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**IN SEARCH OF THE NEW “TURNS”:
HISTORY AND THEORY
IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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**IN SEARCH OF THE NEW “TURNS”:
HISTORY AND THEORY IN THE 21ST CENTURY**²

This study researches some of the most recent theories (elaborated by historians and social scientists) applied to the practice of historical research. The object of this research includes ideas, concepts, notions, methods of scholarly analysis of past social reality, as well as the emergence of new interdisciplinary fields, mutual borrowings and interventions. In this connection, the opposite process — the historization of some very disparate disciplinary discourses — is briefly addressed. It includes especially historical aspects of anthropology and sociology in the coming century.

The research is based on information from journals specialized in history and theory, on leading history journals which demonstrate the state of art in various research areas, on sociological journals publishing material on historical sociology and on monographs from 1995—2010.

Keywords: history and theory, history after postmodernism, interdisciplinarity, theorizing global history, “spatial turn”, evolutionary ideas and history, “deep history”, recent historical sociology.

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² In this paper I used the results of the project “The Formation of Disciplinary Field in Social Sciences and Humanities, 19th – 21st cc.” completed within the research program of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” in 2011.

This article analyses new shifts in the theoretical foundations of the historical discipline that emerged in the 21st c. – the theory of history. The objects of research are primarily the most recent concepts, new methods and ways of studying the phenomena of the past. As a whole, I deal with theories, ideas, concepts and notions, the use of methods of scholarly analysis in connection to certain segments of past societies; as well as with the emergence of new interdisciplinary fields.

The idea to re-evaluate the methodological foundations of the historiography of the 21st c. was born in the context of general reflections on the new theoretical discourses in social sciences and humanities of the last two decades³. In social sciences theories often are “common property”. They belong to everyone who works in the field of social thought. In the second half of the 20th c., especially in the 1960s–1980s, all social sciences were characterized by a continuous emergence of new theories and their quick adaptations by other disciplines. These mutual appropriations created new research objects and interdisciplinary fields, united by their shared objects and methods⁴. Historical discipline gained a lot from this process and its current condition and contents are still defined by its ability for creative adaptation of theoretical innovations that were acquired in the last century. It is evident. What is less obvious though, is the role of new social theories in the contemporary discipline of history. This raises a question about the status of theory in the historiography of the 21st c.

Consequently, the analysis of the current state of theory of historical knowledge presents an interesting problem barely touched by researchers. Contemporary historical literature does not hold any serious debate on this subject. Moreover, one can hardly find any studies of the recent development trends of theoretical foundations in other social sciences and humanities (economics, sociology, psychology, philology). It could be argued that after decades of growth in the last century, scientists have reached a plateau or entered a “cooling period” and are still busy implementing the existing theories. However, this hypothesis could be proved or rejected only after careful reading and analysis of a big volume of secondary literature such as specialized journals and monographs. This would verify the hypothesis and help us to evaluate the level of theoretical renewal of historical knowledge. As well it would identify the fields of history that constitute its methodological avant-garde.

³ The first approach to the re-evaluation of new tendencies in theoretical thought of contemporary social sciences and humanities (economic theory, sociology, theory of history and philology) resulted in a series of workshops and seminars at the Poletayev’ Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (Higher School of Economics) in 2010-2011, including the seminar on history in February 2011, where my paper “What had happened to ‘History and Theory?’” was presented and discussed. I am grateful to all colleagues who took part in the discussion. Materials see in: <http://igiti.hse.ru/Meetings/Conferences>.

I wish to express my gratitude to Elena Vishlenkova who read the first version of this text and discussed the problem with me.

⁴ Savelieva 2011. C. 491–515.

In my opinion, to define the theoretical frontier of history in the 21st c., one needs to answer this question: Which of today's new historical explanations are based on concepts, theories and approaches that emerged within the last 15 years?

An analysis of the current state of historical knowledge requires a short description of the period from the 1960s to the early 1990s. Any historian would agree that those were “glorious decades” of radical innovation and methodological re-equipment of the historical discipline. These innovations were characterized by interdisciplinarity, by the emergence of a great number of new historical sub-disciplines, the rise of a new (interdisciplinary) canon of historical works, by the return of “big history” to the public, and by evident methodological reflections. Various aspects of the development of historiography in the late 20th c. have been discussed in numerous works⁵.

Historical studies of the second half of the 20th c. made good use of the concepts and notions formulated in the framework of economics, sociology, political studies, cultural anthropology, psychology, and linguistics. Interaction between disciplines often presented itself in historical texts through a linking of non-historical theory with historical methods of research. From the 1960s onwards, historiography has been changing rapidly and the following model of interaction appeared: a choice of social science theory – its application to historical material – a corresponding historical sub-discipline ⁶.

It should be noted that the “appropriation strategy” revealed new opportunities for the analysis of historical material and proved to be extremely fruitful for the development of historical knowledge. The close ties between history and social sciences, created by leading Western historians, resulted in economic and social history being placed in the avant-garde of historiography in the 1960s. Its foundations were laid in economic and sociological macro-theories (economic cycles, economic growth, social stratification, modernization, symbolic power, conflict, world system analysis and structural analysis).

After the establishment of economic, social and demographic history that at the time was turning towards the use of mathematical and statistical methods historians appropriated from the achievements of other social sciences and humanities. Cultural anthropology was very popular among other fields of our discipline, such as historical anthropology, history of mentalities, history of everyday life and even “new” political history. They all used cultural anthropology's theories and, to some extent, its methods.

⁵ I would refer the reader to the most famous ones: *Faire de l'histoire* 1974; *La nouvelle histoire* 1978; *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory* 1979; Wehler 1980; *The New History: The 1980s and Beyond. Studies in Interdisciplinary history* 1982; Novick 1988; *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 1991; Iggers 1997; *Passes recomposes: Champs et chantiers de l'histoire* 1995; *L'Histoire et le metier d'historien en France 1945–1995* 1995; Windschuttle 1996; Hobsbawm 1997; Pomian 1999; Tosh 2000; Clark 2004.

⁶ Savelieva, Poletayev 2005.

In the 1960–1970s, historians enthusiastically appropriated macro-theories (economic cycles, theories of conflict, modernization, and various theories of power). However, beginning in the 1980s, they turned to microanalysis using corresponding theories (consumption function, bounded rationality, network interaction etc.).

As a result, the late 20th c. saw an endless emergence of new historical sub-disciplines. Along with the well-established history of international relations, economic, social, political, cultural, military, agricultural histories we now also have the history of everyday life (including its numerous aspects ranging from the history of food to the history of scents), labor history, urban history, demographic history (f.e. the histories of childhood and old age as separate subdisciplines), women’s history, gender history, economic history, psychohistory, and many other types of histories.

History and Theory in the 21st c.

I began this study looking through the journal “History and Theory”. Since 1970s this was my main reference point in the field of “theory of history”. My idea was that the theme issue titles and the article topics would help to locate landmarks within the field of theoretical research, would point to new fields of research and would define emerging interdisciplinary cross points. However the reading of the journal disappointed me completely. The journal’s content has obviously changed since the mid-1990s. Although this change is barely noticeable in the themes of the issues, it is visible in the statement of issues within the articles. Moreover, one is surprised by the sheer amount of articles on cinema, opera, photography, TV series, historical memory, “unconventional history” and other topics typical for cultural studies. “Theory and History” rather reflected the change of priorities that had begun in the 1990s and the blurring of the boundaries between academic and non-academic history. The journal has certainly changed during the last 15 years⁷.

The “poverty of theory” can also be seen in the list of the most popular articles of 2008-2009.

⁷ In fairness, it must be said, that the contents of the issue published in 2010 for the journal’s 50th anniversary had “themes of the future”, demonstrating a shift towards scientism and realism *History and Theory: The Next Fifty Years*. December 2010. Vol. 49. Issue 4.

Top highlights 2008–2009

Runia, Eelco. Burying the Dead, Creating the Past.

Iggers, George. A Search for a Post-Postmodern Theory of History (review of the book “Meaning and Representation in History”. Ed. by Jörn Rüsen).

Jay, Martin. Faith-Based History (review of the book “A Secular Age” by Charles Taylor).

Carr, David. Narrative Explanation and its Malcontents.

Spiegel, Gabriel M. Revising The Past / Revisiting the Present: How Change Happens in Historiography.

Classen, Christoph and Kansteiner, Wulf. Truth and Authenticity in Contemporary Historical Culture: An Introduction to Historical Representation and Historical Truth.

Printy, M. Skinner and Pocock in Context: Early Modern Political Thought Today (review of the books on contemporary political thought: “Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought”. Ed. by Annabel Brett and James Tully, with Holly Hamilton-Bleakley and “The Political Imagination in History: Essays Concerning J. G. A. Pocock”. Ed. by D. N. DeLuna and assisted by Perry Anderson and Glenn Burgess).

Bevernage, Berber. Time, Presence, and Historical Injustice.

Werner, Michael, Zimmermann, Dicte. Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisee and The Challenge of Reflexivity.

Dietze, Carola. Toward a History on Equal Terms: A Discussion of Provincializing Europe (review of the book “Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference” by Dipesh Chakrabarty).

This list demonstrates at the same time a high demand for theoretical research and a weak moment in its development. It is interesting to note that what is in high demand here are reviews – the list of the top 10 works includes 4 of them! The good example is the review “A Search for a Post-Postmodern Theory of History” by George Iggers⁸. It is interesting to note that it is *just* a review of *just* a book that is *just* about the end of both modern and postmodern periods in historical discipline and about the need for a new “theory of history”. It must be admitted that the book in question, “Meaning and Representation in History”⁹, was edited by a well-known theorist, Jörn Rüsen, and it includes, apart from his own article, works by the famous Frank Ankersmit and David Carr. The author of the review, George Iggers, is equally well known. However, it is reasonable to think that readers are attracted mostly by its topic,

⁸ Iggers 2009.

⁹ Meaning and Representation in History. 2006.

which offers new approaches to history or, at least, new reflections, written by Iggers after reading the collective article.

The article by the famous philosopher of history David Carr, “Narrative Explanation and its Malcontents”¹⁰ from the section *Forum: Historical Explanation*, was written as a defense of the narrative form of historical study. Having dealt with the arguments of the opponents of narrative explanation from the School of Annales (Fernand Braudel, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, etc), other schools of the “new scientific history”, and of postmodernists (Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur), Carr attempts to rehabilitate the “telling of histories”. This was totally expected of him. In his opinion, the narrative obeys rules that are imbedded in action itself and “...It is because of this closeness of structure between human action and narrative, that we can genuinely be said to explain an action by telling a story about it”¹¹.

Michael Printy’s review: “Skinner and Pocock in Context: Early Modern Political Thought Today”¹², about the books on political theory written in the tradition of J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, brings the reader back to the heights of 20th century historical and political thought. The article by Gabriel Spiegel, and the entire issue it was published in, is dedicated to the important matter of ceaseless revision in historical discipline¹³. The author analyses possible psychological, social and professional reasons for changing interpretations by using the example of the linguistic turn in historiography.

I would like to emphasize that the above-cited articles are written by the representatives of the “old guard”, who reflect on the discipline’s evolution from a theoretical point of view. But the “top list” has another half and we will deal with it shortly.

In his introduction to the series “Making Sense of History” the editor Jörn Rüsen writes that, while many theorists proclaim the end of academic history, “historical matters”, such as popular memory, TV- and Hollywood histories, and public and political debates on the past “seem to replace it with vengeance”. Having said that, he asks whether the academic discipline of “history” as it existed in Western universities for the last two hundred years, presents a specific method or type of historical reflection that could be distinguished from other forms and practices of historical consciousness and calls for “new theoretical reflection”¹⁴. This demarcation line between academic history and other forms of historical knowledge is often blurred even on the pages of respectable academic journals.

¹⁰ Carr 2008.

¹¹ Spiegel 2007.

¹² Printy 2009.

¹³ Spiegel 2007.

¹⁴ *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*. 2002. Pp. vii, ix.

An example of this can be found in the theme issue “Truth and Authenticity in Contemporary Historical Culture”¹⁵ of the journal “History and Theory”. Even the 4-page introduction, written by Christoph Classen and Wulf Kansteiner, appeared in the Top Highlights. The authors analyze problems central for historical studies (here – in the context of shaping mass historical knowledge). They focus on six types of historical representation that play important roles in contemporary historical culture; historical fiction, historiography, photography, feature films, video games and museum displays. Each essay examines a historical event that served as a touchstone for theoretical discussions on historiography, historical culture and ethics of historical representation. Five essays deal with the themes of World War II and the Holocaust¹⁶. One deals with the history of slavery and its legacy in the USA.

Among the “representative texts” are: the novel “Slaughterhouse-Five” by Kurt Vonnegut¹⁷, the film “Schindler’s List” by Steven Spielberg¹⁸, popular video games, etc. The choice does not raise objections. What is surprising is the result. All of these forms of knowledge are made equal and make no distinction not according to their influence on mass audience but according to the criterion of historical authenticity¹⁹.

In another article from the same list the author, Eelco Runia, reproaches professional historians for studying such painful subjects as “memory” and “trauma” in a “Positivist” style. The author argues that doing so they reveal their “insincerity”. As a result, according to Runia, “commemoration is all over the place but is never taken as seriously as it should be”²⁰. I remind my readers that what we are dealing with here is the top theoretical journal about the philosophy and methodology of history. This is not a publication like “Common Knowledge”²¹.

Here the first question arose: does the journal show “the average temperature”, or has something happened to that particular journal? There are some reasons to avoid generalization. One of the most obvious of reasons is that the guest-editor who worked on a considerable number of the past issues was the famous philosopher Frank Ankersmit, who opted for an openly postmodernist view with all its characteristics (the rejection of the

¹⁵ Classen, Kansteiner 2009.

¹⁶ Kansteiner 2009; Keilbach 2009.

¹⁷ Rigney 2009.

¹⁸ Classen 2009.

¹⁹ Classen, Kansteiner 2009. P. 1.

²⁰ Runia 2007.

²¹ Published by the Duke University Press: ‘The mission of *Common Knowledge* is both incredibly ambitious and shockingly simple: to offer a line of communication between academia and the community of thinking people outside it. The Common Knowledge was created in order to form a new intellectual model based on discussion and cooperation, not on the metaphors taken borrowed from the language of sport or war... Our ways of thinking about theory and its relation to humanity would be challenged on the pages of the Common Knowledge’.

correlation of historical knowledge with reality, absolute value of the metaphoric character of history writing etc.)²².

Reading through the pages of “History and Theory” prompted me to turn to other historical journals with theoretical bias, including *Historical Method*, *History Today*, *Journal of Modern History*, *Rethinking History*, *American Historical Review*, *History Workshop Journal*, and others. It certainly was not an exhaustive reading, but rather a browsing by a “trained eye”. In general, the browsing has shown that it is certainly not possible to speak about the eclipse of theoretical aspects in academic historical periodicals. One encounters a great number of works on the theories of nationalism, theories of Empire, and on gender approach. There are articles on the role of the “agent” in historical studies, on comparative studies and its substitutes, on causal pluralism in the studies of the past, on the use of historical linguistics, on the end of Marxist historiography, and on historical revisionism. Some issues and articles offer conceptual re-interpretation of well-known historical phenomena, for example, the English or the French Revolutions etc. But certainly, the content of all the above-mentioned journals demonstrates the shift towards the strategy of “real concern”.

Browsing through the full-text databases of historical articles of the last 15 years in order to find new works on the theory of history (in general) certainly added a few layers to the picture. However, it was not radically changed. There can be no doubt that there has been no remarkable theoretical innovation in the historical studies of the 21st c. It has not occurred on the level of application of *new* powerful concepts, or on the level of interdisciplinary interaction, nor in the field of theoretical reflection. This is in contrast with any decade of the 1960s–1980s.

If one turns to earlier formed tendencies, it is easy to notice that cultural history continues to expand (including various visual studies). This is also true of micro-history, local history, historical anthropology, the history of mass beliefs and “historical memory”, and gender and women’s studies. The history of science and education has changed considerably. In general, in the last decade historians have learned much and have reinterpreted the known evidence in radically different ways; the scope of produced work is amazing. However there were no theoretical shifts in those fields. Historians continue to use the analytical procedures and methods appropriated and mastered by them in the last century.

The “image” of historical studies is obviously influenced by exogenous factors. Social problems of our society – post-Socialism, Globalism, new world order, religious mobilization,

²² It should be noticed that Frank Ankersmit has lately rejected consistent postmodernism and is now searching for the “third postmodern stage”. See: Ankersmit 2006. P. 121.

the new character of migration and marginality, mass culture – set the task to produce a scholarly analysis of phenomena and processes linked to them (democracy, Empire, transition, civilization, culture, identity, gender, mass representations) for social scientists, including historians. I think that the development of the contemporary historiography in general is defined by “social demand”, to a greater extent than at the time of the first “turns”. This could be seen in the spreading of “public history”, and in the authority of the “public historian”²³. However, the question about the extent of the influence of social demand on the transformation of historical studies does not have an easy answer. One should remember that the “new social history”, which came to dominance against the background of the events of 1968, focused on social movements, revolutions and other forms of mass protest (though at the time ‘public historians’ would not have dreamt to press the academic ones, but the ‘Left’ were quite successful in pressing the ‘Right’).

At the same time, endogenous (cognitive) factors linked to changes in the social sciences and humanities are important for the development of historiography. New “turns” do occur and they create new interdisciplinary fields. Contemporary social sciences use the achievements of disciplines such as geography, biology, neurology, and anthropology quite actively. Their interaction with these natural sciences create new interdisciplinary leagues and “turns” that had never existed before; among them the spatial turn²⁴, evolutionary economics²⁵, moral geography²⁶, and sociobiology (biological or cognitive turn)²⁷.

The remarkable interest of social sciences in biology is linked with the idea that since humans are social and biological beings, their biological nature should be taken into consideration by the social scientist to the same extent as their social one. Moreover, the Neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory is very popular now²⁸. Some historical works on theoretical or philosophical foundations of historical studies demonstrate the awareness of these recent developments. However, we find that there is understandable hesitation by historians to follow the example of other social scientists²⁹.

Of all the above-mentioned transformations that are now taking place in the field of social disciplines, the “spatialization” of social sciences is the most promising one for

²³ On the spread of public history in various countries, see the theme issue of the journal *The Public Historian*. Santa Barbara: Summer 2010. Vol. 32. Issue 3.

²⁴ Baker 2003; Canizares-Esguerra 2002.

²⁵ See, for example: Witt 2003; Witt 2008; *Frontiers of Evolutionary Economics* 2001.

²⁶ Cresswell 1996; Livingstone 1992; Sibley 1995.

²⁷ Boyd, Richerson 1985; Boyd, Richerson 2005a; Boyd Richerson 2005b; Smail 2008.

²⁸ *The Return of Science: Evolution, History, and Theory* 2002; Fracchia, Lewontin 1999, and the subsequent debate in *History and Theory* Vol. 44. Issue 1 (February 2005): Runciman 2005; Fracchia, Lewontin 2005; Runciman 2005.

²⁹ See: *History and Theory*. Theme Issue 1999. Vol. 38, and the discussion that followed, in: *History and Theory*. February 2005. Vol. 44. Issue 1.

historians³⁰. The reinterpretation of the factor of space could be explained by the fact that innovations in contemporary historiography are localized within the field of global history, post/neocolonial historical studies, history of Empires, and substantial philosophy of history (linked to the problems of globalism)³¹. Instead of comparative history, the *entangled* history is offered more and more often³². In general, works on world history in its various forms can be found in abundance in historical publications. Thus, the influence of the new interpretation of social space on historical discipline is revealed, first of all, in the transformation of a discipline that had been called “world history” since Polybius. “The whole world”, the oldest object of historians’ reflections, turned into one of the most asked-for objects of contemporary historiography as well as the most radically re- and deconstructed one.

The spatial turn and the global history

Until the last decade of the 20th century, world history did not enter the list of “new scientific” (i.e., equipped with the most advanced social theories) historical sub-disciplines and still was eclipsed by universalist concepts, produced by the philosophy of history and macro-sociology. World history was based on the ideas of universality, linearity, cycles, progress etc. (Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Pitirim Sorokin, Filmer Northrop, Kars Jaspers, Alfred Kroeber, Eric Voegelin a.o.). The macro-sociological concepts offering various models of transition from traditional society to a modern one still were actively used in the last decades of the 20th century. Very few historians, among them William McNeill and Leften Stavrianos³³, have written about world history in a different way.

In the late 20th – early 21st cc. “world history” was radically transformed. New and more prominent trends emerged within its framework. They were the result of critical and postmodernist revolutions in philosophy (primarily post-colonial criticism³⁴) and they widely used concepts and approaches of anthropological, linguistic and cultural turns.

It is, first of all, global and transnational histories that offer constructions of a universal non-Eurocentric world. Secondly, it is world history that was a result of the re-interpretation of the comparative history of civilizations. This re-interpretation puts the process of interaction between world systems and local civilizations into focus. Thirdly, it is international history that studies the history of the shaping and development of various

³⁰ On the spatialisation of social sciences see: Gieryn 2000; *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* 2009; Low 2001; Massey 2005; Murdoch 2006, Filippov 2008.

³¹ Crossley 2008; Cowen 2001; *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History* 2002; Reynolds 2000; Bulliet et al. 2008; *The Global History Reader* 2005; Mazlish 2006; Bentley et al. 2003; see also: *Journal of Global History*. 2006–2010.

³² Cohen, O’Connor 2004; Kocka 2003; Werner, Zimmermann 2006.

³³ McNeill 1964; Stavrianos 1989.

³⁴ Gilbert, Tompkins 1996.

international communities. And, one could add with some reservations, theoretically re-equipped history of empires³⁵ and nations.

The triumph of world history in all its new versions is not only an obvious response to the powerful social demands of various social groups, including the members of the “post-colonial world” (from nations and ethnic groups to the bearers of modern and postmodern ideologies), but also a result of cognitive processes that provoked scholarly interest. It compels us to look closer into what global history is and what the methodological innovation of the “spatial turn” of historiography consists of.

One of the main functions of geographical space in a historical study is to set the framework for the subject of history. It marks the limits of social interactions in the social reality of the past and thus transforms geographical space into a historical space. At the same time a historian could use his/her own view of space, s/he could refer to space construed by the actors of social interactions, or could study the process of construing spatial units in a particular period of the past. When the territory marked by a historian has not been recognized as united in the social reality under examination, historical space is set from “outside”. It is construed by an observer, regardless of the representations of historical actors.

The radical re-interpretation of historical space was initiated by the groundbreaking works of Fernand Braudel, who suggested viewing historical areas where life was defined by uniform geo-demographical sphere as integral units, regardless of political borders³⁶. Thus, the new approach to the history of vast non-state territorial units was established.

Slightly later, scholars found another resource and focused on studying what people thought about their own and “foreign” space, how they imagined various geographical areas, how they construed territorial units and what meanings they gave them. Among such studies are works on the formation of geohistorical (geopolitical) constructs such as “India”, “Eastern Europe”, “the Balkans”, “the Caucasus”, “the Wild West” etc. In this interpretation, historical space is linked with the formation of the symbolic universe of the system of culture: mystical components of tradition, signs of birthplace, the design of life space and the foundations of national identity. The same type of analysis is shared by the works of cultural anthropology that analyze the category of “space”, and the studies of the history of “mental maps” with the concepts popular at the turn of the century – “frontier”, “contact zone”, “medianity”, “orientalism” (and other “isms” created in the same way)³⁷.

³⁵ See: theme issue *History and Theory*. Oct 2005. Vol. 44. Issue 4.

³⁶ Braudel 1990 [1949].

³⁷ Shenk 2001.

Contemporary historical studies are a new stage in analytical reflection on space. Its aim is to create a radically new global (transnational) space which is segmented, dispersed, and most importantly: non (Euro) centric.

The studies that could now be united, although not without reservations, into a rubric of “world history” introduce some radical changes. They re-historize the images of Africa, Asia and Latin America and turn Europe into a province³⁸. It takes apart such generalized notions as “The Third World”, “periphery”, “West”, or “East”. The categories “Eurasia”, “Latin America”, “Pacific region”, “Atlantic world” (but not in the Braudelian sense) began to dominate over concepts linked to the “Greenwich Meridian” and “the world of the West”. At the same time, the existence of a good deal of historical and territorial objects in the past or the present is being “discovered” or re-discovered. Scholars study the subjects topical to the world of today: migrations, the phenomena of polylinguism and polyculturalism, various trans-cultural processes, and a “fragmented world”. However, these aspects are new for historians. The deconstruction of the old compendium of national myths goes on simultaneously.

The global studies, an umbrella term that embraces world, global, transnational and other histories, is an interdisciplinary field. As for the labels “global”, “world”, “international” histories, and their analytical contents, they are either set into opposition to each other, or are paired³⁹. The term “global history” is more popular with philosophers and social scientists, while the majority of historians prefer the notions of “general” or “world history”⁴⁰.

The idea and often ideological basis for the most notable new trends in world history is to be found in “postcolonial criticism”. I would add, however, that postcolonial criticism, that offered a radical reconstruction of the image of world history (including the demolition of borders between world history, Oriental studies and ethnology), was not so new after all. Its recognized gurus (Frantz Fanon is a social philosopher, and one of the theorists and inspirers of the New Left, Leopoldo Zea is a philosopher, Edward W. Said is a literary critic and a theorist) created their fundamental works in the mid-20th c.⁴¹ By the 2000s, there were already

³⁸ Chakrabarty 2000; Dirks 2001; History and Theory, Forum: Provincializing Europe // History and Theory, February 2008. Vol. 47. Issue 1. The article Dietze 2008 made it into the above mentioned 10 top highlights.

³⁹ Repina 2009.P. 31. See, for example: Kossock 1993; Geyer, Bright 1995; Mazlish 1998; Internationale Geschichte. Themen – Ergebnisse – Aussichten 2000; Across Cultural Borders. Historiography in a Global Perspective 2002; Writing World History 1800–2000, 2003; Manning 2003; Bayly 2004; Palgrave Advances in World Histories 2005; Hughes-Warrington 2006; O’Brien 2006; Sachsenmaier 2007.

⁴⁰ Ionov 2003. See, for example: Globalisation in World 2002; Rethinking American History in a Global Age 2002; Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914 2004; World Civilizations: The Global Experience. 2000–2003; Stearns 2003; Traditions and Encounters. A Global Perspective on the Past 2003; Osterhammel, Petersson 2003.

⁴¹ Fanon 1967; Fanon 1963; Fanon 1969; Zea 1970; Said 1978; Culture and Resistance: Conversations With Edward W. Said 2003.

books being written about them. In my opinion, the philosophical stimulation produced by postcolonial criticism drastically reduced historians' need for new social theories.

In the framework of the model of “turns”, all types of historical global studies would be united under the label of “new world history”. But this would be a “secondary turn”, since their conceptual apparatus appropriated the notions from anthropological, linguistic and cultural turns. Nevertheless, all types of “new world history” undoubtedly represent the union of history with other disciplines.

First of all, it is “history with geography”⁴²; its new theoretical problems (the spatialisation of social thought, the problems of “conceptual geography” and “moral geography”) are being actively debated in contemporary historical literature⁴³.

Global history studied a number of important problems linked to a subject's self-identification, the definition of its status (“subaltern”), and also with the concepts of “modernism”, “hybridity”, “métisisation”, “racialism”, “liminality”. The concepts of the structures of power, social hierarchy, identity, imaginary communities are borrowed from sociology and are developed with the use of historical material. Cultural anthropology provided the notion of the Other. One only needs to look at the names of instigators of global history to understand that “new literary criticism” is extremely popular. It allows for a variety of colonial discourses.

The political sciences are well suited for the analysis of international, inter-ethnic and institutional relations. However, they are not well represented. One exception is the “new history of empires” and that deserves to be studied separately⁴⁴.

Let us mention in passing that global history explicitly represents the moral aspect of contemporary consciousness, which is politically correct and multicultural. In the words of Jack Goody, one of the most historically oriented of contemporary anthropologists, while addressing the past of non-Western (geographically and even chronologically) peoples, Western historians get a chance to dissociate themselves from the act of “theft” that consisted in the fact that: “civilization, democracy, science, capitalism, love, the nuclear family, and many other values and institutions, all of which some other cultures can properly claim to have invented or shared”, were interpreted as Western in origin⁴⁵.

As with any historical sub-discipline, new world history has acquired a canon of classical authors⁴⁶ who, nevertheless, also belong to the shared pool of the humanities of the

⁴² Baker 2003; Canizares-Esguerra 2002; Casey 2005; Coleman, Agnew 2007; Ethington 2007.

⁴³ Wigen 2006; Horden, Purcell 2006; Alison 2006; Matsuda 2006.

⁴⁴ The group of historians united around the journal *Ab Imperio* analyses the state of research in this field.

⁴⁵ Goody 2006. Cited in: Smail 2008. P. 61.

⁴⁶ Savelieva 2011.

late 20th c. New authoritative names are scarce, among them are f.e. Dipesh Chakrabarty⁴⁷ and Jürgen Osterhammel⁴⁸, two very different but equally influential historians. Nevertheless, old names are in abundance: Benedict Anderson, Bill Ashcroft, Rogers Brubaker, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Frederick Cooper, Edward Saïd, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Ernest Gellner. I would like to particularly mention Jerry Bentley⁴⁹, a well-known specialist in world history who became famous in the 1970s-1980s. He is the founder of a tradition that does not correlate with postcolonial criticism and offers another view on the cognitive value of world history.

“World history produces the most fruitful contexts for the realisation of numerous historical tasks. Historical development and historical processes are being unfolded in various registers: undoubtedly – on local, regional and national levels, but also on transregional, continental ones, on the levels of the whole of Western or Eastern hemispheres, oceanic and global ones. World history more than any other approaches to the past is capable of placing historical development and historical processes into wider contexts related to them and help historians construe meanings out of countless number of bits and fragments of information that together make up the experience of the past”⁵⁰.

Interdisciplinarity, the emergence of new historical sub-disciplines, new powerful theories, new “classical” authors, are criteria used to characterize a theoretical innovation of historical disciplines. If one applies these criteria to world history, it would certainly be possible to see the establishment of a new interdisciplinary sub-field. One could probably even talk about global and transnational history as being the avant-garde of historical research. It seems, however, that this field does not have *new* powerful theories or a compendium of classical names much different from the late 20th century canon.

It is remarkable, however, that in the issue of “History and Theory”, dedicated to the future development of the historical discipline for the next 50 years, David Christian prophesizes: “Over the next fifty years we will see a return of the ancient tradition of “universal history”; but this will be a new form of universal history that is global in its practice and scientific in its spirit and methods, including the possible integration of historical humanities with historically oriented natural sciences, among them cosmology, geology and biology”⁵¹.

⁴⁷ Chakrabarty 2000; Chakrabarty 1998.

⁴⁸ Osterhammel 2000; Osterhammel 2005; Osterhammel, Petersson 2005.

⁴⁹ Bentley 1996; Bentley 2002; Bentley 2003.

⁵⁰ Bentley 2007.

⁵¹ Christian 2010. P. 6.

New crossroads

The aim of the present article was to reassess the state of the historical discipline during the last 15 years, in order to determine whether the process of mastering new theoretical instruments acquired by historians at the late 20th c. is still going on actively, and whether there still is a significant expansion of research fields based on new theories and models. The analysis presumed comparing the essence of the innovations in historical studies according to such parameters as theoretical innovation, the emergence of new methods, modifications of the subjects of research (especially those connected with new interdisciplinary interactions). The development dynamics of the historical discipline in the late 20th c. and in the 21st c. being compared within the framework of this general problem supports the suggested hypothesis of ‘reaching a plateau’ after almost half a century of rapid and diverse theoretical transformations. The analysis of such a dynamic field as world history (in its various versions) does not, in my opinion, present enough evidence of a considerable *theoretical* breakthrough even within that particular branch of historical research.

A number of relevant explanations for the situation with “history and theory” could be offered. The first answer that comes to mind is that the natural process of the discipline’s development suggests a decrease in the demand for new theories after several decades of unusually (abnormally?) rapid growth. It seems that the abundance of theories appropriated in the 20th c. enables historians to produce a huge number of studies, a process that can continue for a long time. The variety of historical study themes seen in academic publications provides evidence to support this explanation. However, the creativity of theoretical innovations of the 1960s-1980s is just one explanation and at least another three could be added.

1. Disillusionment with general theories and the aftermath of the postmodernist attack on history as an academic discipline. It seemed that historians had survived this attack with minimal losses. Years have passed, but there have been almost no postmodernist works on history even though there have been a number of manifestoes. The impact of postmodernism, however, has proved to be much more serious than seemed to be the case at the turn of the century. Postmodernism has barely influenced historical methods; but it has had a serious impact on topics of historical research, on the attitudes towards theoretical models, and on the academic status of history in general. Moreover, it is clear that postmodernism influenced the system of argumentation: the standards of exact academic reasoning have weakened considerably.

2. Negative changes in the historical discipline were brought about by the institutional establishment of cultural studies (here we are not interested in positive ones). The emergence

of numerous curricula, journals and grants on cultural studies since 1980s did not make traditional historians happy. It is not a coincidence that the article “The End of American Reason” (1987) by Alain Blum, that called for a return to “real books and important problems” suddenly, became a bestseller. Arthur Schlesinger wrote at the same time that the “cult of ethnicity” represented an attack on the “shared American identity”⁵² and an attempt to “turn the college generation against European and Western tradition”, a kind of “cultural and linguistic apartheid”, and called the “silent majority” of American professors to break their silence and to challenge “fashionable stupidity”. Other works followed concerning the dominance of cultural studies and the helplessness of academic historians in the face of “political correctness”⁵³. However, the contents of the journals often still dominated by the same American professors show that resistance to the expansion of cultural studies was a difficult if not hopeless task. It is enough to say that since 2004 the “Journal of American History” published reviews of films! A new form of presentation of history has been accepted as legitimate by the historical association⁵⁴.

Here one should ask a question: the historians that are now interested in theory, what kind of training have they had?⁵⁵ The answer is: they were students when the academic curriculum was drastically reshaped at the expense of historical disciplines. The popularity of cultural studies led to the current situation where the teaching of history in universities is drifting further and further away from the classical model of historical education. Evidence for this is seen in the research sponsored by an influential American organization, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni – ACTA, at the beginning of this century. An analysis of university curricula shows that in the lists of required courses, historical courses have recently merged into one group along with a variety of non-historical courses under the rubrics “American culture”, “world culture”, “textual and historical studies and other “cultural” topics⁵⁶. And of course, some students trained in such an eclectic way are practicing historians now.

3. Finally, one can suppose the scarcity of new developments in the adjacent social sciences from where historians borrow concepts. If they lack new fruitful theories there is nothing to appropriate. But is it so? On the one hand, there is some evidence to prove it. On the other hand, in my opinion, there is at least one radical innovation that is remarkable in the context of our topic. It can be found in a number of disciplines and it reveals the *imperialism*

⁵² Cited in: Levin 1993.

⁵³ See: Levin 1993. P. 852, fn. 5.

⁵⁴ Potapova. Manuscript.

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Arkady Perlov for this idea.

⁵⁶ Restoring America’s Legacy: The Challenge of Historical Literacy in the 21st Century 2002.

of history (or to be precise – historicism) that seemed to have disappeared long ago. One witnesses a new stage in the historization of sciences (not only social ones) that presents itself in the active use of the neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory⁵⁷, the biological or cognitive turn in anthropology⁵⁸, the successes of evolutionary economics⁵⁹, and the historical aspect of ecology⁶⁰.

No doubt, we are now dealing with the temporalization of some very different disciplinary discourses. I will briefly 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 and to the so-called “third wave”⁶¹ in historical sociology. Historians know the essence of the new concept of history offered by anthropologists. It is a radical interdisciplinary project that covers millions of years and numerous biological species as an object of history. Here culture is viewed as a form of existence specific to the human species, that is the contradiction between things human and inhuman, nature and culture disappears⁶². The principle of the “diversity of cultures” stimulates the link with “distant and deep history”, since everyone has a right to have a history and should be represented. Its logical result was in the radical prolongation of history (or at least, pre-history) and the principal broadening of the understanding of human interaction with the natural environment (that clearly surpasses its Braudelian interpretation). This phenomenon was called the “biological” or “cognitive” turn, and historians are aware of it.

The “third wave” in sociology however strangely remains unnoticed. The representatives of the “third wave” (Ronald Aminzade, J. Casanova, Elizabeth Clemens, Brian Dill, D.G. Frank, Larry Griffin, Geoffrey Haydu, Michael Hatcher, Edgar Kieser, John Meyer, William Sewell et al.⁶³) rejected the fundamental principles of their teachers (among them were the famous scholars – Tedda Sckocpol, Immanuel Wallerstein, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Charles Tilly) and preferred to focus their studies on topics other than typology, the search for similarities, continuity and big narratives. Instead, they focused on chance, dynamics, changeability, instability, and mutations. Their models of explanation raise the status of

⁵⁷ The Return of Science: Evolution, History, and Theory 2002; Fracchia, Lewontin 1999 and the subsequent debate in *History and Theory* 44 (February 2005): Runciman 2005; Fracchia, Lewontin 2005; Runciman 2005.

⁵⁸ Smail 2008.

⁵⁹ See, for example: Witt 2006; Witt 2008; *Frontiers of Evolutionary Economics* 2001.

⁶⁰ Szabo 2010.

⁶¹ 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.

⁶² See, for example: Schäffer 2007; Gamble 2007; Smail 2008.

⁶³ On the “third wave” see: Steinmetz 2007; Clemens 2006; Adams et al. 2005; Abbott 2001; Griffin 1992; Clemens 2005; Friedland, Alford 1991; Griffin 1993; Griffin et al. 1997; Haydu 1998; Isaac, Griffin 1989; Kiser, Hechter 1991; Mahoney 2000; Mahoney 2004; Sewell 2005; Somers 1998.

historical actors and singular events and, accordingly, are focused on the unforeseen long-term consequences of human actions in the unfolding of historical trajectories. The process of analysis is linked with a succession of events, probability and unpredictability, turning points, “historical traps” etc. 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. The “third wave” of historical sociology surprises by its historicism and the desire to explain the complex web of numerous factors, wishes, events with unexpected consequences even in retrospect, which is so valuable for a historian.

Historians, including American ones, don’t seem to be well aware of the works of the “third wave”. It seems, however, that this sociological trend has already gained some ground. The articles of “new” historical sociologists are being regularly published by leading sociological journals, and the reviews of their books could be found in almost every issue of the “Annual Review of Sociology”.

Thus, we witness yet another intervention into the territory of historians. In the mid-twentieth-century, economists overtook economic history in the USA and, even now, primarily economists in departments of economics are studying economic history in this country⁶⁴. By the end of the last century, historians faced intervention from philologists (new historicism), and historians turned out to be very sensitive to the postmodernist challenge. Gender and women’s studies and postcolonial discourse have also invaded the territory of the past. Now we witness a new intervention by historical sociology. But this invasion is different from many others. The “third wave” seems to finally come extremely close to historians by focusing its studies on the singular, unique, and individual in the perspective of time.

Whether the “historical meeting” could happen at the next crossroads seems to me a question with a predictable answer. Interdisciplinary communication in the new theoretical format would force historians to master a rather complicated theoretical arsenal (mostly borrowed from economic theory) that has been mobilized by the sociologists of the “third wave” to solve the problems of historical changeability and unpredictability. But a crossroad (at least one!) has certainly been found.

⁶⁴ William Sewell writes about the results of this intervention for the economic history in the USA, that relative indifference of professional historians to “the history of economic life over the past thirty years... seems paradoxical, considering the remarkable transformations that have taken place in world capitalism during this same period. I trace the neglect to the capture of the once interdisciplinary field of economic history by mathematically inclined economists and to the roughly simultaneous turn of historians from social to cultural history” (Sewell 2010).

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