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The Holocaust and the Contemporary World

STUDIES

THEORY OF HISTORY VIS-À-VIS TWO WORLD WARS AND THE HOLOCAUST

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The present paper was directly inspired by the publication of the Polish translation of Raul Hilberg's monumental work *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) in 2014. The translation *Zagłada Żydów europejskich* is, as the publisher, Piotr Stefaniuk, claims, "the most complete authorial edition" because it was enriched with "additions and corrections made [by Hilberg] since the recent edition of the book in English in 2003" (Stefaniuk 2014: IV). This work cannot possibly be ignored not only by a historian but also by a philosopher engrossed in theoretical grappling with problems posed before the humanities and social sciences by the phenomena of totalitarianism and genocide in its paradigmatic form of the mass murder of the Jews. We owe it to Hilberg that a part of the history of reception of the work became Arendt's well-known reportage *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, it is especially the misunderstandings around its interpretation, documented by Hilberg, of the role of Judenraete (Jewish Councils) in the German Nazi machinery of the Holocaust that influenced the critical reading of his own views. (On the essence of his views on the subject and about what differs him

from Arendt Raul Hilberg writes in his book: Hilberg 1996). Yet another objection should be noted here, namely that his source materials were confined to German documents – altogether, this resulted in both the books being closely scrutinized in Israel for many decades: *Eichmann...* was first published in Hebrew in 2000, and *The Destruction...* in 2012 (see. e.g. Zertal 2005). In the first edition of *Eichmann...*, the author masked the borrowings from Hilberg anyway, in the *Postscript* to the second edition she admitted her debt she owed him (Arendt 2006: 282). Without his work, such important interpretations of the Holocaust as for example the one proposed by Zygmunt Bauman would not have surfaced.

Hilberg's work, read again today, provides an unusual opportunity to ask a more in-depth question about what is new at all that the two World Wars and the Holocaust contribute to the methodology of history or, rather, to the self-awareness of history as a scientific discipline? What do they change in the perception of significance and function of historiography in culture? The objective of this article is a tentative reconstruction of a possible answer to these questions, a reconstruction based on the ground of some theoretical approaches that demonstrate my interests and competencies. It is by no means a systematic or comprehensive subject study.

These questions require some explanations and specifications. They do not concern interpretation of the relevant events – *I do not therefore ask about the uniqueness of the Holocaust* and I do not take part in the discussion held by its professional theorists such as, for example, Dominick LaCapra or Berel Lang. Secondly, I assume that these are problems to be handled by a philosopher exploring the theory of science: in part two I am therefore interested in the positions of the authors who are most influential for the contemporary theory of social and humanistic research: Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur. The point is why their opinions about the “turnaround” in the theory of history after The Second World War are not confirmed in the recent, general serious studies I know in this field: the fact that there is no agreement among the experts is an additional encouragement for me to grapple with the subject. Apart from those general studies in theory of history by, for example, Krzysztof Zamorski and Donald R. Kelley, there are others, but extremely monothematic, usually written – again – by professional Holocaust historians, focused on the relation between the Holocaust and methodology of history (see e. g. Stone 2012). It is also Hilberg as an author of some unique and at the same time universally applicable meta-historical reflections who will help me in this endeavor as late as the last part of the present text. And thirdly, it is impossible to settle the issues in question without first recapitulating the socio-cultural context in which history as science found itself both after The First World War and The Second World War. Accordingly, this article is organized into two main chronological parts.

Science is thus assumed here as contextually understood, according to which it is a specific cultural practice – in today’s parlance also: discourse – determined by the activities of persons who pursue and teach it, forming “scientific – or, in other words, interpretive and discursive – communities” within particular research traditions and research institutions together with the functions and social, political and moral interests that they implement. The approach also assumes a relationship between theory of (historical) knowledge and the theory (and practice) of power: the state and authority. History, as a modern science arisen in the nineteenth century, interferes in the disciplinarily managed modern socio-political reality, it participates in the work of legitimizing and constructing it. The contextualization of history is illustrated by its condition after The First World War – the trauma of it became the cause of the cultural “turn” to memory...

The First World War and the Turn to Memory

The literary expression of the “turn” to memory, which began the cultural career of the term, indisputably became Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, a voluminous work published in 1913-1927. Of greater importance for social theory, including the theory of history is the term *collective memory*, coined at the same time, which was systematically studied by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) in his work *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925). The concept of memory as a social construct challenges its previous meaning connected with the Cartesian and Bergsonian concept of the mind, which represents memory as a bridge that leads to the sanctuary accessible only to us (Ankersmit 2001: 159). It rejects the perspective of modern rationalist philosophy based on the concept of the subject experiencing himself as the transparent “I”, existing in the successive states of the mind and living in the world that is just as comprehensible and ontically stable as the Self is. And this world can be originally accessible only to an individual, therefore individual memory takes logical precedence over collective memory. This concept was the binding one earlier, prior to the radical change that took place following the “Great War”. The change also includes the redefinition of memory which ceases to be perceived as mental powers entirely controlling private reality and it begins to be understood as a disposition co-shaped by social context.

This process is recorded by historical sociology, according to which memory begins its career with the process of democratization or privatization of history: traditionally, the word “history” was reserved for studying the collective past while “memory” applied to how we remember our individual personal past. The semantic correction of these concepts, both in their

public/popular and specialist uses, would be made because of The First World War and its groundbreaking significance for social perception – or: human experience – of the world in the dimension of the present and the past. The concept of memory loses its former individual connotations, the ability to recall past events is discovered as a reliable mechanism of social control applied by modern institutions of power, which also have science at their disposal. The interment of the dead and the duty to commemorate them became the responsibility of state commissions and public organizations specially established for the purpose already during or right after the war. For example, in 1919 in Berlin Der Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (People's Association for Care for German War Graves or German War Graves Commission) was set up – similar associations being established at the time in other parts of the country: in Bayern, Westphalia, or Lower Saxony. The aim of the Association was to create “people's community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) through honoring the fallen soldiers. From 1922 it organized annual celebrations of the National Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*) (the National Socialists changed the name of the holiday to “Day of Commemoration of Heroes [*Heldengedenktag*]) with the intention of unifying the Germans at the graves of the fallen over party boundaries, and religious or social divisions. Two Sundays before the first day of Advent the Germans still pay tribute to the victims of both World Wars and Nazi terror and persecutions.

Similarly, since 1919 the British and the Commonwealth citizens have solemnized the celebrations of Remembrance Day of 11 November – in 1918 the Germans signed the act of surrender, which meant a ceasefire, hence comes another name of this national holiday: Armistice Day, or Poppy Day: red poppies as the symbol of the blood shed in the battlefields of Flanders. After World War Two, the Remembrance Day was devoted to the victims of both Wars, and today also to the victims of subsequent armed conflicts in which the Commonwealth countries were involved. The memory of The First World War victims is still commemorated by the French, for whom it was a “terrible shock”:

It remained, Jan Baszkiewicz explains, in their collective memory, which defined their attitudes and reactions throughout the period of 1918-1939. It determined the pacifism of the French society and impacted the course of war events between 1939 and 1940. In all cities, towns and villages in France there were monuments with long lists of names of those fallen in the war (Baszkiewicz 2004: 530).

What determined the change in the approach to memory, a change significant in historical and civilization terms, was the paradox of the situation of that time. We should bear in mind that according to the latest estimates over 10 million soldiers were killed during The First World War,

in France alone 1.4 million people were killed and over 4 million were wounded. The sociologists write: “Paradoxically, just as the effect of war was felt more brutally than ever among civilian populations, the tasks of consolation were made more public than ever before.” As a result, they conclude that “the memory of the war was refashioned into a sacred experience which provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate.” (Olick, Robbins 1998: 119).

History as a science, especially in the dimension of social practice – traditions and research institutions, publications, scholarly debates at mass media forums – faces the task of participation in those processes of commemorating, and consequently, of shaping the collective identity: the losers and winners in the war, the nation states emerging in its aftermath, they all demand novels to honor the fallen and to seek justification for the present in their sacrifice. The story or “narration” as Charles Taylor explains, “is one way of gathering time. It shapes the flow of time, ‘de-homogenizes’ it, and marks out kairotic moments like the Times of revolution, liberation, 1789, 1989,” (Taylor 2007: 714) but also the war which combines *kairos* (a happy moment of gaining freedom) with *trauma* (shock and injury).

De-homogenization of the flow of time caused by The First World War is particularly manifested in its work of destroying chronology: it shortens the twentieth century by two decades because it is with that war that the nineteenth century actually ends. The armed conflict is in a sense a culmination of all major civilization processes that arose in the world in the century preceding it (conflict). The “Great War,” so called in the 1920s and 1930s, is the direct product of industrial revolution, it introduces advanced lethal technologies – combat gases, tanks, and military aircraft – but it is also a product of modern mass society equally molded by science and technology and the mass media, ideas and ideologies. All these development trends of the nineteenth century can be roughly described by means of two opposing logics/dynamics: technological imagination *versus* historical imagination; instrumental reason – oriented towards changes, connected with rationalization processes in the Weberian sense – *versus* hermeneutic reason oriented towards tradition and duration (Heller 1999). In the climate of dominance of natural sciences extending into social thought, as a result of which such disciplines as modern sociology and economics emerge, there also reactively develops humanist metareflection resulting in the rise of inter alia modern history; in pursuit of discovering universal laws of nature, justification is sought for exploration of the human world; it is in it that attempts are also made to discover universal laws governing historical processes and providing a development impulse to a particular, historical reality. In the theory of historiography, these opposing logics of research procedure come to the fore as idiographism and nomotheticism: the chronicler of the

contemporary dispute over the limits of scientific cognition was Leopold Ranke, who wrote inter alia the following in his *History of the Popes: their Church and State* already in the 1830s:

In the history of a nation or power, there is no problem more difficult than that of appreciating correctly the connection of its particular relations with those of the world in general.

It is true that the individual life of a nation is determined by causes peculiar to itself, inherent in its nature, and displaying a characteristic consistency through all ages. But each community is subjected to the action of general influences, by which its progress is powerfully affected.

In this conflict of forces it is that the character presented by modern Europe may be said to have its basis. Nations and States are separated eternally on certain points of their existence, but at the same time are knit together in indissoluble community. There is no national history of which universal history does not form an important portion (Ranke 1901: 3).

If The First World War is the climax of the conflicts rocking nineteenth-century Europe, if it became a landmark, a turning point in the course of history of not only Europe but also the world, then, like Ranke does, one should ask what it changed in writing of history, what the new marriage of *separate existence* and *general regularities* would consist in? What did the memory of the war, transformed into “sanctified experience”, into new rites of secular religion, change in the scientific and social perception of history? These are the questions in the understanding sociology or philosophy of culture: the two perspectives, however, elucidate the semantic context for the theory of historiography. One of the best-known answers to these questions – in today’s humanities – is given by Walter Benjamin a century after Ranke. It reads:

Experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper demonstrates that it has reached a new low, that our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible. With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent--not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? (Benjamin 2006: 362).

I repeat: to the German philosopher and culture critic the “Great War” “began the process” of challenging the significance of human experience. The process is associated with radical changes in the shape of the external and moral world that “had never been thought possible before”: after war devastations “nothing remained unchanged”, we have a different world than the one people formerly knew, about which they spoke with confidence, in the

conviction that things were like they said they were. A model of such communication is realism in the nineteenth-century literature: it presents the world in direct, precise, faithful, “real” terms (one could put it this way), because it speaks of *things themselves* – in relation to all forms of human activity: military, economic, political, moral operations. Benjamin says that the war began to cut the umbilical cord linking us with reality: we break away from the real, we cease to experience it while we are more and more dependent on its cultural representations, on the “floods of books” filled with linguistic clichés and popular beliefs. We become more and more reflective, dependent on sign systems, self-contained, unable to talk about experiences – “grown silent”. The accuracy of this diagnosis of the society affected by war cataclysm was in a sense confirmed already during the war (in 1917) by the sociologist Max Weber, when he described the phenomenon that he called “chase after ‘experiences’” (adding, incidentally: “the really fashionable value in Germany nowadays”), the chase, he believes, “can to a very large degree be the result of a diminished ability to live up to the inner demands of ‘everyday existence’” and “owing both to the increasing rationalization and intellectualization of all spheres of life and to the increasing subjective importance attached to the individual to all his manifestations of life (which often seem extremely trivial to others)” (Weber 2012: 321). Weber, admittedly, does not directly associate these phenomena with war but he speaks about the society which is plunged into a war: then, naturally, an individual life and individual histories *fall in value*.

Critical social theory recognizes a paradox: the poorer we are in communicable experience, the more we desire it in the rationalized organization of life, which gives us uncertainty instead of certainty, and instead of foundations – the fragility and transience of existence. Inhabitants of scientific civilization, who perceive the world according to abstract models, have problems with everyday existence, chronically accidental, and that is why it is unable to live up to the demands of theory. They lose their maturity, ability to find their way in the human affairs; consequently, they act with less and less recourse to their practical reason, otherwise called conscience, and confine themselves to chasing monological experiences. With their maturity, they also lose the ability to narrate. This is how Benjamin sees it.

But that end of the narrative turned out to be its new beginning – the beginning of work on memory. In the interwar decades, memory becomes the object of historical studies, on equal terms with sources such as documents, archives, or historical monuments. Furthermore, collective/social memory also co-determines the way of understanding this research – it is the state that commissions research on what it and its citizens remember and have to remember to continue to exist after the great trauma. Much later, at the end of the twentieth century, the humanities, which chose inter alia Walter Benjamin as their cult hero, modern history as

a scientific discipline was treated as an instrument of violence and of excluding the marginal and the local from historical consciousness. Overcoming of the modernist paradigm resulted in the renaissance of small narrations. In this process memory began to correspond to what was marginalized in the past by the dominant community which needed an official history, learned and publicly celebrated as an ideology, a tool to legitimize power, rule, and to mold public discourse (Ankersmit 2001: 159). But that is another story.

World War Two and the Question about Theory of History

There is no general agreement about the groundbreaking significance of the kairotic-traumatic narration about The Second World War for the theory of history. Krzysztof Zamorski who has recently surveyed the positions on history as a science, distinguished three paradigms of understanding it: historicism, history as a social science (the Annales school concept), and postmodernism. In this last stage of development of the theory of history, in terms of which the achievements of inter alia Hayden White are described, the Polish scholar does not point to any connotations of the theory with The Second World War or with the Holocaust (Zamorski 2014). A similar way of thinking is expressed by the eminent US historian of ideas, Donald R. Kelley, frequently cited by Zamorski. The author (Kelley) of the three-volume history of historiography writes the following:

The Second World War, like the *First* and no less traumatically, shattered *many* lives, and yet in methodological terms it had limited impact on the theory and practice of history, at least among the victors. (...) As with the *first war there were many careers* which, *however disrupted, displayed continuity* from the 1930s (...) to the 1950s, with historical scholarship in general remaining in *many* of the old institutional and methodological channels (Kelley 2006: 138).

Kelley uses statements with large quantifiers, he writes in a handbook-like style thereby tending to oversimplify, which may actually be unavoidable in the grand project he had undertaken. It is puzzling that he expresses practically no opinion about the history of the Holocaust in the volume cited, although he writes about scholars who are the classics of the genre, i.e. above-mentioned Hayden White, but also Dominick LaCapra or Frank Ankersmit (he omits to mention the great Holocaust historians: Raul Hilberg and Saul Friedländer). It is strange because it is inter alia these authors who believe that the event, symbolically called Auschwitz,

was of crucial significance for understanding *historical research in general*. I would add Paul Ricoeur here and will name only some examples of the terms for Auschwitz which they apply: it is to be then an “exemplary situation”, “where not only the limits of representation in its narrative and rhetorical forms, but the whole enterprise of writing history, are open to discovery” (Ricoeur 2006: 254). The exemplar or “instantiation, illustration, sign, or singular epiphany” – as LaCapra defines Auschwitz – of the transhistorical, theoretical concept or concern such as sublimity, the differend, or the split, abject subject” (LaCapra 2004: 111), or describe Auschwitz in different terms as: “the paradigm” of limit situations (White 2004: 113), or – ultimately – “the limit case of historiographical theory” (Dintenfass 2000: 19).

One can therefore be confused when, in view of Kelley’s foregoing enunciation, these kinds of declarations about historical writing will be referred to. They are not just hollow declarations because there is thorough research behind them, for example like that contained in one of the major studies of historiographical problems in world literature: in Paul Ricoeur’s monumental work entitled *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), where he is asking “how the problems posed by the writing of the event ‘at the limits’ called Auschwitz are exemplary for a general reflection on historiography” (Ricoeur 2006: 349). And he answers (using detailed arguments earlier): “They are so insofar as they themselves are, as such, problems ‘at limit’” (Ricoeur 2006: 260). The confusion described here is further complicated by the opinion of yet another giant of the contemporary humanities, German philosopher, according to whom after 1945 occurred the “historically enforced transition to a higher reflective level” in the theory of historiography, and it “has not simply affected the ideological premises of German historiography; it has also intensified the methodological awareness of the dependence of every historiography on its (historical) context” (Habermas 1988: 39).

It is not only historical reality that “imposes” the manner of comprehending it, including a scientific way, but also the other way round: the way of thinking adopted in a scholarly discipline also impacts the socio-political “context”, which it co-creates – cooperates with it. This relationship, as we will see, is not a causal link, it is far more complex. Scientific reason does not control practice – it is involved in the world flood of events.

Ricoeur’s and Habermas’s positions require writing out and explaining. Before I do this, however, I will, for the formality of argument, include several remarks on the contextual determinants of the science of history after The Second World War.

Political Context

The impact of theory on praxis is a certain regularity identified by modern historiography aware of its “scientificity” which consists in critical and revealing investigation free from authorities and mistrustful of overt documents and “self-evident” data. From its beginning, science of this kind had to be in conflict with the existing, traditional socio-political order. Conflict was the inevitable result of critical, inquiring thought penetrating – in the hope of finding the historical truth – all classified sources, whether private or state files, whose “secrecy directly stemmed from the desire of the ruling social groups to shield their allegedly due privileges from criticism” (Pomian 1992: 73). This is what Krzysztof Pomian writes about the struggle of modern historical science with feudal institutions, a struggle which, he believes, became part of “the general process of breakdown of the traditional order” (Pomian 1992: 73).

This must have been a similar situation with the humanities in the twentieth century, facing socio-political transformations that inevitably took place whether after The First World War, which has been discussed above, or, more intensely, after The Second World War. After 1945, social sciences become part of the work of reflection on the unprecedented scale of The Second World War barbarity and feel obliged to participate in defining Human Rights in order to erect a barrier to any totalitarian power. These sciences overlap therefore with new socio-political practices providing them with the conceptual framework. This also happens in the case of the process of building the European community, which, as German sociologists vividly write today, “builds upon the devastations of The Second World War, the Holocaust and Stalinist totalitarianism” (Beck, Grande 2007: 34). These are the events that mark, they believe, a watershed in Europe’s collective identity. The same authors go on to say:

It is no accident that the institutionalized European cosmopolitanism which fosters respect for difference can be traced back to the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-1946. The latter went beyond national sovereignty for the first time and established new ways of comprehending the historical monstrosity of the murder of the Jews in legal categories, namely, in terms of “crimes against humanity” (Beck, Grande 2007: 34).

The reasoning which consists in combining the memory of the war victims with the European perspective also defines the program line of institutions responsible for making so-called historical policy in contemporary Germany. But this is a sideline. What is more important for us who try to show the original changes made by the war in the way or ways of thinking

about history as a scientific discipline is to remind us that the concept of “the crime of genocide” was to be a legal instrument in the international arena, one that serves to prevent next “final solutions.” It appeared in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (New York, 9 December 1948), aimed against persons perpetrating “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (For the text of the Convention see: <https://treaties.un.org/doc...> See also: Hilberg 2014: 1502-1503). The Convention, which did not, of course, protect the world in the second half of the twentieth century from crimes of this kind, is still in force, and it is impossible to estimate how many potential criminals were discouraged from their reprehensible plans by the prospect of inevitable punishment. Its definition of genocide is the basis for today’s sentences passed by the International Criminal Court in The Hague (established in 1998). Anyway, it is a fact (I repeat after historian Jan Baszkiewicz) that it is the reflections consequent upon The Second World War that result in “the overwhelming career of the philosophy of Human rights, which is expected to protect justified rights of individuals and minority groups from the State even if it is strengthened by the support of the majority” (Baszkiewicz 2009: 161). Theoretical and political studies in this philosophy are made in feedback. Academic historiography also takes part in this interaction. The above-cited sociologists confirm the condition of its (history’s) new self-knowledge as follows:

Academic historiography can no longer adhere unquestioningly to the distinction between the national and international. This way of operating has become untenable in Europe with the end of the old polarity of the East – West conflict. With this, something qualitatively new entered European historical space. In the newly unfolding European space of memory, which breaks with insularity of methodological nationalism, the national horror of the destruction of the Jews and the national wars and expulsions can no longer be studied in national terms but call for a systematic change in perspective, specifically, a Europeanization of perspectives (Beck, Grande 2007: 132).

Creating the collective memory of The Second World War events is a task and a challenge facing the theory and practice of historical research just as it faces socio-political theory and practice. The awareness of these interrelationships must influence academic historiography – both in the aspect of its methodological characteristics (research problems, epistemological and anthropological assumptions), and the formal ones as a cultural practice (institutions, systems of funding research, etc.) – which begins to perceive itself in relation to the processes of integration of national societies rather than in relation to building their separate differences, negative identities, based on the pattern: “we” are not “them”. An element of this discipline identity is becoming a belief that the desirable integration of societies cannot be a normative one, that

cannot be effected according to the abstract, *a priori* adopted theoretical models: it would then follow the pattern of totalitarian thinking, genetically linked to technological civilization. Science which confines rationality only to discursive thinking and removes the data provided by practical reason (so-called power of judgment) from the cognitive sphere (discredits them as “subjective”) becomes dogmatic and comes to serve political power reduced to ruling. Rather than ‘obey’ practice, it controls it, cannot become involved, feel the significance of some matters, be sensitive to suffering, etc. In contrast, critical theory can do all these.

The Ethical Turn

Critical reason rejects dogmatism in science and its accompanying repercussions – a vision of society confined within politics. This way of thinking came to the fore inter alia in the German public debate known as *Historikerstreit*. It is said that the Historians’ Debate, which went on between 1986 and 1987, did not contribute to enriching the knowledge of the past, to discovering any new, previously unknown facts or ways of interpreting them. But it did contribute to what was called “the ethical or normative turn” in historiographical theory, a turn whose visible sign was the figure of *historian-public intellectual*, who combines, as the American historical theorist, Dominick LaCapra puts it, the *subject-positions* of scholar and critical intellectual/theorist (LaCapra 1996: 217).

The debate was actually begun by Jürgen Habermas in 1986 in his polemic in the leftist “Die Zeit” against the views of neoconservative historians: Ernst Nolte, Michael Stürmer (at that time the two published their texts in the rightist “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”) and Andreas Hillgruber. The discussion was accompanied by other events, important for the German public sphere of the time, and being part of the political strategy for the normalization of collective memory capable of dealing with the Nazi legacy – the strategy adopted by the Christian Democratic government headed by Helmut Kohl, who came to power in 1982 under the banner of “spiritual-moral change” (Mazur 2013: 223-229). This was about establishing the museums of history of Germany: in Bonn, it was the *Haus der Geschichte*, in Berlin – the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*. The atmosphere was thus conducive to discussion on the subject fundamental for Germany’s new identity, and it can today resemble our Polish public debate and its accompanying events that made up the so-called “historical policy” under president Lech Kaczyński, with the participation of so-called “musealists” (a circle associated with the 1944 Warsaw Rising Museum and the then Mayor of Warsaw, i.e. the late president Lech Kaczyński). Right-wing historians and

journalists are trying to revise the recent history, showing German Nazi crimes in a broader context: “Was the Gulag Archipelago not primary to Auschwitz? Was the Bolshevik murder of an entire class not the logical and factual prius of the ‘racial murder’ of National Socialism?... Did Auschwitz in its root causes not originate in a past that would not pass?” (Nolte 1993: 18-23). Questions of this kind are an introduction to comparative history, which strips the studied events of their uniqueness, and thereby the participants in those events – of their perpetrator status. Nolte’s reasoning also renders the general idea that spurred a left-wing Frankfurt School philosopher and intellectual to express his opinion. I am not interested in the course of the Historians’ Debate, well-known and widely described, or in the details of presented arguments, I will only confine myself to Habermas’s position because it has two references: on the one hand, the local, so to say, reference to the condition of history as a discipline in post-The Second World War Germany (it is the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge); on the other hand, however, its significance has a far broader range – one of the greatest philosophers in the second-half of the twentieth century, who specializes in studies on the theoretical foundations of social sciences, has something significant to say on the theory of history as a science in general, regardless of its national origin.

Until 1945, Habermas believes, the self-understanding of German historiography was dominated by thinking characteristic of historicism, emphasizing its subservient functions towards nation and the state: these consisted in establishing the sense around which there would form a national consensus, historical awareness, the vision of tradition which was in fact a “substitute for religion” (Habermas 1988: 38). The Second World War, Habermas claims, destroyed this identity of history as a science, imposed on it the necessity of different self-knowledge – a self-knowledge that also demands its interference in the public sphere, ultimately in political decision-making; the difference being, however, that it would no longer be interference for only one vision of history and one vision of the present; on the contrary, the new methodological awareness allows “plurality of views on history”, that is why it serves to remove the existing, conventional identities, and restrictions on human freedom and happiness with them. According to Habermas, the historians who came to the fore after 1945 should be aware of that and thereby pursue their discipline as a *critical social science*, which means non-dogmatic, rejecting all closed interpretations of history. The new methodological awareness of history admits of pluralism of such interpretations, reflecting the “structures of open societies” (Habermas 1988: 38). And such a society, in Habermas’s view, is the Federal Republic of Germany. Habermas therefore expects history (as a science) to be involved in this practice for the sake of emancipation – the freeing of individuals and social groups from the condition of any

enslavement, and dissolution of all substantial forms of domination and their accompanying injustice. That is why the science in question will have to use such categories of “need”, “suffering” or “unnecessary suffering” (Habermas 1974: 280) because it is them that should protect it from the destructive intention of controlling social practice, from imposing on it the alien criteria of rationality, good, true, right behaviors. Social science thus understood and free from these intentions is a product of *non-dualistic cognitive theory*, which abolishes the theory/praxis distinction, and is inspired here both by Marxist dialectics and the so-called linguistic turn in social philosophy, the turn being co-authored by Habermas himself. If the purpose of science should be “good theory” (Hudzik 2014), then it may only mean the creation of “true” consensus – this solution is suggested by social theory referring to linguistic philosophy – or a “satisfactory” argument towards specific social interests (Habermas 1974: 279-280), and this is already a case of Marxist legacy. “That process of scientifically enlightened communication to be institutionalized in the political public sphere – as the philosopher writes – would set into motion a sociotechnical dissolution of all substantial forms of domination – and would maintain this dissolution itself in the permanent reflection of the citizens, for the sake of their emancipation” (Habermas 1974: 278). Critical scientific reason, also in the historiographical area, thus loses its innocence, known as *objectivity*, it takes root, is institutionalized, in the *political public sphere*, and becomes its integral part rather than an external, non-binding opinion of an observer/analyst of the political scene. Criticism is leveled both at the vision of conventional society consolidating the existing relationships between power and social domination, and at the modern State managed by technocrats. It creates open, post-conventional society, it participates in eliminating all forms of ruling, domination, and social injustice through molding reflective citizens capable of liberal creation of political will. Within its cognitive sphere, the critical reason has therefore interests, acts of involvement, sensitivity to suffering, the will to emancipate, etc.

This is distinctly a political-science vision of history as a science – a practical theory involved in creating social consciousness of the so-called constitutional patriotism – according to Habermas, both science and patriotism “has unfortunately only been able to develop in the German Kulturturn since – and because of – Auschwitz” (Habermas 1988: 39). Science and politics are two discourses or theories, languages and cultural practices in one, which, preserving their autonomies, meet in the *public sphere*, the space of critical discussion, exchange of views and knowledge, outside of the state control. One could not therefore radically separate the spheres of occupational activities from public ones in particular, and this is a conclusion by Dominick LaCapra – one could not “define history in purely professional, objective, third-person terms under the aegis of a strictly differentiated or even autonomized paradigm of research” (LaCapra

1998: 67). It follows from Habermas's argument "that only a narrowly positivistic self-definition could wall professional historiography off from such problems as the public role of memory and mourning" (LaCapra 1998: 67). In concluding these remarks, let me note that LaCapra is one of postmodern rebels in the field of history, critical of the rigors of academic research, which certainly differentiates him from most of his German colleagues, especially the participants in the debate in question, not to mention Habermas himself. Donald R. Kelley gives him the following reference saying that from the standpoint of historian's craft, LaCapra's formulations leave a little to be desired, and they seem to some extent to encourage us to abandon historical search and entrust our fate to literary (and cultural) criticism LaCapra largely practices himself (Kelley 2006: 249).

The Historians' Debate points out the dubious issue of thinking in terms of binary oppositions – theory/praxis – and consequently, the hybrid character of social roles of "the intellectual/public historian", as well as the hybrid, i.e. theoretical-pragmatic character of science itself, impacting the public sphere, and, mutually, receiving stimuli from there in the form of systems of institutional, ideological or worldview expectations/requirements. Habermas attributes the *intensified methodological awareness* of historiography's dependence on the context to reflection on Auschwitz, to recall his words from the above-cited article in "Die Zeit". "Intensified awareness" does not describe a qualitative change in the theory of historiography – it refers to a quantitative change measurable on the scale of the sharpness of methodological awareness, in which a conviction is advanced that the past as the object of historical research is something mobile, non-objective, unstable, and finally, which is possible, something that still continues to be. One of the best-known statements concerning the understanding the Holocaust past, which still continues, is that by the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman in the late 1980s, i. e. about fifty years after the event. The sources of failure of scientific research on the Holocaust lie, in his view, in the nature of the studies seeking to be objective, which requires neutralization of the attitude of a researcher-analyst (historian, sociologist) (Bauman: 1989). However, even in this last variant of understanding the past extended over the present, the charges of presentism are not admitted, i.e. presentism associated with the use of the conceptual apparatus contemporary with the researcher, or with yielding to political interests or ethical convictions. It is believed that interpretations of texts or events from the past, if they should be essential for historical understanding – "understanding how this could have happened" – cannot be free from determinants of this kind. There are no *simple representations* of the real.

Auschwitz, History, and the Power of Judgment

Let's return to Paul Ricoeur. The fundamental problem with writing about the event which he and many other scholars generally term "Auschwitz" stems from the character of the event, that is from the fact that it is "at limit". Incidentally, the terms "limit situation" and "limit experience" were introduced by Karl Jaspers (Jaspers 1971). Ricoeur defines the "limit" of event or experience through its incommensurability with daily human experience or, in other words, by its inhumanity (Ricoeur 2006: 175). In his professional career the historian experiences firsthand, in a way, the limits of written communication which coincide with the limits of the language or of our/human form of "normal" treatment of the world. He therefore experiences the existence of some incommunicable "remainder", something that lies "on the other side" and cannot be included in the world of life. The naming and describing of this "remainder" would mean its elimination. And this is also the case with Auschwitz: writing about it encounters the limits of human language and understanding of the world. "The World of Auschwitz lies outside discourse just as it lies outside reason" – Ricoeur cites Georg Steiner's words (Ricoeur 2006: 256-257). How then should one represent that which demands/requires representing but cannot be named or comprehended? And how can one at all seek to achieve "the greatest clarity" in this undertaking? It is the clarity of thinking and argument that will be the criterion for academic research, if one should believe Karl Jaspers, the author of the concept of the *limit experience* crucial for the present discussion. He would define history as science in the wider sense, which, he claims, "includes any clear understanding obtained through rational and conceptual means". And he goes on: "Thinking so understood does not provide insights into matters hitherto unfamiliar, but clarifies what it is I really mean, want or believe. Science in this broader sense is identical with the area of lucid self-knowledge" (Jaspers 1959: 12). This is one of the possible, actually very accurate, definitions of the methodological specificity of the humanities which use understanding and interpretation.

But this means that the problem that the historian has with Auschwitz touches upon the essence of so defined scientificity of his discipline: clear thinking and judgments about the past, and the genuineness of their formulation, in short: the essence itself of critical thinking. The boundaries/barriers/aporias that are in the way of fulfilling these criteria for historical research define at least three problem areas indicated by Ricoeur. Firstly (I am citing one by one and trying to explain), it is "the impossibility of neutralizing the differences in position of witnesses in the interplay of scales" (Ricoeur 2006: 260) – because, as I understand it, they are not credible in the sense that they are permanently indeterminate, ambivalent, oscillating between detached

observers (and that is why always morally sharing the guilt in some way), active heroes opposing brutal violence, and passive victims, the lines between the perpetrator, witness and victim being blurred.

An illustration: it is impossible, within one article, to document such abstract claims by means of historical sources, this would require a far more extensive study. For example, to show what the foregoing “impossibility of neutralizing the differences” in the position of witnesses specifically consists in, I will quote an entirely randomly chosen excerpt from only one account based on the interview with an SS soldier:

But whilst he [Groening] might have agreed in a theoretical way with the collection of lies that constituted the Nazi propaganda against the Jews, it was quite another thing to be involved in their mass murder. And crucial to the way Groening adjusted to Auschwitz was his immediate decision to separate method from theory. When he saw SS ‘sadists’ brutally clearing the arrival ramp of lost children, the sick and the elderly, he went at once to complain to his superiors and asked for a transfer (which was denied). But he didn’t think of complaining about the fact that mass murder was taking place – instead he complained only about the way it was happening. He said to his boss that ‘if there was a necessity to exterminate the Jews, at least it should be done within a certain framework’. Groening accepted the decision of the Nazi leadership that the Jews were a threat and had to be ‘diminished’; I suspect he even agreed with the policy. So he concentrated his efforts on ensuring that, on the rare occasions he witnessed it, the process was completed in as ordered a way as possible (Rees 2008: 19-20).

The SS man was thus an observer, sometimes even involved, because he took the opportunity of expressing his half-opposition, let’s put it this way, but he was essentially not involved, as a desk official only organizing the order of work in the mass murder factory, while the victims were actual perpetrators...

Return to Ricoeur’s arguments. The second illustration of the “limit phenomenon” of Auschwitz, which he provides, is “the impossibility of summing up in one all-encompassing history the reconstructions backed up by heterogeneous affective investments” (Ricoeur 2006: 260) – it is impossible to build an overall narrative on this event because there are no mutually comparable sources of information from persons on the basis of whose accounts a *consensus* about its course could be reached: individual accounts on the subject are not only inconsistent but also mutually untranslatable. Read the interview with the SS man once again and think about the “protagonists” in this account: himself, his colleagues, Sonderkommando prisoners, and those cleared off the arrival ramp... The impossibility of coherent, all-encompassing narration means that the theory of historiography will adopt an anthropological assumption, according to which a human individual cannot be fully understood (Pomian 1992: 284). Finally, the third

aporia in historical research, according to Ricoeur, is “the unsurpassable dialectic between uniqueness and incomparability at the very heart of the idea of singularity” (Ricoeur 2006: 260-261) – the dialectic means here a contradiction without prospects for a possible synthesis: the uniqueness of Auschwitz cannot be complete because one would have to be silent about it, while every manner of speaking about it involves the use of concepts, thereby universalizing it. But this is a trivial observation, a conclusion resulting from the old dispute between comparative and idiographic history – the latter would have to be a dull description of events, detail by detail, moment by moment. What then should the case of Auschwitz contribute to this – third – observation? Nothing new, because it presents nothing but “limit”, a classical, so to say, situation of the trap into which the historian falls, between the necessity – moral demand – of representing the past event, explaining it in rational terms as well as explaining his own attitude towards it: “what I really mean, want or believe”, and the experience of exhaustion, impropriety, inadequacy and finally disproportion of linguistic forms available to the historian: conceptual frames, narrative types, rhetorical figures. Words change into slogans, stereotypes, they become ossified, lose their meaning, may be filled with diverse content. Auschwitz therefore faces its historian with the horrendous absurdity and meaninglessness of the event, which not only frightens him, or, more euphemistically, deprives him of clear thinking, but also does not allow him to explain its uniqueness. A historical description, as has been said, has to contain general concepts, and these bring with them the moment of universality and construction. Owing to them, the event loses its singularity, becoming similar to others. Hence Ricoeur’s conclusion noted at the beginning of this discussion: studies on Auschwitz/Shoah allow the historian to see “not only the limits of representation in its narrative and rhetorical forms, but the whole enterprise of writing history” (Ricoeur 2006: 254).

Historical writing as such cannot be codified then. It would therefore have to be some genre of art, the art, however, that does not consist in the rules of poetics, correct production – *techné*. If so, art should rather be understood as studying the past, basing on the sense, or, more precisely, on this real judgment: “what I really mean, want or believe” – otherwise called *power of judgment*. As Ferdinand de Saussure once said, “history is no narrative, but a selection of accurate facts” (cited after Bourdieu 2014: 173). And selection is a province of the power judgment. This kind of cognitive power is governed by the sense of the logic of orders of historical events, the logic that evades the disjunction of either “the truth of facts” or “the truth of reason”, in other words: either uniqueness or repeatability, contingency or necessity, singularity or universality, facticity or fiction. Historical reality, opened to judgment, is then no longer characterized by identity or contradiction, it has to be rather a domain of similarities and differences – the field of

connections between the same and the other. It is only differences and similarities that are attributed (given) to the power of judgment. This is the general conceptual pattern of the epistemology and ontology of the science of history presented here.

I need to make a digression. The application of dichotomous thinking in historical research is not a speculative invention. It can be easily used in modern historiographical theory, which originated from the Renaissance, and whose representatives also treated their work as art identified, however, with rhetoric, or, as the ancients did – with *techne*, with describing the past according to the rules. They consistently sought the rules defining the rationality of the description, and its beauty and truth with it, in ancient times. From that time on nothing new or better would emerge in the art of the word in general, and in particular, in its application to historiography: this is what the humanists assumed, believing that in antiquity “the human capabilities reached the absolute maximum” (Pomian 1992: 41). When describing the past, there is nothing else they can do but imitate the compositions and elevated style of the ancient authors. The so conceived understanding of history in esthetic terms resulted in a prolonged dispute lasting until the late eighteenth century (“although, as Krzysztof Pomian writes “its echoes still reverberate here and there even today”) (Pomian 1992: 43), between “historians” who practice historiography and “antiquarians” concerned with source research. Underlying this dispute was an epistemology built on the opposing treatment of two aspects of the historian’s work: literary and cognitive. Throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries this dichotomous thinking gained momentum, ultimately resulting – particularly owing to Leopold Ranke and his school – in “de-rhetorization” of history (Zamorski 2014: 121), i.e. in the removal of history outside the area of historical research. In this process the so-called paradigm of historicism develops, i.e. research procedures consisting in the linguistic analysis of the source texts, combined with their criticism: heuristics (external criticism) and hermeneutics (internal criticism), and oriented towards constantly discovering new facts. The result of this approach is descriptive (ideographic) historiography (Zamorski 2014: 109-113), declaratively free from rhetorical figures. Rhetoric becomes synonymous with the irrational and the contingent, while source research with the rational and the necessary. But the criteria for their rationality are non-scientific, they derive from the object of research, or ultimately from institutions: the most valuable type of sources is here primary sources in the form of official acts (Zamorski 2014: 111).

In the research into it, the phenomenon of Auschwitz described by Ricoeur is no longer subject to such binary oppositions; nevertheless it demands *discovering and analyzing facts*, but also *judging them*. *Judging* changes the character of research and transforms it into studying – to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term – “the encounter of two histories” at one temporal point, which itself is

the history incarnated in bodies and history objectified as structures (Bourdieu 2014: 174). This observation is accurate about the reality open to the power of judgment: the structures are institutions, socio-historical objects and their related specific logics: norms and rules of action, speaking, necessities, indispensable restrictions that we always experience only at some specific moment, in the coincidence of random events. Consequently, we can no longer say that there are different points of view on history which (history) should essentially continue to be the same. This description is about “the encounter” of divergent histories that cannot be agreed upon for some higher sense, while the historian, rather than offer synthetic presentations produced by interpreting the same in differences, is required to affirm coincidence, or, to put it differently, the art of grasping *contingent rationality*. Historical reality, characterized in ontological terms as *contingent rationality*, cannot be comprehended as a whole, it is the object of thinking by something infinite, whose elements cannot be captured in one act. And the historian is aware of them when adopting a research approach, or, to use Bourdieu’s terms, *habitus*, as “a definite manner of constructing and understanding practice in its specific logic” (Bourdieu, Wacquant 2001: 107), consisting in *selecting accurate facts*. Studying them is a specific kind of creation marked by the scholar’s “socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu, Wacquant 2001: 113) rather than a matter of imitating ready-made narrative and rhetorical forms of historiography, as the humanists would have it, or of discovering facts, whether individual, as proponents of historicism argue, or social as the “Annales School”-related authors of the paradigm of history as a social science maintain. Both of them – supporters of historicism and of the foregoing school – satisfy the criteria for so-called *modernism* in historiography, a position that recognizes, in general, that the past is the object of scientific cognition, i.e. cognition that does not treat sources as authorities, and criticizes them, being guided by the idea of objectivity, or acquiring verifiable and intersubjectively communicable knowledge. In this approach, the past is known in the same way as cultural phenomena are. “In either case, as Krzysztof Pomian explains, one can use repeatable, codifiable procedures, which allow everyone who can use them to arrive at the same conclusions” (Pomian 1992: 264).

Historical science, which identifies historicity as the domain of *contingent rationality*, and adopts the *power of judgment* as the most effective and adequate vehicle for reaching it – the past, cannot be codified. It uses the type of cognition in which the boundaries between the subject and the object, between the historian and the past event, are blurred.

The Hilberg Case

Epistemology, reconstructed on the basis of the reflection on theory and research practice by French scholars Ricoeur and Bourdieu, recreates we could say, the model of *performative history*, a science that assumes that the past exists insofar as it continues to be *reenacted* by its historian-performer, insofar as it continues to exist in him, in his unique manner of knowing it. The historian's thinking may therefore appear to be artistic creativity, which cannot obviously be entirely identified with art announcing the demise of scientific research under the banner of "the past belongs to us and we can (freely) change it". Creative thinking, free from a nihilist scenario, would have in that case to consist in activating mental powers in chronically indeterminate proportions – often described in literature on the subject with the metaphor of *play* – between discursive cognition, i.e. thinking consisting in reasoning (criticism and analysis of sources), and non-discursive, associated with imagination as the ability to imagine phenomena, situations, states of affairs; it is a capacity subjectively determined by the state of mind: emotions, sensitivity... Or to put it differently, this time using Raul Hilberg's methodological reflection: this is about the mode of research procedures that can be described as the *play* between striving to directly present the truth about the past event (Hilberg sought to examine literally every document that could give him any clue to any of the cases he was interested in or wanted to investigate [Hilberg 2014: XXV]), and the infinitely free thinking about how it happened (Hilberg observes that in order to reconstruct the event [Holocaust], whether in film or in books, one has to be a consummate artist, because this picture is a creative act in itself and for itself [Hilberg 1996: 83]); (the play) between the intellectually and morally binding grasping of reality, and being engrossed with the possibilities itself of representing it – the search for a linguistic form for it (Hilberg says he had to control his work, dominate it the way Beethoven molded his music; Beethoven's *Appassionata* showed him that his thousand pages could not shout, that he had to suppress the ringing and resonance, and very seldom relax control [Hilberg 1996: 85]).

In this way of presenting the past there is resemblance to the work of art which, on the one hand, is rooted in actual experience, while on the other hand it is undertaken as an experiment showing different viewpoints on history. The structure of the historian's thinking resembles what in the modern humanities rooted in Kantian philosophy is called *judgment of taste* or *esthetic judgment*. This judgment has a cognitive sense: the sense of knowing and recognizing – in that which is acted out, represented, and presented – the truth of things, events, and persons and oneself, the one to whom the truth is presented: the viewer, observer, researcher, here: the historian. Here, cognition therefore also embraces the expression or manifestation of, to repeat Jaspers's formula

once again, *what I really mean, want or believe*. And it is this model of cognition that can be found in Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews*. The book shows the writer grappling with the matter of the past, the work of the historian that can be described precisely as the *play* of linguistic and methodological conventions, of expressing and designating, manifestation and argumentation, decisions and choices in these aspects/dimensions, made by the scholar who seeks to *understand* the past, based on the artifacts it has left, i.e. chiefly documents. It is this *play*, defining the *habitus* – a special manner of understanding research practice – that allows the author to ultimately render that *contingent rationality* of past events, to *touch* their limit status – *touch* can be one of the possible, I am not sure whether the most fortunate, metaphoric illustrations of the play which is about the play itself, some kind of movement of thinking. To stop or grasp it, agree on conflicting standpoints or on *subject-positions*, as has been said, is impossible: one cannot harmoniously reconcile the general and the individual, neutrality and involvement, facticity and fiction. There is no combination that could comprise all these elements at once, combine them into a totality – there is no one truth about the Holocaust or the whole knowledge about it. Thus Hilberg, on the one hand, explicitly owns up to scientism, which dominated in social sciences at American universities in the 1940s when he was a college student: he assumes the position of an observer, avoids judgments, he removes, as he claims, “accusatory terms like ‘murder’, as well as such exculpatory words as ‘executions’, which made the victims into delinquents, or ‘extermination’, which likened them to vermin” – he introduces “charts and numbers, which added an air of cool detachment to [his] writing” (Hilberg 1996: 87-88). At the same time, on the other hand, the same author understands and practices historical research as a branch of artistic creativity. This is what he writes about his experiences as a Holocaust historian:

The artist usurps the actuality, substituting a text for a reality that is fading fast. The words that are thus written take the place of the past; these words, rather than the events themselves, will be remembered. Were this transformation not a necessity, one could call it presumptuous, but it is unavoidable. It is applicable to all historiography, to all descriptions of a happening (Hilberg 1996: 83).

There is no actuality then, there are only linguistic representations of events. Language is a universal medium of all thinking, a form of relation to the world, which the historian utilizes. What is unique is particular statements – uses of language. This distinction is not very original, however, it draws upon the well-known structuralist distinction between *langue* and *parole*, authored by de Saussure. But this is not what Hilberg has in mind – in his *non-dualistic theory of cognition*, he also breaks the binary schema of structuralism: mental structures/the phenomenal

world. The metaphor of *play* conveys reality, to which its own truth is given owing to representation. Truth does not exist outside representation, nor can the historian go beyond his representation, he is unable to do so even when he cannot actually name something, assign the right word to a thing, when he stops at the level of the form itself, arrangement of words, sentences and chapters: even the composition element is not “without significance”, it does not remain silent and takes on additional semantic/representational functions. Hilberg recollects the progress of the creative process, which accompanied the writing of *The Destruction of the European Jews*:

I grasped for an overall symmetry. Beethoven had sketched the finale of his Eroica symphony by pairing what he placed first with what he put down last, then what followed the first with what preceded the last, and so on in candelabra fashion toward the middle. I had done something very similar with my twelve-chapter work. The first chapter was thematically reflected in the last. The second was matched with the next to the last, and the third with the tenth. The longest of my chapters was the one on deportations. It was the *andante* of my composition, with a theme and multiple variations that mirrored the special conditions under which deportations were carried out in each country (Hilberg 1996: 85-86).

Historical events that arouse terror – *mysterium tremendum* – make one realize the limit of all written communication; that which is “beyond the limit”, the unsaid “remainder”, therefore enters the semiotic world through the structural, composition element. The meaning of the “remainder” is non-verbal, residing in the rhythm of the narrative, in the moods and emotions it evokes, and it enters the “play” with cognition, discursive thinking, here: with criticism and analysis of sources – texts and documents. The subject of this play, the play that by definition is a presentation, *playing something*, of one’s own sense and own goals, is the abovementioned *power of judgment*. Its judgments are not about *cognitive truth*, i.e. the truth that can be proved through reference to reality “alone”: no external, non-linguistic context of play sets its objectives or tasks. Writing of history, understood as *selecting accurate facts*, is done in relation to and among its other representations, more or less *accurate* in the meaning: adequate, precise, profound, mature, not without reason, appropriate for the situation, even “truthful”. In the judgments measured by the scale of accuracy what matters is better – sharper, more precise, thorough, mature, etc. – *understanding* of past events. As such, in respect of their logical value, these judgments cannot thus be binary – true/false, they must be always unclosed, dialogical, open to other judgments – other voices read from the past: factual descriptions and objective (impersonal) narration are accompanied for this purpose by sentence patterns showing the mechanism for “selecting

accurate facts”, rendering the essence of performativity of historical research. These are the patterns like “one day...”, “[XY] may have been involved/been the issue”, “it appears that...”, “this usually took place in the following way...”, “this is illustrated by the following story...”, “an eyewitness account reads...”, “the reason why [X acted so and so] is not known,” etc. These types of expressions and syntagmatic relations enable the reader’s interference, open him/her to other histories, other possible courses of events. A historical study is then like a work of art, produced from the reflection on real experience, at the same time chronically experimental, open to interpretations, allowing complementary inquiries and varied solutions... The artwork that excites us, teaches non-conformism and detachment from standard thinking and judgments identified with the “good form” of academic studies ... All this was brought home to Hilberg by the Auschwitz phenomenon.

Conclusions

Reflection on history as a science, connected with two World Wars in the twentieth century, owes its appearance within the culture of memory to the trauma of The First World War. Inspired by this context, theory exposes memory as the collectively developed ability to recollect the past, detrimental to individually experiencing and communicating it (the past), i.e. in a narrative form. The theory of historiography owes, however, to The Second World War a new, other than before, self-understanding and conceptual imagination which could be generally described by means of a series of mutually connected research approaches and categories such as a) critical social theory, parting with the historicism paradigm as well as dogmatism in science, b) ethical turn, c) non-dualistic historical epistemology and ontology accompanied by the following concepts: *contingent rationality*, *power of judgment*, *play*, (presenting the past as an) *artwork*, and *performativity*. Not all the elements appear together in one research project – they have been reconstructed in my article *ex post*. This reconstruction takes into consideration many different – from the historical point of view, apparently not all – attempts to create a new methodological consciousness of historical science towards war and the Holocaust. It seems that even if the placing of Hilberg’s work within the series of the theoretical transformations were evaluated/denounced as a certain overinterpretation, then regardless of the degree of its accuracy it could – my interpretation – still preserve its heuristic value and inspire new conceptual associations and connections in considering the theory of historiography. Without drawing such a conceptual map one may appropriately conclude – as many in fact do – that The Second World War had “a minor influence” on this academic discipline. And this is not true.

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ABSTRACT

Theory of History vis-à-vis two World Wars and the Holocaust

The author poses two questions: Is there anything new that the two World Wars and the Holocaust introduce to the methodology of history or rather to the self-consciousness of history as a scientific discipline? What do these events change in the way we perceive the importance and function of historiography in culture? The article consists of introductory remarks, main text and conclusions. Key considerations are divided into six parts: 1. The First World War and the Turn to Memory, 2. World War Two and the Question about Theory of History, 3. Political Context, 4. The Ethical Turn, 5. Auschwitz, History, and the Power of Judgment, 6. The Hilberg Case. A reconstruction of the methodological consciousness of history is carried out on the basis of the research categories and attitudes proposed by such authors as Habermas, Ricoeur, Jaspers, and Bourdieu. Using some of these ideas, it culminates in the interpretation of Hilberg's theory of historiography. The ideas are, among other things, the following: critical theory, ethical turn, power of judgment, non-dualistic epistemology and ontology.

KEYWORDS

Theory of history, history as a science, world wars, the Holocaust, critical social theory, ethical turn, power of judgment, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, Raul Hilberg

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