

THE CONSTITUTION OF A SYSTEMICALLY-BASED LITERARY HISTORY: THE CULTURAL SYSTEM AS THE OBJECT OF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS IN THE RESEARCH AGENDA OF ITAMAN EVEN-ZOHAR¹

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Abstract || This article presents a series of considerations, founded on Itamar Even-Zohar's theory of polysystemic culture, regarding the delimitation of Literary History's object of study. My purpose is to organically analyze the four principle challenges of dynamic functionalism and the systemic model in their application to diachronic history. These challenges are as follows: 1) to understand polysystemic, extrasystemic and subsystemic interactions as well as the borders between systemic cultures as an alternative to traditional comparative methodology; 2) to incorporate as object of study not only products/texts but also what Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields describes as "espace des possibles"; 3) to test a sequential model capable of elucidating dynamic polychronics and systemic changes; and 4) to configure a critical selection of data that is susceptible to historicization and put it into dialogue with other concurrent historiographic models.

Keywords || Theory of Polysystemic Culture | Literary History | Comparative Literature | Borders | Theory of Social Fields

The goal of this essay is to outline a position on some lines of development of Literary History (LH) and on the perception of its crisis as a discipline. Its next aim is to make a series of precise proposals regarding a change in direction in the definition and demarcation of the object of study, which means a change also in the methodological choices effected in this heuristic turn. The position to be outlined is of a socio-semiotic and systemic nature and is related to two distinct facts. In the first place, LH has ceased to exist as a unified or even cohesive discipline. The undeniable resistance of late-positivist models and practices, grounded especially in the field of education, maintains inherited procedures and espouses an inherited authority; this authority, nonetheless, is obliged to dedicate greater and greater efforts to justify itself, and its attempts are perceived by less-adaptable camps, to be clearly the product of inertia, given the bankruptcy of the underlying programs. The second fact has to do with the new priorities of LH, concentrated today in the establishment of an object of study—pluralized and enmeshed in a sociocultural field—that cannot be reduced to linear narratives and is uncomfortable with a central discursive authority which is linked to obsolete formulas that are, ultimately, de-historicizing.² One consequence is that the properly methodological debate—which was proposed, to some extent, given the gross lack of agreement regarding what LH should in fact historicize and at what scale it should do so³—has been shifted to a second plane.

However, the international cartography of LH does not move as one. After the process of decolonization, and thanks also to the emergence of nationalist programs in geocultural or administrative spaces subjected or assimilated [to other states], there now exist entities (and not only national ones) that undertook *delayed processes* of construction in which LH has acquired once again a clear social-pragmatic sense. This historiographic planning coexists in time—or even in space—with contrarily-indicated movements that affect other entities (let's say again, *national ones*). Occasionally, even in the same geocultural space and at the very same time, different agents activate inverse processes that end up coming together in the conflict of discourses, strategies and programs intended, in part, to highlight the contingency or the legitimacy of the alternative plans. It is accepted that nationally-based LH is a performative stage valid for the specific needs of sociocultural and political cohesion, often determined by urgent historic circumstances. Once these needs have been met, national LH exhausts itself as a project and cedes ground to alternative planes, between regional and world-wide, between regionalization—at a scale greater or smaller than the actual nation—and the globalization of historic perspective. In a complementary fashion, national LH tolerates counter-discourses intended to overturn silences and secrets. In fact, the aporia of national stabilization (or the achievement of a given process of

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1 | This article was originally published in Galician in volume 10 of *Veredas. Revista de publicación semestral*, December 2008. Thanks to the team of *Veredas* for their generosity in allowing its publication in this monograph. The original can be accessed in: <http://www.lusitanistasail.org/descargar/veredas_10.pdf>

2 | De-historicizing because they sustain the idea that literary evolution obeys autonomous adjustments that do not demand to attend the historical relationships of what is delimited as mere *context*.

3 | The beginning of a brief article by M.L. Gaspárov, connected with the Tartu school and author of *A History of European Versification* (1996) is illuminating. A translation of the Russian original from 2003, reads: “A la pregunta ‘¿cómo escribir la historia de la literatura rusa?’ me hubiera gustado responder enseguida: no hace falta escribirla de ninguna manera, ya que ahora mismo no la escribiríamos bien: no hay material” (Gaspárov 2007). Another perspective on the complexity of the task is annotated by Heidrun Olinto (1996: 42-43), keeping in mind recent German theories about a change in the traditional program of LH, especially those of S. J. Schmidt. In this case, attention is put on doubts over the existence of well-trained historians (epistemologically, intellectually, academically) to assume the challenge.

national construction) frequently leads to the political exaltation of all (Literary) History is a failed project that should either be refuted or deconstructed⁴. However, when a national crisis is accentuated, a unifying and “patriotic” rectification frequently appears. A clear case can be found in Hungary at the end of the 19th century, when the national historiographic models of Zsigmond Bodnár and Zsolt Beöthy attempted to obstruct any *non nation-State* alternative and any movement towards the integration of the cultural productions of the multiple linguistic and *ethnonational* minorities, something that had been contemplated a half century before, at least in some respects, in Ferenc Toldy’s historiographic model.

In general terms, the resistance to heuristic and methodological changes in LH lacks a comparison in the field of historiographic practices or in the social-humanistic disciplines. Following the lengthy crisis of positivism, the vitalization initiatives originated basically outside the academic community of historians and philologists. The collective intransigency was frequently experienced as a fight to preserve epistemic-ideological domination and pedagogical control over literary knowledge and its institutionalization. In addition, and at the same time, it was perceived to be an autonomizing and monopolizing strategy to leave literary affairs separate from the confluence of other cultural and social productions, and in a scholastic sense (Bourdieu, 1994), to preserve in from history itself. Despite this, Literary History has not been exhausted as a discipline. Paradoxically, and above all, because it is History.

Ever since the corrections applied at the end of the 18th century, and successively as a catalogue, encyclopedic erudition or philosophic-causal history, the changes in LH were incorporated almost always alongside assimilations that proceeded from the methodological debate over History recognized as a disciplinary framework. This debate progressively involved an opening of different historiographies to other human sciences and, much later, a profound questioning of the centrality of the historic event—something in some regards already foreseen by Voltaire and Madame de Staël. On the contrary, the effective entrance of literary theory and the newly-formed comparative literature in the disciplinary process of LH was modest, discrete and deferred, with but few exceptions. The only clear case in the area of European Romance Studies, would be only in the 20th century, with idealist stylistics, which in reality was a self-supporting project of historiography itself, once the repercussion of Croce’s critical reading of Hegel’s thought was considered, with results so dissimilar as those of Spitzer and Vossler. In other areas, the weight of historic materialism and Marxist sociological thought both bear mention, as well as the long delayed influence of the debates featuring the Bahktinian circle. Little else, however, is of note until the last twenty years of the past century. More than significant, in

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4 | It is legitimate and apropos to note the doubt about the functionality of any automatism that poses a redirection, in historiographical-literary terms, of the binary *critique of identity/ critique of difference*. Counter-historiographical practices, or those formulated as supplement of a (canonical, official...) reference historical discourse, including what Dominick LaCapra (2004) terms as the *experiential turn* of historiography, can self-limit and present themselves as fundamentally secondary from the start. As Mario J. Valdés suggests (Hutcheon & Valdés 2002: 65), the best field test could be the general user of LH, who might serve to check how are partial counter-proposals received, and to what extent they are assumed. Contradictions emerging from that field constitute one of the pillars for Valdés’ position in favor of an *effective history*, a notion that emerges from hermeneutics with historical consciousness. For Valdés (2002: 67), “Effective literary history begins with the recognition that history, and literary history in particular, is effective insofar as it is used and is of use to would-be readers; it is a concept deeply aligned with the idea that we are affected in the present by our sense of the past”.

this sense then, is the time that it took to assimilate the last legacy of the functionalist positions of Jakobson, Tinianov and Sklovski on the non-comparability of synchrony and system, the ineludibly systemic determination of all evolution and the possibility of a history of a literary history that overcomes the genetic history of literature and the linguistic-literary immanence of the Saussurean inheritance. The positions of the Russian formalists would be re-elaborated at the beginning of the 1940s by Felix Vodička (1995) in the framework of research by the Prague School. This research would not be applied in practice, among other reasons because of the complexity of an efficient combination of the sociological, phenomenological and aesthetic-axiological dimensions proposed by the Czech theorist and dependent on an underlying reconstructivist goal. Vodička, in effect, outlined the initial task of LH in the reconstruction of a literary norm in a given space-time and in the hierarchizing of the conglomerate comprising aesthetic works and values as they are successively established in public and critical taste.

In a series of works published in recent years, I have highlighted the indisassociability of the course of LH and the course that corresponds to the matrix that we recognize, by antonomasia, as History. The links are evident but often devalued from an operational and functional point of view. From a series of ten considerations noted in a 2000 publication, I would like now to recover especially the one that establishes the relationships. I insisted on the existence of a group of related and ineludible problems and answers that History and LH share, at least as regards two spheres: the implications between narration and construction (with positions such as those of Ricoeur, White, Gadamer, Koselleck, Derrida, Skinner, Schmidt, Ankersmit...) and the social and institutional function of historical disciplines. I also pointed out some notions capable of articulating historiographic discourse and of centering on possible disciplinary laws of LH—among them, literary change, gradual development, cultural explosion and inter-literary process, for which the theoretical references would be Vodička, the Tartu School, the Bratislava School, the theory of polysystems, Bourdieu, Wallerstein y Martindale. Some of these notions will be taken up again here, fundamentally from the premises of pragmatic semiotics and systemic theories, maintaining present as well the observations of Bordieu, in *Méditations pascaliennes* (1997), about de-historicizing practices and resistances to *historicisation* in common programs applied by philosophers and philologists that serve in the constitution of a history of philosophy or a history of literatures. The forgetfulness of history in these areas is associated, for Bordieu, with the predominance of a tradition (Kant, Hegel, Heidegger) which in reality ritualized the correlation text-canon-exegete and absolved itself of an analysis of production-reception and of the canonization process in concrete historical societies. As concerns literary/cultural change and discontinuities in history, an obligatory reference is, of

course, Foucault, although there exists a line of reflection sustained in the 20th century from Saussure to Lotman or Martindale regarding the appearance of the fortuitous and the contingent in linguistic-cultural processes.

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The systemic option in LH presupposes an awareness of the existence of at least four challenges of significant weight and difficult solution: 1) the explanation of the systemic or field limits and the interactions between system and extra-system, system and poly-system and system-subsystem; 2) the effective incorporation of everything understood as a *systemic product*,⁵ which, logically, should also include the relational introduction of what in the theory of social fields is defined as *space of possibilities*,⁶ 3) the decision on the appropriate way to incorporate systemic diachrony,⁷ which fundamentally would obey either the sequencing criteria of the continuity/change dialectic that would follow a temporal segment in detail –the solution which can be seen as the traditional one– or the comparative criteria or non-consecutive temporal cuts that are read as a discrete succession of moment-states subjected to a systemic contrast, giving way as such to what, along with Itamar Even-Zohar, can be called *dynamic polychronicity*; and 4) the redirection of the critical factor that all cultural history assumes, albeit only for two reasons: first, due to the implications that follow from *selectively* considering or not considering certain factors, products and agents that participate in literary activities, and second, due to the representation of difference in relation to what Michel de Certeau (1975: 63-120) denominated the *historiographic operation*, which not only discursively capacitates what is no longer present but also constitutes a historicization of the present, which would render the critical vector unavoidable. Some of the considerations made, in particular to the objective of heterogeneity, difficult to situate in any historiographic narration/description, converge in the observations that follow, extracted from the article “System, Dynamics, and Interference in Culture: A Synoptic View”, by Even-Zohar (1990: 87):

The system concept had, however, to undergo several modifications in order to accommodate the conception of *stratified heterogeneity*. Firstly, it became necessary to recognize that both synchrony and diachrony should be admitted as systemic dimensions, and therefore that the idea of system need not be exclusively identified with static synchrony (but could be viewed as dynamic polychrony). Secondly, it was necessary to recognize that the idea of system does not imply that there can be observed/hypothesized for any number of phenomena just *one* system, i.e., one network of relations. To speak of an activity, be it language, literature, culture, or “history” in general, as single system is a heuristic simplification rather than an adequate theory.

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5 | “By ‘product’ I mean any performed set of signs and/or materials, i.e., including a given behavior. Thus, any outcome of any action, or activity, can be considered ‘a product’, whatever its ontological manifestation may be, be it a semiotic or a physical ‘object’: an utterance, a text, an artifact, an edifice, an ‘image,’ or an ‘event’. In other terms, the product, the item negotiated and handled between the participating factors in a culture, is the concrete instance of culture. Obviously, a culture product is any implemented item of the repertoire of culture” (Even-Zohar 2005: 25).

6 | In the opening pages to his 1990 work, Even-Zohar calls the attention to the fact that Bordieu reached similar conclusions—“in some areas superior”—to those of dynamic functionalism without any effective theoretical connection or approximation (Even-Zohar 1990: 3).

7 | Incorporation, in itself, already constitutes a test of large complexity for the systemic model, more tested and experimented in synchronic coordinates; which, of course, are also historical, as Even-Zohar reiterates at different points. In any case, it is interesting to recall that since 1968, the Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s pioneering formulation of systemic theories in the context of organic biology differentiated between the significantly called *structural and functional levels* of systems, attending respectively to their static and dynamic aspects.

In their analysis of the processes of self-awareness and cultural modelling, Lotman and Uspenski (2000: 190) likewise mention the common error in many literary histories of superimposing on top of the rigorous description of the literature/culture a uniformity intended to achieve organic unity and the elimination of contradictions. I will return to this below, in particular to the limiting idea of unique systems, which effectively sustains a great number of historiographic accounts—literary or not, systemic or not—to which we have become accustomed. A *unique system* is understood here to be that which excludes the empiric relevance of correlational networks beside the one considered in the postulation of the system as an existing entity. For example, nations and national literatures almost always present themselves, in historiographic practice and in historiographic-literary practice, respectively, as unique systems. Moreover, in the majority of historical/ historiographic operations, it is assumed that without a reduction of the field there can be no object. Of course, in practical terms, there is something reasonable about a decision of this sort, but certainly, what is excluded by an abuse that is not merely heuristic, is commonly interpreted as inexistent.

Identity dynamics generally fit these sorts of operations to a tee. As I have just suggested, a limiting and simplifying decision, that is simultaneously assumed to be legitimate or even apodictically founded, cease to be observed and evaluated as networks pertinent to and concurrent with other inter-related factors. Logically, these networks can incorporate doubly some of the factors already considered in order to postulate the existence of the pre-given system (associated now with other factors and/or other networks) or, alternatively, other factors that have not been incorporated but that do in fact exist, intervene or interact with those mentioned. And these connections are not only made with other factors present in one of the excluded networks but also, in all likelihood, with the very factors integrated in the network that constitutes the supposedly unique system. A community of consumers CC that subscribes to a cultural systems CS_1 , can perfectly well render simultaneous consumer activities perceptible, or even determinant in the market and/or in the repertoire of a different cultural system CS_2 ; and in such a way as to even end up calling into question the primary subscription of CC CS_1 . Therefore, the unique system not only ignores the existence of possible alternatives to the networks that supports the system, but also excludes the possibility that one of its factors could simultaneously be a factor in another system.

Another example will better clarify what is being said. In his reformulation of the theory of polysystems, Even-Zohar (2005: 31) presents the institution and the market as the intermediaries between social forces and cultural repertoires. The issue is that in developed cultural situations not subject to an exceptional uniformizing

and censoring pressure, the existence of *only* one market or one institution is impossible, as impossible as the existence of only *one* repertoire. This is clearly the case in multicultural societies characterized or not by processes of hybridization, as well as supposedly cohesive societies. The market is always plural, in the same way as the repertoire. As we have just seen, sectors of the market in a supposedly unique system participate in alternative and/or extra-systemic systems, and the market of this supposed unique systems will be frequented by consumer associated radically with other systems. This is not an exception, rather it is the norm. The acceptance that any system is in reality a polysystem or “system of systems” is not sufficient to resolve this complex matter that has obvious repercussions in the diachronic transfer of the problem and has an observable effect on the corresponding historicization. In fact, in a systemically-based LH the postulation of a unique system would not only be inadmissible, but the criteria of an exclusive location applied to objects of analysis would also prove unacceptable. Every historic event and every historic subject form part of plural historic planes, and therefore no historic reality pertains to a unique plane of account. One of the problems, then, is that of the identitary adjectivization of systemic LH, since although it be at a secondary level, this sort of characterization (territorial, cultural, social, linguistic...) end of showing its head. And when it does, it is due simply to a kind of conceptual misunderstanding or epistemological imposture (i.e., that which leads to the repeated identification of *literary system* with *national literature*). In reality, the problem is anything but new. Any historiography should manage it by opting for some criteria of axialization and vertebration. The difference lies in the fact that a non-systemic and/or non-empiric LH will promote the naturalization of such a criteria, while the indisputable operations of a systemic LH should always be the opposite: to renounce any camouflaging of the decision, bring it to light alongside the baseline complexity and even expound upon its relation and functional problematization. Before returning to this terrain, other partial analyses that assist in establishing a framework for integrated observation will be outlined.

Clearly, specifying the object of a certain history holds consequences for the sort of knowledge that it aspires to constitute and for the type of discourse associated with that choice. The history of biology and the history of architecture, for example, would share some operations and decisions, and undoubtedly would diverge in others—not only in order to serve objectively differentiated realities, but also because notions such as *organism* or *construction* are problematic in and of themselves, and because they are not unequivocal givens beforehand, since each has its own conceptual history (Koselleck) throughout time. In addition and on another level, the discourses capacitated to inform on the conceptual diachrony associated with these notions and their evolution are equally plural. For these sort

of things, since the Enlightenment, it has been commonly accepted as logical that in comparative terms, the history of biology—obliged to incorporate the specific processes of biochemistry, molecular biology, genomics, and other convergent disciplines—expanded its focus of attentions considerably more than the history of architecture needed to do so.

In this regard, one complementary observation must be made, one which is a common topic of debate in historiographic practices of the sort cited but also always absent in the sphere of literary historiography. This is the issue associated with the field of specialization of the ideal author. Or, to put it simply, the decision about whether the history of architecture should be the responsibility of a historian or an architect, or whether the history of biology should correspond to a historian or a biologist or in general to someone versed in experimental sciences. This sort of correlation is not so clear in literary history. Cases exist, of course, of literary histories by poets and writers (from Ronald de Carvalho to Max Aub or Emma Donoghue), but the debate over whether LH should correspond fully or partially to historians (promoted in theoretical terms by Lucien Febvre, Roland Barthes and many others) turned out to be discontinuous and oftentimes silenced too soon by corporate powers and academic inertia.

In any case, after the experience of the *Annales* School, an understanding seems to have been forged around diverse forms of historiography as programs that only guarantee rigor and utility based on the constitution of collaborative, interdisciplinary and plural working groups. Recall that of the four principal programmatic viewpoints announced by Lucien Febvre in 1947 when he took charge of the sixth section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études de Paris*, one of them was oriented precisely towards the search of a re-encounter between the human sciences, and another was dedicated to the promotion of collective research between teams of historians and other specialists. In this way, it can be imagined that in a not too distant future any postulation of authority or of historiographic discourse grounded in the individuality of the expert/informer will be considered anachronistic and less than credible. Probably, the era of historiographic narratives authored by one person, along with the expectations associated with them, is over.⁸ It does not seem to me that this prevention will take long to extend itself also to groups of historians subject to a limiting epistemologic coherence, and to a programmatic and strategic cohesion that are perceived as excessively rigid, disciplined and autotelic. It is likely, however, that future readers will unconditionally demand to resolve for themselves the contradictions that the facts and the interpretations at odds that teams of historians lay on the table. Thus, it seems confirmed that the greatest public (social, political) challenge of LH is the renegotiation of the narrative-historiographic and administrative-

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8 | This last sentence refers to situations like the one experienced by the Spanish and Latin American academia and intelligentsia, when in the late 19th century largely waited for a historiographic-literary proposal by Menéndez Pelayo that was never totally articulated. González-Millán (2006) compiled letters referred to this wait from the period 1877-1901, including correspondence with Juan Valera, Gumersindo Laverde Ruiz and the Colombian Miguel Caro.

institutional authority that resides in its own disciplinary roots. In that regard, I cannot resist issuing a warning intended to avoid potential simplifications.

It deals with the following: undoubtedly, there are forms of authority that outside the reach of the omniscient account and beyond the narrator-historian's mechanisms of control. The rejection of narrative in the historian's task, which as Peter Burke has reminded us is a demand that appears already by the 18th century,⁹ does not presuppose in and of itself the de-activation of the those mechanisms nor the disabling of determinist, explanatory, causal or teleological dependencies. Neither does it necessarily presuppose a suspension of sequentiality, linearity, continuity or causality. As such, the supposition according to which the change in course expressed by Lawrence Stone (1981) as the transit from an analytic mode to a descriptive one would represent a correction but not an indictment of the "excesses" of narrative historiography, should be carefully evaluated.

In the same way that behind every narrative there lies a (focalizing) narrative voice, behind every descriptive discourse there also always lies a (focalizing) descriptive voice. The option in favor of description does not constitute a guarantee of objectivity or of the non-intervention in the matter of analysis. Moreover, it is not evident that the existence of two constructive principles or formal structures that are opposed to one another in LH (narrate-describe)—in the sense outlined for example by Remo Ceserani (1990: 17-32)—if this opposition is extrapolated beyond the paradigm of nationalist, teleological typical of the 19th century.

Let us return briefly to the debate as to the goal of the historicization of biology and architecture. Along with the notion of *literature* and with its associated historicity, some clarifications and certain precautions comparable to those associated with the concepts of *live organism* and *construction*. In fact, the results of LH are hardly homologous when practices separated sufficiently in time are considered. This is so, it seems at first, because that which is referenced by the name *literature* constitutes very different territories at the end of the 18th century and during the 20th or 21st. However, there is a disinterested and essentialist—and therefore inconvenient—tendency to think of these differences as only problems of nuance. Consequently, not only does the signage of *Literary History* conserve its full validity but it is also legitimate to speak of epistemological and functional continuity between historiographical practices separated by two hundred years and that take as objects of study as different as those that appear, for example, in the model of Girolamo Tiraboschi (*Storia della letteratura italiana*, 1772-1781) and in that directed by Alberto Asor Rosa (*Letteratura italiana*, 1982-1996). Within this frame, perhaps it would

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9 | Scotsman John Millar is a good example, extremely interesting from the systemic point of view.

be useful to begin by making explicit that only by a sort of unwritten agreement is it acceptable to speak of a *unique* discipline despite the fact that the fields subject to historicization vary so greatly. This would explain, when viewed from a different angle, the rejection of the use of the word *history* in some fully historiographical projects, and even the fact that there are those who opt to suppress the signage of *literature* in favor of others such as *literary culture*, or even *literary life* or *literary field*.

The historiographic modalities understood as discursive practices possess in and of themselves a performative dimension with a double-perspective: one directed at the referenced community and another directed at the community that references, regulates and institutionalizes historiographic operations and knowledge. Whereas the first is configured around historic agents linked by their direct relationship with the predetermined object and by some connection of contiguity and continuity that joins them in space-time as a group (cultural, linguistic, religious, social, national...), the second comprises those agents that document, construct, discursify... history and that participate in a scientific dialogue and in an epistemological and ideological struggle for the control of knowledge and its influence in the public sphere. Sergio Sevilla (2000: 140-158) correctly relates this performativity with an epistemological changes by which the *theoria*—before, “duplicado conceptual de lo real”—came to be treated as *poiesis*: historiography confronted in this manner a rhetoric-pragmatic turn, in such a way that the imaginarium came to be what constituted social reality, and it is theory that produces, in a poietic sense, the world (White, Durkheim, Mauss, Castoriadis).

None of what we have just mentioned excludes a critical frame from historical knowledge: historiographic intervention will always be what, to begin, questions the connections of contiguity and continuity and the very existence of the postulated community as a specific object of attention. As such, discontinuities and alterities can mesh by means of diverse procedures, in a historiographic series, giving rise even to the refutation of the objects/identities considered and agreed upon by consensus as existent in other moments and/or from other perspectives; or, on the contrary, demanding the incorporation of objects/identities unobserved or excluded by the regulating community of historical knowledge. One highlighted feature of the practico-agential dimension of historians and their discourses lies in the possibility of a non-exclusive application of methods and scales, an issue that again conjures the idea of plurality and that seems important to underline. For example, scales applied on the same nucleus of reference subjected to contemplation on different levels, originate proposals that are not necessarily antithetical nor contradictory (nor necessarily complementary, understood from an informative point of view). The mappings and scales, contemplated

for the significance of their historical-literary application, point to the inexistence of isolated or impermeable communities as opposed to their outside/boundaries or to other communities.¹⁰ Furthermore, they also question the very identity of the community as this is postulated upon uni-parametrical bases (language, religion, gender, administrative units...). Put more precisely: it questions the consensus around the postulation/invention of an entity functionally admitted as a historical subject.

Thus, what we have said of course does not mean that any one-scaled historiographical practice is indictable, regardless of the size of the scale; this is hardly the case. But it does introduce an important heuristic and epistemological reservation that can be translated into the following terms: *“all that can be said is the result of informing/interpreting as if the scale utilized were the only or the most appropriate for the established objective.”* Obviously, this objective is susceptible to variation, as it will depend on diversified and irreducible criteria that range from a supposition of intentionality or of a faint intentionality, to some sort of *a priori* (academic, sectarian, ideological...) compromise. And, what is to be said of the methods? At least as much.

Let us return to the question of performativity, now in association with the constructivist principles that the theory of polysystems assumes. Perhaps it will be useful to begin with an affirmation: there is no possibility (and there never was) of a (literary) historiography that wasn't performative. This is so because every history involves some agent that take a certain stance and intervenes as a subject in a communicative-performative act. The following is a necessary complement to this affirmation: the space for a non-empirical (literary) History is more and more limited every day. This possibility existed in the past; indeed there are many examples of this approach. However, despite the performative character of the historian's intervention and in normal conditions today, an alternative that avoided facts that pointed towards one metaphysical or transcendent direction, or even to a manifest teleological point of departure, would be anachronistic and intellectually unjustifiable. Evidently, this does not erase the consequences of discursive relativism nor the derivatives of the relativism known as the linguistic turn. Nor does it erase the consequences owing to the constructivist approach regarding the correlation of theory and its objects, which leads Even-Zohar (1990: 3) to affirm that the only appropriate or viable way of observing a certain object of research is by establishing hypotheses by which the object is effectively subjected to a localizable group that espouses relatively succinct rule, the discovery and formulation of which should constitute the objective of all science.

The theory of polysystems of Itamar Even-Zohar was presented in

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10 | Consider in this respect Even-Zohar's first principle of literary/ cultural interference. In "Polysystem Studies", he noted that "Literatures are never in non-interference" (Even-Zohar 1990: 59) and in *Papers in Culture Research*, "Interference is always imminent" (Even-Zohar 2005: 57).

1978 as an approach appropriate for the analysis of historical-cultural methodology and for the stipulation of alternatives applicable, in particular, to the historiographic treatment of dependent of minoritized systems, perhaps because this was, starting ten years earlier, one of the basic preoccupations of Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski), a comparatist and Professor of Poetics at the University of Tel Aviv and one of the references for the Unity for Research of Culture¹¹. However, the historical perspective is emphasized less in the subsequent compilations of the work of Even-Zohar (1990, 2005, 2007), although there is normally a clear two-fold programmatic possibility presented as a theory of static systems and a theory of dynamic systems. One notable feature of this alternative is that which is expressed strongly in these terms: “it must be admitted that both synchrony and diachrony are historical, but the exclusive identification of the latter with history is untenable” (Even-Zohar, 1990: 11).

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We must now focus our attention on the answer that a systemic-based LH can offer to the four heuristic-methodological challenges cited above, which are, let us note, convergent and interdependent. To review: 1) to establish concretely, in a dynamic perspective, both systemic limits and poly-, extra-, and sub-systemic interactions 2) to include, in a relational perspective, not only the products but also the possibilities; 3) to choose between the model of traditional sequencing and that of a dynamic poly-chronicity to account for systemic evolution and changes; and 4) establish a (critical?) selection of historicizing heterogeneous data, and adjust a dialogue with previous and concurrent historiographical constructs, if not a fully *effective history*.

The issue of the limits of systems theory has been a key one since Niklas Luhmann's took up Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's notion of autopoiesis. As noted by Maldonado Alemán (2006: 19-23), for Luhmann autopoietic social systems are autonomous systems organized in a self-producing, self-regulatory and self-referential way, and establish differentiating limits with their environment. In this light, autopoiesis shares points of convergence in the representation of culture in other theoretical platforms, as a semiotic system that models the semiotic-sphere (Lotman), as the *habitus* in the social field (Bourdieu), as the repertoire in the cultural system (Even-Zohar), or the textual and the anthropo-social life in the literary institutions (Moisan). Maldonado Alemán (2006: 27) notes that the history of literary systems must include three types of relationships: inner-systemic, extra-systemic, and inter-systemic. In any case, I will warn again about what I previously interpreted as a sort of reduction to the principles of single system and localization, by means of

NOTES

11 | “History of literature”, “cultural history” or “historical model” vertebrate the summary and contents of *Papers in Historical Poetics* (Even-Zohar 1978). On this topic, see the partially divergent analysis by González-Millán (2001: 306), who considers that Even-Zohar incorporates a historical horizon on the initially constituted mode, but that it is blocked by the “mediación de un esquema heurístico excesivamente sistemático e abstracto”.

which the analyst would incorrectly tend to ignore the existence of alternative systemic networks other than the one considered to be the basic autopoietic reference, or to the affiliation to a different systemic network or a supposedly intra-systemic relationship. In a more categorical vein: a social space does not need to include one single social/cultural system (actually, that would be extremely rare),¹² and a systemic factor can simultaneously associate (most do it) with different systemic networks, that is, with different systems.

In order to curb the limits of the system it would be productive to attend, in addition to the interferences and what might be called a *paratactical* relational dimension—which comparative historiography has been studying for some time, with mixed results—to the *hypotactic* relational dimension that concerns joints-disjoints, and the adjustment polysystem/system/subsystem rather than an inter-systemic central-central, or central-radial view. The cultural system is always a complex system that includes limits, interrelations and hierarchies.¹³

In a previous paper I explored the affordances of the notion of *systemic delegation*, close to that of subsystem¹⁴ and similarly receptive to Bordieu's model of social fields and what might be termed as a topology of systems (Casas, 2003: 74-75). As it affects hypotactic inter-systemic relationships I will try to define the concept with more precision. A systemic delegation is the result of an interference between cultural systems which projects the core of the source system to the center or periphery of the receptor system.¹⁵

Systemic delegation relates to two possible factors: the prestige of the source system, and/ or a certain degree of systemic proximity. This proximity can be geographical, linguistic, political-administrative, cultural, ideological, religious, etc. In the context of globalization, the scale projection of the core of the source system is not limited to elements of the repertoire, but also to those of the market, of consumption, and especially, institutional elements. Thus, this projected globalization implies a challenge to the maintenance of the unified identity of the receptor system (or culture): systemic delegation, as a *scale*, meets the receptor system and destabilizes its identity.

Moreover, this interference agrees with the laws of cultural interference posed by Even-Zohar since 1990, which means that it proceeds uni-directionally from a strong or prestigious system to a weak or dominated; or, on other occasions, to an emergent system being constituted. It also means that systemic delegation, as the result of the interference, will redistribute functional identity (not necessarily the same as the one of the core of the source system) and will normally simplify, regulate and sketch the imported or appropriated

NOTES

12 | Remember Even-Zohar clear position in this regard, and his misgivings about any kind of reduction of the heterogeneity of literary studies: "The acuteness of heterogeneity in culture is perhaps most 'palpable', as it were, in such cases as when a certain society is bitor multilingual (a state that used to be common in most European communities up to recent times). Within the realm of literature, for instance, this is manifested in a situation where a community possesses two (or more) literary systems, two 'literatures', as it were. For students of literature, to overcome such cases by confining themselves to only one of these, ignoring the other, is naturally more 'convenient' than dealing with them both. Actually, this is a common practice in literary studies; how inadequate the results are cannot be overstated" (Even-Zohar 1990: 12).

13 | Further—privileging attention to Lotman—the semiospherical border is a simultaneous factor of organization (towards inside) and disorganization (towards outside).

14 | Elias Torres Feijó has used *subsystems* in different works since 2000, applied to the systemic-cultural research of the group Galabra, directed by Torres Feijó. I will come back again later to Torres Feijó's theorization, very much connected with Even-Zohar's model.

15 | I would not oppose the substitution of "receptor system" for "receptor culture" if there is some systemic insufficiency. In historical processes of colonization or imperialist expansion, systemic delegation would come up to be a part of the apparatus of cultural assimilation the follows

elements and relationships, while tending to preserve a relationship of dependence with the strong system. This simplification will amount to the acceptance of its own systemic minorization, an interiorization of subalternity and a limitation in the aspirations of an autonomous cultural system to the *local* and *minor*. On the other hand, saying that the projection on the receptor system can go to the center or the periphery amounts to pointing out that the functional localization of systemic delegation will have strength/ prestige and will exert a variable domination, depending on historical circumstances.

Scholars connected with the systemic paradigm have not noted the multiple occasions on which Even-Zohar refers to communities, a notion that might seem ambiguous in a theoretical-systemic sense, but not so much as a cultural referent.¹⁶ Precisely, the incorporation of the concept of systemic delegation fits quite simply in the frame of relationships between communities connected by some form of domination or subjugation, or by historical ties derived from processes of expansion or colonization¹⁷. There lays the ultimate comparison with a polarity system-subsystem and to the dynamics of emancipation/ subjugation

From here, how is it possible to historicize complexity and heterogeneity? It seems evident that the geographical and linguistic dimensions, inescapable in literary historiography, make their appearance as well when a systemic perspective is selected. Both should concentrate an important part of their efforts in thinking precisely about the correlation between autopoiesis and environment, in thinking about limits and that which remains extra-systemic as constitutive factors of the system, which nationally-based LH never undertook,¹⁸ since it assumes the centrality of the idea of nation as a normative model based on exclusion, and forecloses any acknowledgement of its invented/ postulated status, consensual or imposed.

But there is another factor that affects the correlation autopoiesis-environment in cultural systems, and in particular in literary systems: the phenomenon of translation, almost always excluded from the historical-historiographical perspective even though it is key from a systemic point of view, and not precisely because it understands translated literature as a juxtaposed series of secondary products and repertoires, but as built-in element, in an equal status, of the network of systemic factors that define the polysystem.

Once the simplistic comparison between literary system and national literature is discarded, then, what should be done? Shall we pose culture, language, social space, public sphere, ethnicity, community, territory, etc., as the referent of LH, and, therefore, the referent for

NOTES

the phase of highest rigor in the acculturation of subjugated communities. In this cases, there always appears and establishes an intellectual bureaucracy that becomes one of the more effective mechanisms for the consolidation of hegemony, and which in turn would end up being the preferred target of counter-hegemonic reaction of cultural resistance. In modern and contemporary processes of centralization, stemming from the constitution of states with planned cultural homogenization (virtually all of them), systemic delegations belong to the transmission belts of hierarchies, which aspire to constitute the acknowledgement of the superiority of the national-state culture over stereotyped and minoritized representations of the local/ regional.

16 | It does not seem too far-fetched to think that, in Even-Zohar's work "community" is comparable in most of the occasions to "nation". Almost always, the first encompasses—at least—the second, sometimes without changes in extension. Under this light, it might be necessary to nuance González-Millán's position (2001: 34) on the silence or implicit denial of the national discursive logic in theoretical texts of Even-Zohar, an appreciation that extended to the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

17 | Even-Zohar establishes that in cultural polysystems, the center and the periphery are not necessarily singular positions. There might be diverse centers and peripheries in a same polysystem. My interpretation is that the more complex the polysystem, the more possibilities for the generation of—let's say *sectorial*—center-peripheries. It remains to be studied the possible adaptation of the notion of systemic delegation

one given culture, one language, one social space, and one territory? There is more than one possible solution, and it will surely depend on the previous planning and the effects achieved by the agents who assume the historiographical enterprise.

Since the early 1990s, José Lambert has called for the privilege of a spatial-administrative localization (“literature *in X*” as alternative for “literature *of X*”), not exactly a territorial dimension, which would make it possible to observe the forms of cohabitation between literatures/languages/cultures and public institutions, especially those of the State. The proposal is of interest beyond Lambert’s specific applications with regards multilingual and multicultural societies. It also activates productive adaptations to the spatial turn of the social sciences over the last decades. In that sense, I have noted in a recent work the possibility of developing a literary geo-historiography organically determined by the local, regional, national and global dimensions of literary culture (Casas, 2005), for which I assessed four ongoing research programs with interesting results: the one by Dionýz Durišin and the Bratislava School; the empirical-systemic theory (Schmidt, Even-Zohar, Tötösy de Zepetnek, the CRELIQ and later the CRILCQ in Quebec); postcolonial and subaltern studies, and Mario J. Valdés and the Committee of Comparative Literary History of the International Comparative Literature Association.

Focusing on the second of these perspectives, as of today, there is no solution that generates consensus on the issue of systemic limits, especially as regards what I have termed subordinate relationships, but Torres Feijó’s (2004) analytical model offers useful tools to deal with the dialectics system-subsystem which integrates highly operative notions for a system-based LH, such as *protosistema*, *parasistema* o *enclave*.¹⁹ Torres Feijó’s (2004: 28) previous differentiation between *social space* and *social ensembles* moves beyond Lambert’s forms of cohabitation, by bestowing analytical weight, not so much to the institutional acknowledgment of difference, but to the socio-cultural consciousness of difference/dependence/conflict, and to the decision and capacity to intervene, to manage and negotiate these issues in the public sphere. This appears to be a viable and promising option that should be contrasted with other systemic frameworks, for example, that of the Latin-American postcolonial cultures in the 19th century, in which the historiographic dialectics between conservative and liberal sectors offers highly relevant political-institutional, cultural and performative information, according to the modes and rhythms of the access to independence in the different republics—extreme cases could be Chile and Mexico—but also in regards to the degree of implementation and consolidation of colonial traditions.²⁰

As regards the problematization underway here, the fundamental question is that of a historiographical alternative that could be posed

NOTES

system-subsystem), associated to a double principal functionality, cohesion and control. In sum, an echoey provincialization of culture in the center-radial sense.

18 | Not even in projects receptive to the empirical-systemic paradigm. A case of note is the one of the project *La Vie littéraire au Québec*, currently directed by Denis Saint-Jacques and Maurice Lemire, with five of the eight planned volumes already published. Volumes III, IV y V include an initial chapter titled “Les déterminations étrangères du champ littéraire”, but I do not think that it engages with the concrete tasks just mentioned as obligatory. Chapter V, for example, focuses on three spheres of exterior relationships: French literature, Catholicism, and US culture (Saint-Jacques and Lemire 2005: 9-29).

19 | In this model, the subsystem is characterized by “práticas que, mantendo especificidades a respeito do sistema originário, nom pretendem impugnar a sua pertença a este (o que, provisoriamente e de forma insuficiente e esquemática, se pode fazer equivaler a ‘literaturas regionais’ tal como entendidas, por exemplo, no contexto cultural ibérico)” (Torres Feijó 2004: 429). The proto-system, “práticas tendentes à configuração de um novo sistema segregado do sistema a que se está vinculado”. And the para-system would exist as long as there are “redes culturais, com vínculos de compartição exclusiva entre os seus membros, que actuam e se desenvolvem em um espaço social ocupado por um sistema a que nom pretende substituir nem impugnar mas com o qual nom se vincula em modo nengum, do qual nom fai parte” (Torres uses as example

from systemic frameworks. The possibility of establishing a systemic LH as the sum of a series of partial histories related to the network researched (the history of the repertoires, of consumption, of the institutions, etc.) is, from a systemic point of view, inappropriate, absurd and sterile. The possibility of establishing the LH of a polysystem by adding the history of the subsystems is similarly nonsensical. Despite this, there is a large number of these kind of attempts, often self-proclaimed as *systemic*, of a mere basic and ancillary value. Their programs are clearly insufficient, as a systemic history must account for the relationships of interdependence among factors (or, in a second sense, the relations of subordination system-subsystem), and there is no way to describe the functioning of the factors of a polysystem (or the subsystems) in isolation or autonomously. To draw the history of a factor or the history of a subsystem in an autonomous way, that is, to reduce heterogeneity to homogeneity, is not a systemic analysis.

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I will now refer, more succinctly, to the other three challenges to a systemic LH. I will first discuss the dialectic between existing products and possible products. Systemic analysis prioritizes existing factors and relationships (existing in the sense of effective, actual), and leaves research on possible alternatives, and the related network, in a second level, to say the least. This circumstance probably answers to one of the heuristic objectives underscored by Even-Zohar, especially in his revision of the theory of polysystems: to reduce parameters and connections among them in order to ascertain the empirical character of the object of study. To be precise, it should be mentioned that the theory of polysystems assumes what Lotman and Uspenski (2000: 191) term as the principle of alternativity, by which semiotic-cultural element, orders or structures—even the whole semiotic system—are perceived as alternatives.

In contemplating the dialectic between products and possibilities, basically from the perspective of the repertoire and the correlation “*culture-as-goods/culture-as-tools*”²¹, Even-Zohar draws upon different models, especially those of the sociologist Ann Swidler and the one of the Tartu-Moscow School (Lotman, Uspenski and Ivanov, in particular),²² but demonstrates a keen interest in establishing a dialogue with Bourdieu’s theory of social fields and particularly the notion of *habitus*. However, an initial consideration of the repertoire as the ensemble of rules and potential materials for the production and consumption within a given system, and its own connection with the binary producer-product, proves insufficient to explain everything that is explained in the theory of social fields: the correlation between positions in the field, the space of possibles, and “position- takings” understood as choices among those possibilities.

NOTES

cultural practices of gypsy communities in different social spaces of Europe). Finally, an enclave is a social space related to another actor, admitted in the metropolis, and which assumes its belonging to a unique cultural system, something quite common in communities of European émigrés established in the big American cities in the 19th century and part of the 20th.

20 | Beatriz González Stephan (1987: 186) explains this in detail: “donde las estructuras coloniales tuvieron un arraigo más profundo, el proyecto liberal se cumplió de forma moderada, dando lugar a un conservadurismo con tintes liberales, que, paradójicamente, facilitó el surgimiento de historias literarias alrededor de la década del 60 [s. XIX]. Epistemológicamente el discurso histórico tenía un asidero: fundamentar la razón de la misma historicidad en y desde la Colonia, asumiendo más o menos de forma crítica el legado hispánico. Son los gobiernos conservadores los que aceleran la aparición de estas historias, independientemente de que estén concebidas bajo una perspectiva liberal o conservadora.”

21 | Even-Zohar notes that for a new LH, rather than a history of literature/ culture as goods or as tools, it would be more interesting to establish a history of interdependence between the two notions, “porque podría explicar las circunstancias que hacen posible que la literatura mantenga o pierda su posición en la actividad incesante para manejar los repertorios de vida en la sociedad” (Even-Zohar 2007: 34).

22 | In this point I disagree with Even-Zohar (in 2005: 37-38) on the passive character of Lotman’s notion of culture.

According to Bourdieu, the space of possibles is a coordinate system that always mediates between positions and effective position-takings as each is perceived from a certain *habitus*. What does the space of the possibles, as an object of diachronic analysis, offer to the history of the field? Bourdieu (1992) notes, among other aims, the constitution of the *social trajectories* of groups of agents, understood as the series of positions occupied in successive spaces interdependently with their respective spaces of possibles. It seems to me that this complex task, necessary yet not sufficient as a system-based historiographical program, is not comparable to Even-Zohar's model.

The third challenge consists, in practice, of a choice among models of articulation of the diachronic dimension. Lying somewhere between the traditional sequence and dynamic poly-chronicity, this second model seems the most suitable for specifying systemic changes by means of a comparative criteria among temporal cuts, which, as mentioned above, could be read as a discrete succession of states of system subject to contrast. Thus, the combination description-narrative could also offer safety mechanisms to limit the all-inclusive and standardizing tendency of the traditional historicist narrative, and the homogenizing authority of the narrator-historian. It could also limit the tendency to causality and the temporal-causal ordering of reality, and could activate, at least, a critical attitude towards what Hayden White analyzed as meta-history, that is, the discursive infrastructure that prefigures a tropological option constitutive of the historiographical discourse, and which, in truth, would be prior to the diversification of proposals motivated by ideological or methodological drives.

Finally, a system-based LH would need to solve what some might call a *critical aporia*. The expression is undoubtedly exaggerated, and misguided to boot. The premises of systematicism—which coincide at this point with what at another moment was expressed by the *nouvelle histoire*, or history of mentalities, and even later, cultural history and Subaltern Studies—do not accept the preeminence of the socially privileged as a privileged object of study. As noted by Even-Zohar (2007: 5), research cannot be confused by criticism, or analysis with value attribution. For that reason, systemic research does not discriminate against marginal or non-prestigious cultural production. In the same way, Even-Zohar underscores that no science can select research materials according to criteria relating to taste or value judgment. This is unquestionable. But it should be noted that critical is not a concept that necessarily refers to a personal judgment nor to an axiological horizon. Not at all.

As stated previously, there are two sides to the alleged critical aporia that need clarification. The first has to do with the selection of what

NOTES

In collaboration with Uspenski, Lotman explained culture as a semiotic mechanism of textual production (bear in mind the specific sense of this concept for the Tartu-Moscow school). In lack of sufficient space to extend on the argument, I cite: “La cultura en general puede ser presentada como un conjunto de textos; sin embargo, desde el punto de vista del investigador es más exacto hablar de la cultura como de un *mecanismo que crea un conjunto de textos, y de los textos como de la realización de una cultura*” (Lotman & Uspenski 2000: 178; my italics).

would be taken under examination. It is not possible to examine a totality, and as Valdés has reminded us in the discussion about the endeavor to plan a history of the literary cultures of Latin America, multiplicity and heterogeneity do not amount to a totality. In this sense, the aspiration to the documentation and transcription of the totality of data amounts to an unapproachable and impossible program, for a system-based LH, or for any other view focusing on the 21st century from a historiographical perspective. Resistance to the neo-positivist temptation must be a solid principle for future LH.

The alternative is simple. It consists in the acceptance of the principle of critical selection of the referents (agents, repertoires, products, events, institutions, spaces of possibles, position-takings, etc.) as a guarantee for the presentation of heterogeneity. Following Even-Zohar's proposal that synchronic (and not only diachronic) research is fundamentally historical when it is solved by means of systemic methodology, the same criteria can be applied to the analysis of a cultural system in the context of a theory of static systems.

I will now limit the second aspect, previously introduced as the *historiographical operation*, to the authorial sphere of the researcher-historian, and the connections that can be made between the analyzed system/time and his or her own system/time, that of the research/writing. The theoretical debate is widely known. The key point is that all historicization of a past presupposes an *experiential* understanding of the present, to begin with, because the present is the only place from which it is possible to carry out the observation of history and proceed to a historiographical enunciation. In this initial sense, an acritical history is impossible or non-performative, for which reason some theoreticians of history talk about the task of the historian is a task of mediation. There are even those who establish a pragmatic correlate between history and translation. But rather than responding to these series of question, I would like to finish considering what was previously mentioned as *effective history*.

The brief text by Gaspárov noted previously makes mention, as do the pages that Lotman and Uspenski devoted to an erroneous application of the principles of self-description and self-understanding of cultures, of the tendency by literary historians to introduce information about the reception in subsequent periods of a particular author or a particular poetics as a *complement* to the analysis performed at that moment. This practice bespeaks an unjustifiable shift, since the interest these proposals hold is due precisely to the words and opinions of those who analyze them, as participants in an ongoing, open history of *effects* and in the interpretations/analyses of events, agents, and processes.

As such, a system-based LH must assume the commitment to attend

to and include these effects, going beyond an allegedly objective and unprejudiced observation of historical phenomena. Moreover, I believe that a system-based LH should also consider—and declare—the position from which the researcher-historian works and the space of possibles in which his or her discourse operates. This does not necessarily have to amount to a hermeneutic program or an ego-history, nor to an epistemological resolution like that of Mieke Bal and the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (Bal 1999), in which the interest of the past lies fundamentally in being a part of the present, and where cultural analysis—in opposition to history—is understood as *cultural memory in the present*. It would however, be desirable to provoke, at least, an exercise of self-analysis such as the one that Pierre Bourdieu undertook at certain moments in his career. After all, who can negate the validity of the words that close this paper? “To understand means, first of all, to understand the field in which one has been constructed, and against which one has been constructed.”

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