



Other voices, other archives. The written memory of the subaltern classes¹

Outras vozes, outros arquivos. A memória escrita das classes subalternas

Otras voces, otros archivos. La memoria escrita de las clases subalternas

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Abstract

This article reflects on the capacity to produce testimonies written by the subaltern classes. From a diachronic approach, it investigates the particularities of such memory over time. It is distinguished between the indirect and fragmentary conservation typical of the pre-nineteenth centuries, usually deposited in isolated remains, and another of a denser and articulated type developed in the contemporary era, especially in the twentieth century. It analyzes so-called "Archives from the Margin" and, in particular, what "popular writing archives" mean in the field of personal archives or auto-archives. Finally, the very concept of "archives" is problematized.

Keywords: Written memory. Subaltern classes. Archives from the Margin. Personal archives. Popular writing archives.

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Resumo

Este artigo reflete sobre a capacidade de produzir testemunhos escritos pelas classes subalternas. A partir de uma abordagem diacrônica, ele investiga as particularidades de tal memória ao longo do tempo. Distingue-se entre a conservação indireta e fragmentária típica dos séculos pré-XIX, geralmente depositada em vestígios isolados, e outra de um tipo mais denso e articulado desenvolvido na era contemporânea, especialmente no século XX. Nesse sentido, parte do artigo trata de iniciativas recentes para salvaguardar a memória escrita das classes subalternas. Ele analisa os chamados "arquivos à margem" e, em particular, o que "arquivos de escrita populares" significam no campo dos arquivos pessoais ou auto-arquivos. Finalmente, o próprio conceito de "arquivo" é problematizado.

Palavras-chave: Memória escrita. Classes subalternas. Arquivos à margem. Arquivos pessoais. Arquivos de escrita populares.

Resumen

El presente artículo reflexiona sobre la capacidad de producir testimonio escrito por parte de las clases subalternas. Desde un acercamiento diacrónico indaga en las particularidades de dicha memoria a lo largo del tiempo. Se distingue entre la conservación indirecta y fragmentaria propia de los siglos anteriores al XIX, depositada por lo común en vestigios aislados, y otra de tipo más denso y articulado desarrollada en la época contemporánea, especialmente en el siglo XX. En relación con esto una parte del artículo se ocupa de las recientes iniciativas de salvaguarda de la memoria escrita de las clases subalternas. Analiza los denominados "archivos del margen" y, en particular, lo que suponen los "archivos de la escritura popular" en el campo de los archivos personales o del yo. Por último, se problematiza el concepto mismo de "archivo".

Palabras clave: Memoria escrita. Clases subalternas. Archivos del margen. Archivos personales. Archivos de la escritura popular.

*What happens is that the past is always a habitation
but there's no oblivion capable of demolishing it².*

1. The rescue of the subalterns

In a poem as unforgettable as it is cited, written in the long-lasting exile through which Bertold Brecht had been after Adolf Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, the German poet and dramatist introduces us to the thinking of a worker who watches astonished at the few mentions that his equals enunciate when narrating the origins of past times. Whether the workers that constructed some monument – the Egyptian pyramids, the Inca temples or China's Great Wall –, or the soldiers that fought and gave their lives in a thousand battles – from India's conquest, by Alexander the Great, to Federico II's victory in the Seven Years' War – it is not a coincidence that many of these people became outcast and forgotten in relation to the greater names – in their majority, men – that have hegemonized and sometimes still hegemonize the historic writing and the social memory.

If the poem I have just referred to – “Questions from a Worker who Reads” – was written by Brecht in 1934 for his *Kalendergeschichten*, five years later he wrote another one equally critic – “Literature will be Scrutinized” – in which he questioned that this subject had been focused on who “sat on golden chairs to write”. He proposed, as a counterpart, that “entire literatures, written in selected expressions”, were examined in order to “find hints of the fact that rebels also lived where there was oppression”, applauding, as a concluding remark, the gesture of those who “joined the ones from the bottom” and talked about their lives, “with art, in the noble language once reserved to the glorification of kings”³.

In these poems, Bertold Brecht mentions some of the contradictions in which we can socially and academically incur when, by means of either action or omission, we cooperate to eternize the silence from the ones at the bottom, to mask their prominence in the historical happening, to proscribe or dilute their history into dictated other ones, or even constructed in more proper terms for them, which is the error that reproduces all historic periodization based on nations and kingdoms.

In such a perspective, the discovery of the popular classes as subjects of History arises in the second half of the nineteenth century: on the one hand, Marx proposed that History extended itself as the History of society, including all the realms of human activity; on the other hand, a historian such as Jules Michelet situated ordinary people in the center of the revolutionary scenario, in a way that John Richard Green was the author of the history of the English people, but not of its kings and conquerors.

In those times, the conception of people was many times involved in an aura of romanticism, which was deprived from the political connotation that it had in the first decades of the 1900s, when Antonio Gramsci also reflected on the subaltern in his *Quaderni del Carcere*, written among 1929 and 1935, and in the letters he sent from prison. According to Guido Liguori, such a concept has three acceptations in the Italian thinker's work. Initially he uses it to define the subaltern officers in the army, followed – in *Quaderno 3* – by the reference of the subaltern classes as opposed to the dominant class and, at last, in a cultural dimension⁴. For Gramsci, the subaltern groups would be those who are always marginalized in relation to the political, economic, ideological, or cultural powers, cornered by those who exert the “hegemony”, that is, the dominant class, which, to the Italian intellectual, is always the same one, while the subaltern classes are more than one. In his own words, “la storia dei gruppi sociali subalterni è

² Benedetti, Mario. Olvidadores. In: Id. *El olvido está lleno de memoria*. Madrid: Visor, 1997 (1995, 1ª ed.), p.17.

³ Brecht, Bertolt. *Poemas y canciones* [1960-1965]. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998, pp. 91-92 and 127-129, as for both poems.

⁴ Liguori, Guido. Tre accezioni di subalterno in Gramsci. *Critica marxista*, 6, June 2011, pp. 33-41; and Id. "Classi subalterne" marginali e "classi subalterne" fondamentali in Gramsci. *Critica marxista*, 4 September 2015, pp. 41-48.

necessariamente disgregata ed episodica”; and, consequently, “le classi subalterne, per definizione, non sono unificate e non possono unificarsi finché non possono diventare ‘Stato’: la loro storia, pertanto, è intrecciata a quella della società civile, è una funzione ‘disgregata’ e discontinua della storia della società civile”⁵.

Based on the above, it would be suitable to ask, as Gayatri Spivak did some years ago, if the subaltern subjects can speak for themselves. The answer of the Indian thinker, expert on literary criticism and literature, is disappointing. Specialist on the post-colonial branch of studies, she argued about the difficulties in finding this own voice based on ethnocentrism, with which many extraneous cultures, alien to the illustrated canons in the west world, have been studied and interpreted⁶. Apart from pointing out that the subaltern individuals are not only in the decolonized countries, her theses, more than polemic, are openly debatable because they deny the subalterns the capacity of speaking and producing testimonials for themselves, considering that, once they do it, according to her, they lose such a condition.⁷

There is no doubt that there are many voices and mediated testimonials in which others speak on behalf of the subaltern classes, but, as well, throughout History, there can be found numerous occasions in which these classes have generated their own written testimonials. From a Marxist perspective, in the sixties and seventies, several British historians, exponents of the *history from below*⁸, included threatening letters from peasants and workers in some researches. Eric Hobsbawm and Georges Rudé used these letters in a particular way, signed by the mythological Captain Swing, as they were sent by the peasants to the land owners during the rural insurgence in the year of 1830, in England; that is so because Edward P. Thompson used similar testimonials more emphatically in his works about the peasant insurgences in the 18th century, and in the first third of the 19th century⁹. This is not a hindrance for the same Hobsbawm to allude, right after this period, the difficulty there was to know the thinking from the ones below based on their own testimonials and not on their actions, given that “for most part of the past, people were generally illiterate anyway”¹⁰.

It is clearly like this, as the paleographer Armando Petrucci had warned with authority when he pointed that, even in a society in which literacy is widely developed, as in the case of the industrial society of the contemporary world, the “uso globale e continuativo della cultura scritta, e cioè della capacità di scrivere (comporre in modo corretto una certa gamma di testi) e di leggere (comprendendo) una in genere anche più vasta gamma di testi, è limitato ad una élite assai ristretta della popolazione, appartenente alla borghesia medio-alta”¹¹. But, at the same time Petrucci observed such a reality, a by product of the unequal social ascension and written cultural practices throughout the centuries, he also pointed to the search and to the study of the written production of the subaltern classes, which were fragmented and disperse in the periods situated before the 19th century, and were more dense and continuous during the Contemporary Age, as

⁵ Gramsci, Antonio. *Quaderni del carcere*, 3, *Quaderni 12-29*. Gramsci Institute’s critic editio nunder Valentino Gerratana’s supervision. Torino: Einaudi, 1975, pp. 2283 (= Quaderno 25, § 2) and 2288 (= Quaderno 25, § 5).

⁶ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *¿Pueden hablar los subalternos?* [1999]. Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani, 2009, with a suitable preview study from the work’s translator Manuel Asensi Pérez, “La subalternidad borrosa. Un poco más de debate en torno a los subalternos”, pp. 9-39.

⁷ In this respect, it is very pertinent to mention the criticism proposed by Piedras Monroy, Pedro Andrés, “Sobre *Can the Subalterns’s Speak* de Gayatri Spivak”, which can be read at https://www.academia.edu/9687318/Sobre_Can_the_Subaltern_Speak_de_Gayatri_Spivak. Accessed on September 1st 2021.

⁸ Thompson, Edward P. *History from Below*. *The Times Literary Supplement*, April 7, 1966, pp. 279-280.

⁹ Hobsbawm, Eric J.; Rudé, Georges. *Captain Swing*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1968; Thompson, Edward P. *The Crime of Anonymity*, originally published in Hay, Douglas; Linebaugh, Peter; Rule, John G.; Thompson, E. P.; Winslow, Cal. *Albion’s fatal tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, pp. 255-308.

¹⁰ Hobsbawm, Eric. *History from below: some reflections*. In: Krantz, Frederick (ed.). *History from below: studies in popular protest and popular ideology in honour of George Rudé*. Montréal – Québec: Concordia University, 1985, p. 67.

¹¹ Petrucci, Armando. *Per la storia dell’alfabetismo e della cultura scritta: metodi-materiali-quesiti*. In: *Alfabetismo e cultura scritta nella storia della società italiana*. Atti del Seminario tenutosi a Perugia il 29-30 marzo 1977, Perugia, Università degli studi, 1978, p. 41.

the broad diffusion of the epistolar practices, the memorialist genre or even the domestic and laboral writing shows.

As the French historian Arlette Farge would say, some years later in her *Le goût de l'archive* (1989), “the popular classes, less able to handle writing, did not prevent themselves from representing their own voice: the archive has resources related to this matter, it is necessary to bother going after them”¹². Natalie Zemon Davis, as an example, enlightened us many years ago about the narrative force of the pleas of forgiving directed by the common people to the French king in the 16th century. In fact, in those times one of the resources offered by collections to the written memory concerning the subaltern classes is in the petition that their members sent to governors and institutions in order to obtain any favors, mainly because they told him about their lives by presenting different narrative strategies that aimed at convincing and moving the plea’s addressee¹³.

It must be said that this does not mean that the value of the written testimonials concerning the subaltern classes become a sacred entity. Their written production exhibits the same debilities and partialities as any other document, besides being sometimes out of context. The quality of their testimonial lies on the interpretive capacity of the historian or studios who works with it while reflecting on the past no matter its strands (social, political, cultural, religious, educational or linguistic). But these doubts affect equally the written memory of the hegemonic classes, and not always they are as evident as others when concerning the common people’s writings.

2. The Silences of the Archive

Ignored by historiography, including the Marxist one that has given a major relevance to the study of the apparatus related to the political and union powers, and also gradually by practices of the archive that have focused and remain focusing on both the institutional and elite preservation, the written testimony of the subaltern classes is generally originated by these forgetting processes that are so full of memory, as evoked Mario Benedetti in some of his poems. As in “Do you remember, brother”, in which he sings against the marginalization of the people, including those who take their political representation, or either by the historians who marginalize their existence:

On the other hand, in the most learned works
Of the historians with a craft
The people still remain in the footnotes
And in the last section of the bibliography¹⁴.

More than tracking the silenced words and signs that were denied by the “symptoms generated by the logics of negation, present in the dominant’s discourse order”¹⁵, it is about rescuing, conserving, archiving and studying the common people’s own written testimonial. A superficial review of the advent of writing serves the purpose of determining that it has been, during millennia, a right reserved to the dominant classes and preferably to men, something that gives rise to many exclusions: popular classes, women, minorities of all sorts (ethnic, religious, sexual etc.). That is why revising the avatars of written activity throughout time supposes acquiring the consciousness of the power of both the writing process and the archive, and consequently of the recurring shadows in history, one of those that affects the testimonials produced and left by the subaltern classes, a subject that leads us to reflect also on the own archive’s history. The latter can keep uncountable bodies of documentation associated to the maintenance of power, whether it is the State, the Church, the institutions, the family or

¹² Farge, Arlette. *La atracción del archivo* [1989]. Valencia: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, 1991, p. 79.

¹³ Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987.

¹⁴ Benedetti, Mario. Te acordás hermano. In: Id. *El olvido está lleno de memoria*, op. cit. p. 43.

¹⁵ Mezzadra, Sandro. Introducción. In: Id. (ed.). *Estudios postcoloniales. Ensayos fundamentales*. Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2008, p. 28.

individuals, through which they have to perpetuate some sort of documental elitism. As Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook indicated, “archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies.” A power, they added, that does not escape to the professional performance of the archivists, that, far from being neutral and objective, as usually they try, involves decisions that actively take part in the nature, safeguard and arrangement of the archival collections and, therefore, in the memory of the society¹⁶.

In this regard, it is pertinent to remember words from Jacques Le Goff. In a text of his from 1978, “Documento/Monumento”, published in the *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, the French medievalist observed that “the document is not stagnant merchandise from the past”, but “a product of the society that has made it according to the bonds of forces that in it retained the power”¹⁷. He also wrote that “the document is not innocuous”, but the result of “an assembly, conscious or unconscious, of history, of the time, the society that has produced it, but also of the later times when it has continued to live, perhaps forgotten, during which it has continued to be manipulated, in spite of silence”¹⁸.

These judgments of Le Goff must serve to us as incentive when we become interested in the history of the production and conservation of documents. It is not my place to enter this matter now, but I will say that some of the lines which he had explored the most have preferredly focused in the institutional story of archives and documentary deposits, in its collections and their internal organization; whereas not always one has discussed neither their nature nor the bias that introduce them in the recognition of that strange country that is the past, from furthestmost to closest. We thus face an authentic “archival conflict”, understood as a conflict that takes place between the documentation written, selected and transmitted, and that other one that is undervalued, destroyed or despised, marginalized for not serving the interests of the powerful ones and the hegemonic forms of making history each time.

This is something that also can be extended to the archivist concept of familiar archives, in many cases biased clearly towards the elites. According to Olga Gallego Domínguez, the personal archives “include those of the old noble families and those of wise people, writers, artists, men of State, politicians, the military, members of churches, journalists, workers, professionals, etc., who have produced and conserved documentation of their activities”¹⁹. It is possible that the mention of the workers and the final et cetera had left a place for people “without attributes”, but this is not mentioned explicitly. Still more excluding is the proposal that a few years later Vicente Pons Alós offered; he considered personal archives those “that group the documentation related to it or the positions held by an important persona and his/her cultural, ecclesiastical, social or economic trajectory”²⁰. Very different, however, is the perspective that the historian Philippe Artières and the sociologist Jean-François Laé adopt in their book *Archives personnelles. Histoire, anthropologie et sociologie*. In line with the challenges opened by the social history of writing, their proposal tolerates a greater ductility of the term “personal archives”, so that these are configured by the own writings of each person – correspondence, appointment books, diaries, memories, etc. – and by the ones of official character – divorce record, declarations of heirs, etc. – which allows one to write the life of an individual and to even

¹⁶ Schwartz, Joan; Cook, Terry. Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory. *Archival Science*, vol. 2, n. 1-2, 2002, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷ Le Goff, Jacques. Documento/Monumento. In: Id. *El orden de la memoria. El tiempo como imaginario* [1982]. Barcelona: Paidós, 1991, p. 236.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁹ Gallego Domínguez, Olga. *Manual de archivos familiares*. Madrid: ANABAD, 1993, p. 17.

²⁰ Pons Alós, Vicente. Los archivos familiares: realidad y perspectiva desde la óptica del historiador de los archivos. In: Blasco Martínez, Rosa M^a. (ed.). *I Simposium Los archivos familiares en España. Estado de la cuestión*. Santander: Asociación para la Defensa del Patrimonio Bibliográfico y Documental de Cantabria, 1996, p. 45.

think about how each one “writes” it (or helps to write) based on the documents that he/she produces, conserves and destroys²¹.

According to the expositions that have governed much of the archivist practice throughout time, the written memory preserved usually is the best mirror of the structure of the power and the prejudices established in every age. Paul Thompson reached these conclusions after reflecting on the presences and absences detected in the conserved private correspondence in the English provincial archives: significant as far as letters exchanged between the landowners, but almost nonexistent with respect to the epistolar interchanges of the common people²². Their deductions are equally valid for other places where the selection process has been laden with argumentations that always have favored the institutional memory, of the power and the leading classes. As Petrucci indicated, “il dominio sulla memoria e sull'oblio in quanto pratiche sociali è un fatto eminentemente politico e costituisce un elemento fondante del controllo e del governo di una società sviluppata”²³.

The subject, by all means, would allow deeper reflections, but one cannot be eluded that this characteristic is present in the original reason of some of the great historical archives; and neither that much of the destruction and elimination policies, on the one hand, and the diffusion projects, on another hand, nowadays dump in the digital world, tend to prioritize facts and people anchored in a estatalist and institutionalist vision of historical development. This, in itself, ends in a hegemonized history by leading classes, since they have been those that traditionally have taken the State to interpret it and to usufruct it for their own corporative benefit, also when it resulted from revolutions in the name of those at the bottom.

3. Against Oblivion

A way for history from below not to be robbed or sifted by the appropriation that is carried out in other sectors of the society, even in certain academic circles, is in the meaning that, as historians, we give to their own documentary memory. It interests, then, to preserve the direct testimony of the popular classes so that they are not condemned to footnotes of history books, as denounced by the poem of Benedetti already mentioned, nor so that their history has to depend on the visions transmitted in chronicles, reports and information emanated from above.

As I have stated previously, with respect to the Early Modern Age, a remarkable part of the written vestiges of current people was filed in judicial and police registries, as Arlette Farge has shown us in different works. Her investigations in the eighteenth-century archives of the French police have resulted in a series of works in which, besides approaching the life of the town of Paris in those times, it has rescued and integrated in the laboratory of history the personal documents and of another nature related to common people, while recovered their voices according to which they were caught in files of that nature²⁴. Aside from maintaining another form of making history, the example of this historian, and also the one of other colleagues equally sensible to the word of those at the bottom, it highlights that, in past times, one can even find testimonies written by the subordinate classes, although writing was less spread in these sectors and, with a few exceptions, they did not develop a culture of conservation of writings at personal or familiar level²⁵.

²¹ Artières, Philippe; Laé, Jean-François. *Archives personnelles. Histoire, anthropologie et sociologie*. Paris: Armand Collin, 2011.

²² Thompson, Paul. La historia oral y el historiador. *Debats*, n. 10, december 1984, p. 54.

²³ Petrucci, Armando. *Prima lezione di paleografia*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2002, p. 116.

²⁴ Farge, Arlette. *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1979; *La vie fragile : Violence, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Hachette, 1986; *Le bracelet de parchemin. L'écrit sur soi au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Bayard, 2003; *Effusion et tourment. Le récit des corps. Histoire du peuple au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007; *Essai pour une histoire des voix au dix-huitième siècle*. Paris: Bayard, 2009; and *Vies oubliées: Au coeur du XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: La Découverte, 2019.

²⁵ Petrucci, Armando. Scrittura della memoria e memoria dello scritto. De l'ordine degli oggetti scritti all disordine della scrittura virtuale. *Parolechiave*, 9, 1995, pp. 83-92; and Mandingorra Llavata, M^a. Luz. *Conservar las escrituras*

If, for the French *ancien régime*, the police collections of Archives of the Bastille guarded in the Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal are being released like portentous deposits in which one can locate written tracks of many infame lives²⁶, as would say Foucault²⁷, for the Hispanic scope of the Early Modern Age that same assignment is fulfilled by the inquisitorial and judicial, civil and ecclesiastical archives. In the processes instructed by these instances from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the incorporation of documents seized from the prosecuted individuals to the files, as evidentiary matter, was frequent. For example, much of the letters from common people that have been conserved in our public archives indeed is found in those collections²⁸, as also in others related to emigration to America, either the files from the deceased, urged in the distribution of inheritances, or the letters of complaint in favor of relatives resident in the Peninsula²⁹. In addition, where the Law established the patrimonial transmission into the hands of the first-born, such as in Catalonia, the familiar archives conformed throughout the centuries include an ample number of personal writings of the Early Modern Age: accounting books, memory books, family books and correspondences; some of them due to the urban elites and others³⁰ to farmers more or less accommodated³⁰.

The panorama changes significantly when we enter the Contemporary Time. On the one hand, the growth of literacy from the middle of the 19th century, although unequal in its rate according to the countries³¹, established the bases for a massive appropriation of writing by the popular classes³², thus this conquest of literacy, which had been under development for a long time, became effective³³. On the other hand, many of these writings still are conserved at familiar level given their testimonial and emotional value; others are kept in different archives, since, as in the case of the Early Modern Age, in many circumstances they served as proof in judicial and administrative procedures, as shown in the works of Verónica Sierra Blas³⁴; and finally, a third set is constituted by the documents that integrate

privadas, configurar las identidades. Valencia: Publicaciones de la Universitat de València, Seminari Internacional d'Estudis sobre la Cultura Escrita, 2000.

²⁶ Farge, Arlette; Foucault, Michel. *Le désordre des familles. Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIII^e siècle* [1982]. Paris: Gallimard, 2014. See also Dutray-Lecoin, Élise; Muzerelle, Danielle. *La Bastille ou "l'enfer des vivants" à travers les archives de la Bastille*. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010.

²⁷ Foucault, Michel. La vie des hommes infâmes. *Les Cahiers du chemin*, n. 29, 15 January 1977, pp. 12-29; Collectif Maurice Florence. *Archives de l'infamie, avec le texte de Michel Foucault, "La vie des hommes infâmes"*. Paris: Éditions Les Prairies ordinaires, 2009.

²⁸ Among others, Sánchez Rubio, Rocío; Testón Núñez, Isabel. *El hilo que une. Las relaciones epistolares en el Viejo y el Nuevo Mundo (siglos XVI-XVIII)*. Cáceres/Mérida: Universidad de Extremadura/Editora Regional de Extremadura, 1989; Martínez Martínez, M^a. del Carmen. *Desde la otra orilla. Cartas de Indias en el Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid (siglos XVI-XVIII)*. León: Universidad de León, 2007; and the project *Post Scriptum: A Digital Archive of Ordinary Writings (Early Modern Portugal and Spain)*, directed by Professor Rita Marquilhas: <http://ps.clul.ul.pt/en/index.php?action=home>. Accessed on September 1st, 2021.

²⁹ Otte, Enrique. *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 1976; and Macías, Isabelo; Morales Padrón, Francisco. *Cartas desde América, 1700-1800*. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura y Medio Ambiente, 1991.

³⁰ Torres i Sans, Xavier. *Els llibres de família de pagès. Memòries de pagès, memòries de mas (segles XVI-XVIII)*. Girona: CCG Edicions, 2000; Castillo Gómez, Antonio. *Entre la pluma y la pared. Una historia social de la escritura en los siglos de Oro*. Madrid: Akal, 2006, pp. 59-91; and Jané, Oscar; Poujade, Patrice (ed.). *Memòria personal. Construcció i projecció en primera persona a l'època moderna*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2015. See also the webpage *Memòria Personal*, <http://www.memoriapersonal.eu/>. Accessed on September 1st, 2021.

³¹ Vincent, David. *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

³² Lyons, Martyn (ed.). *Ordinary Writing. Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in the 19th and Early 20th-Century Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007; Lyons, Martyn. *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c. 1860-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; and Edlund, Anne-Catrine; Ashplant, Timothy G.; Kuismin, Anna (ed.). *Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity*. Umeå: Umeå University & The Royal Skyttean Society, 2016.

³³ Castillo Gómez Antonio (ed.). *La conquista del alfabeto. Escritura y clases populares*. Gijón: Trea, 2002.

³⁴ Sierra Blas, Verónica. *Palabras huérfanas. Los niños y la Guerra Civil*. Madrid: Taurus, 2009; and *Cartas presas. La correspondencia carcelaria en la Guerra Civil y el Franquismo*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2016, both built with personal sources conserved in private or in official contexts, depending on the case. Another sample, Taillemite, Hélène. *Lettres du bague: les correspondances privées conservées par l'administration pénitentiaire coloniale dans les dossiers individuels des condamnés aux bagnes de Guyane et de Nouvelle-Calédonie*. *La Gazette des Archives*, 214/2, 2009, pp. 53-67.

archives especially created in order to recover and to conserve a memory that is fragile per se, susceptible to disappear as the generations follow one another and the familiar patrimonies disperse.

The idea of preservation of the autobiographical personal patrimony goes back at least to 1831 with the creation, in Finland, of the Finnish Literature Society, born with the objective to promote Literature in Finn. Later on, at the beginning of the 20th century, the sociologists William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki conducted a massive search of letters along their investigations on the Polish peasantry. According to the testimony of Thomas himself, he began to mature the idea after finding in the sweepings the letter of a Polish immigrant written to his father. Shortly after, in 1914, he obtained a great amount of the letters received in the folkloric magazine in Poland. With that material, and already with the collaboration of Znaniecki, they published an announcement in a newspaper of Chicago to obtain the correspondence received in the United States by the numerous Poles who had arrived there in the migratory waves from those times³⁵. The conducted investigation with 15.000 collected letters was shaped in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, published in five volumes between 1918 and 1920, in which the edition of 764 letters was included³⁶. Soon, the breach opened by this work led to other operations of private documentary memory, mainly with the return from Znaniecki to Poland in 1921. On their initiative, on the 20 of December of that year, the Institute of Sociology of Poznan announced an event of “working memories” which were followed by others, reaching the number of 28 between 1921 and 1938. Later other similar events came after the World War II, 800 between 1946 and 1972, which implied the participation of about 250.000 Poles³⁷.

Contemporarily to the work of Thomas and Znaniecki, in the first decade of the 20th century, Austrian linguist Leo Spitzer, student of the Romance languages, taking advantage of his work as censor in the Ministry the War of his country, conducted a compilation of letters from Italian soldiers who were prisoners in the World War I; they were published at the end of the war.³⁸ Regarding the same conflict, shortly after, between 1929 and 1934, Adolfo Omodeo reunites another epistolar anthology, but a different one. Led by an idealistic and patriotic conception of the war, he became interested specially in letters from military officials and graduates; to him, those were the ones that best expressed those ideals. As consequence, he relegated to an appendix the letters of the soldiers, labeling them, in addition, as irrelevant and banal: “Eppure nulla di più insignificante di quelle lettere: attestano solo il più banale istinto di conservazione: nulla hanno da dire allo storico”.³⁹

On the other hand, in 1937, the Mass Observation Archive was founded, at the moment located in the library of the University of Sussex. The initiative came from three intellectuals – the anthropologist Tom Harrison, the journalist and poet Charles Madge and the artist and documentary producer Humphrey Jennings – whose intention was to analyze the crisis of those

³⁵ Zarco, Juan. Estudio introductorio. In: Thomas, William I.; Znaniecki, Florian. *El campesino polaco en Europa y América*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas-Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2004, pp. 65-69.

³⁶ Thomas, William J.; Znaniecki, Florian. *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*, Boston: Richard G. Aldger, 1918-1920, 5 vol.

³⁷ Markiewicz-Lagneau, Janina. L'autobiographie en Pologne ou de l'usage social d'une technique sociologique. *Revue française de sociologie*, vol. 17, n. 4, 1976, pp. 593-595.

³⁸ Spitzer, Leo. *Italienische Kriegsgefangenenbriefe. Materialienzueiner Charakteristik der Volkstümlichen Italienischen Korrespondenz*. Bonn: Hanstein, 1921. Italian translation: *Lettere di prigionieri di guerra italiani. 1915-1918*. Milano: il Saggiatore, 1976; reissued in 2016 with studies by Lorenzo Renzi, Antonio Gibelli, Luca Morlino and Silvia Albesano. About this work and the linguistic trajectory of its author, see Desideri, Paola; D'Angelo, Mariapia. La voce della Grande Guerra: le lettere dei prigionieri italiani raccolte da Leo Spitzer. *Linguistica*, LVIII/1, 2019, pp. 271-282. In another work, Spitzer studied the metaphors used in letters written by the Italian prisoners to approach the hunger, although it was prohibited. See Spitzer, Leo. *Die Umschreibungen des Begriffes "Hunger" im Italienischen: stilistisch-onomasiologische Studie auf Grund von unveröffentlichtem Zensurmateriale*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1921, recently translated to Italian: *Perifrasi del concetto di fame. La lingua segreta dei prigionieri italiani nella Grande guerra*. Milano, il Saggiatore, 2019.

³⁹ Omodeo, Adolfo. *Momenti della vita di guerra. Dai diari e dalle lettere dei caduti*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1934, p. 14; later re-edited in many occasions (Torino: Einaudi, 1968; Udine: Gaspari, 2016). About this compilation and the slant applied by Omodeo, see Caffarena, Fabio. *Lettere dalla Grande Guerra. Scritture del quotidiano, monumenti della memoria, fonti per la storia: il caso italiano*. Milano: Unicopli, 2005, pp. 180-181.

years by means of the experiences of the life of common people. Having referred fundamentally the period of 1937-1949, in 1981, a new phase started, which adopted the same ethnographic procedure for the final years of the 20th century⁴⁰.

Taking the witness of these initiatives, largely interested in the formation of collections of the national identity, in the eighties another big wave influenced by the height of social history and its elaboration was experienced, counting on the written testimony of the popular classes. From a scientific and social perspective, it was fundamentally about bridging some of the gaps that could affect the documentary patrimony, mainly the one produced and conserved in specific hands; that is to say, those memories, diaries, correspondences, memory books or appointment books that some people could keep in old trunks. In that context, the three centers that have best represented the phenomenon of the “archives of popular writing” were opened in Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale, in Pieve Santo Stefano (1984), although its later evolution focused more on autobiographical texts in ample sense; Archivio della Scrittura Popolare, in Trento (1987); Archivio Ligure della Scrittura Popolare (1988), with headquarters in the University of Genoa, aside from other collections conserved in different places, mainly in museums and libraries of the Resistance⁴¹.

Its constitution was parallel to the foundation, in 1986, of the Archivio Interregionale della Scrittura Popolare, which was not a point of physical concentration of documents, because that work was fulfilled by the centers that I have just mentioned, but a work group oriented to promote the recovery of sources and its interdisciplinary study⁴². After this, in 1988, the Federazione degli Archivi della Scrittura Popolare was created with the objective of “contribuire alla conservazione, alla salvaguardia e al reperimento di tutta la produzione scritta di matrice popolare (edita e inedita), con la sola esclusione di documenti scritti di natura istituzionali (verbali di Camere del lavoro, di sindacati, di partiti, di gruppi, etc.)”⁴³.

In the nineties and first years of the 21th century, the social factor handed over protagonism in favor of the autobiographical fact in accordance with the interest that different disciplines – History, Psychology, Education, Anthropology or Literature – showed towards the writings of the self, prioritized in the set of private and ordinary writings according to what is reflected in the name that was given to some of the associations and archives created in that time: Association pour l'autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique (Ambérieu-en-Bugey, France, 1992), Archives de la vie privée (Carouge, Suiza, 1994), Association européenne pour l'autobiographie (Carcassonne, France, 1998), Deutsches Tagebucharchiv (Emmendingen, Germany, 1998), Finnish Academy for Autobiography and Folk Art (Kärsämäki, Finlandia, 1999), Archives du Patrimoine Autobiographique-APA Belgique (Brussels, 2003) and Association pour la conservation des Archives de la vie ordinaire (Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 2003)⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Sheridan, Dorothy. Mass-Observation: des “capsules” de vie quotidienne. *Cahiers de sémiotique textuelle*, 20, 1991, pp. 75-85, and Writing to the archive: Mass-Observation as autobiography. *Sociology*, vol. 27, n° 1, 1993, pp. 27-40; MacClancy, Jeremy. Brief-encounter: the meeting, in Mass-Observation, of British surrealism and popular anthropology. *Man* (N.S.), n° 1, 1995, pp. 495-512; and Courage, Fiona. Observing Britain by Mass Observation. In: Barbalato, Beatrice; Mingelgrün, Albert (ed.). *Télémaque: Archiver et interpréter les témoignages autobiographiques*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2012, pp. 49-58.

⁴¹ Castillo Gómez, Antonio. Notas sobre escritura y memoria popular en Italia. *Boletín de la Unidad de Estudios Biográficos*, 5, 2001, pp. 51-59.

⁴² The document, entitled “Per un archivio interregionale della scrittura popolare”, was published in *Materiali di Lavoro*, 1-2, 1986, pp. 223-227 and in the magazines that were added to the initiative: *Movimento operaio e socialista*, *Rivista italiana di dialettologia*, *Venetica*, *La ricerca folklorica*, *I giorni cantati*, *Memoria*, *Fonti orali*. *Studi e ricerche*. See also Antonelli, Quinto. *Scritture di confine. Guida all'Archivio della scrittura popolare*. Trento: Museo Storico in Trento, 1999. pp. 16-20.

⁴³ The proposal of the statute, approved during the second seminary on popular writing, which happened in December, 1988, was published in its review-memorial: “Il secondo seminario nazionale dell'Archivio della scrittura popolare (Trento, 10-11 dicembre 1988)”, *Materiali di lavoro*, 1-4, 1988, nuova serie, pp. 245-247. It can be seen in Antonelli, Quinto. *Scritture di confine, op. cit.*, pp. 30-32 (p. 30 for the date). About these beginnings, see also Castelli, Franco. Per un archivio della scrittura popolare: problemi, suggestioni, prospettive. *Quaderno di storia contemporanea*, 2, 1987, pp. 55-65.

⁴⁴ Lejeune Philippe (ed.), *Archives autobiographiques*, monographic issue, *Cahiers de Sémiotique Textuelle*, n. 20, 1991; Iuso, Anna. Les archives du moi ou la passion autobiographique. *Terrain*, n° 28, 1997, pp. 125-138; Antonelli, Quinto; Iuso, Anna (ed.). *Vite in archivio*. Napoli: Ancora, 2000; Iuso, Anna. Europa autobiographica. *Genesis*, vol. 16, n. 1, 2001, pp.

In Spain, although some of the centers that today participate in the objectives that I am commenting on existed from before, such as the Muséu del Pueblu of Asturias, founded in 1968, their definition as archives focusing the recovery and conservation of the written patrimony of common people were stimulated with the creation, in 2004, of the Red de Archivos e Investigadores de la Escritura Popular (Network of Archives and Researchers of Popular Writing), whose denomination reflects a clear influence of the Italian experience⁴⁵. Aside from the assigned researchers in a personal capacity, this network today forms sixteen centers or collections, some of them related to official institutions and others not. Some have a general character: Arxiu de la Memòria Popular (La Roca del Vallès, Barcelona), Archivo Bajo Duero de la Escritura Popular (currently located at the Museo Etnográfico de Castilla y León, Zamora), Archivo de Escrituras Cotidianas (Alcalá University), Museo de la Escritura Popular (Terque, Almería) and Archivo de la Memoria Histórica de Canarias (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria). Others have specialized in subjects such as emigration: Muséu del Pueblu d'Asturies (Gijón), Arquivo da Emigración Galega (Santiago de Compostela), Centro de Estudios de la Emigración Castellana y Leonesa (Zamora) y Centro de Interpretación de la Emigración e Instrucción Pública (Boal, Asturias); or school culture: Centro Internacional de la Cultura Escolar (CEINCE) (Berlanga de Duero, Soria), Museo Pedagógico de la Universidad de Salamanca, en Zamora. One, finally, the collection "Palabras en el tiempo", from the Archivo de la Fundación Antonio Machado de Collioure, is constituted by messages of different types – specially of admiration and political affinity – and on different supports that are left in the tomb of the Spanish poet in this locality of the French southwest, or deposited in the mailbox that the mentioned foundation installed in it in the eighties of the last century⁴⁶.

According to what has been seen, the formation of these collections, as well as of the writing acts that sometimes have generated them, preferably responds to the intervention of very diverse associations and organizations, which in itself constitutes a social fact worthy of study⁴⁷. In spite of their mainly non-institutional and even anti-institutional character in certain cases, according to Patrice east Marcilloux, this type of archives does not escape to a certain logic of legitimation. It can be produced by the appropriation of a space for the collection, up to a point to embody the identity of the place, as it happens to Pieve Santo Stefano, the "cittá del diario", or by the emotional implication through the reading of the manuscripts deposited in them, or by means of the autobiographical events that some of them organize, for exemple the Association pour l'autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique, the Archivio diaristico nazionale or the Arxiu de la Memòria Popular. These factors take this author to say that "toute thésaurisation de la vie a donc besoin d'unereconnaissance pour ne pas être vaine: il faut un réceptacle autrésor"⁴⁸.

220-231; Meurice, Francine (ed.), *La réception des textes dans les archives du patrimoine autobiographique*, monographic issue, *Degrés. Revue de Synthèse à orientation sémiologique*, n. 136-137, 2008-2009; and Barbalato, Beatrice; Mingelgrün, Albert (ed.). *Télémaque*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Monteagudo Robledo, José Ignacio. Los archivos españoles de la escritura popular y la autobiografía. In: Meurice, Francine (ed.), *La réception des textes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-9; and Castillo Gómez, Antonio. Conjurando el olvido: la Red de Archivos e Investigadores de la Escritura Popular. In: Barbalato, Beatrice; Mingelgrün, Albert (ed.). *Télémaque*, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-215. See also the webpage www.redaiep.es, in which it is possible to find current information on it, as well as objectives and activities.

⁴⁶ Sierra Blas, Verónica. La boîte aux lettres d'Antonio Machado. In: Bertherat, Bruno (dir.). *Les sources du funéraire en France à l'époque contemporaine*. Avignon: Éditions universitaires d'Avignon, 2015, pp. 362-365; Palabras en el tiempo. El archivo vivo de Antonio Machado en Collioure. In: *Actas del III Aula Juan de Mairena: Machado, el exilio español (Segovia, 11-14 de noviembre de 2015)*. Segovia: Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2016, pp. 35-55; and Un dialogue qui jamais nes'interrompt: le boîte aux lettres d'Antonio Machado à Collioure. In: *Collioure... les jours bleus d'Antonio Machado/los días azules de Antonio Machado*. Canet: Editions Trabucaire, Fondation Antonio Machado de Collioure, 2019, pp. 100-107. The admiration is shared by other writings as "idols" such as the more than 140.000 letters that were sent to the Italian singer Gigliola Cinquetti in the sixties and seventies of the last century, from all the regions of Italy and different foreign countries. See Iuso, Anna; Antonelli, Quinto (ed.). *Scrivere agli idoli*. Trento: Museo Storico in Trento, 2007.

⁴⁷ Lahire, Bernard. Sociología y autobiografía. *Revista de Antropología Social*, 13, 2004, p. 43.

⁴⁸ Marcilloux, Patrice. *Les ego-archives. Traces documentaires et recherche de soi*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013, p. 87.

4. Autobiographical, ordinary and popular writings

After explaining the process that gave origin to this set of autobiographical archives of the private life and the popular or ordinary writing, I will now focus on the hues that contribute to the different denominations, but not before discussing the term “archive”. In archivistic purity, it is evident that, in most of the cases, it is about documentary collections that do not meet the canonical definition which we can find in manuals, dictionaries and laws related to archives. Thus, in the vocabulary of archivistic terminology promoted by the International Council on Archives, three meanings are contemplated:

1. «Ensemble des *documents*, quels que soient leur date, leur forme et leur support matériel, produits ou reçus para toute personne physique ou morale, et par tout service ou organisme public ou privé, dans l'exercice de leur activité, et qui son soit conservés para leur créateur ou ses successeurs pour leurs besoins propres, soit transmis à l'institution d'*archives* compétente en raison de leur *valeur archivistique*.
2. «Institution responsable de la prise en charge, du traitement, de l'inventaire, de la *conservation* et de la *communication* des archives, dite aussi service d'*archives*.
3. «Bâtiment ou partie de bâtiment où sont conservés et communiqués des *archives*, dit aussi dépôt d'*archives*».⁴⁹

The first of these definitions, which is the one that interests more for the object of this work, is basically the one that inspired the legislations on historical patrimony and archives of different countries. In the case of the law 16/1985 of Spanish Historical Patrimony, article 59 considers as archives “the organic sets of documents, or the compilation of several of them, reunited by the public or private entities, in the exercise of its activities, to the service of its use for the investigation, the culture, the information and the administrative management”⁵⁰. That is to say, practically just the same that is established, for example, by the French law of January 3, 1979: «Ensemble de documents, quels que soient leur date, leur forme et leur support matériel, produits ou reçus par toute personne physique ou morale et par tout service ou organisme public ou privé, dans l'exercice de son activité » (art. 1)⁵¹.

From this point of view, the archives of popular writing, which are autobiographical or of the daily life, not even can be assimilated to the personal collections, since they are usually constituted by very heterogenous documents and numerous loose pieces, together, certainly, with some more homogenous personal or familiar legacies. Nevertheless, I understand that in these cases the archivistic rigor did not have to be an inexcusable condition since we are speaking of interventions in the recovery and safeguard of a certain type of written patrimony that responds to other intentions and normally overwhelm emptinesses neglected by the people and institutions that have the responsibility to conserve, to classify and to transmit the written memory.

Consequently, it seems more relevant to me to focus in the complements of the name, beginning by the designation “archives of popular writing”, which relates specifically with the Italian experience. It was there where, at the end of the seventies, a line of investigation on “alfabetismo e cultura scritta” was launched, in which took part varied people such as *alla rovescia* paleographers, this is something heterodox, historians, linguists and anthropologists. It coincided with a generation that was solid in the theoretical field and militant in the academic one, which comprised people such as Armando Petrucci, Attilio Bartoli Langeli, Carlo Ginzburg, Giorgio Raimondo Cardona or Franco Cardini, whom at that time called the attention on the study

⁴⁹ Walne, Peter (ed.). *Dictionary of Archival Terminology/Dictionnaire de Terminologie Archivistique. English and French with equivalents in Dutch, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish*. München: K.G. Saur, 1988, 2^a ed. (1^a ed. 1984), pp. 22.

⁵⁰ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1985-12534>. Accessed on September 1st, 2021.

⁵¹ <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006068663>. Accessed on September 1st, 2021.

of writing in its social dimension, affecting specifically its active and passive use on the part of the popular classes⁵².

By then Armando Petrucci indicated the particular interest that he had on the study of the graphical testimonies produced by the subordinate classes or oriented by them, while highlighted the ambiguity of the term “popular writing”⁵³, for several reasons: a) the difficulty to attribute the “uso di un determinato tipo di scrittura ad una precisa categoria o classe sociale”; b) the fact that belonging to the popular sectors does not mean to have been excluded in the past, at least individually, of “un certo grado di promozione sociale e perciò grafica (basti pensare agli schiavi 'notarii' del mondo romano)”; and c) the writing used by the subordinate classes does not have “caratteristiche omogenee, autonome and perciò stesso identificabili”⁵⁴. As a paleographer, his reflection was centered fundamentally in the graphical aspect of the writing. When not observing exclusive characteristics of the subordinate classes, the term “popular writing” seemed to him reducing and even unsuitable. Nevertheless, other studies have appreciated, including diachronic perspectives, a series of graphical and linguistic characteristics that are quite common at the “unskillful hands”, that is, to the people with an insufficient alphabetical competition or with a practice of inconstant writing⁵⁵. Petrucci admitted shortly after that in certain circumstances the most elementary graphic executions constitute “vere e proprie scritture 'popolari', riservate cioè nell'uso alle classi subalterne della società”⁵⁶.

The issues of the term, assumed by those who impelled it, has caused to frequently interchange it by writings “of the margin”, of the “border” or of the “common people”⁵⁷, on the one hand, and by “autobiographical”, “ordinary” writings or of the “private”, on the other. In some cases the social condition of those who write is highlighted, whereas in others preference is given to the textual typology or the scope of production, if we understand it, according with Giorgio Raimondo Cardona, as “l'insieme di situazione sociali tipizzate e regolate da norme di comportamento”⁵⁸.

The denominations that prioritize the autobiographical character evidently are inter-class, because they place this aspect above the social condition of the individual, no matter how hard in certain cases the popular classes have been focused. Its diffusion was greater among the students of the literary practice, as well as between the ones who are interested in their therapeutic or resilient potential, which has led to the term “archives qui guérissent”⁵⁹. At first, the

⁵² *Alfabetismo e cultura scritta nella storia della società italiana*, op. cit. See also Bartoli Langeli, Attilio. Ancora su paleografia e storia della scrittura: a proposito di un convengo perugino. *Scrittura e civiltà*, II, 1978, pp. 275-294.

⁵³ This term had been used previously by Charles Perrat when emphasizing the role played by the French bastard, widely used in the documentary, private and librarian field during the low late Middle Ages. Perrat, Charles. *Paléographie médiévale*. In: Samaran, Charles (ed.). *L'Histoire et ses méthodes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p.606.

⁵⁴ Petrucci, Armando. Per la storia dell'alfabetismo e della cultura scritta; metodi-materiali-quesiti, *art. cit.*, pp. 43-44; and Funzione della scrittura e terminologia paleografica. In: *Paleographica, Diplomatica et Archivistica. Studi in onore di Giulio Battelli*. Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1979, I, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁵ Marquilha, Rita. *A Faculdade das Letras. Leitura e escrita em Portugal no século XVII*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2000, pp. 239-240. Concerning the diachronic persistence of the graphic features, Bartoli Langeli, Attilio. *La scrittura dell'italiano*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2000; Hans-Bianchi, Barbara. *La competenza scrittoria medievale. Studi sulla scrittura popolare*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2005; and Steffen, Joachim; Thun, Harald; Zaiser, Rainer (ed.). *Classes populaires, scripturalité, et histoire de la langue. Un bilan interdisciplinaire*. Kiel: Westensee-Verlag, 2018.

⁵⁶ Petrucci, Armando. Funzione della scrittura e terminologia paleografica, *art. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵⁷ Antonelli, Quinto. *Scritture di confine*, op. cit., pp. 24-29; Gibelli, Antonio. Introduzione. Scritture e storie di gente comune. In: Conti, Piero; Franchini, Giuliana; Gibelli, Antonio (ed.). *Storie di gente comune nell'Archivio Ligure della Scrittura Popolare*. Genova: Università degli studi di Genova, Dipartimento di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea-Editrice Impressioni Grafiche, 2002, pp. 5-13; and Caffarena, Fabio, *Scritture non comuni. Una fonte per la storia contemporanea*. Milano: Unicopli, 2016, pp. 15-27.

⁵⁸ Cardona, Giorgio Raimondo. *Antropologia della scrittura*. Torino: Loescher, 1987 (1ª ed. 1981), p. 100.

⁵⁹ Cyrulnik, Boris. *Autobiographie d'un épuvantail*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008, pp. 12-15; Marcilloux, Patrice. *Les ego-archives*, op. cit., p. 85; and Demetrio, Duccio. *Raccontarsi*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1995. In short, in the film *Coming Home* (2014), from the Chinese director Zhang Yimou, this is the intention that makes the male protagonist, Lu Yanshi, to give a box of letters to its wife, Feng Wanyu, who suffers from psychogenic amnesia, to see

autobiography was understood as something restricted such as the “récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité”⁶⁰. Later the term dispensed the introspective condition and started to designate the set of texts that approach the individual, some of them written in first person and others not.

Between some historians the term “egodocuments” took root, in fact coined by Dutch Jacques Presser in the fifties and later developed by his compatriot Rudolf Dekker. It understands the texts that “hide or discover deliberately or accidentally an ego”⁶¹, and those in which “an author writes on his own acts, thoughts and feelings”⁶². Although this category is not exempt from shades and controversies, one of its main advantages is indeed in the plasticity that it offers when including so diverse textual modalities, and simultaneously close, such as autobiographies, memories, diaries, family books, personal chronicles, travel journals and even autobiographical fiction⁶³. Neither the expression of the self we must understand in a purely introspective perspective, nor the author must write necessarily by himself. To this necessity it seems advisable to also accommodate autobiographical texts that result from the writing delegation, either by illiteracy or incompetence of the individual, or by any misfortune or adversity, or simply because the act of writing is entrusted to some close friend.

More focused on the domains of production of writing are other categories of ample echo in the French historiography, either the traditional “écrits du for privé”, used in investigations of historical profile⁶⁴, or the most recent one, of “écritures quotidiennes” or “ordinaires”, with a more anthropological profile⁶⁵. According to Daniel Fabre, its main impeller, the ordinary writings are purely against “à l'univers prestigieux des écrits que distinguent la volonté de faire oeuvre, la signatura authentifiante de l'auteur, la consécration de l'imprimé”. In his opinion, it is about writings not related to the requirements of the literary institution, generally associated to collective or personal circumstances of certain intensity or to the routine of the daily occupations:

if so she becomes able to recognize him when he returns home after years imprisoned in a work field during the Cultural Revolution.

⁶⁰ Lejeune Philippe, *Le pacte autobiographique*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, pp. 14. Little opened to the texts that did not have that introspective character, the own author reviewed it and clarified it later. See Lejeune, *Signes de vie (Le pacte autobiographique, 2)*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, et “El pacto autobiográfico, 25 años después”, in Celia Fernández Prieto et M^a. Ángeles Hermosilla Álvarez (eds.), con la colaboración de Anna Caballé, *Autobiografía en España: un balance. Actas del Congreso Internacional celebrado en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de Córdoba del 25 al 27 de octubre de 2001*, Madrid, Visor Libros, 2004, pp. 159-172.

⁶¹ Presser, Jacques. Clio kijkt door het sleutelgat. In: Id. *Uit het wer van J. Presser*. Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polaken Van Gennep, 1969, p. 286. Cf. Dekker, Rudolf. Jacques Presser's Heritage: Egodocuments in the Study of History. *Memoria y Civilización*, 5, 2002, p. 14.

⁶² Dekker, Rudolf. Egodocuments in the Netherlands from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century. In: Griffey, Erin (ed.). *Envisioning Self and Status: Self-Representation in the Low Countries 1400-1700*. Hull: Association for Low Countries Studies in Great Britain and Ireland, 1999, p. 255.

⁶³ Dekker, Rudolf (ed.). *Egodocuments and history: autobiographical writing in its social context since the Middle Ages*. Hilversum: Verloren; Rotterdam, Faculty of History and Art Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2002; Amelang, James S. *The Flight of Icarus. Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 22-511; Amelang, James S. (ed.). *De la autobiografía a los ego-documentos: un fórum abierto*, monographic issue, *Cultura escrita & Sociedad*, 1, 2005, pp. 15-122.

⁶⁴ Foisil, Madeleine. L'écriture du for privé. In: Ariés, Philippe; Duby, Georges (ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée, vol. III. De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, ed. Roger Chartier. Paris: Seuil, 1986, pp. 331-369; Bardet, Jean-Pierre; Ruggiu, François-Joseph (ed.). *Au plus près du secret des cœurs? Nouvelles lectures historiques des écrits du for privé en Europe du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2005; Ruggiu, François-Joseph. Écrits du for privé. In: Figeac, Michel (ed.). *L'ancienne France au quotidien: la vie et les choses de la vie sous l'Ancien Régime*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2007, pp. 167-170. Bardet, Jean-Pierre; Arnoul Elisabeth; Ruggiu, François-Joseph (ed.). *Les écrits du for privé en Europe. Enquêtes, Analyses, Publications*. Bordeaux: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2010; Ruggiu, François-Joseph (ed.). *The Uses of First Person Writings. Africa, America, Asia, Europe / Les usages des écrits du for privé. Afrique, Amérique, Asie, Europe*. Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2013; Bardet Jean-Pierre; Ruggiu François-Joseph (ed.). *Les écrits du for privé en France. De la fin du Moyen Âge à 1914*. Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2014.

⁶⁵ Fabre Daniel (ed.). *Écritures ordinaires*. Paris: P.O.L.-Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993; Id. (ed.). *Par écrit. Ethnologie des écritures quotidiennes*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997.

Elles n'aspirent ni à l'exercice scrupuleux du «bonusage» ni à la sacralisation qui, peu ou prou, accompagne depuis deux siècles la mise à distance littéraire. Et puis, surtout, la plupart de ces écritures-là, associées à des moments collectifs ou personnels intenses ou bien à la routine des occupations quotidiennes, semblent vouées à une unique fonction qu'elles absorbent et les uniformise: laisser trace. Elles n'auraient pas d'autre sens, elles n'auraient pas d'autres effets. Elles témoignent tout au plus d'une compétence qui ne devient évidente que lorsqu'on ne la possède pas⁶⁶.

Sharing the substantial aspect of this definition, I wanted to clarify the importance that Fabre attributed to the authorship, to the intention of *faire oeuvre* and therefore to the consecration through the press. However, the typographic diffusion is an ambition that is proper of those who conceive the written production as a craft; it admits a couple of details. On the one hand, the printed legitimation has not operated with the same logic at all the moments of history. Moreover, in periods such as the Early Modern Age, poetry and theater enjoyed an ample circulation of handwritten texts without providing a shred of notoriety to the authors. On the other hand, in the Contemporary Era, specifically in the 20th century, many diaries and memories, even from popular classes, and have reached status of printed material through their testimonial value before the literary one; but they do not cease to be ordinary writings in the most total sense of the word. I understand that the honor entailed by the press cannot be an attribute to determine the ordinary character or not of a certain piece of writing. Rather it would be necessary to establish differences according to the texts and the will of their authors, establishing a prudent distinction between those whose sense is in the desire of *laisser trace* and those conceived with greater skill in literary terms and habitually conceived to be published, although it would be necessary to reframe this condition at the present time from the new horizons that the Internet is broadening⁶⁷.

Returning to the beginning of this terminological discussion, if in the autobiographical archives, as Daniel Fabre said, “il testimone della storia cede il posto all'esploratore dell'intimità”⁶⁸, in those of the popular writing the social condition of the individuals prevails. With no need to understand it in a rigid way and although the conceptual solidity of the social class has questioned the development of the society of masses⁶⁹, something that has been questioned to the light of the current crisis⁷⁰, it does not seem to be very suggestive to avoid the differences and inequalities dissolving them in less compromising literary or anthropological formulations. If we do so, there is the risk that the written production of the popular classes (or common people) becomes invisible in the magma of the ordinary writings, of *four privé* or autobiographical, with which we have resigned to the assertive project that protected the first movements in that direction.

5. Conclusion

The approach raised in these pages to the memory of the subaltern classes has focused specifically in the written dimension, but it is obvious that its testimony also admits sound, visual and even digital records. With this a world is opened to everything still to be explored, which is parallel to the substitution of the paper by the screen as writing material, but also to the uncertainties that the digital conservation raises. Let us think about the ephemeral nature of a

⁶⁶ Fabre, Daniel. Introduction. In: Id. (ed.). *Écritures ordinaire*, op. cit., 11.

⁶⁷ Casellas i Serra, Lluís-Esteve; Hernández Olivera, Luis (ed.). *Ego archivo. Memorias personales en un mundo digital*, monographic issue, *Tabula*, 17, 2014, pp. 13-172.

⁶⁸ Fabre, Daniel. L'Europa autobiografica. *Primapersona. Percorsi autobiografici*, 1, 1998, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Pertinents in this regard are the reflections offered by Eley, Geoff; Nield, Keith. *The Future of Class in History. What's left of the Social*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2007.

⁷⁰ Jones, Owen. *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso Books, 2011; and Siblot, Yasmine; Cartier, Marie; Coutant, Isabelle; Masclat, Olivier; Renahy, Nicolas. *Sociologie des classes populaires contemporaines*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2015.

certain type of messages (*SMS, WhatsApp, chats*, etc.), about the lack of archives and deposits of electronic correspondence or about the fast obsolescence of the different systems of storage. I only point to this question since it is not either a land on which I move comfortably. More attached to the written tradition that has constituted us as humanity, from the distant fourth millenium before our age up to the present time, to conclude, I want to insist on the need to look for and to conserve the written production of the subordinate classes for several reasons.

The first and fundamental one is because it hoards the echoes of many voices that not always have deserved enough attention and quite often have been marginalized in the public policies of the documentary memory. Even when these have been more sensible, the focus has been projected more to the political, union or welfare institutions that acted in favor of the popular classes from which came their members. Within this context of negligence, there are plenty of examples of the speed with which politicians and people responsible for archives act when it is about rescuing from forgetfulness documents related to the history of the elites and the institutions, including those of the working class, whereas there is not equal diligence if the documentation concerns people without attributes.

Secondly, because it is an extremely fragile documentation but that can still be found and conserved. As the antifascist military man Nuto Revelli said years ago, one of the people who did most in Italy to dignify the memory of the defeated, even though the peasantry has not professed the “cult to the papers” proper of the elites, in the 70s, when he published *Il mondo dei vinti. Testimonianze di vita contadina*,⁷¹ still the familiar archives were many and could be found in each town, in cardboard or tin boxes.

Still it keeps happening, so that the rescue and preservation of that documentation are also an act of responsibility as opposed to the marginalization undergone during centuries, a “duty of memory”. Not only by its utility at the time of surpassing traumatic experiences, but also because they suture the social wounds that all construction of the deprived or hemiplegic memory causes. Because they consolidate the idea of the archive as a “container of the related collective memory, mainly, the knowledge and practices of the dominated classes and the subaltern groups”. Thus it became clear not long ago, in the text of the call of the international seminary “Commons Archives”, celebrated in December, 2015, in the Museo Centro Nacional Reina Sofía, in Madrid, when the following was stated:

to reflect on how these archives, that feed an important patrimony on the memory, the collective experience and identity, can be constructed, managed, conserved and opened to the citizenship and the public in general as an exercise of civic and democratic culture, independently of criteria of national allegiance or availability of economic resources for its consultation or use; and to debate on the possible implication of the public institutions to protect this kind of archives from the double danger of its privatization (for example, of the collections of Latin American political art that originated from the work of individual or collective artists) or its invisibilization and abandonment (for example, the memory of fights and social events that are important and constituent of the experience of the present, but marginalized by the ways of production of discourse and memory of the mediatic, academic and institutional *establishment*).

The crucial aspect is, then, the issue of *public memory* produced by the current forms of conservation of the social action, that leave out of the dominant discourse important parts not only of history in general, but also of the collective experience of the strictest contemporaneity. We think that this line of research on archives and the memory of the subaltern and dominated groups introduces a powerful line of reflection

⁷¹ Revelli, Nuto. *Il mondo dei vinti. Testimonianze di vita contadina*. Torino: Einaudi, 1977.

around the new political rights and the new characteristics of a genuinely democratic public sphere in a moment as the current one, which is crossed by a sense of multifactorial crisis that deeply affects the forms of collective behavior in our societies.

Commons Archives concentrates these debates and lines of work, since it considers archives as motor of political activation at the present, whilst it intends to define devices that do not cancel nor objectify the dynamics from which these exercises of conservation of the memory come.⁷²

The Indian historian Ranahit Guha, one of the most outstanding voices of the branch of *subaltern studies*, was convinced that “in the practice of historiography, even the elitists must play their role, even if it is the one of teaching with negative examples”, for that reason he also declared his conviction that “the elitist historiography had to be fought”⁷³. Not only historiography, but also the memory operations synthesized in the archivistic policies. And for each other I understand that the archives of popular writing and those others that are interested specifically in visual, sound or electronic records of marginalized individuals and groups can be fundamental, starting from women, largely ignored as subjects of memory and archive, and including the ethnic and colonial minorities, or the social movements of our time⁷⁴. We cannot forget, paraphrasing Schwartz and Cook, that the control of archives includes the control of the society and, therefore, the capacity for determining the winners and the losers of history, that is to say, for privileging or marginalizing, and it can be a tool of hegemony or resistance⁷⁵. In us is a decision to make, but all history as a report elaborated and contrasted of what happened should not have to be made from the silence of some voices and the applause of others. Moreover, if in short term history may be written by the winners, in the long run, as Reinhart Koselleck argues, the advances in historical knowledge are due to the defeated, because they are the ones that feed the historical change⁷⁶.

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- ⁷² <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/actividades/archivos-comun>. Accessed on September 1st, 2021. See also Prieto del Campo, Carlos. Archivos del común o los *commons* del conocimiento, la información y la memoria. http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/64_archivos_del_comun_o_los_commons_del_conocimiento_la_informacion_y_la_memoria. Accessed on September 1st, 2020.
- ⁷³ Guha, Ranahit. *Las voces de la historia y otros estudios subalternos* [1982, 1983 y 1996]. Barcelona: Crítica, 2002, p. 40.
- ⁷⁴ Marcilloux, Patrice. *Les ego-archives, op. cit.*, pp. 130-148.
- ⁷⁵ Schwartz, Joan M.; Cook, Terry. *Archives, Records, and Power, art. cit.*, pp. 4 y 13.
- ⁷⁶ Koselleck, Reinhart. *Los estratos del tiempo: estudios sobre la historia* [2000]. Barcelona: Paidós, 2001, pp. 83 and 92.

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