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MASKS OF TRUTH: FROM THEORY OF HISTORY TO CASE STUDY
(Summary)

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As Paul Ricoeur put it in *Temps et récit*, theory helps us realize that our relation with the document is never an innocent, but always an “ideological” one, that is, we start from our personal opinions, with biases, which influence both the choice and the interpretation of sources. We should state here that the theory of history does not pay attention to this evidence in order to challenge the verity values of historiography. Discussions around this aspect get historians accustomed to the reality of their limits, urging them to take precautions, to select evidence in such a way as for their research to resist in time, not to fall into disuse, once new archive collections are discovered. By rendering relative the omnipotence that the nineteenth century historians assumed, pretending an exact reconstruction of history, the present ideas do not discredit historical research, but make it more aware of its own limits, helping it to avoid easy extrapolations, as well as the traditional empiricist excesses, which for the sake of the detail miss the conclusions. Discourse analysis and hermeneutics warn the historians that the document is a means of information with a view to synopsizing, and not an end in itself, unfortunately exploited as a “discovery”, as a novelty, and not like it should be, from the standpoint of its force to signify, of its availability to participate in an ampler account, in a historiographical reconstruction. In other words, theory consolidates history’s claims of scientism, it does not undermine them with speculations. It does not impose dogmas or witticisms, insisting upon delimitations, classifications and precautions to take into considerations when we start an investigation. *What frightens us under the name of “theory” is nothing else but the inventory of possible working methods.*

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