

Ruled Imagination: Representation and Factuality in Historical Knowledge

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Abstract

This paper aims to show how Paul Ricoeur's inquiry on memory, trace, and testimony contributes to rebalancing a framework that, at the dialectical level between imagination and representation, would essentially present historians' work as hermeneutical. In Ricoeur's later writings, we find a differently balanced perspective by focusing the (neurobiological and psychological) substrate of representation behind trace and memory. Representation precedes interpretation. And neither memory's fidelity nor history's epistemic truth belong to a game that would be solely played within the communicative space of a plurality of cognitive agents who are exchanging, controlling and sharing their experiences. Consequently, the reality of the past itself emerges in the practice of memory's background.

Keywords: realism, memory, imagination, trace, testimony

1. Critical realism or anthropological anchorage?

Paul Ricoeur's interest in the relationship between truth and history dates to his youthful philosophical work, a work that has varied progressively throughout its stages. It has been a complex movement, in some parts of a karstic nature, to polarisation on more definitely methodological and epistemological themes in the 1980s and, above all, the 1990s. Especially in these decades, Ricoeur's theoretical maturation on the historical knowledge question should be placed, for

abandonment of a more general and, at least in part, 'militant' approach (it was intertwined, for example, with 'existential' questions, as 'Le socius et le prochain', in *Historie et Vérité* [1955], reveals); and even for characterisation of a new research *modus*, always speculative, but focused on issues of historical knowledge construction (beyond the pure hermeneutical horizon, which is its most proper terrain) in reference to thematic-problematic and bibliographical itineraries constituting axes of the historiographical debate and the contemporary 'Philosophy of History'. In this way, Ricoeur fits into the current debate on historical knowledge's nature and the gnoseological functions involved in it. He starts from an anthropological concern, of phenomenological and hermeneutical substance, about human beings' historicity. He does so, however, penetrating the exact node of the technical-speculative dialectic between objectivity's claim and historical knowledge's truth, on the one hand, and, on the other, the (inevitably) representational character of the historian's reconstructive work, through which, and for whose only means, this knowledge is pursued. Then, what is the reference of historical representation? Which is the balancing or the procedural, safest alethic formula to guarantee objective referentiality to historical knowledge or to guarantee a true/right synthetic formula (*truthful synthesis*) between the order of empirical or empirically verifiable, usable elements (e.g. finds, objects, documents, oral or written eyewitness accounts) and the order of representative functions (i.e. cognitive, linguistic-conceptual and rhetorical-narrative)?

Ricoeur's critical realism approach intercepts and addresses this tension through tripartite dialectical intertwining, that is, adding the hermeneutical-speculative dilemma of human historical identity. It is an aggravation, if not an imbalance, perhaps, of the dialectical problem; but, perhaps, it constitutes a path for identifying a new argumentative resource in favour of the epistemic and heuristic force of

an (well disciplined) ex-post representational reconstruction. (1) On the one hand, history is *the past that has been*, that is, the past of facts inscribed in the space of time, memory and traces, or in material and cultural supports. Within this framework, the *princeps* referent concerns the unitariness or referential objectivity of time (and of facts framed in it, namely facts 'that were' and 'that were as they happened'); of time (ontologically) as such and/or of time in the sense of 'past human vicissitudes' (non-cosmic-physical time, but rather calendar time, the time of facts inscribed and ordered over time). On this point, Ricoeur adheres to a *realist* epistemic conception, overlapping and identifying historical time with physical time according to a position that we could call of objectivist ontology. The historian cannot alter facts 'so-and-so happened' but rather only their representative, narrative, interpretative re-figuration. Even representation evaluated/verified as the most faithful and truthful remains, in any case, a representative reconstruction, something that in the specific field of history, which is a discipline exerted to order, explain and understand a partly intangible, fragmentary and 'obscure' heritage invariably requires operations of cognitive processes of pragmatic measurement and hypothetical reconstruction, of explanation and interpretation, of observation and representation, of description and imagination (see Ricoeur 1994). (2) On the other hand, history is the field of historical knowledge, something that exists only through cognitive and representational functions. From this perspective, Ricoeur's position tends towards an epistemological orientation with hermeneutical prevalence. Indeed, while his *hermeneutic arc* theory constitutes an epistemological and methodological model transversely arranged between explication and comprehension, on the other hand, precisely for coordination of this model's two functional mechanisms, Ricoeur poses interpretation in a mediatory position, imagining a similar exercise within disciplines having problematic epistemological status, such as

psychology, sociology and history. In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (orig. 2000; trans. 2004), he presents the concept of interpretation as follows:

To speak of interpretation in terms of an operation is to treat it as a complex of language acts—of utterances—incorporated in the objectifying statements of historical discourse. In this complex several components can be discerned: first, the concern with clarifying, specifying, unfolding a set of reputedly obscure significations in view of a better understanding on the part of the interlocutor; next, the recognition of the fact that it is always possible to interpret the same complex in another way, and hence the admission of an inevitable degree of controversy, of conflict between rival interpretations; then, the claim to endow the interpretation assumed with plausible, possibly even probable, arguments offered to the adverse side; finally, the admission that behind the interpretation there always remains an impenetrable, opaque, inexhaustible ground of personal and cultural motivations, which the subject never finishes taking into account. In this complex of components, reflection progresses from utterance as an act of language to the utterer as the who of the acts of interpretation. It is this operating complex that can constitute the subjective side correlative to the objective side of historical knowledge (Ricoeur 2004: 337).

The net problematic aspect mirrored and summarised in this passage is considerable. By many paths, we will return repeatedly to it.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, not only reference to, but even use of hermeneutic arc theory is massive and strategic; and it is so exactly within moments technically more complex in reference to the historical knowledge's constitution and synthesis as determined by certain procedures and operations of 'selection' and 'connection' (see Ricoeur 2004: P. II, Ch. 2).

One cannot deny the presence in Ricoeur's work of a certain component of epistemological realism or, at least, a problematising consideration of this component's irreducibility. We see it mirrored both in his treatment of human action and in the way in which he questions historiographical operation of complex conceptual entities' constitution. On the one hand, human actions cannot be treated exhaustively, they cannot be understood in the same way as natural events, although in a certain sense they are so, and an aspect of empirical description (physical-biological support) is also required. Actions incorporate intentionality; they are 'endowed with meaning' (Weber even before von Wright is a very dear author to Ricoeur). On the ground of the *Lebenswelt*, so to speak, the ability to grasp actions as anything other than mere events or physical movements is spontaneous and unreflective: it is immediate. Nobody 'taught us' that a mother's gesture consists of a physical aspect with an overlapping intentional element. Words are immediately grasped as meaningful, different to mere sounds, even when we do not know the speaker's language. Here, the element of immediate, pre-theoretical, pre-conceptual understanding dominates, linked to our common belonging to human life. Innate and acquired 'baggage', as implicitly and not reflectively connected to the world of life, is what counts. On the other hand, we have complex conceptual entities, referable to human actions' complex macro-aggregates. Here, the hermeneutic question of interpretation rises in a specific way. Here, deciphering of extended and complex event cycles, arising from many intertwining actions,

requires recourse to *ars interpretandi* as reflective and advanced techniques. This work cannot be reduced to empirical explanation of natural processes. It requires reading skills, comparable to deciphering texts in philology; and requires going far beyond understanding of individual intentionalities. In fact, it uses dialogic truth's methods and ideals and intersubjective consensus's construction, partly detached from criteria of correspondence to things' objective states. Interestingly, the *hermeneutical arc* theory seems to offer a procedural efficacy and balancing legitimisation of the two instances, empirical and hermeneutical: on the one hand lies, the accomplished action and, on the other, the interpreted action; on the one hand there are survey, analysis, measurement and empirical-factual study of single collected finds, data and documents; on the other, lies interpretative-narrative synthesis of the whole (microhistory/macrohistory).

Here, we see coming into play the dialectical problem between paradigms and historiographic models. It is a dialectic with respect to which Ricoeur (unlike his ontological disposition) does not take a realist position, not even an anti-realist one, but the position of critical realism as anticipated. It is a position or middle way whose most explicit dialectical counterpart is represented by Hayden White's model, on the one hand, that is, history as rhetorical-poetic knowledge or, also, aesthetic-practical knowledge and, on the other hand (always on the same front line) by Hans Kellner and Frank Ankersmit's models, that is, history as a narrative operation and history as hermeneutical discipline. Comparison with the latter perhaps weakens Ricoeur more, from the perspective of his model's effective *alternative* characterisation. In fact, alongside suspicion of his propensity for historical knowledge as a substantially interpretative operation, and of the interpretation understood in a certain way (as we can see from the quotation above), we see a tendential convergence of interest in enhancing the narrative dimension and, with it, precisely in enhancing

those rhetorical-hermeneutical aspects in some respects rejected (or, in any case, resized) in Kellner and Ankersmit's examination. Moreover, the narrative dimension constitutes the third major paradigm of Ricoeur's hermeneutics understood as a general philosophy (which passed from interpretation of symbols in the 1960s, to hermeneutics of text in the 1970s and, from there, to the narrative problematic in the 1980s, the hermeneutical phenomenology of the self in the 1990s and, indeed, the hermeneutics of history).

(3) Finally, the field of history is the field of human experience, of the subject that knows the world, intervenes in it, manipulates it and creates and recreates its own cultural, identity and intersubjective relations, and which [or through which one] represents and imagines [himself/herself]. According to some of Ricoeur's major interpreters, his philosophical course would be characterised by a general anthropological background. He would be passed (from *Soi-même comme un autre*, 1990), 'de la grammaire de l'identité personnelle à sa déclinaison dans la condition historique effective des êtres humains' (Jervolino 2002: 48). The implication at the front of historical knowledge's problematisation would be direct and pervasive not only because of the speculative connotation's peculiarity in understanding historical truth according to truth's problematic perspective (1) in historical knowledge and (2) in historical action, or in the dialectic between history understood as *res gestae* and history understood as *historia rerum gestarum*. On the 'human factor' so to speak Ricoeur seems to weigh significance for what concerns the speculative and gnoseological perspective and for the methodological and epistemological side of historical knowledge's construction. The dense quotation referred to above, concerning interpretation, well reproduces these elements, indicating in them an operation of mediative tension anchored to a given 'vision'. Interpretation is conceived as an operation framed in a complex of linguistic acts forming historical dis-

course, and simultaneously, as an instrument of an interlocutor's (cognitive and comprehensive) clarification, also in the (intersubjective) game of the possible 're-readings'. Furthermore, interpretation is also conceived, as a reflection of motivational, subjective and cultural instances, referring to the questions of 'Who' as an expert subject (i.e. the historian) and/or as an interested person. Within the same channel must be framed a wider discourse, strictly implied (according to Ricoeur and philosophical hermeneutics in general) in the methodological-epistemological problem of historical knowledge as bearer of further difficulties and criticalities or, conversely, of potential productive keys *pro argumentum*. We can introduce it through a formula of questioning: 'What is the relationship between argumentative and imaginative components in historical knowledge's construction?' Not only does Ricoeur *not* accept such a polarised formulation of the problem from which, from letters, we intend to suggest (at least hypothetically) a distinction of structure and/or system between linguistic-cognitive-rational functions and symbolic-psychological/ideological-representational functions within argumentative weaving, he rather sees operating the intervention of motivational and rhetorical-argumentative instances. In addition, to him, a strategy is chosen that of an all-round analysis of the function or, better still, of the imaginative faculty which still reflects an anthropological-hermeneutical sensitivity for construction of a theoretical argumentative position.

In the essay on imagination (Ricoeur 1976), this faculty is considered to play both an innovative role, as an ability to open up to other points of view, and a 'critical-cognitive' role, central in the historical scientist's work of knowledge, interpretation and reconstruction of past events. This appends by virtue of the ability (precisely, 'imaginative ability') to identify with the other in past events, and by virtue of an intersubjective openness, which is linked both to this

specific aspect and to more general research conducted and knowledge measured in the historians' community. Therefore, not only on the side of understanding the historian's cognitive operation, there is a potential configurability of 'ideological position' from the perspective of rhetorical-narrative functions (a *necessity* historical knowledge's cognitive-comprehensive and communicative synthesis), as potential identifiability of persuasive components within argumentative construction (in one way or another, intertwined with previous functions). Not only this (or *even* for that?), imagination would be a mediated and synthetic faculty between perception and measurement in general cognition and symbolic and performative contributions, between 'external' or acquired data (i.e. objective components) and hypothetical-hermeneutical elements; also between causal elements analysed in a descriptive-explanatory way and motivational elements comprehensively considered in narrative reconstruction (all under auspices of interpretation, according to the provisional procedural arrangement of hermeneutic arc theory).

Thus, this centralisation of the imaginative faculty directly calls the function of representation and the problematic of historical knowledge's representational construction. In fact, to the extent that the historian's reconstruction massively depends on the imaginative faculty's functioning, the historian's narration, narrative synthesis, comprehensible-explanatory framework and general operation of 'interpretative reordering' must be framed with reference to this faculty and must inevitably find an outlet, first of all, in something representational.

2. Cognitive scope and social practice in historical representation

Ricoeur's (theoretically) critical-realist stance with reference to historical knowledge has been said to result from historiographical and

phenomenological-hermeneutical research in his maturity. This is a position that, in itself, limits action's cognitive range for hermeneutical operations, operations, in fact, close to reality's unalterable datum and, at the same time, favours use of specific hermeneutical 'paraphernalia', on both the epistemological front (i.e. hermeneutic arc theory) and the front of linguistic-aesthetic and poetic-narrative instruments. For this reason, a critical itinerary through a narrative theory such as that exhibited in the trilogy of *Temps et récit* (1983–85) is not at all impromptu or marginal in an inquiry into Ricoeur's theory of historical knowledge (and this beyond acceptance or not of the validity of the 'anthropological hypothesis' introduced above; and more, just in this trilogy's general conclusions, Ricoeur introduces a substantially *narrative* dimension of personal identity...). Indeed, since it systematically investigates fictional and historical narration, narrative theory precisely focuses on the key problematic point of the 'dialectic' (let us say) between *fait historique* and *représentance* (with explicit passages of analysis and interpretation in *Temps et récit*). On the one hand, it is a dialectic that brings to the surface Ricoeur's disposition toward a position of critical realism; on the other, it refers to the question of historical representation, understood as cognitive synthesis between cognitive-understanding functions and the *quid* of the fact, of the datum, of the past that 'has been'. This immediately reveals itself in tension with representation from hermeneutical discourse on the imaginative faculty that places historical representation (and knowledge in general) as creative and productive synthesis, as cognitive intentionality: (1) on the world and on facts that is, on theoretical terrain of *events* and, at the same time, (2) on the human being as subject of *motivation* and *action* or on the theoretical-practical terrain of the initiative. Still, this tension is reproduced on the narration's terrain, as the first 'material' and 'performative' outcome of representational operation in the historian's synthesis. On

the one hand, we have narrative synthesis as an epistemological break with the form of narrated truth, which is prevalently rhetorical-poetic and orally transmitted (or, also, in written form) under control of the memory's exercise. That is 'epistemological rupture' as synthesis of explanatory and descriptive-interpretative prevalence, which results from research 'on field' around findings, clues, data, documents on archival materials, etc. On the other hand, narrative synthesis constitutes an objectified expression (of the operation and of the historian's imaginative work) in a formulation susceptible to an 'autonomous life' (and, therefore, of verification) within the scientific community, in contrast to expressive synthesis still conveyed by the memory, which depends on modelling work in memories and experienced facts, that is, the psychology, the existential sphere and the experience of the facts' narrator.

Already in itself, the rich semantic notion of representation reveals conceptual and theoretical density for which it can become catalyst and vehicle. Conversely, philosophical research in itself has proven since antiquity both the speculative fertility of this notion and its polyvalence. Aristotle, for example, frames representation both as a cognitive intellectual function and as a psychological capacity to represent the perceived in the memory. This is a position that refers analogically to the articulation that, centuries later, Immanuel Kant introduces between representation as intuition (*Anschauung*) and as concept (*Begriff*). The reference is not accidental: In using this notion within his research on historical knowledge, Ricoeur shows how to articulate his analysis precisely in reference to an analogous polysemy of representation. He conceives this notion as essentially articulated in three aspects: psychological sense and experience (cognition and work of memory), cognitive and intellectual (descriptive-explanatory synthesis, comprehension), productive and expressive meaning (imagination, creation of meaning, innovation). Such polysemy gener-

ates complex interdisciplinary dialectic that determines the effect of a 'spiral' theorisation, based on binomial *représentance-representation*. It is a spiral moving between psychology and philosophy of mind on the one hand, and phenomenology of memory and historical knowledge on the other; and also between, on the one hand, historical ontology, narrative theory and rhetorical-poetical creation, and, on the other hand, hermeneutics of action and self (see J. Michel 2013: 278 ff).

Perhaps we are entering such a level of dilatation/deformation of representation and its uses, to be able to judge it as a useless notion both as progress and as this examination's perspective of Ricoeur's theoretical position. However, (1) this notion is particularly significant in historical knowledge's construction and is implicated in its major problematic cornerstones. Moreover, (2) Ricoeur develops an orderly progressive treatment in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (see, in particular, Ricoeur 2004: P. II, Ch. 3), reflecting critical hermeneutics' style: that is, an articulated interdisciplinary approach on several levels of discourse and disciplined according to levels and degrees of analysis. In addition, (3) today, the most important advancements around the 'representational objects' even within the philosophy of history and concerning 'representational life' of great interest in cognitive science, come from interdisciplinary research. In particular, cognitive science offers a point of support to representation's foundational argument on subjects' substantial unity and psycho-biological regularity. This is a useful argument; to recognise in historical knowledge, on the one hand, the validity and 'ontological hold' of assumptions such as permanence of motives for action and reasons based on behaviour of historical agents, and on the other, acceptability and 'methodological-epistemological' strength of cognitive operations based on the imaginative faculty, i.e. interpretation, identification and narrative reconstruction. Naturally, it does not constitute in itself a sufficient factor

to overcome critical elements connected to representational constructions and historical knowledge. On the contrary, this same factor can sustain those theories of historical knowledge that have a prevalent hermeneutical-narrative basis, as in Frank Ankersmit, or sustain those with a post-structuralist feature, that is, rhetorical-linguistic or aesthetic-linguistic, as in Hayden White. Ricoeur refuses both such polarised perspectives, placing himself onto a sort of mediative and tensional position between instances connected to realist ontology (essentially, the problematic historical representation/reconstruction and the reference to the past's factuality) and instances of an epistemology based on interpretation (*arc herméneutique*) that conceives representation as both a cognitive-comprehensive synthesis and as a metaphoric relation or report. The impact of this second aspect (and, therefore, of the representational aspects) on the question of realism is due to its specific ontological implication. The 'seeing-how' of historical reconstruction grasps and mirrors (in a more or less faithful and truthful way) the datum that 'has been', but not in-how-is-in-itself and for itself but for-as-it-is-given, that is to say for-as-it-was-experienced. In this lies the function of representation that defines the analogical relationship (see Ricoeur 1985: 282–283), and reflects substantial intertwining on the point of 'historical fact' among epistemological, ontological and anthropological dimensions (the human being as actor and *historical* subject).

(1) For the mature Ricoeur of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, as its functional and onto-epistemic characterisation, representation is conceived differently from White and others, resulting from mobile dialectics ruled along the line of imagination and interpretation among, on the one side, experience and lived time, 'hermeneutical formulation' and the work of memory, and, on the other side, between cognition and factual concatenation (under natural time), between the world's reality and linguistic-conceptual maps applied to it.

(2) As procedural characterisation, essentially, representation is to him a refigurative and narrative expression always the result of functions' government under the aegis of imagination-representation. At the same time, it is not the concern of a *rhetorical* effect of persuasion, or *aesthetic* of beauty, gusto and appreciability/availability of the whole reconstructive work; nor *narrative* for a narrative effect as such (that is, concern for a credible, balanced, meaning of the plot, a beginning, a weaving of intrigue, a final outcome and conclusion). It is under the concern of an operation of *measured* and *controlled* synthesis (thanks to procedures' support, their application in accordance with known, reproducible standards and ways, and to the support of material elements and empirical data or, in any case, empirically tractable data); at the same time it is under the concern of a *plausible* and *truthful* synthesis (thanks to the interpretative work's continuative anchorage to (available) material and documental supports and to narrative reconstruction elaborated on these factual elements' basic framework following a unifying weaving explicitly operating between the 'void' and the 'full' of the research object).

(3) Finally, below the anthropological-philosophical dimension (referred to as representational function), we do not find neuro-cognitive, psychological and memory discourse, but narrative discourse and discourse referred to identity; in a word, we find the *cultural* dimension and the dimension of socio-historical-cultural constitutional level of personal identity and human experience. This component's consistency and significance emerges in all its strength (a) varying the scale of research, reconstruction and writing of history and (b) sensitising the historian's operation with insertion of tools and sociological knowledge theories. These are two operations that in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur performs explicitly and intentionally the former focusing on 'microhistories', the latter using some key concepts and terms of Durkheim's sociology. Ricoeur writes, in

particular: 'If we broaden our gaze beyond macrohistory, we see outlined in other societies than those studied by *microhistoria* entanglements of great complexity between the pressure exercised by models of the behavior seen as dominant and the reception, or better the appropriation, of received messages' (Ricoeur 2004: 219).

Not only on the principle of structural and psychological unity of human perception and cognition, in a word, of neuro-psychobiological human functions, can procedural functionality and cognitive validity of the imaginary-interpretation-representation circuit be supported, but also for a certain historical stability, in a given period, of a cultural or socio-cultural *habitus* that is, a given set of values, ideals, conceptions of the world, habits, relational behaviors, normative sets, oral codes, and so on. In short, even functions or symbolic forms contribute to substantiating interpretative reconstructions' veracity and the very substance with which facts that 'have been' turned out to be such: truly historical and unmodifiable facts.

There is a strong connection between regularity of social action (in different contexts, according to different epochs) and the permanence of ideals and motives of action. The connection between events and experiences given in a specific time (socio-historical-cultural) and the constitution of those experiences and events *as events* is no less strong; those events are *objectified* (as facts separated from experiences), but they are objectified according to that particular configuration (and self-representational) socio-cultural representation. The historical facts of the history of human civilisation are inscribed in natural time as events, once passed. However, they remain events not treatable as objects of nature or existing as configured data within an independent and neutral, natural space. Like a pile of stones, the ontological constitution of a boundary wall can happen only within certain (cognitive, cultural, social and institutional) conditions, so only under certain conditions (still cognitive, value-related, cultural and

social) a given series of objective events attributed to the history of human civilisation, configured as such in an exact natural time, assume ontological characterisation of events *historically* objective. No historical fact as a human fact can occur in purely objective natural time.

Ricoeur's perspective seems to lead us in this direction and in many ways induce a 'downward' revision of the incidence and truth of the real's component. *Ergo*, is it a kind of weak realism?

3. Memory, Testimony, Trace

We therefore seem re-awakened on a ridge with hermeneutical prevalence, a ridge within which the approach emphasising the centrality of the linguistic-narrative and poetic-rhetorical dimension on historical knowledge's empirical and objectivistic dimension seems to acquire greater incidence. It should be an imbalance that would leave, pending effectiveness of the right, procedural and epistemological, balance of an approach based on hermeneutical arc theory. However, Ricoeur's research offers important functional elements to a vision that sees the interpretational function as operating between imagination and representation according to a sense that rebalances the involved parts. This is a minority line compared to that frankly hermeneutical, yet significant on which Ricoeur focuses, particularly in his study phase on memory (more precisely, on memory, trace and testimony), compared to his study phase on imagination, on narrative structures and on historical construction's poetic dimensions.

In the great work of 2000, memory, as power to retain and reactivate memories as well as a naturalist psychology of cognitive faculties and abilities, must be investigated by phenomenology of intentional modes typical of experiential consciousness, internally articulated over time. Its cognitive dimension intertwines with the pragmatic dimension of individual and collective use made of it. Like any

effective exercise of a faculty, it is exposed to risk of abuse. These are the most characteristic and well-known motifs of *Memory, History, Forgetting* related to the ethical-political sphere and centred on history's formative impact on psychic and cultural memory. It is interesting to explore the dialectic between two great themes trace and testimony in unstable equilibrium in Ricoeur's analyses of the relationship between memory and history. On the one hand, the theme of testimony seems to emancipate historical knowledge from that of trace, giving it a clear dialogic, linguistic scope in which the fiduciary dimension, not strictly cognitive, plays a decisive role at the base of social bonds. On the other hand, according to Ricoeur, the question of trace, with its perceptual and causal conditions, reappears at the root of testimony. We can still use the paper '*Mémoire: approches historiques*' to clarify the point. Given a phenomenological, not empirical, key (oriented to define memory's typical, essential forms), research identifies a plurality of components of the power to remember, in each of which arises the problem of reference to the past. Ricoeur distinguishes at least three aspects:

1) The ability to retain a memory, understood as a mere apparition and presence in the image of a past thing. An experience naturally referring to something from the past occurs spontaneously, as in the Greeks' *mnēmē* (μνήμη), particularly focalised by Aristotle (Ricoeur 2002: 46; Id., 2000: 732; Id., 2004: 6–7). Remembering as an appearing, *question du quoi*, is a mental function, with a passive feature (*pathos*) (Ricoeur 2004: 4). The sentiment of temporal distance is fundamental here: for this paradoxical capacity, we can say that an event happened before we tell of it; memory as a temporalising function (see Ricoeur 2002: 57);

2) The ability to recall the past through a search (*rappeler le passé*), to the extent that oblivion, or other obstacles allow it. The memory loses its characteristic of a simple and spontaneous apparition

tion; it is now the object and fruit of a search, aroused by removal of the primary impression and aimed at its recovery and *recognition*. It is the Aristotelian *anamnēsis* (ἀνάμνησις) (Ricoeur 2002: 46), placed at the end of an intentional process and specific effort. The pragmatic approach to anamnesis complicates the picture and favours transition from the *quoi* to the *qui* question: Remembering is not just about receiving; it is doing something that certainly interferes with the claim of memory's fidelity) (Ricoeur 2004: 4); this aspect can also be traced to what Bergson calls *survivance* and Husserl, retention and reproduction (*Wiedererinnerung*) of a memory (Ricoeur 2002: 57);

3) The memory's constitutive belonging to a subject, which has direct and privileged access to it, the *mienneté*; thus, we could speak of the memory's *phenomenic* subjectivity. A memory is the object of *appropriation* in the first person (singular or plural); the memory of an individual or a collective subject is irreducible to that of any other.

As is evident, the trace theme is unavoidable at this level of analysis. Within layers emerged from long tradition, memory seems inextricably linked to enigmas of the presence of the absent and the similarity between original and image, which make its need for 'fidelity' (*fidélité*) fragile, controversial and problematic. In itself, it seems insufficient, even inadequate before historiographical truth's closest constraints and standards of control.

As for testimony, from the perspective of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, it plays a crucial role as a moment of transition from memory to history, especially in the passage from oral to written form. (In '*Mémoire: Approches historiennes*' testimony, as it offers itself in comparison with other witnesses' discourse, places itself in a strategic position as a transitional element between history's *fidélité* and *vérité*. Memory's originality and privilege on the plane of reference to the past, as a happy moment of immediate recognition, is what makes it the matrix of history, whatever the history's degree of autonomy to-

wards it (see Ricoeur 2002: 56). As stated previously, memory (as its third aspect) has a dialogic, not solipsistic dimension; we must speak of *mémoire à plusieurs*. As we mentioned above, this point is particularly important for theoretical emancipation from naive realism. In testimonies' dialogic comparison, the question of resemblance loses importance (see Ricoeur 1998: 7) and seems to open a way to avoid aporia traditionally linked to memory's first dimension (*mnēmē* and *anamnēsis*).

But let us look more closely at how history, through testimony, comes to depend on memory. Ricoeur stands on this line: We have no better memory to ensure our memories' reality. We have nothing better than testimony and its criticism to accredit the historical representation of the past (Ricoeur, 2004: 278). Testimony transmits to history the force of declarative memory (Ricoeur, 2004: 497). Beyond this level, nothing is left but transition to the extralinguistic, eventually rooted in *ce qui se donne, sous le nome de trace, comme l'effet-signe de sa cause*. Historiography can bestow, correct or reject testimony, but cannot eliminate it.

Three basic stages mark transition from memory to testimony and autonomous historical discourse: declarative memory, narration and inscription. With narration, the witness opens in public space, accompanying reality's assertion with self-declaration of being a credible author of testimony. Willingness to repeat and compare testimony and to inscribe outside the body via any material support constitutes the next decisive step.

Now, let us get some other ideas from a paragraph in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (see Ricoeur 2004: 161–166) that provides an analytical framework of testimony's pragmatic and performative aspects and of the highest levels of discursive processing to which its content is subjected after a perceptual event. It has a fundamental function, fixed at a first level, as a frontier (*frontière nette*) between *réalité*

and *fiction* via the *factuelité attestée*. The perceptive original node differs from simple imagination (referring to something absent, but not attested *auparavant* from perception. This is a distinction that, as we already saw, emerges from ancient times with notions of *eikòn* and *tupos*). Phenomenology of memory shows all its ambivalence. What is attested inseparably blends the past's reality and the narrator's presence in the event's places, highlighting the fiduciary dimension and therefore remaining fundamentally intersubjective as to testimony (Ricoeur 2004: 163–164).

Certainly, emphasis on testimony's pragmatic aspects (*confiance* and *subçon*), which show theoretical advantages of historical knowledge's foundation as far as possible, independent of aporia of memory's first level, conditioned by the 'image' and 'imprint' metaphors tends to overshadow original expression's role. However, we can ask ourselves whether the graft in testimony's intersubjective and linguistic space really dissolves riddles of trace and image and completely exorcises the phantom of realism. Ricoeur himself indicates the problem in '*La marque du passé*' and in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. As previously stated, testimony depends in the last instance and also in its registered, archived form on memory. Along this line, however, the original impression returns to the limelight as an irreducible component of memory's phenomenological description and presents itself as an original datum of the experience of the past, a sort of *natural* evidence that any social actor and historical agent has in its ordinary practices. This line of discourse, certainly secondary, survives and acts as a counterpoint to *Memory, History, Forgetting*'s main track. Some very clear texts favour this reading. We can concentrate the question around three reasons: 1) common passivity in memory, image, trace and oral testimony at the origin of each 'inscription'; 2) psychic trace's receptive character as a primary impression's persistence, as reception of shock, of affection by an event that

has struck us; and 3) ante-predicative belief, which is *natural* in the past's reality and around the fact that something actually happened, is the basis of recognition of the past's images in oral testimony.

Memory remains the primary source of assurance that something happened (*before* we were able to speak of it). Historiography in itself, with its methodical elaboration, does not modify the certainty that, no matter what the past is, it is the memory's ultimate referent, and our reconstructive practices objective correlate. In '*La marque du passé*', the point had been addressed, developing history and memory's referential dimension through representation, *lieutenance*, as already introduced in *Temps et récit*. From this perspective, motif is always connected to memory's perceptive root; a moment of passivity, a receptive aspect *pathique* connect the icon and the trace. One and the other refer to something's occurrence, a shock, an impression's inscription, a passage that left its mark. At its root, testimony hides an enigma of the same type: before saying, witnesses have seen, heard, felt or believed they saw, heard, felt; what matters is that they are afflicted, struck, wounded, by the attested *événement*. We are on the same ground as the feeling of temporal distance inherent in memory that comes to mind. Testimony conveys by saying '*c'est quelque chose de cet être-affecté par ... the empreinte*'; from a previous event, testimony conserves energy (*énergie*) and even violence (*violence*), which passes from a first-level witness to a listener, a second-degree witness.

We re-discovered this motive at different moments according to different hints in Ricoeur's later texts, starting from articulation of trace in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Within '*L'oubli*' of the Part III '*La condition historique*', beyond its interesting correlation between forms of oblivion and of memory, there is trace's triple distinction, relevant for investigation into memory and history's relationship (Ricoeur 2004: 415). First, Ricoeur speaks of *trace mnésique*, sustaining that

what we know about the human brain is complex. The cerebral, cortical trace, a field of neuroscience, is *external* (Ricoeur 2004: 416), known only from the outside, scientifically, without correspondence with what is felt and what humans actually 'live'. In this sense, we say, 'to see *with* the eyes' and 'to take *with* the hands', but we do not say, 'to think *with* the brain'. From his standpoint, Ricoeur focuses on what, in the controversial conscience in philosophy of mind, is discussed as *explanatory gap*. The written trace, which became a documentary trace in the historiographical operation (source of its first 'distance' from memory; see Ricoeur 2000: 737), is a material trace (e.g. cortical), so it can be altered and destroyed. The archive is also set up to respond to this threat of destruction (Ricoeur 2004: 416). The psychic trace defined as impression, rather than as imprint, in the sense of affection, left in us by an event, '*marquant*' or '*frappant*' (*Ibid.*) is presented by Ricoeur as an inner trace. Above all in this paper, we are interested in characterisation of the psychic trace; it corresponds to the recognition experience, typical of memory as *anamnesis*. Notably, Ricoeur claims autonomy and irreducibility for this analytic level, raising the problem of the relationship between traces of skill and psychic traces. He tries to safeguard the epistemological gap between the two levels, the neuronal and the psychic viewpoint, protecting it from any form of ontological, spiritualist or materialist reductionism. Formation of psychic traces is not a process explainable in merely neuroscientific terms because trace has an unavoidable semiotic component.

We have now to focus on an aspect that, is somehow surprising compared to the main line of Ricoeur's approach, based on the idea that we cannot understand memory without starting from the antagonist form of oblivion. In the psychic trace, we have to do with an *oblitération de réserve*, instead of an *effacement*, and this requires reference to notions like duration, persistence (*rémanence*), and reliving

(Ricoeur 2004: 417), elaborated from the phenomenological tradition and from Bergson. By analysing Ricoeur's lexicon, we easily find a realist substrate. Images of the past can be recognised. We discover, for example, that many rememberings of childhood were not destroyed, but only made inaccessible (see Ricoeur 2004: 416–417). In the moment of recognition, the current image is considered faithful to *affection première, au choc de l'événement*. Other impressions, convergent in this hint, are presented in the section '*L'oubli et la persistance des traces*'. The following represents its short list: *persistance des impressions premières en tant que passivités: un événement nous a frappés, touchés, affectés et la marque affective demeure en notre esprit* (Ricoeur 2004: 418–419). The point concerning recognition and memory's relationship is quite intricate, but synthesising contradictory aspects is possible, as follows: recognition is defined as superposition of current mental images and psychic trace lived from the primary impression that constitutes the original datum of remembering's whole process, and then of telling stories and explaining events with cognitive intentionality (see Ricoeur 2004: 418, 430), which cannot be considered without referring to a shock's specific causal antecedent, a perceptive nature that leaves its impression (internal trace). In the first pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur remembers how Aristotle shifted the metaphor of the seal on the graphic plane, of the portrait and highlighted the presupposition of an agent who imprinted the trace, a sign of passage. Behind a shape in wax is the act of imprinting a seal. We have an implicit reference to the sign-imprint's external cause. To be valid as a footprint, a thing must include a dimension of otherness concerning its origin (Ricoeur 2004: 12).

In '*Entre la mémoire et l'histoire*', published digitally in 2002, provides a brief but penetrating presentation of *Memory, History, Forgetting*'s themes. Three aspects of memory are identified, some-

how, as enigmatic: a) the presence (of the mind's image or imprint); b) the absence (of the past thing to which the image refers); c) the anteriority of an event (feeling of temporal distance, expressed by verbal time or adverbs: remembering something that existed *auparavant*).

Memory depends on original perception, on an event's impact that refers to past actions of agents similar to us. History is bound to the perceptive nucleus of memory (of which it inherits aporias). This is particularly forceful for traumatic events, that is, the living experience of a wound sedimented in the *faire histoire*, of events at the limit of the representable, of the *stroke* with which the actual story affects the collective and private memory; something that asks to be told, told and not forgotten (no matter if it is terrible or admirable, as in archaic history). Great events such as the Holocaust and the twentieth century's great crimes, despite being at the limits of representation, like all events that have left their traumatic imprint on hearts and minds, ask to be told, narrated and understood (see Ricoeur 2004: 457, final section '*Le pardon difficile*'). The source of the request for truth is pragmatic and vital: it is not in representation, but rather *dans l'expérience vive du 'faire histoire' tel qu'elle est diversement affrontée par les protagonistes* (see Ricoeur 2004: 259).

4. Memory and the reality of the past

We can now draw some conclusions about the potentiality of the memory-history relationship in relation to Ricoeur's hermeneutical itinerary and, more generally, with respect to these realist motives' fecundity. Belief in the past's reality is, at least partly, a correlate of memory's practice; the certainty that something has actually happened is an implicit element of our ordinary way of seeing things. In the sense explained above, we could say that these are background aspects of everyday linguistic and non-linguistic practices. Ricoeur

talks about *croyance antéprédicative, et même prénarrative* on which fundamental matrices of historical knowledge rest: recognition of images of the past and oral testimony (Ricoeur 2004 : 499).

Memory's fidelity or history's epistemic truth does not pertain to a context that has only to do with the *communicative* relationship between plurality of cognitive agents that reciprocally exchange, control and share their respective experiences. Construction of individual and collective memory depends both on dialogue between witnesses and on originary strength of impression, hit and passivity that primarily characterise memory's experience. In parallel, the referential aspect of the discourse of the past is not at risk from the irrecuperable absence of the memory's ultimate reference.

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