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Primary experiences and discontinuities of remembrance: notes from a text by Reinhart Koselleck

Abstract

This article takes as its starting point a text by Reinhart Koselleck on the theme of memory, which analyzes supposed discontinuities between primary experiences and secondary forms of remembrance. Although this is a specific text and we do not intend to see its statements as foundations of a supposed author's thought as a whole, we point out some potential relations with theses found in his other works. Then, some of his formulations are brought to a rather strictly epistemological level and compared to theses by authors such as Aleida Assmann, Joël Candau, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Ricoeur. The goal, in this case, is just mapping some problems regarded as relevant when dealing with the relations between history, memory, truth, and justice, without any ambition of solving them.

Keywords: Koselleck, Reinhart; Memory; Experience.

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Experiências primárias e descontinuidades da recordação: notas a partir de um texto de Reinhart Koselleck

Resumo

Este artigo tem como ponto de partida um texto de Reinhart Koselleck sobre o tema da memória, que analisa supostas descontinuidades entre as experiências primárias e as formas secundárias de recordação. Embora seja um texto específico e não se pretenda compreender as afirmações nele contidas como fundamentos de um suposto pensamento do autor em sua unidade, são indicadas algumas possíveis relações com teses presentes em outras de suas obras. Em seguida, algumas de suas formulações são trazidas para o plano mais estritamente epistemológico e confrontadas com teses de autores como Aleida Assmann, Joël Candau, Hannah Arendt e Paul Ricoeur. O objetivo, nesse caso, é apenas mapear alguns problemas considerados relevantes quando tratamos das relações entre história, memória, verdade e justiça, sem qualquer pretensão de solucioná-los.

Palavras-chave: Koselleck, Reinhart; Memória; Experiência.

In a recent article on Reinhart Koselleck, Luciana Villas Bôas reproduced an excerpt from an interview the German historian gave in 2005, where he sought to relate the events of World War II and the decision to become a historian. At the time, Koselleck stated that all those who had frustrated expectations of victory should turn the reasons for defeat into methodological premises, just as it has been the case since, at least since, Herodotus. Then, he added: “I might say that I completed my studies through the war experience. My basic attitude was skepticism as a minimum condition for reducing utopian excesses – even the 1968 utopian excesses” (VILLAS BÔAS, 2014, p. 95). Such a statement, if not self-revealing enough, seems to be consistent with theses directly observed in his texts. In his meta-historical essay on the relations between the forms of

experience and the methods of history, published in 1988, we find the following sentence: “on the fact of being a loser lies an inexhaustible potential of knowledge” (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 92).¹ The statement, in the end of the penultimate paragraph, ensured the emphatic closing of a text which, among other things, concluded that the great methodological innovations of history always came from the field of losers, not from the victors.²

Although debates on the theme of memory and experiences in World War II occupy a specific place in Koselleck’s intellectual production, the historian’s interventions at this level have been less discussed than his studies in the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) and his theses about the new experience of time inaugurated in modernity. An effort to analyze this was made by Niklas Olsen, who used texts, interviews, and communications, especially in the 1990s, when Koselleck participated more actively in the public debate on the preparation of monuments to represent the Holocaust. Seeing that as a time in which the German historian had become known as a “classic public intellectual,” expressing his views on subjects of a social nature without restrictive ties in partisan, political, or ideological terms, Olsen stressed that this part of Koselleck’s work was the most difficult to grasp, given the supposed self-referential content of certain discussions and the ambivalent and hesitant nature of many statements (OLSEN, 2012).³

Olsen’s perspective, however, consisted in seeking organicity in Koselleck’s intellectual project by approaching the comprehensiveness of his work, as synthesized in the formula ‘plural history,’ repeated several times. With much more limited objectives, this article starts from a specific text by the German historian, including the risks of overestimating the continuities and intentionalities supposed to have been originated in

¹ “En el hecho de ser un vencido reside un potencial inagotable de conocimiento” (free translation).

² Niklas Olsen emphasized the resemblance to Carl Schmitt’s claim that extraordinary histories were written by the losers, not by the victors. However, the author did not fail to indicate, apart from the recognized importance of Schmitt’s work for the German historian, characteristics that could singularize his convictions, also with regard to the experience of World War II (OLSEN, 2012). Olsen’s book was read in the e-book format, so we avoid mentioning the pages quoted (whose numbers depend on the formatting chosen).

³ Olsen’s text is only one example, given the vast bibliography that has been accumulated on Koselleck’s work, which this article would never want to exhaust. On the subject of memory and the cult of the dead, we may highlight the relevant studies by Faustino Oncina (2011; 2009).

the 1950s. The text chosen to guide the analysis was an article on the discontinuity of recollection written by Koselleck for a series of lectures on National Socialism, organized by the Department of Philosophy of the University of Heidelberg, in 1998 (KOSELLECK, 2011a).⁴ This is an intellectual intervention marked by the intensity of debates on the theme, whose specificities should not be neglected, both due to peculiarities of the subject in the German case and to the risk of overvaluing this type of reflection in relation to rather elaborate and systematic historiography works. On the other hand, besides being possible to find certain statements similar to others observed in analyses regarded as more relevant in Koselleck's theoretical production, the text can serve to address subjects of wide scope concerning the ethical and epistemic dilemmas that characterize historiography.

Therefore, we focus herein on reflections about themes related to foundations of historical truth and the relation between memory, truth, and justice. We compare some of his propositions with those of authors who, although not necessarily related to the intellectual tradition of their formation, are considered as relevant to think through these themes. It is worth emphasizing, in this case, that it is not intended to assign a unity to Koselleck's reflections on the theme or seek the roots of his formulations (from the biographical viewpoint or the academic route), as already done by many other authors. His text, marked by a very specific intellectual and political atmosphere, serves only as a starting point for the theoretical exploration of fundamental problems when we deal with the historian's craft. In this way, the confrontation of some of his statements with the reflections of authors such as Aleida Assmann, Joël Candau, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Ricoeur should not be understood as the search for a correct reading, which solves the problems pointed out, but only as the effort of exploring relevant aspects that seem to condition the very writing of history.

⁴ The text was published in the magazine *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* the following year. The time was delicate, in view of the photographic exhibition *War of extermination. The Wehrmacht crimes in Eastern Europe 1941-1944*, organized by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, which echoed Goldhagen's viewpoint of the responsibility of Wehrmacht men in the Holocaust (ONCINA, 2007; GOLDHAGEN, 1999; FINKELSTEIN, 1999; HUSSON, 1997).

The nontransferable experience: discontinuity of remembrance

In the article of the conference at the University of Heidelberg, Koselleck used events related to his past as a German soldier during World War II to support the thesis that what might characterize the experience was the fact that it was nontransmissible (KOSELLECK, 2011a). As a testimony, the historian reported that he was imprisoned along with more than 30 thousand German soldiers by the Russian army, in 1945, indicating that so far they knew nothing about the concentration camps and the extermination practiced by the Nazi regime. Forced to walk to the Birkenau camp, the captured soldiers contacted the Russians' reports of the gas chambers that had operated there. The Germans, however, were not taken into the camp and they were reluctant to believe those facts, until a unique experience provided Koselleck with certainty of what had happened. Obligated to peel potatoes along with the other prisoners, who were under the watchful eye of a Pole who had been arrested in one of the camps, Koselleck might have resisted orders to go faster by arguing that they would not have the potatoes, which were given to the Russians. Suddenly, the Pole might have taken a chair and threatened to hit Koselleck: "You want me to break your skull, you gassed millions," he might have said (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 40).⁵ Then, the chair was thrown to one corner of the room, in an equally spontaneous gesture, something which might have provided the German historian with certainty of that revelation. Concluding the account, Koselleck argued that the experience he had at that moment was intransmissible.

The background of Koselleck's discussion of this experience was the problem of generational conflict between those who directly experienced World War II and the so-called '1968 generation,' also in view of the vehement accusations against German intellectuals about alleged involvement with National Socialism. For our purposes, on the other hand, what is relevant is that, through the thesis on the non-transmissibility of experience, Koselleck concluded there was a radical discontinuity between primary experiences and forms of remembrance, outlining a theoretical formulation that could tend to overcome the specific constraints of the seminary. This and other ideas advocated in the text did not seem casual and their relations with elements observed in

⁵ "Quieres que te rompa el cráneo, vosotros habéis gaseado a millones" (free translation).

other historical reflections by him should not be neglected. This is the case of his characterization of the “experience structure of the generation that lived around 1945”:

(...) in the structure of the experience of the generation that lived around 1945 segmental modes of experience were assumed, which consisted of fragmented spaces or had cracks in the form of prisms, where the most different experiences clustered or broke, these experiences were undergoing a very weak and precarious relation with the general events of that time, according to the image that we have of them today. It also depends on the unity of generations that have their experiences at the same time, without having to start from a collective experience. Durkheim's thesis seems to me very difficult to demonstrate empirically, since every experience, as a primary experience, is a fractional experience, remains as a segmental experience, nontransferable experience, and all subsequent procedures of condensation are secondary. (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 40-41)⁶

Koselleck's statement about discontinuity in relation to primary experience was supported by other equally relevant statements, which also need to be considered with some hesitation: “it is needed that the space of experience, which is fragmented and pluralistic, casual, and non-transferable, goes beyond primary experiences to aggregate into a verified and institutionalized space of remembrance, which will persist as secondary” (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 41-42).⁷ That is why, as Koselleck argued, the University Department of Contemporary History and numerous institutes of history had been created. On the other hand, it is true that, from his viewpoint, it was not a process specifically related to the events of the Third Reich and World War II: “the transition from primary experience of plural and segmented origin to institutionalized remembrance is a

⁶ “(...) en la estructura de la experiencia de la generación que vivió en torno a 1945 estaban presupuestos modos segmentarios de experiencia, que constituían espacios fragmentados o con roturas en forma de prismas, en los que las más diferentes experiencias se arracimaban o se quebraban, estando estas experiencias en una relación muy débil y precaria con el acontecer general de entonces, según la imagen que hoy tenemos de él. Esto también depende de la unidad de generaciones que tiene sus experiencias al mismo tiempo, sin que yo tenga por qué partir de una experiencia colectiva. La tesis de Durkheim me parece muy difícil de demostrar empíricamente, pues toda experiencia, como experiencia primaria, es experiencia quebrada, sigue siendo experiencia segmentada, experiencia intransferible y todos los posteriores procesos de condensación son secundarios” (free translation).

⁷ “(...) es necesario que el espacio de experiencia, que es fragmentario y pluralista, causal e intransferible, se remonte de las experiencias primarias para agregarse a un espacio de recuerdo constatado e institucionalizado, que seguirá siendo secundario” (free translation).

constant process, which, in each of the present times, establishes an experience on a scientific and ex-post basis” (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 42).⁸

In fact, it becomes key to try understanding Koselleck’s statements about the discontinuity of remembrance in relation to the experience, considering other of his texts, avoiding a simplistic reading of the theses evidenced there. A first aspect to be emphasized, in this case, is that the assumption of the multifaceted and fragmented nature of experiences with a primary nature, as implicit in the previous citation, did not refer only to the individual level, making it possible to notice the relevance that the generational approach showed when considering other theoretical formulations by Koselleck.⁹ In his writings on the monuments of the cult of the dead in battles of modern times, which pointed out a politicization arising from the loss of power of the Christian interpretation, Koselleck also considered the generational selection key to grasp a social and political sensibility that, in addition to rather Immediate events, might have its own tempo of temporal change.¹⁰ Previous to the impositions related to the rules inherent to the language of representations in the monuments, this sensitivity would keep a strong generational mark:

⁸ “El paso de la experiencia primaria de origen plural y segmentario al recuerdo institucionalizado es un proceso constante, que en cada actualidad fija científicamente y ex post una experiencia” (free translation).

⁹ The importance of the generational approach may be seen in other texts by Reinhart Koselleck, also playing a relevant role in the reflections on the various temporalities that introduce the collection *Estratos do tempo* (KOSELLECK, 2014).

¹⁰ In the text, Koselleck mentioned “a social and political sensibility that has its own history and which has had repercussions both productively and theoretically on the language of monuments” [“una sensibilidad social y política que tiene su propia historia y que ha repercutido tanto productiva como teóricamente sobre el lenguaje de los monumentos” (free translation)]. According to the author, “the relation between the political-social imperative of meaning and its configuration through images was produced by means of the language of monument forms, which must arrive at the observer’s sensitivity. Both the form and the sensibility underlie historical change, but they are clearly modified at different temporal rhythms” [“la relación entre el imperativo político-social de sentido y su configuración por medio de imágenes ha sido producida a través del lenguaje de las formas de los monumentos, que debe de llegar a la sensibilidad del observador. Ambas, la forma y la sensibilidad, subyacen al cambio histórico, pero se modifican claramente en variados ritmos temporales” (free translation)] (KOSELLECK, 2011b, p. 98-99).

The political cult of the ancient monuments to the dead is running out as the survivors of a generation die. It is necessary to refer this fact to the natural change of the generations without having to deal with the issue ephemeral modernity. Political experiences and messages are hardly transferable beyond death. The monument that must ensure the transmission of a sensibility that goes beyond death does not seem to be able to carry out this task alone. (KOSELLECK, 2011b, p. 100)¹¹

If the thesis of the hard transmission of a political sensibility to subsequent generations appeared in this text that dates back to 1979, aimed at the period that lasted until the end of World War I, in later works, the theme of the rupture related to World War II was resumed. In a text published in 2002, for instance, Koselleck argued that the affirmative, pedagogical, relation that might exist between the causes of death and his political purposes tended to be replaced by representations indicating that meaning could no longer be assumed or found. In his reading, after events such as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and especially the genocide produced by National Socialism, the messages observed in the monuments would refer mainly to lack of meaning, total despair, and an absurd nature of violent death (KOSELLECK, 2011c, p. 117 ss.).

Although these texts are relevant to the theme concerned, perhaps one of the most significant to grasp the complex relation between primary experiences and generational approach is its meta-historical reflection on the experience forms and historical methods. Published in 1988 and aimed at supposed anthropological constants that could condition the ways of acquiring and reporting human experiences, the text takes a rather systematic composition and it seems to be indicative of the relevance of the problem of generation in the scope of Koselleckian analyzes (KOSELLECK, 2013a). For our purposes, before explaining the central elements of their meta-historical propositions, it is key to understand his reflections on the various forms of acquiring experience and how they relate to the generational approach. According to Koselleck:

¹¹ “El culto político a los antiguos monumentos a los caídos se va agotando a medida que van muriendo los supervivientes de una generación. Hay que remitir este hecho al cambio natural de las generaciones sin tener que tratar la cuestión de lo efímero de la modernidad. Las experiencias y los mensajes políticos son difícilmente trasladables más allá de la muerte. El monumento que debe asegurar la transmisión de una sensibilidad que vaya más allá de la muerte no parece poder llevar a cabo esta tarea solitario” (free translation).

The minimum temporal space of the first acquisition of experience extends to the periods that shape life, modify it, or stabilize it in the itinerary from birth to death, since no experience can be immediately translated. When we think of the circle of people who are affected by such stabilizers of medium-term experiences, it is always the individual men who are affected by such experiences. But it may be assumed that the time frames of experiments are largely specific to a generation. (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 51)¹²

The excerpt above refers to two key ways of acquiring experience according to Koselleck, related to short and medium-term events, and it indicates that the notion of experience did not refer only to that directly experienced by historical subjects at their actual time, but equally for its accumulation within the time span of a lifetime or a generation. Short-term experiences might accurately reflect the surprising nature of certain events as experienced, above all, individually (although surprises may be collective), while the medium-term experiences might put the generational approach concerned:

The experiences are unique, insofar as they are made, and repeatable, as they are accumulated. Consequently, every history has a double aspect, which is constituted by experience and it is derived from this. Both singular and surprising events evoke experiences that give rise to histories, such as the experiences accumulated help structuring the histories in the medium term. There are specific conditions and procedures from a generation where personal histories overlap, but they also refer to broader spaces in time, which constitute a common space of experience. Whatever ‘the spirit of an age’ is, it is found here (...). (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 53)¹³

¹² “El espacio temporal mínimo de la primera adquisición de experiencia se extiende a los períodos que configuran la vida, la modifican o estabilizan en el itinerario que va desde el nacimiento hasta la muerte, pues ninguna experiencia puede traducirse inmediatamente. Cuando pensamos en el círculo de personas que son afectadas por tales estabilizaciones de las experiencias a medio plazo, siempre son los hombres individuales los afectados por dichas experiencias. Pero cabe suponer que los espacios de tiempo de las experiencias son en gran medida específicos de una generación” (free translation).

¹³ “Las experiencias son únicas – en la medida en que son hechas y repetibles – en la medida en que son acumuladas. En consecuencia, toda historia tiene un doble aspecto, que es constituido por la experiencia y que puede ser derivado dela. Tanto los acontecimientos singulares, sorprendentes, evocan experiencias que dan lugar a historias, como las experiencias acumuladas ayudan a estructurar a medio plazo las historias. Hay condiciones y procesos específicos de una generación en los que se solapan las historias personales, pero que también remiten a espacios de tiempo más amplios que configuran un espacio de experiencia común. Sea lo que sea ‘el espíritu de una época’, es aquí donde se encuentra (...)” (free translation).

As we can notice, despite the argument for the inexorability of the uniqueness of experience, Koselleck indicated that a certain relation to temporality would allow us to set generational experiences as well. In spite of the different way of processing events due to age and social status cleavages, “it is also true that political events evoke in everyone something that is minimally common, which goes beyond age differences, so that we can speak of political generational units beyond the biological and social generation” (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 51).¹⁴ There is a need, in fact, to think of an accumulation of experience impossible in the events experienced in their singularity: “unlike the unique surprises that, of course, can affect many, at the same time, the confirmation and strengthening of experiences refer to similar experiences of the contemporary men (If it were not so, they could not only be accumulated)” (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 51-52).¹⁵

These two forms of experiencing events, with their respective short and medium lengths of time, might therefore allow us to formulate specific modes of explanation for their occurrence, either by surprise or by experience accumulated generationally. But beyond these two forms of acquiring and explaining experience, there would be a third, referring to a longer duration, only attainable by historical reflection. Depending on research techniques that escape immediate experience, this form of explanation would correspond precisely to the invention of what Koselleck might see as the historical method: “the impossibility of retrieving what was experienced as unique provides historiography with an immediate foundation” (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 58).¹⁶ Therefore, this is not only what we usually name as historical method, but to a certain extent an explanation for the occurrences of phenomena which, based on the long duration, would allow us to speak of a specific mode of experience: the “historical experience,” seen as a form of acquisition and explanation of experience that keeps its roots in the existential needs of man to accumulate and assign meaning to the events of the world.

¹⁴ “(...) también es cierto que los acontecimientos políticos evocan en todos algo común mínimo por encima de las diferencias de edad, de modo que se puede hablar de unidades generacionales políticas por encima de la generación biológica y social” (free translation).

¹⁵ “A diferencia de las sorpresas únicas que, por supuesto, también pueden afectar a muchos al mismo tiempo, la confirmación y el fortalecimiento de las experiencias remiten a experiencias semejantes de los contemporáneos (de no ser así no podrían apenas acumularse)” (free translation).

¹⁶ “La imposibilidad de recuperar lo experimentado como único funda inmediatamente la historiografía” (free translation).

Inscribed in actual practical life itself, historiography has relations with a determined historical consciousness about events and their temporality, which is not a mark of modern history writing, but which, always conditioning any historical effort of explanation, has been made evident by historians of Antiquity. The great feat by Herodotus and Thucydides, therefore, could have been taking this existential condition of the forms of explanation and their specific temporality as a presupposition for the writing and rewriting of histories, setting, above all in Thucydides, an early rather systematic formulation of what we mean by historical method. Increasingly formalized, this form of explanation could become autonomous in relation to its conditions of departure, which might undoubtedly bring to Koselleck's text a singular intent and functionality: having the anthropological constraints of the historical method, we could, from then on, address it not as 'evidence,' but to consciously discuss the most productive ways of using it.¹⁷

With this kind of philosophical anthropology of the conditions of possibility of 'historical experience' as an account and experience of events, Koselleck sought to achieve a level of meta-historical reflection that, while structuring, did not ignore the role of contingency in history. Although the experiences are accumulated, the temporal conditioning of human life, either at the biological level of the length of existence or within the generational units pointed out, would bring along with it a rupture in relation to the original meaning of experiences, which would only accentuate with the passage of time. As a rational construction of meaning, although it is permeated with the three temporalities already indicated, history would refer principally to the long duration, constituting itself precisely in the rupture mentioned. This is what could also justify the asymmetry characteristic of the meta-historical categories of 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation,' indicating that forgetfulness is a part of the human condition, despite the methodologically based attempts to construct rather lasting explanations

¹⁷ Koselleck went on stating that, "if we investigate the history of methods applied over time to the historical-philological method, they may be interpreted as advances of the anthropological premises warned by Thucydides. (...) The difference established by Thucydides between language and history, which he himself had expressly thematized through his discourses, is not surpassable by any philological method" ["(...) si se rastra la historia de los métodos aplicados en el curso del tiempo hasta el método histórico-filológico, éstos pueden interpretarse como desarrollos de las premisas antropológicas advertidas por Tucídides. (...) La diferencia establecida por Tucídides entre lenguaje e historia, que él mismo había tematizado expresamente mediante sus discursos, no es superable por ningún método filológico"] (free translation) (KOSELLECK, 2013a, p. 73).

(KOSELLECK, 2006c). It remains to be seen whether, in so doing, Koselleck did not rely on an overvaluation of the rational component of historiography as a form of account of experience characterized, above all, by the rational explanation of longer duration.¹⁸ Assuming that a certain generational change for this kind of explanation was possible, would not this distinction between ‘conjunctural subjectivity’ and ‘far-reaching reasons,’ besides bringing difficulties to the so-called ‘present-day history,’ tend to undervalue the open-minded component that characterizes historical imagination?¹⁹ We will return to the theme later and, for the moment, it is worth emphasizing that such a distinction restates the thesis about the discontinuity of remembrance. So, let us come back to the text of the 1998 seminar.

The discontinuity of remembrance in Reinhart Koselleck’s account

Koselleck’s reflections on the temporal structure of experience, as indicated, re-emphasized a discontinuity between ‘conjunctural subjectivity’ and ‘long-range reasons,’ presupposing a certain rupture between the forms of acquiring experience related to individuals and generational units, on the one hand, and those concerning the accumulation of experience from explanatory reconstructions based on elements that go beyond the boundaries of these time frames (individual life and generation). This is, in other words, the discontinuity between ‘primary experiences,’ marked by ‘conjunctural subjectivity,’ and causal reconstitutions with a historical nature, which tend to homogenize representations of the past, which as constituents of a ‘space of experience’ shared on a generational basis would tend to be multiple and fragmented. Although plural, this ‘space of experience’ might contain marks of sensitivity that could allow us to rightly understand the generational approach as crucial, because, as Koselleck pointed out, otherwise we could never accumulate experiences more productively. His meta-

¹⁸ The greater relevance given to recurrent phenomena and long duration as explanatory factors can also be seen in Koselleck’s evaluation of the history of the present time, whose risk seemed to him to overvalue novelties in relation to recurrent phenomena (KOSELLECK, 2013c).

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning an analysis by Elías Palti on the implications of Koselleck’s attempt to retake a “critique of historical reason” by solving it on a Kantian terrain and in opposition to Dilthey (PALTÍ, 2013; 2011). A reading close to that of Palti on the Kantian foundations of Koselleck’s proposal can be found in José L. Villacañas (2003). A more vehement critique can be found in Sandro Chignola and Giuseppe Duso, who oppose the attempt to substantiate a science of history and favor a complete identification between concepts and political philosophy (CHIGNOLA, 2003; 1998; DUSO, 1998).

history, therefore, resumes the thesis on the discontinuity of remembrance.²⁰ Yet, how can we think of Reinhart Koselleck's account on the capture by the Russians regarding more recent studies on memory and narrative?

Therefore, let us return to the problem of transmissibility of experience. We might consider, for instance, certain reflections by Paul Ricoeur, for whom "it is only at the level of the narrative that the work of remembrance is first exercised" (RICOEUR, 2005, p. 37). The theses of the French philosopher would have repercussions in texts by several authors, such as those by Fernando Catroga, who would also see memory as a relational and intersubjective phenomenon. If the scientific components of Halbwachs' sociology make naive a certain propensity for reification of 'collective memory' as a phenomenon foreign to individuals, rather relational models of thinking the conformation of subjectivity would allow not only to control this positivist hybris, but to avoid a dangerous narcissistic tendency of closure in the oneness of the self (CATROGA, 2001, p. 19 ss.).²¹ Without completely dismissing Halbwachs, Catroga would not fail to consider memory as a narrative formulation that, characterized by the values of the present, would have the points of departure and arrival controlled by the evocative self (CATROGA, 2001, p. 21).

The problem, on the other hand, was treated with greater specificity by Aleida Assmann: "when verbalization occurs, we do not remember the events themselves, but our verbalization of them. Linguistic signs play the role of names, through which objects and situations can be recalled again" (ASSMANN, 2011, p. 286). Therefore, this is the difference between transmissibility and communicability of experiences: whereas no experience is shared, not all can be regarded as incommunicable. It was in this way that Joël Candau formulated the notion of meta-memory as a category of his typology about the forms of remembrance, seeing it as the representation that the individual produces about her/his own memory (CANDAU, 2011). This type of perspective seems to be inconsistent with the assumption that experiences that occurred in previous decades could remain as 'primary experiences,' because they undergo the changes arising from the placement in verbal structures of shared signs.

²⁰ Faustino Oncina argued that Koselleck's interest in the iconography of violent death was directly related to his meta-history (ONCINA, 2007, p. 57).

²¹ The difference in perspective seems to be related with Koselleck's greater distance from sociology (cf. VILLACAÑAS, 2003).

In this case, we might wonder if a certain discontinuity would not always occur in relation to the moment of experience itself. It is also possible to put into question whether formulations such as those mentioned above were available in the horizons of the intellectual debate in which Koselleck's account was produced. The intention here, however, is not demonstrating, anachronistically, alleged inaccuracies of the theses of the German historian. It is worth noticing that this is a complex author, who prepared quite sophisticated reflections on the relations between experience and language, which even allowed the establishment of a critical reading of Gadamer's hermeneutics through its differentiation of history theory. By the way, it is relevant to notice that, in one of the most indicative texts of his interpretation of Heidegger and Gadamer's formulations, Koselleck resumed the theme of generational approach as one of the foundations of his meta-historical reflection, arguing precisely for the existence of specific experiences of each generation, which could be non-transferable (KOSELLECK, 1997, p. 248-250).²² Therefore, the problem might reappear at the moment when Koselleck was placed in the unique situation of witness and historian at the same time, thinking through the nature of his recollections and their implications from the theoretical viewpoint.²³

There are dimensions of the problem, on the other hand, that go beyond the theme of linguistic mediation, appearing in another text by Koselleck, in which he resumes the problem of memory of World War II. Without neglecting that the "schemes of linguistic tradition" would impose new contents that "overlap or eliminate the original content of the war experience," Koselleck emphasized that "people added to this all those experiences that individuals gathered during the war without being able to articulate them linguistically and that they keep influencing the ways of thinking and the ways of behaving, without which conscience itself owes or can give reason to this" (KOSELLECK, 2013b, p. 143).²⁴ Addressing the same problem, Candau resumed Maurice

²² It is worth noticing that the text "Theory of history and hermeneutics" consists of a homage to the 85th birthday of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which took place on February 18, 1985. Therefore, this is a production much earlier than the text analyzed herein, dated 1998.

²³ The problem of the relation between the places of historian and witness has been the object of a vast bibliography, above all after the more effective consolidation of the so-called history of the present time. A more specific reflection on this subject would go far beyond the limits of this article, although it could assist in the preparation of other questions about Reinhart Koselleck's text. Concerning the theme in a rather general way, see, for instance, the already classic work by Annette Wieviorka, about what she named as "the era of witness" (WIEVIORKA, 2006).

²⁴ "(...) esquemas de traducción lingüística" / (...) "sobreponen o eliminan el contenido original de la

Bloch's reflections to indicate that "the presence of the past is much more complex, much less apparent, but also much stronger than the existence of explicit narratives could make us believe." The subtlety of the thesis removes it from the relation established by Ricoeur between memory and narrative, as "the part of verbalized memory is not memory as a whole" and what is not manifested directly by linguistic mediation "has social significance, since this is an asset placed in reserve for future social representations" (CANDAU, 2011, p. 34).²⁵

Again, the theme seems to have been addressed sensitively by Aleida Assmann, in her reflections on affection as stabilizer of remembrance (ASSMANN, 2011). It is worth considering, from this perspective, that feeling can also be a support of remembrance, perhaps more fragile precisely due to the difficulty of its transmissibility. In this case, the problem would be not only the medium through which the past comes to the present, but also to consider that the body marks left by past events and actions affect the very structure of individuals' perception, reconfiguring their subjectivity, hence the way the world will be valued from there on. We are on the threshold of dealing with the theme of trauma as a way to stabilize memory, which interferes with the very matrix of the unconscious by determining compulsions, but let us return to this subject later.

Starting from Assmann's reading, there would be no basis in the search for the uniqueness of an experience by means of the marks of affection through which an event, once placed into narrative, might have maintained a certain stability of remembrance. According to the author, this would be possible only if we considered memories produced at a time prior to any elaboration using a narrative structure:

Affection as a potentiator of perception preserves elements of remembrance that enter into storage memory as parts without a whole or as folded micronarratives and stay there side by side, disconnected. Such nuclei of pre-linguistic and protonarrative remembrance are midway between symbolic 'impression' and coding. In the direction of

experiencia bélica" / (...) "a ello se añaden todas aquellas experiencias que los individuos han reunido durante la guerra sin poderlas articular lingüísticamente y que siguen influyendo en los modos de pensar y las maneras de comportarse, sin que la propia consciencia deba o pueda dar razón de ello" (free translation). The text was originally published in 1992.

²⁵ On the various forms of presence of the past in the present, see also the important work by David Lowenthal (LOWENTHAL, 1998).

symbolic coding, they form the material for secondary procedures of narrative and interpretive stabilization. Here again we must return, once again, to the meaning of verbalization of memories. Memories are turned into *anecdotes* that, as a rule, were regularly polished by means of a narration. In this process, the stabilizing force migrates from affection to the linguistic formula, gradually. (ASSMANN, 2011, p. 282)²⁶

In fact, Assmann's perspective indicates that, marked by affection as the main support, certain memories would migrate progressively to the narrative formula, becoming communicable through linguistic codification. This is the passage from affection to symbol that, although not seen as a discontinuous process, seems to contain a certain inexorability when we deal with memories that could be narrated, it clashes with Koselleck's perspective of advocating for any permanence of the original meaning of an experience that has occurred more than half a century ago. Should not we think of a memory of numerous previous verbalizations? New marks left in individual subjectivity by later events could not cause interference with not only content, but their own perceptual structure of events, conforming a myriad of varying degrees of discontinuities? The most important problem here, however, refers to the implications of this debate to think of the specificities of the criteria inherent to historical truth. We will deal with the theme later, after combining more elements from Koselleck's reflections on the discontinuities of remembrance.

The three forms of discontinuity of remembrance highlighted by Koselleck

Ultimately, we have known three different forms of remembrance, none of which is satisfactory to explain, judge, and reflect upon the inconceivable and to be able to face the memory. The scientific, moral, and religious pathways lead, each in their own way, to despair. And it is precisely this, despair, which must be retained in the memory. Metaphorically, each step leads to the gas chamber, but not to its interior. (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 48)²⁷

²⁶ Emphasis in the original.

²⁷ "En definitivo, hemos conocido tres formas diferentes de recuerdo, ninguna de las cuales es satisfactoria para explicar, juzgar y reflexionar suficientemente lo inconcebible y para poder afrontar el recuerdo. La vía científica, la moral y la religiosa llevan cada una a su manera a la desesperación. Y, precisamente es esto, la desesperación, lo que debe ser retenido en el recuerdo. Metafóricamente, cada paso lleva junto a la cámara de gas pero no a su interior" (free translation).

In the 1998 seminar article, shortly after the above statement, Koselleck would criticize the forms of Holocaust representation on German monuments. Although not explicitly stated, the logical sequence of argumentation should not be taken as meaningless: within the limits of the scientific, moral, and religious paths thus asserted, artistic representation might contain relevant singularities. And, in this way, the vehemence of affirmations that, “metaphorically, each step leads to the gas chamber, but not to its interior” and that what should be retained in the memory is despair provide significant elements of analysis. From this viewpoint, we could point out that, while science, morality, and religion can lead to despair, only artistic representation might effectively bring to the original sense of experience, that is, despair itself as an effectively lived experience. In an author whose intellectual education is rooted in a tradition of strong neo-Kantian colorations, these phrases gain remarkable singularities, in view of the richness of discussion on specificities related to the power of affection of images, possibly one of the motivating elements of Koselleck’s studies about iconology of violent death (cf. ONCINA, 2011).

It does not seem to be without a purpose, in this case, that his theses on the monuments to the dead have pointed out to the very rhythm of change of social and political sensitivities in relation to the events, which goes back, among others, to the claims of Jacob Burckhardt and Aby Warburg of Images as a previous level of contact with the world in relation to what is written (ASSMANN, 2011, p. 237 ss.). It is not worth recalling the details of this complex and rich tradition, but it seems correct to assert that the appreciation of the impregnating power of images as forms to represent the world, which might allow an energetic reactivation of past experience, does not disagree with the Koselleckian formulations. The potential of images to revive the deepest and most extreme sensations of human experience, such as the immeasurable genocidal reality perpetrated by National Socialism, seems to underlie their arguments about the need to retain despair.

It could also be possible to trace relations between the assumption of the existence of transhistorical anthropological constants that marked certain authors of this tradition (as in Panofsky’s search for ‘general and essential tendencies of the human mind’ through pictorial representations) and the meta-historical formulations of Reinhart

Koselleck (PANOFSKY, 2012, p. 63 ss.). On the other hand, being aware of the relation between images and dreams in the debates of this tradition, it is relevant to emphasize that, in one of the tests of *Future past*, Koselleck took as an object of analysis dreams of the Third Reich time collected from a work by Charlotte Beradt (KOSELLECK, 2006b). Among the hypotheses formulated, it is precisely the conception that, as ‘portraits of the inner soul,’ dreams would be pre-linguistic histories, which could give direct access to the unconscious and that would even hold a certain unity marked by the generational approach. Comparing the dreams of individuals outside and inside the concentration camps, Koselleck emphasized that unlike the ‘utopian dreams’ of the former, saturated with experiences and leaving some room for an imaginable space of action, in the case of the latter, there would be a total loss of experience, a disappearance of human reason. ‘Void of action and flooded with lights and colors,’ these dreams would be experiences of a terrible existence, thus unapprehensible and non-communicable. Therefore, we would be herein at the level of bodily marks of terror, something which refers to the possibility of representation before the trauma experience.

In this case, it is worth noticing that Koselleck’s argument about the monuments to the Holocaust began precisely by addressing the problem of the risk of oblivion that the petrification of experience might generate: “whenever remembrance is embodied in a monument, it is not unreasonable to overlook the danger that, precisely because it establishes institutionally forms of memory, it blocks the memory itself” (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 48).²⁸ The problem became particularly serious because these were not supposedly incomprehensible and inexplicable crimes. It should be remembered that, from a different perspective, the belief in the impossibility of any representation came to establish dangerously radical proposals: according to François Lyotard, the only form of long lasting maintenance of a non-synthesizable experience like that would be avoiding monuments, keeping only affection as a stabilizer of remembrance (an “affection which one does not know how to classify, as a state of death in the midst of the life of the spirit”) (LYOTARD apud ASSMANN, 2011, p. 280). This paradoxical species of ‘illness under prescription’ might be vigorously repelled by Aleida Assmann, for whom over-affection,

²⁸ “(...) siempre que el recuerdo se materializa en un monumento no cabe menospreciar el peligro de que, precisamente porque fija institucionalmente formas de recuerdo, bloquee el propio recuerdo” (free translation).

unbearable as in trauma, would become not a stabilizer, but a destroyer of memories (ASSMANN, 2011, p. 281).

The possible concession to a greater capacity of art in the search for the original meaning of experience, as already indicated, was based on the supposed discontinuity that the scientific, moral, and religious ways, as forms of memory, could have in relation to the primary experience. The emphasis on the disruption of these supposedly institutionalized modes of formatting memories, rather than varying degrees of detachment from the original, unapprehensible sense of any experience, might have implications for these three different routes of access to the past. Concerning the religious level, Koselleck pointed out the limits both of attempts to support the absurdity of pain through penances, as in Christian prayer, and tendencies towards the establishment of State-administered cults that might strengthen new forms of 'civil religion' just as already intended, at least, since Rousseau. As far as 'moral response' is concerned, his statements are truly incisive:

But insisting on moral affirmation is a repeated affirmation that can only be verified: 'it was unjust,' 'it was unjust,' 'it was unjust.' This repetition is not an argument that allows us to gain any additional knowledge. Hence the moral explanation consists in a cosmetic situation, because, on the one hand, it does not add any knowledge, but on the other, it is needed in contrast to the question of how it can occur. And, as we know, this is the issue that is dealt with by Goldhagen, who solved it in a simple and moral way, but who rightly asks himself: how was it possible? The question remains open and it will remain open, since through a moral response it is only almost explained, but never completely, because the moral scope and the scopes of sociological explanation or any other scientific type are heterogeneous. They remain heterogeneous and involve an aporetic situation: that moral judgment is as correct as it is useless. It is as correct as it is useless. (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 47)²⁹

²⁹ "Pero la insistencia en la afirmación moral es una afirmación repetida que sólo puede constatar: 'Fue injusto', 'fui injusto', 'fue injusto'. Esta repetición no es un argumento que nos permita ganar algún conocimiento adicional. De ahí que la explicación moral se halle en una situación aporética, pues por una parte no añade conocimiento alguno, pero, por otra, es necesaria como contraste a la pregunta de como pudo ocurrir. Y, como es sabido, esta es la problemática que trata Goldhagen, que ha resuelto llanamente de un modo moral, pero que formula justificadamente: ¿como fue posible? La cuestión sigue abierta, y seguirá abierta, pues a través de la respuesta moral queda sólo cuasi explicada, pero nunca completamente pues el ámbito moral y los ámbitos de explicación sociológicos o de cualquier otro tipo científico son heterogéneos. Siguen siendo heterogéneos y entrañan una situación aporética: que el juicio moral es tan correcto como inútil. Es tan correcto como inútil" (free translation).

The repetition of the uselessness of moral judgment seems indicative of the presence of the theme for Koselleck. It is worth emphasizing, on the other hand, that it could be reckless to decontextualize his discussion of the conflicting complexity involved in the specific context of the German case at that time. Koselleck's text dealt with truly thorny issues, stating emphatic assertions that 'moral judgment is always right' and that it is impossible to try explaining crimes without the perspectives shown being judged by whether the Nazi ideology is shared: "from the moral viewpoint, crimes cannot be explained, unless a person says 'I did it.' In turn, by saying 'I did not do it,' the suspicion that the one who is speaking is apologizing arises" (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 43).³⁰ In its conception, this accusatory rationale would be inescapable as long as those who witnessed the Third Reich were alive and the debate would only disappear after their deaths: "as long as Germans who were contemporaries of Auschwitz live, this argument and this explanation will be taken as an excuse, and nothing can be done about it" (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 43-44).³¹ The theoretical aftermath of a morally conflicting issue seems clear, echoing statements that, despite their apparent simplicity, bring in themselves an enormous complexity and density, as in the mention of the dilemmas of those who, after acting in the SS, sought to reintegrate to social life. Noting that "not every SS man was a murderer," Koselleck argued, for instance, that "this was the problem: the average citizen was the one who had committed the crimes. This is the thesis that Goldhagen rightly supports in part" (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 45).³²

It is worth emphasizing that the problem of moral judgment involves debates not only on the psychological imperatives of subjects themselves, who, having lived the extreme experience of the fields, would need to reintegrate into collective values by recomposing traits of intersubjectivity against the pathological risks of isolation, but also the broader problem of the reconstitution of the social bond, in order to re-establish a public sphere, starting from the judgment of criminals as a symbolic maintenance of the collective agreement on what is right or wrong. The recomposition of bonds of trust, the

³⁰ "(...) desde el punto de vista moral los crímenes no pueden explicarse, a menos que se diga 'yo lo hice'. Ya diciendo 'yo no lo hice', surge la sospecha de que quien habla se está disculpando" (free translation).

³¹ "Mientras vivan alemanes que fueron contemporáneos de Auschwitz, este argumento y esta explicación serán tomadas como disculpa, sin que se pueda hacer nada contra ello" (free translation).

³² "(...) ese era el problema: el ciudadano normal era el que había llevado a cabo los crímenes. Esta es la tesis que Goldhagen sostiene parcialmente con razón" (free translation).

strengthening of belief in values formalized by legal contracts (even considering the weakness characteristic of contracts written by human hands), among other similar issues, involve this broad debate and it is worth mentioning that, although in a less incisive passage, Koselleck did not fail to affirm the importance of the moral sphere “to put the responsibility of those involved on the balance” (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 46).³³

Koselleck's statements can also be aimed at the epistemological field, since the assumption of non-complementarity between the levels of scientific knowledge and moral judgment, or even of the latter's cognitive uselessness, allows us to reflect on the specificities of historical truth. Also in the case of the scientific discourse, according to Koselleck, the limitations might be significant, even generating an excessive tension on those scholars who tried to explain the events related to the Nazi exterminations. The scientific discourse seemed, in fact, to be an “endless task,” because “what must be explained remains incomprehensible, either from the sociological viewpoint, from social history itself, from psychology, or from the critique of ideologies, or from the functional or intentional approach” (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 46).³⁴ If these statements are compared to those produced within the same period, they acquire a significant value, referring again to the problem of discontinuity between the lived experience and the scientific explanation as one of the three forms of memory already mentioned.

On discontinuities between historical science and primary experiences

Niklas Olsen reproduced some statements made by Koselleck in various events and texts from the 1990s, when he participated more actively in public debates about the memory of the Holocaust. In the text related to the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of May 8, 1945, for instance, the German historian would also address the permanence of certain experiences:

³³ “(...) para poner en la balanza la responsabilidad de los implicados” (free translation).

³⁴ “(...) tarea casi interminable” / “(...) aquello que hay que explicar sigue siendo incomprensible, ya sea desde el punto de vista sociológico, del propio de la historia social, de la psicología o de la crítica de las ideologías, ya sea desde el planteamiento funcional o el intencional” (free translation).

There are experiences that flow into the body like red-hot lava and petrify there. Irremovable, they can be retrieved at any without changing. Few such experiences can be transformed into authentic memories; but when it happens, they are grounded in their sensorial [*sinnliche*] presence. The smell, the taste, the sound, the feeling and the visible surrounding, in short, all senses, in pleasure or pain, are awakened and need no effort of the memory. (KOSELLECK apud OLSEN, 2012)³⁵

The remission to a new apprehension of the occurrence from all the senses, as indicated in the passage above, restores the thesis of the primary experience as something that remains, breaking through the individual intentions and producing a relation with the past very different from that allowed by the three forms of remembrance mentioned above. Mobilizing the comprehensiveness of the senses, this supposedly more intimate relation with the past, however, might be restricted to certain events experienced, since not all of them would leave lasting traits. Still according to Koselleck:

Indeed, there are numerous memories that I have often mentioned and repeated, but who's true sensorial presence [*sinnliche Wahrheitspräsenz*] has vanished long ago. Even for me, they are merely literary stories: when I listen to myself, all I can do is to believe in them, but I can no longer vouch for their sensory-based [*sinnlichen*] certainty. However, many things belong to the unchangeable primary experience, the petrified lava. (KOSELLECK apud OLSEN, 2012)³⁶

The contrast mentioned by Koselleck between 'literary stories' and experiences whose certainty could be attested by sensory sources, as well as the assumption of an immutable primary experience, constitute problems of difficult definition. A similar distinction in the text on the discontinuity of recollection, grounded the criticism of excesses of moral judgments produced by the 1968 generation in relation to those who would have actually experienced the intensity of World War II. Might there be a level of experimentation of the past that, generated by direct experience (both from an

³⁵ The original text, entitled "Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen," was published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in the early May 1995. May 8, 1945, became a symbolic date of the end of World War II due to the surrender of Germany, although the conflicts generally did not end on that date.

³⁶ "Indeed, there are numerous memories that I have often mentioned and repeated, but who's true sensorial presence [*sinnliche Wahrheitspräsenz*] has vanished long ago. Even for me, they are merely literary stories: when I listen to myself, all I can do is to believe in them, but I can no longer vouch for their sensory-based [*sinnlichen*] certainty. However, many things belong to the unchangeable primary experience, the petrified lava" (free translation).

individual and a generational viewpoint), would be not only untransferable, but supposedly less contaminated by moral and ideological judgments? It is necessary to move slowly, at the risk of overestimating certain theses observed in these specific texts. Anyway, it is relevant to notice a possible relation not only between the passages indicated and their reflections on the post-1968 moral judgments, but also that similar assumptions of discontinuity or disruption were observed in the aforementioned meta-historical essay on methodology of history and in his studies on the monuments to the dead, who advocated for the existence of a social and political sensibility hardly transmissible beyond generations.³⁷

On the other hand, by claiming personal memory as a right, Koselleck also seemed to grasp that this level of primary experience, perhaps because of its pre-linguistic conformation and referred to sensory components, would be less subject to the manipulations of collective memory:

There is therefore a veto-right of the personal experience that blocks for any incorporation in a collective memory. And it is a part of the often (and often vainly) claimed human dignity, that every human being has a right to an individual memory. Such an entirely personal right to a memory offers protection against ideological indoctrination, against mental control and subjection. (KOSELLECK apud OLSEN, 2012)³⁸

In fact, it is not intended herein to face Koselleck's assertions and his work as a whole, and it should be considered that the approaches mentioned to other texts by him are fragmentary.³⁹ As already indicated, it becomes more important for this article to start from these formulations observed in specific texts, not to reconstitute any essence of a historian's thought with such an extensive and diversified work, but with the aim of problematizing them in the light of the theses of other relevant authors who have

³⁷ I refer, for instance, to the texts "Monuments to the fallen as places of the survivors' identity foundation," published in 1979, and "Change of experience and change of method. A historical-anthropological note," published in 1988, already analyzed (KOSELLECK, 2011b; 2013a).

³⁸ Entitled "Gebrochene Erinnerung? Deutsche und polnische Vergangenheiten," the text was originally published in *Das Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*, in 2001.

³⁹ Perhaps for this reason, Olsen chose to emphasize the discrepancies between Koselleck's theses on the theme of memory and those observed in the rest of his work. It should also be noticed that the analysis undertaken herein does not seek to grasp Koselleck's perspective as skeptical of the explanatory potential of history, since such an aspect would clash with the great empirical investment of his investigations of modernity.

explored similar themes in their texts. Bringing these problems to the epistemological level, for instance, we may resume some formulations by Aleida Assmann, particularly regarding the differentiation between ‘objective truth’ and ‘subjective veracity’ or, in Jean Starobinski’s terms, between ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity.’

In addressing Rousseau’s difficulties in dealing with the very recollections in his *Confessions*, Starobinski referred precisely to the dimension of affection as a form of memory stabilization whose epistemological foundations are different: “I cannot deceive myself about what I have felt,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau said (ROUSSEAU apud Assmann, 2011, p. 271). The truth that Rousseau intended to share with us, according to Jean Starobinski, concerned not the exact location of biographical data, but rather a “wider truth, which in fact escapes the laws of verification.” In this case, therefore, “we are no longer in the field of *truth*, of true stories; we enter the field of *authenticity*, indeed” (STAROBINSKI apud ASSMANN, 2011, p. 271).⁴⁰ It is in this way that we can see the discussion resumed by Assmann in the next moment of the text, about the “apodictic quality of affective memories”: “they are incorrigible, because they stand or fall according to the intensity of the vital reference, of the immediate impression. When the latter are given up, there is nothing left for them” (ASSMANN, 2011, p. 273).

The risk of presupposing a higher truth through direct experience, from the philosophical viewpoint, has been addressed by Hannah Arendt and, with due care, can be used herein to profit from the historical truth (ARENDT, 2008, p. 117 ss.). This is a way of thinking which, according to Arendt, has become the true axiom of the Western metaphysical tradition as a whole, grounded in an alleged identity between thought and sensations through which we know the world. If in the Hebrew tradition the ‘guiding metaphor’ of hearing filled this gap, in the Western world the Greek philosophers would have taught us that vision was the basis of the search for a truth which, in this reading, could only become ineffable. According to Arendt, the inevitable counterbalance might have been the devaluation of dialogical foundations of the act of thinking, since the words by which discourses express themselves could, at most, guide in the direction of intuition, seen as the ultimate foundation of an activity appreciated by its supposed individual and contemplative nature.

⁴⁰ Emphasis in the original.

Arendt's concern was arguing that philosophical thought is based on metaphor, a means taken as the source of a link between the visible and the invisible, and supply the limitations of the senses as parts of our cognitive experience of the world, bases of common sense. The use of metaphor, at this point, was precisely meant to indicate the non-equivalence between thought and senses whatever they were, which did not assume their devaluation and, much less, a relapse into formulations derived from the "metaphysical fallacy of the two worlds," which might tend to adopt a dualistic and irreconcilable perspective between these two levels: the metaphor would precisely interconnect them, "giving us guidance when we fear dithering blindly between experiences in which our bodily senses, with their relative certainty of knowledge, cannot guide us" (ARENDT, 2008, p. 129).

It may be interesting, in this way, to think of the notion of 'historical truth' as close to what the author conceived as the real foundations of the act of thinking, in view of its metaphorical and discursive nature, irreducible to the tendency to isolation observed in the merely contemplative attitude. Taking the truth of experience as superior prevents the establishment of any criterion, as the "truth as self-evidence does not demand criteria; it is the criterion, the final referee of all that can come" (ARENDT, 2008, p. 140). Unlike the "essentially active nature, I would almost say violent, of metaphysical intuition," the "historical truth" (as well as the philosophical thinking) seems to demand not only the word as a form of openness to the other, but the axiomatic demand of the noncontradictory, of argumentative consistency: "since the discourse is carried out in sequences of phrases, the end of thought can never be an intuition, without being capable of confirmation by some piece of self-evidence observed through silent contemplation" (ARENDT, 2008, p. 142-143).⁴¹

The claim of the incommensurability of experience, if devised at the epistemic level, could run the risk of getting closer to the contemplative attitude, whose most appropriate metaphor might have been formulated by Heidegger: "the resonant sound of silence" (*das Gelaüt der Stille*) (Heidegger who, in Arendt's reading, would not have entirely escaped the metaphors of vision, such as Walter Benjamin) (ARENDT, 2008, p.

⁴¹ In the first passage, on the violent nature of metaphysical intuition, Hannah Arendt reproduces Henri Bergson's words.

143). The ‘self-absorbedness’ of truth tends to be muted, since the senses are always individual, making the only attitude morally possible in face of a claim of truth for the pain experienced in a particular experience, for instance, is respectful silence. Even because, as Paul Ricoeur pointed out, the search for justice through memory could not do without the axiom that a moral priority belongs to the victims (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 102). The Ricoeurian solution pointed at the fact that, in this case, the victims should never be ourselves, but always others.⁴² The problem of restoring the moral dignity of victims is key to the debate on memory and justice, and it must be added to the need to resume the public order previously discussed.

It is interesting to notice that the assumption of the permanence of primary experiences, just as observed in certain texts by Koselleck, bears some resemblance to Henri Bergson’s theses on the functioning of memory, not only because of the inseparability of the moments of perception and recollection/recognition, but because it is based on the possibility of access to the whole images of the past that might be kept in a state of latency (BERGSON, 1999). Also according to Paul Ricoeur, the structuring principle of *Matière et Mémoire*, beyond all the complexity of the problem of duration, might be based on an antithesis between action and representation, which could associate memories wholly preserved at the level of unconsciousness (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 438 ss.). It was this kind of conception, as well as the metaphysical bases that conformed the theses about the survival of images, which Ricoeur intended to review, revaluing the active dimension of memory effort.⁴³

It would not be difficult to perceive relations between the metaphysical foundations of the contemplative notion of truth criticized by Arendt and Bergson’s conception of the state of latency of images, as well as the clear connections of this debate with author’s appreciation of the active foundations of philosophical thought. It is not by chance, therefore, that his theses bear some resemblance to the rereading of *Matière et Mémoire* proposed by Paul Ricoeur. In this case, the whole Arendtian

⁴² “The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, by remembrance, to someone other than you” (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 101).

⁴³ See also his discussion of the concepts of ‘search’ and ‘evocation’ that, referring to classic works by Plato and Aristotle, might serve not as dichotomies, but as polarities, in the same way of the reasoning that would structure the whole section on memory phenomenology in the book (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 45 ss.).

discussion of the contemplative foundations of the Western metaphysical tradition reinstates the theses that go through her works about the obscurity of politics as a field to express active life, in which diversity can manifest itself liberarily and set something that might characterize the essentially human.⁴⁴ Perhaps there is a possible difference between Arendt and Koselleck's conceptions of politics, in spite of a certain closeness that characterizes their interpretations of modernity. This is so because, although both have assumed that diversity is constitutive of human relationships, generating conflicting interests, Koselleck does not seem to have put the problem of politics as the focus of his *Historik*, getting closer to the Heideggerian conception of appreciating temporality as the main theme, despite it has been done from another perspective.⁴⁵

In this case, this is one of the most relevant points when we think of the elements that have detached Hannah Arendt from Heidegger's philosophy, since all the crucial ontology rooted in the problem of the revelation of being has been virtually replaced by the theme of concealment of politics, observed in almost all of his works (DUARTE, 2003; ABENSOUR, 1989). The issue, however, may also be thought concerning the way how Reinhart Koselleck, in certain texts, appropriated the conceptual pair friend/enemy established by Carl Schmitt, revaluating the existential dimension of politics by seeing this conflict as an structuring anthropological data of the historical world (KOSELLECK, 1997).⁴⁶ In this case, perhaps we can differ the rather general perception that the *politician* is a constitutive element of human life, which, also seeing it as the irremediable basis of human being's historical condition, might associate it with violence and its inexorability, just as in Carl Schmitt (SCHMITT, 2015). In Arendt, the category appears, in general, related to the ideal of democracy as a place to manifest the differences.

⁴⁴ The theme would be constant in the works by Hannah Arendt, such as, for instance, in *The Human Condition*, *Between Past and Future*, *On Revolution*, *On Violence*, among others.

⁴⁵ The issue of the presence of Carl Schmitt's concept of politician in Koselleck's work and the weakness of thinking that the human being has a direct access to historical time was addressed by Villacañas (2003). Differences concerning the Heideggerian philosophy were explained in "Théorie de l'histoire et herméneutique" (KOSELLECK, 1997). For a comparison between Koselleck and Arendt, see Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (2010, p. 212-236).

⁴⁶ See also the reference to Carl Schmitt made in *Future past* (KOSELLECK, 2006a, p. 230-231).

Personal memory or fair memory?

Every man has the right to have his own memory – that I will not allow to be collectivized. (KOSELLECK apud OLSEN, 2012)⁴⁷

The separation established by Koselleck between primary experiences and secondary recollections also refers to the claim of the right of protection to individual memories against possible deformations of collective memory. Again, such affirmations may be considered in relation to those of authors for whom the ideologization of memory might have roots in their own narrative configuration (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 95-98). From this different perspective, there would never be a feasible exteriority when it comes to potentially narrative memories, which would imply reflecting on specific formulations of the notion of ideology and its relations with the language level. The problem, on the other hand, can also be aimed at the theme of the relation between truth and justice, which seems to constitute the historian's activity.

In this case, the separation established by Koselleck between the moral and scientific levels would be faced with perspectives also assumed in the debates at the time, which could resemble Ricoeur's conceptions of the historian as one who seeks a fair memory. In the final paragraph of the text analyzed herein, we find imperative statements emphasizing that, in a German monument on World War II:

(...) We can not include or exclude concrete groups of victims. We cannot set the arbitrary boundaries of groups that were destined to death by establishing a hierarchy of victims. However, we must remember that it is not our competence to build monuments to the victims (...). A monument of the murderers that reminds us who is accountable for the murders, exterminations, and death on gas chambers. We have to learn to live with this memory. (KOSELLECK, 2011a, p. 51)⁴⁸

Koselleck's theses on monuments were also based on empirical data provided by relevant historiographical research, indicating that the frontier between using scientific

⁴⁷ This is an excerpt from an interview of Koselleck in 2005, due to the 60th anniversary of May 8, 1945, originally entitled "Ich war weder Opfer noch befreit".

⁴⁸ "(...) no podemos incluir ni excluir a grupos concretos de víctimas. No podemos fijar las fronteras arbitrarias de los grupos que fueron destinados a la muerte, estableciendo una jerarquía de las víctimas. Más bien debemos recordar que no es nuestra competencia erigir monumentos a las víctimas (...). Un monumento de los verdugos que nos recuerde quién tiene la responsabilidad de los asesinatos, los exterminios y el gaseado. Hemos de aprender a vivir con ese recuerdo" (free translation).

knowledge and the formation of moral judgments about the past may be thinner than the article itself suggests. How can we see these formulations in relation to the criticism prior to the cognitive uselessness of moral judgments? The understanding of morality, as it appears in the German historian's text, seems close to what Paul Ricoeur has identified as a typical form of judgment in judge's work and not historian's: the establishment of a definitive sentence from an imperiously binary topology, which seeking individual culpability, usually focuses on a small number of actors. This fact might be justified to some extent by the specificities of the present case, very marked by the atmosphere of moral judgments that marked the debates on the Holocaust in Germany. From this perspective, on the other hand, little would be asked about the collective nature or the previous causes of the events, as we could assume in an attempt to broaden perspectives through historical contextualization (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 335-338).

These and similar characteristics were emphasized by Ricoeur in order to deconstruct the identification of historian's work with the moral prerogatives of the 'duty of memory,' closer to the conjunctural imperatives of justice that, in a coercive way, impose a debt that should be subjectively felt as an obligation. The attempt to better equate the problem, revaluing Freudian discussions on memory work and mourning work, however, never did it without some identification between search for the truth and justice as key to historian's work. In this case, therefore, the relation between scientific knowledge and moral judgment, which restores in a new way the overlap between veritative and pragmatic dimensions both of memory and historiography, seem much narrower.⁴⁹

The psychoanalytic interpretation proposed by Ricoeur could even stimulate a reading of Koselleck's historiographical work as a mourning work: would we be facing an attempt to reconcile the historian with his past as a soldier in the German army? This is because Koselleck himself pointed out the major experience of World War II with regard to his historical elaborations, and he also advocated for a veto right of individual memory which, according to Olsen, might be suggestive of a self-protective attitude (OLSEN, 2012). In this case, perhaps we should consider that, unlike Ricoeur, for whom the

⁴⁹ It is in this way that we can see Ricoeur's disagreement with the alternative established by Todorov between the search for truth and good (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 99).

narrative elaboration had a certain liberating dimension, Koselleck seemed to think that a lesser risk from the individual viewpoint would involve the maintenance of some experiences outside the deformations imposed by language. Was this the difficulty of elaborating certain experiences through their narrative expression?

Perhaps it would be more interesting to conduct the interrogation in reverse, asking for a feasible use of the tension generated by the experience of the past as a stimulus for rethinking historical knowledge, as suggested in his claims about the potential for methodological innovation stemming from the historical condition of loser. In this case, the pessimism claimed by Koselleck was perhaps related to a conception attentive to the inexorability of human conflicts, never solved by the therapeutic perspective adopted by Paul Ricoeur, with his eminently curative purposes. Then, we could speak of tensions that, stimulated by the subjective relations an individual has with himself, would be the true potentiators of historical imagination? Quite debatable, these psychoanalytic speculations seem to have little scope in view of the solidity of Reinhart Koselleck's historiographical works, out of which the text selected herein for analysis represents a rather limited part.

Perhaps it is worth reflecting further on the possible relation between Koselleck's view of the limits of moral judgments and their cognitive uselessness and their conception of the historical world as marked by irreducible conflicts.⁵⁰ But, in this case, any opposition to Ricoeur must be qualified, since the French philosopher's reflections on memory did not fail to emphasize the persistence of violence and war as major aspects of human history (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 92 ss.). By the way, it should not be forgotten that this reading, inspired by Thomas Hobbes' work, is compatible with his appropriation of Freudian theses, at least if we think of the centrality of Hobbesian thought in the study of culture and its discontents (FREUD, 2011, p. 57 ss.). But this work by Freud, on the other hand, would also end up in an irreducible conflict, which would disagree with a certain optimism that crosses Ricoeur's theses on the curative potential of his therapy by the conjugation between memory work and mourning work.

⁵⁰ As we could notice in the attempt to extend the Heideggerian perspective from a set of conceptual pairs illustrative of these limiting and contingent elements typical of the human historical condition in *Théorie de l'histoire et herméneutique* (KOSELLECK, 1997).

In fact, it is worth asking whether the attempt to conjugate a close look at the irreducible conflicts of the human world with therapeutic solutions might not hold certain tensions with Freud's texts themselves, less due to the complex problem of the transposition of characteristics related to the functioning of individual memory at the collective level than due to the presupposition of historian's potential as a true referee of absences and excesses of memory. If we accept that the public space may be conceived as equivalent to the 'arena' as an intermediate region between psychoanalyst and patient under analysis, we cannot fail to point out that Freud himself put into question who would be truly entitled to act at this therapeutic level in a collective context.⁵¹ Would a historian have this competence, or even such an authority assigned by the collectivity to do so? And could the therapeutic use of memory even have curative potential or do historiography, as Michel de Certeau suggested, have a greater tendency to conceal conflicts, appeasing the present through a relation with the past (the other) that could never solve the irreducible tensions that characterize human life? (CERTEAU, 1975).

⁵¹ On public space as an intermediate region between therapist and patient, see *Memory, History, Forgetting* (RICOEUR, 2007, p. 92). When referring to the use of psychoanalysis in the treatment of cultural phenomena, Freud would ask: "And with regard to the application of the therapy of understanding, what would be the most pertinent analysis of social neurosis, if no one has the authority to impose group therapy?" (FREUD, 2011, p. 92).

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