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# **TWO-FACED STATUS OF HISTORY: BETWEEN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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**TWO-FACED STATUS OF HISTORY:  
BETWEEN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES<sup>2</sup>**

In modern academia, history is occasionally classified as a social science. My aim is to demonstrate why history has not become a ‘real’ social science, although historians who represent the most advanced trends within the discipline aspired to this. Two-faced status of history is problematized as a conflict between social theory and historical method when historians adopt the theories of the social sciences. I consider two topics to be central here: the uneasy relationship between social theories and methods, and the indispensability of the cognitive potential of the humanities. Although historians have sought theoretical renewal by turning to the theories of various social sciences, they rarely could use techniques that represent ways of cognition normally used by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, etc. – psychometric testing, sociometric monitoring, ethnographic description, in-depth interview, long-term observation. This situation has undeniable positive effects. The impossibility of using social science techniques ensures the autonomy of history and enables it to preserve its disciplinary core. At the same time, dealing with meanings and using the cognitive methods of the humanities, history can catch things more ephemeral than trends, patterns, mechanisms and statistical rules.

Keywords: the humanities, social sciences, history, theory, method, symbolic interactionism, cultural interpretation, vague theories

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It is worth noting that historical studies traditionally have been considered a part of the humanities, although in modern academia, history is occasionally classified as a social science. My minimum task in this article is to show why history has not become a real social science, although many prominent historians of 1960s–80s wished for it. The maximum task is to offer an answer to the question: ‘What are the positive results of this situation?’<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I will speak only of the cognitive status of history, not about the sociology of science, which implies the analysis of organizations and institutions, the status of the discipline within universities, or a society, its social impact, critical function, etc. As well, I leave out the fact that history is often prescribed not only scientific tasks of classification, description and explanation, but also a wider – social – function.

Reference literature was primarily research on the history and sociology of the social sciences and humanities. Other sources include history in the field of human sciences and on the methodology of history. The reader will find references to the literature in the relevant sections of the article. But it seems that the question, which I plan to discuss, so far was not raised.

### *Continuum of Human Sciences*

Classification of science into a disciplinary structure is at least as old as science itself. After centuries of constructive but yet an inconclusive search for a perfect classification scheme, the only sensible approach to the question appears to be a pragmatic one: what is the optimal scheme for a given practical purpose? To this end, ever so many systems have been composed and introduced by universities, libraries, publishers, encyclopedias and, in ever growing numbers, by electronic databases, internet based information services, etc.<sup>4</sup> All contemporary classifiers divide the human sciences into the humanities and social sciences.

The demarcation line between the humanities and social sciences is often made according to subject. In such case, *the humanities* are defined, for example, as academic disciplines that study culture. The humanities include disciplines that have such subjects as ancient and modern languages, literature, philosophy, religion, and visual and performing arts such as music and theatre. Humanistic subjects have been at the heart of a liberal arts education. Through an exploration of the humanities, we learn “how to think creatively and critically, to reason, and to ask questions”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to the students of the Faculty of Artes Liberales, University of Warsaw, four-year International Doctoral Program (MPD) for inadvertently sparking my interest in the problem of the current status of the humanities.

<sup>4</sup> I mean applied classifiers of sciences here, rather than countless classification offered for centuries, beginning with Plato and Aristotle. See more info: *Savelieva, I.M., Poletayev, A.V. Istoriya i vremya: v poiskah utrachennogo. M.: Yazyki russkoy kul'tury, 1997. Ch. 1. (Савельева И. М., Поletaев А. В. История и время: в поисках утраченного. М.: Языки русской культуры. 1997. Гл. 1.)*

<sup>5</sup> The Stanford Humanities Center. URL: <http://shc.stanford.edu/why-do-humanities-matter>, (accessed 07/01/2015).

The shortcoming of this definition is obvious. Although the main social sciences include anthropology, economics, political science, psychology and sociology, there is also a group of *social sciences* that study culture (cultural anthropology, media studies, cultural studies, cinema studies, etc). According to their subject, the social sciences are sometimes defined as academic disciplines concerned with society and the relationships among individuals within a society. At times they can be very broad – academic disciplines concerned with *human aspects* of the world. The latter description is very similar to the definition of the humanities, isn't it?

Another widely accepted demarcation line between the humanities and social sciences concerns not their subject, but method. It is accepted that the humanities use methods that are primarily critical, or speculative, and have a significant historical element. It is here that they *differ* from the natural sciences, which predominantly use empirical methods. It is thought that social scientists use methods *resembling* those of the natural sciences as tools for understanding society, and so represent science in its stricter modern sense. However, this distinction is also ambiguous. Firstly, it is rather strange that the difference between the humanities and social sciences is defined according to their relation to an 'other' – the natural sciences. Secondly, there are a good number of approaches within the social sciences that rely on interpretative methods of social critique or symbolic interpretation. In modern academic practice, researchers are often eclectic, using multiple methodologies (for instance, by combining quantitative and qualitative techniques).

It is remarkable that nearly all new disciplines concerned with humankind which emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – communication studies, cultural studies, education, environment, human geography, international relations, internet, linguistics, media, social work – have been identified as social sciences. This identification in itself reveals a desire to be accepted into the corpus of social sciences, not the humanities; and, accordingly, to have theoretical and methodical claims as a 'hard' science. However, it is easy to deduce that the practitioners of these disciplines mostly rely on interpretative methods.

The formation of academic disciplines took a long time. The 'liberal arts' of the Middle Ages<sup>6</sup> and the original division of university corporations into faculties<sup>7</sup>, the specialization of humanistic studies<sup>8</sup> and the notion of disciplina (which did not initially have clear scholarly connotations<sup>9</sup>), as well as numerous ways of classifying knowledge, of inventing and re-

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<sup>6</sup> The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages. David L. Wagner (Ed.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983; *Weisheipl, J.* Classification of the Sciences in Medieval Thought // Medieval Studies. 1965. Vol. 27. P. 54–90.

<sup>7</sup> *Schneider, J. Hans J.* Wissenschaftseinteilung und institutionelle Folgen // Philosophy and Learning. Universities in the Middle Ages / Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen, Jakob Hans Josef Schneider und Georg Wieland, Ed. by Leiden; New York; Köln, 1995. P. 63–121.

<sup>8</sup> *Grafton, A, Jardine, L.* From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe. London: Duckworth, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> *CM.: Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions / Karla Pollmann, Mark Vessey (eds.) Oxford, 2005.*

inventing new sciences, especially popular in the early Modern period – all of this was just a preempt to a contemporary, socially determined ‘tree of knowledge’. In Europe of the 18th and 19th centuries, the analogue of contemporary human sciences was the set of moral and political sciences; the famous German notion of *Geisteswissenschaft* emerged in the 1849 translation of ‘A System of Logic’ by John Stuart Mill (1842) particularly as an analogue of moral sciences (and was later analysed in detail by Dilthey in his ‘Introduction into Human Sciences’ (1883))<sup>10</sup>.

‘It is difficult to assign major thinkers of this era to a single field, as we understand these fields today. Was Adam Smith or John Stuart Mill a philosopher, an economist, or a political scientist? Was Marx an economist, a sociologist, a philosopher, or a historian? Was Tocqueville a historian, a sociologist, an ethnographer, or a political scientist?’<sup>11</sup>.

Scientific disciplines were formed within the framework of the so-called ‘second scientific revolution’ in universities because of the system of specialization, workshops and laboratories<sup>12</sup>. Germany was the leader in this process, although for Britain the marker of disciplinary division was the emergence of university departments in the early 19th century (apart from traditional colleges and faculties). In France, it was the work of academies and specialized schools of higher education. In the 19th century the transition from general knowledge of humankind to human sciences was complete; it included the processes of specialization and professionalization. Lorain Duston has shown that professionalization and specialization in British, French and German academia took different forms but everywhere these processes led to the institutionalization of the humanities and social sciences<sup>13</sup>. In the early 20th century academic disciplines turned into separate worlds<sup>14</sup>. As formulated by William Sewell,

‘The academic disciplines, however, have utterly transformed the Edenic intellectual landscape of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The disciplines, true to their name, wield powerful disciplinary mechanisms of control and constraint. With their monopoly on certification and their control over curriculum, hiring, tenure, and allocation of research funding, the disciplines have entrenched themselves within clearly drawn borders’<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Cm.: *Makkreel, R., Luft, S.* Dilthey and the Neo-Kantians: The Dispute Over the Status of the Human and Cultural Sciences // *The Routledge Companion to Nineteenth Century Philosophy* / Dean Moyar (ed.) London: Routledge, 2010. P. 554–597; *Makkreel, R.* The Emergence of the Human Sciences from the Moral Sciences // *Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* / A. Wood, S.S. Hahn (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 293–322.

<sup>11</sup> *Sewell, Jr., W. H.* Logics and History: Social Theory and Social Transformation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2005. P. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Cohen, B. I.* Revolution in Science. Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985. P. 91–102.

<sup>13</sup> *Daston, L.* Die Akademien und die Einheit der Wissenschaften. Die Disziplinierung der Disziplinen // *Die Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin im Kaiserreich.* Jürgen Kocka, Rainer Hohlfeld und Peter Th. Walther, eds., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> *Abbott, A.* Chaos of Disciplines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; *Lepenis, W.* Gefährliche Wahlverwandtschaften. Essays zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 1989; *Novick, P.* That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>15</sup> *Sewell, Jr., W.* Op. cit. P. 2.

The reference here is not only to institutional borders and to mechanisms of management and control. At the same time, sciences differentiated between themselves in the cognitive sphere as well: rules that define disciplinary discourses were being developed, as well as theories, methods, and clusters of key notions. It was at that time the humanities parted ways with social sciences. Nevertheless, the sciences (including natural sciences) were based on shared universal concepts (historicism, evolution, structure, order, etc.), and big theories. It is sufficient to look at historical studies in the 19th century – whether the rising Marxist schools, geohistory or socio-cultural history – to see that human sciences used common theories and ideas. The intellectual baggage of social knowledge was available to all – the warping between ideas of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer or George Mead was the norm.

### *History as Social Science*

At the same time each discipline gradually developed its own theoretical techniques and sets of research methods – thus the famous call of Johann Gustav Droysen to historians: ‘Search for methods!’ Already in his introduction to the second volume of the ‘History of Hellenism’<sup>16</sup>, Droysen remarked that for all the abundance of the philosophy of history, historical studies still lacked their own *historical* theory. In his famous essay ‘Historika’ Droysen wrote that history as a discipline, which, as it was said at times, gave its name to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, still had not found its ‘life point’ and still borrowed it either from the philosophy of history, or from theology of history, etc. Droysen saw the task of his contemporaries-historians to provide historical studies with sovereignty. To do so he thought it necessary to generalize upon the methods of historians, ‘to unite them in a system, to develop their theory and thus to establish not the rules of history, but only the rules of the historical process of perception and knowledge’<sup>17</sup>. ‘We need someone like Kant who would reconsider not historical materials but theoretical and practical approach to history...’<sup>18</sup>.

Acquiring theoretical and methodological autonomy in the sciences took a long time and even in the 1930s most social disciplines still were at the stage of formation (these disciplines, like sociology, were living through infancy, according to Bloch<sup>19</sup>) and the founders of the Annales School deferred not to social sciences but to natural sciences. Above all they were impressed by the discoveries in the field of physics. An important consequence of this situation

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<sup>16</sup> Justus Olshausen (1800–1882) – a German orientalist who made contributions to Semitic and Iranian philology. From 1830 to 1852 he was a professor at the University of Kiel, since 1852 professor of Oriental languages at the University of Königsberg.

<sup>17</sup> Droysen, J.G. Oчерк istoriki [1858] // Droysen J.G. Istorika. SPb.: Vladimir Dal’, 2004. S. 578. (*Droysen J.G. Grundriss Der Historik*. Jena, 1858. S. 27).

<sup>18</sup> Droysen, J.G. Teologiya istorii (Predislovie ko 2-mu tomu “Istorii ellinizma” // Droysen, J.G. Istorika. SPb.: Vladimir Dal’, 2004. S. 505–525. (*Droysen J.G. Vorwort zur Geschichte des HellenismusII* [1843]).

<sup>19</sup> Bloch, M. Apologiya istorii ili remeslo istorika. M: Nauka, 1986. S. 11. (*Bloch M. Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien*. 1949).

was the relative equality in the relations between the representatives of social sciences, including history (this is the underlying principle of “historical synthesis” proposed by Henri Berr). Still the lesser prestige of the social sciences, lack of awareness of their achievements or underrating of these achievements yielded a very important result. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century historians had much higher claims to producing their own theories. For example, the “old” social history created at the time (Henri Pirenne, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel) was at least on a par with the “new” social history of the 1970s in terms of theoretical independence.

Meanwhile, after the 1930s, the formalization of social sciences grew. The late 1930s saw the publication of the first works by Paul Samuelson that laid the foundations for the presentation of economics in mathematical formulas; the Chicago School arose (Ernest Burgess, E. Franklin Frazier, George H. Mead, Robert E. Park); Talcott Parsons published ‘The Structure of Social Action’ (1937); etc. It was truly a great step towards the ‘scientization’ of the human sciences as it has been and still is understood. The specificity of the social sciences is that the focus is theory and anything can be chosen as method – mathematics, cybernetics or linguistics.

As a result, since the mid-20th century, historians as well as other representatives of the humanities aspired to the scientization of their discipline. For the most part historians have sought theoretical renewal by turning to the theories of various social sciences. The process later was dubbed ‘the strategy of borrowing’. As a result, in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. historians have produced practically no ‘historical theories’ of their own. Examples of some important exceptions date fairly far back: among them are ‘The King’s Two Bodies’ by Ernst Kantorowicz (1957), a book that laid the foundation of a ceremonialist trend in historiography; the theory of three levels of social change by Fernand Braudel (1958); the theory of childhood in the early Modern Times by Philippe Aries (1960); ‘The Long Middle Ages’ by Jacques Le Goff (1985); and Reinhardt Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte* (1979). ‘The strategy of borrowing’ implies that history can naturally rely on the theoretical apparatus of the social sciences that deal with the present time. Since the 1960s, historiography has changed rapidly as the following model of interaction became established: a social science – a corresponding historical subdiscipline – the choice of macro- (and later also micro-) theory – and its application to historical material. This model overturned the relationship between history and social science that existed in the Positivist paradigm. While in the 19th century historians were supposed to provide empirical material for the social sciences to develop their theories, now, on the contrary, the social sciences supply theoretical concepts for history.

Since the 1960s, historians have reacted quickly to new developments in the social sciences. For example, the theory of modernization and world-systems analysis were promptly taken up by historians as was a concept of symbolic power. Historians in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century were quick to take on board some theories of modern social and cultural anthropology. The same can be said about the “linguistic turn” in historiography. Today we have many interesting examples of micro-history being modeled on micro-sociology and micro-economics through the use of corresponding concepts. The conceptual and theoretical apparatus of the social sciences is applied in a variety of ways, for example in the works of Giovanni Levi devoted to economic and social history and to the discussion of the theoretical problems of microanalysis. In that sense, the work of the Italian historian is highly representative.

Let me give a few examples of the fruitful use of microanalysis social theories in the works of Levi. From microeconomics he borrowed the concept of ‘limited rationality’ of the behaviour of economic agents developed by Herbert Simon, and the non-institutional theory of the functioning of markets going back to the works of Ronald Coase, and developed since the 1960s by Armen Alchian, Harold Demsetz and others. From microsociology Levi used the theory of symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer), the scale of social interaction by Frederick Barth, symbolic power by Pierre Bourdieu, and network interactions by George Homans.

On the whole, the invasion of the social sciences into history<sup>20</sup> in my opinion was not the ‘icy embrace of scientificity’ (Hans Ulrich Hombrecht)<sup>21</sup>; I would rather call this ‘energetic embrace’, as this process did not destroy historiography but rather transformed it. Each stage in the development of social sciences and humanities had its clearly defined set of authors, where historians found inspiring ideas, methods and citations. This is the evidence and manifestation of the interdisciplinary character of the social sciences and humanities. The role of big philosophical concepts (life cycles, progress, regress, Eros) fortunately diminished but the importance of concepts and models from the social sciences has grown dramatically. Historical studies broadly referred to such classical authors as economists Joseph Schumpeter, Simon Kuznets, Walt Rostow, Karl Polanyi, Douglass North, sociologists Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Immanuel Wallerstein, Pierre Bourdieu, as well as the re-interpreted Karl Marx. Leading anthropologists (Clifford Geertz, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Arnold van Gennep, Edmund Leach, Marcel Mauss, Marshall Sahlins, et al.) perform the function of classical authors in the studies on historical anthropology and the history of mentality. Similar lists of big names could be produced if one turns to linguistics, psychology, cultural studies, etc.

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Minimum optimum’ at the third stage of its development, according to Rolf Torstendahl. *Torstendahl R. The Rise and Propagation of Historical Professionalism*. N.Y.; London: Routledge, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> *Gumbrecht, H.U. Ledyanye ob'yatiya “nauchnosti”, ili Pochemu gumanitarnym naukam predpochitel'nee byt' “Humanities and Arts” // Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie. 2006. No. 5. S. 7–17. (Гумбрехт Х. У. Ледяные объятия «научности», или Почему гуманитарным наукам предпочтительнее быть «Humanities and Arts» // Новое литературное обозрение. 2006. № 5. С. 7–17.)*



Talking about borrowing social theories by the humanities, receptivity curves<sup>22</sup> should be taken into consideration – the citation of strong theories usually begins later and continues when these are already losing popularity in adjacent disciplines.

What happens if a historian bases his/her research on a theory developed for another discipline which has other ways of working with subjects existing in the present? Examples from a number of historical sub-disciplines could be offered to answer this question.

### *Social Theories and Methods of the Humanities*

The borrowing of social theories and concepts was easily mastered by historians, but borrowing social theories was not accompanied by the adoption of prescribed methods. I will clarify that by methods I mean just methods (the word ‘method’ means a ‘way’ in Greek); as far as scientific work is concerned, its synonyms could be the words ‘technique’, or ‘way’. The question of correlation between theory and method when human scientists adopt the theories of social sciences seems to me to be central in the explanation of *continuous autonomy* of the humanities. Let’s take the case of history. Although economic and social historians of 1960s–70s were ‘learning to count’ quite enthusiastically (one should remember a famous phrase by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie addressed to the advocates of discourse-analysis: ‘I made so much effort learning to count, how could I find time to learn to read’<sup>23</sup>), nonetheless historians rarely can use techniques and ways of cognition normally used by sociologists, psychologists or anthropologists (the latter, however, often borrow research techniques from each other) – psychometric testing, sociometric monitoring, ethnographic description, in-depth interview, long-term observation. How can one find a way of applying social theory to investigate past social reality? Examples from a number of historical sub-disciplines could be offered to answer this question. To analyse the complex connection between theories and methods I will refer to cultural history. Being placed at the crossroads of history and culture, this approach widely implements theories from various human and social sciences. Besides, cultural history is a contemporary phenomenon and emerged on the wave of interest towards interdisciplinarity. Thus it absorbed and successively reflected many historiographical turns and used a wide range of relevant theories in their dynamics.

My favourite example is ‘Cockerels and cats’ – one day I will write an article with such a title. Following the famous cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, historians tried to imply the

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<sup>22</sup> See: *Jacobs, J. A. Receptivity Curves: Educational Research and the Flow of Ideas: Expanded Version. Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, PSC Working Paper Series, 2013. SC 13-10. [http://repository.upenn.edu/psc\\_working\\_papers/50](http://repository.upenn.edu/psc_working_papers/50) (accessed 07/01/2015).*

<sup>23</sup> *Le Roy Ladurie, E. Zastyvshaya istoriya // THESIS. 1993 (1974). Vyp. 2. S. 153–173. S. 155. (Le Roy Ladurie, E. L'histoire immobile // Annales:Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations, mai–juin 1974, v.29, no.3, p.673–692.)*

method of ‘thick description’ (Geertz borrowed it from the philosopher, Gilbert Ryle)<sup>24</sup> for cultural interpretation of social and cultural experience of various social groups of the past. A great number of scholars wrote on the role of Geertz in cultural history. One of the direct followers of Geertz in historiography, Robert Darnton, tried to implement the ‘thick communication’ approach of his colleague and mentor, Geertz (at Princeton they conducted a seminar together for many years). It would be instructive to ask just two questions: ‘What have you learned about the Balinese from the study ‘Deep Fight: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’ by Geertz?’<sup>25</sup> and ‘What have you learned about the Parisian artisans of 1730s from the article ‘Workers’ Revolt: the Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Severin’ by Darnton?’<sup>26</sup>

Geertz spent weeks in a village on Bali. His methods were *ceaseless* observation, communication and thick description of ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ games. The result of the research was rather detailed and reliable observations of the life of the Balinese: one can learn almost everything about the Balinese from the book – from everyday life and communicative practices to the organization of society and, more importantly, the structure of their symbolic world. What Darnton had at his disposal was a three-page story by an eyewitness printer, Nicolas Contat<sup>27</sup>, who was learning his trade at the Rue of Saint-Severin in Paris in the late 1730s and wrote that ‘in all years of the existence of the Jacques Vincent’s printing press nothing as hilarious as the great cat massacre has ever happened’<sup>28</sup>. Darnton has viewed this story as fiction and has used it for ‘an ethnologic explication de texte’<sup>29</sup>. In addition to the direct (but a very short) story by Nicolas Contat source materials from the vast archive of the Printing Guild of Neuchatel was used; its documents helped make indirect conclusions (‘printing business was conducted in a similar way everywhere’<sup>30</sup>) about the corporation of artisans, not in Neuchatel, Switzerland, but in Paris – their everyday life, rituals and values. In order to understand ‘meanings that popular culture invested into cats’ the author has turned to European folk tales, recorded (or written?) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Are we getting anything but a tale as a result? In the end, Darnton has to rely not on the ‘thick communication’ methods but on the Bakhtin’s idea of Rabelaisian culture of laughter, and is not quite confident when he concludes that ‘Perhaps when printers tried a great

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<sup>24</sup> Geertz, C. *Interperatsiya kul'tur*. M.: ROSSPEN, 2004. P. 56–57. (Geertz C. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*.)

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* P. 478–522.

<sup>26</sup> Darnton, R. *Rabochie buntuyut: velikoe koshach'e poboishche na ulitse Sen-Sevren // Darnton R. Velikoe koshach'e poboishche i drugie epizody iz frantsuzkoy kul'tury*. M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002. P. 91–125. (*Darnton, R. Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin // Darnton, R. The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. Basic Books. 1984.)

<sup>27</sup> *Nicolas Contat. Anecdotes typographiques où l'on voit des coutumes, moeurs et usages singoliers des compagnons imprimeurs*. Ed/ Giles Barber, Oxford, 1980. P. 51–53.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* P. 91.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* P. 91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* C. 98.

number of half-starved cats, administered sacrament to them, and hung them, the printers wanted to ridicule the legal and social system of their world'<sup>31</sup>.

The key word here is the word “perhaps”.

If one takes into consideration volume, depth and accuracy of information and the persuasiveness of conclusions, Darnton certainly loses to Geertz, and thus thick description in history loses to thick description in cultural anthropology. The reason is that a thick description by a historian could not have been based on participant observation, but implied work with sources that were scarce and mostly were not directly related to the described incident. The past of ‘other’ communities cannot be explained by methods applied by cultural anthropology to ‘other’ cultures, simply because it is not possible either to observe, or even to fill in gaps in the documents. If, however, one is ‘to follow the idea to the end’ and to evaluate the chances of using theories of cultural interpretation in historical studies, one would have to admit that turning to cultural interpretation broadens both the topical scale and the limits of the source analysis. Thanks to invasion of cultural anthropology, history has demonstrated the colossal potential for bringing in new data (“sources”) in historical parlance, and teasing out totally new information from the sources previously used. As a result, the imagination and assumptions of historians, which are acceptable methods in the humanities, enable us to gain knowledge that is impossible to get using methods that are more ‘precise’. This is an important value of the humanities.

To be accurate, I have to say that cultural history now is successfully represented by the use of clear and numerous examples of social theories’ methods. For instance, the use of semiotics’, linguistics’, and visual studies’ instruments helped produce interesting results in the field of the symbolic representations of power, history of empires, rituals, everyday life, events, etc. The use of these methods was possible because what is relevant here are the ways to study texts in a wide sense, be they written sources or visual objects.

Another important theoretical pillar of historical studies was the theory of symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Yrjö Engeström, David Middleton, Thomas Park, James Horton, Charles Cooley, Florian Znaniecki, et al.)<sup>32</sup>. The key point of the theory of symbolic interaction, from the point of view of historians who use it, is the idea that a human action is not only an interaction between persons but also an interaction inside an individual mind. Our ideas, mindset, or values are important, but the ceaseless process of thinking is of great importance as well. We are not just the products of a society simply conditioned or influenced by others. In essence, we are thinking animals and we always have an

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. C. 116.

<sup>32</sup> Mead, G. H. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Ed. by Charles W. Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1934; Blumer, H. *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.1969; Griffin, E. A. *A First Look at Communication Theory*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006. P. 60; Charon, J. M. *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration*. Boston : Prentice Hall, 2009 (10th edition) [1979].

inner dialogue when we interact with others. If we are to understand the cause of action or an event, we need to concentrate on human thinking and reflection. The past influences our actions because we think about it and turn to it to define the current situation.

The theory of symbolic interactionism can be used successfully to study such problems in the past as social communities, collective action, social movements, emotions, and deviant behaviour. This theory offers the most important heuristic perspective for the study of the past of the communities with high level of self-comment and reflection (intellectuals, artists, scholars).

Up to now historians have used interpretative possibilities of symbolic interactionism insufficiently (in two senses: infrequently and superficially). Reasons for this again stem from the evident break in research methods between social scientists and historians. While using the theory of 'symbolic interactionism' a historian faces a situation where it is not possible to apply their instruments to historical material directly. One has to adopt the methods of historical study to this theory, to search for the replacement of 'participant observation', to deduct the processes of social interaction and individual reflection from existing sources and through these to understand 'why people did what they did', and how social meanings were produced, that is, to operate in the humanities territory.

In addition to the lag between theoretical frame and specific methods, the strategy of appropriation social science theories carries an often real threat of anachronisms due to the use of theories geared to the functioning of one type of society or one period of time to study societies of a different type/time. Such anachronisms have been observed in various fields. As a result, many historians who tried to combine the theoretical models of the social sciences and time-tested methods of work with historical material came to grief (like a number of sociologists who promoted macro-theories of historical sociology to study past societies). Some innovative sections of history, which initially produced quite impressive results, later faced the problem of the limits of applicability of theories created to explain modern society to societies of the past. On the whole, it seemed that very few social theories could be successfully applied to the study of past societies, because to perceive them one needs to employ the explicatory mechanisms of the humanities, and not of social sciences<sup>33</sup>.

### *The Use of the Humanities*

The sustainable humanitarian component, whether it is explicit or implicit, does not seem to me an internal affair of history per se. Further I will focus on some cognitive benefits of belonging to the humanities.

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<sup>33</sup> This idea is developed in detail in the book: *Savelieva I.M., Poletayev A.V. Istoriya i vremya: v poiskah utrachennogo.*

1. One of the values of the humanities is in the fact that they still provide a rich source of vague ideas, which, due to their 'vagueness' easily find place for themselves in various disciplines. Despite losing the hope for the unity of social knowledge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the shared field of ideas and fundamental concepts remain, and the humanities still produce a considerable amount of vague ideas, which have powerful heuristic potential (*Die Sattelzeit, longue durée, the Carnival, archaeology of knowledge, la mort de l'auteur*, etc). The more vague a theory is, the more popular and successful it could become. The unexpected attractiveness of *grande idee*, which temporarily pushes out all other ideas, is determined, says Susanne Langer, by the fact that they resolve so many fundamental problems at once that they seem also to promise that they will resolve all fundamental problems, clarify all obscure issues. Everyone snaps them up as the open sesame of some new positive science, the conceptual center-point around which a comprehensive system of analysis can be built. The sudden vogue of such a *grande idee*, crowding out almost everything else for a while, is due, she says, 'to the fact that all sensitive and active minds turn at once to exploiting it. We try it in every connection, for every purpose, experiment with possible stretches of its strict meaning, with generalizations and derivatives'<sup>34</sup>.

Vague ideas are 'commonly used' and their life cycle sometimes is very long; for example, a number of intuitions of Walter Benjamin are still in demand. These are presented in a manner described by Susan Sontag in the following way:

'His phrases are not born in a way we are used to: one does not follow from the other. Any phrase emerges as the first – and the last one. ('A writer should finish every sentence (with full stop and begin anew' – says the introduction to 'the Origin of German Baroque Drama'). The movement of thought and history is enfolded as a panorama of ideas, all points are taken to their extremes, and intellectual perspectives are mind-blowing'<sup>35</sup>.

Moreover, the flexibility of the humanities often leads to metaphorization of even highly formalized concepts of the social sciences and expands the field of their application (such was the fate of concepts like path dependence, thick description, symbolic interactionism, symbolic power, agency, and many others). Benjamin or Foucault were not threatened by metaphorization – they *were* the creators of metaphors.

Susanne Langer wrote that some ideas spread among intellectuals with a surprising ease. These ideas solve so many fundamental problems that they are taken up, viewed as a key to a

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<sup>34</sup> Langer, S. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. 4th ed. Cambridge, Mass., 1960 (1942). Cited by: Geertz, C. *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* // Geertz, C. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. N. Y.: Basic books, 1973. P. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Sontag, S. *Pod znakom Saturna* // Sontag S. *Mysl' kak strast'*. *Izbrannye esse 1960–70-h godov*. M.: Russkoe fenomenologicheskoe obshchestvo, 1997. (*Sontag S. Im Zeichen des Saturn. Essays über E. M. Cioran, Antonin Artaud, H. J. Syberberg, Roland Barthes, Leni Riefenstahl, Walter Benjamin, Elias Canetti.*)

new, promising science, a conceptual centre to build a comprehensive system of analysis around it.

‘After we have become familiar with the new idea, however, after it has become part of our general stock of theoretical concepts, our expectations are brought more into balance with its actual uses, and its excessive popularity is ended. A few zealots persist in the old key-to-the-universe view of it; but less driven thinkers settle down after a while to the problems the idea has really generated. They try to apply it and extend it where it applies and where it is capable of extension; and they desist where it does not apply or cannot be extended’<sup>36</sup>.

Thus, a theory gains the status of a programmatic idea and finds a permanent place in our intellectual arsenal (if it ever had any true potential, that is). But it loses the grand, all-embracing scale and limitless perspectives of application that it had initially.

2. The realization of the limits of social sciences’ explanatory power has strengthened the cognitive status of the humanities and provoked a linguistic turn in social sciences<sup>37</sup>. One more radical innovation is remarkable in the context of our topic, in my opinion. It is found in a number of social disciplines, and it reveals the imperialism of history that seemed to disappear a long time ago. One witnesses a new stage in the historicisation of sciences (not only social ones) that presents itself in the active use of the neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory<sup>38</sup>, biological or cognitive turn in anthropology<sup>39</sup>, the successes of evolutionary economics<sup>40</sup>, historical aspect of ecology<sup>41</sup>. Here we do not talk about the direct influence of the humanities but rather about the attractiveness of their historicity.

Now we clearly deal with the temporalisation of some very different disciplinary discourses. I would address some processes taking place in the social sciences closest to history: in anthropology and sociology. I refer to the further deepening of history (in a direct sense: for millions and millions of years) in historical anthropology (this phenomenon was called the “biological” or “cognitive” turn)<sup>42</sup> and to the so-called “third wave”<sup>43</sup> in historical sociology. The

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<sup>36</sup> Cited by: *Geertz, C.* Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. P. 3—4.

<sup>37</sup> *Clark, E. A.* History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. 2004; *Toews J. E.* Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience. // *The American Historical Review.* 1987. 92/4, 879–907; *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD1973.

<sup>38</sup> *Fracchia J., Lewontin R.C.* Does Culture Evolve? // *History and Theory.* 1999. Vol. 38. P. 1–13; *The Return of Science: Evolution, History, and Theory* 2002; *Frontiers of Evolutionary Economics* / Eds. J. Foster, J. Stanley Metcalfe. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2001; *Runciman, W.G.* Culture Does Evolve // *History and Theory* February 2005. Vol. 44. Issue 1. P. 1–13; *Runciman, W.G.* Rejoinder to Fracchia and Lewontin // *History and Theory.* February 2005. Vol. 44. Issue 1. P. 30–41.

<sup>39</sup> *Smail, D.* On Deep History and the Brain. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example: *Witt, U.* The Evolving Economy: Essays on the Evolutionary Approach to Economics. *Global Business and Economics Review.* 2006. Vol. 8. No. 3/4. P. 338–342; *Witt, U.* *Evolutionary Economics* // *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* / ed. by Steven Durlauf and Lawrence Blume, 2nd ed. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; *Witt, U.* *The Evolving Economy: Essays on the Evolutionary Approach to Economics.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> *Szabo, P.* Why History Matters in Ecology: an Interdisciplinary Perspective // *Environmental Conservation.* Cambridge: Dec 2010. Vol. 37. Issue 4. P. 380–388.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example: *Schäffer, J.-M.* La Fin de l’exception humaine. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2007; *Gamble, C.* *Origins and Revolutions: Human Identity in Earliest Prehistory.* N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 200707; *Smail, D.* Op. cit.

“third wave” of historical sociology surprises by its historicism and the desire to explain the complex web of numerous factors, wishes, events, turning points, “historical traps”, etc. with unexpected consequences even in retrospect, which is so typical to the humanities approach. It does not result in the creation of a typology, but rather in the establishment of a chain of events and complicated cause-and-effect relations unique for each historical tendency.

3. Historicist re-orientation and complication of contemporary analytical instruments also suggests turning to cognitive sets and structures of social self-reflection and self-representation that were produced, for example, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or in the period of Romanicism. The sets of past scientific and social ideas are not just a pre-history of thought that can be taken out, they remain relevant outside of their own epochs. This is certainly true of the demand in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries for classical methodological and philosophical works of the early Modern period (by Descartes, Vico, or Hobbes).

If we take into account the above, we can recognize that the impossibility of using social science methods has a positive value; it ensures resistibility of the humanities and enables the preservation of the disciplinary core. When it is not possible to use the methods of social sciences, theories ‘soften’ and this gives a different cognitive perspective. Using methods specific to the humanities it is possible to catch things more ephemeral than trends, patterns, mechanisms and statistical rules.

‘Through the humanities we reflect on the fundamental question: What does it mean to be human? The humanities offer clues but never a complete answer. They reveal how people have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense of a world where irrationality, despair, loneliness, and death are as conspicuous as birth, friendship, hope, and reason’<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> This label united the contemporary historical sociologists who show interest in an event, and act of will, a chance etc. See: Adams et al. 2005. On the “third wave” see: *Clemens, E. S.* “Sociology as a Historical Science,” *The American Sociologist* 37:2 (Summer 2006), 30-40; *Adams, J., Clemens, E. S. and Orloff, A. Shola.* “Introduction: Social Theory, Modernity, and the Three Waves of Historical Sociology” / *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology*. Ed. Julia Adams et al.. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005. Pp. 1-72; *Abbott, A.* *Time Matters: On Theory and method*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; *Griffin, L.J.* *Temporality, Events, and Explanation in Historical Sociology: An Introduction // Sociological Research and Methods*. 1992. V. 20, p. 403–427; *Clemens, E. S.* *Afterword: Logics of history? Agency, multiplicity, and incoherence in the explanation of change. / Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology*. Ed. Julia Adams et al.. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005. Pp. 493–515; *Griffin, L.J.* *Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology // Am. J. of Sociology*. 1993. N. 98. p. 1094–1133; *Haydu, J.* *Making use of the past: time periods as cases to compare and as sequences of problem solving. American Journal of Sociology*, 104(2), 1998. P. 339–371; *Kiser, E., & Hechter, M.* *The Role of General Theory in Comparative-Historical Sociology. American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 97(1), 1991. P. 1–30; *Mahoney, J.* *Path dependence in Historical Sociology. Theory and Society*, 29(4), 2000. P. 507–548; *Mahoney, J.* *Comparative-historical Methodology. Annual Review of Sociology*, 20, 2004. P. 81–101; *Sewell W.A. Jr.* *Logics and History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2005; *Somers, M. R.* ‘We’re no Angels’: Realism, Rational Choice, and Relationality in Social Science. *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(3), 1998. P. 722–784; *Steinmetz, G.* “The Relations between Sociology and History in the United States: The Current State of Affairs,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20 (March/June 2007), 1-12; *Savelieva, I.* *In Search of the New ‘Turns’: History and Theory in the 21st Century // «Humanities» (WP BRP 02/Hum/2011National Research University Higher School of Economics*. 2011. 28 pp.

<sup>44</sup> Commission on the Humanities. *The Humanities in American Life: Report of the Commission on the Humanities*. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press. 1980. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft8j49p1jc/> P. 1. (Accessed 07.01.2015).

It should be said that by the end of the last century, the euphoria regarding the unlimited possibilities of universal laws, historical synthesis, mathematical methods, powerful theories, etc. has diminished not only in the humanities, but also in the social sciences. The matter is that the humanities deal with meanings (texts of various kinds), and social sciences with processes, institutions, mechanisms, etc. Working with meanings typical for the humanities does not suggest the rejection of a scientific approach, at least, if one is to apply the accepted definition of scientificity: ‘true scientific analysis has to correlate with facts, meet the requirement of simplicity and to have an explanative power’<sup>45</sup>. Macro-concepts of social sciences do not answer the questions of ultimate meaning, while the humanities try to do so. I refer not only to secular humanism. The mystery of the humanities is in its ‘softness’, which they cannot be rid of, and which does not show their weakness or immaturity, but rather their quite different heuristic potential.

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<sup>45</sup> *Lévi-Strauss, C. Strukturalnaya antropologiya. M.: Eksmo-Press, 2001. S. 42. (Lévi-Strauss, C. Anthropologie structurale. Paris: Plon. 1958.)*