



*REINHART KOSELLECK'S INTELLECTUAL FASCINATION.
THE LEGACY OF HIS VISIT TO TIMIȘOARA¹*

Victor NEUMANN

Travels and themes for dialogue

I first met Reinhart Koselleck in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria. It was in November 2002, when the French foundation *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société* and the circles of social-political studies around Professor Ivaylo Znepolski organized a debate about the historian's work. The gathering was part of a series of academic meetings where former guests were well-known names such as Francois Furet, Paul Ricoeur and Jaques Derrida. The participants of the debate dedicated to Reinhart Koselleck were, among others, Heinz-Dieter Kittsteiner, Heinz Wismann, Maurice Aymard, Alexandre Escudier, Alban Bensa, Jean-Marc Tetaz, Christo Todorov, Helge Jordheim, Alexander Kiossev, Roumen Daskalov etc.² I remember that when I introduced Fernand Braudel's name into the discussion, I challenged Koselleck. Despite obvious methodological and theoretical differences between the two historians, I raised the discussion on the possible

¹ Text presented at the round table organized at the Bielefeld University, at ZIF (Zentrum fuer Interdisziplinäre Forschung) and dedicated to the memory of the historian Reinhart Koselleck. The round table took place on 29 August 2014 and was part of the programme of the 17th International Conference of Conceptual History held in Bielefeld on 28-30 August 2014.

² *Okolo Reinhart Koselleck. Istoricesko Vreme u temporalnost*, [Historical time and temporality] (Dom na naukume za coveka u obšestvomo: Sofia, 2003).

complementarity of their approaches regarding their understanding of historical time in different geographical spaces. That was the starting point of a long and fruitful exchange of ideas concerning the diversity of the methods of thinking and writing history. The dialogue I had in Sofia put me in contact with Reinhart Koselleck in both his capacity as a scholar as well as a human being.

One year later, in 2003, we saw each other again in Sofia, when the special guest was Pierre Nora. The reunion had a different topic from the previous year's one, generating again a spectacular polemic between Koselleck and Nora on the topic of "places of memory". In one of those days I mentioned to Koselleck about my intention to translate one of his texts into the Romanian. It was the article *Geschichte*, inserted in volume II of *GG (Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe)*³. The evolution of the concept of history, the diversity of its meanings, its contribution to the changes of the social-political languages are elements that in my appreciation are essential in a moment when history in the former communist states is still waiting for being researched, re-thought and re-written without the ballast of the extreme ideologies that loaded it or embezzled it from the academic research during the 20th century⁴.

Then a discussion about the translation into the Romanian of *Zeitschichten* (Temporal strata) followed. Related to this, on 21 March 2003, Reinhart Koselleck wrote me the followings:

*Dear and distinguished Mr. Neumann, Thank you for your interest and your request for granting the copyright for translating my book Zeitschichten. Certainly I do grant it and meanwhile I have sent a letter to Suhrkamp Publisher as well. As soon as I receive an answer, I will let you know directly, provided the publishing house won't do it itself as well.*⁵

The encounter with the East-European university milieu had revealed Reinhart Koselleck's insight to discover and understand immediately the similarities and differences between Western and Eastern Europe. He had quickly and precisely identified the legacies of fascism and communism, commenting upon and photographing the monuments that we had encountered during our walks on streets in the historical centre of Sofia, and later in Timișoara. The studies about the ceremonials of commemoration of the wars and of the functionalization of the representation of death to the benefit of

³ Reinhart Koselleck, "Geschichte, Historie", in Otto Brunner, Werner Konze, Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Band 2, (Stuttgart: Klett-Kotta, 2004), 593-717.

⁴ Victor Neumann, *Istoria ca teorie a istoriei. Reinhart Koselleck despre evoluția modernă a conceptului Geschichte* [History as theory of history. Reinhart Koselleck about the modern evolution of the concept Geschichte], introductory study to the Romanian edition *Conceptul de istorie (Geschichte, Historie)* [Concept of History]. Translated by Victor Neumann and Patrick Lavrits. Introductory study by Victor Neumann (Iași: Publishing of the Al. Ioan Cuza University, 2005), 7-23.

⁵ Letter kept in the personal archive of the addressee.

the survivors revealed Koselleck's particular interest for the representation of the historical experiments. According to him, "the history of European war memorials testifies to a common visual signature of modernity. But it just as much attests to an optical transformation of experience..."⁶.

His travels in Central and Eastern Europe had extended such type of studies, one of his acknowledged intentions being that of writing a European comparative history of the memorials. In Timișoara he was interested in the monuments dedicated to the world wars, as well as those memorializing the events of 1989, the year of major changes in Central and Eastern Europe. It is worth to be noticed that Timișoara was the first city of Romania which in 1989 rose up against Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship, representing alone in the whole country the opposition against his regime for one week until the break of demonstrations in other Romanian cities and until the end of the communist regime. Reinhart Koselleck had requested a whole day for visiting the most important monuments in Timișoara. He searched, took pictures, read with genuine interest the inscriptions, continuously commenting on their symbolism. The reference to the inscriptions was part of his working methodology, being a useful reference for empirical understanding. Along with his curiosity for memorials and tragedies to be found in symbolism and in social-political languages that were associated with them, it was impressive that on that occasion, too, he invoked the aspirations of our contemporaries for the integration of the two parts of Europe and the importance of redefining European identity. He noticed and understood rather quickly the particularities of Central and Southeastern Europe, the experiences and expectations of the populations in these regions, the purpose of their integration and reintegration into the circuit of cultural and civilization values of the continent.

Doctor Honoris Causa at the West University of Timișoara

Reinhart Koselleck's trip to Timișoara took place following the decision of the West University of Timisoara's Senate to award him the Doctor Honoris Causa title. Consequently, on 22 November 2004, Reinhart Koselleck wrote to the then Rector of the University the followings:

*"I am extremely honoured that the Senate of your University had decided unanimously to award me with the title of Doctor Honoris Causa. This fact represents a great joy for me as I hope that the scientific relationships between the Romania and Germany will come even closer in the future..."*⁷.

⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, War Memorials: Identity Formations of the Survivors, în Idem, *The Practice of Conceptual History, Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Translated by Todd Samuel Pressner and Others, Foreword by Hayden White, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California: 2002), 285-326, 324.

⁷ Due to the amiability of the past rector Ioan Mihai, the letter is kept in Victor Neumann's personal archive.

Whenever he wrote to me, he was doing it in a very natural way, suggesting that a trip to Timișoara would be welcomed for the promotion of his new interdisciplinary perspectives for the study of history. In a letter dated 8 February 2005, he pointed out, along with organizational matters, the topic of his conference:

Dear and distinguished Mr. Neumann, First of all, I wish to thank you for all the efforts you have been and are taking. I hope that our festive meeting in May will be an even more pleasant one due to the preparations you have undertaken until now! After our telephone conversation, I can now confirm that I will arrive to Timișoara on Tuesday, 24 May 2005[...] The most important thing: it totally depends on your competence and imagination how you wish to organize the activities from the 24 May afternoon until 27 May at noon. The title of my contribution is: „Repetitional Structures in Language and History”, where I will develop some thesis concerning the semantics and history and where I will analyse their mutual relationship. If the text needs to be translated in advance, I will send it to you in two weeks. Afterwards, if you wish to do some changes there will still be time to agree on them. With kind regards and best wishes, yours, Reinhart Koselleck⁸.

His visit to Timișoara started on 24 May and ended on 28 May 2005 (one day later than initially scheduled). The main moment of his visit was the ceremony of awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of the West University of Timișoara in a festive surrounding. On that occasion, Reinhart Koselleck hold a conference on “Repetitional Structures in Language and History” as he announced in his letter⁹. The topic was not new within the array of his studies; however its presentation in the Romanian context was completely new. In order to highlight the relationship between linguistic innovation and linguistic repetition, he quoted the Romanian linguist Eugen Coșeriu¹⁰, highlighting his contribution. Language and history are interdependent, any language can be modified by history and any history is being conditioned and intermediated by language. However, through this Koselleck did not want to say that “language and history are in a one-to-one ratio” neither that “history is being built by language exclusively”¹¹. As for history, despite repetitions, it is full of surprises and therefore the testimonials about the past have to be continuously processed. Language describes and articulates reality more or less; therefore Koselleck admitted that there were unsolved differences between the linguistic performance itself and the historical world¹².

Koselleck’s Repetitive Structures and Xenopol’s Historical Series

⁸ Letter kept in the personal archive of the addressee.

⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Wiederholungsstrukturen in Sprache und Geschichte în Laudatio und Vortrag. Anlässlich der Verleihung des Doctor Honoris Causa Titels an Herrn Professor Reinhart Koselleck*, Extrakt (Temeswar Universität Verlag: Temeswar, 27. mai 2005).

¹⁰ The two scholars had met, Coșeriu having the opportunity to visit Koselleck in his house in Bielefeld, Luisenstrasse 36.

¹¹ Idem, Acknowledgement addressed on the occasion of awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of the West University of Timișoara.

¹² Idem, Acknowledgement addressed on the occasion of awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of the West University of Timișoara.

The topic of the conference incited my interest. The quest of “coincidences and conflicts disposed and content in repetitive processes”¹³ had already been formulated by the Romanian historian Alexandru D. Xenopol. I compared the repetitive structures described by Koselleck with Xenopol’s hypothesis formulated in *La theorie de l’ Histoire* (Paris, 1908), where the latter advocated that “series is the real organizing element of the historical science”¹⁴. According to Xenopol, “any series of development connects a succession of facts that emerge from a core, ascends or descends in order to reach to a result that gives its name to the series”¹⁵. In favour of his hypothesis, Xenopol invoked the series of the primitive field, that of transformation of the crawlers into birds, the series of the pre-historical Stone Age, and also the origin and evolution of the English liberties from the Normand conquest to the Constitution of 1688¹⁶. Being based on examinations and comparisons between the scientific methods, the aim of his study was to offer history the status of science. Xenopol’s observations – a part of those being inspired by Heinrich Rickert’s reflections¹⁷ - highlight the role of research and exposure of the causative relations that confer history the character of science.

The Romanian historian was concerned by “searching the cause in repetitive facts”, which in his view had to confer substance to science. When it was about to formulate his conclusions he noticed that the research of the causes did not represent the main aim of the sciences of repetition¹⁸. Koselleck was impressed by this kind of study. Speaking to him about this, I was provoking him a real curiosity, this time for the Romanian intellectual milieu, respectively for Xenopol’s ideas and interpretations written and published one century ago. It was about his book *La theorie de l’ Histoire*, which mentions the attractive hypotheses of the „series of phenomenon and events, always unique and specific”¹⁹. Then Koselleck put me numerous questions about Xenopol’s biography and personality, about his studies and his references. Right after Koselleck’s return to Bielefeld, he borrowed Xenopol’s above-mentioned book from a German library. From the letter he sent me on 24 September 2005 results that he read it, recognizing the author’s merits:

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ A.D. Xenopol, *Teoria istoriei* [Theory of History], Translation from the French Language by Olga Zaicik, Introductory study by Al. Zub, (București: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing, 1997), 110.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 102.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 102-103.

¹⁷ Vezi Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* (Eine Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften), (Freiburg i.Br./Leipzig: 1896).

¹⁸ A.D. Xenopol, *Teoria istoriei* [Theory of History], 107.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 5.

„[...] Meanwhile I borrowed A.D. Xenopol's book „La theorie de l'histoire” [...] Xenopol was an extremely productive intermediary between the German culture and the French one, which is today again repeating due to your contribution. I convey you and your wife all the best and I thank you again. Yours, Reinhart Koselleck²⁰.

***Graduiertenkolleg Temeswar and Begriffsgeschichte Rumäniens/
The <Reinhart Koselleck> Doctoral School of Timișoara and the Romanian Conceptual History***

The project of a future *Begriffsgeschichte* of Central and Eastern Europe started with the research of the fundamental concepts and of the Romanian social-political languages, the long-term objective being re-thinking the working methodology and re-writing the regional national histories. Being influenced by the fact that the cross-examination of the linguistic parameters in which a history was elaborated was essential from Koselleck's point of view, I outlined the steps of a first undertaking, namely re-reading the fundamental sources and formulating new questions about the past.

The project concerning the development of a *Graduiertenkolleg* (<Reinhart Koselleck> International Doctoral School of Conceptual History) in Timișoara and of a Centre for Advanced Studies in History was shaped as a follow-up to the echo of Koselleck's work, but also as an outcome of our recurrent discussions and of the direct impulse got from the historian during our meetings in Sofia and in Timișoara²¹. A blissful meddling with the preoccupations of Armin Heinen of the Aachen University regarding Romanian history made possible the starting-up of two projects with the support of the Volkswagen Foundation of Germany and of the National Council for Scientific Research in Romania. The projects are running as of 2008, and respectively 2011, and are evolving in the perspectives initially thought together with Reinhart Koselleck. In the *Graduiertenkolleg Temeswar/ The <Reinhart Koselleck> International Doctoral School of Conceptual History of Timisoara* were trained doctoral students from Romania, Germany and Hungary, there were coordinated six doctoral thesis, all finalized through the examination of professors from Romania, Germany and Hungary. In the School there were published articles, studies and books.

The publishing of the above-mentioned doctoral thesis is currently in progress. Team researches made possible the organization of international conferences at the <Reinhart Koselleck> Doctoral School and the Centre for Advanced Studies in History of the West University of Timișoara, attended by historians, sociologists and linguists from Germany, France, USA, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania in 2009, 2012 and 2014. A particular focus is granted to the

²⁰ Letter kept in the archive of the addressee..

²¹ My preoccupations concerning conceptual history were daing back prior to the meetings with Reinhart Koselleck and they were first capitalized in the book dedicated to the evolution of a few Romanian concepts. See Victor Neumann, *Neam, Popor sau Națiune? Despre identitățile politice europene* [Neam/ Kinship People or Nation? On the European Political Identities](București: Editura Curtea Veche, 2003; 2005).

preparation and publication of studies and volumes of history of concepts and conceptual history on Romanian, Central and Southeast European topics. One of these, coordinated by the myself and by Armin Heinen, *Istoria României prin concepte* [History of Romania through Concepts] (Polirom, 2010), has been recently edited in English under the title *Concepts of Romanian History* (CEU Press, Budapest, 2013).

<Reinhart Koselleck> Library in Timișoara



In October 2013, Reinhart Koselleck's private library reached Timișoara. Katharina Koselleck's idea, one of the historian's daughters, to contact me in a view of a possible transfer of her father's library to Timișoara has got a prompt positive answer from the West University of Timișoara. Following the legal and administrative preparations the transfer itself took place. Then, a few more months of selection, ordering and cataloguing the books - a work coordinated by myself and my assistant, dr. Cristian Roiban and in which our students were involved - followed.

On the 10th of February 2014, the new <Reinhart Koselleck> Library was formally opened within the Centre for Advanced Studies in History of the West University of Timsoara. The festivity took place in the presence of the German General Consul in Timișoara, Mr. Rolf Mahrn, of the West University of Timișoara leadership, of academics and researchers in the fields of humanities and social and political sciences, and of a large number of students. Katharina Koselleck's participation to the ceremony was emotional, remembering a part of her father's biography. She expressed her delightfulness and content for transferring her father's library in good hands, being convinced that it would serve for both the academic milieu in Timișoara, as well as the ones the rest of Romania with the aim of extending *Begriffsgeschichte/ conceptual history* studies.

Reinhart Koselleck's library contains 5,855 titles. The particular interest for the library comes from the fact that it is about a collection of books useful for studies in more disciplines such as history, linguistics, philosophy political sciences, arts, sociology, psychology, geography and law. It contains a lot of editions - old and new alike – of the histories of Prussia, Germany, France, England, Italy, Spain and the USA. Also, the library contains numerous working instruments such as dictionaries, lexicons and periodicals.

The largest part of the books collected in Koselleck's private library are in German language. There also many pieces in English, French, Italian and Spanish as well. The research of the library facilitates the access to Koselleck's notes in the books, to identifying and researching one of the bibliographical references of his work, to find out information concerning the extra-professional preoccupations of the scholar. The library is valuable not only itself by serving to any researcher in the fields of social sciences and the humanities, but it is also useful firstly to those who are dedicated to inter-disciplinary studies, respectively to the history of concepts and conceptual history. The circle of specialists from Romania and other neighbouring countries is impressed by the existence of such a

collection of books in Timișoara, which confers a real chance for developing a centre of reference for *Begriffsgeschichte* studies dedicated to Central and Eastern Europe.

All the achievements in Timișoara during the latest decade bear Koselleck's hall-mark, namely the Doctoral School, the Centre for Advanced Studies in History, the conferences, the publications and last but not least the Library.

I have to mention that I am more than grateful for the encounters with the scholar, for his curiosity for the evolution of our university circle, for the discussions on topics of history, anthropology and politics.

What equally impressed me about the great historian was his outstanding openness to the working hypotheses and thoughts of others, to the human and intellectual profile of his partners of dialogue; also, of his real interest for the places, people, intellectuals and books which remained unknown to him and which – as he considered – had to be recovered through the drive of the most committed and genuine researchers.