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# Hermeneutics and Time

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## Introduction

In the rise of German Romanticism in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the aspiration to read the works of Greek and Roman writers and philosophers deeply and of understanding their words exactly brought about the flourishing of classical philology.<sup>1</sup> The Schlegel brothers, Friedrich Ast and Friedrich Schleiermacher<sup>2</sup> were the leaders of this undertaking. The hermeneutical practices carried out by figures such as Erasmus or Martin Luther in the previous centuries had concentrated on efforts to make translation of *Vulgate* texts of *New* and *Old Testaments* more sophisticated and accurate.<sup>3</sup> The Bible is, of course, a canon for Christian believers and belongs to the sphere of sacralization that embodies an extreme form of the Gadamer's notion of the history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).<sup>4</sup> Since such believers have made the texts of which it is comprised the identity and foundation of the Christian faith, the latter exist under the burden of multiple interpretations of words and phrases and the constant effort to eliminate errors in the understanding of texts.<sup>5</sup> From the generation of humanists the study of classical texts has been oriented toward producing texts that are "more faithful" to their original versions and understanding the mentalities and

- 1 For instance, see J. G. HERDER / J. W. GOETHE, *Le tombeau de Winkelmann*, trad. De M. Charrière, Éditions J. Chambon, 1993; A. MOMIGLIANO, *Deutsch Romantik und italienische Altertumswissenschaft*, in id. *Ausgewählte Schriften, Bd., 3, Die moderne Geschichtsschreibung der Alten Welt*, J. B. Metzler, 2000, pp. 10–22.
- 2 D. THOUARD, *Les trois possibilités de l'herméneutique après Kant (Schlegel, Ast, Schleiermacher)*. Pour une logique des positions herméneutiques, in J. M. Salanskiet et al, *Herméneutique: texts, sciences*, PUF, 1997, pp. 33–55.
- 3 A full account on the studies of biblical texts before the eighteenth century, see P. GIBERT, *L'invention critique de la Bible, XVe–XVIIIe siècle*, Gallimard, 2010.
- 4 See H.-G. GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, trans., by J. Weinsheimer / D. G. Marshall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Continuum, 1989, p. 298 et sq.
- 5 P. POKORNÝ, *Hermeneutics as a Theory of Understanding*, trans., from Czech by A. Bryson-Gustová, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011, pp. 104–108.

ideas of writers who composed the latter. It can be said that the former aspect was a task, advanced by philological approaches that has grammar and pragmatics as their instruments, while the latter was reserved for as a proper task for hermeneutics.

It was Wilhelm Dilthey who realized a great turn in hermeneutics, which has been largely focused on language phenomena. He sought to establish the logic of human sciences and to lay their epistemological and methodological foundations under the influence of Immanuel Kant whose project was to give philosophy the methodology of exact science by refuting the traditional metaphysics. Having struggled, on the one hand, against positivistic mode of thought represented by August Comte or John Stuart Mill, and on the other hand, against idealism of Friedrich Hegel, Dilthey devoted himself to the construction of a foundation for the human sciences. In this undertaking, he received valuable suggestions from the historian Johann Gustav Droysen who had distinguished the concept of explanation (*Erklären*) from that of understanding (*Verstehen*), the former belonging to the logic of natural sciences, and the latter to that of the logic of human sciences. Dilthey believed that he would offer a hermeneutical foundation as the basis of comprehension.<sup>6</sup> According to Dilthey, actual experiences, expressions and understandings compose the trinity that constitutes the hermeneutics of human sciences. The “essential function of hermeneutics consists in the theoretical establishment of the general validity of interpretation, which lays the foundation for the truthworthiness of history, against the arbitrariness of Romanticism as well as the constant encroachment of skeptical subjectivism in history”.<sup>7</sup>

Once given an “existentialistic turn” by Martin Heidegger (Grondin), Dilthey’s methodological hermeneutics for the human sciences became a real philosophy. At the same time, the aim, task and status of this interpretative approach changed for the object of hermeneutics was no longer limited to texts but extended to human beings. Simultaneously, its methodological orientation shifted to phenomenological deconstruction and its focus from reflective interpretation to philosophical practice.<sup>8</sup> As presented in his unfinished masterpiece *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s moment of time comes into play as essential element for his ontology. Ten years younger than Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer published his *opus magnum* in two volumes called *Truth and Method*, in his sixties. As indicated in its title, this masterwork concentrates on hermeneutics, which Gadamer rather shifted toward its Diltheyan origins, retaining the basic character Heidegger’s existentialistic hermeneutics and an affinity with the

6 About contributions for the Hermeneutics realized by Dilthey, see J. GRONDIN, *L’herméneutique*, “Que Sais-Je ?”, PUF, 2006, pp. 22–27.

7 *Ibid.* p. 25.

8 *Ibid.* pp. 28–29.

practice of textual interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

This paper discusses the hermeneutical problems inherent in historical texts. It is not necessary to say that history is a discipline that looks into change in time, so that historical sources contain a time-moment. To assist my reader, I trace in a summary fashion the context that permits one to comprehend the time-factor in hermeneutics; this approach responds to the time elements dwelling in texts and functions as a resonance device for the hermeneutical method.

## I. Augustinian tradition of time-consciousness and its deployment

Among the numerous discourses of Western thinkers on the question of the modes of time that of the fifth century Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa, surpasses others in the excellence of its conceptualization. In his *Confession* Augustine writes,

“What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know. Yet I say with confidence that I know that if nothing passed away, there would be no past time; if nothing were still coming, there would be no future time; and if there were nothing at all, there would be no present time. But, then how is it that there are the two times, past and future, when even the past is now no longer and the future is now not yet? But if the present were always present, and did not pass into past time, it obviously would not be time but eternity. If, then, time present—if it be time—comes into existence only because it passes into time past, how can we say that even this is, since the cause of its being is that it will cease to be? Thus, can we not truly say that time is only as it tends toward nonbeing?<sup>10</sup>”

If the past has passed away and the future does not yet exist, then how can we

9 About Gadamer's hermeneutics, see H.-G. GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode, Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, J. C. B. Mohr, 1990, 2 Bde; *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed., by R. J. Dostal, Cambridge University Press, 2002. Fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Wahrheit und Methode* has been an opportunity to make an anthology about Gadamer's Hermeneutics. See *Consequences of Hermeneutics. Fifty Years After Gadamer's Truth and Method*, edit., by J. Malpas / S. Zabala, Northwestern University Press, 2010. For an biographical account of Gadamer, see J. GRONDIN, *Hans-Georg Gadamer. A Biography*, trans., by J. Weinsheimer, Yale University Press, 2003.

10 “Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio: fidenter tamen dico scire me, quod si nihil praeteriret, non esset praeteritum tempus, et si nihil adveniret, non esset futurum tempus; et si nihil esset, non esset presens tempus. Duo ergo illa tempora, praeteritum et futurum quomodo sunt, quando et praeteritum jam non est, et futurum nondum est? Praesens autem si semper esset, praesens, nec in praeteritum transiret; non iam esset tempus, sed aeternitas. Si ergo praesens, ut tempus sit, ideo fit quia in praeteritum transit; quomodo et hoc esse dicimus, cui causa, ut sit illa est, quia non erit; ut scilicet non vere dicamus tempus esse, nisi quia tendit nonesse?” Augustini Confessio, libri 11, cap. 14. *Patrologiae Latinae*, t. XXXII, Paris, 1877, col. 816. I adopted the English translation made by A. C. Outler in the collection “The Library of Christian Classics” vol. VII, The Westminster Press, 1955, pp. 254–255.

perceive them? Augustine maintains that each of three modes of time has its proper “present”. Through those presents, one can recognize every mode of time. Precisely, we are able to recognize the past through memory, which is the “present” facet of the past. As for the present, we know it by direct intuition. Regarding to the future, it is expectation, that represents its “present” facet. Furthermore, Augustine explains the way in which each mode of time submits to the dynamism of a mutual proportional relation employing a metaphor of the progression of singing of a hymn:

“I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my attention encompasses the whole, but once I have begun, as much of it as becomes past while I speak is still stretched out in my memory. The span of my action is divided between my memory, which contains what I have repeated, and my expectation, which contains what I am about to repeat. Yet my attention is continually present with me, and through it what was future is carried over so that it becomes past. The more this is done and repeated, the more the memory is enlarged—and expectation is shortened—until the whole expectation is exhausted. Then the whole action is ended and passed into memory”.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, with the progression of the hymn, what belongs to the performance’s future transfers to its past; in this way, the entire hymn being chanted vanishes into memory.

It is said that Edmund Husserl who, with his *Logical Investigations* raised high the banner of Phenomenology at the wake of the twentieth century, had a sort of allergy to hermeneutics (Grondin). In particular, he avoided historicism and had no interest in the hermeneutics of a phenomenon, but in the phenomenon itself.<sup>12</sup> For all that, Husserl’s *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* made an inquiry into time as an object of intention. At the beginning of his introductory remarks, he puts;

“The analysis of time-consciousness is an age-old crux of descriptive psychology and theory of knowledge. The first thinker to be deeply sensitive to the immense difficulties to be found here was Augustine, who labored almost to despair over this problem. Chapters 13–18 of Book XI of the *Confessions* must even today be thoroughly studied by everyone concerned with the problem of time. For no one in this knowledge-proud modern generation has made more masterful or significant progress in these matters than this great thinker who struggled so earnestly with the problem”.<sup>13</sup>

11 “Dicturus sum canticum quod novi: antequam incipiam, in totum expectatio mea tenditur; cum autem coepero, quantum ex illa in praeteritum decerpsero, tenditur in memoria mea: atque distenditur vita huius actionis meae in memoriam, propter quod dixi; et in expectationem, propter quod dicturus sum: praesens tamen adest attentio mea, per quam trajicitur quod erat futurum ut fiat praeteritum. Quod quanto magis agitur et agitur, tanto breviata expectatione prolongatur memoria, donec tota expectatione consumatur, cum tota illa actione finita tranerit in memoriam”, Augustini Confessio, libri 11, cap. 28, *ibid.*, col. 824. Outler, *op. cit.* p. 267.

12 J. GRONDIN, La contribution silencieuse de Husserl à l’herméneutique, *id. Le tournant herméneutique de la phénoménologie*, PUF, 2003, pp. 19–37.

13 E. HUSSERL, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, ed. M. Heidegger, transl. J. S. Churchill, M. Nijhoff, The Hague, 1964, p. 21.

A lively present is fundamental to the Husserlian philosophy of intentional experience, and that present—a moment—does not result in a convergent point, but the present contains a longitudinal intention. Husserl argues that by the grace of this intentional moment, the “now”, remains. At the same time, being is thought of as a past-having that retains what has just passed away as a proto-impression of itself and the future as a future-fore-having of what is arriving.<sup>14</sup> Husserl thus executes a logical operation similar to that of Saint Augustine, when the latter made perceptible the three modes of the time by noting the “present” facets of each mode, by extending to an immediate past and also to an imminent future the “lively present” that was ultimate resource of all *noesis*.

Thus, the present is not as an instant like as a geometrical point or spot, but rather a moment with a range, which is underpinned by *noesis*; for that reason, we are able to seize an event as being present that carries its beginning and its end. According to Kei-ichi Noe;

“each event could be identified so far as individual existence; in this sense they are discontinued entities. On the other hand, since events are tied by causal and intentional relations, they compose a continued entity. ... A chain of events consists in a continuity of discontinuities that one can describe as an integration of the discontinuity and continuity<sup>15</sup> Thus, the appearance of a new event can not remove the former event, but the new ones are piled up on the former events”.<sup>16</sup>

Noe thus speaks of the multi-time layering of historical consciousness. I prefer the term multi-layered-lamination of time-consciousness. Either way, time accumulates in layers, instead of passing away. Using a metaphor of piling of transparent plate glasses, Noe skillfully explains this concept;

“We are looking into those transparent plate glasses from above. We see most clearly a pattern that is inscribed on the top plate glass, which corresponds to an event belonging to the perceptible present. The range of presentness should be identical with the duration during which one is looking into the plate glass. It might be impossible, though, to look into and to distinguish directly that pattern that is placed on the plate glass at the bottom but through the depth of numerous plate glasses, which suggest the distance of time. That plate glass means an event recalled”.<sup>17</sup>

By the way, if I continue to liken a number of successive events to the piling of glass plates, each glass plate is an entity that should be independent of other ones, which are piled below it. This is what Noe means by “the continuity of discontinuities” and

14 See F. DOSSE, *L'histoire*, Armand Colin, 2e éd. p. 103.

15 F. DOSSE, Paul Ricoeur, Michel de Certeau et l'histoire. Entre le dire et le faire, in id. *L'histoire entre mémoire et épistémologie. Autour de Paul Ricoeur*, direct. par B. Müller, Éditions Payot Lausanne, 2000, p. 156.

16 K. NOE, *Monogatari-no-Tetsugaku (La philosophie du récit)*, Éditions Iwanami, 2005, p. 273.

17 *Ibid.* pp. 273–274.

I would say in addition that it implies the discontinuity of time, which is measured by events. It was Walter Benjamin who emphasized the discontinuous aspect of the time. He suggests that “time in history can be opened infinitely to all the directions, and each instant can be never filled”.<sup>18</sup>

The discontinuous image of time in history invalidates an explanation of events through cause-and-effect relationships and also neutralizes the idea of historical inevitability.

That idea of the discontinuity of time received an enthusiastic support from French historians and in particular to specialists in contemporary history, thanks to a contribution by Reinhart Koselleck, which I will discuss below. I would simply mention here that the fundamental nature of the discontinuity of time must be deduced from a discussion of the scale of historical analysis. In the *Game of Scale*, Jacques Revel asserts that factual relations and the levels of information vary depending on the scale of one’s observations; they differ on a large scale from a micro scale. These changes of scale allow what has not been recognized to appear, and, on the contrary, what has been recognized to be concealed.<sup>19</sup> They provoked inevitably a rupture between events. Although we cannot identify clearly this rupture with discontinuity of the time in history, it must be said that the discontinuities that accompany observation have a nature parallel to that of time.

The most famous inquiries into the problem of time are, without doubt, those of the French phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur, who published his three volumes *Time and Narrative* between 1983 and 1985.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Ricoeur does not often use the word “text”, preferring “narrative”.<sup>21</sup> He assumes three different concepts of the term “configuration”, each corresponding to a stage in the genesis of a text; in this respect, they are completely different from those that we propose as a working hypothesis of genetic configuration. Ricoeurian configurations consist of a *préfiguration*, a configuration at the stage of gestation of narrative; a true configuration that corresponds to the stage of completion of narrative, and finally a *réfiguration*, the disposition of elements by which a reader understands a narrative. The importance of Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative* is not so clear on the question of time. In his conclusive long discourse, Ricoeur explains his working hypothesis: “temporality can not be spoken of in the direct discourse of phenomenology, but rather requires the mediation of the indirect discourse of narration”.<sup>22</sup>

At the beginning of the first part of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur indicates Augustine’s aporetic question about time and his response of the triple present and the “plot (*muthos*)” theory that he deduced from Aristotle’s reflection of narrative and the tragedy. It is not easy, to be honest, to follow the argument of Ricoeur, because of

18 W. BENJAMIN, *Origine du drame baroque allemand*, tra., en français par S. Müller, Flammarion, 2000, p. 255–256.

19 See *Jeux d’échelle. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*, edit. J. Revel, Le Seuil- Gallimard, 1996.

20 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols. transl., by K. McLaughlin / D. Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988.

21 D. FREY, *L’interprétation et la lecture chez Ricoeur et Gadamer*, PUF, 2008, p. 196.

22 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, transl. by K. Blamey / D. Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 241.

the seeming deficiency of temporality in the “*muthos*” discussion of Aristotle. I do not see clearly the reason why the latter could complement Augustine’s theory of time. I would recall here that Daniel Frey in his doctoral thesis *L’interprétation et la lecture chez Ricoeur et Gadamer*, remarks on the inappropriateness of combining the theory of temporality and that of “*muthos*”, although he appreciates the acuity of Ricoeur’s observation. In an article Ricoeur discloses why he cited Aristotle. He writes that he wished to “account for time by way of narrative” and to reveal its ontological meaning.

## II. Historicity of event

The event is a basic concept for the hermeneutics of texts in history. In French the concept “*event*” is expressed in “*événement*”. When Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch created “*Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*” in 1929, they believed that the concept of “event” had been applied exclusively to superficial political or diplomatic matters; therefore, this type of “*history in events*” or “*histoire événementielle*” should be abolished.<sup>23</sup> Almost of all of the historians influenced by them shared the view that event was nothing but a bubble on the sea.<sup>24</sup> At the peak of the structural boom in sixties and the seventies of the twentieth century, French historiography had made a great turn looking with new insight into historical events, seeking to renovate the old “*history in events*” into a form of history influenced by social and structural histories. I would cite a few titles of those remarkable books that have been written with this spirit: Georges Duby’s *Le dimanche de Bouvines* or Bernard Guenée’s *Un meurtre, une société. L’assassinat d’un duc d’Orléans, 23 novembre 1407*.<sup>25</sup> In the latter, the author claims, reversing the metaphor of bubble on the sea, “if a fisherman does not pay attention to a bubble on the surface of sea, does he arrive to run some risk, doesn’t he?”<sup>26</sup>

We would also remember that Paul Veyne in *Comment on écrit l’histoire* has argued for the essential narrativity of historical accounts.<sup>27</sup> Modern or contemporary history is more appropriate to the execution of a thick account of an event because of the huge documentation available for inquiries. Contemporary history, or what the French call “*present history*”, has the virtue of specifically asking the epistemological question “*what is event*”, by working in great detail. It is this field where one could profitably inquire into an event from the perspective of the hermeneutics of the text. It was

23 G. BOURDÉ / H. MARTIN, *Les écoles historiques*, Éditions du Seuil, 1997, pp. 181–243; C. DELACROIX / F. DOSSE / P. GARCIA, *Les courants historiques en France, 19e–20e siècle*, Armand Colin, 1999, pp. 53–149. Also cf. S. SATO, Jyukyu-seiki France no rekishigaku to rekishikyōiku (History and education of History in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), *The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Study* (Niigata University), vol. 4 (2010), pp. 3–12.

24 Wording is Paul Valéry’s.

25 G. DUBY, *Le dimanche de Bouvines*, Gallimard, 1973.

26 B. GUENÉE, *Un meurtre, une société. L’assassinat du duc d’Orléans, 23 novembre 1407*, Gallimard, 1992, p. 16.

27 P. VEYNE, *Comment on écrit l’histoire. Essai d’épistémologie historique*, Édition de Seuil, 1971.

German historian Reinhart Koselleck who got to the heart of this problem, and so doing, influenced French historians.<sup>28</sup>

He was made famous by a big publication project, *Geschichtlich Grundbegriffe* (1972–1997) in eight volumes, edited with Otto Brunner and his *mentor* Werner Conze.<sup>29</sup> In it, they classify more than a hundred concepts such as “feudalism”, “noble”, “laborer”, “peasant” and so on to illustrate the vicissitudes of meaning over time. Koselleck demonstrates the importance of altered meaning of the same concepts.

In his article *Theory of History and Hermeneutics*, he examines the question of what kind of relationship hermeneutics establishes with time. “Without the element of time, all understandings do not know in what way they should be expressed. An understanding of the text or what is understood relates to its meaning—as an existential enterprise executed by human beings—; all of the acts of understanding are essentially tied to time”.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the interest that he took in hermeneutics was most essential. When Koselleck matriculated in later forties and early fifties of the twentieth century at Heidelberg University, after demobilizing from the military service, an impressive array of famous philosophers such as H.-G. Gadamer and Karl Levith had at Heidelberg seminars to which another great masters like as Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt often attended. Koselleck, placing himself on the front line of existential hermeneutics, became acquainted with them to tie a warm friendship.<sup>31</sup> As for semantic inquiry in the events of history, Koselleck’s *Vergangene zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (1979)<sup>32</sup> has attracted the most discussion. Among the articles contained in it, his *Space of experience and horizon of expectation. Two historical categories*<sup>33</sup> produced a massive response among intellectuals in Europe and throughout the world.

In this essay, he stresses the methodological importance for historians of distinguishing between concept and category in the praxis of textual interpretation. For instance, “war”, “peace”, “force of production”, “mode of production”, “antique slavery”, and “Reformation” belong to concept and it would not be difficult to find corresponding terms in historical texts. However, Koselleck’s *space of experience* or *horizon of expectation* belongs to the cognitive category that is placed above the concept. One cannot directly deduce these meta-categories from the terms that find in texts. For instance, the concept “war”, can be refined by way of defining more precisely what should be excluded as being part of the counter-concept “peace.” Thus, we are able to determine more exactly a semantic scope. We can do the same for the concept “labor”, by comparing it to the counter-concept “leisure”. On the contrary, a meta-historical and cognitive category, —*space of experience, horizon of expectation*—, does not

28 Cf. Introduction de R. KOSELLECK, *L'expérience de l'histoire*, Le Seuil-Gallimard, 1997.

29 *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 8 Bde, ed., by O. Brunner / W. Conze / R. Koselleck, Verlag Klett-Cotta, 1972–1997.

30 Cf. Op. cit. R. KOSELLECK, *L'expérience de l'histoire*, pp. 237–261.

31 R. KOSELLECK, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. by K. Tribe, Columbia University Press, 2004, p. xi.

32 See note 31.

33 KOSELLECK, *Futures Past*, pp. 255–275.

permit such a procedure. Koselleck derived his epistemological position from the study of the history of concepts. Inquiring into the German term “*Geschichte* (=History)”, he recognized that its eighteenth century use referred to something “taking place”. He noticed a phrase used by the German poet Novalis *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: “... observe the covert inter-linking of the before and after, and learn how to compose history from hope and memory.”<sup>34</sup> This conception of “*Geschichte*” thus essentially lacks in meaning a consideration of the “past” that the word would be soaked semantically with what we sense now. Instead it implies a covert inter-linking of what is taking place as something that is passing away, to the future.<sup>35</sup> It is what Koselleck wished to stress that one could think of a relationship to the past or the future, only after one has learned to construct a history from the modalities of memory and hope. It is apparent that this transcendental definition of history arises from the Christian background. We immediately recall Saint Augustine’s triple “present” theory, in which the present aspect of the past is perceived in memory and the present aspect of the future in expectation. Koselleck was aware of this conception, and he explained that he expressed memory through the concept of *space of experience*, since the full connotation of “experience” encompasses more than simple “memory”. As regards the future, while the expectation has a stronger sense than hope, he preferred the term *horizon of expectation*.<sup>36</sup> *Space of experience* and *horizon of expectation* are overlapping meta-historical categories that form an anthropological condition, without which history would be neither possible nor imaginable. They are also an indication of the temporality of history. Note that these meta-historical categories have a heuristic character, which functions as an instrument for analysis in the sense that in a given age, the modalities of *experience* and *expectation* may change from one to another during the course of history.

Efficiently employing the twin categories of *space of experience* and *horizon of expectation* for analysis and to reveal their anthropological value, Koselleck offered some important reflections on events or the happenings. In his article “*Theory of History and Hermeneutics*”, he makes the distinction between the task of philosophers and that of historians, arguing that “fundamentally the historian makes use of the text from which he could cut out a historical testimony, but the real world always overflows the testimony (the reality always exceeds all quantities of testimony). The historian subjectivizes facts that exceed all interpretations. And those facts, even if they could be reconstructed only through languages, are essentially extra-textual. They matter almost as irony”.<sup>37</sup> How should we give meaning to an event that consists of those facts? Such an undertaking involves the semantics of history. The fact must be neutral to the meaning. Recently, François Dosse, in his epistemological study of events, indicated that an event is a Sphinx that makes us anxious.<sup>38</sup>

34 NOVALIS, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Philipp Reclam Jun, Stuttgart, 1965, pp. 84–85.

35 KOSELLECK, *Futures Past*, p. 258.

36 *Ibid.*

37 KOSELLECK, *L'expérience de l'histoire*, pp. 258–259.

38 F. DOSSE, *Renaissance de l'événement. Un défi pour l'historien: entre Sphinx et Phénix*, PUF, 2010, p. 92.

The classically conceived logic of history is causal. When, however, one deepens the understanding of temporality from the perspective of phenomenology, one arrives at a horizon that escapes the traditional epistemology of history. In his reflections on “the hermeneutics of events”, Claude Romano places events into two categories.<sup>39</sup> The first category embraces events that are oriented to nobody, such as falling rain or shining sun, while the second involves events that arise personally in relation to someone. The former belong always to facts and the latter solely to events. Nevertheless, a paradox exists here. One cannot bestow perfect objectivity on an event, since the observer of an event cannot be excluded from the event itself, his understanding of which form an integral part. The event must be what happens to someone in particular. The meaning of an event overcomes in all respects its facticity and varies according to the semantic world of the observer. Romano argues that, contrary to the classical manner of explaining an event from its context, an event by its ability to cut off causal relationships, discloses the context peculiar to itself. Phenomenologically speaking, no one, after all, can entirely recognize an event from beginning to end. Romano borrows the wording of Boris Pasternak: “No one makes history. Nobody saw the unfolding of history more than they saw the growing of grass”. This cognitive idea seems similar to Jacques Derrida’s original concept of “*différance*”. The Czech specialist on hermeneutics, Petr Pokorny may share this view.<sup>40</sup>

If it is impossible to explain the nature of an event by a causal relationship, that is, by something occurring in an earlier fraction of time, how can we give semantic value to an event? Since we cannot derive a proper semantic value for the event by completely reducing the facts that compose it, we must understand that the nature of an event is epigenetic (*ex post*). In this regard, the French historian, Michel de Certeau writes, “An event will not be something that one cannot see or hear upon its arising. It belongs to something that is becoming.”<sup>41</sup> He looks into the traces of an event as being made up of elements that constitute the semantics of the event.<sup>42</sup> This approach may be valid in understanding of the “May 1968” or even that of “the 11<sup>th</sup> of September”. It is certain that the latter emerged from the background of the domination of Arab countries by the Western World, but this reality does not necessarily lead to abominable and savage acts of terrorism. A great distance separates domination in general and this act of terrorism, which may be thought of as a counteraction to such dominance. In fact, investigation has made it clear that the terrorists had discussed the plan, which was designed to kill an enormous number of people, beforehand. It was possible, then, for them to abandon the attack plan at the end of discussion. In this sense, the immoral act was not inevitable but optional. The semantics of “the 11th September”, must, according to Michel de Certeau, “be

39 C. ROMANO, *L'événement et le monde*, PUF, 2e éd. 1999, p. 70.

40 See POKRNY, *Hermeneutics*, op. cit. p. 182.

41 M. de CERTEAU, *Prendre la parole*, in id. *La prise de parole et autres écrits politiques*, Point / Seuil, 1994, p. 51.

42 The concept of traces is seen as important factor for the reference to historical practice. Cf. P. BOUCHERON, *Faire profession d'historien*, Publication de Sprbonne, 2010.

constructed through an infinite number of traces—the countermoves of the US government, the action of people who have lost those most dear to them, the debate about the future use of the site of the Twin Towers, the victims’ funeral ceremonies, and so on—that were laid down after the tragic event.” As François Dosse writes at the end of *Renaissance de l’événement*, “the nature of event lies in the non-linear becomings that are its epigenetic echoes.”<sup>43</sup> Here it is appropriate to quote the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann who argues as follows:

“In an event, not only the event occurs. According to the relevance of the event, the past and future are created at the same time. If a fire occurs during a vacation, the incident changes the meaning of the vacation. It becomes evident that the insurance coverage will not be sufficient and that it is necessary to find a temporary residence. The instantaneous character of the event changes the past and future through the event itself. For when it happens, it is necessary to have a sustainable present that arises from the event. If someone would foresees or remembers an event, that person uses the event in order to change the definition of its meaning. The time of an event arises from this function, not from the calendar or the clock. Thus, an event, each and every event has a peculiar future of its own. In other words, viewing only an event, a clear difference between the future and the past is discerned, since a continuing stock of the meaning gets blended together in its future and the past, through recording of what is the future for what has passed away”.<sup>44</sup>

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Michel de Certeau studied as a Jesuit the religious history at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, before he was nominated as a director of study at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*. At the *École Pratique* his studies were carried out under the direction of the religious historian Jean Orchival who compared scientific practice to the religious experience using a three-stage model. In the first stage, “ascetic purgation”, one reads a text for a long time, employing all of one’s grammatical and philological knowledge. In the second or “shining pass” stage, one discloses the “otherness” of the text by way of the text itself. In the last experience, the “otherness” of the text is superimposed on the subjectivity.<sup>45</sup> When someone who is well acquainted with the hermeneutics, reads the disclosure of the process of historical practice given by Orchival, he discovers that it is replete with religious implications. In this sense, it is easy to recall the key term of Gadamerian hermeneutics the “fusion of horizon”, that emerges from the “hermeneutic circle” and understandings,<sup>46</sup> which somehow strengthens the validity of these hermeneutics.

43 DOSSE, *Renaissance*, op. cit. p. 321.

44 N. Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik, 1*, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980, p. 242.

45 See DOSSE, *Michel de Certeau*, p. 94.

46 Cf. S. SATO, Tetsugakuteki-kaishakugaku kara Tekusuto Kaishakugaku he (From philosophical hermeneutics to textual hermeneutics), in *Hersete: Journal of Hermeneutic Study and Education of Textual Configuration*, vol. 4–2, p. 99–100.