistic categories of highbrow and lowbrow literature, popular and niche, and take the division into genres very lightly. We should drop the definition of “national literatures,” knowing as we do that the universe of literature is a single thing, like the idea of *unus mundus*, a common psychological reality in which our human experience is united. The Author and the Reader perform equivalent roles, the former by dint of creating, the latter by making a constant interpretation.¹⁰¹

And we should focus on the essence of literary presentation: a creation of the world where a common language and view of the reality complement each other, facilitating a proactive approach for real, not in a virtual reality. A key role is played here by a common (shared) language.¹⁰² However, the biggest problem for a community is when it cannot create one. Or when such a language “thanks to which the maps of the world were drawn” is forgotten. Perhaps it got waylaid. “Maybe it lies wadded up and dusty in a drawer of bras and knickers, squeezed into a corner like sexy thongs acquired once in a fit of enthusiasm that there was never really an occasion to wear”, Tokarczuk notes in a bizarre way.¹⁰³

How to find it? And bring back to life? That is the question! Let’s try to address these issues.

IV *Lector in fabula 2.0: reading as knowing*

Literature and language open up to the issue of *reading*. Literature is a particular kind of communication practice, where the author’s experience meets the reader’s experience, and the language of a story is merely (or as much as) a medium for the meeting. The meeting always bears the risk of a misunderstanding/rejection on the part of both sides. It can always end up in a failed cognitive experiment. It is not about the truth of a text (whatever it means) but about the fact that, within a given cognising culture, the truth is not revealed but co-created. From the perspective of the author, we can deal with a *textual seduction*, or with reason-oriented argumentation, devoid of emotions. What really matters is cognitive effectiveness. Reading involves a meeting between two consciousness, standing in each other’s way, wrestling with each other. It is vital that they treat each other as subjects, which offers a real chance for a dialogue. Let’s take, for instance, street disputes in Nachman’s youth, when public verbal duels were commonplace.¹⁰⁴ *A disputation as a cognitive practice*, where the texts, being read, got emancipated, subjectified, and invited to be debated about, challenged to a cognitive duel. A debate which facilitates the reader’s and the writer’s development helps them to create themselves anew. That is the essence of Olga Tokarczuk’s project *Lector in fabula 2.0*. “Contrary to appearances, it is not about finding out something new; it is about making sure that what we know is still valid.”¹⁰⁵

One can read compulsively,¹⁰⁶ just like priest Chmielowski did: “printed pages inspire in him an Instinct that is difficult to master: the need to seize and not let go before getting a good look – if only a fleeting one – at the whole.”¹⁰⁷ One can read carefully, ruminating on the text time and time again, as was practised by my favourite Józef Czapski, leaving us traces of the books he read in *Czytając*.¹⁰⁸ Or Umberto Eco or Tony Judt, just to mention a few. Today the majority of people, if they still read, limit their endeavours to book summaries offered by Wikipedia or Harold Bloom’s guidebooks.¹⁰⁹ Tokarczuk is aware of the cultural context she operates in. She is aware of the printed word being displaced by multimedia. It is one of the threads running in her Nobel lecture. She is convinced, however, that reading and literature are still an integral part of

the world for those looking for things of cognitive value. It is perhaps because a meeting in literature, according to Tokarczuk, takes place not in an abstract space but in a specific/named *cultural space*. “There is always a hand behind letters, always a face that emerges from the sentences on the page”, she writes in the Books of Jacob.¹¹⁰ In other words: a meeting on the stage of a drama, which is a human life. A meeting, in which that which is private, intimate, and signed with a particular name and surname becomes public.¹¹¹ Without going public, without a reader, there is no literature. It is only in the reader and through the reader that literature is complete and becomes a full-fledged cognitive laboratory. A transition from a literary text into a narrative cognitive laboratory, in Tokarczuk’s cognising culture, gets labelled as **the wonder of reading**.

Each time we open a book, a wonder, something extraordinary happens between the eye and the surface of the paper. We can see strings of letters, and when we scan them, our brain transforms letters into images, thoughts, scents, voices. It is not only about decoding basic signs, even the computer would be able to do it. It is rather a matter of images, scents, sounds that transpire out of signs. It is about a possibility to communicate the subtlest, most complex experience to the reader, to open up someone’s whole life to them, to a greater degree than in the real life. How is it possible? I guess psychologists have never explained this wonder of reading properly. It is a wonder which has become commonplace as it happens all over the world. It is a wonder I know well myself since first and foremost I am a reader and only then a writer.¹¹²

“Yes, we are here to read”, I must admit that this single sentence from *The Tender Narrator* broke all the barriers between Tokarczuk’s cognising culture and my own.¹¹³ *We live to read* could be for her (and for me) a message/motto of all humanistic studies. Obviously, a thesis that we live, as authors, through our books would be nothing new. It belongs to a long-lasting European tradition, dating back to Ovid. My academic lecturer of philosophy, Professor Andrzej Nowicki, made it a basis of *incontrology*, a branch of philosophy of culture, which looked for an atheistic perspective of immortality in possible *in spe* meetings in objects/books. A system constructed by Nowicki (inspired by the renaissance philosopher Vanini, whose texts we were inundated with during lectures) assumed that if a thought awoken by reading becomes an immanent part of my *ego*, not only will the author live in me but also will I live in the author. The unity of time and place is insignificant in the case of immortality, something that Yente knows very well. That is how Nowicki describes it:

If one of Ovid’s thoughts, being a part of his personality, became one of the most important thoughts of my very own system, then Ovid lives in me, and also I lived in a way – two thousand years ago – in Ovid.¹¹⁴

Obviously, Olga Tokarczuk is also aware that reading means participating in “a long chain of initiates”, in line with Nachman from Busk: “And I felt then that I became another link in the long chain of initiates”, he said leaning over the *holy book*. The wonder of reading is not about a feeling of continuity or a simple understanding of the text. Those who read only to understand commit a sin. A sin of **blasphemy**, Tokarczuk adds. “One reads to experience – it is a deeper, wholistic kind of understanding”.¹¹⁵ What is the essence of the wonder behind reading? It is about opening the reader to “[...]a patient venturing into a multilayered, complex, meaningful structure of the surrounding world, by means of a conscious use of language, playing with signs, contexts, references, to a constant spiraling up or down the stairs of ambiguous images.”¹¹⁶

There is no fear of meeting the Other in such an approach. I do not mean only that “by reading, we participate in someone else’s life, and become them. We look through their eyes, perceive the world with their senses, think like the character which we are drawn to.”¹¹⁷ I mean something more, I mean opening up to **otherness**. It is another significant epistemic category in Tokarczuk’s cognising culture. **Otherness** is much more than **Strangeness**, it is a kind of ontological/semiotic incommensurability. It is like dealing with Chinese characters which we cannot comprehend, treating them as “a message without any sense”.¹¹⁸

There is something attractive in being the Other, something that one can relish, which seems sweet. It is good not to understand the target language, customs, move like a ghost between others, who are distant, unrecognisable. Then a specific type of wisdom emerges – an ability to deduce, to grasp the uncommon. Acuity and perceptiveness get activated. The Other acquires a new perspective and becomes, willy nilly, a sage. Whoever told us that being an insider is nice and sweet? Only the Other can fully understand what the world is.¹¹⁹

History is understood here as **a text to be read**. Olga Tokarczuk’s *Lector in fabula 2.0* prepares us for such a *reading of the world*. *The experienced past* is translated/rendered into the language of a historical novel or historiography, similarly to Alun Muslow’s idea.¹²⁰

Literature/historiography is open to such an experience, and as a result it makes the readers open to it too. The world of the Frankists recreated in *The Books of Jacob*, or the world of Montailou, is a cognitive “training in otherness”. Tokarczuk even recommends it to young writers, encouraging them to travel into the worlds which are different from/incompatible with the worlds we live in:

Due to the fact that we do not use a local language, the rough seams of an illusory vision of the world as tamed and controlled by us become ever more visible, and we and our sight act from a distance, roaming, like a ghost, through layers of signs and facilities. We fall back on blind chance

and amazing coincidences, we also rely on our own illusions, when we order from a menu, guided by the apparently well-known order of impenetrable letters.¹²¹

The opposite of cultural otherness is a **capacity for cultural translation**. Tokarczuk points out that it is the deepest form of cognition. Translation is an ultimate act of understanding. Something which is even metaphysical, which happens only to geniuses, and for which she thanked her translators in the Nobel lecture talking about *a miracle of rendition*, when a source text's meaning **gets immediately rendered into another, equally valuable target text**. It is not only about translating one's cognising culture into another. Sometimes a translation gives a new life to a literary work, and it "begins to sprout":

Translation is not only a rendering from a source language into a target language, across cultures, but it is also like gardening, when you cut off an offshoot and graft it onto another plant, where it sprouts, flourishes and becomes a fully-fledged branch.¹²²

The same idea could be found in *The Books of Jacob*, particularly in a letter from Benedykt Chmielowski to Drużbacka:

In this Manner, when we quote and cite our Sources, we build an Edifice of Knowledge, and we enable that Knowledge to proliferate as I do my Vegetables or Apple Trees. **Quoting is like grafting a Tree; citing, indicating a grafted Quote's Source, like sowing Seeds**. Consequently, we need not fear Fires in Libraries, a Swedish Deluge, or the Uprisings of a Khmelnytsky. **Every Book is a Graft of new Information**.¹²³

[emphasis – J.P.]

I am impressed by this novel metaphor: quoting is like grafting a tree! What a depth of meanings.

It is time now not to waste the sowed seeds and test the fertile ground for grafts of new, insightful information. We will try to address the issue of how, according to Olga Tokarczuk, we know.

V How do we know? Olga Tokarczuk's historical epistemology

Olga Tokarczuk's cognising culture operates with a whole gamut of cognitive tools to capture the full complexity of cognitive processes. It is thanks to them that we go deeper, revealing new layers building up the cognising culture through which we "view the world". An act of perception, signalled in language through various forms of the verb "**to perceive**", assumes a one-off character of this cognitive act.¹²⁴ "To perceive" means to see something accidentally, but it does not involve a plan "to get to the core of things". There is just plain sight. Its ontic status is based on belief/trust. Perceiving is an

anti-conceptual visualisation/an empty frame (if it exists at all). It is all different in the case of knowing, especially when it comes to its form, which Tokarczuk calls *insight*.

Insight is a sudden, holistic, spontaneous realisation of the essence of what we perceive. It is a special kind of perception – multilayered and simultaneous. What, where, how, why, what for is packed all into one; it is an intellectual, emotional, and intuitive realisation.¹²⁵

It is a significant declaration. Tokarczuk's cognising culture operates on three levels: intellectual, emotional, and intuitive. Let me be clear: they are all essential to fully know a given phenomenon as they complement each other. Let me present each of them briefly.

The intellectual level is a level of enlightened knowledge. It aims, in line with Ascherbach from *The Books of Jacob*, to “**polish words so that it will be possible to see through them clearly** [emphasis – JP].”¹²⁶ It is a world of concepts, precision, logic, deduction, and induction. A world of empirical data, perceptively verifiable, processed into scientific knowledge. Seeing and measuring, discussed by Tokarczuk's characters when they talk about the Enlightenment in *The Books of Jacob*. Yet there is the other side to it. “[...]something well lit casts shadow. That is what is disturbing about this new idea. Enlightenment begins when people lose their faith in the goodness and the order of the world. The Enlightenment is an expression of mistrust”.¹²⁷

Mistrust towards that which we intentionally want to be left in the shade is secondary to higher goals. These goals were meant to be progress and modernisation. Ruling over the world thanks to science and at the cost of the uneducated. Even at the cost of moral order and bending of the rules of nature, or discarding them.

Olga Tokarczuk's cognising culture rejects this axiology. For Tokarczuk, **shadow** is equally important to a well-lit object. The Enlightenment and science strive for objectivity. Shadow is close to subjectivity:

Expressing one's views must be subjective, contrary to what is taught at universities, contrary to the whole institution of science as knowledge aiming at maximal objectivisation. Our communication is significant and deep as long as it remains a mutual exchange of that which is subjective, not fully to be communicated across. And he [John Maxwell Coetzee] states: only literary fiction is able to describe such a state of subjectivity in people (and at the same time, a state of their completeness), only fiction with its possibility to build the whole character has an advantage over the arguments of reasons (hence over a traditional form of intellectual lecture).¹²⁸

In a similar fashion, Tokarczuk negates the opposition of culture and science. She sees it from a different angle:

/.../ Aufklärung relationship to culture is the same as theory's to practice. Enlightenment has more to do with scholarly work, with abstractions, while culture is the perfection of interpersonal contacts through the intercession of the word, literature, the image, fine arts, she writes in *the Books of Jacob*¹²⁹

It is emotions rather than intellect that are of greater significance in these contacts. While intellectual categories can be negotiated (or at least we can attempt to do so), emotional categories “elude such a negotiation” on the level of rationality and need to be experienced in a casual way.¹³⁰ A key role here is played by a capacity for **empathy**.¹³¹ Without empathy, Tokarczuk's cognising culture could not be designed properly.

Empathy has had a relatively short tradition in the history of humanity, [she writes.] Most probably it was developed somewhere in the East, at least six centuries before Christ. It was not until the Buddhist teaching that such an approach was appreciated – to look at another person as if we were them, not to trust an apparent boundary that separates us from others, for it is an illusion. **Whatever happens to you, happens to me**. There is no “other people's suffering”. These illusory boundaries make people distinct from one another but also separate people from animals.¹³²

[emphasis – J.P.]

“Whatever happens to you, happens to me” is a motto of Olga Tokarczuk's cognising culture. That is why the narrator **needs to be tender**. From here it takes only a little step to understand that tenderness is the highest form of love and humanity. And at the same time, it is a foundation of her philosophy of history, or perhaps, for the better choice of words, her **hauntology**, alluding to a category from Derrida's *Specters of Marx*,¹³³ since there are many ontologies/ various cosmologies behind Tokarczuk's cognising culture. They are specific spectres of the past, making themselves present here and now, which also deserve **tender memories**. The only religion that Yente preaches is **the religion of remembering about those who passed away**. Tokarczuk's “Spectre past” is not haunting and is not taken straight from horror stories but rather complements the spirituality of the world understood as a whole.

Tenderness is also the foundation of her *philosophy (history) of life*, relying on the co-existence and empathy with the whole World, including the non-human one:

There is still a greater, more powerful or perhaps even more fundamental word, which with a grace appropriate only to concepts, covers love, not diminishing its importance. It is **empathy** but not the one which the West reduces to a relationship between a happy and less happy person but the one semantically closer to **compassion, coexistence, a relationship so**

close that the line between “self” and “non-self” gets blurred.

Such empathy is no less intense than love. It is an authentic and deep feeling of one’s own pain and recognising it in others. Empathy – a community of pain. In fact, isn’t the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself a manifesto of empathy?¹³⁴

[emphasis – J.P.]

Isn’t a *community of pain* an extension of the commandment, preached by Joanna Duszejko in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*? **Tenderness** is, above all, an *epistemic category*. According to Tokarczuk, it is “a mode of looking, which presents the world as a living, interconnected, cooperating, and codependent entity”. It is an invitation to share the fate. It appears when, with due attention and concentration “we look into another being”, into that which is not “I”. It is tenderness that allows us to notice correlations, similarities, and identities.

That is what tenderness serves me for – because tenderness is the art of personifying, of sharing feelings, and thus endlessly discovering similarities. Creating stories means constantly bringing things to life, giving an existence to all the tiny pieces of the world that are represented by human experiences, the situations people have endured and their memories. Tenderness personalizes everything to which it relates, making it possible to give it a voice, to give it the space and the time to come into existence, and to be expressed.¹³⁵

Such an understanding of tenderness is close to Miranda Fricker’s notion of **virtue epistemology**.¹³⁶ Both refer to the same notion: caring for another being, together with their fragility, uniqueness, and a lack of resistance to suffering and time. Tenderness towards the world. Without any divisions into those enlightened and non-enlightened, into Culture and Nature, into people, animals, plants, and objects. It is all about discovering the intuition, belief, and **ego** that are all inside us, even though deeply hidden, the metaphysical experience of the **unity with the world**, which makes it superior to our “self”. As Tokarczuk points out in *Lalka i perła* [The Doll and the pearl]:

The existence of ego can be proven psychologically but not scientifically, therefore you will find more discussions of ego in literature rather than in experiential sciences. It is all “within us”, a sort of an incredible, unfathomable, halographic reflection of the world in the human mind. A grain of the whole. The existence of ego entails a perspective that is located above, above our biography, our knowledge of the world.¹³⁷

Thus, we entered the level of intuitive cognition, and we may come back to the notion of **insight**. An insight is a synthesis of all three kinds of cognition: intellectual, emotional, and intuitive.

“I love the word ‘insight’”, Tokarczuk writes,

It accounts for many of my not fully rational narrative decisions, uncommon situations, eccentric choices. Insight is a sudden, unexpected change in the perception of something, leading to a new, deeper and fuller understanding. Thanks to insight, something which initially seems complex may prove to be fairly simple. I suppose that insight, above all, concerns the perception of a whole unaffected by time, where time, together with its consequences (through causes and effects, consequences, linearity), is conceptualized as a whole. In a sense, in a brief, eventful moment time ceases to exist. Through insight we can see everything at once, the beginning meets the end and forms a closed circle of time, symbolised by *uroboros*, hence time understood as a sequence of moments no longer exists. Time understood in terms of wholes, details, generalities, is given at once. As Nabokov describes it: “It is the prison wall of the ego suddenly crumbling away and the non-ego rushing in from the outside [...]”.¹³⁸

Nabokov’s thought is important: cognising culture, where we view the world solely from the first-person perspective and is a kind of epistemic prison. It is only when the walls crumble away, when we break with the limited perspective, and incorporate other, different perspectives that we get a chance to understand things in a more complete way, symbolised by **insight**. Uroboros is the time of truth synthesis, which cognising culture can reach by insight. Insight is the final part of a cognitive process, a creative combination of three elements: intellectual, emotional, and intuitive cognition. “The process of reaching the truth” takes place between the initial: *to perceive something/someone* (perception) and the final *insight* into something/someone. Tokarczuk offers no clear-cut dichotomy between the truth and lies. In an essay titled *Moment niedźwiedzia* [The Bear’s moment], such a division is questioned (and treated similarly to Kahneman’s cognitive biases) and treated as a false morpho-genetic structure of the reality. Literature has an advantage over other discourses since it often crosses the border between fiction and reality and thus has a more suggestive/effective impact on readers than traditional scientific argumentation.

So, what is the **truth**? *The Books of Jacob* offer the following, metaphorical explanation of its essence:

The truth is like a gnarled tree, made up of many layers that are twisted all around each other, some layers holding others inside them, and sometimes being held. **The truth is something that can be expressed in many tales**, for it is like that garden the sages entered, in which each of them saw something else.¹³⁹

[emphasis – J.P.]

According to Tokarczuk, in the epistemological sense, there is no universal truth. Its existence is a myth to be found across cultures. It may become

dangerous (even deadly) when combined with a belief that we, humans, are constant, and our reactions are predictable.¹⁴⁰ A methodology based on this false premise assumes,

People don't know themselves, but if you furnish them with questions that are smart enough, they'll be able to figure themselves out. They pose themselves a question, and they give themselves an answer. And they'll inadvertently reveal to themselves that secret they knew nothing of till now.¹⁴¹

A belief in scientific, objective power of testing is yet another illusion. There is nothing particular in them that has not been already cognitively well known. There is no objective cognition. It is always embedded in culture, mediated through it. Tokarczuk claims it can be witnessed on a basic level: the relation between a witness and an observer. **The observer** is one of the most important epistemic categories of her cognising culture. It is a theoretical construct, equally important to Umberto Eco's *Model Reader*. It already appears in *Lalka i perła*. We find out two things about it: (1) "the observer is elusive" and (2) "the author is merely a tender and delicate tool of the observer. The author fills the work delineated by the observer with words, specific descriptions, events, memories."¹⁴² In *The Books of Jacob*, the author is personified by Yente and becomes a fourth-person narrator. There is no doubt that it is a figure of great significance. The observer is **a conscious witness of events**. We can only become the observer when we take up this role and reach an appropriate level of theoretical-cognitive consciousness. A question which arises in this context is, when does a witness become an observer (*is called upon a new perspective of vision*, as Tokarczuk calls it)?

The moment Wokulski is able to name that which happened, to produce a creative, healing introspection, the moment he starts to make sense of the architectural chaos of the city, he can pose questions and undertake tasks of a new quality. The novel reaches its climax point here. Comparing the city plan of Paris offered by the travel guidebook with what he sees, **Wokulski becomes the observer**, with new, unexpected senses being revealed to him. A physical change of the place, replacing Warsaw with Paris, is a symbolic manifestation of **the new perspective of vision**. **The resulting distance** is therapeutic as it helps to make sense of chaos, the "axis of crystallisation". It is the greatest spiritual discovery, a ticket to salvation.¹⁴³

[emphasis – J.P.]

The following three elements are characteristic of the observer:

- 1 a change of the perspective of vision,
- 2 a resulting cognitive distance,
- 3 a capacity for conceptualisation: to name that which happened or was witnessed.

Without realising, that is, naming that which we observe, we cannot reach the level of understanding **history as an object of knowledge**. What will be left is faith in the witness and their evidence, as well as historiography as an object of faith. Obviously, that is not the road taken by Olga Tokarczuk. The observer proposed by her is equipped with three additional tools or cognitive instruments: **ex-centricity**, **panopticum**, and **conjecture**. The first two are connected with their epistemic position and the third one is a method of gap-filling in source materials, made possible owing to their grammar decoding (cultural code). Let us start with ex-centricity.

The theoretical-cognitive category of *ex-centricity* entails breaking with a cognitive perspective of the centre and shifting direction towards *peripheries*. Being in the centre means following the intellectual mainstream of a given epoch. A kind of practice that, by default, narrows cognitive horizons in return for a feeling of epistemological comfort, which is best illustrated in a tale of the bizarre, *Zieloni ludzie* [Green people].¹⁴⁴ Let me add that it is alien to Tokarczuk's cognising culture. For her, it is peripheries that are of great value:

It is all about a special position that we take in perceiving the world – going away from the center, beyond the shared, obvious and commonly accepted experience of the world. It is about a conscious looking for a perspective that has been uncommon so far, and which in its novelty shows that which has gone unnoticed, that which has been neglected.¹⁴⁵

Le Roy Ladurie in *Montaillou*, Eco in *The Name of the Rose*, or Banaszkiwicz in *Opowieści bajeczne* [Fairy tale stories] go against the mainstream current of their epochs and take an ex-centric position. It is a prerequisite of a good historical writing.

Those who are not ex-centric enough will never become good writers. Eccentricity needs to be nurtured and cherished from within since only such an inward tendency can help us see what is beyond the accepted social horizon. I would even suggest a permanent and controlled flight of the future and today's writers out of this comfortable, yet deadly to all artistic work, stay in the center. There is nothing as dangerous to a writer as the intellectual mainstream.¹⁴⁶

Another cognitive tool in this culture is **the drone-like position of the observer**, thanks to which they reach a kind of *epistemological panopticon* – a holistic vision/cognition, where time and space do not pose any cognitive limitations.¹⁴⁷

This drone-like perspective has a great power and in a way refers to a revolution that we are participants of right now, in the time when with a click of a computer mouse we can see well-known places from the least expected perspectives of panopticon. We live in the world of panopticon

and the panopticon narrator has become a sign of our times. When Yente showed up, the work gathered momentum. Bearing in mind a wider time frame of the tales brought in by Yente, being able to move across time, to build panopticon images, both detailed and general, withdrawing from hasty judgments and emotional attachment, I could have a look at my characters from a new perspective, to see their future and trace its sense in the past.¹⁴⁸

A drone-like character is a desired characteristic of the cognising culture of history. A historian, as an observer and a narrator, can operate with all sorts of time scales (as Fernand Braudel did, brilliantly), even though the predominant one is the past. However, *a drone-like character* entails a capacity for geolocation, for perception of “spatiality” of historical events, as was skilfully used by Timothy Snyder in *Bloodlands*.¹⁴⁹

What is **conjecture** then? Let us start with its description offered by Tokarczuk:

A story, which reaches us from the past, is most often full of gaps. We can get to know only selected details, those which seemed important to the writer. [...] I treated the descriptions found in the documents that I collected as incomplete. They did not touch upon everyday lives of the characters, or upon what they ate or how they dressed; there were no scents or weather fluctuations (unless they described extreme weather conditions) provided. The method of conjecture is thus providing the described universe with a certain continuity, constancy in the world so painfully experienced by discovering gaps and fragments. I considered my work as building a certain narrative whole around historical facts treated with utmost respect. Where the facts were unclear to me or psychologically difficult to be accepted, I relied, as the last resort, on quotations.¹⁵⁰

The recording of one’s own methodological self-consciousness may as well come from Le Roy Ladurie or Umberto Eco. However, only the bravest researchers of the past could afford to break conventions. It is a third-person, objective narration that has been dominant in historiography. It has been an ideal for over two centuries, and a historian, in line with Leopold von Ranke’s classical formula, was supposed to write *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. In such a narration (in literary studies its equivalent would be the so-called auctorial narrative mode¹⁵¹), a historian-narrator places themselves beyond and above the presented world and attempts to describe it in such a way so as not to intervene in it (and indeed, in their epistemic naivety, they think about themselves in such a way). The method of conjecture breaks with this cliché. It intervenes in “the truth of evidence” for it itself is a product of an epoch, of a cultural context it is embedded in. The Apocrypha also give a chance to discover something important (*Podróż ludzi Księgi*) [The Journey of the Book-People]. As Tokarczuk points out:

That which is “unimportant” is often motivated by cultural factors – a good example can be the well-known fact that historians more often recorded the participation of men than women, since it was men who were regarded as true and exclusive subjects of history. Historical relations are of a patriarchal character and neglect the historical role of women. Or: the commonly accepted perception of history is based on believing in the agency of outstanding figures rather than impact of social processes. Each epoch has its own glasses through which it perceives the world.¹⁵²

I am, to the contrary, interested mainly in that which, from the perspective of a witness of history, is “unimportant”. Cognition is concerned with a continuity of our experiencing the world (*Prawiek i inne czasy* [Primeval and Other Times]). It requires raising bidirectional questions: (1) how was the past active in its following present forms till today and (2) what form did the today’s experience take/could have taken in the past? That is why *The Books of Jacob* are not limited to the level of Jacob Frank’s testimony. The novel relies on ex-centricity, drone-like character, and conjecture in order to cross the boundaries of his knowledge and self-consciousness as a witness of history.

Considering this theoretical-cognitive issue, Nachman observes, in a philosophical way, that:

there are two varieties of it being impossible to know. The first variety is when someone does not even try to ask or investigate, considering that in any case he cannot learn anything in full. And the second is when a person does investigate and seek, and he comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to know completely.¹⁵³

Olga Tokarczuk always chooses the other option, aware of the fact that what it offers is only one of many possible interpretations of the world. She deeply believes that: “**the truth of the world is not matter, but the vibration of the sparks of light, that constant flickering that is located in every last thing**” [emphasis – J.P.].¹⁵⁴

In order to discover that, one needs to arouse the approach of tenderness towards the world. Tenderness is not only a kind of affirmative thinking. It is a form and a path to know. Constructivists are not right when they say that knowing must be associated with violence.¹⁵⁵ For Tokarczuk cognition is not a form of violence. On the contrary, it is a form of love. It is precisely this interconnection of tenderness towards the world with its cognitive recognition that offers a chance for genuine progress: a symbiosis between Culture and Nature. In *borrowed time*, at the end of the Anthropocene, thinking in terms of symbiosis is the only chance to save the world, Tokarczuk points out. Otherwise, we will perish. If only because we, humanity, have created, *the most aggressive form of being* which threatens Mother Earth.¹⁵⁶ In her essay *On the origin of species*, she describes this form of being:

They travel in packs and are anemophilous, covering large distances without difficulty. [...] The experts say these plastic bags open up a whole new chapter of earthly existence. [...] this foregoing of all contents unexpectedly affords them great evolutionary benefits. They are mobile and light prehensile ears permit them to latch onto objects, or the appendages of other creatures, thus expanding their habitat.¹⁵⁷

Plastic bags and Mother Earth. Juxtaposed with each other in the culture of the Anthropocene and reflected in Olga Tokarczuk's consciousness as the Darwinian irony of fate in its ontological dimension. The "virus" of plastic, a product of civilisation, is in a deadly clash with the civilisation of Nature.

Flights offers some more elements related to ontology. It is the *ontology of dead body*, so close to Ewa Domańska's notion, here represented in its cognitive sense by Doctor Blau (a character from *Flights*) and the science of plastination:

Every body part deserves to be remembered. Every human body deserves to last. It is an outrage that it's so fragile, so delicate. It is an outrage that it's permitted to disintegrate underground, or given to the mercy of flames, burned like rubbish. If it were up to Blau, he would make world differently – the soul could be mortal, what do we need it for, anyway, but the body would be immortal. We will never learn how to diversify the human species, how unique each individual, if we are so quick to condemn bodies to destruction, he thought. In the past people understood this – but they lacked the means, the methods to preserve. Only the wealthiest could afford embalming. But today the science of plastination was developing very fast, perpetually perfecting its methods. Anyone who wanted to could save his body now, and share its beauty, its mystery with others. Here is the wondrous system of my muscles, the sprinter would say, the 100-metre world champion. Look, everyone, at how it works. Here is my brain, the greatest chess player would cry. Ah, these unusual two grooves, let's call them 'bishop twists'. Here is my stomach, two children emerged from here into the world, the proud mother would say. So Blau imagined it. This was his vision of a just world in which we would not be so quick to destroy what is sacred.¹⁵⁸

It is a mini version of Domańska's *Nekros* offered by Olga Tokarczuk.

VI Anima: Is Olga Tokarczuk's cognising culture of any gender?

Such a question, as far as I know, has never been raised by Tokarczuk in a straightforward manner, even when she pondered on the issue in *Jak powstaje płéć* [How does gender emerge].¹⁵⁹ It does not mean, though, that such a thought has never occurred to Tokarczuk. Both in her literary analyses (*Lalka i perła*, *Moment niedźwiedzia*) and novel narrative practices, gender **is treated by the writer as a means of organising** ideas rather than a platform of access to new

kinds of cognition. In her *Wykłady łódzkie* [Łódź lectures] she states: “It has always been obvious to me that in the place where a responsible voice operates, gender has not been important yet (or perhaps already) since we are moving around deep spaces of human psyche where gender seems superficial.”¹⁶⁰

Tokarczuk cannot be described as “documenting herself”, an idea that can be sometimes found prevalent in feminist manifestos.¹⁶¹ Naturally, Tokarczuk is aware that a typically masculine way of experiencing war and the way of sharing it – vide Rzecki¹⁶² – elevated to the status of a cultural ideal, may produce and promote trivial attitudes towards war. However, this time it is all about a direct relationship between gender and cognition in the context of writing. Tokarczuk seems to be more concerned with a cultural “recording of oneself” rather than gender-related “documenting oneself”.¹⁶³ Here is how Nachman Samuel ben Lewi of Busk perceived his role:

He documents himself. He calls those notes scraps, for they are what remains after other, more important work. Crumbs – such is the stuff of life. His writing on the lid of the case set up on his lap, in the dust and discomfort of travel, is in essence tikkun, the repair of the world, mending the holes in its fabric so filled with overlapping patterns, squiggles, tangles, trails. This is how to view this strange pursuit of Nachman’s. Some people heal others, some build homes, others study books and rearrange the words in them to find the proper meaning. Nachman writes.¹⁶⁴

Mending the world, Tokarczuk does not overuse feminised forms. In *Flights*, the first-person narrator (the figure of *quasi-author*) passes a comment: “But I never became a real writer”.¹⁶⁵ Obviously, she is aware that the Polish language (as many others) is androcentric yet, in her opinion (if I get it right) feminised forms will not change the reality, and too often they are empty gestures devoid of any profound meaning. The essence of the problem is not to change the language into less oppressive but to change the mindset and attitudes when it comes to thinking about gender. *Gender correctness* also falls short of its goals.¹⁶⁶ Tokarczuk’s views are expressed by Jacob Frank when he points out: “for women are to a considerable extent slaves of this world, knowing nothing of the freedom, having not been taught how to be free.”¹⁶⁷ *To be free* in Tokarczuk’s cognising culture entails *being subjectified in each and every discipline*: beginning from cognition and philosophy, to the domain of human rights and sexuality. It means not to be treated like an object. Her feminism is rooted in counter-history, it offers emancipation in the face of the existing heritage and cultural convention, the principles of which are presented to Yente by rebbe Mayer:

Thoughts must be concealed, particularly since you were born, to your great misfortune, a woman. Think so that they think you are not thinking. Behave in such a way that you mislead others. We all must do this, but women more so. Talmudists know about strength of women, but they fear it, which is why they pierce girls’ ears, to weaken them. But we don’t. We

don't do that because we ourselves are like women. We survive by hiding. We play fools, pretend to be people we are not. We come home, and then we take off our masks.¹⁶⁸

Literature, understood as a laboratory where one can experiment and search for the most bizarre experiences, plays a useful role in putting on and taking off masks, including gender-related ones. It is Olga Tokarczuk's tales and novels that are fertile ground for cognitive experiments, for example, an analysis of a variety of sensory experiences, using the body to increase their intensity, narrative playing with gender (for instance, by creating a transsexual character, Paschalis, in *House of day, house of night*) on the level of semiophors and symbolic culture.¹⁶⁹ It definitely requires a discussion in a separate work. Right now I would like to outline its three aspects.

The first one is *anima*, which is an archetypal "soul image", yet in Tokarczuk's works it has an additional characteristic of viewing each situation through the eyes of others, which is evidenced in *The Books of Jacob*.¹⁷⁰ Here the two perspectives adopted complement each other, becoming *yin* and *yang*. This, in turn, allows for a play with gender-related *yin* and *yang*, with the use of introspection as a method of a deepened psychological analysis, involving a first-person and second-person narrator.

The second aspect is sensory, embodied cognition, symbolised by Hayah's translucent skin, into which "the Torah itself has entered", which now "beams out now through her skin". As the rabbi of Busk, Nachman ben Lewi, taking Hayah's breast into his mouth, he thinks to himself: "You have to close your eyes, and you have to go into the darkness, because it's only out of the darkness that you see clearly".¹⁷¹ This scene, as an act of completion/closure of cognition through *insight* is a literary visualisation of a sensory way of reaching the truth. Reaching the Truth/Pearl is a sort of epistemic orgasm. A divine kiss, *neshika*, described in *the Books of Jacob*, is of a similar meaning. A question arises whether *insight* would be flawed without these accompanying bodily practices, or perhaps their aim is just to intensify experiences.

Finally, let us discuss the third aspect of philosophy of history. It can be described as a metaphysical question concerning the role of women in history. There are many *seeds* of this thought, sowed across Tokarczuk's tales and novels. She is quite familiar with the idea of historical responsibility of women, for that which Violetta Julkowska calls *intergenerational transfer of values*¹⁷² and which is clearly visible, for example, in *Ostatnie historie* [The Last Stories]. But it is also about something more: Tokarczuk's cognising culture is characteristic of **meta-physical feminism**. It is evident in the author's very first novel *Prawiek i inne czasy* through the character of Bożycza,¹⁷³ a female equivalent of Bóg [God], who "fills the world" of a disadvantaged boy, Izydor Niebieski. Then, it can be witnessed in the Sumerian goddess with a message to the world, ushered by Tokarczuk into the 20th century in *Anna In*, and finally, in its richest form, it can be found in *The Books of Jacob*:

“Our ancestors had no idea what they were even searching for so long and hard”, as Jacob Frank explains it to his accolades during night teachings.

Perhaps a few of them knew that in all their writings and all their wise teachings, ultimately what they were looking for was Her. Everything depends on Her. As Jacob found Rachel by the well, so Moses, when he reached the source, came to the Maiden.¹⁷⁴

Jacob Frank searched for the truth and found Hayah, whom “the Torah itself has entered”. God and the truth are a woman. Just like Nature – Mother Earth is. This lays the groundwork for **a thesis of Tokarczuk’s metaphysical feminism.**

VII Experience of historicity: Olga Tokarczuk on how to write and understand history

Life is created by events, but it is only when we are able to interpret them, try to understand them and lend them meaning that they are transformed into experience. Events are facts, but experience is something inexpressibly different. It is experience, and not any event, that makes up the material of our lives. Experience is a fact that has been interpreted and situated in memory. It also refers to a certain foundation we have in our minds, to a deep structure of significations upon which we can unfurl our own lives and examine them fully and carefully. I believe that myth performs the function of that structure. Everyone knows that myths never really happened but are always going on.¹⁷⁵

Experience is an interpretation/reading of the significance of that which happened and which directly affects our lives. It can take a universal and timeless form, becoming a myth, “always going on”; it can also take the form of cache memory, where we store/collect useful “recipes for life”. However, they themselves, events per se, together with their dates and places, are of interest only to historians. They belong to historiography. Only when processed in consciousness do they acquire their driving force: they spur us into action. In *The Books of Jacob*, Hryćko, a bright boy from Rohatyn, when talking to the priest, states: “God created man with eyes in the front, not the back of the head, and that means we’ve got to think about what’s to come, not what has been.”¹⁷⁶

According to Tokarczuk, there is a fundamental difference between culture of history/historiography and culture of memory. History is intellectual and underpinned by metaphysics, while memory is emotional and underpinned by mourning.¹⁷⁷ Each has its own muse. **Yente’s realm and religion is memory, while Klio’s realm and religion is history.** A historian’s work relies on *bringing things back to life in the present and in the past*, while Yente’s work relies on *preserving memories*, “begging for a moment’s attention”:

From where Yente is looking, there are no dates, and so there is nothing to mark with any celebration, nor any cause for alarm or concern. The sole traces of time are the blurry streaks that travel past her sometimes, stripped down to just a few characteristics, ungraspable, stripped of speech, but patient. These are the Dead. Yente slowly gets into the habit of counting them. Even when people completely stop being able to feel their presence, when they can no longer be reached by any sign from them, **the dead still traverse this purgatory of memory** [emphasis – J.P.]. Deprived of human attention, they do not have places of their own, nor any sort of foothold. Misers will take care of the living, yet the dead are neglected by even the most generous. Yente feels something like tenderness towards them, when they graze her like a warm breeze – her, stuck here at the limit. She permits them these relations for lifetime, and now, having receded into the background upon their deaths, they are like those veterans in Częstochowa whom the king and the army forgot.¹⁷⁸

Culture of memory as *purgatory of memory*, an in-between state. It is not life “here and now”, nor is it a distant past that lost its links with the present. Memories are like actors working in the background; their silhouettes are obscure, and they get blurred, being replaced by the more intense experience of the foreground. Sometimes, in an act of mourning or expiation, their monuments are erected yet these are merely empty cultural gestures of no symbolic value.¹⁷⁹ A symbol, as Tokarczuk notes, is not created by people but is recognised as *signifier* (just like Pomian’s *semiophor*).

It is not arbitrary (then it would be a sign). A symbol allows people to have contact with the mysterious but it does not solve it or explain it. It cannot be explained through interpretation. The more general it is, the more it appeals to our imagination. It never leaves people indifferent.¹⁸⁰

Symbols belong to the culture of history. They call for action, and they urge to change history. They are *prospective* in this sense. With *myths* the situation is different. Even though they refer to the past, their essence lies in the present. They affect our “here and now”.

Mythological thinking looks for non-obvious relationships between phenomena, makes use of the imaginative and brave art of synthesis. It has a capacity to link distant phenomena and to bring out their striking similarities. It is sensitive to little facts, omitted details, sometimes sparking conspiracy theories, yet in the majority of cases it can transcend the obvious. Relying on rituals, it calms us down and reassures us that we can trust the world.

I am convinced that mythological thinking is not a thing of the past and it lingers in our minds, resurfacing in various areas of our lives (religion, business, everyday life). In art it seems a *sine qua non* of artistic expression.¹⁸¹

A thesis that any experience of historicity is a state of mind, which manifests itself primarily in the form of a myth, and only with time acquires a status of a historical narrative (historiography) is quite close to the ideas promoted by most of today's theoreticians of history. However, a complex relationship between memory and history has recently been an object of numerous neuroscientific studies, which (on the basis of multiply verified empirical studies) locates episodic memory and experiencing of historicity (semantic memory) in two separate brain areas, linking them with different cognitive heuristics.¹⁸² What is interesting, myth also belongs to semantic memory, as it shifts historicity over into a new, atemporal dimension. Tokarczuk wrote about a similar concept in *Flights*. Wondering how the past is constructed, one of the novel's characters, a professor (his progenitor could be Krzysztof Zamorski, with his seminal work *Dziwna rzeczywistość* [Strange reality]¹⁸³) puts forward a hypothesis that we should

... treat the past as though it still existed, it's just that it's been shifted over into another dimension. Maybe all we need to do is change our way of looking, look askance at it all somehow. Because if the future and the past are infinite, then in reality there can be no 'once upon', no 'back when'. Different moments in time hang in space like sheets, like screens lit up by one moment; the world is made up of these frozen moments, great mega-images, and we just hop from one to the next.¹⁸⁴

On the one hand, we deal with "immobilisation" of historicity by means of the universal character of myth. On the other hand, we deal with negating the ontological continuity of a historical being, represented cognitively by a collection of metaphotographs, frames from the past.¹⁸⁵ Continuity/linearity of historical narrative is only one of many structural procedures.¹⁸⁶ It opens up **the Land of Metaxa**, that is, the realm of a *linguistic* (narrative) *creation of the represented world*:

The Land of Metaxa, existing beyond space and time, encompasses the mental work that has never had the status of ordinary reality. However, they have the status of extraordinary reality. It is here that Little Red Riding Hood asks the Big Bad Wolf, pretending to be her Grandmother, three suspicious questions, and Jason sails to Colchis in the quest for the Golden Fleece. It is here that historical figures, who died a long time ago and their physical bodies turned into ash, reside. It is here that Plato, Socrates, and Diotima, even though we are not certain if she existed at all, reside.¹⁸⁷

The Land of historical Metaxa is inhabited with various actants, that is, author's constructs such as the four characters of *Podróż ludzi Księgi* or the spiritual medium Erna Eltzner, a character of "E.E.". The only limitation is historical imagination, responsible for *narrative projections*, for example, personification of the fourth-person narrator of *Yente*.

I understand the notion of personification after James Hillman as spontaneous experiencing, imagining and presenting of, in speech or in internal dialogues, images and complexes as mental beings. Personification is thus a kind of mental activity, which creates human and non-human beings in its own image. It is a kind of projection, then.¹⁸⁸

In a similar vein, Le Roy Ladurie personifies Beatrice de Planisolles, and Banaszkiwicz personifies Kadłubek.

Secondly, Tokarczuk refers to/makes use of the “**as if**” construction as a foundation of conceptualising the described past situations, which are “fluid”, *in statu nascendi*, are just in the making, and their ultimate form is not determined yet.¹⁸⁹ It is the narrative response to the “flickering” of being, to its ontic ambiguity, for example, when cognising culture, while analysing an object of cognition, cannot determine whether it is a *revolution* or a *crisis*. As Tokarczuk points out:

The concept “as if” differs from *metaxa* in that the latter is a space given to us a priori, while “as if” is subject to being constantly created, even though both spheres are equally dynamic. In fact, the essence of “as if” is a reevaluation of a dispute on what is real and what is not real. From the perspective of “as if” we can say that what affects our lives and is useful to us is real. The essence of *metaxa* lies in coping with life’s adversities so that they could be taken care of in an intellectual way. “As if” and *metaxa* are key words that determine how the Land of *Metaxa* functions.¹⁹⁰

The opposite of such an understanding of *metaxa* is **literalism**, manifesting itself through a lack of ability for synthesis, or for an understanding of the complexity of beings. “Those suffering from literalism see things blown out of proportion, without context and relationships, and, unfortunately for them and for others, lose the sense of synthesis essential for experiencing the world in a full and multidimensional way.”¹⁹¹ It is a vice of *Mieszczanie* [Townsfolk] in Tuwim’s poem, where all things in their world are isolated and disconnected. Some people perceive history in such a way, as a collection of autonomous historical facts building the past, with the dates and place names being learnt by heart. It is a case of **historiographic literalism**. It can function on many levels. The first one, which can be labelled naive, entails a literal (verbatim) treatment of the content of written sources. It reflects what Tokarczuk describes as “[...]the case when someone refuses to view the world as complex and ambiguous due to their lack of attentiveness and a lack of education, or perhaps even due to some sensory defect.”¹⁹² I will not believe it unless I check it first (the figure of “doubting Thomas”) is an attitude which we adopt towards something which requires crossing the level of direct “visibility” from us, typical of the second level, a bit higher than the previous one. Let us note that staying on the observation level (i.e. what is/could be directly observed by a historian or a reliable witness) facilitates historical cognition, based, in principle, on indirect

reasoning. It is a step backwards in relation to the paradigm of *history as an object of knowledge*. Once again its foundation is **faith in witnesses' credibility**.

There is also a more refined form of *historiographic literalism*, represented by **methodological reism** (in line with Polish logician and philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński).¹⁹³ We can talk here about rationalism, scholarly methodology, and common sense. What exists are *things* understood as a kind of *artefacts* (people are one of them). They are countable by nature; hence, faith in statistics replaces other scientific "truths". All the rest is hypostasis, general ideas, often found in historians' works, which, however, did not provide any real historical designatum. Therefore, according to the followers of reism/historiographic literalists, they should be eliminated from historical narrative, from historiography. Tokarczuk rejects such a claim, believing that **methodological fundamentalism** makes it difficult to "strike a balance between private and communal languages", and balance is the foundation of culture. It is all about constantly *caring* about balance.

Collective languages are trodden routes, while individual languages perform the functions of private paths. Collective languages are agreed upon forms of communication that have been adapted for society to be as understandable as possible to the widest range of that society's members; above all, they are to convey content that enables the construction of a similar or identical picture of reality. In a reality held in common, words will refer to concrete phenomena and things, whether existing or ideal. Moving forward, the common language and picture of reality will reinforce each other. The paradox is that in this situation of codependency between the collective language and conception of reality, one gradually begins to feel trapped, since language fuels reality and reality fuels language. The best examples of this are closed totalitarian regimes in which the media, seized by the authorities, grinds out a well-known, predictable reality couched in only the most appropriate terms. In this scenario, collective language serves to maintain a given political vision and is consciously and cynically used in propaganda. Soon communication stalls; then it becomes impossible. It becomes an act of courage to recall a word or an idea from outside that system, or to pronounce aloud a truth that is apparent though not accepted by the system.¹⁹⁴

Let us ponder for a while the thought expressed at the end of this quote: language of a paradigm becomes a trap. It imposes a certain way of thinking/of viewing the world. It is typical not only of science or literature but is evident also in socio-political life.

How we think about the world and, perhaps even more importantly, how we narrate it, has a massive significance. A thing that happens and is not told ceases to exist and perishes. This is a fact well known to not only historians, but also (and perhaps above all) to every stripe of politician and tyrant. He who has and weaves the story is in charge.¹⁹⁵

Each *system* comes with its collective language, working at the service of the system. It comes with its own *newspeak*, to refer to the notion proposed by Polish theoretician of a public discourse, Michał Głowiński. In totalitarian regimes, it serves the authorities: it censors dissenting voices and renders its own reality imposed (by collective language) to private language. Freedom entails breaking with the System, protesting against its culture. In my opinion, it is one of the most significant messages behind Tokarczuk's Nobel lecture: defending oneself against enslavement, against the symbolic violence of collective language through promoting indigenesness and ex-centricity. A therapeutic value may be also offered by **ognosia**,¹⁹⁶ which, in Tokarczuk's cognising culture is both a cognitive process and a literary practice. Tokarczuk makes a conscious use of **a number of narration techniques** in order to convey the complexity of human life/history/Light, "[...] instead of using narration to build a semblance of continuous reality in time – its fragmentation and an unexpected revelation of the illusory character of our vernacular, sequential experience".¹⁹⁷

The state of *ognosia* can be achieved through a fourth-person narration.

This is a point of view, a perspective from where everything can be seen. Seeing everything means recognizing the ultimate fact that all things that exist are mutually connected into a single whole, even if the connections between them are not yet known to us. Seeing everything also means a completely different kind of responsibility for the world, because it becomes obvious that every gesture "here" is connected to a gesture "there," that a decision taken in one part of the world will have an effect in another part of it, and that differentiating between "mine" and "yours" starts to be debatable.¹⁹⁸

The world, history, and human life as experienced on an everyday basis is a tangle of fractals. Only those who can fathom the theory of chaos can face it and recognise facts which are seemingly not connected only to realise that they form a single whole. Therefore, Tokarczuk addresses the issue of writing stories in the following way: **only a number of narrative perspectives, which are not isolated but complement each other, allow for a synthesis on a higher, meta-level, for historical ognosia.** *Ognosia* is described by theory of history as reaching the level of *metahistory*. Reaching the meta-level helps the ideal observer, a cognising culture, to perceive a variety of perspectives, and to look for a symbiosis between them. Finding it means reaching the level of **metasynthesis/metasymbiosis**.

This new perspective, based on complexity, views the world not as a hierarchically organised monolith but rather as a diversity and complexity, a loosely organic network structure. But what is most important is that within this perspective we start to perceive ourselves, for the first time, as complex and diverse organisms – that is where the discovery of biotone and microbiota leads us, together with their strikingly strong influence on our body and mind, on the whole of what we call a human being.¹⁹⁹

It all hinges on where our “vantage point” is placed, to what extent we can feel “the time of history” and its appropriate “space”. William Davisson, a Scotsman from Aberdeen, a character of *Zieloni ludzie* [Green People], residing at the royal court of John Casimir, expressed this idea in the following way:

I think that the world is built of circles around a place. And that this place, known as the center of the world, changes in the course of time – it used to be Greece, Rome, Jerusalem, and now undoubtedly it is France, or Paris. One can draw these circles with a compass. The rule is simple: the closer you get to the center, the more real and tangible it all seems; the further you get away from the center, the world tears apart, just like a wet canvass. Also the center of the world is as if slightly upstretched so that ideas, fashions, inventions, all of it flows off it to the side. First, it is the nearest circles that get all soaked up, then the next ones but a bit less, and just a little of it reaches the furthest areas.²⁰⁰

It is evident that the epistemological character of this comment is interwoven/linked with its ontological aspect, with a certain philosophy of history behind the ideas reaching “circles”, from the centre to the peripheries. The centre versus ex-centricity in a narrative plan entails a multitude of narrative perspectives, being “an act of trusting a natural inner rhythm which opens us up to ‘accidental’ knowledge, contributing, without any conscious effort, to a narrated story”.²⁰¹ In practice, it boils down to employing, depending on the needs, first-, second-, third-, fourth-, or even multiple-person narrations. It boils down to expressing the idea of “**writing through an observer**”. *The Books of Jacob* offer a description of “the spirit” of the author when she faces a dilemma regarding which type of narration to choose. Nachman, who was baptised and named Piotr Jakubowski, comments on his writing dilemmas [**the quote may be long, but it is of great significance since it presents a metaphorical explanation of Tokarczuk’s historical narrative**]:

Every situation feels endless to me when I try to describe it, and out of helplessness, the pen falls from my hands. The description of a situation never fully exhausts it, for there is always something left undescribed. When I write, every detail sends me back to another, and then the next one again to something else, to some sign or gesture, so that I must always make a decision about what direction to pursue, in telling this story, where to fix my internal gaze, that same powerful sense that is able to summon back past images.

So in writing I stand at every moment at a crossroads, like the idiot Ivan from the fairy tales Jacob used to love telling us so much back in Ivanie. **And now those crossroads are before my eyes, those bifurcating paths, of which one, the simplest one, the middle path, is for fools, while the other, to the right, is for the overconfident,**

and then there is the third path, which is for the brave, the desperados, even – that one will be full of traps, potholes, hexes and calamitous occurrences.²⁰²

[emphasis – J.P.]

A historian/historical writer faces a challenge: the past requires to be told, and its narrative may change the course of history in the future.²⁰³ As Tokarczuk points out:

No doubt a genius will soon appear, capable of constructing an entirely different, as yet unimaginable narrative in which everything essential will be accommodated. This method of storytelling is sure to change us; we will drop our old, constricting perspectives and we will open up to new ones that have in fact always existed somewhere here, but we have been blind to them.²⁰⁴

So far, we need to do our job, which is to “tell stories as if the world were a living, single entity, constantly forming before our eyes, and as if we were a small and at the same time powerful part of it”.²⁰⁵

Tokarczuk, like Michel de Certeau,²⁰⁶ believes that historian/historical novelist creates a narrative about the past as a metaphor of absence. But this does not exhaust the topic! This very last sentence of the Nobel lecture, adopted for the needs of the theory of historical narrative, would best sum up Tokarczuk’s historical poetics. It should sound like that: **The past should be told as if history were a living, single entity made up of three dimensions of time and space, constantly forming before our eyes: the unity of, and as if we were a small and at the same time powerful part of it.**

VIII How does History become? An introduction to Olga Tokarczuk’s philosophy of history

After the epistemology and poetics of historical narration, it is time to present the ontological assumptions of Olga Tokarczuk’s cognising culture. I have already hinted at a few of them (including the *morphological structure of history*, unveiled layer by layer by successive acts of cognition, or the historiosophical threads of *The Books of Jacob*), but now I would like to systematise them and complement them with an answer provided to the fundamental question: how does history become? In *Lalka i perła* we find the following lecture on “metaphorically given ontology”:

Being incarnates different forms because it has a task to perform. Being human provides a special and unique opportunity to fulfill this task. A higher place in the hierarchy of beings is connected with greater awareness, but also greater suffering. Suffering is the essence of life. Human life is an exception, a gift, a rare gift. There is some chain of incarnations by

which “stones, trees, air and the sky” will be able to take this test as human beings. There is a recurrence of existence, but also a recurrence of failure. It would mean that only some, a few, succeed in fulfilling the task.²⁰⁷

[emphasis – J.P.]

It is not so much the idea of *reincarnation* or *metempsychosis* that seems most important in this statement (although, of course, the works of Olga Tokarczuk can also be seen/read from this angle) but just the very **task-oriented nature of being** combined with an ever-growing awareness – “Job’s complaint” – that the whole world is built on suffering. The Nobel Prize winner adds: “Being human is a great opportunity because only humans among other beings are capable of transcending and freeing themselves from suffering.”²⁰⁸ It is not about human beings as individuals, but about humanity, whose task – goal – is to reduce suffering in the World. If we realise the enormity of the suffering that surrounds us, we cannot remain passive about it. We cannot pretend that we do not see it, that it does not concern us. This would be a denial of humanity, which, after all – *ontology* smoothly transforms into *deontology* here – is identical with the attitude of empathy towards **every suffering**, of co-sensitivity with the World. **“I understood then that human life is made of suffering, that suffering is the true substance of the world”** – this is a quotation from *The Books of Jacob*.²⁰⁹ Empathy thus has its source in ontology, and from ontology emerges **Olga Tokarczuk’s thesis of activism as opposition to the inflicted suffering**. Not only human suffering, of course, but also the suffering inflicted on other beings who are capable of feeling it. And also as an objection to the suffering inflicted on Nature by human civilisation – the era of the Anthropocene, which threatens the future of Mother Earth. This World has been left for us to manage. As Nachman Samuel ben Levi said:

Now, to create the world, God had to withdraw from Himself, leave a blank space within His body, which became a space given to the world. God vanished from this space. The word ‘disappear’ comes from the root word ‘elem’, and the site of that disappearance is known as ‘olam’: ‘world’. Thus even the name for the world contains holds the story of God’s departure. The world could be created solely because God was not in it. First there was something, and then that something was gone. That is the world. The world then, in its entirety, is a lack of something.²¹⁰

What have we done with the World left to us? Were we “good hosts/shepherds” of the world? These questions have been present in the works of Tokarczuk for a long time, not only in the Nobel lecture. There are two attitudes to this abandonment of the world by God. One can flee, just like *flights*, struck by this knowledge,²¹¹ or one can fight for this better, more humane world, trying to bring its harmony back, just like Jacob Frank did. **History is created by people. But people who first have to create themselves**, Olga Tokarczuk tells us. In her cognising culture, there exists a strong opposition between humunkulus – the finished/created/passive human being and the one who has

to create themselves in order to become *homo historicus* – the author of History. In *Lalka i perła*, she expresses the idea in the following way: “so we have the first opposition: Wokulski and Izabela. The human being who creates himself and the created human being. The process and the state. The real human and the unreal human.”²¹²

History is the domain of the actants, the real people. This is what fascinated the Nobel laureate in *Lalka*:

the following of dreams, the description of the distribution of forces that push us all forward, force us to set tasks and pursue them with a conscious or vague, oneiric self-denial. Striving towards something. A goal-oriented movement. Discovering more possibilities of self in this movement. Merging oneself into a unity made up of broken fragments.²¹³

This also becomes a message, a leading motif of all her work. This is how Erna Eltzner, the monk Paschalis, Anna In, Janina Duszejko, or Jacob Frank behaves. It is like wandering through the worlds of history (the ability *to fly away into the past*, like Yente²¹⁴) in search of real people, no matter if they are real or imagined. With the awareness of the binary and of the dialectic of World/History/Humanity. As rebbe Mordke put it:

Every place has two characters – every place is double. What is sublime is also fallen. What is clement is at the same time base. In the deepest darkness lies the spark of the most powerful light, and vice versa: where omnipresent clarity reigns, a pit of darkness lurks inside the seed of light. The Messiah is our doppelganger, a more perfect version of ourselves – he is what we would be, had it not been for the fall.²¹⁵

The question that arises in this context is what motivates people to act? Tokarczuk’s cognising culture answers this question differently in the context of an individual’s life, and differently in the context of social/historical challenges. It is a dialectic of two times of history, symbolised by Kairos and Chronos.²¹⁶ However, there is something that unites these two perspectives. It is the **idea of development through crises**. Crisis here, nevertheless, is not something external to the subject and negative, but a natural and necessary state to enter a new / higher / better / more mature stage. Let us take a closer look at this.

The idea of a crisis as an engine of transformation is to see development as stages necessary for transition. **Development is the fulfilment of forms, a process involving the building of a form, its disintegration, and then its integration at a new, higher level.** Each period of disintegration is a necessary psychological crisis, requiring an enormous mobilization of forces so that the stage of building the next form could occur. Much of the modern theory of personality development is based on this philosophy ²¹⁷

[emphasis – J.P.]

It seems that the basic ontic idea of Tokarczuk's cognising culture – the transition from one form of being to another (the equivalent of crisis understood in such a way in nature is *moulting*, the replacement of an old *form* with a new one) – has its continuation (or perhaps its source?) in one of the theories of personality development.²¹⁸ The principle itself applies also to human life: it is about building oneself on an ever higher level. The starting point for personal development is the recognition of one's own situation as a crisis.

A crisis always involves a mental imbalance. The old status quo, which not so long ago was completely sufficient, is now being undermined. Instead, something new appears, not yet clear, not very precise, but it attracts us. Human beings discover within themselves previously unknown possibilities and desires; they hesitate between the security of the familiar and the curiosity of the new. Such a loss of balance can be considered purposeful – thanks to it all obstacles hampering human development crumble.²¹⁹

The catalysts of the crisis understood in such a way are, as Tokarczuk says, three gravitational forces that motivate us to act: **otherness, vanity, and love**. Otherness is a sense alienation from the “here and now”. A kind of cognitive distance that allows us to see something else, to see more and from a wider perspective than before. It is a projection of the future mapped onto the current state, a call to act, to free oneself from what is old, to metaphorically “moult”. It is the beginning of a journey into the unknown. Also the one into the depths of history. “**The alienation that constitutes a meta-plane for human life**. The otherness that helps to acknowledge that people belong not where they think they belong, but to some There, which they do not remember.”²²⁰ Human life is about discovering one's own belonging to the world, but also the discovering of one's own otherness in it ...

Vanity, on the other hand,

suggests the absence of something, an empty, ‘vacuous’ place that remains after something has been removed, overlooked, lost, after something that was once there is now gone. Vanity is a void enclosed by some surface, an exteriority; for there is no interior without the exterior.²²¹

In this sense, a vain person is internally empty, has no world of values of their own, is a blend of “judgments, convictions, prejudices, evaluations. Their source is always external,” Tokarczuk says. The personification of vanity understood in this way is Izabela Łęcka. **A crisis of recovery** occurs when we **realise how dependent we are, how entangled we are with what is outside**.

People often think they are objective in their perceptions, but this is certainly not the case. For perception, too, is influenced by some common spirit that agrees with us the colours of time and makes us see not what is, but what we think it is.²²²

How often we gravitate then, unaware of this captivity of our minds by external social forces that influence us through various biases or correctness, prejudices, stereotypes or the only acceptable “truths” on any subject. Throwing off these limitations is as liberating as transformation through moulting.

There is also something else:

One of the most important characteristics of a vain person would be an inability to show empathy, compassion. Compassion probably comes from a rare ability to see others as oneself or, to the contrary, to see others as if one were that other, different person. **Compassion – that is, empathy, emotional identification. To identify oneself in this way, however, one must be non-vacuous in the literal sense: must be filled with some quality. This presupposes the necessity of some emotional content to which emotional content of another person can be related.**²²³

[emphasis – J.P.]

The real individual, the agent of history, **must be filled with some quality**, must have the capacity to show empathy, to relate to the fate of others. He/she can become so, for example, thanks to another gravitational force, which is **love**. “Love,” says Tokarczuk, “is /... a powerful driving force, independent of will power, conditioning one to be a human being, a force attributed to God, or even a basic category of divinity.”²²⁴ It is love that underpins the most important human relationships, and although the word love itself is not very precise since it encompasses many types of love and different states of mind, well known from History and well described by literature, yet no one seriously can deny its causal role. We are able to do a lot for love and because of love or a lack of it. Love has already shown its cognitive power in Tokarczuk’s cognising culture: it liberated us towards a new perspective, it was – as an epistemic category – a tenderness towards the World, which resonated so strongly in the Nobel lecture. Now it turns out that it is also the foundation of her philosophy of history, outlined years before in *Lalka i perła*:

There is, however, a word greater, more powerful, or perhaps more fundamental, which, with a grace appropriate only to concepts, includes love without diminishing it. It is **compassion**– not the kind of compassion reduced in the West to the relationship of the happy to the less happy, but closer in meaning to **empathy, to co-existence, a relationship so close that it blurs the boundaries between “self” and “non-self”**. Such empathy is not something less intense than love. It is authentic and deep sensing one’s own pain and recognizing the pain in others. Compassion – the community of pain. Isn’t the commandment ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ actually a demand for compassion?²²⁵

[emphasis – J.P.]

What is striking is the continuity of Olga Tokarczuk's thinking and axiological consistency across the several years that separate these two texts. Her most important cognitive category, so strongly emphasised in the Nobel lecture – **tenderness**, though not yet named, is after all clearly present already in *Lalka i perła*. The narrator's tenderness in confrontation with history is particularly challenging. How to present the meeting of what is individual, personal, or local with that which is universal in the making of History. Everyday life with the uniqueness of the moment. Continuity with discontinuity. The cognising culture of the Nobel Prize winner found an idea/recipe for this: the philosophy of history of *The Books of Jacob* was based on the dialectics of Kairos and Chronos.

Chronos rules the historical time, understood here as a linear flow, a stream of events. His realm is built around process, transience, and inevitability. Kairos, in turn:

(...) always operates at the intersection of linear, human time and divine time – circular time. And at the intersection between place and time, at the moment that opens up for just a little while, to situate that single, right, unrepeatability possibility. The point where the straight line that runs from nowhere to nowhere – for one moment – contact with the circle²²⁶

This is the time of the agents of history, because Kairos refers directly to a decision made by a human being. Agent is aware of the turning point of the situation in which he finds himself, a unique opportunity. If agent does not notice this single moment, this Kairos, the chance for a twist of fate is irreversibly lost. He also loses the chance to transform himself – to **metanoia**. Józef Tischner once said that

Kairos is a dramatic time. It is not the time of physics or movement of the stars. It is human time. The time of history. The time of haunting – an encounter with the Other. Something significant may come of it, or it may end in a parting, a parting of the ways. It can be a time of grace or fate. Time may be fulfilled: *When the fullness of time had come, the word became flesh*, John the Evangelist says. The meeting at Kairos always happens in the present, not in the future and not in the past (the realm of Kronos/Chronos).²²⁷

This thinking is very close to Olga Tokarczuk's. It is about the present, about the current moment, which should be well spent, because it can be “burdened with consequences”. To find oneself in the right time and place in history, **to recognise this unique chance and action** – this is the *clue* of historical agency! In *Flights* she writes:

Many people believe that there exists in the world's coordinate system, a perfect point where time and space reach an agreement. This may even be why these people travel, leaving their homes behind, hoping that even by

moving around in a chaotic fashion they will increase their likelihood of happening upon this time. Landing at the right time in the right place – seizing the opportunity, grabbing the moment and not letting go – would mean the code to the safe had been cracked, the combination revealed, the truth exposed. No more being passed by, no more surfing coincidences, accidents and turns of fate. You don't have to do anything – you just have to show up, sign in at that one single configuration of time and place. There you will find your great love, happiness, a winning lottery ticket or the revelation of the mystery everyone's been killing themselves over in vain for all those years, or death.²²⁸

But to find yourself in the right place and time of history is very difficult for a mere mortal. Sometimes we are too far ahead of our time, and we are doomed to failure and oblivion, and sometimes, staring into the future, we fail to see what is important *here and now* and we also lose. Kairos and Chronos are the two sides, two complementary faces of historical time. And at the same time, the basis of her philosophy of history.

It turns out, therefore, that this **heretical** – in relation to the classical understanding of history – **Olga Tokarczuk's cognising culture** offers an extremely interesting theory of history, which may also interest and inspire professional historians and theorists of historical cognition. Half a century ago, Hayden White, in *Metahistory*, showed us what interesting conclusions can be drawn from the study of historical imagination. The author of *The Books of Jacob* proves that literature and historiography can benefit from each other, also in the 21st century.

Notes

- 1 Naturally, I don't mean to treat her as a professional historian. I would rather like to follow Hayden White's idea of "figurative imagination" and analyse Tokarczuk's historical writing in the context of the cognitive problems of historiography. See Hayden White, "Historicism, History, and Figurative Imagination", *History and Theory*, Beihaft 14: *Essays on Historicism* vol. 14 (1975), no. 4, 48–67 and his, "Historical Text as Literacy Artifact", *Clio* vol. 3 (1974), no. 2, 277–303.
- 2 By the way, it is the title of the last chapter of the Kołakowski's seminal work. See: Leszek Kołakowski, *Metaphysical Horror* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishers, 1988).
- 3 *The Books of Jacob* offer a few scenes of reading holy scriptures, viewed as a prolegomena to a discovery of the mystery of the world.
- 4 José Ortega y Gasset. *History as a System (Historia Como Sistema, 1935)*, first published and translated by William C. Atkinson, eds. Raymond Klibansky and Herbert J. Paton, in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936). Later ed. by Helene Weyl as, *Toward a Philosophy of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1941). Republished *History as a System and other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History, 1961*.
- 5 "Partially" since the accuracy of this remark relates only to a certain group of historiographers, which "cling" to "facts".
- 6 Andrzej Mencwel, *Historyczna powieść współczesna. O "Księgach Jakubowych" Olgi Tokarczuk* [Historical Contemporary Novel. On the Olga Tokarczuk's "The Books of Jacob"] In: idem, *Przedwiośnie czy potop. Nowe krytyki postaw polskich* [Coming

- Spring or Deluge. New Critiques of Polish Attitudes] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2019), 388.
- 7 Jorge L. Borges, *The Library of Babel*. trans. James E. Kirby. online: <https://maskofreason.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/the-library-of-babel-by-jorge-luis-borges.pdf>
 - 8 Since I intend it to be a **reconstruction** (and not a cultural imputation), hence the evidence must be solid and well-documented. For that reason, and also to ease the process of reading, I needed to rely on a number of quotations rather than refer only to certain works or their fragments. However, it is a standard practice in studies on cognising cultures, *vide my Homo historicus. Studium z sześciu kultur poznających historię* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2019).
 - 9 Olga Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator* [The Tender Narrator] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2020), 287; This chapter (pages 261–289) is grounded in the text of *Nobel Lecture. The Tender Narrator* available online: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/tokarczuk/lecture/> [access 15.11.2022].
 - 10 Other issues related to Olga Tokarczuk's works are subject to an analysis in an interesting monograph by Katarzyna Kantner, titled: *Jak działać za pomocą słów? Proza Olgi Tokarczuk jako dyskurs krytyczny*. [How to Act with Words? Olga Tokarczuk's Prose as a Critical Discourse] (Kraków: Universitas, 2019); A starting point for her interpretation was, among others, the concept of paratopia, put forward by the French theoretician of literature Dominique Maingueneau. See: Idem. *Le discours littéraire: Paratopie et scène d'énonciation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).
 - 11 Bronisław Baczko, *Rousseau: samotność i wspólnota* [Rousseau: Solitude and Community] (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2009), 271.
 - 12 Olga Tokarczuk, *Tropem herezji* [On the Trail of Heresy], interviewed by Tomasz Stawiszyński, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 2014, no. 42, 58.
 - 13 Alun Munslow, *The Aesthetics of History* (New York - London: Routledge, 2022), 13.
 - 14 Olga Tokarczuk, *Góra Wszystkich Świętych* [Mountain of All Saints], [in:] Eadem, *Opowiadania bizarne*. [Tales of the Bizarre] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2018), 197.
 - 15 Indigenous knowledge is an object of interest for *cultural psychology*, see: Carl M. Allwood and John W. Berry, "Origin and Development of Indigenous Psychologies: An International Analysis", *International Journal of Psychology* vol. 41 (2006), no. 4, 243–268. What characterises this kind of knowledge is a mistrust towards (or even breaking with) "the epistemic logic typical of the West", see: Kuo-Shu Yang, "Indigenous Psychology, Westernized Psychology, and Indigenized Psychology: A Non-Western Psychologist/s View", *Chang Gung Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* vol. 5 (2012), no. 1, 1–32.
 - 16 Olga Tokarczuk. *Flights*. translated by Jennifer Croft (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2019), 352–353.
 - 17 This is highlighted by the very title of *The Books of Jacob*, which mentions *Imagination, which is people's greatest natural gift*.
 - 18 *Opowiadania bizarne*, op.cit., 160.
 - 19 Ibidem, 163.
 - 20 Ibidem.
 - 21 Such is a tender description of the skeleton of the holy martyr Oxensius made by the sisters from the nunnery at the Mountain of All Saints, with whom they live and whom they take care of, knitting and embroidering decorations for him:

There were big semi-precious stones in his eye sockets, and the bald skull sported a decorative cap, crocheted with threads, interwoven with beads. By the neck he was wearing an embroidered stock tie made of thin lawn, which, formerly snow-white in colour, was greyish now; it looked like a patch of grimy autumn fog. His dried skin could be seen here and there from under the

clothes, which was covered by a mercifully long, eighteenth-century, exceptionally decorative jacket.

Ibidem, 175

This is merely an incentive to read Tokarczuk's brilliant tale.

- 22 Ewa Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* [Nekros. Introduction to the Ontology of a Dead Body] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN, 2017).
- 23 Olga Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła* [The Doll and the Pearl] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2019), 10. This book is a hermeneutic analysis of one of the most popular Polish novels *Lalka* [The Doll] by Bolesław Prus (published in 1890). Main characters in *Lalka* are: Wokulski (rich merchant), Izabela Łęcka (his love interest), and Rzecki (Wokulski's trusted friend).
- 24 Eadem, *Flights*, 79.
- 25 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 25.

It is why Wokulski goes to Paris. The city astonishes and stuns him, works like a consciousness-altering drug: it bombards him with stimuli, is one constant stimulation, it struts before the senses and hooks them on the external: it sparks projections, it is all that is possible; its wealth seduces.

Ibidem

- 26 Eadem, *Wędrowiec* [Wanderer] in: idem, *Czuły narrator* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2020), 5–6.
- 27 Ibidem, 6.
- 28 Zygmunt Bauman, *Living on Borrowed Time: Conversations with Citali Rovirosa-Madrazo* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
- 29 *Lalka i perła*, 9.
- 30 *How to write and understand history* is a title of the book (1993) by Jerzy Topolski, in which he unravelled the *mysteries of historical narrative*.
- 31 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Translated into English in 1978 by Barbara Bray, and has been subtitled *The Promised Land of Error. Cathars and Catholics in a French Village*. The first Polish edition was published by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1988). The book was translated into 27 languages and sold almost 3 million copies.
- 32 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, op.cit., 191–192.
- 33 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, op.cit., 22.
- 34 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 195.
- 35 Ibidem, 197.
- 36 Ibidem, 181. Tokarczuk's thesis that a story exists only as a kind of potential, as a representation of the past, waiting to be realised, is similar to Umberto Eco's view.
- 37 Poetics of historical narrative will be discussed in detail later in this book.
- 38 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 31.
- 39 Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, op.cit., 27.
- 40 Technically speaking, the same applies to Kuhn's *scientific revolutions*. Before him there was Ludwik Fleck. And before Le Roy Ladurie, there was Karol Zbyszewski, a student of Marcelli Handelsman (1882–1945), the well-known Polish historian, and the author of the rejected doctoral thesis, which later on became a best-selling book, *Niemcewicz od przodu i tyłu* [Niemcewicz from Front and Back], published first in 1939. He relied on the same narration technique as Le Roy Ladurie in *Montaillou*, published 36 years later, interweaving dialogues between the main characters, "reconstructed" from the available sources, into the historical narrative.
- 41 Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrative* (Milano: Bompiani, 1979).
- 42 Jacek Banaszkievicz, *Uczta rozrachunku (Quentin Tarantino, Wincenty Kadłubek, Bruno z Kuefirtu, Richer z Reims). Krótko o pewnym schemacie narracyjnym racjonalizującym przedstawioną rzeczywistość* [A Feast of Reckoning (Quentin Tarantino, Vincent

Kadlubek, Bruno of Querfurt, Richer of Reims). Briefly About a Certain Narrative Scheme that Rationalises the Presented Reality], [in:] Idem, *Takie sobie średniowieczne bajeczki* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Avalon, 2013), 541–561.

- 43 Ibidem, 543. One can only imagine a reaction to the text by all the predecessors of Banaszkievicz, who relied on the convention of “embellishment”, typical of classical historiography. It would be priceless to see their faces!
- 44 Jacek Banaszkievicz, *Gall jako historyk poważny, czyli dlaczego dzieje i Bolesława Chrobrego, i Bolesława Krzywoustego są prawdziwe i nie groteskowe*, [in:] Idem. *Takie sobie średniowieczne bajeczki*, 563–585.
- 45 Here is Banaszkievicz’s reconstruction of Gallus Anonimus’s thoughts on the essence of historiography:

What good is Troy and Pergamon, what good are Hector’s or Priam’s deeds, or those of Roman or Gall rulers. Those heroes enjoyed greater fame after they died than when they were alive. A similar story is with ancient hegemon, Athens, or empires: Median, Persian, or Roman. All this is *scriptura clamante*, owing to a lot like me, wanting to put the deeds of the former heroes in writing. Post-mortem glory, which is extended, or even exaggerated by the pen is a privileged that the mighty of this world owe to me and my fellows. Awareness of this, so evident in the chronicler’s opinions, is connected with his yet another, extremely important belief. I can grant immortality to princes and kings, but I do even more. I pluck them from oblivion and obscurity, together with their noble deeds.

Ibidem, 568–569

- 46 Published in Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 147–260.
- 47 Ibidem, 177.
- 48 See: Ibidem, 189.
- 49 “Freud did not convince me to his theory. He convinced me to his method”, she notes. Ibidem, 112. Interestingly, Hayden White had a similar approach to Freud – see his “Historicism, History, and Figurative Imagination”, *History and Theory* vol. 14 (1975), no. 4, 54.
- 50 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 112.
- 51 Ibidem, 113.
- 52 Eadem, *Flights*, 351.
- 53 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 192.
- 54 Eadem, *Flights*, 81.
- 55 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 141–142.
- 56 In the second half of the 18th century, it was one of the largest public libraries in the world, stolen by the Russians after the fall of the Kościuszko Uprising, it was taken to S. Petersburg in 1794.
- 57 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 36.
- 58 Eadem, *Flights*, 81.
- 59 Ibidem, 422.
- 60 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 275.
- 61 Ibidem, 81.
- 62 METAXA, that is, that which is “between”. For Tokarczuk, it is one of the key concepts which help mankind to deal with a chaos of reality. “They are auxiliary structures, putting experience into order”, as she writes in Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 247.
- 63 Ibidem, 271.
- 64 See: very interesting research on Wiki society by Dariusz Jemielniak, *Życie wirtualnych dzikich. Netnografia Wikipedii największego projektu współtworzonego przez ludzi*. [Life of Virtual Savages. Wikipedia Netnography: the Largest Project co-created by the People]. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Poltext, 2013). which is the first in Poland sociological book on Wikipedia.
- 65 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 273.

- 66 Eadem, *Flights*, 422.
 67 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 280.
 68 Eadem, *Jak wymyślić heterotopię. Gra towarzyska* [How to Invent Heterotopia. A Social Game] in: Eadem, *Moment niedźwiedzia* [The Bear's Moment] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012), 14–15.
 69 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 62.
 70 Richard E. Nisbett. *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently ... and Why?* (Detroit: Free Press, 2003).
 71 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 289.
 72 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 80
 73 Ibidem, 37.
 74 Ibidem, 64–65.
 75 See: Margater S. Archer, *Being Human: the Problem of Agency*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Meta-reflexivity is characterised by the author of *Being Human*, as an ability to have an internal conversation, the basis of which is a critical attitude towards one's own reflexivity and influences of words. It is quite close to Tokarczuk's beliefs.
 76 Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 37.
 77 Mircea Eliade, *Dziennik emigranta* [Emigrant's Diary] (London: Wydawnictwo Puls 1990), 222 on basis of French Edition *Fragments d'un journal* published in Editions Gallimard in 1973; After: Olga Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 80.
 78 See: Jan Pomorski, "Wprowadzenie: historia jako autorefleksja kultury poznającej" [Introduction: History as Self-reflection of a Cognising Culture [in:] idem. *Homo metahistoricus*, op.cit., 9–14.
 79 A *back question* is, in line with Derrida quoting Husserl in *L'Origine de la Geometrie*, "a pure form of all historical experience". After: Hans-Jorg Rheinberger, *Historische Epistemologie zur Einführung*. (Hamburg: Junius, 2007), 102.
 80

I'd love to know how a Bat sees the world; just once I'd like to fly across the Plateau in its body. How do we all look down here, as perceived by its senses? Like shadows? Like bundles of shudders, sources of noise? (...) The truth is I had a lot in common with them – I too saw the world in other spheres, upside down.

Eadem, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*
 (London: Ficarraldo Editions, 2018), 145

- 81 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 79–80.
 82 Eadem., *Zagubiona dusza* [Lost Soul]. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017).
 83 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 50.
 84 Ibidem, 49–50.
 85 I. Hacking, *Representing and Interventing. Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 228.
 86 For more details on paradigm of representation, see: Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). See also: Harry Jansen, "Research, Narrative, and Representation: A Postnarrative Approach", *History and Theory* 58, no. 1 (2019), 67–88.
 87 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 93.
 88 Ibidem, 98.
 89 Many of Olga Tokarczuk's thoughts on the issue can be found in *Moment niedźwiedzia*.
 90 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 14.
 91 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 274.
 92 Ibidem, 263.

- 93 See: J. Pomorski, *Potęga historii* [The Power of History] – <https://jakiejhistoriipolacypotrzebuja.umcs.pl/?p=1094> [last access: 28.11.2021]
- 94 *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne* [Literary Work as a Historical Source] edited by Z. Stefanowska, J. Sławiński (Warszawa: PWN, 1978).
- 95 Bronisław Geremek, *Fabula, konwencja i źródło. Utwór literacki w badaniu kultury średniowiecznej* [Plot, Convention and Source. Literary Work in the Study of Medieval Culture] in: *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne*, op.cit., 114–115.
- 96 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 27.
- 97 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 6.
- 98 Ibidem.
- 99 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 27.
- 100 Ibidem, 49.
- 101 Ibidem, 285–286.
- 102 Ibidem, 89.
- 103 Eadem, *Flights*, 333.
- 104 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 774.
- 105 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 41.
- 106 Apparently, that is how Brzozowski used to read – I borrowed this concept from Andrzej Mencwel, who wrote a book on Brzozowski, see: Andrzej Mencwel, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Postawa krytyczna. Wiek XX* [Stanisław Brzozowski. A Critical Attitude. The Twentieth Century] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014).
- 107 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 862.
- 108 Józef Czapski, *Czytając* [Reading] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2015).
- 109 Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (New York: Scribner, 2001).
- 110 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 809.
- 111

Literature begins when one signs a text one has written under one's own name, when one stands behind the work as its author, expressing through words one's deepest, most intense, and sometimes even painful unique experience, taking on the risk as well that it will not be understood, that it will be ignored, that it will make people angry or be dismissed. Literature is thus that particular moment when the most individual language meets the language of others. Literature is thus the space in which private goes public.

Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 87–88

- 112 Ibidem, 94.
- 113 Ibidem, 113.
- 114 Andrzej Nowicki, *Spotkania w rzeczach* [Meetings in Things] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 21.
- 115 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 104.
- 116 Ibidem, 111.
- 117 Ibidem, 100.
- 118 Ibidem, 76.
- 119 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 375.
- 120 See: Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*. (New York: Routledge 1997).
- 121 Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator*, 76–77.
- 122 Ibidem, 83.
- 123 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 620.
- 124 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 52.
- 125 Ibidem, 53.
- 126 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 141. It should be noted that: “Words are like lizards, able to elude all containment”, Ibid., 497, and that “each word has its anti-word, its opposite meaning; only their juxtaposition makes the concept clear”, Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 55.

- 127 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 138.
- 128 Eadem, *Czudy narrator*, 49–50.
- 129 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 140.
- 130 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 11.
- 131 On empathy see: Christian Keyzers, *The Empathic Brain: How the Discovery of Mirror Neurons Changes Our Understanding of Human Nature* (Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011).
- 132 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 57–58. I found the same idea of empathy as a way of approaching to the Human Past in Thomas Kohut's book. See: Thomas A. Kohut, *Empathy and the Historical Understanding of the Human Past* (New York – London: Routledge, 2020).
- 133 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 134 Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 59.
- 135 Eadem, *Czudy narrator*, 287–288.
- 136 Miranda Flicker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 137 Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 17.
- 138 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 200–201.
- 139 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 79.
- 140 Eadem, *Flights*, 21.
- 141 Ibidem.
- 142 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 18.
- 143 Ibidem, 22.
- 144 Here is the final fragment:
- I was leaving the last circle of the world, its disgusting, wet frontiers, its unwritten pain, its vague, indistinct horizons, beyond which there is only Great Nothingness. And yet again I was heading to the city center, where everything makes sense and falls into place. And now I am writing down what I have seen in the frontier, honestly, just as it was, nothing less, nothing more; and I hope that the Reader will help me understand what happened there at that time and what I cannot grasp, i.e. that the peripheries of the world mark us with some mysterious powerlessness.
- See: *Zieloni ludzie* [Green People]. in: Eadem, *Opowiadania bizarne*, 43–44
- 145 Eadem, *Czudy narrator*, 203.
- 146 Ibidem.
- 147 His visualised figure, described in *Flights*, 41, is Bentham's panopticon, organising space so that the prisoner was always visible. In *The Books of Jacob*, on the other hand, this role is played by Yente.
- 148 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 177.
- 149 Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
- 150 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 196.
- 151 See: Franz R. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* (Stuttgart: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).
- 152 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 196.
- 153 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 49.
- 154 Ibidem, 45.
- 155 Andrzej Zybortowicz, *Przemoc i poznanie. Studium z nie-klasycznej socjologii wiedzy* [Violence and Cognition. A Study in the Non-classical Sociology of Knowledge] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 1995).
- 156 It should be noted that the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador make direct references to *Mother Earth*.
- 157 Tokarczuk, *Flights*, 403.
- 158 Ibidem, 135.

- 159 Eadem, *Jak powstaje pleć*, in: Eadem, *Moment niedźwiedzia*.
- 160 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 166.
- 161 For example, Hélène Cixous, *Śmiech Meduzy* [The Laughter of Medusa] translated by Anna Nasilowska. "Teksty Drugie" issue 4–5–6 (1993), 147–166.
- 162 "Rzecki, in his journals, presents war, history like usually men do – the left wing, the right wing, this general, that general, attacking, advancing, flank, and rearguard". Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 45.
- 163 See: Elżbieta Wiącek, "The Works of Olga Tokarczuk: Postmodern Aesthetics, Myths, Archetypes, and the Feminine Touch", *Women's Writing On-line*, no. 1 (2009), special issue *Poland under Feminist Eyes: Research in Literary and Feminist Studies*, 134–155.
- 164 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 808.
- 165 Eadem, *Flights*, 18.
- 166 Clearly, "The development of the gender category put things into order to some extent." Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 166.
- 167 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 458.
- 168 Ibidem, 741–740.
- 169 The problem of transsexuality is emphasised even more in *Empuzjon* – the last novel by Tokarczuk, published in 2022.
- 170 In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* and in *The Books of Jacob* animals, plants, and objects are also equipped with anima.
- 171 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 636–637.
- 172 Violetta Julkowska, *Historie rodzinne. Narracje – narratorzy – interpretacje* [Family Stories. Narratives – Narrators – Interpretations] (Poznań – Bydgoszcz: Instytut Historii UAM – Oficyna Wydawnicza Epigram, 2018), 234–235.
- 173 "Izydor reaches his own understanding of God, contemplating the order of the four directions of the world. First he experienced an erotically anxious epiphany of God as "Bożycza" [Goddess], a female principle filling the world. The dialectics of his search comes to fruition in the synthesis between Bóg [God] and Bożycza [Goddess], the latter being called "Boże". Such a word solves the issue of God's gender. "Boże" sounds grammatically just like "słońce" [the sun], "powietrze" [air], "miejsce" [place], "pole" [field], "morze" [sea], "zboże" [grain], "ciemne" [dark], "jasne" [light], "zimne" [cold], "cieple" [warm]." Tokarczuk. *Prawiek i inne czasy*, op.cit., 232.
- 174 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 464.
- 175 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 273.
- 176 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 874.
- 177 On the mutual relations between memory and history, see: Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory", *Social Research* vol. 75 (2008), no. 1, 49–72.
- 178 Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 29–30.
- 179 Olga Tokarczuk writes about it, among other things, in the context of the "Smolensk" mourning (the government plane crash on 10 April 2010, in which the Polish president died) in *Moment niedźwiedzia*, op.cit.
- 180 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 20.
- 181 Eadem, *Czuły narrator*, 217–218.
- 182 See: Larry R. Squire, Eric R. Kandel, *Memory: From Mind to Molecules* (New York: Scientific American Library, 1999).
- 183 Krzysztof Zamorski, *Dziwna rzeczywistość. Wprowadzenie do ontologii historii*. [Strange Reality. An Introduction to the Ontology of History.] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008).
- 184 Tokarczuk. *Flights*, 392.
- 185 Beverley Southgate works on a similar principle, recalling subsequent images created by the power of historical and literary imagination by Tolstoy, Proust, and Virginia Woolf among others. See his, 'A New Type of History'. *Fictional Proposals for dealing with the Past*. (New York - London: Routledge, 2017).

- 186 This range of possibilities is delineated by three sets of “landscapes” (scripts): The Land “This-Has-Already-Been”, The Land “Anything-Is-Possible”, and, most important for Olga Tokarczuk, the Land of Metaxa, Eadem, *Czudy narrator*, 257.
- 187 Ibidem, 248.
- 188 Ibidem, 211.
- 189 See: *A Past of Possibilities: A History of What Could Have Been*, edited by Quentin Deluermoz and Pierre Singaravélou, translated by Stephen W. Sawyer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).
- 190 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 247.
- 191 Ibidem, 254–255.
- 192 Ibidem, 252. The author adds: “Not seeing the whole, we remain dependent on local currents and single elements of a great puzzle of the world, both the existing one and the ideal”, Ibidem, 26.
- 193 See Chapter 2.
- 194 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 89.
- 195 Ibidem, 263.
- 196 Ibidem, 28–29. “The treatment of agnosia often uses the novel as a treatment method (short stories are also used on an ambulatory basis).” Ibidem, 29.
- 197 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 7.
- 198 Eadem, *Czudy narrator*, 285.
- 199 Ibidem, 17–18.
- 200 Eadem, *Zieloni ludzie* [in:] *Opowiadania bizarne*, op.cit., 25.
- 201 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 17.
- 202 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 326.
- 203 I find a similar idea in *A New Philosophy of Discourse: Language Unbound*. Edited by Joshua Kates (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), where Kates coins the term “talk!” as a way to refer to language in an anti-foundational vein.
- 204 Tokarczuk, *Czudy narrator*, 286–287.
- 205 Ibidem, 289.
- 206 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
- 207 Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 32–33.
- 208 Ibidem, 79–80.
- 209 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 795.
- 210 Ibidem, 798.
- 211

Once, long ago, the Tsar tried to reform the world but he was vanquished, and the world fell right into the hands of the Antichrist. God, the real one, the good one, became an exile from the world, the vessel of divine power shattered, absorbed into the earth, disappearing into its depths. But when he spoke in a whisper from his hiding place, he was heard by one righteous man, a soldier by the name of Yefim, who paid attention to his words. In the night he threw away his rifle, took off his uniform, unwrapped his feet and slid his boots off. He stood under the sky naked, as God had made him, and then ran into forest, and donning an overcoat he wandered from village to village, preaching the gloomy news. Flee, get out of your homes, go, run away, for only thus will you avoid the traps of the Antichrist. Any open battle with him will be lost outright. Leave whatever you possess, give up your land and get on the road Eadem,

Flights, 267

- 212 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 44.
- 213 Ibidem, 6.
- 214 Eadem, *The Books of Jacob*, 842–844.

- 215 Ibidem, 784.
216 This dialectics, for example, is not noticed by François Hartog, see his, *Chronos. The West Confronts Time*, translated by S. R. Gilbert (Columbia University Press, 2020).
217 Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 47.
218 For example, it could be the eight-stadial cycle of personality development of Eric Erikson, whose book Tokarczuk knew. See his, *Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959).
219 Tokarczuk, *Lalka i perła*, 46.
220 Ibidem, 54.
221 Ibidem, 55.
222 Ibidem, 12.
223 Ibidem, 56–57.
224 Ibidem, 59.
225 Eadem, *Lalka i perła*, 59.
226 Eadem, *Flights*. 394–395.
227 Józef Tischner, *Kairos. Rozmowy z ks. prof. Józefem Tischnerem* [Kairos. Interview with rev. prof. Józef Tischner] <https://ninatka.pl/audio/kairos-rozmowy-z-ks-prof-jozefem-tischnerem> [access: 20.06.2022].
228 Tokarczuk, *Flights*, 85.

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