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**FROM SCIENCE-HISTORY TO MEMORY-HISTORY? : ATTRACTIVENESS
AND RISKS OF A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TREND**

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I

The name of the International Commission which organizes this session, is International Commission on History and Theory of Historiography.¹ In this paper I try to link the two sides or aspects that this name suggest : the most historical-factual or contextual one and the most theoretic or epistemological-speculative one. Specifically, first of all I intend to reflect on what changes in the theory of history are observed in the last 20 years if we analyse the real practice of the community of academic historians in the West. I do it starting from a case study related to Spain (more exactly to Catalonia) that I think is significant. Significant also because it is coherent with a previously detected general trend. Later, I advance the hypothesis that perhaps these changes can be summed up in the transition from a history nearer to science to other history nearer to memory, clarifying what I mean by this term. In the last section of my exposition, I reflect on the attractiveness and risks of memory-history, and on some possible strategies to overcome the risks inherent in this fascinating practice.

II

In 1979, in a famous article published in *Past and Present*, Lawrence Stone detected an important historiographical change or turn, which he named *Revival of Narrative*, understanding narrative as a *code word*.² As a field of reflection he took the practice of a very outstanding and limited group of specialists, and he alluded to the 1970's decade. Before

this paper, I had already the idea that this change in the historiographical practice, which Stone detected in the central countries of historians ecumene, also happened later in Spain, with an important time-lag. After the analysis that I will comment to you I have confirmed myself in this notion.

How to prove if there has been (and in what extent) a transformation in the historiographical trends (and in the underlying theory of history)? In contrast with L. Stone, I have preferred to take as a starting point the professional practice of a very large number of historians in a broad sense, exactly 241. Maybe I choose this way because of the influence on me of the socio-cultural approach to the study of historiography made by Ch.-O. Carbonell.³ This group of historians have in common that they have researched on the early modern history (16th-18th centuries) of Catalonia and they have presented papers in the setting of two similar congresses, celebrated in Barcelona in 1984 and 2003 and organized by the Department of Early Modern History (*Historia Moderna*) of Barcelona University which I belong to.⁴

I have ventured to ask me if this change could be summarized, for the reasons that I will expound, in the words of the (interrogative) title of my paper. I do not know if this turn of science-history to memory-history (in the case that this designation was acceptable with the necessary shades) could be understood as another possible turn later still than the linguistic turn. I think rather that this change of tendency would be a show (in the case of Catalonia) of the inside-turn of which Donald Kelley has spoken, and of a turn of history in pursuit of the subject or of history understood above all as an identity self-discovery of the group itself, on which E. Hobsbawm⁵ has written (and about that I have recently expressed some reservations). This turn it would happened in Spain with a time lag of 10-15 years with regard to the countries placed more in the core of the international historiographical debate.⁶

In any case, before continuing, I must explain something more the reasons why I have chosen as phenomenological starting point two particular congresses. Very concisely, the causes can be summarized so: they are two academic meetings on the same themes,⁷ promoted by a same university institution, with a number of participants very large (both veteran university teachers and young researchers) and separate by almost twenty years of difference. So, there are enough elements in common and enough passed time (in view of the quick transformation of the historiographical trends) to make in this case study a fruitful comparative analysis, which shows the differences in the practice of the historians community⁸. Nevertheless, I advise that I have not sought to make an exhaustive

monograph, which would require an exhaustive monograph. In this analysis, which is the starting point for a more theoretic reflection, I only try to draw the general features from some approximate empiric observations.

In the *First Congress of Early Modern History of Catalonia*, held in the Faculty of Geography and History of the University of Barcelona in 1984, a total of 156 papers were presented. They were sorted in the following (previously established) thematic sections or blocks that reflected somehow the at that time theoretically hegemonic paradigm of *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations.*) : Population (16); Country World (27), Urban World (39), Politics and Institutions (38), Religion (19), Culture and Mentalities (19).⁹ How many of these papers could be classified in the title science-history? How delimit it, even if it is approximately? For this, in a first approximation, I have followed the two following criteria. First, the consideration if the research reflected in the paper based itself on the use of a relatively systematic quantifying, in view of there is a very important elective affinity, in several historiographical trends, between the practice of history understood first of all as a social science and the quantifying. The other possible requirement has been to observe if in the paper there was (or not) explicitly used a conceptualisation which referred to history as a science, either in the Marxist version, the eco-Malthusian one or in another one. The sum of papers that complied with at least one of the requirements (or quantifying or express reference to history as a science) is, according to my provisional calculation, 99/156, that is to say, about two thirds of the total number (exactly 63.5 %). Beyond a reviewable numerical exactness, which for the purposes of this paper is secondary, the main thing is to outstand the clear supremacy of a conception of history as a science, not very far from the social physics, based to a large extent on serial sources, which had as a setting of conceptual analysis some large wholes, a history made “from outside” the experiences of its actors and based on scientific-methodological premises whose validity was supposed very large if not universal.

Applying these same simple analytic indicators, what do we find two decades later (at the year 2003) in the *5th Congress of Early Modern History of Catalonia*? At this time the 85 published papers were distributed in thematic blocks, organized outside enough the structuring in the three classic levels of *Annales*. These blocks (with the number of respective papers) were : *Identities and Political Reality* (14), *Women and Daily Life* (8), *Family, Groups and Sociability* (9), *Population and Resources* (12), *Conflicts, Revolts and Revolutions* (19), *Representation and Social Configuration* (16), *Space and Religious Culture* (7). The percentage of the papers that have at least one of the requirements above-mentioned, indications clear

enough of a conception of history- social science, has diminished drastically : from about two thirds in 1984, it has passed to less than a quarter (24.7 %). Nevertheless, to avoid equivocations it is as well to specify that undoubtedly this do not mean that the considered community of historians had renounced to the conception of history as a scientific and methodologically solid knowledge and with direct references to happened realities. It could also been understood as an evidence of that François Dosse has called the humanization of the human sciences (*l'humanisation des sciences de humaines*).¹⁰

Which are the most important transformations in “the historiographical landscape” that underlie in that aforementioned simple quantitative observation?¹¹ In broad outline, we discover that a turn has occurred from a predominantly socio-demographic and socio-economic history towards a history of the consciousness, the group identity (and representation) and how this group lives its relationship with other social groups (of the sociability) or political communities, with special attention to the moments of acute crisis. A turn towards a history less based on seriable sources (as the notarial records) and more based on the reconstruction of the subjects experiences, taking as reference often very small human fields (microhistory). It is a more anthropological and somehow less sociological history, and undoubtedly with a lesser attention to the strictly economic aspects.

The self-discovering of the consciousness of group (either this one is delimited according to the vector of gender (women) or ethnic-cultural (language and political culture)) in the temporary perspective could be one of the important connecting themes. Because of this, by way of hypothesis, with all the risks and shades that this requires, I have advanced, between question-marks in my originary writing, the designation of memory-history for this kind of more subjective history, with a content more existential than essentialist and with more attention to the discourses, perceptions and representations – to the mental images and the ones expressed outwardly or objectified in iconic products. Since in fact the visual turn -the importance of the iconic evidence as a source and the art history as a specific discipline- is another feature of that transformation¹².

In any case, it is clear that memory-history would be only a name used in a metaphoric and debatable sense, and in a way similar to narrative (the code-word used by L. Stone.. I think that at least it is not a wild expression, since there is in this case too an elective affinity between the ethnic-political identity ant the relevance which is paid to the chosen or constructed memory. At the end of my route through the papers of the congress I have thought that other denomination for this new historiographical tendency could be

representation-history.¹³ The advantage of this term in relation to the former one rest on it could also assume and express one of the characteristics above-mentioned in the transformation of the historical practice in the last years : the growing relevance which is paid to the images as historical sources, in a great accordance with the iconocentric culture in which we are immersed, favoured by the mass media.

III

Before going on to some general theoretic considerations (since I think that the case from I have started is a particular variant of a large enough phenomenon) about the attractiveness and risks which this historiographical trend of memory-history or history-representation presents, I would like to mention very synthetically (there will be cause to return more carefully to it in other work) the endogenous and exogenous reasons (naturally interrelated) because of them I think that this transformation is happened in the historiographical practice in Catalonia.

As first we are in the history-existential reality which is fruit of the evolution in time, and after we research and write history as knowledge, I will begin by the exogenous reasons, that is to say the reasons due to the change in the context interacting with the historian. I would emphasize three. In first place, using the terminology of R. Koselleck, the different politico-cultural fields of experience and horizon of waiting, in Catalonia in 2003 (with regard to 1984).¹⁴ The cause is in large measure that, the autonomous government of Catalonia (*Generalitat de Catalunya*), which has exercised very large powers, during more than 20 years, in the fields of education and the historical culture -inside the kingdom of Spain, according to the Spanish 1979 *Constitución* , has promoted the reinforcement of a specific strong identity consciousness, debatedly “national

Other new very important reality has been the experience, intensified on a large scale in these last five years, of the living world of the others (the immigrants), and hence it is necessary to acquire an anthropological perspective to learn to combine the human nearness as human beings, and the understanding of the cultural distance which makes problematic this nearness in the daily social relationships. Last but not least, the fall of the regimes of the so-called real socialism, with the great questionings that this has meant to the Marxist paradigm and derivedly for all the teleological metahistories.

In relation to the reasons that are endogenous to the evolution itself of the discipline, they are probably the same that were expounded by L. Stone in 1979 (in the

aforementioned paper) and Jürgen Kocka in 1986.¹⁵ As a deferred consequence of that change of the western historiographical climate, is significant that in Spain and especially in Catalonia a certain familiarity with other works has been added in the last years to the almost exclusive knowledge (as reference in theory of history) of the work by Josep Fontana, centred almost exclusively on Marxism and *Annales*.¹⁶ Between that works there are the general views by Peter Burke and Georg Iggers¹⁷, which have also other proposals as the defended by the linguistic turn by H. White, microhistory and the history of daily life (more or less influenced by the symbolic-cultural anthropology of C. Geertz) and the contributions by Paul Ricoeur in the hermeneutical plane and in that one of the relationships between historicity and narrativity.

IV

I think that it is worthwhile, and I go on the final block of my paper, to propose a general theoretic reflection (without circumscribing it to the Hispanic context) about the attractiveness and risks which the historiographical trend of memory-history implies. It is as well to show before that this tendency, very tangible today, is undoubtedly an example that the work of historians (history as a cognitive-existential construct) tends to go really beyond the domains of science, as the title of this session suggests to us. History tends to saturate itself with a (retrospective or prospective, towards the past and towards the future) self-projection in which the desires can be (and usually are) so or more important than the empiric realities, which are the field of choice of science or at least of the classic model of science.

The attractiveness that memory-history presents are important and diverse. Since memory-history has a strong and seemingly clear existential connection with whom write and read it, this history is more easily near, own, deeply felt, fascinating and gratifying to these people than science-history. More gratifying too insofar as it acts as a vicarious compensation of the gaps or frustrations experienced (in the past) or feared (to the future) by the people members of the human group which that history is directly addressed to.¹⁸ The memory-history, which is constitutively narrative, is more easily digestible, because it is accompanied with the wine of the human personality. This history is in short more near to “my” or “our” personal and untransferible experience, a experience which it seems more necessary to safeguard now, in the age of the grey technological interchangeability and the almost inevitable uniformity towards which the globalisation tends. In a sense, memory-

history can act salutarily as a safeguard of the difference and the cultural biodiversity. Moreover, a hastened rhythm of social change with very doubtful guaranties of the success of its direction makes more desirable to revisit closely the worlds we have lost (perhaps not irretrievably) as other possible germs of alternative futures.¹⁹

Probably, rather than to enlarge on explaining the almost obvious attractiveness of memory-history, to balance the subject today it is as well to take a longer time over its risks and how overcome them.²⁰ The most important risk rest on that -in the cognitive-existential construct which history is- the veritative tension or the cognitive dimension towards the human reality (an always undoubtedly complex and mixed reality) remained excessively subordinated to (and altered by) the volitional, emotive and subjective dimension which operates in pursuit of a past selectively chosen in a more or less conscious way.²¹ Memory-history constructs so a “hot” past. This past is warm and comforting to the members of the own group but often is withering and worrying to those who enter it from outside. Because of this, memory-history has a small range of shareability (of potentiality to be shared) and is given to convert itself in the past that we would like to have lived. But as what for some are dreams to other are nightmares, it is difficult to edify solidarity, which requires the acceptance and assessment of the other, on a history that only was memory-history. Of course this does not mean that on tackling the knowledge of the past we must put ourselves in an attitude equidistant between victims and executioners.

History, as a scientific knowledge and learning which implies the sense, requires also a wise, generous and open ethical engagement.²² Maybe this engagement could summarize as a continuous effort to safeguard the experience of the different ways how the human dignity can be shaped temporarily and culturally, a human dignity which is capable of including everybody and all the peoples. Memory-history tends to symbolically condense this dignity only in a selectively constructed realization. Then this necessary memory-history must be complemented and balanced by science-history more inclined to establish common and universalising standards of verification of facts, realities and processes. We could say perhaps that the hot and colouristic past that memory-history offer to us must be tempered with the cold and greyish past of science-history. Of course I talk about analytic polarities which nevertheless can be useful in our attempted thinking of a theory of history which was up to the challenges of our times.

¹ There are important shades of change of meaning between history “on” (does it not suggest first of all themes or an object of reflection?), the name which figures in the program of this Congress, and history “for” (history in favour of, with suggestions of engagement to) which was the designation used in the last *19th ICHS* (Oslo, 2000). Since this observation is relevant to the reflection that I propose to do, I place it on record (history is always at a time on something or of something, and for, in favour of something or somebody, with a purpose).

² L. Stone, “The Revival of Narrative. Reflections on a New Old History”, *Past & Present* 85, 3-24.

³ The most emblematic work of this approach may be his *Historie et historiens. Une mutation idéologique des historiens français, 1865-1888*, Toulouse, 1976.

⁴ This is due to my original chronological field of research. From a lot of years, besides early modern historiography, I study, research and teach about the Present Historiographical Trends and I am also interested in the theory of history.

⁵ Kelley, Donald : “El giro cultural en la investigación histórica”, in Olabarri, I. & Caspistegui, F. J. (eds.) : *La ‘nueva’ historia cultural: la influencia del postestructuralismo y el auge de la interdisciplinariedad*, p. 35-48, Madrid, 1996. The return of the subject (“El retorno del sujeto”) was the felicitous title given to the 2nd vol. of the first international congress *Historia a Debate* (Santiago de Compostela, 1993), edited by Carlos Barros. For his part, Hobsbawm, E. : “I Life in History”, *Past and Present*, 177 (2002), p. 14, writes : “[...] history was not so much a way of interpreting or even changing the world, but a means of collective self-discovery, a way of winning collective recognition. [...] the risk inherent in this search for identity and roots is that it leads to in-group history fully accessible only to those who shared the historical and life-experience of its subjects, or even the physical configuration of the humans to whom it appeals [...]”.

⁶ As evidences that in France, Germany and USA, for example, this turn or change of trend has happened before, suffice it to adduce the context and the success of the tremendous work directed by Pierre Nora, *Lieux de mémoire*, Paris, 1984-1986; or the reflection on the importance of the historical culture in the public debates in Germany during the 1980’s decade and the beginning of 1990’s, carried out in the work by Füsman, K.; Grütter, H.T.; Rösen, J. (eds.) : *Historische Faszination*, Cologne, 1994. In this last year other significant work was published in USA : *Telling the Truth about History*, written in collaboration by three women historians : J. Appleby, L. Hunt y M. Jacob.

⁷ The name of the first congress was simply, without any specific thematic limits, First Congress of Early Modern History of Catalonia (*Primer Congrés d’Història Moderna de Catalunya*, 2 vols., Barcelona, 1984); the second one was planned with the same purpose of being a balance and a impulse to the university research without any thematic exclusion, because of this the organizers chose a very generic title, 5th Congress of Early Modern History of Catalonia (*5 Congrés d’Història Moderna de Catalunya*), although by agreement of the Department a subtitle was added (*Identities, Conflicts, Representations*). Between these congresses, other three Congresses of Early Modern History of Catalonia have been celebrated with specific themes, limited by the period or the subjects.

⁸ On “Comparative History” a sound síntesis in S. Berger; H. Feldner and K. Passmore (eds.): *Writing History. Theory and Practice*. New York 2003, 161-179.

⁹ To set adequately in a context these papers, it is as well to clarify that among them, by express will of the Organizing Committee (the Department teaching staff), there are both works of veteran historians, almost everybody university researchers (even some papers of invited established authors as Pierre Vilar and Miquel Batllori), and the contributions of new researchers. Because of this, there is also an important diversity as for the degree of conceptual and methodological elaboration. This very criterion of opening and impulse rather than exclusive gathering of great specialists has continued being applied in the other four Congresses that have been organized. The philosophy of these congresses is evident in the preface inserted in the record of the first congress, which although is not signed by the Director of the Department then, Pere Molas, was written by him. This is not the place for exposing the internal history of the aforementioned Department

which could contribute to explain the important reduction in number of papers presented to the 2003 Congress in relation to the 1984 Congress. In any case we must have in mind that between 1984 and 2003 the number of students in the Faculty of Geography and History of Barcelona University decreased dramatically.

¹⁰ 'Devant la crise des grands paradigmes unitaires (fonctionnalisme, marxisme, structuralisme), ainsi que, parallèlement, des réponses holistes et déterministes aux questions sociales [...] les nouvelles approches théoriques misent sur un ressourcement pragmatique de la théorie de l'action, une dynamisation des "ateliers de la raison pratique" et, plus généralement, pourrait-on dire, une "humanisations des sciences humaines" ', in: *L'empire du sens. L'humanisation des sciences humaines*, Paris, 1997.

¹¹ Xavier Gil-Pujol has used this felicitous expression, "historiographical landscape", in a paper to the 5th Congress of Early Modern History of Catalonia, in *Pedralbes. Revista d'Història Moderna*, 23-II (Barcelona, 2003), p. 9-34.

¹² A recent evidence of this interest of historians in the visual sources is B. Roeck, *Das historische Auge. Kunstwerke als Zeugen ihrer Zeit. Von der Renaissance zur Revolution*. Göttingen 2004. In a theoretical level, the underlaying (acentuación) of the esthetic dimension of historical knowledge is very clear in F. Ankersmits, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 2005

¹³ In the case of the Congress papers which I am paying attention to, this name is supported by several related facts : professor R. Chartier, an important theorizer of the operative potentiality of that concept, is who gave the inaugural lecture (the closing lecture was entrusted to the English hispanist James Casey, who titled it The invention of the community and the social history ("La invención de la comunidad y la historia social"); the term "Representation" was one of the three terms which appeared in the subtitle of the last Congress; and just because the particular thematic block which was dedicated to "Representation and Social configuration" was the second from the number of papers that it attracted (16), after "Conflicts, revolts, revolutions" (19). It is as well to specify that in this last thematic block a good part of the papers presented payed an important attention to the analysis of the discourse and to the debate if there was a differential political culture (or language) in Catalonia with regard to Castile in those stormy collective experiences (basically 1640-1652 and 1702-1714).

¹⁴ The very quick (partial) translation to Spanish (or Castilian) of *Zeitschichten* (the strata of the time), 2000/2001, contrasts with the long time passed (almost 15 years) between the original edition and the (complete) Spanish translation of *Vergangene Zukunft*.

¹⁵ In "Theory Orientation and the New Quest for Narrative", in *Storia della Storiografia*, 10, p. 170-181. This issue, devoted to the "Narrative History and Structural History. Past, Present, Perspectives", collected in large measure some contributions presented in the session (organized by the late-lamented Wolfgang Mommsen) of the then *Commission Internationale d'Historiographie*, in the setting of the 16th ICHS (Stuttgart, 1985).

¹⁶ Fontana, Josep, *Historia. Análisis del pasado y proyecto social*. Barcelona 1982.

¹⁷ P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Cambridge 1992; Iggers, Georg G., *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Hannover (NH)/London 1997.

¹⁸ Cf. Huyssen, Andreas : *En busca del futuro perdido. Cultura y memoria en tiempos de la globalización*, p. 7, Mexico, 2002 (translation of *Twilight Memories : Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, 1995).

¹⁹ As the reader can guess, with these expressions I pay homage to Peter Laslett and David Lowenthal.

²⁰ A very significant fact of the attractiveness that this notion of "memory" exerts today on historians is the title The writing of memory (*La escritura de la memoria*) which Jaume Aurell (a Catalan medievalist who knows excellently the present historiographical debates) has chose for the

general view which he has just published on the historiography in the 20th century, with the subtitle From positivisms to postmodernisms (*De los positivismos a los postmodernismos*).

²¹ This polarity of history between a factual past and a voluntarily imagined existence is accurately expressed so : history is the resultant of what happened and what we would like to have been.

²² For my part I have synthesized this engagement in three values : true, liberty and solidarity. “I think that who study history must explore the lacks of solidarity in the past to impulse it in the present” (“Quien estudia historia, pienso yo, ha de explorar los déficits de solidaridad en el pasado para impulsar ésta en el presente”) : here is one of the statements which I did in my intervention during a round-table conference about “The historian, Ethics and the social engagement” (“El historiador, la ética y el compromiso social”, 1999) and which I still keep up. See Barros, C. (ed.) : *Historia a Debate*, vol. II, *Nuevos paradigmas*, p. 240-242, Corunna / A Coruña, 2000.