

Rethinking the Humanities

Rethinking the Humanities:
Paths and Challenges

Edited by

Ricardo Gil Soeiro and Sofia Tavares

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P U B L I S H I N G

Rethinking the Humanities: Paths and Challenges,
Edited by Ricardo Gil Soeiro and Sofia Tavares

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

ACT 23: Rethinking the Humanities: Paths and Challenges

The present volume is part of the “Alterities, Crossings, Transfers – ACT” series, hosted by the Center for Comparative Studies, University of Lisbon. The acronym ACT designates a series of publications of monographic thematic issues mainly connected with the research on cultural contacts, discursive migrations and disciplinary, as well as epistemological reconfigurations in the area of comparatist studies. Topics range from philosophy, anthropology, post-colonial studies, and translation studies to a strong emphasis on interart studies, following a rigorously trans-disciplinary perspective. It also manifests still another dimension of this project: the fact that each volume constitutes the “transcription” of a “performance”, of a set of texts orally communicated to, and actively discussed by, an audience.

—Helena Carvalho Buescu
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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING THE HUMANITIES

RICARDO GIL SOEIRO AND SOFIA TAVARES

The International symposium '*Rethinking the Humanities: Paths & Challenges*' was organized in May 2010 by the Center for Comparative Studies (University of Lisbon, Portugal) whose declared aim is to aggregate the collaboration of a number of researchers with cognate interests from various departments of literary and cultural studies in order to pursue an international research and publication agenda, as well as an ongoing schedule of conferences, symposia, and guest lectures. These activities are organized to function in transversal fashion to the academic and Pedagogical Program, with particular focus on Intercultural Studies (embracing travel literature, utopian literature, and literary translation); European literary and cultural studies (highlighting the presence of Portuguese and Lusophone cultures in the context of Europe); Inter-semiotic Studies with a focus on cinema, theatre, painting, and architecture.

It was within this wide spectrum of interests that the idea for a symposium on the state of the Humanities was born. We believe it couldn't have been more timely. Although we were not interested in working along lines charted out by the later Heidegger, for example, and his focus on the notion of 'crisis' (according to which the whole of Western civilization is undergoing an absolute and unprecedented crisis, for which the statement "God is dead" can stand as the shorthand expression), it is nevertheless indisputable that several higher education commentators have pointed to budget cuts, waning student interest, and dwindling tenure-track positions as evidence of a crisis in the liberal arts and Humanities.

In the past few decades, we have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the present situation of the Humanities. Several colloquia, collection of essays and books are a clear evidence of such rise to prominence of this attention. It would only suffice to name Paul Ricoeur's speech "Humanities Between Science and Art" at the opening ceremony for the

"Humanities at the Turn of the Millenium", held at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, George Steiner's lecture "Humanities - At Twilight?" at Boston University on 2nd of April 1998, the recent Winter Issue 2009 of *Dedalus*, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, which expands on the overall theme "Reflecting on the Humanities" (see, for example, Richard F. Franke's essay "The Powers of the Humanities & a Challenge to Humanists", in: *Dedalus*, Winter 2009, vol. 138, n° 1, pp. 13-23), as well as several important books, such as: *Literary Culture in a World Transformed: a Future for the Humanities* (2001), by William Paulson, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (2008), by Frank Donoghue, and *Reforming the Humanities* (2009), by Peter Levine. Even more recently though, namely in November 11-12, 2011, the University of Vermont held its Fall Conference 2011 on the topic of "The Power of the Humanities: Why They Matter".

It could be argued, however, that reflecting upon the subject of the crisis in the Humanities has always been a pervasive topic, and that it draws our attention to a deep self-critical awareness (regarding the range and limits of their knowledge) which has constantly been a common trait to humanists. Be that as it may, this long-standing critical stance has been acutely dramatized in an era of increasing contingency and devaluation of the Humanities. See, for instance, Martha Nussbaum's most recent book *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (published in 2010), in which the American philosopher makes a passionate plea for the Humanities, arguing that education has become increasingly utilitarian, market-driven, career-oriented, and impoverished in its attention to the arts and Humanities. Historically, she argues, the Humanities have been central to education because they have rightly been seen as essential for creating competent democratic citizens. But recently, Nussbaum argues, thinking about the aims of education has gone disturbingly awry both in the United States and abroad. Anxiously focused on national economic growth, we increasingly treat education as though its primary goal were to teach students to be economically productive rather than to think critically and become knowledgeable and empathetic citizens (this idea also underlies Richard Rorty's notion of 'solitariness'). This shortsighted focus on profitable skills has eroded our ability to criticize authority, reduced our sympathy with the marginalized and different, and damaged our competence to deal with complex global problems. If, as George Steiner admonishes, "the 'humanities' are indeed at twilight, they should evidence their claims to remembrance, to heuristic value, by making us alert to the new. They should continue to instruct us that there can be, even in the unknown, there perhaps above all, a homecoming."

Drawing upon the interrogative tone of Steiner's essay "Humanities-At Twilight?" (1999), the present volume, which arises from the aforementioned international symposium (although it surpasses it in scope and in ambition), aims at reflecting on the future of the Humanities at the beginning of this new millenium. Within the contemporary framework of a re-definition of the academic disciplines in the present day society, is it legitimate to speak of a crisis in the Humanities? (At the university, for instance, such crisis manifests itself in the decline of the demand for this field of study and, at a social level, this crisis is noticeable when we look at the demise of its symbolic value within a multicultural, multilinguistic and profoundly globalised society.) Which set of horizons will be brought about for the "new" Humanities now emerging? What are the paths for renewal in light of what may very well be a shift in terms of an epistemological paradigm? Are we, in fact, at the twilight of the Humanities? Or, on the contrary, is there an excessively rhetorical discourse around the notion of 'crisis' in this particular field of study? It is, then, our goal to contribute to the clarification of these questions by examining the following topics: the downfall of the Word's legitimation vis-a-vis the dominance of the image (the transition from a logocentric culture to a culture which largely rests on the its visual dimension); the symbolic power of the Humanities (the social legitimation of the 'litterae humaniores'); the re-definition of the function and of the education patterns within the Humanities at the universities; the centrality of the 'classics' in an 'era of the void' (Lipovetsky); the epistemological place of the Humanities (Humanities as a middle-ground between science and art, and Humanities as testimony - see P. Ricoeur's essay in this volume); the civic (im)pertinence of the Humanities. Indelibly, changes brought upon by the resurgence of a profit-and-efficiency driven ideology have jumped to the forefront in our understanding of the Humanities. What are the processes, then, by which these changes occur? What is the extent of these changes? How can we persuasively advocate for the importance of literature, history, philosophy, and foreign languages in the globalized world of contemporary higher education? What should a compelling new vision of the Humanities look like?

This collective volume brings together eminent scholars from across different fields of the Humanities to engage in what we hope to be a profound examination of how the Humanities find their place in this period of complex challenges and exciting new opportunities.

The volume consists of two parts. The first part - "Questioning the Humanities" - , comprising three seminal texts by Paul Ricoeur, George Steiner, and Marjorie Perloff, is crucial for the overall volume's coherence

since it sets the tone for the following essays. In fact, before the contributors presented their lectures in Lisbon (which were then reworked and rewritten for the present volume), they were asked to reflect upon these three texts, as they constitute, in our view, key theoretical contributions to what a clear and informed debate on the 'status quo' of the Humanities should be like. On the other hand, by choosing these particular texts, we hoped to stimulate a fruitful discussion, given the fact that for the most part of their final horizon, these three texts don't move beyond a rhetoric of 'crisis' which the following essays (part II – "New Horizons for the Humanities") will then explore in length. Perhaps a particular case in point is Steiner's essay, and it can easily be seen that the majority of the texts particularly draws upon Steiner's approach of the present situation within the Humanities, seeking, however, to deconstruct his rhetoric. It is in this light that the unity of the volume is achieved, so much so that the first part provides the theoretical and seminal framework with which the following essays will dialogue (more or less profoundly, depending on the particular case at hand). In short, in spite of the diverse range of approaches (which we do not wish to erase or neglect), the richness of the volume is also accomplished by its coherence and by its overall purpose: that is to say, to surpass the enduring and dominant rhetoric of crisis by drawing upon a wide variety of perspectives and areas of research (this is the chief justification for the volume's subtitle: 'paths & challenges').

The opening text, "Humanities Between Science and Art", corresponds to Paul Ricoeur's speech given at the opening ceremony for the *'Humanities at the Turn of the Millenium'*, held at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. This event was a joint Faculty initiative based at the Centre for Cultural Research, Faculty of Arts, University of Aarhus, Denmark. This initiative included the organisation of a series of conferences during the years 1999 and 2000 concerned with the following themes, crucial to our reflection upon the paths and challenges presented to the Humanities: 1) The Humanities in the Process of Globalisation and Internationalisation; 2) The Humanities and the Information Technologies; 3) The Humanities at the University, and 4) The Humanities in Transformation. Ricoeur's essay was first presented as a keynote lecture given at the opening ceremony (June 4th, 1999), Center for Cultural Research, University of Aarhus, Denmark, 1999. At the outset, the theme of memory is brought to the fore as it puts into play the paradox of presence and of absence which, to Ricoeur's mind, works as an aporia at the heart of the phenomenology of memory. And this paradoxical tension is then transferred from memory to history. Subsequently, the French philosopher points out three distinct phases in the process of history-

writing: 1) the documentary phase, 2) the explanatory phase, and 3) the literary phase. To begin with, the preliminary phase encompasses the written testimonies from which the historiography takes its departure (here the notion of testimony and critique of testimony are predominantly considered). This initial step is then followed by the explanatory phase, in which the unsteady position of historiography midway between science and art is explored (Ricoeur clarifies that this is when history takes hold of itself as part of the representation component of the historical reality itself). Finally, we enter the last stage of historical inquiry, namely the literary phase (bringing history closer to art, this concluding phase highlights the narrative form of the historical discourse). Apart from providing a thorough analysis of the working of the historiographical operation, we find that this discussion also helps to illuminate one of Ricoeur's central insights on the relationship between history and literature: both of these spheres belong to the category of symbolic discourses and, while differing from one another as far as their immediate referents are concerned, their ultimate referent is the human experience of time (it should not go unmentioned, however, that the dialectics between explanation and comprehension, mirroring the conjunction between the documentary pole and the literary pole, serves a clear example of the fertile dialogue between science and art at play within the historical process). Allowing us to overcome simplistic dichotomies which antagonistically aim at separating factual from fictional discourse, the Ricoeurian approach teaches us that both histories and novels alike do speak figuratively and symbolically about that ultimate referent – that is, the aporias of temporality which can only be conveyed through a symbolic discourse rather than through a logical and technical discourse. In accordance with these considerations, since narrative discourse does have a creative impact on the way we shape the perceived world, it is possible to argue for an extension of the creative power of narrative to the Humanities seen as a whole. This could be linked to what Marjorie Perloff identifies in her essay as one of the major causes for the trivialization of the status of literary study in today's academe, namely the subordination of the pleasures of representation and recognition (the historical and cultural dimension) to the pleasures of the fictive, the 'what has happened' to the 'what might happen'.

George Steiner's essay "Humanities - At Twilight?" was initially presented as a lecture given at Boston University on 2nd of April 1998, and it might be regarded as a central piece to which all the remaining essays of the collection do indeed revert back to. Although praising Steiner's thought-provoking essay, Richard Wolin does not shy away from

stressing a tone which is, in his assessment, veritably Spenglerian (vd. "Reflections on the Crisis in the Humanities", in: *The Hedgehog Review*, 13.2, Summer 2011, p. 8). In fact, the essay opens up with Steiner's musings on the intuition of crisis as an indelible aspect to our being-in-the-world, an insight already present in his conviction that we all come *after*, that we are latecomers in the era of the epilogue, as stated in *Grammars of Creation* (2001). No doubt this elegiac facet entailed by Steiner's essayism sets the tone for the rest of the article. But is equally true that from the very outset Steiner is clear enough to point out that we must safeguard a kind of rigorous skepticism towards the notion of a crisis of culture. When accepted without careful critical pondering, such a naive notion of crisis, he admits, runs the risk of merely turning into high gossip tag, indeed truly Spenglerian in its guise. Be that as it may, he does grant that the ubiquitous malaise within the Humanities does request a closer inspection. In order to pursue such a critical scrutiny, Steiner starts by stressing the difficulty in circumscribing the domain and the scope of what one usually classifies as the Humanities, making it truly challenging to establish what falls under the humanistic rubric and what does not. Steiner's case is then followed by a discussion about the pragmatic consequences of the demise of the Humanities made manifest, for example, in the harsh funding cuts vis-a-vis other academic fields, as well as the appalling decline of the former prestige of the '*litterae humaniores*' which, in its turn, carries a deep impact on the dim career prospects for graduate students in the Humanities. This situation is exacerbated by the ambiguity which inhabits the status of 'research' within the Humanities which Steiner (certainly too hastily) equates with the mass production of the ephemeral (which produces a sort of reiterative criticism) and with over-specialization which is now widely regarded as counterproductive. If, according to Steiner, theory within the Humanities is intuition grown impatient (a *dictum* which is repeated throughout his work, namely in his 1997 intellectual autobiography *Errata*), then it would be fair to conclude that the present-day idolatry of the theoretical within the humanistic realm is no more than a symptom for a futile yearning for respectability and prestige achieved by the natural sciences. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Steiner also points the accusing finger to poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism, clearly reproaching these theoretical paradigms for the current state of *misère*. By destabilizing the question of the meaning of meaning and, by the same token, subverting the underlying assumptions of a transcendental humanism, these theoretical formulations and critical discourses of our unstable post-modern condition only deepens the present sense of an acute crisis. But even if Steiner is being here harshly

dismissive of the post-modernist venture, the crux really lies elsewhere. Steiner calls it the Cordelia paradox which is described as follows: "In our limited consciousness, the fictive can overwhelm, can blot out any 'reality principle'. The torments of Cordelia come to be 'more real' than the torture or abuse of the child next door. The second impulse is that toward intelligible form. The shapes of the inhuman, of daily injustice and suffering tend to be messy, inchoate, almost impossible to grasp other than in the trivializing habituation of the media. Poetics, the arts, music, philosophic argument, the We know, and the mere articulation of such knowledge is monstrous, that one can play Schubert or read Virgil in one's home and then proceed to the day's work in the torture-rooms and extermination camps. No poetic artistic responsiveness, no scholarly or scientific commitment to ideals of uncorrupt verity, no prodigality of institutions of higher learning or museums crowded with loved masterpieces, no multiplicity of operas, concert halls, quality bookshops, attenuates the potential for, the axiomatic fabric of the exact sciences, offer those contours of legible order, those harmonies of resolution that the literate soul seems to crave and seek out. (The Platonic doctrine of Forms, with its incalculable legacy in Western idealism, incorporates this recognition.) Possessed by a delight in fiction and mimesis, by a more or less sophisticated 'rage for order' (Wallace Stevens's haunting phrase), men and women are made inattentive to, passive in the face of, the politics of injustice, of enslavement and of massacre. These, however, are only conjectures. I know of no comprehensive, convincing answer." Albeit conjectural, Steiner's premise according to which the Humanities do not necessarily humanize does bring us before a fundamental crossroads where the thrust of the crisis is inescapable (this issue is brought to the fore rather explicitly in Pedro Serra's contribution). In conclusion, brought to a standstill, Steiner's concrete standpoint remains elusive: he seems to be lingering on what was ever so radiantly in the past rather than focusing on what lies ahead. In doing so, we are only expected to envisage a celebration of remembrance and to look forward to an enigmatic homecoming (with obvious Heideggerian overtones): "If the 'humanities' are indeed at twilight, they should evidence their claims to remembrance, to heuristic value, by making us alert to the new. They should continue to instruct us that there can be, even in the unknown, there perhaps above all, a homecoming."

Although Marjorie Perloff's essay, "Crisis in the Humanities", is far-reaching in the questions it poses, resorting to an extremely rich field of knowledge and references to support her argument, there is nonetheless a couple of basic assumptions underlying her standpoint which, to our mind,

will undoubtedly deserve further critical attention from the part of the reader. First of all, by hinting at the concept of the Post-Human, the author seems to be musing with the related notion of Post-Humanities. Accordingly, in so doing, this would lead the reader to ask himself or herself whether in fact the crisis in the Humanities highlights or entails a comparable crisis of the Human or vice-versa. One of the most daunting features of the current state of affairs is the subordination of the pleasures of the fictive (the power of *mimesis* as described by Aristotle in his *Poetics* - discussed here at length) in detriment to a focus on a historical and cultural outlook which has diminished the status of literary study in the today's academy (in this respect, the rise of cultural studies in light of traditional literary studies downfall is brought to the fore). Another troubling indicator is the despotism of the "useful" in which the Kantian notion of the 'purposiveness without purpose' (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*) has lost its legitimacy. Perloff describes the situation as follows: "Indeed, the neo-Puritan notion that literature and the other arts must be somehow 'useful,' and only useful, that the Ciceronian triad - *docere, movere, delectare* - should renounce its third element ('delight') and even the original meaning of its second element, so that *to move* means only to move readers to some kind of virtuous action, has produced a climate in which it has become increasingly difficult to justify the study of English or Comparative Literature." In the final stage of her argument, Perloff draws upon Steiner's essay "The Humanities-At Twilight?" as a paradigmatic example of what she calls a misplaced *retro Kulturdrang* - an overly philosophical pessimism akin to The Frankfurt School from whose cultural straight-jacket the author of *In Bluebeard's Castle* never quite freed himself. To be sure, Perloff points out rather poignantly that in Steiner's elegiac take on the future (or lack thereof) of the Humanities does not take into consideration the vibrant versatility and ongoing vitality of contemporary culture - simply taking for granted Adorno's hyperbolic dictum: "Kein Gedicht nach Auschwitz." ('No poetry after Auschwitz.').

The second part of the present book, "New Horizons for the Humanities", opens with David Damrosch's essay "The End of the Book? Literary Studies in a Post-Literary Age, 1960/2010/2060". Using literary studies as his case in point, this essay centers on the challenges posed for the Humanities by today's new media and the new modes of reading and analysis they foster. In an age of Google searches and 140-character Twitter feeds, the question that the author poses is clear: Is there still a significant place in modern culture for slow, complex readings of long, complex texts? Damrosch frames his argument with a look fifty years back to the state of reading circa 1960, at the juncture of older styles of "close

reading” and the rise of intensive modes of theoretically-informed reading, and proposes a very different situation in 2060, when reading can be seen as largely absorbed into a “post-literary” culture dominated by images and sound bites. His claim is that humanists can – and must – actively engage with the new trends, which cannot be wished away; the essay closes with examples of creative approaches to the new media that can give us new and vital ways to circulate and study the works of our humanistic tradition.

In António Sousa Ribeiro’s essay “The ‘Crisis of the Humanities’ Revisited”, we are conducted throughout a revisitation of the course of the Humanities as a discipline and knowledge field, so to understand its present state of crisis and what to expect from the future. This journey starts in the Enlightenment period and finishes in the present with the inevitable question about the future. And the future depends on the transformation of the Humanities in something transversally involved in every social practice. Bakhtine defends that every cultural act takes place essentially at the borders. Negotiating borders and defining spaces of articulation is a core condition for the definition of the Humanities. In order to succeed, the Humanities need to abandon defensive positions, and to think transversally the domains that have been autonomized in the process of modernity instead of accommodating to that autonomy. The Humanities do not need hibernation strategies, for they are a model of knowledge and understanding unique that cannot be replaced or subsumed in any other approach.

In “Education Toward Autonomy”, Richard Wolin visits the several periods of crisis that the Humanities have faced all over the years to understand the nature of the crisis that is confronting the Humanities today. In a time in which we observe an acceleration of temporality and the a severe shrinkage of social space, and where there is an endemic and pervasive tension between our spiritual capacities and the reigning forms of objectivity, the Humanities face a hard task. In this context, education plays an important role because it is no longer the prerogative of a well-entrenched elite. The Humanities provide the individual with the cultural and intellectual prerequisites for individual self-realization and collective self-determination. They provide them with the knowledge of history, language and logic necessary to assimilate the past and to make informed contemporary political judgements.

According to Cândido de Oliveira Martins’s reflection in “New Horizons for a Humanistic-Literary Culture”, the present condition of crisis within the Humanities is a consequence of the social and cultural evolution of societies that, gradually, replaced it by the strong empire of the natural sciences. The clash between the humanistic culture and the scientific

culture dictated, if not the death – as the most sceptical would consider – at least a profound change within the heart of the Humanities. The future of the Humanities relies on a new attitude of cultural transference and transversal knowledge. It is the moment to undergo an epistemological change and explore new research areas, establishing strong connections between the two cultures. According to the author, the survival of the humanistic culture depends on the ability to show its usefulness within the context of the contemporary world. To do so, the new Humanities need to become less elitist and more open to new areas of study. The written word has to be fully used to oppose the “amnesic” world of post-modernity. The creation of a literary culture may establish the needed connection between past and present, and engage in a comparative dialogue able to provide the right answers without excessive erudition or specialization. The humanistic culture can bring the necessary critical reasoning to a civilization that has emerged so deeply in the present that has become a forgetfulness civilization with no past and no future.

In Peter Levine’s “An Ethical Turn for the Humanities”, we are conducted through a description about moral concepts and moral judgement. The ethical argumentation proves to be complex and not always as straightforward as one would wish. In fact, it shows many resemblances with the aesthetic judgment. In *Protagoras*, Socrates suggests a method to deal with moral judgement (*techné*). This method would be an alternative to the habit of telling and interpreting stories. Throughout the following centuries the method was developed and offers today many alternatives to the Humanities. Social scientists, lawyers, ideological thinkers, amongst others belong to forms of expertise that are useful and that have tried to prove their supremacy to the Humanities, but often conflict. That happens because there is no methodology that can replace our public discussions or bring them to a close, and results from the nature of moral reasoning. Although it is indispensable, its components are heterogeneous and some cannot be incorporated in general theories. The Humanities show enormous potential to enrich and discipline public discussion about moral issues. They need to return to the public discussion and overcome scepticism and handle diversity.

In his beautifully written essay “And in the Shadow of Prometheus Lives Man”, José Pedro Serra provides us with a lucid understanding of the depth of the crisis at hand. He does not shy away from facing the deep-seated perplexities brought about by the position occupied by the Humanities in today’s cultural panorama, audaciously choosing instead to recognize the existence and the extent of the problem at stake. The real and all too menacing risk would be, in Serra’s view, to downplay the

implications of the predicament we find ourselves in by timidly giving in to the cultural disorientation which strikes us ever so deeply. Even if he agrees to the difficulty of tracing the overriding factors which lead up to the present crisis, Serra nevertheless does single out “the death of God” as a major thread in the fabric of the current existential landscape - one whose enduring echo continues to be felt. Nietzsche’s announcement (spelling as it does the demise of the idea of an intelligible, immutable, and eternal principle), in Serra’s account, ultimately entails the question of meaning, the hermeneutical dimension of Man. Cut off from this lasting *archê*, deprived from a redeeming *telos*, man’s wanderings are now forgotten by a disenchanted Ithaca. Furthermore, the seduction of the techno-science, together with the rise of an era of the void, brought about the downfall of the aura of splendour traditionally attached to the Humanities. Literary studies, in particular, have been shaken in their epistemological purposes and wounded in their ontological dignity. They may have been turned into a tolerated luxury at best: a mere product for commercial consumption. Originating in wonder, being a declination of finitude and a fragile yet commanding testimony to our essential incompleteness, literature seems to offer manifold possibilities – as long as we remain open to its unique wisdom. J. Pedro Serra places this amorous and loving answerability to the solicitation of a text at the centre of literary studies. He also touches upon the importance of teachers, the importance of the classics, as well as the indispensable conservatism of Faculties of Letters meshed up with their eagerness for the new. As the author so brilliantly concludes: “Whilst we recognise ourselves as the protected creatures of Titan, gazing in blind hope as we dance with death; or in the ambiguity of a magnificently creative act, which might well be seen as damned, we will, strangely, be Mankind. Because in the shadow of Prometheus lives Man.”

Words well worth the notice of our heart and, in a time when the value of the Humanities is called into question, they can put us on the right track to achieve a keener understanding of how and why the humanities do matter and of how and why they will always succeed in irrevocably changing our lives.

PART I.

QUESTIONING THE HUMANITIES

CHAPTER ONE

HUMANITIES BETWEEN SCIENCE AND ART

PAUL RICOEUR

In this present essay I take “Humanities” as the bundle of disciplines of which the human sciences – the *Geisteswissenschaften* – constitute the hard kernel. And I take history, or rather historiography, as the paradigmatic case of a human science, which extends between the two poles of science and art. At one end we have the procedures linked to the treatment of archives, at the other end we have the range of verbal expressions which make history a segment of literature. In between you have the dichotomy between explanation and comprehension, namely the range of devices thanks to which historians attempt to give answers to such questions as “Why did this event occur, why did these people do these or those things?” These explanation devices deal in different ways with the clause *because* as the linguistic trait common to all our answers to the question *why?*; and we know how heterogeneous the uses of the clause *because* may be. The conjunction of explanation and comprehension midway between the documentary pole and the literary pole is itself a good example of the mixture of science and art all along the historical process. Before proceeding analytically by treating in turn three distinct phases – the documentary, the explanatory/comprehensive, and the literary ones – let me say a few words about the dynamic unity which holds together the three phases. First, the whole process occurs in the plane of writing. Archives, at one hand, are written, and books, at the opposite end, are written. This is why we may call the whole process historiography; history writing. It would be a mistake to assign the category of writing to the literary phase alone. From beginning to end, the historiographical process moves in the element of writing. This is the main difference between history and memory. Memory unfolds its stages within the oral discourse, even if declarative memory through story telling is ready for being written. But precisely this last stage of memory is the first stage of history; then memories have assumed the shape of a documentary piece in

an archive. For that reason it would be appropriate to apply to this transition, rather to this leap, from orality to scripturality, if I may say so, the kind of perplexity that Plato induces in the dialogue *Phaedrus* concerning the invention of writing, or better, the gift of writing. Is not writing a threat for memory?¹ Is this *pharmakon*, this drug offered by the god to the king, a poison or remedy? The question is paradoxical to the extent that Plato himself kept writing. So the question is planted as a thorn at the heart of all human practices shaped by the use of writing. It will accompany us from the beginning to the end of our inquiry. Does writing work as a poison or as remedy as regards the weaknesses of memory? Who knows? Which weaknesses? Which weaknesses of memory as prewriting? Two of them deserve to be pointed at, because both of them will accompany our travel through historiography. The first one concerns the phenomenological status of memories. A memory is a kind of mental image which claims to provide a subsidiary presence to an absent thing, more precisely to events which are no longer there, absent in that sense, but which were present to contemporaries when they occurred. Presence of absence, absence of a previous presence – such is the main paradox of memory as representation of past events. The Greek had a first word for this paradoxical phenomenon, the word *eikon* that we may translate by image, effigy, or representation. And they had another word, *mimesis*, to say the relationship between the present image and the absent thing, the past event. This paradox – presence of absence, absence of a previous presence – works as an aporia at the heart of the phenomenology of memory. And it is transferred as such from memory to history. At its first stage, the documentary one, history relies on the *traces* left behind by the memory of past events; and the problematic of the *trace* repeat that of the *eikon* as *mimesis*. This paradox too will accompany our whole travel, to the extent that it is at the last stage of the historical process, at the literary stage, that historical writing assumes the function of representing the past. We speak of a historical text as a true representation of the events whose traces had been stored in our archives and which had been questioned in terms of *why?* and *because*. The ultimate test is the corroboration of this basic claim of any historical piece of literature, by opposition to fictional literature, the claim to tell the truth about past events. But the heritage of memory at the level of history is still heavier. Memories are not only images occurring suddenly within our minds with the truth claim which we said as regards past events, - they are images which are target of a search, the search which we call recollection. And recollection is a kind of action, even of practice, sometimes of art, the famous art of memory about which Frances Yates wrote her famous book *The Art of Memory*.² This search has

its own rules that Aristotle was the first to explore in his essay *Memoria et Reminiscencia*,³ *reminiscencia* being the Latin word for recollection. Recollection has not only its own rules, but also difficulties and failures of its own. It may be prevented by resistances, as we learned with Freud, it may be manipulated, as we learn by the sociology of knowledge and especially of ideology, and it may be ordered, as it occurs within the framework of ritual commemoration. These recollections have to do with the loss of objects of love (or hatred); the work of memory is also a work of mourning. These burdens too have to be taken into account by history. The threat of haunting ghosts, the tendency to repeat instead of remembering, the threat of ideology, and also the burden of preserving the traces against this wearing away of memory that we call oblivion, forgetfulness.

Such are the two kinds of heritage transferred from memory to history, the true representation of the absent past, the honest recollection of the traces left behind by the testimonies related to past events and preserved in our archives. In summary the task of history is itself inherited from memory, the twofold task of providing a true representation of past events, that of building its construction as recollective reconstruction of the past. The question remains: does the fulfilment of this task provide a remedy to the weaknesses and diseases pertaining to the *iconic* status of memory and to the search process of active recollection?

1. The documentary stage

It is as a scientific method that history starts its job. We called *documentary* this initial stage of historical inquiry. What is a *document*, and to what extent are we allowed to speak of documentary evidence? Let us start from the concept of *trace* that we introduced earlier in relation with the Greek notion of *eikon* and *mimesis*. An *eikon*, we said, is the present image of an absent thing, of a past event which is no longer present but which was present, which *had been*. Trace is the remain of such a present. These remains are immensely various and heterogeneous, from pottery, tools, metals, stones to written documents. It's mainly with written documents the historians have to do, archaeologists dealing with the other kinds of remains. Those that Carlo Ginzburg call *indices*, *index*, indicating marks. Now these written documents are mainly written *testimonies* left by contemporaries. And it's to these written testimonies that the scientific procedures linked to the critique of testimonies are connected since the time of Lorenzo Valla, the author of the *Donation of Constantine* in XV century⁴ and with a more and more critical eye, also Mabillon, Richard

Simon, Bayle and also Spinoza with his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.⁵ Let us stay a while with the notion of testimony and critique of testimony. What is a testimony? It is mainly the declaration of a witness who says three things. 1) *I was there* 2) *believe me or not* 3) *if you don't believe my word ask somebody else. I was there*. This claim is that of transmitted memory. It's a word said publicly to somebody else who receives the testimony and in some cases, those that interest us, writes it down. The testimony, we say, is *deposited*. But before that the witness has linked within me and the same statement an account, a narrative, and an act of selfdesignation thanks to which he or she ascertains his or her testimony, what we call *to attest*. The discursive act of testifying links together is an objective account and a subjective involvement.

Such is the first component: *I was there*. Then, the second one: the other directed dimension of the testimony; somebody else is asked to believe my own word; this relationship of confidence is the presupposition of all kinds of contracts, pacts, treatises etc. On it relies the whole structure of the linguistic community to which I belong. On the extent that the witness is ready to renew and confirm his or her testimony, testimony may be held as a basic institution. But testimony adds its own weaknesses to those of memory; for professional historians every testimony may be held as unreliable as long as it has not been confirmed. By what? By some other testimony. I mean the testimony of other people. We have nothing better than a confrontation between competing testimonies. The outcome of this critical process is what has been called documentary evidence. It has its own limits. First, documents remain mute as long as they have not been questioned. And questions are themselves dependent on subjective interests and intellectual affinity with some specific events, protagonists, institutions, or social and political trends; furthermore, some new documents may always be discovered; as the logical status of evidence, it relies more on falsification than on verification. Finally, it concerns propositions related to relatively discrete facts, implying proper names, scattered dates, places, verbs of action, or description statements concerning circumstances, etc. Nevertheless the claim that there are no such reliable historical statements is merely contrary to the experience and the practice of professional historians, who agree about limited strings of facts, that we call historical facts. They constitute the scientific component of the truth-claim raised by historical knowledge. To that extent history may claim to be more remedy than poison to collective memory. The reliability of documentary evidence is enough to defeat the negationist stance which denies the patient and unlimited commitment of the historian at work at the archives.

2. The explanatory stage

Enough for the documentary stage of historiography. Through the question already implied at the documentary stage we are led to the explanatory stage of historiography. A question usually concerns a hypothesis bearing on a contention of historical facts. All questions are not about causes and reasons, but these questions constitute the kernel of historical inquiry. In that regard analytic philosophers of history are right to take into account the whole range of uses of the clause *because*, ranging from causality down to reasons for acting, motivation, and emotional facts. In this way we should no longer oppose explanation and understanding or comprehension. Henrik von Wright is right when he proposes for historical explanatory devices a mixed model connecting what he calls causal segments and teleological segments. In fact professional historians are not interested in these canonical distinctions which are not adjusted to historical practice. Philosophers, including logically oriented philosophers, should derive their explanatory/comprehensive categories from the actual way of dealing of professional historians. For them the important question concerns the connection between economical, social, political, cultural factors, the temporal architecture of long or short duration, the play between macro- and micro-development – you don't see the same things from above as from below, social constraints are easier to detect at the macro-level; strategies of negotiation where people fight with uncertainty are easier to decode at the micro-level. In the same way the relationship between structures, conjunctures and events provide the epistemological look with specific problems which are connected with the layer-structure of historical time for which we have no ready-made logical procedures. We have to look at the historian's practice, its way of raising questions and solving problems. History has its own intellectual procedures which have been learned on the spot. Among the numerous problems raised by such contemporary historians as the French member of the Annales school with and after F. Braudel I should like to isolate one specific problem which concerns more directly our inquiry about the relationship between science and art in historiography. It is the problem of mentalities and more broadly of representation as a rather new "object" for professional historians. Representation constitutes the mental component of a social action, the symbolic mediation of every social transaction. Historians have to be interested into the connection between representations and actions, to the extent that history itself is a kind of representation of the ways in which the social bond itself gets construed, including the identities proceeding from this linkage.

Representations in that way belong both to the most refined objects of history and to the historical process itself. It's the place where science and art join their resources. Representations are social facts and mental processes that may be approached from without as objective phenomena and from within as subjective devices with which we share empathic feelings. This is why the history of representation is so problematic, but also so interesting to scrutinise. The unstable position of historiography midway between science and art is quite perfectly reflected in the dealing of such good historians as Georges Duby writing about "the time of the cathedrals" or "monks, warriors and women".⁶

With the history of representations, history takes hold of itself as part of the representation component of the historical reality itself. We are led in this way from the explanatory/comprehensive phase of historiography to the literary phase.

3. The literary phase

The third part of my paper will be devoted to this literary phase which brings history closer to art. Two main problems may be raised. The first concerns the means, the procedures, which contribute to the literary structure of the historical work. The second concerns the end, the finality, of these operations. It's with the second problem that all difficulties linked to the notion of representation come to the forefront. Concerning the means, the strategies, the operation, the procedures, the first thing to say is that the literary representation cannot be reduced to a mere verbal garment added or superimposed to a discourse, the coherence of which would be completed before this stage; the verbal strategies that we will describe bring with themselves an intelligibility of their own which will play its role in the whole process of giving an account, a faithful account of the past. The specific resources of the representation stage is numerous and complex. We have first of all the narrative form of the historical discourse. In *Time and Narrative*⁷ I took the narrative as the basic structure of history writing and supported the claim of the so-called narrativist interpretation of the historical understanding. Today I am more cautious and suggest to reserve the discussion of the role of narrative to the third stage of the historiographical operation. Why? Because, if you hold history-writing as a species of the genre storytelling, then you run the risk of dealing with the narrative as an alternative mode of understanding at the level of explanation. To my mind the pair 'explanation – understanding' or 'comprehension' has to be dealt with as a distinct topic within the

framework of the relation between the question *why?* and the answer *because*.

Telling is not a substitute for explanation. Nevertheless, the narrative form brings with itself all the resources of intelligibility linked to the act of emplotting, emplotment. But not everything is a plot in history writing; the conjunction between structure, conjuncture, event raise a problem of an explanatory kind, not merely of a narrative kind. You are right to speak of plot and emplotment when the concrete interaction between the protagonist of social action comes to the forefront. It's this dramatic – sometimes tragic-dimension of human action which gives an opportunity for a narrative representation of past events. In this regard a typology of the situation able to generate conflicts, confrontations, but also deals of all kinds, promises, treatises, exchanges provide matter for telling. For the *Annales School* it's the event-layer of the whole historical process which is offered to narrative description, to narrative account, to story telling. To support with some reservation the claim of the narrativist school we can say the structure have to become conjuncture and conjuncture to become event in order that history may be written. Then something happens - events happen. Real people do real things. There is something to tell. But telling is not the only device pertaining to the literary phase. The rhetorical side of narrative should be taken apart from the process of narrating. By rhetoric devices I mean two different things. We owe to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* an useful distinction between the different uses of public discourse: deliberation, judication, and demonstration. They correspond to three paradigmatic situations: the public assembly, the tribunal, and the audiences summoned by such situations as games, burials, victories, defeat; then particular discourses assume the form of *laudatio* or *deploratio*, praise or blame or mourning, as funeral discourse. It's a question whether historical discourse may get rid from praise, blame, deploration, mourning. Classical historians such as Thucydides praising Pericles, seventeenth century historians praising the King were allowed too to blame tyrannical figures. And today it's impossible to write a history of the holocaust without assuming the stance of blaming, condemning the perpetrators and mourning the victims. Has praise been disappearing from historical discourse? Praise of greatness according to the diversity of the forms of greatness in democratic societies. What is at stake is the very structure of a discourse aiming at interesting, convincing, and persuading the readers; there is a pact between the historian as writer and the public as a reading public; in this respect, rhetoric is the whole of devices aiming at persuading the reader that the writer is right. But rhetoric cannot be reduced to strategy of conviction; it's also a strategy of

persuasion; here come the so-called figures of discourse; the figurative dimension of language Vico analysed and even promoted: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, but also irony; such figurative devices get mixed with the procedures of narration and with the structures of argumentation, contributing in this way to the logic of probability which prevails in the discourse of Humanities. We should not forget that probability and persuasion constitute the objective and subjective sides of rhetorics. Convincing and persuading constitute the correlative replica from the part of the receiver, of the reader of the historical work. A third device has to be added to the two preceding ones: the narrative and the rhetorical. This last one is the most problematic; it concerns the strategy of depiction added to that of conviction and of persuasion; the depiction brings history close to fiction. The depiction of situations, of course of action, of characters, of dramatic events, with the stress laid on accidents, breaks, leaps, discontinuities, brings historical works close to epic, tragedy, and for us modern, to the novel. It's a fact that 19th century's historical works were contemporary to the production of the most impressive novels from Balzac to Tolstoj and Dostojevski. The danger then is that of complete fictionalisation of historical discourse. This danger could be anticipated, to the extent that history as the heir of memory is also the heir of the main aporias of memory, the aporia of the *eikon*, of the image as the presence, the presentation, the representation of an absent thing which was present when it occurred. The link between presence and absence was already the enigma of the mnemonic image. How an absent thing can be re-presented in an actual image, which claim to be the *image of*. This aporia of memory was still aggravated by the fact that an image of the past is not only found but searched for, and in a sense forged, elaborated, construed, established, such was the problem of recollection – as faithful. These two aporias of memory return at the level of history writing in the following way. The question is whether history provides a more faithful image of past events than memory. Of course its scope is broader, images of the past proposed by history are not private images but public images, supported by documentary evidence and the coherence of explanatory devices; history in that sense looks as a remedy to the weaknesses and diseases of memory. We may speak of history as of learned memory, a critical memory. But that positive assessment should not prevent us from being watchful as concerns the specific deviations generated by the process of history writing. The paradox is that the narrative, the rhetorical, and above all the fictional strategies proper to this stage of historiography tend to overshadow the intentionality of historical knowledge, namely the claim to tell the truth about the past. The concrete analysis devoted to the