Tellhistory

A Theoretical Introduction to the Poietical

Introduction

What Tellhistory is

In 2012, a diplomacy student called Alex Whitcomb was traveling with his wife and a colleague to do a camp research in Kurdistan. Indeed, to resume the Kurdistan's history would be a too ambitious venture for our simple purpose: we should just remind to the reader that Kurdistan has always existed as a nation, or rather more nations, but it never reached the desired statal condition, due to the fragmentary situation of the territory divided between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Hence, it is not difficult to guess the condition of kurdish historiographical apparatus: often censured by other transnational powers, forgotten with the disease of kurdish identity, almost completely ignored by European historical interest. On the other hand, Alex once told me, kurdish people developed a genuine (and sometimes exhausting) attitude to tell their stories during any possible collective event. During one of those nights passed by listening to his wife's father tales, the idea of Tellhistory was conceived for the first time.

Everyone has a story to tell, everyone loves to listen to a different story, but no one knows where the story 'happens', literally we lack of a place where to narrate our tales. Tellhistory was initially thought with this aim: to become a place, or rather the place

of all the places in which the stories and the memories of individuals are narrated. In this sense, Tellhistory definitely constitutes a mapping experiment. Writing what Tellhistory is represents the greatest obstacle to the realization of this thesis : by being essentially a visual and auditive experience - explicitly opposed to the form of the text - we can only delimit our description to a simple formula: Tellhistory is a free platform in which anyone is allowed to record and release their own memories concerning historical-sociological events by using the medium of video-messages.

In the section "Our Mission" of the Tellhistory's website you can read:

> "How many people do you know with great stories? How many of them will be remembered? We are all making history and no one's contribution should be forgotten.
> Tell History is democratizing the way history is told, recorded and shared. This is a job far too important–and far too large–to be left to academics alone.
> We give you the tools to save these stories. Why? Because the memories that matter to you, your family, and your community are incredibly valuable, but they are also fragile. They deserve to be passed on to future generations.
> We offer a place for personal experiences to be preserved. Every new story contributes to a better understanding of the world we live in today.
> *We all shape the future, and we all should be present in the past."*

They way Tellhistory operates is incredibly simple and intuitive. The team of interviewer creates a topic, for example "Tangentopoli" or "President Obama", which are afterward collected under these particular categories: Politics and Society, Culture, Business, International Conflicts, Environment, Civil Wars and Revolutions, Science and Technology, Disasters, Terrorism, Peace, Genocide. The interviewer is meant to choose a particular place where to base his inquiry with the intent of creating a net of stories marked by the same original discourse. Indeed, the greatest appeal of Tellhistory's project relies in its sort of dispersing look toward the topic: an argument immediately generates a new argument and the tread of the story multiplies and complicates the interactions within the plots.

The interviewer plays an interesting role in the research: he is asked to record and to interview, so to actively participate to the moment of narration by interrogating and deepening, but he is also meant to be 'invisible'. That means that when the interviewer

cuts the video recording, he must disappear: his voice fades out and his presence is erased. Why?

Tellhistory is *in toto* an experiment: as any experiment, it acts according to a model of reality and with a specific aim. The model of reality is unavoidably that of globalization realized in the image of the global map: every record, once registered in the website, is pointed in the virtual map which indicates where the interview was released. This feature represents the deep core of the project: whereas a topic may involve a specific geographical zone ("President Obama" will obviously engage mostly with an american audience), the network of tellers spreads everywhere, showing how the geographical limits can be easily transcended by the personal perception of history. Hence, the above mentioned topic "President Obama" will be narrated by a community way larger than the sole american one : among the Historytellers you would find people living in The Netherlands, in Morocco, Finland, Brazil, Kurdistan, Greece, Thailand, Italy, Canada etc.

Nevertheless, the initial goal of tellhistory was to find a *motif,* a reason for people to voluntarily release and record their memories by themselves, with the freedom to launch their own topics or trends without any restriction. Therefore, the inherent aim of Tellhistory is the one to educate people from all over the world to oral history. This is the main reason why the interviewer, which in a sense constitutes the vital nerve of the project, is finally supposed to disappear from the recorded memory. Useless to say, this *modus operandi* turns out to be the geniality and at the same time the major limit of the project.

What Tellhistory could be

In many ways, I started to consider Tellhistory a *pretext*.

Firstly, it represents a pre-text to the extent that it evades the conventional textuality of historiography by presenting a vocal testimony of experience with the precise intent to challenge the exclusive and dominant status of written history. Pre-text, also in the sense according to which it operates to become a database for historiography to be written differently, for example accounting the singular experience of the individual and his sphere of interpretation which breeds from it.

But there is a second, negative reason that made me engage Tellhistory in the form of a pretext: that is, the project fell into a failure.

"If Tellhistory can interest someone, those are a few History students in Harvard and maybe a branch of anthropologists", Alex told me during our last conversation on Skype. It seems, (and I tragically experienced it by trying to extrapolate memories from people down in the streets, waiting at the airport, chilling at the University's cafeteria) that despite there might be many reason to listen to a stranger's story, its way more difficult to make people confident, or rather motivated to share their memories with a global audience. It seems that while the epoch of social media is increasingly feeding our egos by furnishing different tools to set our social image, namely to improve our fictional skills, it is not yet ready to make the individual a full and responsible user of the web in the area of knowledge: area in which history is supposed to cover a determinant role in this time of shocking and uncatchable changes.

The reason for this failure might be several: from the simple website setting, which distinguishes it from the average social media in which the user is asked to contributes with his own reactions (likes and comments), to the contingent fact that people don't feel history to be a big issue for their life's experience.

Nevertheless, this failure is absolutely eloquent because Tellhistory tried for the first time to enter the dimension of what I will call the *poietical*, a dimension which is not completely present in our era but still ongoing: somehow, I feel Tellhistory's failure to be completely positive for foreseeing the present and the future, the same way the Paris Commune's failure was explicative and constructive for the raising of Communism.

Accordingly, Tellhistory works in this thesis as a pretext to the extent that it represents a limit-thought for our reflection concerning the possible new status of oral history within the *Bildung* of a new 'global' community.

Hence, this thesis attempts to discuss the three main problematics that Tellhistory opened up with is extremely valuable work.

The first chapter, entitled "The Narrative", will provide a short critique to the conventional relationship between word, fact and experience: here will firstly emerge the basilar dualistic frame that governed the problem of narrative by separating the official, general, scientific claim of historiography from the personal, variable and subjective narrative of the individual. This reflection will depart from accounting a double crisis of narrative: the one of experience, which forbids any personal narration to become paradigmatic for other individuals, and the one of scientific discourses, differently carried out by several postmodernist thinkers, that argues the inherently interpretative and therefore subjective status of sciences (among which historiography), which prevents them to reach the claim for universality they pursuit. By trying to find a new configuration that would integrate and to rehabilitate these two narratives, our argument will approach the foucaultian idea of an "history of the present", the only model that would simultaneously unify the formalization of the past with the constant interpretation promoted by the individuals in the present.

The second chapter, named "The Voice", will examine all the possible reasons according to which the materiality of voice would embody the best tool to carry on the claim for an history of the present: we should say that whereas the first chapter engages the problem of the message, the second discusses the problem of the medium. Accordingly, we will attempt to disentangle the human voice from Derrida's popular critique of logocentrism, by comparing it with several different models that picture the voice as a collective connecter as well as the only medium capable to give the full dimensions of the human: his feelings, his imaginary, his activity into the real world.

The last chapter, which takes the name of "The Community", departs from the possibility for an heterogeneous group of 'vocalized individuals' to constitute a community, namely a group definable according to common parameters. For the voice turns out to be the element which transcends all the particular claims for identity, the essential experience of language will become the fundamental experience of a globalized word. What we will be stressing is that, in this plateau, the language is no longer separable from action: by being configured as an action-in-progress, the respective community cannot be completely defined once for all; it can only be performed within the univocal sphere of voice/language. It is at this point that we will introduce for the first time the concept of *poietical*, which assumes different shades depending on the noun that precedes it: somehow, it will attempt to reorganize historiography, narrative and community around a model that accounts the universal experience of language through its vocalization, and consequently the necessary presence of a form of action that is performed by all the individuals, be them aware or not.

If we should synthesize the problem of this thesis in a single question, we should ask: "How can a community which lacks of its own narrative attempts to vocalize it?". Indeed, this question might sound too cryptic because it gathers three more essential questions: "Is globalization able to move toward a singular community?" "How can this community elaborate its own narrative?" and finally "Can this narrative be achieved through the medium of spoken language?".

It is clear that all these questions depart from a necessity to demonstrate the incredible value of Tellhistory : nonetheless, is not the particular function or reality of Tellhistory 'as a tool' that is discussed, or even put at stake, in this essay. If anything, is what Tellhistory let open, the breach which it created with its own work, its own limit that constitutes the central focus of this work.

In a sense, the author of this thesis will behave more as the interviewed rather than as the interviewer: he will depart from objective, 'academic' questions, and he will move toward critics, representations, idiosyncrasies which might achieve interesting conclusions or miserable failures. He will often forget about Tellhistory: as those who,

in front of a camera, began with telling their impressions concerning a particular historical event, and then they suddenly switched to related memories, unexpressed fantasies, deluded expectations, ironical interpretations. For all this inconveniences, the author should apologize: but we hope that exactly this point, this continuos turning out the language, with the related impossibility to define who the author is, and who the audience, and what the topic, might constitutes the most precious key to access this work.

The Narrative
Chapter One

1.1 For an historical storytelling

The first chapter of this thesis will be trying to define the relationship between narrative and history with the aim of providing an alternative method for the recording, writing, and interpretation of a field still in process of auto-definition : the "global history".

In order to show up the limits of what is called "global history", a discipline that Dominic Sachsenmaier has defined an "intellectual trend" rather than a proper historical field[1], we would not go only through the broad critique that is been carried against - or in favor of - this discipline; we will also attempt to demonstrate its limits when it is approached as a narration and, specifically, as a storytelling. According to this second approach, the main questions will be: Who might be the author of this story? Who the addressee? What might be the form of the message involved in this narration? Finally, could we possibly validate this narration as something effective, shared, and, above all, true?

This ambitious purpose of leading "global history" under the domaine of "storytelling", must face the difficulty of assimilate global history to a canonical historiographic field. This difficulty could be expressed in at least two aspects: the first concerns the form and the method of this history, whose proportions cannot apparently be limited to the textual forms proper of cultural studies; the second problem, intrinsically epistemological, doubts about the actual existence of a global past which could guarantee the construction of a global historiography. If this past doesn't exist, we should consider the possibility to establish a new form historiography which, in the impossibility to be built upon a ground of past events, can only rely to

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[1] D. Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 18

the experience of an ongoing present. As I will try to suggest, it is precisely in this possibility to make the present historical (and history present) that individual storytelling arises with an unexpected power.

If historiography and storytelling share the same structural possibility of 'being narrated', they differ for the extent in which the first one is generally considered non-fictional, objective, scientific, whereas the second one is often relegated in the area of subjectivity, performance, and fiction. The major effort made in order to state how fictional and historical narration are able to manifestate the experience of time certainly belongs to Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, an oeuvre that will be essential for the development of this thesis. According to his critique, the virtuous circle that allows time to be experienced through narrative (and viceversa) its precisely the dynamic which enables historiography to establish its scientific structure from its narrative nature. Therefore, if historiography can aim to an epistemological establishment only by facing its sub-lunar essence, that is its inherent necessity for interpretation and representation, we are asked to figure out how this sub-lunar status could be improved into a new global community in order to become historical. Hence, the first part of this research will analyze precisely the substratum of different narratives involved in this process, trying to define the difficult relationship between personal narrative, intended as the set of of discourses, testimonies and memories of the individual, and the Grand Narratives, the system of dominant discourses which have defined science, historiography and culture all over the human history.

1.2 Personal Narratives and Grand Narratives : a lost relationship

In his short essay entitled *Experience and Poverty*, Walter Benjamin seems to be discussing the annihilated relationship between the value of personal experience and the actualization of contemporaneity. What the most of the scholars defined clear

about this essay is the evident critique against the current emptiness of Grand Narratives:

> "Moreover, everyone knew precisely what experience was: older people had always passed it onto younger ones. It was handed down in short forms to sons and grandsons, with the authority of age, in proverbs; with an ofter long-winded eloquence, as tales; sometimes as stories form the foreign lands, at the fireside. —Where has it all gone? Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story? Where do you still hear words from the dying that last, and that pass from a generation to the next like a precious ring? Who can still call on a proverb when he needs one? And Who will ever attempt to deal with young people by giving them the benefit of their experiences?[2]"

It is necessary to stress that the apparently evidence of a discourse against the Grand Narratives, intended in their strictly post-modern sense, could not be so evident and univocal. While is clear that, through this dense and somewhere cryptic text, emerges suddenly the strong critique against the Grand Narratives intended as the matrix of a culture that is now experienced as " a surfeit that it has exhausted them [the people]", to which Benjamin hopes the coming of a narrative that will "leave no traces[3]", is less clear the reason why his critique is starting from the direct experience of the individual rather than, as Lyotard did, from the inherent contradiction that those narratives were carrying.

Whereas Lyotard, in his famous essay *The Postmodern Condition: a report on Knowledge* is translating master systems, like modern science, into what it defines properly a discourse, Benjamin is operating the other way around: what he depicts like a master narrative is instead the simplest act of communication, namely, the communication of an experience. Why is this inversion so important for our research?

As long as our purpose is, at least at the beginning, the one of understanding why an hypothetical global community is without an own narrative, this inversion could help us in order to understand whether this community is still subjected to the grand narratives of late capitalism, or rather annihilated by the fundamental mistrust in the

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[2] W. Benjamin, *"Experience and Poverty," Selected Writings Volume 2*, Translated by Ronnie Livingstone, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 1999, p.731

[3] Ibidem, p. 732

act of communication, namely, the intersubjective communication of an experience. The two faces of this dilemma are literally calling for a resolution or a reunification: on the one hand, we have the controlling presence of capitalist, colonialist and scientific discourses which could not fit anymore with the skeptical opposition of minor (sometimes literally "personal") narratives; on the other, we have the impoverishment of singular experience intended as the matrix for a shared narrative which is currently been replaced by the major ones. Probably this distinction will result at the end univocal, perhaps strictly dialectical, to the extent that any major narratives is not only created and manipulated by a system of power, but also lived and experienced by the individual. What is clear for our purpose is that the very meaning of narrative must be put at stake: we are not looking only for a present description of a global narrative, but above all for a deontological definition of a narrative that is still in progress, that still has to come.

If we attempt a work of reunification of those two sides of the problem, we have to consider that Benjamin's and Lyotard's critiques are also separated by a broad epistemological distance.

In Lyotard's critique, scientific discourses, that are being demonstrated to be inherently narrative, cannot totally achieve the purported status of truth, a truth that can be univocally and naturally stated without the necessary moment of acceptation by a public audience. What Benjamin is being arguing seems to precede this structural differentiation between scientific and narrative discourse: why a narration is not able to be scientific anymore? That is, why the audience, the addressee of any personal narration, is unable to receive a story as an argument of truth? Has Narrative ever reached a scientific status?

This ultimate gap reveals that is possible to conceive science and narrative as two different epistemologies (in which one results, at the end, subjected by the other), or as two complementary discourses that are meant to sustain each other in order to make possible any statement of truth.

In order to reveal the apparent conflict that defines the relationship between narrative and science, which would be better to be distinguished in terms of *fictional*

and *non-fictional discourses,* I am going to read this opposition in light of Paul Ricoeur's analysis developed in the first volume of *Time and Narrative.*

It is particularly interesting to define the core of this extraordinary oeuvre by using a term developed by Nikita Nankov in his article entitled *The Narrative of Ricoeur's Time and Narrative*[4]. He called Ricoeur's approach a philosophical 'credulous incredulity': the first term refers to the massive and precise synopsis of philosophical and historical movements that, before him, have signed the debate around the narrative nature of historiography; the second term stresses instead a specific suspicion about the action of intellectual repetition based on the previous act of reviewing, that inherently calls for a subversion or reinterpretation of these theories.

This credulous incredulity is important for us in two senses : first, because we are trying to read the incredulities of Lyotard and Benjamin in light of another incredulity that could lead us to master the problem; second, because exactly by mastering the final problem we might find us in a position of incredulity, or dissatisfaction, toward Ricoeur's analysis.

1.3 Time, therefore Narrative: phenomenological and cosmological narratives

The theoretical apparatus of Time and Narrative is based on a double initial move that looks for both the conceptual foundation of time and narrative in two different authors. For what it concerns the topic of time, Ricoeur reclaims Saint Augustine's philosophy to be the only one capable of problematizing two separate and complementary aspects of time, namely the phenomenological and the cosmological, through which emerge the unavoidable difficulty of representing time in language: here Ricoeur's analysis of the aporias of time result fundamental for his research. On the other hand, he considers Aristotle's philosophy of *Poetics* as the most appropriate thought for the definition of the interaction between real experience (in that case,

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[4] Nikita Nankov, *The Narrative of Ricoeur's Narrative and Time,* The Comparatist, vol. 38, October 2014, pp. 227-249

experience of time) and the constitution of a text. As we know, Aristotle's *Poetic* is a treatise on the plot production in the ancient Greek theatre, from which Ricoeur extrapolates the dynamic of mimesis with the aim of universalizing this concept for all the narrative production.

1) For time is treated as the beginning of the oeuvre, we should follow the text logic structure and explain how Saint Augustine's philosophy enables Ricoeur analysis of time, an analysis addressed to the identification of three majors aporias that make the interaction between time and narrative problematic.

All the process of self-investigation developed in *Confessions* is an attempt to find a convergence between idealistic and sceptic notions of time: on the one hand, time is the aristotelian structure of the universe which depends on the eternal fact that "there are stars and other lights in the sky, set there to be portents, and be the measures of time, to mark out the day and the year[5]". This divine eternity is opposed to the chronological experience of human being, divided in past, present and future, which is the only one that can be named 'time'. This aspect, properly phenomenological (opposed to eternal cosmological), defines simultaneously the two first aporias: the one that cannot define a univocal - but a double - essence of time, and the one that declares possible a phenomenological experience of past (things that are no more) present (things that are passing by) and future (things that are not yet). The third aporia, finally, ask whether is possible to escape "the ultimate unrepresentability of time[6]".

2) Aristotle's *Poetic* could be considered a deontological argument on the production of plot, intended as the founding element of intersubjective communication into the Greek tragedies and comedies. This art of the 'emplotment' lies, for Ricoeur, in a three-folded application of mimesis (misesis1- mimesis2 - mimesis3). *Mimesis1* indicates the primal field of human acting , which is always already prefigured with certain basic competencies: for example, competency in the conceptual network of the

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[5] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Translated by R. Pine-Coffin, edited by Penguin Classics, Penguin UK 2003, p. 271 (paragraph 23)

[6] Ibidem, p. 279 (paragraph 28)

semantics of action (expressed in the ability to raise questions of who, how, why, with whom, against whom, etc.); in the use of symbols (being able to grasp one thing as standing for something else); and competency in the temporal structures governing the syntagmatic order of narration (the "followability" of a narrative). *Mimesis2* concerns narrative "emplotment." Ricoeur describes this level as "the kingdom of the *as if*" Narrative emplotment brings the diverse elements of a situation into an imaginative order, in just the same way as does the plot of a story. Emplotment here has a mediating function. It configures events, agents and objects and renders those individual elements meaningful as part of a larger whole in which each takes a place in the network that constitutes the narrative's response to why, how, who, where, when, etc. By bringing together heterogeneous factors into its syntactical order emplotment creates a "concordant discordance," a tensive unity which functions as a redescription of a situation in which the internal coherence of the constitutive elements endows them with an explanatory role. *Mimesis3* concerns the integration of the imaginative or "fictive" perspective offered at the level of *mimesis2* into actual, lived experience. Ricoeur's model for this is a phenomenology of reading, which he describes as "the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader[7]". Not only are our life stories "written," they must be "read," and when they are read they are taken as one's own and integrated into one's identity and self-understanding. *Mimesis3* effects the integration of the hypothetical to the real by anchoring the time depicted (or recollected or imputed) in a dated "now" and "then" of actual, lived time. It is precisely through this circular dynamic that the virtuous cycle of time and narrative is enacted: "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence[8]".

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[7] P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 1,* translated by Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer,,University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 71

[8] *Ibidem* p. 52

The inherent connection between time and narrative is given by the possibility of resolving the aporias of time by a narrative reconfiguration. The attempt to resolve the second aporia, the one that concerns the three ecstasis of time, becomes relevant for the distinction between fictional and historical narrative. According to Ricoeur, whereas fictional narrative can sublimate the magmatic interpenetration of past, present and future by the configuration of a story that is not necessarily tied to a consequential line of events, historiography has to invent a medium-time between the phenomenological experience of humankind and the cosmological eternity of non-human time. This time, namely the historical, "transposes in a practical way and on the dialogical level of a common history the phenomenological meditation that is speculative and on a monological level[9]". Nevertheless, this possibility can be obtained at the price of sacrificing the natural plurality of the plot, by replacing the multiple narration with a collective singular, that literally "stands for" the multitude of individual experiences. Here arises the mythical figure of the historian, the one who is asked to guarantee both the explanatory and the understandable feature of history, the one who act as a judge in a court to determine what, in the infinite field of the past, is allowed to belong to history. Therefore, the historian distinguishes himself from the fictional author for the extent that the author is free to locate himself in all the three ecstasis, whereas the historian can only refer to a past experienced from its future (namely, from the present of the historian). Hence, whereas the author can only refer to phenomenological time of experience, the historian deals with a dangerous business that makes though the mediation between phenomenological and cosmological time:

> "The final consequence is that there is no history of the present, in the strictly narrative sense of that term. Such a thing could be only, an anticipation of what future historians might write about us. The symmetry between explanation and prediction, characteristic of the nomological sciences, is broken at the very level of historical statements. If such narration of the present could be written and known to us, we could in turn falsify it by doing the opposite of what it predicts. We do not know at all what future historians might write about us. Not only do we not know what events will occur, we do not know which ones will be taken as important. We would have to foresee the interests

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[9]Nikita Nankov, *The Narrative of Ricoeur's Narrative and Time,* p. 238

of future historians to foresee under what descriptions they will place our actions. Peirce's assertion "the future is open" means "no one has written 'the history of the present." This latter remark brings us back to our starting point, the internal limit of narrative statements[10]"

Once given this perspective, Lyotard's and Benjamin's positions assume a different connotation. We argued that both the philosophers claimed against the possibility of narratives to be valuable for the individual configuration of reality: while the first one attacks the Grand Narratives, intended as the major dispositive of dominant cultures' perpetration, the second expresses the inherent impossibility for an individual narrative to reach the status of truth, which could enable personal experience to become valuable into an intersubjective relation. What we can unveil, through a comparation with Ricoeur's analysis, is how these two perspectives are inherently supposing the impossibility to "make the present historical". Before discussing this possibility, which is inherently related to the epistemological value of Tellhistory, it would be useful to develop a short insight into the "history of present", a concept that found up an intriguing explanation into Foucault's early genealogy.

1.4 History of the present

In the preface of *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel wrote one the passages fated to become monumental within the field of philosophy of history:

> One more word about *teaching* what the world ought to be: Philosophy always arrives too late to do any such teaching. As the *thought* of the world, philosophy appears only in the period after actuality has been achieved and has completed its formative process. The lesson of the concept, which necessarily is also taught by history, is that only in the ripeness of actuality does the ideal appear over against the real, and that only then does this ideal comprehend this same real world in its substance and build it up for itself into the configuration of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its gray in gray, then a configuration of life has grown old,

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[10] P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 1*, p. 147

and cannot be rejuvenated by this gray in gray, but only understood; the Owl of Minerva takes flight only as the dusk begins to fall.[11]

The metaphor of the Owl of Minerva refers directly to the *episteme* of philosophy, by implicitly addressing the status of any historical discourse which necessarily precedes the birth of any philosophical system. For philosophy is also the reflection on the facts of history, therefore the reflection on the very possibility to build any historical discourse, history itself must be taken as "something given", as a datum previously stabilized by the framework of historiography. Following Hegel, philosophy is condemned into a perpetual delay, the same delay which separates the living, evolutive process of history (namely, history of the present) from its theoretical translation into a discourse of history, namely historiography. This schema is unavoidable until philosophy of history keep on questioning history as a line which goes from a point in the past towards a final point in the present. Within the sphere of modern thinking, only a particular theory had been able to contrast and criticize this approach by discussing its fundamental process: the creation of an "origin".

The theory that we are summoning is the one of genealogy, originally developed by Nietzsche and subsequently reinterpreted by Michel Foucault. Firstly, it must be pointed that genealogy is not an alternative to historiography intended as the proper registration of historical facts; instead, it questions the epistemological fundament of historiography by criticizing the claim for both an evolutive and a marxist interpretation of the human history. That means that, at least in Nietzsche's theory, the role of contingency framed by the evolutive and marxist theories do not take account of the infinite field of possibility that are given in every historical process. Furthermore, genealogy sides more on the hermeneutic necessity for *reading* history rather than on the teleologic habit for *writing* history. According to what Foucault wrote on his *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,* "genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective

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[11] F. Hegel, preface to *Philosophy of Right,*Oxford University Press; First Published: by Clarendon Press 1952, Translated: with Notes by T M Knox 1942, p. VIII

of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins' [12]".

The precise opposition to teleology is also what constitutes the possibility for a simultaneity of philosophy and historiography in the common field of an *history of the present*.

This term opens up the opportunity for a wide deployment, especially after our attempt to find up a breach in which the grand narratives and the personal narratives could cooperate in framing a global history of the present. Nevertheless, we should first analyze what history of the present means for the French philosopher who originally invented this field.

The definition of a "history of the present" sounds unavoidably provocative, and furthermore absolutely paradoxical. To those who are not confident with Foucault's theories, this idea risks to suggest a form of "presentism": a kind of historical writing that approaches the past using the concepts and concerns of the present. Indeed, for canonic historiography this approach would achieve the highest degree of shame, namely the shame of anachronism, inasmuch as it projects contemporary values and meanings onto a past that may have been constituted quite differently.

As David Garland has stated in his essay *What is a "history of the present"? On Foucault's genealogies and their critical preconditions,* a first gaze must be directed towards the two majors methodologies employed by Foucault himself during two different periods: these are *archeology* and *genealogy.* The archeological model, despite its revolutionary approach, can be inscribed into a major current represented by scholars like Louis Althusser, Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilheim, whose work was structurally focused on the "break", that is on the rupture moment which caused the transformation of any given social system. Therefore, the archeological method represented a primal inquiry which "digs down into the past, uncovering the discursive traces of distinct historical periods and re-assembling them, like so many distinct layers

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[12] M. Foucault,*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,* in *Language, Counter-memory,* edited by D.F. Bouchard, Itaca, Cornel University Press 1977, p. 140

or strata, each one exhibiting its own structured pattern of statements, its own order of discourse[13]".

As already suggested, this model tried to highlight those moment of discontinuity between the emergence or overlap of two different orders of discourse, in order to show, exactly like psychoanalysis does, how the inherent conflict of 'narratives' shaped the representation of history in the present: "My problem is essentially the definition of the implicit systems in which we find ourselves prisoners: what I would like to grasp is the system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it; I would like to make the cultural unconscious apparent[14]".

The intention which, after the publication of *Discipline and Punish* in 1977, sustains the elaboration of a contemporary genealogy, despite its sense of continuity with the archeological model, opposes the very research of the origin pursued by archeology: "I was interested in [the subjects of his archaeologies] because I saw in them ways of thinking and behaving that are still with us. I try to show, based upon their historical establishment and formation, those systems that are still ours today, and within which we are trapped. It is a question, basically, of presenting a critique of our own time, based upon retrospective analyses[15]".

Precisely in this act of questioning our own times lies the specificity of the history of the present, a present in which the dominance of traditional discourses (which we can easily translate with the name of Grand Narratives) must be highlighted and criticized according to the contextual variances:"What is present reality? What is the present field of our experiences? Here it is not a question of the analytic of truth but involves what could be called an ontology of the present, of present reality, an ontology of modernity, an ontology of ourselves[16]".

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[13] D. Garland, *What is a "history of the present"? On Foucault's genealogies and their critical preconditions*, in *Punishment & Society*, Vol. 16(4) 365–384, New York University 2015, p.369

[14] M. Foucault in *A conversation with Michel Foucault* by J.K Simon, Partisan Review 38(2), 1971, p. 196

[15] Ibid. p. 192

[16] M. Foucault,The Government of Self and Others (Lectures at the College deFrance 1982–1983). New York: Palgrave, p. 21

By applying this particular model, the narrative status of historiography is once again pinpointed: as long as it is a narration, namely a narration enacted in the present, past itself proves itself to be a product *of its own product*, namely the present. Yet, it could be questionable the status which the genealogical model covers in the distinction between the personal and the grand narrative: is it really capable to transcend this conflictual dimension?

For history is criticized for its normative and regulative function upon the individual, someone would be tempted to see in the genealogical model an attempt to unify the abyss between individual and major narratives. Furthermore, it is absolutely remarkable how genealogy was able to relate the text of history with the object of history, in an horizon in which facts and interpretation were indissolubly connected in the major area of the discourse. Being the writing of history also a content among the contents of history, Foucault's position closely resembles the one of Frank Ankersmit, who discussed the interrelation of factual truth and fictive sense using psychoanalysis as the perfect instance of this relation:

> "Psychoanalysis recites the novel a person has created of his own life but, however much distorted that novel may be, it is truth itself as well, without being, as in the novel, merely an expression of it. It is the novel of our life-history and the history of the novel of our lives. Psychoanalysis is able to achieve this synthesis because - in contrast with historiography and the novel -it does not generate the dichotomy or doubling the spoken word and what the spoken word is about. On the contrary, psychoanalysis aims at precisely the elimination of that dichotomy[17]"

Once the identity of the spoken word (historiography) and what the spoken word is about (history) is intertwined trough the genealogical approach, a new problem arises. We can argue that this problem is inherently related with a wider discipline which has been subliminally involved since the beginning of our research. Speaking of the irreconcilable distance between individual and grand narrative, following the discussion toward the problematization of an history of the present, we have always maintained, with the legitimacy of the authors quoted, a strict hermeneutical

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[17] F. Ankersmit, *Wahrheit in Literatur und Geschichte "*, published in: *Geschichstdiskurs. Band 5: Globale Konflikte, Erinnerungsarbeit und Neuorientierungen seit 1945* , Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, Ernst Schulin Hrsgb. Frankfurt am Main : Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag , 1999, p. 10

approach. For hermeneutics is the discipline which inquiries the capacity and the legitimacy of any interpretation of texts, speeches, utterances and more generally theories, this approach is originally condemned to follow the decay of the event in the same way in which Minerva's owl flies toward the sunset. When we questioned Lyotard's and Benjamin's analyses, we where examining the conflictual modality of historical writing upon the subjects' experience; in order to disentangle this problem we considered, following Ricoeur's main oeuvre, that any narrative presupposes a moment of reading in which the moment of writing is experienced by the individual; finally, we problematized the possibility to experience history during its very formation, namely in its present development, arguing that the distance between the fact and the discourse must be considered under the same critical light.

Nevertheless, we can prove the last point to be far from being reached in our discussion. As we already stated, we maintained an hermeneutical approach which, at the end, turns out to be the the fundamental limit of our research. That means that until we are entangled into an hermeneutical research, we are mechanically forced to produce a higher, or more general, interpretation of any given theory. By considering the position that we described for the genealogical (or the psychoanalytical) model, we pinpointed the necessity to achieve a conjunction between the sphere of facts and experiences with the field of narration and discourse; yet, by achieving this perspective, we also generated an higher interpretation which unavoidably covers the intellectually position of a dominant narrative.

In the second chapter, we will try to prove the limit of the hermeneutical reading into the sphere of media communication, focusing on the epistemological differences given by a theory of text, which implies both the acts of writing and reading, against a possible theory of the voice, in which other operations could eventually lead us toward a new theorization of an history of the present.

The Voice

II.1 Introduction

We concluded the first paragraph of this thesis by addressing what peculiarly seems to us the core problem of our research: in order to determine the nature of the narrative which sustain Tellhistory, we pointed out the necessity to found this narrative on a medium which must differ from the text.

Indeed, Tellhistory is already involved in the development of an oral medium which minimally implies the presence of a description in form of written text. Yet, our analysis of the oral medium will not attempt to justify the method but rather to test the limits of the same in order to explore all the possibilities which Tellhistory could eventually open up within the field of global historiography.

Given the nature of this discussion, which implies a double research on new historiography and on media theory, the following chapter will be developing two different treads: the first will analyze the relationship between orality and new media, mostly employing the fundamental researches pursued by the School of Chicago scholars' like McCluhan and Walter Ong, with the additional intent to discover new entailments of their theories within the parallel world of social media; the second will be looking for a position into the larger, but unfortunately not very popular, field of oral history, with the precise intent not only of highlighting the similarities with the structure of Tellhistory, but especially by pinpointing the differences between the oral-historical research and the program invented by Tellhistory itself.

Nevertheless, both the approaches require a preliminary insight into the specific concept of voice. Indeed, the concept of voice could be examined by different

disciplines according to different research exigences: a wide literature was developed in the field of paleoanthropology, where a particular attention was payed to the cultural shift from orality to writing in primitive societies, and indeed linguistic has covered since the beginning of XX century the largest part of discussion about the interaction between orality and text.

Yet, given our theoretical need for a significant definition of the concept "voice", namely a definition which could give the dimension of the capacity of constituting original meanings through the use of voice, we will introduce the discussion with a brief synopsis on the role covered by voice in philosophy, especially referring to particular theories emerged from phenomenology, structuralism and post-structuralism.

II.2 Voice in phenomenology and structuralism

The inquiry on the concept of voice has covered different interesting positions trough the developments of phenomenology and structuralism, two philosophical disciplines which constantly absorbed and reinterpreted the elements of one another, in a way that they seem mutually permeated, especially for what concerns the topic of language.

In this way, Husserl's analysis can be elected as the original point from which phenomenology and structuralism initiated the debate on the differences between spoken and written language. Nevertheless, husserlian phenomenology is born with the aim of contrasting the emerging relativism promoted by both marxism and psychoanalysis, intentionally looking for an *a-priori* feature which could ensure any form of empirical knowledge of the world, and thereby establishing a privileged position for human rationality as a foundation for objective knowledge, which by extension may be left open to the metaphysical. Husserl's transcendental idealism challenged the more canonic form of Platonic idealism by producing a dimension in which the metaphysical *a-priori* poses itself in the contingent context of reality, refusing in this way the absolute distinction argued by the Greek philosopher. No longer does the Ideal exist exterior to temporal and spatial forms, but interweaves with the

temporal and spatial. Yet, the meaning intended as universal's expression remain separated from the human subjectivity in the act of embodiment within the world. The role played by language in this process of meeting between the physical and the metaphysical is firstly explained in the first of the six Investigations.

Here Husserl separates and defines what he calls expression and indicative speech (ß1-ß8). Anticipating what Saussure called *signifiers, indications* are those signs that bring comunicative intention from a subject to another, literally those marks which carry means able to be perceived, transmitted and received. The core difference which distinguish indications from expressions is that an expression does not necessarily convey meaning; it simply exists in the mind like a sensation or visual image without a name or description. To simplify the distinction, it would not be naive to understand expressions as the Platonic Ideal form, while seeing in the indication the embodiment of the same Ideal form. As such, indications are arbitrary and meaningless in and of themselves. What makes communication possible begins precisely in the constitution of "sense", namely the act in which the indication meets the world by converging in a context in which the word explains itself. He writes:

> The articulate sound-complex, the written sign, etc., first becomes a spoken word or communicative bit of speech, when a speaker produces it with the intention of ìexpressing himself about somethingî through its means; he must endow it with a sense in certain acts of mind, a sense he desires to share with his auditors. Such sharing becomes a possibility if the auditor also understands the speakerís intention. He does this inasmuch as he takes the speaker to be a person who is not merely uttering sounds but speaking to him, who is accompanying those sounds with certain sense-giving acts which the sounds reveal to the hearer, or whose sense they seek to communicate to him. What first makes mental commerce possible, and turns connected speech into discourse, lies in the correlation among the corresponding physical and mental experiences of communicating persons which is effected by the physical side of speech. Speaking and hearing, intimation of mental states through speaking and reception thereof in hearing, are mutually correlated[18].

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[18] E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations.* Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 7

For this passage remains one of the most explicit for what concerns the voice, the rest of Husserl's production considers language in its general presence. Nevertheless, this passage pinpoints a feature which will become fundamental in Heidegger's philosophy, in which it will cover a position that literally exceeds the limit of language as communication, irremediably separating the phenomenological analysis from the structuralist. Heidegger considers fundamental the Husserlian consideration according to which any speech acquires the faculty of communication in the act of a subjective embodiment. Rather, in vocal discourse the sounds and vibrations of phonation fall outside of both signification and materiality, and allude to what withdraws and hides. One cannot appeal to a metaphysical-technological explanation because the phūsis of spoken language retreats from analysis. When Heidegger affirms that 'Language is the flower of the mouth' (OWL 99), he means to situate nonrepresentational language within a region of being that negotiates the interstices of the body and the world. As he writes,

> The sounding of the voice is then no longer only of the order of physical organs. It is released now from the perspective of the physiological-physical explanation in terms of purely phonetic data. The sound of language, its earthiness, is held with the harmony that attunes the regions of the world's structure, playing them in chorus.[19]

Still within the evolution of phenomenological thinking, Merleau-Ponty argues that words are not representations of thought; words are thought, and thought does not exist exterior to or separate from the elements used to bring it into fulfillment. […]

In terms of embodiment, Merleau-Ponty also credits the spoken word with inhabiting a physical space that is inseparable from the physical body : our physiognomy delimits phonetic properties, and we learn words as we learn to pronounce them aloud, putting our vocal apparatus in motion. Words are not images that exist separate from the actual instance of usage in either thinking or speaking. Likewise our physical expressiveness fills out the meanings aimed at by our linguistic

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[19] M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, translated by Peter D. Hertz. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971, p. 101

utterances. Corroborating Husserl's view of speech transpiring as an embodied activity, Merleau-Ponty states,

> The spoken word is significant not only through the medium of individual words, but also through that of accent, intonation, gesture, and facial expression, and, . . . as these additional meanings no longer reveal the speaker's thoughts but the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being[20].

On the other hand, despite the original similarity in the analysis of language, post-structuralism achieved a perspective diametrically opposed for what it concerns the evaluation of spoken language. As Andrew McComb Kimbrough stated in his dissertation *the Sound of Meaning: Theories of Voice in Twenty-century Thought and Performance[21]*, post-structuralism contributed to a progressive impoverishment of spoken language. Whereas phenomenology, with the new impulse given by the evaluation of the bodily presence, has interpreted vocal language as a tool able to give sense to the frame of grammatical language, post-structuralism considered the arbitrary and subjective sphere of vocal language to be subjected to the dominance of psychological and social rules.

Hence, despite Saussure interpretation of spoken language as "the seeds of every change, each one being pioneered in the first instance by a certain number of individuals before entering into general usage[22]", the pupil Claude Levi-Strauss, in his oeuvre *Structural Anthropology* , argues that linguistic frame works "beyond the consciousness of the individual, imposing upon his thought conceptual schemes which are taken as objective categories[23]". Despite the philosophical tradition considers Levi-

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[20]M. Merleau-Ponty,, *Phenomenology of Perception,* translated by Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 151

[21]A. McComb Kimbrough, *The Sound of Meaning: Theories of Voice in Twenty-century Thought and Performance,* dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Theatre, 2002

[22] F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* translated by Roy Harris. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1983, p. 97

[23] C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology. Vol. 1.* Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brook Grundfest Schoepf. New York and London: Basic Books, Inc., 1963, p. 19

Strauss thought to be strictly structuralist, this analysis links him directly to the wide area of post-structuralism and critical theory which engaged the study of the subject as entangled into the unescapable relationship of dominant powers. Once given this essential outline of the opposition between phenomenological and structuralist model, it must be somehow relevant the intuitive analogy which emerge from the discussion developed in Chapter I.

Once again, this time by approaching the particular topic of vocal language, we are forced to face the evident opposition between the possibility to let the subjective narrative emerge from the personal speech, or rather to interpret the personal speech as one of the infinite variants within the sphere of a major narrative, in this case language itself (intended as a dominant frame).

As long as we have to evaluate the possibility of creating new meanings by the narration through the use of voice, the circular problem of narratives will constantly present itself. Hence, it could be useful to compare two different traditional position which have given interesting insight on the value of orality, especially for their apparent theoretical opposition: the theory of *phonocentrism* and the theory of *secondary orality*.

II.3 Phonocentrism and Secondary Orality

The opposition between phonocentrism and secondary orality might not appear so direct and evident as we are attempting to argue. Indeed, these theories seem to converge in the idea that orality, following the importance originally stated by Saussure himself, sustains all the linguistic apparatus, being it simultaneously the origin and the main reality of language itself.

Nevertheless, intentions and outcomes of these theories prove the distance which separates Derrida's critique from Ong's analysis. Already in the choice of words, *critique* and *analysis,* we are giving a general clue for deciphering the immense distance which distinguishes such similar thoughts.

According to Spivack, Derrida's notion of *phonocentrism* challenges directly both the ideas of the centrality of speech in Saussure's structuralism and, simultaneously, the Heideggerian existentialism which implements Being and presence:

> In the *Grammatology* Derrida suggests that this rejection of writing as an appendage, a mere technique, and yet a menace built into speech - in effect, a scapegoat - is a symptom of a much broader tendency. He relates this phonocentrism to *logocentrism* — the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness. In the *Grammatology* and elsewhere, Derrida argues that the evidence for this originary and teleologic presence has customarily been found in the voice, the *phonè*.[24]

The tradition assaulted by Derrida has considered the voice to be the tangible material which gives sense to the otherwise meaningless frame of language. In a particular passage of Grammatology, Derrida pushes the critique started from phonocentrism (relating it to the broader sense of logocentrism) towards an essential critique of *centrism* itself, namely the pursuit of any origin or paradigm which could signify the totality of the system:

> the notion of the sign…remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and meaning of being, of voice and ideality of meaning…One already has a premonition that phonocentrism gets mixed up with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence, with all the sub-determinations which depend on this general form […] Logocentrism would thus be solidary with determination of the being of the entity as presence.[25]

It is precisely in this pursuit of an alternative to any possible *centrism* that this inversion of hierarchy acquires a totalizing meaning within Derrida's critique. Therefore the frame of writing must not be interpreted as merely signal codification,

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[24] G.C. Spivak, *Translator's Preface* in J. Derrida *Of Grammatology,*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2016, p. XC

[25] G.C. Spivak, *Translator's Preface* in J. Derrida *Of Grammatology,*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2016, p. XC

but rather as the field in which the difference takes place, namely the place in which every monotheism (the one of God, of the Author, of the Self) is constantly undermined and put at stake. The greatest challenge of deconstruction lies exactly in declaring the text to be the absolute non-central paradigm of reality, by creating, in a sense celebrating and contrasting master Heidegger, a metaphysic of non presence, of perpetual alterity.

Assuming the risk of oversimplifying Derrida's theory, we must point out the outcome of this thesis from the perspective of voice. One of the core sentences of *Grammatology* , probably the most misunderstood and still the most popular, says *Il n'y a pas de hors-text* (there is not out-text). In his attempt to destabilize any univocal thought, Derrida extended the area of writing beyond the boundaries of language itself, in order to account the possibility that language itself has to create relationship based on the production of difference. We must deduce that voice becomes a corollary of writing in which the traditional identity with being/presence is refused. Hence, what is the role of orality within Derrida's Grammatology? What does the interaction of writing and speech produce?

Whether an interaction between the claim for presence of speech and the constant alterity of writing exists or not, we should firstly question the theory which traditionally faced Derrida's analysis, despite its structural difference given by its socio-anthropological approach. As we already stated, both Derrida's deconstruction and School of Chicago's analysis depart from the consideration that speech has always played the most fundamental role. Nevertheless, the model differently elaborated by McLuhan and Ong followed a tread which considers language to be like a material, therefore an object which effectively interacts with human senses, rather than like the pure system of signification represented by the French philosopher.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy,* Marshall McLuhan has discussed the linguistic evolution of Western societies by relating linguistic structures with a phenomenological study of human perception. From this perspective, pre-literate societies were defined by a solipsistic integration of the individual with his environment, which was experienced especially by his auditive perception, for his constant necessity to memorize, listen,

understand and perform the formulas of a language freed by the technology of writing. On the contrary, literary societies, especially those based on a high-level development of communication, perceive the world in terms of spatio-temporality by a perspective which is almost exclusively experienced by sight. This diametrical contrast plays in McLuhan's analysis the role of fundamental discriminant able to explain every apparent opposition between aural (or oral) societies and visual (or literary) societies. Therefore, each technology enhances different levels of sensitive perception:

> If a technology is introduced either from within or from without a culture, and if it gives new stress or ascendancy to one or another of our senses, the ratio among all of our senses is altered. We no longer feel the same, nor do our eyes and ears and other senses remain the same. The interplay among our senses is perpetual save in conditions of anesthesia. But any sense when stepped up to high intensity can act as an anesthetic for other senses. The dentist can now use "audiac"—induced noise —to remove tactility. Hypnosis depends on the same principle of isolating one sense in order to anesthetize the others. The result is a break in the ratio among the senses, a kind of loss of identity. Tribal, non-literate man, living under the intense stress on auditory organization of all experience, is, as it were, entranced[26].

This principle of technologic affection recalls Rousseau's critique of language and arts, pointing out all the consequences which any technical development implies:

> The role played by print in instituting new patterns of culture is not unfamiliar. But one natural consequence of the specializing action of the new forms of knowledge was that all kinds of power took on a strongly centralist character. Whereas the role of the feudal monarch had been inclusive, the king actually including in himself all his subjects, the Renaissance prince tended to become an exclusive power centre surrounded by his individual subjects. And the result of such centralism, itself dependent on many new developments in roads and commerce, was the habit of delegation of powers and the specializing of many functions in separate areas and individuals[27].

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[26] M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy, The Making of The Typographic Man,* University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1962, p. 24

[27] Ibidem, p. 10

Clearly one of the the most important theoretical challenge consists, for Derrida and McLuhan, in stating how the mutual objects of critique has contributed to the creation of centrism/centralism, namely how the limit of subjectivity emerged from a particular inclination of human progress. This conceptual knot is particularly relevant for our discussion, as long as our purpose remains that of understanding how the voice could enable a new perspective on history, namely an history of the present. Can therefore the notion of centrism be determinant for our purpose? In other words, to what extent the centrality (or rather the alterity) of the subject can affect our aim to define a history of the present through the use of voice?

It must be noted that a convergent point between McLuhan's oralism and Derrida's textualism can be eventually found in Walter J. Ong's study of the switch from orality to literacy. Although Ong's analysis can certainly be inscribed within the School of Chicago movement, whose the intellectual main figure was McLuhan himself, his study proceeds with the structuralist intent of defining the mutual differences of aural and chirographic societies, constantly avoiding any negative connotation which would define an oral culture as "a culture without writing" like Levi-Strauss did. In his book *Orality and Literacy*, Ong explained the main effect which the development of writing technology can cause upon an aural society (given that all the societies, before the invention of writing, are oral societies), therefore causing a switch from a social structure to another. Nevertheless, this process is not totally homogenizing and pervasive: in his demonstration, Ong can quote several groups which are still at the stage of *primal orality*, namely completely free of writing. In describing the way in which primal orality operates in contrast with literary societies, Ong applies an expected dual opposition: according to the title given by the several paragraphs of *Further characteristics of orally based thought and 36 expression*, orality distinguishes itself for being additive rather than subordinate, aggregative rather than analytic, redundant or 'copious', conservative or traditionalist, close to the human lifeworld, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, homeostatic, situational rather than abstract. Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to pinpoint that orality contrasts literacy for being essentially performative and 'temporal':

For anyone who has a sense of what words are in a primary oral culture, or a culture not far removed from primary orality, it is not surprising that the Hebrew term *dabar* means 'word' and 'event'. Malinowski (1923, pp. 45 1, 470–81) has made the point that among 'primitive' (oral) peoples generally language is a mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought, though he had trouble explaining what he was getting at (Sampson 1980, pp. 223– 6), since understanding of the psychodynamics of orality was virtually nonexistent in 1923. Neither is it surprising that oral peoples commonly, and probably universally, consider words to have great power. Sound cannot be sounding without the use of power[28].

On the other hand, writing stands as the technology which enables any capacity of abstraction:

Writing is in a way the most drastic of the three technologies. It initiated what print and computers only continue, the reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent space, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist[29].

If we recall what we said about the configuration of narrative through the emplotment in Paul Ricouer's *Time and Narrative*, we could be able the recognize the respective roles of writing and voice in this process: whereas writing triggers the possibility of abstraction, therefore of any categorization of time's modalities, it is due to the inherent capacity of orality to identify itself with the present event, being intrinsically correlated with the passing of time. In this way, as Saint Augustine stated, past and future are only thinkable in terms of the "present of the past things" and "the present of actual expectations", in the same way in which any written sentence can be produced starting from an oral level. Despite the apparent naivety of this this example, it is fundamental to account, like Ong did, the interrelation of spoken and written language, intended as two open systems which constantly affect and shape themselves. Hence, Ong's cosmology is not just structured upon primal oral societies and literary societies. In the era of electronic development, signed by the creation of radio, television and computer, the primal revolution initiated by printing technology

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[28]. W.J Ong, *Orality and Literacy, The Technologizing Of The Word,* Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York 1982, p. 31

[29] Ibidem, p. 26

is transcended toward a new level: we assisted to the (slight) switch from literary society to media society. More than in any previous society, orality and writing are strictly entangled into each other:

> At the same time, with telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of 'secondary orality'. This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas (Ong 1971, pp. 284–303; 1977, pp. 16–49, 305–41). But it is essentially a more deliberate and self- conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well.
> Secondary orality is both remarkably like and remarkably unlike primary orality. Like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves. But secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture—McLuhan's 'global village'. Moreover, before writing, oral folk were group-minded because no feasible alternative had presented itself In our age of secondary orality, we are group-minded self-consciously and programmatically. The individual feels that he or she, as an individual, must be socially sensitive. Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward[30].

If we step back to the problematic entangled with the dominancy of *centrism*, we can probably discern two different way of performing the individual within writing and orality. It is not wrong to say, ironically following Derrida, that the individual in language is equally supported by his *presence* and his *absence*. Nevertheless, whereas the individual is encoded like the speaker into a vocal discourse, which implies a living and participatory audience, he loses his individual status by being part (at least, in oral society) of a shared narrative and therefore of a shared thought: his living presence is the warrant for his absence into the discourse. On the other hand, whereas the individual writes a text, he is encoded like an author, namely the singular creator of a script which is not meant to be shared, nor to be positioned into a debate structured

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[30] W.J Ong,*Orality and Literacy, The Technologizing Of The Word*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York 1982, p. 133

upon any agonistic exchange of words. The post-modern notion of the death of the author can only reinforce this idea we are trying to highlight: the author's *absence* is the only ground in which the living *presence* of the text can achieve its singularity. Therefore, the peculiar case of secondary orality represents also an instance of *secondary writing*, to the extent that it performs the modality of a spoken language, enhancing a new feature of textual debate and 'virtual' discussion. It is not by chance that Liliana Bounegru, in her short essay entitled *Secondary Orality in Microblogging* has pinpointed the new creation of a living audience into the neutral boundaries of virtual texts represented by the new realities of social networks:

> The secondary oral culture today has reached the highest level of development in cyberspace from all electronic media, and went beyond Ong's description, where the audience plays no role, is absent or unseen, to the audience playing an active role in the definition of the self. Microblogging is the newest phenomena that develops on features of secondary orality. […] The main features of oral communication: subjective, grounded in observable and everyday, close to the human life and world, shared knowledge, aggregative, in the sense that it collectively builds consensus through dialogue and debate, situational (valuing direct experience over theory), are technologically enhanced to transform into secondary orality, recognizable through: potential for both subjective and objective, transcending barriers of time and space, grounded in everyday life, collaborative knowledge but possible to archive, "chunked" text but possible to aggregate and link, allowing both situational and abstract, analytical topics. All these features of secondary orality are recognizable in the Twitter world. Although conceived as a simulation of face-to-face communication, Twitter fragments the communication process and keeps focus on transmitter, who integrates his followers' input (tweets, profile) as part of his identity, a reminiscence of the written discourse, because Twitter's interface is a textual one[31].

It is precisely in this experimental area, experimental for being not completely acknowledged by both the users and the critique, that Tellhistory's project is trying to define its own role as a platform in which the personal narrative of everyone might achieve the status of a collective, even literally historical narrative. Yet, the historical narrative owns specific features which are not merely ascribable to the concepts of

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[31] L. Bounegru, *Secondary Orality in Microblogging*, published in Master of Media Amsterdam University website (http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/blog/2008/10/13/secondary-orality-in-microblogging/)

collectivity, intersubjectivity and auto-consciousness. Hence, if we finally reached a glimpse of possibility for Tellhistory to saturate the gap between the Grand and the personal narrative, we still need to inquiry the potential of this project in a field which is explicitly historical and historiographical.

II.4 Oral History: method and meaning

Until the early Fifties, the status of oral history has been strictly entangled into a larger production of written historiography: to this extent, oral history was eminently employed as a tool for gathering and collecting information and witnesses. The popularity slowly achieved by oral history was due to the production of economic recorders which gave the possibility to register any interesting memory. The popularization of this technology mainly affected those field of non-orthodox historiography in which the collection of aural datas was fundamental to contrast, or at least to criticize, the boundaries of a 'major', or rather 'official' historiography. According to *Columbia Encyclopedia* :

> The discipline came into its own in the 1960s and early 70s when inexpensive tape recorders were available to document such rising social movements as civil rights, feminism, and anti–Vietnam War protest. Authors such as Studs Terkel, Alex Haley, and Oscar Lewis have employed oral history in their books, many of which are largely based on interviews. In another important example of the genre, a massive archive covering the oral history of American music has been compiled at the Yale School of Music. By the end of the 20th cent. oral history had become a respected discipline in many colleges and universities. At that time the Italian historian Alessandro Portelli and his associates began to study the role that memory

itself, whether accurate or faulty, plays in the themes and structures of oral history[32].

It is precisely within Alessandro Portelli's research that the status of oral history switches from a mere method to a specific discipline featured by original meanings and functions. Although his main oeuvre, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli,* follows a wide tradition of study-cases in which all the oral testimonies cooperate to describe an event excluded by the area of written history, it breaks up with the canonic limit of this discipline. In fact, by attempting to reconstruct the case of Luigi Trastulli, a young factory worker from Terni, Portelli provides a deep insight into the specificity of oral history, not only for the particular stories which it carries, but also for the special modality of the oral narration. Trough the realization of this attempt, Portelli is necessarily forced to face the limits imposed by canonical categories such as 'objectivity', 'factuality', and the relationship between historian and 'material'. Indeed, the entire definition of history is at stake in Portelli's work, for his conception is saturated both by an anthropological intention and, on the other hand, a strong political aim. In this sense, it is important to stress the influence imposed by the work of Ernesto deMartino, the Italian anthropologist who claimed a participant role for the Southern rural masses of Italy which were officially excluded by history as explained by his own master, the philosopher Benedetto Croce. Therefore, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* carries a double significant contribution to the writing of history: firstly, it considers oral testimonies for their intrinsic potential rather than for the mere informative feature; secondly, it explores the deep political power in which oral history is involved in its silent deconstruction of official historiography.

When asked to demonstrate the objectivity of any oral narration, Portelli does not hide the impossibility, or rather the senselessness, of ascribing this kind of narration to the scientific sphere of objectivity. In Portelli's words:

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[32]"oral history." The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed.. . Retrieved March 30, 2017 from Encyclopedia.com: http://www.encyclopedia.com/reference/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/oral-history

Oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no "false" oral sources. Once we have checked their factual credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that "wrong" statements are still psychologically "true," and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts[33].

Being based on the original production of subjectivity, the individual historical narration is somehow equable to perception: no one can contest another's one. Hence, according to Portelli, the specific interest of oral history does not interferes with the discovery or the verification of state of affairs, but rather with the representations and interpretations which the individual produced starting by their partial experiences. Indeed, the main 'organ' which controls this production is the one of memory, an organ which, according to Portelli:

is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context[34].

Thus, the non-objectivity of memory depends on its intrinsic features which make it partial, artificial (creative) and variable. In this sense, memory cannot be treated exactly like a written document: in fact, although any document is subjected to the necessity of being proved through a philological analysis (exactly like any oral testimony), it also remains stable and invariable despite the several perspective applicable on it. Indeed, as we said by analyzing Walter Ong's thought, any oral discourse implies an audience in which the author and the reader are sensibly 'reduced' to the democratic figure of the speakers, namely speakers within an audience. Therefore, while the reader is the unique variable into the act of text

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[33] A. Portelli, *The Death Of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories, Form and Meaning Of Oral History*, Suny Press 1991, p. 52

[34] Ibidem, p. 53

reading, in an oral interview both the subjects are involved into the living and variable process of narration:

> The historian may validate his or her discourse by "ventriloquizing" it through the narrators' testimony. So far from disappearing in the objectivity of the sources, the historian remains important at least as a partner in dialogue, often as a "stage director" of the interview, or as an "organizer" of the testimony. Instead of discovering sources, oral historians partly create them. Far from becoming mere mouthpieces for the working class, oral historians may be using other people's words, but are still responsible for the overall discourse[35].

As we can guess from this sentence, the historian's work does not concern exclusively the research or discovery of datas concerning mere facts. When we consider, following Portelli's discourse, that the historians "partly create" their own sources, we are necessarily forced to think about the nature of these 'sources' we are discussing. As long as a source is meant to be a-priori to the narration, be it written or oral, therefore non-created but strictly 'happened', this kind of sources employed in oral narration must concern more the *interpretative* rather than the *representative* faculty of historiography:

> The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*. This does not imply that oral history has no factual validity. Interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events; they always cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes [36].

The distinction between event and meaning might eventually require a further deepening which would take the space of a separate thesis. Nevertheless, we should stress that this separation attempts to account the modality in which event and meaning, equally involved both in the written and oral history, changes depending on the structure of the inquire. Therefore, pinpointing that oral history extrapolates the meaning out of an event could signify that the individual act of interpretation of an

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[35] A. Portelli, *The Death Of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories, Form and Meaning Of Oral History*, Suny Press 1991, p. 56

[36]Ibidem, p. 50

event is for the historian the event itself   to investigate on. Indeed, official historiography itself have dealt with the purpose of furnishing a meaning, namely to rationalize the chaotic process of history trough the lens of different theories; what oral history does is to question the 'users' of history about their own theories, and somehow to produce new theories in the very act of speaking. Hence, if we understand a particular historical research in light of a theory (ex. marxism), we should understand a mnemonic speech by deciphering other elements. If we admit that a theory like marxism can be influential for any individual representation, we should also account the irreducible idiosyncrasy in which any individual experience is entangled: hence, all along with marxism, many other contexts, sometimes even apparently contrasting, can be determinant to properly understand a speech.

Despite its inherent difficulty to be formalized, there are many semiotic features which characterize the oral discourse in order to be comprehended as a meaning-producer:

> Whereas pauses of irregular length and position accentuate the emotional content, and very heavy rhythmic pauses recall the style of epic narratives. Many narrators switch from one type of rhythm to another within the same interview, as their attitude toward the subjects under discussion changes. Of course, this can only be perceived by listening, not by reading […]
> This is not a question of philological purity. Traits which cannot be contained within segments are the site (not exclusive, but very important) of essential narrative functions: they reveal the narrators' emotions, their participation in the story, and the way the story affected them. This often involves attitudes which speakers might not be able (or willing) to express otherwise, or elements which are not fully within their control. By abolishing these traits, we flatten the emotional content of speech down to the supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document[37].

By being eminently affectional rather than intellectual, oral history resists the codification into writing precisely for its present-form. Nevertheless, being the aim of the historian the one of understanding history rather than moving emotions, the emotive potential of oral history is supposed to be led toward the goal of knowledge. This particular knowledge could be described as the history of meaning-producing, or

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[37] A. Portelli, *The Death Of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories, Form and Meaning Of Oral History,* p. 47

even *history of imaginarium*. As many   contemporary scholars have stated by approaching different fields, the imaginary can be described as the set of beliefs, credences, expectations, skills and human relationship which affect the effective agenda of any individual. In Portelli's case, the imaginary involved in his research comprehended the opinions of workers about political manifestations, public riots, the role of their own town into a larger national politic, the American/Soviet dominancy, up to the topics of memory itself and the pursuit of justice. In this sense, history as memory turns into a critical tool for seeing all the relationship, or rather all the Grand narratives which, by crossing the existence of individuals, generates infinite and extremely variable micro-narratives.

II.5 A Tellhistory case : men, nature and governments

In order to generate a discussion about the problem of publicly dealing with the danger and the effects of earthquakes, I have created a personal Tellhistory tread in which I collected personal testimonies of people who experienced the tragedy happened in the region of Abruzzo in April 2009. Indeed, this topic constitutes nowadays a fundamental knot in which the shaking and insecure body of Italian government crosses the axis of public opinion and the crucial experience of the individuals. Furthermore, the shocking Abruzzo's earthquake of 2009 represents the mirror of another recent earthquake which have devastated a huge portion of Central Italy during the summer of 2016. These two episodes, so similar for what concerns the geographical circumstances and the urbanist frame, are also exemplar for the way they revealed all the subliminal fears, expectations, hopes and regrets directed towards the two different governments which dealt with the catastrophe. Being the two governments quite distinguishable (the first from the moderate right, the second from the moderate left), they obviously managed in different ways to guarantee the security of the citizens involved and to prepare new and quick reconfigurations of the cities; nevertheless, both the approaches generated impressive rhetoric operations aimed

either to criticize either to celebrate the govern's agenda. Indeed, the case I am about to show is incomprehensible outside the limits of a broader historiography, at least one perpetuated by the formalization of news and journalism: while the history of the individual can be 'read' in itself without referring to external elements, his narrative can be interpreted only in light of the infinite other narrative relationships which it entertains.

Nevertheless, it would be relevant to test this case by applying Portelli's methodology and theory, not only to stress the natural equivalence which link Tellhistory to the discipline of oral history, but also to demonstrate how Tellhistory's project might carry a potential of innovation within the discipline itself and, in a sense, beyond the limits of the same.

A testimony that I found particularly interesting is the one of Luciano C.[38], citizen of the destroyed city of L'Aquila, father of two kids and employed in a factory of the same city. I developed the interview by using a set of simple questions in order to stimulate as much as possible the stream of consciousness of Luciano: hence I asked something like "What do you remember of the night of the earthquake?", "Which is the image that mostly impressed your memory?", "Which where your expectations after the disaster?" and so on.

In Luciano's testimony there are two main moments in which a sort of organic interpretation emerges from the way he speaks, looks at the camera, or simply ignores to deepen the discourse. The first concerns the moment in which Luciano explains the action of Protezione Civile, inherently accusing them to have been too "naive" or "unprepared" to face the imminent earthquake. The second one concerns the moment in which Luciano openly congratulates with the Government (back in the days Berlusconi was presiding) for the generous action carried after the disaster. The reader should know that although the mentioned action was incredibly quick and resolutive, the "New Towns" were built for a small amount of homeless while many others wee left in the agglomerates of tends. In both the cases, Luciano voluntarily avoided to name the responsible agents: in the first instance, he converged with the

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general idea that Protezione Civile was generally guilty for not having advised the citizens about the imminent danger; on the other, he celebrated the immediate intervention of Berlusconi's government. Indeed, for those who followed Italian politics at that time, the inherent paradox immediately emerges: for Guido Bertolaso, chief of Protezione Civile (afterwards charged for plural homicide) was also director of Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri under the fourth Berlusconi's govern (and, in many occasion, favorited and defended by the same Prime Minister).

In my opinion, this interview was emblematic for two reasons. Firstly, it remarked a feature that we already discussed in a theoretical frame: every individual narrative necessarily resists the integration with a major narrative (in this case, that of the newspapers and, somehow, of official history) and thus it resulted hardly assimilable to a broader concept of historiography. On second thought, it also permitted to guess a deeper problem: although Luciano's story is not compatible with the official state of affairs, it is also hardly definable as 'individual'. Here I'm referring back to the Benjamin's problem of bringing experience out of a tale: Luciano's status as the 'survivor of a tragedy' does not allow him to add something theoretically valuable to the debate about the earthquake's history; somehow his opinion is way more based on a national-spread rhetoric which opposed the Berlusconi/Bertolaso's supporters against all the others. Indeed, there is nothing wrong in this process: it is doubtless that Luciano's consideration came from an evaluation of his own experience (being introduced into a New Town's house, having abandoned his own apartment etc.). Nevertheless, more than his individual-status, what seems to decade is his own belonging to a community, namely the possibility to ascribe to a determinate group the interpretative priority concerning specific topics, in this case the experience of the earthquake. My guess was that, in a world fragmented into the unifying power of media communication, it raises a kind of impossibility of the "to-speak-for", which somehow put at stake the anthropological aim of Portelli's research: namely, to let the individuals emancipate from a superior discourse to make individual-history valuable again. This problem, now briefly introduced, will be the centre of the next chapter.

The Community
Chapter Three

III.1 Introduction

Trough the exposition of a theory of oral history, one that could fit with the parameters and the intentions sustained by Tellhistory's project, we finally identified a specific method able to elevate the individual narrative up to the formal level of historiography. By giving a new role to the undistinguishable unity of spoken and written words into the epoch of secondary orality, we confirmed once again the necessity for a position *in between*: between the machine of grand narratives and the living sphere of individual experience, between the variable field of oral testimony and the stable area of writing. In this final chapter, we are necessarily forced to define, or at least to inquiry about the missing element of our scheme: after having problematized the message (narrative), and consequently the medium which vehicles the message (orality), we are unavoidably led to question the nature of the *user*, namely to define the features which characterize the subject of oral narration. At first sight, the order given to this analysis might appear problematic or even inverted if we consider the indisputable centrality that the subject retains in every process of narration, especially when the last one is meant to be authentic, biographical, historical.

Therefore, the apparent specularity we already encountered in the binomials grand/individual narratives and written/oral narration is not simply reciprocal, but often even 'chiasmatic': in this sense, our previous analysis of the notion of *centrism* gave us the dimension of ambivalence which constantly pervades this discussion. In this sense, the following reflections on the nature of the user will probably add further ramifications to the simple, and yet quite dense, scheme we are trying to outline: by being so intrinsically circular and redundant, this analysis might achieve a rhizomatic

structure rather than an arborescent and dualistic frame. Once again, if on the one hand we will always refer to the generality of a concept, namely to its possibility to be enlarged and then stabilized into a theory, on the other we will constantly problematize the fugitive figure of the individual and the collective, in order to extrapolate, where possible, a form in which both terms might achieve a state of coherence, or at least define a specific lack of the same coherence we are accomplishing.

Hence, if we appealed improperly to the concept of rhizome, we did it to the extent that

> as a model for culture, the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source of 'things' and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those 'things.' A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by 'ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.' Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a 'rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo[39]

The idea of 'mapping', be it of a physic movement or of an abstract concept, seems to fit perfectly with our intention of designing a non-hierarchical interaction between the formal ground of theory and the living sphere of the individual in history. By expressing, or rather representing, the mutual relationship between the subjects and the surrounding environment, the act of mapping comprehends both the position of the individual and the position of the group to which he belongs. Although this consideration might result redundant, if not literally obvious, it played an important role in a particular way of mapping the world by paying attention to all the dynamics which influence the relationship between subjects and space.

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[39] G. Deleuze - F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Penguin Classics Books, London and New York, 2003,

In Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity At Large*, this sort of multiple intersection is for the first time analyzed beyond the traditional boundaries of Nation-State identity. His theory starts from questioning a problem which covered a huge portion of modern anthropology, namely the unrepresentable dynamic of homogenization and localization, which somehow resembles our attempt to integrate the personal and the 'impersonal' narrative of history. In that sense, homogenization as promoted by capitalism and liberal economy owns the power to unify cultures around the same fetichism of production, but for the same reason of being almost completely dissociated by the dominant imperative of State-Nations, it accomplishes new forms of 'singularity' able to transcend the previous known forms of *community* . The case of Filipinos men who sing old folk-rock belonged to the 1950's American repertoire better than the Americans themselves serves particularly well to introduce the revolutionary idea of *-scape* proposed by Appadurai. In order to explain the inherent paradox of centralization pursued by western capitalism, Appadurai proposed a segmentary vision based on the most explanatory faculty which distinguish the contemporary subject from all the previous historic configuration: the *imaginary*. Basing this reflection both on Anderson's imagined community and on the Frankfurt School's idea of images, the different *scapes* outline the qualitative differences which enable the subject to configure his own identity depending on variances which do not belong directly to the standard national (or social) set. We can synthesize Appadurai's scheme in this way:

- *Ethnoscapes* — the ever shifting "landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and persons".

- *Mediascapes* − "refer both to the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios) which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media". "Tend to be image- centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality".

-*Technoscapes* − "the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and of the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now

moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" driven by "increasingly complex relationships between money flows, political possibilities, and the availability of both un- and highly skilled labor".

-*Finanscapes* – the flow of capital: "currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move mega-monies through national turnstiles at blinding speed".

-*Ideoscapes* – "Also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it"[40]

As we already discussed in the section dedicated to Alessandro Portelli's oral history, the oral discipline is made partially to accomplish the non-accomplishable aim of designing a history of the individual as entangled in network of relationship which link him to his memories, to his future, to his own expectations about the present. If, on the one hand, this aim is unreachable for the immanent variability and the constant changing of the sources, on the other it appears understandable as a scheme which consider the individual within a movement, be it more dynamic than the nation and more fluid than the state-form. Therefore, while we can follow Appadurai when he proposes a vision of community that evidently transcends the limits of all the dominant and traditional forms, we should at the same time question the meaning of community, its own epistemology, and consider the possible outcome of such a new categorization. Hence, does any scape simply undermine the canonical idea of community, or is itself a new modality of community?

If we consider, still following Appadurai, the case of those Sri-Lanka guys which usually go to the U.S. to drive a cab, tempted by the tales of their fellows who returned enriched by the job abroad, how should we define their community: do they belong to the Sri-Lanka's expats, to the Sri-Lanka's expats who drive a cab, to the Sri-Lanka expats who drive a cab with the dream of going back to their country and tell their

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[40]A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization,* University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 329-331 (the whole set of definitions belongs to this part)

fascinating stories? It is clear to foresee that, proceeding on this tread, we will experience the unattainability of the Portelli's analysis, namely the impossibility of designing the exhaustive subjective portrait of the individual by appealing to major definitions, likewise ideas, images or finances.

Whereas Appadurai's analysis opened a broad and necessary horizon where to deconstruct the traditional idea of community, it also deconstructed its own deconstruction: such an idea of community turns out to be unavailable because it considers the singularity of the individual within an idea of community where he rests indissolubly alone. We can conclude that while the application of any *-scapes* is incredibly useful to approach globality from a narrative perspective, it also precludes the possibility to *escape* this scheme: a new Grand Narrative, a narrative of disjunction and dispersion, of loneliness and singularity, of impossibility for definition waits at the gates of this theory. Nevertheless, how can we elaborate further the assumption of a community of individuals, or even an *individuals' community*? What is the power of this approach?

III.2 Future Community

In order to better qualify the dimension of Appadurai's paradox, it would be relevant to step back to a more general definition of community, one that might give us a positive explanation of what a community is meant to be. Traditionally identified as the milestone of any reflection upon 'community' in sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* proposed the first practical distinction between community and civil society. Indeed, community was already a interesting term within German philosophy: not by chance, Hegel used this term in several circumstances, often with ambiguous meanings, which unequivocally influenced Tönnies necessity for a

definitive distinction. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* community is often referred to as 'Gemeinwesen', which indicate that

> In an *ethical* community, it is easy to say what man must do, what are the duties he has to fulfil in order to be virtuous; he has simply to follow the well-known and explicit rules of his own situation[41]

In other passages, community is otherwise related to *der Staat* (the state), recalling indeed the specific figure which follows the creation of *Zivilgesellschaft*, namely the 'civil society' born from the apparent opposition of subjectivity and pursuit of the good resolved into the sphere of ethics. Therefore, ethic does not work properly to posit 'community' on the side of State rather than on that of civil society. Nevertheless, this lack of position into Hegel's philosophy might turn out to be eloquent if we consider how the German philosopher stressed the fundamental organicity (or totality) of both *Staat* and *Zivilgesellschaft*, namely their adequacy to be defined as *unici*, objects intelligible and distinguishable among all the others. We can argue that the notion of community unavoidably escapes the property of 'unicity', as Appadurai seems to suggest with his disjunctive theory.

Nevertheless, the classical interpretation proposed by Tönnies attempts to separate *Gemeinschaft* (community) from *Gesellschaft* (civil society) according to the principle of nature. In that sense

> Gemeinschaft is based on the idea that in the original or natural state there is a complete unity of human wills. This sense of unity is maintained even when people become separated. It takes various forms, depending on how far the relationship between differently situated individuals is predetermined and 'given'. The common root of these relationships is the all-embracing character of the sub-conscious, 'vegetative' life that stems from birth: human wills, each one housed in a physical body, are related to one another by descent and kinship; they remain united, or become so out of necessity[42]

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[41] F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, First Published by G. Bell, London, 1896. Translated: by S W Dyde, 1896, paragraph 150

[42] F. Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, edited by Jose Harris, University of Oxford, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 22

Whereas

> The theory of Gesellschaft takes as its starting point a group of people who, as in Gemeinschaft, live peacefully alongside one another, but in this case without being essentially united − indeed, on the contrary, they are here essentially detached. In Gemeinschaft they stay together in spite of everything that separates them; in Gesellschaft they remain separate in spite of everything that unites them. As a result, there are no activities taking place which are derived from an a priori and pre-determined unity and which therefore express the will and spirit of this unity through any individual who performs them. Nothing happens in Gesellschaft that is more important for the individual's wider group than it is for himself[43].

We should precise that the natural condition quoted in the first paragraph is not strongly stated as a reflection on the 'state of nature': rather, it attempts to delimit those groups which are not completely formalized within a system of rules, namely a group whose structure precedes, or exceeds, any political frame. Therefore, whereas community is naturally enacted by culture, civil society is rather enforced by superior power. According to Tönnies, any group can be one and the other simultaneously, that means, in any defined group could be pointed what belongs to the community and what belongs to the civil society. Hence, if the state represents the apex of enforcement of a 'non-natural power', and the community is supposed to be the original and spontaneous ground of interaction between 'natural' subjects, it follows that civil society is meant to be that level of interaction in which the individuals play specific 'institutionalized' roles. Indeed, this set of theory turns out to be pretty naive to what it concerns the power's dynamics which pervades societies at any level and plateau.

Altough a post-modern critique would perfectly fit with the dimension of this problem, it's in a precedent thinker that we can already find an exhaustive depiction of the problem of community: Alexis de Tocqueville, with his unlimited curiosity towards the newborn system of democracy, was way more lucid and

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[43] F. Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, p. 52

somehow prophetic about this theme.In *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville writes the following about soft despotism:

> Thus, After having thus successively taken each member of the community in its powerful grasp and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd[44].

In this passage, Tocqueville is referring to a particular concept developed by himself, namely the concept of "soft despotism", the form that the relations community-state assumes when the first opposes the second by constituting a strong, self-conscious and contrastive auto-identity. Anticipating many future critical positions, as those elaborated by the Frankfurt School, Tocqueville argued how the power machine embodied by democracy is able to reduce under its net the contrasting authority of community through acts of legitimization, control, and identification. It follows that, hypothetically, communities exist only outside the borders of state/civil society, *hence* they exist exactly in their absence, in their weakness, in their impossibility to distinguish themselves from any authoritarian frame. From Tönnies' analysis, what resisted the trial of time is precisely its paradox: the impossibility to distinguish community from the state. Our task assumes at this point an alchemic feature: looking for something where it doesn't exist, in the pursuit of media and narratives which are not here yet.

On second thought, the idea of community as something non-existent is a rhetoric already integrated into the contemporary discussion: the same Appadurai's scheme gave us a dimension of the non-definability of community within the global disjunctive reality.

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[44] A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* Volume II, Book 4, Chapter 6

Zygmunt Bauman has immensely contributed to the discussion we have just outlined. In his book entitled *Community, Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, the Polish philosopher introduced the discussion about community starting from an elaboration of 'common sense', that is by expressing the usual feeling that accompanies the mere world 'community' within daily speeches. According to Bauman, the common reaction to the word 'community' is 'warm':

> If someone wandered off the right track, we would often explain his unwholesome conduct by saying that 'he has fallen into bad *company*'. If someone is miserable, suffers a lot and is consistently denied a dignified life, we promptly accuse *society* - the way it is organized, the way it works. Company or society can be bad; but not the *community*. Community, we feel, is always a good thing[45].

The 'good thing' that the individual recognizes, or rather guesses, depends on several sets of *imaged* meanings. Firstly, Bauman explains, it comes from a social desire to not be abandoned ("We won't let you down", as a recent President proclaims) to always find a help where needed. Consequently, it depends on the desire of founding a proper identity, identity intended as a hidden place where to practice trust and loyalty between each other. Finally, being this identity a place, it is supposed to be a *safe* place, a refuge delimited by explicit boundaries, protected from the fearful dangers of the outside. It is exactly this third point which constitutes the original problematic within the community: into this field, the individual is simultaneously appealed by the desire for security and the appetite freedom. Therefore, the pursuit of community can achieve the necessary demand of security only by renouncing the natural exigence of freedom:

> The price is paid in the currency of freedom, variously called 'autonomy', 'right to self-assertion', 'right to be yourself'. Whatever you choose, you gain

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[45] Z. Bauman, *Community : Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd , Cambridge, 2001, p. 1

some and lose some. Missing community means missing security; gaining community, if it happens, would soon mean missing freedom[46].

It follows that the imagined community we described first unavoidably collides with the contingent reality of community, namely its impossibility to completely fulfill the desires of the individuals. Hence, what is the role played not by the actual, but rather by the 'ideal', 'imaginative' community? In Bauman's brilliant analysis:

> In short, Community' stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us - but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess. Raymond Williams, the thoughtful analyst of our shared condition, observed caustically that the remarkable thing about community is that 'it always has been'. We may add: or that it is always in the future[47].

In its being fragmented between the mythical past and the futuristic future, community confirms its incontestable presence within the sphere of imaginary. As far as the past its concerned, the community which 'always has been", it is quite easy to recognize the undermining power of the kind of rhetoric centered on the production of a social nostalgia, as Appadurai has stated, often with the precise interest of stimulating national or sub-national claims for auto-identity and independence. At the same time, while that kind of rhetorics addressee the past as the mythical place in which the community was founded and lived before getting lost, they also proclaim a mission toward the future, toward the realization, the complete fulfillment of an imminent common project.

If we relate the imaginative status of community to the possibility of enhancing a new-oral-historiography, as the one generally described in Chapter II, the outcome turns out to be quite controversial. When we claimed the necessity to elevate the individual presence into the plateau of historical narrative, we have proposed *secondary orality* as a practical bridge toward the emancipation from Grand

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[46] *Ibidem*, p. 6

[47]Z. Bauman, *Community : Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, p. 10

Narratives and, at the same time, we accepted, as Bounegru argued, the possibility for a re-tribalization of the users. Once admitted that the users are really re-tribalizing their own interactions, what is meant to be the product of this modern tribalization? Furthermore, it seems that the claimed presence of the individual collides with the inherent non-presence of the community: can we accept the imaginary as the only convergent point, or should we see the imaginary itself as the limit which divides the man from his dream of community? This theoretical knot represents the deep core of this research: our guess is that within the concept of community we are gambling with the very possibility to unify the two polar narratives or, on the other hand, to demonstrate a problematic horizon in which new theories will spread.

III.3 Whatever Community

The case of Luciano Cretarola is intrinsically emblematic for the role played by the imaginary within the contingent state of affairs embodied in history. As many historical facts are, the event of the Abruzzo's earthquake represent an episode of violence. But, we should ask, what kind of violence is that? Non-symbolic violence, non-judicable violence, violence without an executor, without power, violence outside the boundaries of violence. In his well-know essay titled *Force of Law: the Mystical Foundation of Authority* [48], Jacques Derrida traced a precise limit to the concept of violence: as in Wittgenstein's logic, violence is that action which allows binary statements which would respond to the categories of truth and justice.

Being natural violence, or action without subject, it turns out to be excluded from any possible criterion of judgement: Abruzzo's earthquake, together with all the other natural catastrophes, sits somehow outside the kingdom of language.

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[48] J. Derrida, Force of Law, The "Mystical Foundation of Authority", appeared in Probing the Limits of Representation : Nazism and the "Final Solution", ed. Saul Friedlander, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992

This consideration leads us to two different thoughts. Firstly, being a form of violence without an executioner, natural violence necessarily lacks victims. Indeed, that does not means that an earthquake cannot effectively hurt anyone; it means that it cannot judge, select, choose the identity of its victims. The mere criterion of geographical membership (namely, the fact the earthquake *happened* in Abruzzo) is insufficient to make the Abruzzo's citizens the designated victims of this violence. In that sense, an inquiry on the Abruzzo's disaster attempted with the Portelli's model would not accomplish the goal of representing the thoughts of a community, because a community does not subsist: among the victims there were all kind of ages, classes, political supporters, workers. More than any other event, the natural disaster stresses the fundamental *individualism* of community. Secondly, the sentence according to which " natural violence does not satisfy any criteria of judgement" turns out to be incomplete. In fact, the fact that the cataclysm itself does not let space to any judgment, the symbolic order in which the cataclysm burst into gets completely revolved, giving space to an infinite process of judgments and representations. Hence, under the devastating light of cataclysm, all the surrounding elements enter the same symbolic order: security, mutual help, media communication and the government are all put at stake and declined as the true meaning of the tragedy.

As we can easily understand, the geographical limit of the catastrophe quickly exceeds the limit of the territory, invading the imaginary of the people that did not directly experience the tragedy.

The idea of community which comes out of this analysis is not only disjunctive à la Appadurai, it is also pervasive, for its capacity to invest the totality of the imaginary of the users. The community intended this way is the specular image of the cataclysm: something that does not create a symbolic order of judgment because it cannot designate its own subjects; something that cannot constitute an order precisely because nothing subsists outside its boundaries.

Globality is the cataclysm we experience everyday through imaginary. No one is responsible for it: its victims cannot be identified as such because they are everywhere. Its presence displaces the real community and simultaneously it makes

it thinkable. Still, the simple act of imagining cannot aspire to the general canon to define the new coming community: it can only work to show the disjunctive and pervasive individualism which poses the major limit to the problem. If such a community exists, or rather a process toward the formation of a community, what is the experience that constitutes the catastrophe of globality?

In a famous short essay entitled *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben has addressed this problem of definition we are trying to outline. Indeed, in his reflection the idea of annihilation of the traditional boundaries of community constitutes the starting point for a pursuit of a new element of identification. Particularly interesting is the departure from the structure specifically visual promoted by Debord (and indeed by Appadurai):

> The spectacle does not simply coincide, however, with the sphere of images or with what we call today the *media*: It is "a social relation among people, mediated by images," the expropriation and the alienation of human sociality itself. Or rather, using a lapidary formula, "the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image." But for that very reason, the spectacle is nothing but the pure form of separation: When "the real world is transformed into an image and images become real, the practical power of humans is separated from itself and presented as a world unto itself[49].

Images provide a separation between the living experience and the act of imagination, furthermore they subvert the very relation within this binomial: the experience degrades to the insignificant (meaningless) status of image-portrait, and the imaginary becomes a "world unto itself", the only capable of reading and interpreting this kind of experience. Agamben's fundamental revelation is based on the fact that those images, totally undifferentiated within this sort of capitalism of imagination, can lead toward a deeper experience which transcends the original visual structure:

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[49] G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *Volume 1 of Theory out of bounds*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p.

Whereas under the old regime the estrangement of the communicative essence of humans took the form of a presupposition that served as a common foundation, in the society of spectacle it is this very communicativity, this generic essence itself (i.e., language), that is separated in an autonomous sphere. What hampers communication is communicability itself; humans are separated by what unites them[50].

In this sense, communicability resists communication the same way the imagined community prevents the actualization of real community. If we keep on following Agamben, we would discover that the experience of this gap constitutes itself a revealing moment for what it concerns the status of communication/community. In his pursuit for an element that would furnish the reader's key of the society of spectacle, Agamben isolates the *experimentum linguae*, namely the absolutely original experience of language itself: not this or that proposition, not any specific statement, but the very 'objectuality' of language. In Agamben's words, this act of acknowledgment represents a pragmatic turn thanks to which men are allowed to access the dimension of the new, coming community:

Contemporary politics is this devastating *experimentum linguae* that all over the planet unhinges and empties traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities.

Only those who succeed in carrying it to completion–without allowing what reveals to remain veiled in the nothingness that reveals, but bringing language itself to language–will be the first citizens of a community with neither presuppositions nor a State, where the nullifying and determining power of what is common will be pacied and where the Shekinah will have stopped sucking the evil milk of its own separation[51].

It would not be naive to discern in this sentence a kind of thought that would contrast the heading movement of the above mentioned Grand Narratives. In this case, it is the language proper of nationalistic, cultural and identity centered discourses that is put at stake against a more essential, and yet not determinable, practice of language. At a first glance, we could be tempted to immediately relate this whatever-language with the aim pursued by Tellhistory: namely, a meta-

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[50] Ibidem, p.

[51] G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p.

narrative which, freed by its structural limits, would reflect upon itself, opening up the possibility for the possibility of a "global" community. Indeed, this undeterminability of language is the feature which triggers the movement from a nation-state identity toward a non-identity community founded on the unique possibility of *belonging*. Although this perspective might sound extremely fashionable for our purpose, we must at least indicate two problematic knots within this set of theories.

Firstly, Agamben's prophecy can barely be indicated as a 'community'. By saying this, we do not mean that the common feature of belonging-to-something does not satisfy the necessary requirements for designing a community; we mean that a community can subsist only in relation with an outside, namely with other kinds of real or imaginary communities. Therefore, a community without an outside cannot even be thought, it cannot become the symbolic order which would describe the nature of the individuals involved in it. The only breach that would eventually open up a space for this community stands between the effective domain of State-nation communities and the projective appaerence of the coming community in the individuals imaginary:

> Whatever singularities cannot form a *societas* because they do not possess any identity to vindicate nor any bond of belonging for which to seek recognition. In the final instance the State can recognize any claim for identity–even that of a State identity within the State (the recent history of relations between the State and terrorism is an eloquent conformation of this fact). What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging[52].

Thus, if representability does not work for Agamben's claim, we are led to think that only another category of language might enhance the advent of the global community: that is the category of performativity. The reasons why we might consider performativity as the peculiarity of this whatever language are essentially two: as we just observed, representation and signification belong to the the

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[52] G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p.

grammata of specific languages, thus they depend on specific visions structured within *la langue;* on the other hand, performativity allows us to consider this whatever language as the space of action which transcend the impositions of communicativity we already encountered. Therefore, the free play of language can only rely on the side of *la parole.*

This consideration introduces the second problem, namely the apparent mutism which marks Agamben's reflection about the difference between spoken and written language. Indeed this topic remains obscure in the essay *The Coming Community* : the philosophy of whatever might erroneously push to consider that this essential difference is, for Agamben, absolutely pointless. Nevertheless, in *Infancy and History,* the Italian philosopher payed a different attention to the role played by the spoken word into the constitution of a global community's ethic. Following the same discourse which marked the metaphysical experience of language itself, he shaped the analysis by focusing on a different frame: in this case, what really defines the awareness concerning the *experimentum linguae* is the experience of a linguistic lack. Quoting the heideggerian idea of a linguistic process which constantly experiences the impossibility to pronounce, or rather to find names in particular circumstances, Agamben immediately relates this perception of something-missing to the importance of ethic: according to him, ethic and language both subsist in the dark land of the unknown, for they can only constitute themselves whereas rules, notions, paradigms do not already exist. For what precisely concerns the emptiness of language, Agamben stresses the presence of a "void space" between *phonè* and *grammata*: the same fact that the one can be translated into the other marks the the absolute irreducibility of spoken word to the written word and viceversa. Once given the dimension of this emptiness, it is possible to think that

> Only because man finds himself cast into language without the vehicle of a voice, and only because the *experimentum linguae* lures him, grammarless, into that void and that *aphonia,* do an *ethos* and a community of any kind become possible.
> So the community that is born of the *experimentum linguae* cannot take the form of a presupposition, not even in the purely 'grammatical' form of a self-

presupposition. The speaking and the spoken with which we measure ourselves in the *experi- mentum* are neither a voice nor a *gramma;* as arch-trans-cendentals, they are not even thinkable as a quiddity, a *quid* of which we could ever, in Plotinus' fine image, take *moirai,* any share. The first outcome of the *experimentum linguae,* therefore, is a radical revision of the very idea of Community. The only content of the *experimentum* is that *there is language; we* cannot represent this, by the dominant model in our culture, as *a* language, as a state or a patrimony of names and rules which each people transmit from generation to generation[53].

For various reasons, the theoretical establishment of a void space seems particularly efficient for our purpose of describing the intellectual place occupied by Tellhistory. Somehow, the empty space of the *experimentum* calls for an action of definition which we have outlined all over this thesis: a definition concerning the emptiness about the narrative which sustains the history of the present, a definition of the status of the unheard voice of the individual and the unaccepted text of the power, and finally, a definition of the community we are experiencing nowhere. In this sense, the opera of Tellhistory is not meant to occupy any intellectual place: conversely, it resides into the practical sphere of action, a sort of action which is inherently related with the process of translation. It also seems that this claim for a definition cannot go trough an act of signification: for language is experienced in itself, also the community and the respective narrative must follow the same tread, and thus they cannot become interpretative tools of themselves. To transcend this paradox we must operate toward another paradox: the only way to outline those problems is about the very act of outlining: the problem can only be performed.

III.4 Poietical Community

This last paragraph attempts to furnish an extreme thought to the constant opening discourse we have faced all over this thesis. Indeed, it cannot be final and

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[53] G. Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience,* Translated by Liz Heron, Verso Edition, New York, 1996, p. 9

exhausting : it can only try to resume, by naming the problem, what the problem essentially is. Naming, and not defining: as Judith Butler reminds us, the doctor who exclaims "he's a boy!" is not only describing a biological fact: he's producing an object. To find a name, as we have seen with Agamben, follows the moment of lack that the whatever-individual is supposed to experiment within the 'global community'. Yet, the name we will seek cannot be connotative, for it attempts to let the problem of definition to the user, namely to let a space of exchange between the Grand Narratives of historiography and the singular narratives of individuals. Furthermore, we find ourselves in the need for surpassing Agamben's position: if the individual is asked to *perform* new forms of ethic, he is also asked to fulfill all the other lacks: hence, to perform new narratives, to create new media, and so on. From now on, once understood the extent to which Tellhistory itself performs an *experimentum linguae* (and so an *experimentum civitas*), we will try to give a name to the two major problems we have discussed: hence, we will talk of *poietical history* and *poietical community.*

One of the most interesting Tellhistory's topic concerned the individual inquiry on September 11th, developed during the summer 2016 for the 15th year anniversary of the tragedy which inaugurated, once for all, our entrance into the global world. Among those who accepted to release their personal memories, I found particularly intriguing the testimony of a young Italian girl named Sabina Chionzi, whom I personally interviewed at the Schipol Airport on September 9th 2016[54]. When I initially approached with the simple question "do you remember what were you doing on September 11th 2001?" she smiled with a surprised expression. According to her memory, she was playing with his older brother: they were building towers with lego blocks and, once concluded the construction, they were about to destroy them by simulating a catastrophe. Suddenly, their mother crashed into the room, switched on the TV and assisted, with her kids, to the tragedy live-broadcasted through the televisions all over the globe.

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[54] See "A strange coincidence on 9/11" from the Tellhistory Youtube's channel, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzRwtWN-ME8

Indeed we should agree with Portelli by saying that this memory does not constitute a fact: rather, it gives the dimension of an interpretation: it shows a singular symbolic order in which the fact assumes a sense. Furthermore, the disaster of 9/11 can barely be considered a fact, in the strict sense of something directly experienced by the individual: it is rather the experience of an experience, spread by the media, but nonetheless lived within the daily life sphere.

Obviously, Sabina's story might be read in several ways : nevertheless, it requires to be listened and watched before anything else. The initial smile recalls an interior surprise, similar to that amusement we feel when we discover something new: the memory constitutes that bridge which linked the naivety of the game to the unavoidably reality of the tragedy. Strangely enough, is not the terroristic attack that signifies the game: its rather the micro-experience of playing with toy-towers that becomes the parameter for judging the real world, namely to experience the dramatic distance (or proximity) that divides the *personal* from the *global* experience.

This distance/proximity marks the empty space (described by Agamben) which induces the individual to fulfill it with a personal action of interpretation. The mentioned act of interpretation assumes the features of a poetical creation: then, the towers' game becomes suddenly a *metonymy* for the contingency of 9-11.

Among the 531 video-interviews gathered up by Tellhistory's staff in the last year, many other cases might be quoted to illustrate the fundamentally poetical action which sustain this kind of narrative and community. For example, a Pakistani girl named Scheherezade Rahim told her memory of Benazir Bhutto's assassination (the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan's history) by recalling the story of her sister's marriage[55]. Her big sister, tells Scheherezade, planned to to marry her lover the day after Bhutto got killed. Indeed, the notice of the assassination caught everyone unprepared, also because, as Scheherezade said, the Pakistani media were not well-developed in 2007: every journal spread different, and often controversial, versions of the event. Therefore, the couple was forced to postpone the marriage, and the cheerful atmosphere which marked the previous

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[55] See " Assassination of Benazir Bhutto" from the Tellhistory Youtube's channel, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZpCz12gxk0

days was definitely destroyed: not only the marriage was celebrated in quasi complete secrecy, but the whole city of Karachi was completely empty. "If you could imagine a completely empty racetrack, it's what it looked like", so Scheherezade described the nuptial march of her sister. Now we should ask, what is the core center of this tale? The marriage or the assassination? The one and the other, as they both behave as a metonymy for each other: the failure of the celebration stands for the astonishment of a whole country and vice-versa. The center is here the very production of sense that subsist upon both the elements: it is credible that for Scheherezade the marriage cannot be told without the political murder, and the assassination would not had any meaning without the disaster of the celebration.

It must be clear now why we are pushed to consider Tellhistory's historiography as *poieitcal*. The term we are using recalls theories that date back to Aristotle, hence theories that need to be contextualized again to become functional. Hence *poiein* (to make) represents in a sense the original Aristotelian root projected toward Agamben's theory of a whatever-community: if ethics begins where all the other linguistic capacities lack, then all the other discipline which depend on language must be reinvented. Historiography as well, this historiography we are trying to push into the magmatic present, cannot concern the given state of affairs that characterized traditional historiography: it must be a process *in fieri*, a form of projectuality that works in the present of personal interpretation. Hence, by describing this form of historiography as poietical, we are just adding a microscopical feature to Portelli's model: for language, rhythm and melody are already components both of the Italian historian's and the Greek philosopher's theories. The same goes for Agamben's theory of a necessity for ethics: as we know from Aristotle's *Poetics* (and we already discussed the importance of *mimesis* under the light of Ricoeur's thought), *ethos* begins as the 'science of characters'; in this sense, as Sabina and Scheherezade stories demonstrate, two kinds of characters are always involved in this production: those described within the stories (for example Benazir Bhutto, the firemen etc.) and those who tell the story, namely

the improper authors of their experiences like Sabina, Luciano, Scheherezade and many others, who are turned into the material of the narration in the very moment they begin to tell. For this kind of *poiesis* does not involve, in our case, an explicit creation of an artwork, as Aristotle understands it, but a more essential production of model of being, namely an identity, our idea of poiesis must necessarily refer to Heidegger's analysis. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger has elaborated a model of poiesis which literally contrasts the aristotelian vision which limits the 'making' to the possibility of 'imitating' defined by the concept of mimesis. Hence, in the *Introduction*, the new model of poiesis works to rehabilitate a pre-Socratic notion of productivity which was supposed to be strictly related with inherent productivity of Being (in its material presence, *phusis*) and thus opposed to the Platonic/ Aristotelian idealism which relegated Nature into the static field of ideas rather than into the chaotic flux of becoming. Therefore Heidegger's notion of poiesis precedes the construction of any idea concerning the sphere of Being by showing itself a possibility for the disclosure of Da-sein :

> Knowledge is the ability to put into work the being of any particular [being]. The Greeks called art in the true sense and the work of art *techne*, because art is what most immediately brings Being (i.e. the appearing that stands there in itself) to stand, stabilizes it in something present (the work). The work of art is a work not primarily because it is wrought, made, but because it brings about Being in a being; it brings about the phenomenon in which the emerging power, *phusis*, comes to shine[56].

Accordingly, the original contact with *phusis* cannot be solved for Heidegger by a synthetic resolution as suggested by Hegelian dialectic : it is precisely this being-in, so this being-separated-by that marks the necessity for an action of production which let emerge the sense of Da-sein from the undefinable ground of Being. In Alexander Ferrari di Pippo's words:

> Thought in a more original sense, *poiesis* does not, then, consist in an imitation of a projected model of stable presence. Rather, *poiesis* is a response to an overpowering experience of absence and instability, i.e. the concealing disclosure of *phusis*, which it attempts to overcome by setting Being into work.

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[56] M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics,* Nota Bene Series, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 159

In so doing, the artwork first opens up a world of stable intelligibility and so orients Da-sein[57].

Nevertheless, despite this argumentation sounds quite convincing for the development of our discourse, we should point out again where this experience of estrangement is embodied by in the poietical community. Being the singular experience at stake, as Benjamin reminds us, and being the sciences in a difficult relationship of truth with the real world, the primal estrangement is that showed out by Agamben: the one with (or against) language. Therefore, only if we consider the tangibleness of language as the camp of operability, and we are pretty convinced that the depiction of *secondary orality* marked by the raising up of social media can definitely demonstrate it, we can indicate a possibility for narrative-community production as *poietical.*

It seems that a further proof can be find the famous essay entitled *What is Literature?,* where Jean Paul Sartre has distinguished the prose from the poetical production by appealing to a principle that totally recalls the pure experience of language depicted by Agamben:

> For the poet, language is a structure of the external world. The speaker is in a situation in language; he is invested with words. They are prolongations of his meanings, his pincers, his antennae, his eyeglasses. He maneuvers them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world. The poet is outside of language[58].

It is only by being outside of language that the 'global' or 'coming' individual can experience language itself: not 'this or that sentence' but the universal contingence of any possible language. Therefore, following the idea of an 'objectual language', we are again pushed to extrapolate a fundamental consideration. When language becomes an object, it also becomes universal. The

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[57] A. Ferrari di Pippo, The Concept of Poiesis in Heidegger's An Introduction to Metaphysics. In: Thinking Fundamentals, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 9: Vienna 2000, p. 29

[58] J.P. Sartre, *What is Literature?* Translated from the French by Bernard Frechtman, Philosophical Library New York, p. 13

word *pen* is *penna* in Italian and *piòro* in Polish(it variates in signify something), but the object 'pen', its general idea (its universal) remains the same all over the world (it cannot signify anything). It is clear the we are somehow perpetuating an achievement of Kantian philosophy which catches in the aesthetic judgment a form of hybridity between the sentences concerning mere perceptions and the higher sentences based upon intellective reflections. In fact, in the problematic oeuvre *Critique of Judgment*, Kant names for the first time the original instance of 'singular universal' :

> In all judgements by which we describe anything as beautiful, we tolerate no one else being of a different opinion, and in taking up this position we do not rest our judgement upon concepts, but only on our feeling. Accordingly we introduce this fundamental feeling not as a private feeling, but as a public sense. Now, for this purpose, experience cannot be made the ground of this common sense, for the latter is invoked to justify judgements containing an "ought." The assertion is not that every one will fall in with our judgement, but rather that every one ought to agree with it. Here I put forward my judgement of taste as an example of the judgement of common sense, and attribute to it on that account exemplary validity. Hence common sense is a mere ideal norm. With this as presupposition, a judgement that accords with it, as well as the delight in an object expressed in that judgement, is rightly converted into a rule for everyone. For the principle, while it is only subjective, being yet assumed as subjectively universal (a necessary idea for everyone), could, in what concerns the consensus of different judging subjects, demand universal assent like an objective principle, provided we were assured of our subsumption under it being correct[59].

Accordingly, we can design a triple identity: the aesthetic judgment si a product as long as the product (the product of language) is necessarily in a mediate position between the singularity of the experience and the universality of language. This instance of poietical narrative we are attempting to show can only subsist on this: the universal crash of the individual into the universality of language. With an incredible turn, we translated the word into a thing, and we can progressively understand how fast we are moving trough an horizon in which the boundary between discourse and action turns out to be extremely thin.

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[59] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1790) Retrieved from http://bradleymurray.ca, p. 239

As the singular experiencer of this quiddity of language, the language user is unavoidably a poet. This incredible turn that makes every speaker, from the acculturated Harvard student to the illiterate Kurdish shepherd, a poet, can make us catch a glimpse of solution to the problem of narratives. The popular formula of 'singular universal', dear to the late existentialist movement, is able to posit the 'coming individual' beyond the limits of the mere autobiographic narration, by allowing him to reach the universal, omnicomprehensive metaphorical level of communication: yet, a communication which transcends signification by being absolutely interchangeable in its structural elements (the stories, the memories). Thus, this solution can even surpass the Appadurai's model of imaginary: whereas the imaginary turns out to be a set of categories which overrules the free experience of the individual, the *poiesis* conversely stresses the singular capacity, absolutely accidental, to show the universal limits of language-object experience. Again, it is through this dexterity of language that the *poiesis* of self-production is simultaneously projected in the atomistic sphere of personal living and toward the general, formalized representation of history. It constitutes its 'void space' of incommunicability which triggers action (ethics) and invention (narration): this is what we call *poietical history*.

Finally, there is a last formal reason thanks to which the *poietical community* is paradigmatically captured by Tellhistory. When we encountered the model of 'secondary orality' developed by Liliana Bounegru, we blindly accepted all the characteristics which define it: to resume it briefly, it describes that plateau in which the written language is based upon a spoken, dialogical ground which makes it interactive, tribal, and intersubjective. Furthermore, this kind of textual orality, according to Bounegru, emerged from the last social media revolution marked by the birth of platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Indeed, this ultimate advent made us aware of the imminent (we should say 'messianic', for never being completely realized) re-tribalization constituted by the pure experience of language coming along with a technologic innovation.

Nevertheless, we should argue that secondary orality existed many centuries before the invention of contemporary social media, despite being created after a particular (the most incredible)   human invention. This invention which first carried out secondary orality was indeed writing, and its specific form was the poem. Since the homeric literature, poetry has almost ever acted as the sign for the voice, as the presence for the absence of the human. But, if for Homeric production seems licit to adopt the limit of orality to the argument of *formula,* as Milman Parry argued[60], for contemporary poetry and narration (in which, of course, we include all the forms of *poietical* narratives) the mere formula is abandoned for a more free form of expression which always involves both the singular point of view oriented toward a universal field of possibility.

> Cuando en días venideros, libre el hombre
> Del mundo primitivo a que hemos vuelto
> De tiniebla y de horror, lleve el destino
> Tu mano hacia el volumen donde yazcan
> Olvidados mis versos, y lo abras,
> Yo sé que sentirás mi voz llegarte,
> No de la letra vieja, mas del fondo
> Vivo en tu entraña, con un afán sin nombre
> Que tú dominarás. Escúchame y comprende.
> En sus limbos mi alma quizá recuerde algo,
> Y entonces en ti mismo mis sueños y deseos
> Tendrán razón al fin, y habré vivido[61].

The examples that might be quoted to sustain this argument are almost infinite: it would be more difficult to demonstrate that the tangible, human voice tends to disappear from the poetical composition rather than to prove its contrary. That does not mean that the textual turns out to be absolutely irrelevant; on the contrary, the *written* constitutes that polarity, together with the spoken, in between

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[60] A. Parry, *The Making of the Homeric Verse. The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971

[61] L. Cernuda, *"A un Poeta Futuro", in Como quien espera el alba, 1941-1944: La realidad y el deseo VIII*, Losada, 1947

which the *poietical* performs its activity. Still, this new voice, which manifests itself through the textuality of social network, through recitative memories, through journal articles, through poetry, embodies the unique possible medium for the *poietical community* to realize its essence.

Thus, to conclude, we should resume the main point according to which we ended by indicating our specific theory, hoping that someone will soon finds up its limits in order to develop new approaches:

1) With *poietical community* we indicate the field of possibility in which all the singular identifying communities are annihilated by the universal experience of language. By not being a peculiar symbolic order, it unavoidably transcends the traditional signification which belongs to *any* community: thus, it can only be performed and not meant, produced and not used, lived and not understood.

2) With *poietical narrative* we point to the void space which problematically separated the dominant narratives, embodied by the supremacy of written texts (which can be declined as western, colonial, intellectual, political, authoritative) from the non-intelligible sphere of individual narratives. The *poietical* indicates that intrinsic possibility to produce discourses which depart from the individual experience to reach, trough the amplification of voice, the universality constituted by the global experience of language. What is produced by this narrative is not directly a discourse, but the the possibility of all the other discourses: in this sense, it creates the laboratory in which new ethics and narrations are about to be forged.

3) With *poietical history* we show the necessity to develop a kind of historiography which would account the emergent presence of poietical narratives all over the world. Indeed, it must aspire to delimit an history of the present which cannot avoid the claim of individual to produce their own historiography. Consequently, this historiography cannot be delimited by the narratives of states, nations or ethnical groups: it must adapt itself to the impossibility to

relegate history in a specific order, but enlarge it to the lack of symbolic order embodied within the poietical community and marked by the emergent poietical narratives.

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