

# Theory of history and history of historiography: Openings for “unconventional histories”

Teoria da história e história da historiografia: aberturas para  
“histórias não-convencionais”

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss the relationship between what we will call “unconventional histories”, the Theory of History and the History of Historiography. We will discuss the possible openings of these disciplines to the spheres that strain with their more settled protocols. Moreover, we seek to reflect on the relationship of these openings with the emergence of a temporality that has transformed the Humanities and their epistemological priorities. We will argue that the practical past, the *Critical Quantitative Inquiry*, the paradigm of presence, Public History and popular historiographies would be some examples of openings for “unconventional histories” since these perspectives can critically intervene in speeches and academic and historiographical paradigms.

## KEYWORDS

Theory and History of Historiography; unconventional histories; Public History.

## RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir a relação entre o que chamaremos de “histórias não-convencionais”, a teoria da história e a história da historiografia. Discutiremos aberturas possíveis das disciplinas para esferas que tensionam com seus protocolos sedimentados e, também, a relação destas aberturas com a emergência de uma temporalidade que tem transformado as humanidades e suas prioridades epistemológicas. Argumentaremos que os passados práticos, a *critical quantitative inquiry*, o paradigma da presença, a história pública e as historiografias populares seriam alguns exemplos de aberturas para “histórias não-convencionais”, à medida que intervêm criticamente no que diz respeito aos discursos e paradigmas históricos e historiográficos academicamente instituídos.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Teoria e História da Historiografia; Histórias não-convencionais; História Pública.

Current research has prioritized the need for reestablishing our relationship with the past and temporality in general. These relationships occur autonomously when compared to those produced in academic spaces like universities. The reason for this phenomenon is related to the confrontation of a certain feeling of failure, or even of some irrelevance of History as a discipline in contemporary debates. Hans U. Gumbrecht explained that the time had come for professional historians to face the fact that no one relies on historical knowledge in practical situations (GUMBRECHT 1997, p. 411). Such claim means that the institutional preponderance achieved by the discipline in its manifestation in Western cultures from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards was widely problematized. And it was from this problematization that a formal conception of History has been “replaced” by other forms of access to the past.

Although History remains in the curricula of Western schools, those who teach it feel that speeches used to assign legitimacy to it are losing strength (GUMBRECHT 1997). Gumbrecht also emphasizes that the growth of interest in history that occurs in contexts other than academic institutions in the strictest sense is very distinct. There is a desire for history manifested in the everyday life through literature, films, television series, music, videogames, plays, arts in general, in other words, through television, radio, museums, and other media. This is a demand that cannot be ignored. Understanding the place of History as a discipline in the contemporary world – considering its limits and potentialities –, implies incorporating this second phenomenon in its analysis, starting from the new social configuration of the period to which it is related.

Gumbrecht’s provocation is not the only one, several works reflect on the diagnosis of the limits of History and its relation with the “crisis of historicism”. These works also investigate new demands and possibilities for the discipline. This article collects these reflections, aiming to discuss the relationship between what we will call Ewa Domasnska’s “unconventional histories” (DOMANSKA 2004), the Theory of History and the

History of Contemporary Historiography. The first section of this article describes the birth process of the History of Historiography, of the History discipline in general, and how the sedimentation of a new temporality has transformed the Humanities and their epistemological-ethical priorities. In the second section, I define the term “unconventional histories” starting from the contributions of Ewa Domanska. The third and fourth sections of the article explore how the *Critical Quantitative Inquiry*, the paradigm of presence, public history and popular historiographies can be understood as openings for “unconventional histories”. These unconventional stories stress the historical speeches (epistemological and ethical) and paradigms academically instituted through intervention/criticism. In this regard, this article proposes to broaden and disseminate these debates rather than their systematization.

## History of Historiography and Theory of History: the search for its performance function

The formal birth of History as a discipline occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and unfolded from the emergence of Modernity and the crisis of representation. These two phenomena are linked to the discovery of time as an absolute agent of change. According to Reinhart Koselleck, the emergence of Modernity and the crisis of representation indicate a gradual loss of empathy for the past and estrangement to their proper ability to find an orientation due to the emergence of unprecedented experiences, whereas the future would need to be formed by increasingly fast human activities. This phenomenon led to ruptures in how History was experienced and produced. The discipline thus gained unprecedented contours in Modernity. From the modern philosophies of History and later from historicisms, the past and the future (quickly defined as dimensions of meta-historical and transcultural temporality) were shaped by History. In other words, History reorganized, theoretically and methodologically, the past from the projections opened by the futures, and such form of proceeding was something proper to

the historicist worldview (KOSELLECK 2006; 2013). Thus, we must note that the use of "historicism" in this article refers to a social construction of time that claimed for itself specific forms of historical practices.

According to Foucault, modern society lived a "crisis of representation". For Gumbrecht, this was the birth of the "second-order observer", which can also be a "crisis of perspectives" or "temporalization of perspectives," as Koselleck called it. All these denominations describe the same phenomenon that must be considered when one seeks an accurate birth for History (FOUCAULT 2000; GUMBRECHT 1998; KOSELLECK 2006, p. 161-188). This phenomenon refers to a discontinuity in the Western world that happens as a consequence of the loss of the integration of language, space and time, a phenomenon that reached its apex in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an intense historicity that penetrated all things and assigned a historical character to them, on which everything would be subject to change. With this phenomenon a given language lost its privileged space in maintaining the organicity of the world. Truth would no longer be contained in things, it would be subject to History and mankind, conscious of the multiplicity of points of view, would be responsible for navigating it. Thus, the study of contemporary history was avoided since the analysis of events required a temporal distance that would allow a broader observation precisely because of the passage of time. Truth started to depend on the temporal perspective. The problem that emerged was from which perspective we could "truly" observe the world. From this questioning, the narrativization and historicization of reality surfaced as strategies for coping with the crisis, the world now was associated with a text that had to be constantly rewritten.

The "crisis of perspectives" forced historical knowledge to reevaluate itself. History as a discipline would need to be constantly redone since both the vision and the understanding of events were transformed as time differed and according to the very subject of knowledge. The historiographical production

began to be inserted in more universal conjunctures through the syntheses of the philosophies of history and the historicisms that sought to (re)organize time using historical meanings. In this context, the historiography exercise was born as a critical elaboration of the previously published historiography, this is the History of Historiography, an index of the transformations of History as a discipline and as a space for the thematization of temporal and spatial experiences with their social, cultural and political developments. When related to the Theory of History, the History of Historiography also serves to identify the tendencies and demands of the field of History in general (ARAUJO and RANGEL 2015; KOSELLECK 2006, p. 161-188).

History was developed not only as a result of the concentration of scientific and specialized debates in search for a truth that would surface later on, its political and social dimensions were also recurrent and decisive for the constitution of its characteristics. Similarly, the interest in writing contemporary history was crucial to support it, given that it refers to the existence of competing patterns in the process of disciplining the field (ARAUJO 2015). History echoed a desire for the intervention of subjects in public and everyday life over the course of Modernity, even when it was strikingly marked by a more “scientific” dimension that sought to neutralize individual perspectives in relation to the past. This was fundamental to its institutional formation. Therefore, even if in a conflictive way, History’s process of becoming a discipline fostered demands for a form of History related to the production of presence, impression, orientation and intervention in public debates (ARAUJO 2011).

By establishing a distinction between the “historical past” and the “practical past” Hayden White, in the wake of Michael Oakeshott, points to the disputes and tensions in the institutionalization of the discipline. The “historical past” – the result of the professionalization of history – would have the establishment of “factual truths” that could be empirically traversed as its ultimate goal. The most radical consequence of this process was that historiography distanced itself from

the discussions of its broader social functions for the most part. When History began being produced in a non-passionate way, it would have marked its distance from literature. Such departure in relation to literature implicated in some sort of domestication of the imagination of the past. For White, this “historical past” would have little value in reorganizing/interfering with contemporary debates because a historiography linked to the historical past would not stop thematizing it, consequently leading to a distancing from the critical gaze over the present. In contrast, the “practical past” would deal with the need to act more specifically in contemporary debates, involving discussions of more active actions toward the present. This is a concept of the past that acts in our daily lives, to which we turn voluntarily, and it can be related to the “space of experience” by establishing more intimate commitments to ethics and to imagination (WHITE 2012). Due to the establishment of a new temporality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the future loses a certain capacity to motivate humans and the “practical past” would be more evoked in relation to the “space of experience”. This experience would be determined by the need for empathy, emotion or some orientation. We must note that this is not a pragmatic orientation based on the assumption that the past has the answers needed for our immediate contemporary challenges.<sup>1</sup>

*1 - This orientation is not to be confused with *Historia Magistra Vitae*, which was characterized by the rhetorical and exemplary artifice related to a circular time experience (KOSELLECK 2006, p.41-61).*

Hitherto the accelerated present and the bet on an open future, both capable of fulfilling the expectations generated by such almost instantaneous present, were the shelter and energy source of the Cartesian self in relation to the crisis of representation. After the second half of the 20th century, and precisely at that moment this perspective became more fragile (GUMBRECHT 2015, p. 93-111). The totalitarian experiences of the 20th century weakened the energy sources that shaped the past and the future into a *télos*. Historical narratives grew in number when faced by the growing uncertainty that reality would be oriented towards the achievement of progress. These historical narratives began to dispute space with institutional and predominant macro-narratives that bet on the accomplishment of a destiny of History. Narratives would

no longer have the strength to become meta-narratives since these transformed the future into what they wanted to avoid: a world permeated by violence, authoritarianism and the growth of social inequalities.

The emergence of this phenomenon is associated with the configuration of a new temporality, as mentioned above. Imagining futures that are distant from tradition is much more difficult in this temporality.<sup>2</sup> The notion of time to which we refer to also changes the relation with the canon, causing its authority to be repeatedly questioned by other emerging narratives (GUMBRECHT 2015, p. 93-111). We must highlight that, according to Achille Mbembe, this process signals the fundamental experience of our time, and that such fundamental experience consists in the fact that Europe is no longer the “world’s center of gravity”, and its decentralization led to a certain weakening of the modern knowledge project (MBEMBE 2014).

When we refer to a social configuration of time in which the future loses importance, we realize that one of the dimensions of the past that stands out is its performative power. In this sense, performance function as an evocation of the past, not only being used by the need to produce causal and sequential explanatory narratives, but by a resumption of its own experience. On the one hand, if this performative dimension frees the risk of a certain nostalgia that intends on recovering moral values and conservative social practices, on the other, it diminishes the relationship with the past from its objectification. In the case of the Humanities, Ewa Domanska argues that the expansion of performance – or the performative turn in that field –, is a phenomenon linked to the return to materiality, a response to the weakening of the “world as a text” metaphor, of the world with meanings to be “identified” and constructed. Performance is understood as something that goes beyond the expected institutional behaviors and the contemplative attitude towards reality. Through performance, the world is now seen as a plurality of actions and possibilities from which one acts, not only something to be interpreted (DOMANSKA 2011).

*2 - For the thematization of contemporary temporality, several works can be referred to, for example, ARAUJO and PEREIRA 2018; BEVERNAGE 2012; CHAKRABARTY 2018; HARTOG 2014.*



In the specific case of the Theory of History and History of Historiography, which open space for this type of relationship with the past, such fields can be constituted for activities dedicated to the criticism of final versions of History. These fields seek to show their character of possibility or, in other words, their plurality. Based on Walter Benjamin, Marcelo Rangel suggests that a historiography that responds to the challenges of our time “would not only be devoted to the knowledge of *every past*, but to the participation and continuation of certain critical entities and performances dedicated to the struggle for differentiation and reorganization of history” (RANGEL 2016, p. 170).

The concern to rethink the founding protocols of History and to understand other spaces and languages available to access the past can be combined with what has been called the ethical-political turn. This turn is a recognition of the need imposed by the current historical horizon in which a several humanists are dedicated to discuss the contemporary world, its own determinations, problems and possibilities. We must note that this is a different ethical demand from that of historicist worldviews that sought to standardize, and to control reality based on a universalist project. To have ethics as a central element in the thematization of the contemporary world is attentive to the imponderability character of History, it seeks to explain possibilities and differences, not control them (ARAUJO and RANGEL 2015; RANGEL and SANTOS 2015).

## “Unconventional Histories”

*And what is really naive about historians is that they always think that the current way of doing history is finally the best way.*  
Hayden White (1998)

Disciplinary protocols are established by the confrontation between experiences, subjects and procedures. Thus, some experiences, subjects and procedures are placed in the center (standardized and normalized elements that become



“conventional” for the production of historical knowledge) and others are left on the sidelines (and to these we may refer to as “unconventional”). In general terms, “unconventional histories” would not only belong to History but would also be associated with the “new humanities”. This is an intervention and criticism speech made to certain sedimented historical interpretations, seeking to take form from “others” who were “expelled” from part of conventional history (DOMANSKA 2004, p. 2). The “others” that the “unconventional” intends to draw from the margins refer not only to new subjects (women, animals, ethnicities, etc.), but also to research methods and procedures, writing and teaching that necessarily “question” the “consecrated” protocols of History. We refer to debate protocols and demands that are responsible for the continuous transformation of the social functions of History and of the Humanities in general.

When listing the main “conventions” of a certain type of academic History, in a simplified way, we would highlight some points: a) “Correspondent” truth as a research principle, something that requires a consensus within a given community about what constitutes true statements; b) scientific objectivity; c) the search for causal explanations; d) linear narratives and a realistic writing style, in which imagination would have to be denied, for example.

If the concept of “unconventional histories” is defined in contrast to these protocols we reach the following transformations in relation to “consecrated” conventions: a) there is attention to the notion of truth as an institution of power; b) subjectivity is defended; c) narratives would not be determined only by causal relations and chronology; d) there are different forms of experimentation from the past and; thus written texts and meaning would not be the only privileged means for this. Moreover, this definition does not mean any rigidity or isolation between the spheres being dealt with (DOMANSKA 2004).

The category of “unconventional” refers to historical theories and practices that impose demands that re-emphasize some

protocols that, until then, were central to the discipline. These criticisms emerge within the disciplinary field itself, but also from non-academic spaces. However, the term “unconventional” – understood as a criticism of the most consecrated academic procedures – can be understood, in principle, as something negative, abnormal or improper, a word constituted from an adverb of negation. Considering this idea, using the term “unconventional” risks creating the impression that these forms of historical productions are inferior (or superior in some cases) to what is produced in traditional and conventional settings, even if this is not the objective of the category suggested by Domanska. Furthermore, I do not ignore the need to create a new category capable of overcoming a possible hierarchical view of knowledge, or even the impression that it is a mere criticism of the “authority” conquered by the subject.

It is important to observe that the criticism made by what we call “unconventional” in the face of conventional protocols is the condition that allows the existence (and survival) of History as a discipline (DOMANSKA 2004, p. 4). Academic History is organized from denial efforts and from the incorporation of different relationships with the past. This means that academic History is formed by a tension between understandings and practices that have been institutionalized and those that are latent or left on the sidelines. Therefore, the conventional and the unconventional establish a dialectical tension with each other. Such dialectical tension of openness and incorporation is precisely what changes through new temporal configurations and according to political and social spaces, bringing new subjects, methods and narrative forms. There is a risk of neutralization as the discipline incorporates such procedures that were not at the center of debates. According to Domanska, this occurs is because the process of becoming a discipline depends on the removal of everything that may threaten its existence (DOMANSKA 2004, p. 4). Every process would have a character of violence and segregation, but it would never be free from the tension and openness imposed by the “unconventional”. The dialectic that we mentioned, especially in

contemporaneity, would have as an idea of power the imposition of a tendency to “disobedience” within the discipline History and the Humanities in general. Such disobedience would be based on the recurrence of feelings such as empathy, sincerity, affection, experience, new subjects, new cosmologies, and so on. This set of feelings would bring to light what is left or obscured within the discipline itself (DOMANSKA 2004).

## About Risk Thinking: *Critical Qualitative Inquiry* and Presence

The demands for unconventional practices evoke the possibility of changing the social function of both History and the Humanities, the *Critical Qualitative Inquiry* is an example. In general, what exists is a quest for social justice that takes place within a transformative paradigm. The intention is to challenge the predominant forms that are responsible for inequality, poverty, human oppression and injustice. This proposal is firmly rooted in a human rights agenda and requires an ethical framework based on social justice. The projects involved in the *Critical Qualitative Inquiry* are focused on public education, social policy-making, and community transformation that also occurs via an aesthetic-ethical relationship with the past. The motivation for this type of action is related to a worldview in which “as global citizens, we are no longer called to interpret the world”, but to change it by resisting against injustice and constructing an inclusive and participatory democracy (DENZIN 2017, p. 9). According to Norman Denzin, the *Critical Qualitative Inquiry* community is generally defined by acting through perspectives that cross feminism, queer theory, critical theory, as well as cultural and postcolonial studies. These research lines act both in the centers and on the margins of the intersecting disciplines. The intersection being referred here is found through themes such as communication, race, ethnicity, religious and women’s studies, sociology, history, anthropology, literary critique, political science and economics. There is an interest in creating a safe space capable of reconciling the

qualitative analyses of certain realities with the search for creative alternatives to their confrontation. This points to the configuration of a field in which “writers, teachers, and students are willing to take risks to move back and forth between the personal and the political, the biographical and the historical” (DENZIN 2017, p. 14). To this end, researchers of this field use precisely new performative methods, such as ethno-dramas and social theater. These two methods are able to make oppressive cultural like racism, homophobia and sexism visible.

Particularly, I associate the need for creating new methods – as Denzin argues considering Gumbrecht’s propositions –, as an abandonment of the need to define methodological paths. Although it may seem contradictory, both authors think that their proposals define a certain limit of scientificity in the Humanities. Gumbrecht has “always been convinced that claiming the rigor of a ‘method’ is a trope by which humanists seek an easy escape from their traditional inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* scientists” (GUMBRECHT 1997, p. 425). Moreover, the author believes that the concern of Humanities researchers should be focused elsewhere:

It is both an obligation for, and a privilege of, humanists to practice “risky thinking”. That is to say, instead of subordinating ourselves to rational schemes of evidence and the constraints of systems, we “scientists of the mind” (*Geistwissenschaftler*) should seek to confront and imagine whatever might entail a disruption of everyday life and the assumptions underlying its function (GUMBRECHT 2014, p. XI).

Gumbrecht’s criticism of the conventional protocols of History and of the Human Sciences is, above all, a claim for a distinct relationship with things, beings, bodies and with the past that goes beyond and challenges a conception of anthropology. The anthropology in question is exactly the one in which reason would be superior to bodily and material elements. Gumbrecht’s criticism is also ontological and his works it surfaces from his considerations about *presence*. I would like to address one of

the possible contributions of the presence paradigm using an example related to the History curricula in Brazil.

The Brazilian educational curricula is under a growing demand for the inclusion of History of Africa and the History of Indigenous populations, facing however significant resistance to the historical need for its democratization. To explore the different reasons why this occurs is impossible in a single article, however, I would like to emphasize – although in a general way – how the discussions about university curricula have difficulty transposing the internal debates of universities, debates that are “surrounded by traditional jealousies crystallized in the intense specialization of the field” (BENTIVOGLIO 2017). The centrality conferred on Europe and the chronological-linear approach are just a few examples that evidence the preservation of a “traditional curricula that is still quite similar to the curricula existing since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (BENTIVOGLIO 2017).

Among the many barriers that impede the inclusion of Indigenous, African and Asian studies in curricula, I emphasize the insistence on establishing a relationship with the past that is largely given by “meanings” (GUMBRECHT 2010), this is a limitation that occurs in a culture determined by logical-formal statements. These statements aim to exhaust a theme from causal explanations and Western approaches. To explain the implications of this model I turn to a story often told by Ewa Domanska in her classes and interviews, a story she shared with me at one of our meetings.

In 2010, at the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences in Amsterdam, she organized a discussion on “the rights of the dead”. A Dutch historian who was present stated that this table was not intended to discuss the “ghosts of ancestors”. Faced with such statement, a historian from Nigeria who was also present was furious: she argued that the ghosts of ancestors are part of the daily lives of their people and that this does not refer to an irrational or primitive belief, but rather to their lives and how they coexist with their ancestors. Other historians from African countries stood up applauded. For Domanska, this expressed a demand

from African historians present at the congress (although not only from them) that this belief system cannot be discarded or reduced to some kind of folk belief. In reality, what some reduce to a folk belief is a way of existing and experiencing the world that can and should be present when discussing the rights of the dead. Or, leading the question to the case that concerns us: when a study on Africa is claimed.

We can add to this reasoning that the violations suffered by ethnic and religious groups throughout Brazilian history, including the denial of their worldviews, is also related to the insistence on the “reason/sense” pair. This pair is at the basis of the academic discussions and, consequently, of the established curricula. Some examples of how reason/sense determines reality can be seen when we observe the murder of indigenous peoples by the State and by loggers and farmers, the permanent evangelization of these peoples by religious groups, the disrespect and violence that neo-Pentecostal fundamentalists have subjected the religions of others (including murdering their leaders and destroying their religious spaces), the judiciary that has imposed rules that alter the practices of these religions, some vegan critiques that disregard the sacred dimension of Afro-Brazilian religions in their relationship with animals, nature, and so on. All these events are related to practices of violence involving different historical, political and social issues. Thus, my argument is that the criticism and resistance to these violence practices also goes through rethinking the epistemological, ontological and temporal paradigms centered on meaning and representation, even if this criticism is not restricted to that. These paradigms impose monopolies of interpretation that deny and/or hierarchize difference, preventing the diversification of modes of experimenting reality.

By returning to Gumbrecht, we realize that the dimension of risk in his thinking, as previously mentioned, refers to “presence” as an alternative to the emphasis placed by the Humanities on “meaning” (GUMBRECHT 2010).

“Presence” would be an ontological dimension of existence, a non-hermeneutic way of engaging in relationships with the world, in which the attention would be on things-themselves, returning to experiences and their forms of apprehension through the body. “Presence” is also a desire, *the desire-of-presence*, that would act as a resistance to the domestication of the body imposed by the world of techniques. This is also a critique of the “transcendental” foundation in the structure and functions of human consciousness, which led to the wearing away of the body as an important dimension to life and to the triumph of Cartesian rationality (GUMBRECHT 2014).

Similarly, Ewa Domanska argues that thinking about the past in terms of its presence assumes the attention to the relationships between the human and the nonhuman, the organic and the inorganic, between people and “things.” This reflection process is related to the criticism of the anthropocentric character of History that is based on a dichotomous conception between mind and body, and subject and object. Thus, criticism turns to other equally important forms of existence that are not limited to human beings, this is a demand linked to “new material studies” that do not comprehend matter as an inferior reality to the spirit, relating it to the apprehension of the world. In this perspective, the characterization of things as “dead”, “missing”, “absent” or “past” would be a means of neutralizing their threatening *otherness* or a way of disciplining and shaping them into a narrative. Domanska questioned the understanding of the past as a field of absent experiences that can only be assimilated through scientific historical research capable of attributing a causal linear narrative. Rather, the past would be a performative force with impacts that go beyond consciousness. What we treat as the past seems to set up a field of experiences that acts on us from our body, which constitutes us, and that must be considered in addition to a representation (DOMANSKA 2006).



## Public History and Popular Historiographies: the accomplishment of the *éthos* of History

In an article for the *New York Times* opinion page titled “Historians Shouldn’t Be Pundits”, Moshik Temkin argued that while Donald Trump may be considered a danger to the world, he has been a “boon” to historians. Such blessing is given because of the turbulence being wrought, making historians be called to thematize and elaborate on the meaning of their government through “30-second” speeches on TV or short articles. As a historian, Temkin said he is happy with the well-deserved “publicity” the discipline has gained; however, he is also concerned about the “speediness” and “superficiality” used by historians to synthesize Trump’s rise to power and of certain historical analogies that are being made about his administration. Tomkin’s motivation for writing the article was to draw attention to the fact that certain thematized analogies can be dangerous, such as the comparison between the Trump administration and the Nixon era. According to the historian, if Watergate had shown the effectiveness of democracy and American institutions, there can be no assurance that the Trump era will meet the same fate. According to Temkin, in the present context it would be up to the historian to provide a critical and unaccommodated account of how this conjuncture was created, answering, for example, the following questions:

1. How did a rich man who never contributed to the public good become a public figure?
2. Why are the opinions, evidently misinformed (and even false), posted by him on Twitter important to millions of people?
3. How has wealth made his access to power and political influence possible?
4. Why has xenophobia been such a force in a country built by immigrants?

Temkin further stated that historians have answered these questions, but that they do not serve the interests of American media, thus reserving the debate to very restricted spaces (TEMKIN 2017).

Another question is the following: will historians sit and allow journalists without History training to do their job? Responding to Temkin's article and also published in the opinion section of the *New York Times*, Keri Leigh Merritt disagreed with him in a text entitled "Let the Historians Speak". To Merritt, the central debate is that historians must figure out how to speak to wider audiences; therefore, the analogy would be a useful hook for creating engagement and inciting people's interest thus leading them to want to learn more. For Merritt, Temkin assumes that most Americans are capable and willing to read longer, more nuanced analyzes, although the disparities in education would indicate the opposite. Merritt argued that historians have to be on the front lines, directly speaking to people, otherwise they would allow a politically determined media to "shape" the American public (MERRITT 2017).

About Temkin and Merritt's views, other questions can be asked: would the appearance of historians in the media suffice for a "more efficient training" in History regarding the public? Would the achievement of a new format of communication aimed at the "non-specialized" public be enough for History to "ethically" and "politically" train people? Would it suffice to say that historians are doing their part, but that media would not be interested in hearing them because of specific political interests that also support it?

These debates are at the heart of the discussions on Public History and Popular Historiographies. These discussions have emphasized the contemporary divergences on the means of production/apprehension/teaching of the contents and forms of History, imposing critics on its path and epistemological priorities. In this sense, Public History and Popular Historiographies, and the places where these debates echo in, can be understood as openings for "unconventional history" according to the previously proposed ideas.

Public History has multiple definitions (ALMEIDA, MAUAD and SANTHIAGO 2016; ALMEIDA and ROVAI 2012), it can be the History made for the public; the history made with the audience; the history made by the public; and yet again, it can be the very relationship between history and public (SANTHIAGO 2016, p. 23-36). Despite the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of defining Public History in the face of the different experiences of the field around the world, we can say that its core is the very interest and interlocution with the ethical-political action. To achieve its goal, such attention to social processes and their conflicts is fundamental, regardless if it means to work outside the university, to broaden audiences, to deconstruct the hierarchy of authority in the production of knowledge, to incorporate non-institutional relationships with the past, to produce a self-reflexivity of the field (SANTHIAGO 2016, p. 23-36) or to deconstruct sedimented historical understandings. Public History also aims at the expansion of the labor market for historians, as well as the insertion of History in the media as one of its objectives (SANTHIAGO 2016, p. 23-36).

Public History is not to be confused with and it is not limited to a translation or adaptation of academic content to “non-specialized” audiences, since this perspective is still at risk of maintaining a hierarchy between “academic” and “non-academic” spaces. A more complex performance of Public History assumes the understanding of this area as a field that would involve research and academic approaches, the production of historical knowledge in non-academic settings, classrooms and different audiences connected to some type of historical interest. Public History is a space where the public historian, the history teacher and the “professional historian” can share the issues that are of direct interest, since these surface from a popular and less specialized demand.

When taken as a meeting place, Public History can bring different interests together through historical knowledge, helping to deconstruct the hierarchy between “academic” and “non-academic” spaces by considering that scientific knowledge

is often a product of social structures starting from common sense. Attention to this perspective may also help to break the projection of the privileged/redemptive character of institutional knowledge. Furthermore, it may question the idea that the public historian should offer his audience only “what they desire”. Public History’s purpose would not be merely to “serve society”, because by corroborating the assumptions of serving society, historians risk treating History only as a product to be consumed, which could lead to the accentuation of prejudices and historical structures that need to be demystified.

We can thus affirm that Public History assumes the expansion of public spaces and historical knowledge. The performance of the discipline in different spheres of the academic environment would be one of the central elements for the characterization of the public historian. Some of the examples of spaces and activities for public history would be museums, radio broadcasting, print and television, literature, films, theater, arts in general, oral history, history teaching, and political activism. In this perspective, the dialogue with the “production” of the historical experience performed by historians who work outside the university is necessary, making it more complex – not in a subordination sense, but considering interdependence. In the same way, allowing the same process to happen in relation to academic knowledge is also necessary. This would require the production of new formats of texts, languages and technologies for communication in all these spheres of conception of History.

However, we must note that when reducing the problem of the encounter between a historian and a wider public to the production of new dialogue formats and to the dominion of technologies we are not exhausting the problem of enlarging spaces and of public for the discipline History. Jurandir Malerba showed, for example, how the production of some historical novels on the history of Brazil and Latin America, written in a way and in a language attractive to the general public, brings negative consequences due to the reproduction of stereotypes, prejudices and violence (MALERBA 2014). Stressing that an

accessible format is not sufficient to establish a new form of communication if it is not accompanied by the care with empirical research and with its ethical implications.

The production of new communication formats related to digital technology must also be discussed. The openness to digital media has forced public historians to face a rapidly changing technological field. The Public History also occurs in virtual universes composed of interactive three-dimensional environments, internet blogs, social networking mashups and mobile applications, often involving large investments and financial risks (HURLEY 2016). However, the question yet to be asked is whether this relationship with technology has improved the ability of public history to achieve its main goals such as stimulating and qualifying civic and democratic activism.

Andrew Hurley highlights that deficits in education (in addition to financial ones, of course) have deprived peripheral communities of the possibility of fully engaging with technology. He raised these data based on a research conducted in a poor neighborhood of St. Louis, Missouri. The initial design proposed by Hurley had to be adapted by combining digital instruments with more traditional modes of communication. As an example, the production of virtual realities and the possibility of three-dimensional immersion, without access to effective educational programs, makes the past function more as a constraint than as a repertoire of ideas and inspiration sources (HURLEY 2016). In these cases, one “consumes the past” as a product through the expansion of marketing; however, the past’s critical, reflective and aesthetic potential is lost.

When emphasizing the thematization of contemporary issues “capable of affecting ways of thinking and political action; themes that inevitably act in the common formation of the public” (SILVA 2016, p. 14), Public History is intensely connected to classrooms. Therefore, classrooms are one of the places that lead the integration between the production and circulation of historical knowledge, its forms of presentation and an audience with a practical demand regarding what is learned.

In this sense, the teaching of History would be an example of the performance of Public History. There is an interest in training people for citizenship and for the amplification of voices and subjects (SILVA 2016, p. 15). This happens when the need for the development of History teaching comes from different methodologies and languages in which the imagination, for example, would have decisive importance to avoid abstract simplifications and distance from the past (BARBOSA 2016; ABREU and RANGEL 2015 ).

David King argued that Public History is a threat to most traditional History departments because of the existence of strong prejudice stemming from the well-defined and settled constitution of “disciplinary boundaries and in favor of texts and research of European and very ancient historical subjects, and the more you distance yourself from any of them [...] the more resistance you will find” (KING *Apud* SANTIAGO 2016, p. 214). King claims that Public History points to an opening of new historical approaches. These new historical approaches tend to be more democratizing and dedicated to difference for acting in the contemporary world, and what would determine a redirection of the social function of History would be precisely such democratizing dimension that is present. If, on the one hand, Public History can be understood as a dialogue/performance of the academic world with different spaces, on the other, it is also the realization of an *éthos* proper to historical experiences. King defined Public History as “the institutionalization of a spirit that many historians have had for hundreds of years – but there was no way to manifest such spirit” (KING *Apud* SANTIAGO 2016, p. 213-214). For Public History, this spirit is the accomplishment of an *éthos* of historical knowledge, defined by me as a demand for the social function of History focused on acting on contemporary debates, aiming at understanding and complexifying issues of its public through different formats and spaces of dialogue. In short, it is the secular effort to reduce the boundary between the conventional and the “unconventional”. However, this effort does not mean that the performance of Public History

is free from the risk of simplifying or impoverishing the experiences of the past while attempting to understand and to mobilize it in a pragmatic sense.

The contemporary debate about History presents a demand for the inclusion of popular visions about the past – running parallel to the development of Public History – that has intensified. We are increasingly investigating the ways in which we popularly assimilate some historical experiences precisely because “professional” historiography does not fully control the access to historical reflection and production. The experiences and narratives produced by and directed to non-specialized audiences, having more impact on the subjects’ relationship with History than with the institutional space (PALETSCHEK 2011, p. 1-16), have been the main object of popular historiographies.

The effort to liberate the past from the constraints of academic History has allowed historical consciousness to be increasingly analyzed via popular understandings. This transformation enables a more pragmatic action directed at the contemporary world (PIHLAINEN 2014, p. 16). Popular historiographies do not concern a standardization of History as the result of a single product but reflect the complexity of the cultural and social interface. The popular apprehension of History can act as a paradigm of important analyses for the ways society thinks about History and as open spaces for reflection, and even for the suppression, of an objectifying relationship with the past (DE GROOT 2009).

Popular historiographies that closely follow the different worldviews and ontologies allow a description of certain relationships with reality and still the power to claim the displacement of consecrated priorities and scientific bases. The works of the historian Luiz Antonio Simas and the pedagogue Luiz Rufino stand out as an example of this power. These researchers started from the experiences of *terreiros de macumba* to propose an “epistemic rapture” that claims the notion of “Enchanted Science” instead of “Human Sciences”. This



is the construction of an epistemology that incorporates Black-African wisdoms brought to Brazil through the African diaspora. These wisdoms were intersected with Amerindian ones and with many others. The book *Fogo no mato: a ciência encantada das macumbas* (Fire in the woods: the enchanted science of macumbas) presents a History of Brazil not as focused on Western values but one situated at a crossroads, one capable of untying us from normativity and from violently and symbolically imposed colonial limits. This is a perspective far from what was conventionally agreed to be understood as science. Moreover, this work offers the valuation of other innumerable possibilities to existence (SIMAS and RUFINO 2018).

## Final considerations

This article sought to highlight some of the ontological, epistemological, ethical and political demands that are directed at the History discipline nowadays, emphasizing that these demands are also aimed at the Humanities in general. Although this article may have incurred in the risk of a generalization by referring to History as a single area, I would like to note that I am aware of the complexity and diversity of this discipline. What I have tried to argue from the History of Historiography and Theory of History is that when these fields are combined and turned to the temporal horizons, they aid in the identification of the more general tendencies of historical thought and of thought as a whole.

Some of the “unconventional” demands of History that have been identified are related to the performative and aesthetic character of the past, to the ethical dimensions concerned with difference (the plurality of stories and their subjects), to the broadening of discussions about the public performance of historians and, more immediately, the attention to the popular elaborations of History. Ignoring these demands means risking insisting on a discipline that denies difference by assigning universal meanings to contingent events and singular subjects. The emphasis on this perspective may reject how

much the discipline owes to other spaces and issues inherent in its institutionalization process that are still under-explored. I am referring to the understanding of how their protocols and contents are born from a conflict/criticism with those who are denied. Moreover, I refer to how this process is crucial for the attribution of new meanings to their epistemological and social orientations. In this sense, understanding the ways in which new historical and historiographic processes claim openness to the “unconventional” can help build more complex historical reflections and practices regarding the responsibility of History with its possibilities and limits in time.

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