

# Theory of History, Didactics of History and narrative: a dialogue with Paul Ricoeur

*Teoria da História, Didática da História e narrativa: diálogos com Paul Ricoeur*

Carmen Teresa Gabriel Anhorn\*

## RESUMO

Reconhecendo a especificidade epistemológica das diferentes esferas de problematização do conhecimento bem como a indissociabilidade entre elas, o artigo tem por objetivo discutir a potencialidade analítica da categoria ‘narrativa’ na reflexão sobre produção, distribuição e consumo do conhecimento histórico. Partindo da ideia de que o específico só pode ser pensado no âmbito do geral, o texto argumenta a favor da compreensão da cientificidade da História como elemento comum que permite tratar a história/objeto de investigação e a história/objeto de ensino em suas particularidades. Em diálogo com a hermenêutica de Paul Ricoeur, o artigo aposta no entendimento da narrativa como uma estrutura temporal incontornável na reflexão sobre a natureza epistemológica e axiológica desse conhecimento, estreitando assim o diálogo entre Teoria da História e Didática da História.

Palavras-chave: ciência histórica; conhecimento escolar; estrutura narrativa.

## ABSTRACT

Recognizing the epistemological specificity of the different spheres of the problematization of knowledge, as well as the indissociability of these spheres, this paper aims to discuss the analytical potential of ‘narrative’ as a category to reflect on the production, distribution and consumption of historical knowledge. Starting with the idea that the specific can only be considered in terms of the general, this text argues that the scientificity of history has to be acknowledged as a common element which allows the history/object of research and history/object of teaching to be considered in their particularities. Through a dialogue with Paul Ricoeur, this paper focuses on the understanding of narrative as an unavoidable temporal structure in reflection about the epistemological and axiological nature of this knowledge, thus bringing together dialogue between the theory of history and the didactics of history.

Keywords: historical science; school knowledge; narrative structure.

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\* Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Avenida Pasteur, 250 – Fundos. 22290-240 Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brasil. [cartesa@bighost.com.br](mailto:cartesa@bighost.com.br)

In the last decade the question of the epistemological specificity of historical knowledge learned as the object of teaching has emerged in Brazil as a research problem for the field of teaching history. In the internal debates in this field what is in play is the theoretical possibility of the idea of a 'taught history' being formulated as a fertile category of analysis for understanding the challenges present in the daily professional lives of teachers of this subject in primary school. For some, defenders of the universality of historical science, this possibility is presented as unproductive from the theoretical point of view, running the risk of weakening the critical potential of historical knowledge in a school context. For those who defend an opposing position and who recognize the heuristic value of this category of analysis, to the contrary, it has strengthened the critical dimension of this knowledge to the extent that it acknowledges the singularities of the conditions of production and distribution in which the history taught in schools is inserted.

In this paper, I am returning to this debate, but using a different 'way of entry' from what I have used in recent years. In this perspective I reaffirm certain positions, nonetheless highlighting some aspects that are still little explored.

I continue to emphasize the specificities of each of the different 'spheres of problematization' of historical knowledge. I recognize, however, the importance of problematizing the 'thesis of lack of regularity' on which analyzes of the history taught in Brazil are based and through which the historical knowledge taught is exclusively evaluated through the criteria of historical science, in other words, the rules of production of this knowledge fixed in the ambit of the academic community, ignoring the contingences and demands present in the process of its didactic re-contextualization.

The reorientation of the focus of analysis in this text is shown by the raising of another dimension of the approach confirmed above, which offers its own condition of its possibility. This involves reinforcing less the specificities than the common ground between these different 'spheres of problematization' – research and teaching – of historical knowledge. In effect, and apparently in a paradoxical form, I argue that the construction of more consistent arguments from the theoretical point of view for the defense of particularities involves the assumption of common ground, that which carries a dimension of the universal. How can the specificity of 'school' used as an adjective for historical knowledge be understood without understanding the complexity of the noun 'history' perceived as scientific knowledge?

Underscoring the element of 'general' or more 'universal' order which allows the history/object of investigation and the history/object of teaching in their particularities, assumes entering the discussion of the epistemological and axiological nature of this knowledge. Thereby entering the conflicts in the field of the theory of history, which establish the rules of production of this knowledge and the meaning of the historical truth.

I have divided my argument into three sections. In the first, I present in a succinct form the tensions present in the epistemological debate in the area of history in relation to how scientific it is, with the purpose of highlighting the analytic potential of this 'narrative' category as developed under the scope of the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. The second section is concerned with highlighting the analytical effects of the use of the signifier 'narrative' to think about the field of the teaching of history in primary education, highlighting some *aporias* presented in the contemporary analysis of school historiography, in particular those related to the question of the teaching of temporalities. In the third and final section, I deal with some categories of analysis of the theoretical framework of Paul Ricoeur, as clues to confront the previously mentioned *aporias*, thereby reaffirming the defense of a closer dialogue between the theory of history and the didactics of history.<sup>1</sup>

#### ON THE COMMON GROUND: THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

The defense of the epistemological specificity of school historical knowledge neither assumes the negation of the scientificity of history, nor the importance of this dimension when we deal with this knowledge in a school context. Affirming, as some recent pedagogical discourse has done recently, that the public school is a privileged place to establish relations with a plurality of knowledge does not signify denying its political function of socializing and democratizing knowledge.

Understanding that, when didactically reworked, historical science undergoes a complex process of recontextualization, the challenge consists of thinking of this process without this representing a de-characterization or denying its scientificity. It is interesting to reflect on this process, as Yves Chevillard<sup>2</sup> calls on us to do, when he suggests thinking about the idea of transposition as the action of

Transposing knowledge, almost in the musical meaning of the term – passing (a

musical form) to another tone without altering it, and not in the sense of ‘transferring’ or ‘transmitting.’ The term transposition,... guarantees in this way a great and indefinitely open problem: how to ‘pass’ to another ‘institutional tone’ without changing it? Or at least without altering it too much, controlling the alternations that are necessary? (Chevallard, 1991, free translation)

This approach allows us to bring to the center of the reflect the idea of ‘science’ and ‘scientificity,’ referring us to contemporary epistemological debates. In effect, in times when it was known as a ‘paradigmatic crisis’ – marked by criticisms of the possibility of establishing absolute and definitive truths, the problematization of universals and the essentialist perspectives in the reading of the world – discussing and affirming the scientificity of knowledge tends to demand a greater theoretical effort than in other times, when a univocal sense of positivist science was presented as hegemonic.

In relation to historical knowledge, going beyond our own time, and in function of the specificity of its epistemological and axiological nature, the question of scientificity has marked the debates in the field of the theory of history along the trajectory of the constitution of knowledge as science, in other words from the emergence of history in institutional spaces regulated by epistemic and disciplinary spaces. This involves considering which flows of meaning of scientificity running through the field of history take into account in the process of didactic transposition. What meaning of historical science establishes as common ground the spheres of the problematization of historical knowledge, thereby guaranteeing their indissolubility? With what criteria can these different flows of the meaning of scientificity be picked? And also how can this scientificity be made ‘didactic’?

Guided by these questions and based on the reflections in the fields of the theory of history and the didactics of history, I have selected as a starting point the question of ‘necessities *in* historical knowledge’ which are at the foundation of the production, distribution and consumption of this knowledge. We produce, distribute and consume history with the purpose of giving meaning to our individual and collective temporal experience. In effect, reflection in and with time has marked the particularity of history within the human sciences as a whole. It is not by chance that in the epistemological debates in the area the dimension of temporalities has occupied a leading role. How to state, in other words, how to signify our temporal experience in a discourse which claims to the scientific? Or also: how to recognize the specific contribution of the historical perspective in the construction of our intelligibilities as subjects

immersed in time, in ways other than what other languages already allow us to do?

These initial reflections prepare the path that allows us bring to the discussion the category of 'narrative' analysis which has been polemical in the field of history and around which dichotomous and exclusive theoretical positions have crystallized in relation to the scientificity of this knowledge.

Until a relatively recent time, in the theorizations about historical science<sup>3</sup> discussions about this category have been limited to its condemnation, to the extent that it is associated with the historiographic matrix which was established as 'narrative history.' In harmony with the processes of the modernization and rationalization of this knowledge, the struggle waged against the function of narrative in the conception of history, especially historians of the first generation of the *Annales* School, was done in the name of scientific rigor. Associated with everything<sup>4</sup> against which they wanted to fight for the construction of a scientific history-problem, narrative history, which until then had been triumphant, has tended to be proscribed by the scientific community of historians since then.

Since, for the nascent historiographic approach, the object of science was no longer the individual, but the social groups, nor the sequence of events, but global social facts, narrative – basically perceived as two events or situations ordered in a linear form in time, one following the other, and protagonized by individuals promoted to heroes – has become an obsolete and inadequate language to give visibility to historical science. In this movement, a language which privileges in the organization and presentation of data analytical and structural modality, preferentially with an emphasis on quantitative data, tends to be increasingly privileged to the detriment of narration. Little by little, one of the most current dichotomies of modern historical thought was consolidated, which came to place on one side discourse and historical explanation and, on the other, narrative and comprehension.

Studies by historians such as Jacques Rancière (1994),<sup>5</sup> François Hartog (1995)<sup>6</sup> and François Dosse (1999),<sup>7</sup> written over the last two decades, have helped demonstrate, however, that the terms 'narrative' tends to be used in these debates as a metonymy in which a particular type of narrative is confused with the actual narrative structure inherent in historical knowledge. This metonymy produced a school and left profound consequences, which still persist, in the representation of this discipline among historians and history teachers. As François Hartog (1995) has pointed out, the defenders of scientific history, by devaluing narrative history, have condemned the manner in which this

history conceives the event, the time, the historical subject, the fact, without problematizing the concept of narrative: “the narrative is not in the order of the day. Only to refuse it in the form of narrative history. Which leaves intact the actual question of the narrative, to the extent that the primary object of debate consists of the event and not the narrative” (Hartog, 1995, p.192, free translation).

In relation to this most recent use of narrative<sup>8</sup> in contemporary historiography, François Hartog (1995, p.187) asks in a relevant way: “Is it sufficient to refuse an event and individual to escape the narrative? Or return to the event to speak of the return to the narrative?”

The change in the understanding of the concept of narrative, allowing its exploration as a category of analysis, thereby opening the way for the emergence of a new theoretical perspective in the field of history, owes much to the reflections developed under the auspices of the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur.<sup>9</sup>

Considering the theoretical density of the reflections of this author in this work and the objectives and limits of the text, I will highlight here only some considerations which allow the connection between narrative and temporality to be examined. It is of particular interest to me to explore the analytical potential contained in the understand of “narrative as the guardian of time, to the extent that time can only be thought of when narrated” (Ricoeur, 1997, p.417).<sup>10</sup>

His reflection about the hermeneutics of time shown the central role played by historic time, in other words, the ‘third time’ invented by historians to understand the epistemological and axiological nature of this knowledge, offering the possibility of thinking about historical narrative as an intrinsic temporal structure for historical knowledge. After all, for Paul Ricoeur: “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative form; in counterpart, narrative is significant to the extent that it delineates the traits of temporal experience.”<sup>11</sup>

Taking as a base the in-depth and comparative studies of differentiated dominions, such as literary criticism, the hermeneutic phenomenology of time, and the theory of history, Ricoeur concludes that the latter, although it cannot be classified as a literary genre, cannot “completely break with the narrative without abandoning its historic nature” (Ricoeur, 1983, p.250). In this way it become possible to conceive historic discourse – understood as a form of narrative configuration – based on a “mixed epistemology” (Ricoeur, apud Dosse, 1999, p.76), capable of absorbing the tension that is part of it between the

construction of meaning and search for the truth, between comprehension and explanation.

These reflections allow a meaning of scientificity to be established for historical knowledge which extrapolates the dichotomous perspectives which have marked the debates about the scientific status of this knowledge since the nineteenth century, and which created a dilemma in the field. A dilemma which Jacques Rancière has summarized well by calling attention to the polysemy and homonymy of the term 'history':

The confusion of language is necessary measure the dilemma in its rigor: the new historical science should not be any longer a history, but it should be one. The difference between history-science and history-report should be produced within the report, with its words and in the use of its words. (Rancière, 1994, p.11)

By signifying historical narrative within the framework of its hermeneutics, associated with temporality, Paul Ricoeur offers theoretical assistance to deal with this dilemma, to the extent that it incorporates elements which allow it to be thought of as a hybrid discourse which simultaneously operates with elements from both history-science and history-report, with the result that he calls it the crossed re-figuration of time.

Ricoeur insists on underlining the specificity of historical narrative by highlighting the specific procedures of historiographical operation. In this sphere the author maintains the same line of argument, dialoguing with and against the representatives of both the 'scientificist' and 'narrativist' currents, seeking to tie together their respective contributions.

The approximation with narrativist theories allows him to recognize an internal form of explanation in the act of narrating: narrating is already explaining, through the logical connection of weaving intrigue (one because of the other). This causal relationship should not be confused with chronological sequence (one after the other), thereby allowing history to be distinguished from chronicles. The recognition of a logical nexus (not necessarily and exclusively chronological) assumes that a form of intelligibility characteristic of common sense is taken into account, which consists of the competence to accompany a history. Ricoeur also emphasizes that historical explanation maintains ties with the narrative of fiction, to the extent that it makes equal use of imagination, operating in this form as a register of objectivity marked by incompleteness, compensated by the mediation of subjectivity: "historical intentionality only

is effective when it incorporates to its intention the resources of fictionalization which depends on the narrative imagination” (Ricoeur, 1997, p.177).

Ricoeur, however, recognizes the limits of this approximation when he deals with historical narrative. He identifies the three levels of epistemological cuts which justify this distancing: procedures, entities and temporalities. For Ricoeur historical knowledge comes from research, and, even admitting that the act of narrating involves elements of explanation, he insists on the specificity of the explanatory form of historical knowledge which, by incorporating problematization and criticism, distances itself from the plots of fictional narrative. As he himself points out: “One thing is explaining by narrating. Another is problematizing the actual explanation, submitting it to discussion and the judgment of an auditorium, if not universal, at least with a competent reputation, consisting primarily of the peers of the historian” (Ricoeur, 1983, p.247, free translation).

The epistemological focus which operates in the procedural plane is directly related to the autonomization of historical explanation and is justified by three aspects inherent to the nature of this knowledge: the need for conceptualization, the search for objectivity, and the limits of this objectivity. This author leaves it clear that the search for objectivity, no matter how fragile and exposed to questioning, or incomplete, is a pretension that is always present in the historic research project. The historian can permit himself to only tell history, he has the obligation to authenticate the narrative.

In relation to the entities, the epistemological focus can be characterized by the analysis of the characters/subjects in the historical narrative of a scientific type. Although these characters have tended to be replaced by anonymous political entities (nation, societies, people, civilizations, social classes, etc.), Ricoeur had no difficulty in showing that these entities were presented as ‘almost-characters,’ real actors in the intrigues in which they were involved, bearers of ideas, feelings, dreams and projects, protagonizing as agents or patients, different types of actions and achievements. Finally, the third epistemological focus places in evidence the fact that historians have constructed and operated with temporalities with different rhythms and durations (short, medium and long term), for almost half a century, thereby permitting the notion of event to be rethought. In the place of unique contingent events of a short duration and commonly linked to the political and institutional sphere, historians have come to be interested in economic, social and mental structures whose rates of transformation are much slower, almost imperceptible. In the place of continuity, discontinuity; in the place of the frailty of the event, the weight of large



structures. Nonetheless, Ricoeur's thought contributes to prove that behind this apparent discontinuity, the thread of the plot is not completely corrupted: "In effect Paul Ricoeur, reader of Braudel's *La Méditerranée*, had no difficulty in making the narrative plot appear in his book, with its three voluntarily distinct levels. The decline of the Mediterranean and its departure from 'grand history', such is the global, but virtual, intrigue in which the three levels and the three temporalities participate" (Hartog, 1995, p.192, free translation).

Also important are Ricoeur's contributions for thinking about the unity of time which offers a consistent response, from the theoretical point of view, to the problem of the fragmentation of temporalities. To what extent does narrated time allow us to situate ourselves in the mediation between past, present and future? This involves the actual concept of historicity, understood as the capacity that history, like a 'singular collective' has to give a satisfactory response to the *aporia* of past, present and future fragmentation. Ricoeur allows this discussion to advance when he recognizes the pertinence of linking past, present and future in a totality which is not perceived in a finished and definitive form, operating with a notion of unfinished or imperfect mediation, thereby distancing itself from the Hegelian perspective, as I will develop later.

This brief presentation of some aspects dealt with by Ricoeur in the three volumes of *Tempo e Narrative* highlights his contribution to the reflection on the centrality of temporality in the affirmation and consolidation of its epistemological nature. This affirmation opens new paths of dialogue between the theory of history and the didactics of history which I will explore below.

#### THE TERM 'NARRATIVE' IN DISCUSSIONS OF SCHOOL HISTORIOGRAPHY: FLOWS OF MEANING IN DISPUTE

... some time ago the 'narratologues,' the philosophers and some historians who were not embarrassed with what they read, nor with observing their art with distance, invited us to rub our eyes and face our definition: narration is in the principle of history, it is a constitutive initiative, it is not the practice of rendering accounts, it is a contribution of an intelligibility, not its absence.<sup>12</sup>

Henri Moniot's provocation expressed in this citation reinforces both the reliance on the analytical potential of the narrative to think about the scientificity of historical knowledge, as well as suggesting the presence of resistance on

the part of the disciplinary community formed by historians and teachers of history to recognize this potential.

From this perspective, and agreeing with Yves Chevallard that the movement of didactic transposition is inevitable in the process of the construction of school knowledge, it is important to seek to understand the strategies which seek to guarantee a 'good' reworking of the history/ object of research to the history/object of teaching.

Among these strategies, I highlight two which are of interest to me. The first consists of guaranteeing that in the didactically reworking process the scientificity of historical knowledge will be assured. The second, which occurs in a simultaneous form to the first, is related to the fact that this process equally guarantees the intelligibility of the historical knowledge taught to the subjects/ students of primary school. Two strategies which the narrative category, as conceived in the theoretical framework of Ricoeur, undoubtedly contributes to think of in all their complexity. This is what is argued here.

When we analyze the challenges currently presented to history teachers in face of the 'crisis' of the discipline of history, in particular in relation to how these changes are related to the teaching and learning of temporalities, this becomes even more relevant.

Talking of the 'crisis of the discipline of history' tends, however, to be redundant, due to the vulnerability of this discipline which is expressed in the intensity with which history is interwoven with axiological questions, whether they are political or cultural. This particularity of historical knowledge allows us suppose that the knowledge production process in this disciplinary area suffers in a permanent form from the interference of the consequences of the rhythms of transformation and the tensions between the different projects of society in dispute. The diagnosis of the 'crisis' of this discipline becomes, in turn, difficult to be established. When and through which criteria can we speak of the discipline history? Which criteria can be used to justify, for example, that the proposed new school content is more legitimate or more true than the others?

Considering only our most recent history, the emergence of a vogue for curricular reforms synthesized with the political opening in the second half of the 1980s can be seen as a significant example of this 'vulnerability.' In effect, in the trajectory of the construction of history as a discipline in Brazil, the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as a relatively prolonged period of crisis in this era. This affirmation can be sustained by the fact that these two decades correspond to the convergence of movements<sup>13</sup> which, in a differentiated form,

contributed to triggering and/or worsening this crisis. The discussion about the selection of content to be taught led in this period to heated debates about differentiated historiographic perspectives which disputed the place of legitimate and validated knowledge to be taught to primary school students.

In this text, it interests me to explore less the discontinuities and differences between these proposals for curricular reform than certain common elements and continuities. This signifies having as a focus of analysis the demand that they had and that they have the strength to build around themselves a chain of equivalence between such disparate curricular proposals. The apprehension of this demand assumes analyzing the aspects of continuity which emerged in the 1980s, entered the 1990s without consensual and/or satisfactory responses, and have continued until the present, thereby contributing to qualify the 'crisis' of this discipline.

A reading of curricular texts – proposals, school books, teaching programs – produced in the last forty years, as well as of academic texts shows that the 'great enemy' to be fought since the 1980s in school historiography is the disciplinary matrix which supports the teaching of history, identified by the adjective 'traditional', with negative connotations and associated with the positivist perspective<sup>14</sup> and against which demands for innovation in the teaching of this discipline were – and still are – articulated. From this perspective the history taught in this disciplinary matrix is condemned in the majority of the proposals, proscribed for theoretical obsolescence and for being inadequate in relation to the needs required to educate a citizen and member of a society that wanted to be democratic. The crisis that emerged in the teaching of history during the period being looked at here can be understood as a crisis of hegemony in the discursive educational matrix of school historiography.

Taking into account the focus of this analysis, I will limit myself to exploring the discursive associations between the adjective 'traditional' and the notion of historic time which appears in the criticisms of this disciplinary matrix. In an article published at the end of the 1990s, in which she analyzes curricular reforms, Circe Bittencourt states that "In all of them the justification for a new proposal occur in face of new concepts of history, criticizing the history paradigm labeled as positive, especially in relation to the concept of linear and evolutionary time."<sup>15</sup>

This author concludes in a not very optimist manner, stating that the "desired overcoming of the teaching of history based on chronological time as the sole controller of change, has still not occurred" (Bittencourt, 1998, p.159).

The search for solutions to overcome the difficulties and obstacles to teaching and learning related to historic time were equally present during the long process of preparing National Curricular Parameters, which were published in the 1990s. Presented in this document was a proposal for the didactic recontextualization of historic time based on the Braudelian concept of time with the purpose, once again, of combating the idea of a linear historic time, assimilating the idea of progress and a Eurocentric perspective of history. It involves valorizing the idea of the differentiated duration of the historical facts studied, bringing to the learning of history the operator notions of 'transformation rites,' 'permanence' and 'changes.'

The effects of these continuous fights against 'traditional history' in the sphere of school historiography through proposals for the 'de-syncretization'<sup>16</sup> of historical knowledge are perceptible both in curricular texts and in the daily teaching practice of teachers, and offer evidence about the potential and limits of the approach privileged until then in dealing with the challenges resulting from the process of the didactic reworking of historical knowledge.

A first finding serves us as a starting point. I refer to the permanence of the linear conception in history classes and in curricular texts, as recent studies have indicated, such as those by Sonia Miranda and Tania de Luca (2004),<sup>17</sup> who in analyzing the evaluation program of school books in this discipline, pointed to the even stronger presence of an organization of historic content based on a linear chronology logic.

The permanent insistence on this temporal matrix in history classes tends to be explained by the resistance of some teachers in this discipline to innovation, often putting the blame on them for the failure to implement new curricular proposals.

It is not my purpose to analyze the factors which intervene in the implementation process for innovative curricular proposals. My interest in showing the permanence of this finding is to explore it from another angle, from another perspective. In an apparently paradoxical manner, it interests me to strengthen this permanence as something which carries a positivity, to the extent that it marks an aspect of the epistemological nature of historical knowledge which perhaps need to be better explored. As I explained after four decades of the accumulation of criticisms which denounce the noxious effects of this linear concept of time for teaching and learning, it remains, whilst not as the only alternative, but as a central element in the organization of historical content taught in primary education? In other words, is it the difficulty highlighted by primary school history teachers in 'breaking' the linearity of

chronological time by being read on as ‘resistance to the new’ or does it express a knowledge of experience on the part of teachers who, concerned with the learning of this students, know that they cannot lose the thread of the history taught to them? The voice of a primary school teacher, although it cannot be generalized, makes this last question at the very least pertinent:

The attribution of a linearity intrinsic to the chronological option seems to start with a misunderstanding which associates this path with the entire traditionalist concept of history. It is important to clarify that our choice does not signify an *a priori* criticism of academic production linked to history-problem, on the contrary. In general terms, history-problem represented an important advance in relation to traditional positivist history, as well as in relation to the dogmatism and mechanism frequently present in Marxist historiography. There is no reason not to bring this production into the classroom, even if – in principle – it works with a chronological ordering of historical questions. (P1 – Primary School History Teacher)<sup>18</sup>

A better understanding of this permanence and the evidence it highlights assumes the recognition that these criticisms aimed at ‘traditional history’ have become hybrid and have established singular meanings of historic time and narrative, as well as confusing differentiated plans of analysis.

In the case of the discursive association established between ‘traditional history,’ ‘linear time’ and ‘narrative’ present in these criticisms, the use of rhetorical resources such as metonymy can be perceived, through which particular types of concepts of narrative and historical times appear associated and are imposed hegemonically as the only and universal manner of thinking and signifying these two concepts. This association becomes even more potent when it is manifested through the current polarization in debates in the area between, on the one hand, a ‘romanticized’ and outdated ‘narrative history’ and, on the other, ‘history-problem’ (given different names, such as, for example, ‘conceptual history,’ ‘history by thematic axes,’ ‘thematic history’) with a scientific approach. On one side is the perception of historic time as synonymous with ‘chronology,’ ‘dating,’ ‘memorization,’ ‘timeline.’ On the other, multiple temporalities, with short, medium and long durations, with differentiated rates, continuities and permanence; changes, ruptures, simultaneities.

It can be seen that this dichotomous vision within school historiography still reproduces the binarism established within historiographic from the nineteenth century onwards. In effect this dichotomization mobilizes in the area

other oppositions such as narrativity *versus* scientificity; subjectivity *versus* objectivity, interpretation *versus* explanation, establishing chains of equivalences and antagonistic focuses whose epistemological and political effects are also felt in the pedagogic plane, and particularly in what most closely interests me in this text, in establishing meanings for pasts, presents and futures in school contexts.

Moreover, these bipolarizations in school contexts assume the form of disputes between historiographic matrices, confusing plans of analysis and hindering a more consistent confrontation from the theoretical points of view with the challenges involved in the process of teaching and learning this knowledge.

I argue that the concern with learning *about* and *in* time through the school discipline history mobilizes more than the choice between, for example, a Marxist historiographic conception and a positivist historiographic conception. In this discussion the choice of one or more historiographic matrices are not in play. In effect this concern involves a plan of analysis related to the '*raison d'être*' of this knowledge, i.e., with what justifies its existences as a discursive formation and which in this way participates in the configuration of a rational grid of reading the world.

This precision of differentiated planes of analysis seems to me to be important to try to resolve some challenges that are currently presented to the teacher as *aporias* and which can be translated in questions such as these: how to break this linearity as conceived within the ambit of 'traditional' school historiography and at the same time guarantee the intelligibility of history-taught? What meaning of historical time contributes to assure the political function of this discipline which offers us instruments of analysis for the processes of signification of our temporal experience, in particular in these times where the crisis of discipline is added to a crisis of historicity itself?

As researchers of the teaching of history these questions incite us to seek theoretical and methodological paths which allow the permanence of a linear conception of time to be critically considered without, however, denying the possibility of considering the temporal structure which is the mark of historical knowledge. Relying on rhetorical resources which transform particularities into universalities, parts into wholes, criticism of traditional history often tends to equally combat the possibility of considering the idea of process in which pasts, presents, and futures are linked through other possible and available senses. From this perspective it is what justifies in this text the use of the dialogue with Paul Ricoeur.

## THE 'NARRATIVE STRUCTURE' AS A CLUE FOR THE DIDACTIC REWORKING OF TEMPORALITIES

By offering theoretical assistance to 'rehabilitate' the concept of 'narrative', like 'temporal structure,' Paul Ricoeur opens a dialogue between the theory of history and the didactics of history which I seek to start to explore next, with the focus being the question of temporalities.

By bringing historic time to the center of discussion as a third time that is narrated and invented by historians to take into account our temporal experience at the intersection of natural time and phenomenological time, this philosophy has contributed to the reaffirmation of the perception of historical time as a structuring element of this knowledge, and simultaneously places on other levels the discussion about scientificity in history.

I argue that considering the process of didactic transposition in the ambit of history as a process of reworking the 'narrative structure' of this knowledge allows us confront some of the previously highlighted challenges, guaranteeing that in this process, we stand on the common ground of scientificity and we can respect the particularities of the spheres of problematization of the knowledge involved.

In terms of scientificity and due to what has already been discussed, the narrative structure recognizes and operates with the dual epistemological register of historical knowledge through which what it narrates and explains are not seen as contradictory actions. The apprehension of scientificity in these terms allows notions to be dealt with such as objectivity in history in order to re-signify, for example, the notion of the past as a key element in the process of the didactic reworking of this knowledge.

From the point of view of the respect for the particularities of each sphere of problematization, Ricoeur's contribution is present even in the meaning attributed to the expression 'narrative' in the framework of his hermeneutics. One of the central characteristic of Ricoeur's approach consists of the fact that the narrative intelligibility is based on a triple interpretative movement which extrapolates the moment of narrative configuration in the strict sense. The first dimension assumes the taking into account of a form of intelligibility characteristic of common sense, which consists of the competence to follow a story. This characteristic, present in historic and fictional narrative configurations, is already present for this philosopher in the moment of pre-comprehension: "The two narrative modes are preceded by the use of narrative in daily life" (Ricoeur, 1997, p.280). The configuration of time in the

narrative corresponds to the composition of the literary or historic text when the intrigue to be narrated is armed, reconstructed through the specific resources of each narrative mode. The third moment – the re-figuration of time – corresponds to the meeting of the world of the text with the world of the reader who completes in a provisional and always incomplete form, according to Ricoeur, the hermeneutic circle, thereby making the heuristic load of the term ‘narrative’ to be better appreciated.

This signifies that the formation of the theme, in the case of the historic narrative, allows the possibility of understanding it as always being open to multiple intelligibilities produced in the meeting between the world of the text (the history taught in school books and/or in the classes of this discipline, for example) and in the world of the reader (the different subjectivities positioned as students of history in school contexts). The notion of theme/narrative emerges as a ‘temporal synthesis of heterogeneity,’ integrating a network of meanings and becoming visible in the narrative configuration, whose understanding is always open to new readings.

I will explore the potential of using these terms to consider the production process of didactic historical knowledge, confronting Ricoeur’s contributions with three axes of challenges which are raised today for the teaching of history directly involving the teaching and learning of temporal dimensions which I have named as follows: i) The present as a starting point; ii) Aversion to chronology; iii) After all why teach history?

## THE PRESENT AS A STARTING POINT

English Revolution, Industrial Revolution, French revolution, do I need to study this? I do. This made the world the way it is today and *I want them to understand the world as it is today, not just this, but this is a very important objective, I want them to make a reading of the world, a historical reading of the world.* (P1 – Primary School History Teacher, emphasis added)

In this first point, I have sought to bring together some challenges within the area of history taught to mobilize the idea of ‘present’ associated with the concern of ‘giving sense to the world in which we live,’ which appears in a recurrent form in the statements of teachers from this discipline. The recognition of the need to *start from the present* instead of *running after it* as a starting point which is never reached, as does a history taught according to the chronological rhythm from the oldest to the most recent, is not a new posture among



the professionals from the area. In fact, this concern partially meets the discursive pedagogy which defends the idea of ‘signifying content’ and conditions this on teaching-learning processes which take into account the ‘reality of students.’

How can this ‘present’ be qualified, in which the teachers and/or authors of school books should/want to be based so that the teaching of this discipline becomes ‘more attractive,’ ‘more significant,’ and the learning more effective?

In effect, when to question or problematize the present experienced by students comes to be perceived as a *sine qua non* condition of the narrative intelligibility inherent to the teaching of history, the need to understand this fragment of temporality and how it is connected with the others – past and future – becomes a challenge to be faced by the teachers of this discipline.

By arguing in favor of the historical narrative as the path to think of the totality of time Ricoeur offers us arguments for this type of confrontation. The assumption of the idea of totality as a “game of remissions” (Ricoeur, 1997, p.178) between expectation (future), tradition (past) and present (demand), has pedagogical implications to consider the present as a starting point without losing the thread of the argument. In first place, it allows the question of totality to be associated with the question of the uniqueness of time, without, however, basing it on the idea of a linear time with a predetermined direction and in which the notion of process is confused with the notion of progress. In Ricoeur’s perspective, the possibility of thinking about the past is intimately related to the possibility of thinking about the future through the mediation of the present. Past and present can only be understood in their plenitude if they are inserted in a temporal extension which equally covers the future, the notion of project, of as Ricoeur calls it, the notion of “history to do” (1997, p.360). This perspective also brings other flows of the meaning of process, so dear to history teachers concerned about taught history making sense to students.

In a dialogue with Koselleck,<sup>19</sup> Ricoeur (1997) reaffirms the importance of thinking about the uniqueness of time as a condition for each present to be presented as a space of equivalence between ‘fields of experience’ and ‘horizons of expectations.’ The first expression refers to the persistence of the past in the present, which is maintained according to multiple strategies and itineraries which are grouped and stratified “in a layered structure which allows the past accumulated this way to escape mere chronology” (1997, p.360). The second expression involves the idea of the future-turning-present, covering all the

private or common manifestations which look to the future (hope, fear, concern, desire, rational calculations, curiosity, etc.). It can be seen that both experience and expectation are inscribed in the present, understood as the space which the dialectic between past and future occurs.

This ‘about-face of strategy’ to think about the totality/uniqueness of time, allows the actual notions of past, present and future to be rethought. The presentified past associated with the notion of tradition is no longer seen as something dead and closed in on itself, opening itself to the field of uncertainties and multiple possibilities: “It is necessary to reopen the past, revive in it unrealized, contrary, or even massacred potentials” (1997, p.372). In relation to the present, instead of merely being associated with the notion of presence, it comes to be seen as a space of permanent tension between the “field of experience and the horizon of expectation,” “like the beginning of a continuation” (1997, p.396). Finally, the future is distanced from merely utopian expectations, which cause the flight of the horizon of expectation, and which come to be seen as “the most determined expectations, which are thus finite and relatively modest, and can support a reasonable compromise” (1997, p.371).

These brief considerations point to some interesting solutions for considering the selection criteria which guide the choice of content to be taught in schools and the criteria of its organization in didactic sequences. In relation to selection criteria, the didactic reworking of the temporal structure of historical knowledge, the perspective privileged here demands that questions be formulated which can take into account the demands of those present where this history is being taught, as well as its conditions of production. Stated in another manner: what demands of our present justify the choices between pasts in the narrative configuration of history taught in primary education? In which visions of the future can we or should we invest? In terms of organization criteria the choice of narrative structures, - instead of the choice of content and/or concepts to be taught - guarantees a process of the de-syncretization of historical knowledge in which the threads of the chosen plots are not fragmented in units with fixed content in a form that is stuck to some form of the continuous flow of time and unconnected among themselves.

## AVERSION TO CHRONOLOGY

They (students) need to find dates when they need dates. Understanding the meaning of the date, its use, for this, so what happens? When history enters into this more factual thing, it irritates me, so it will never be there, in my selection

of content I always pass it, I always ask myself constantly *why does the student need to study this? What is the meaning? Why does everyone study it?* (P2 – Primary School History Teacher)

In relation to this point I have organized the challenges with the forms of relating with the past in the sphere of taught history. The forms which still predominate in taught history mobilize perceptions of this fragment of time which tend to empty history classes of their temporal texture. The association between the dead past and the dating established by traditional history narrative tended to develop within the teaching community of this discipline a strong aversion to chronology, putting in check the pedagogic function of the didactic use of a time line. As is explicit in the words of the teacher transcribed above, studying dates in history classes no longer makes sense. Often the paradoxical situation is reached where in the name of a conceptual and scientific history-problem, time (chronological and not unique) is abolished in history classes.

This movement brings with it the form of signifying the past-present relationship, or better said, the understanding of the persistence of the past in the present, as well as the form of recontextualizing it as an object of study. How can relations with the past be established which are not limited solely to the study of chronology? How can these other possibilities of the relationship with the past be taught without mobilizing chronological time?

Ricoeur contributes to these questions not only when he analyzes the problematic of remnants, tracks, and documents seen by him as connectors prepared by historians to allow historical time to do its mediation work, but also when he constructs the concept of '*représentance*.'

According to Ricoeur the work of mediation, carried out by historical time, leads to the preparation of instruments of thought capable of assuring this mediation. These instruments, called connectors, include things like: the calendar, the notion of sequences of generations – which include notions of contemporaries, predecessors and successors – and the remnants or tracks responsible for connecting cosmic time and lived time. The concept of *représentance* was created precisely with the purpose of nominating the dual status of reality (experience) and fiction (imagination, representation), which characterizes the specificity of the object of historical research (Dosse, 1999, p.88). *Représentance* thereby allows the criticism of a naïve vision of reality which is even more necessary when this reality brings with it the notion of 'pastness:' "A The pastness of an observation in the past is not what is

observable, but memorable” (Ricoeur, 1997, p.274). *Représentance* permits thinking in a manner analogical to the apprehension of the past which mobilizes the idea of ‘as if,’<sup>20</sup> considered as the resource of the production of meaning most suited to this type of reality: “The Analogue, precisely, keeps with it the force of re-effecting and distancing to the extent that the ‘how to be’ is ‘being’ and ‘not being’” (Ricoeur, 1997, p.261).

In this way, understood as narratable and memorable the past in Ricoeur’s perspective allows the problematization of its establishment as a mere chronology on a linear time line, without, however, ignoring the indispensable function of temporal marks for the apprehension of narrated time to be achieved in all its complexity.

#### AFTER ALL, WHY TEACH HISTORY?

I remember slavery well, a very wrong attitude, which unfortunately still happens in Brazil. Unfortunately something happens which annoys me a lot which is: bad facts keep marking our history, and not only in Brazil, but in the whole world. *There is only one question, have the times of happiness ended?* (Student from Class 901, emphasis added)

Finally, and no less importantly, this third and final point of the challenges is related to the role of teaching history in the temporal orientation of subjects/students in our present. This question becomes even more relevant if we consider the crisis of historicity which marks our contemporaneity. Characterized by the present tendency of some schools of thought to increasingly distend the relationship between ‘the space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectations,’ resulting in a perception of the present world as a simulacrum without any utopian perspective, this crisis, when recontextualized in a school context, tends to shake the *raison d’être* of the discipline history.

This involves exploring what Ricoeur calls ‘practical reason,’ which allows the perception of the ethnical and political implications of what is in play between the field of experience and the horizon of expectation in each present. Understanding that the tension between these categories is permanent and necessary, the historian and the history teacher also become responsible for the balancing of this tension in order to avoid a schism which would make the possibility of history unfeasible. The challenge consist of not letting others forget “the complex game of inter-significations which is exercised between

our expectations for the future and our interpretations aimed at the past” (Ricoeur, 1997, p.360).

Ricoeur helps us think about these questions in these times of uncertainty, when he reminds us that the characterization – the belief in a new time, the acceleration of progress and the availability of history (i.e., the belief that men are increasingly capable of making their own history) – of the modern concept of historic times created by Koselleck (1990), is being questioned today, which does not signify confusing it with the actual categories which authorize it being thought about.

It is more these two categories – fields of experience and horizon of expectations –, as well as the relationship established between them in the present, than the actual themes in which they were invested in modernity, which contribute to thinking about the notion of historical narrative as an operational category for the apprehension of historical knowledge in its different spheres of problematization. This differentiation is important to the extent that it allows a continued search for the response to the question formulated by this history student which addresses us directly in our positions as researchers and teachers of history. A response which allows us balance, from our present, connections between other possibility of the past still not achieved and less dark futures.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the relevance of the search for a closer dialogue between the theory of history and the didactics of history has been reaffirmed by other researchers in the field, using other focuses. See, for example: MONTEIRO, Ana Maria F. C. Didática da História e Teoria da História: produção de conhecimento na formação de professores. In: SANTOS, L. L. de C. P. et al. (Org.). *Convergências e tensões no campo da formação e do trabalho docente*. Currículo, Ensino de Educação Física, Ensino de Geografia, Ensino de História, Escola, família e comunidade. Textos selecionados do XV Endipe (Encontro Nacional de Didática e Prática de Ensino), UFMG, 20-23 abr. 2010. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2010. p.479-499; KNAUSS, Paulo, O desafio da ciência: modelos científicos no ensino de história. *Cadernos Cedes*, Campinas (SP), v.25, n.67,p.279-295, set.-dez. 2005.

<sup>2</sup> CHEVALLARD, Yves. *La transposition didactique: du savoir savant au savoir enseigné*. Paris: Ed. La Pensée Sauvage, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to highlight that it is the modern concept of the term history that is in question here. For a more profound analysis of the emergence of this concept of modernity, see KOSELLECK, Reinhart. *L'expérience de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard; Seuil, 1997), especially the first chapter, “Le concept d’histoire”, published for the first time in German in

1975. This author identifies (p.26) three meanings, of equal importance, attributed to this expression from the eighteenth century onwards and which remain today: 1) what happened, a thing of the past; 2) the report of a certain history, or of past events; and 3) the knowledge of past events, historical knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that the positivist currents in the spotlight did not question, nor deny the need to search for truth, the scientificity of this knowledge. What was in play was the registers of distinct forms of scientificity.

<sup>5</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Os nomes da História: um ensaio da poética do saber*. São Paulo: Pontes, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> HARTOG, François. L'art du récit historique. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Passés recomposés: champs et chantiers de l'histoire*. Paris: Ed. Autrement, Série Mutations, n.150/151, p.184-193, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> DOSSE, François. *A história à prova do tempo: da história em migalhas ao resgate do sentido*. São Paulo: Ed. Unesp, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> This associative logic between narrative and linear chronological narration of particular events still remains in some more recent historiographic currents, identified with the narrativist or interpretivist paradigm. In a general manner, they tend to be based on the return to the event and/or the individual to proclaim the resurgence of narrative. Despite losing its pejorative connotation, this term continues to be questioned, and has been used in the last twenty years to often describe the movement opposed to the process of rationalization which began in the nineteenth century, in other words, to reaffirm a distancing in relation to the different forms of scientific history.

<sup>9</sup> I refer especially to the trilogy *Temps et Récit*, published between 1983 and 1985. His greatest concern in this work is to look for alternative clues to think about the *aporias* of time which can contribute to overcoming dichotomous visions which tend to oppose cosmological time, the 'time of the world' or 'vulgar time' (the time which passes and lets its effects be seen), to the subjective intimate time lived, experienced by each one of us. His central argument is to affirm the theoretical potential of 'narrated time' (both in historiography and in works of fiction), which functions as a mediation between these two concepts of time. For the foundations of this argument, Ricoeur seeks to link the contributions of both narrative forms (history and fiction), establishing differences and similarities between the processes of the re-figuration of time carried out by these types of narrative intelligibility. From this perspective, Ricoeur identifies and analyzes the aspects which allow both the 'fictionalization of history' and the 'historicization of fiction' to be talked about.

<sup>10</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Tempo e Narrativa*. v.3. Campinas (SP), 1997.

<sup>11</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Temps et Récit*. v.1, p.17. Paris: Le Seuil, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> MONIOT, Henri. *La didactique de l'histoire*. Paris: Nathan, 1993. p.72.

<sup>13</sup> The first movement, internal to the Brazilian historical process, refers to the political redemocratization process which marked the 1980s in Brazil. A space for debates, questioning and reflection was opened in the educational area, creating a fertile terrain for the emergence of innovative curricular proposals in different disciplinary areas. The second

movement corresponds to the specific form through which these debates were incorporated in the field of history due to the internal trajectory of this school discipline. This discussion space in the case of history assumed a dimension of the reconquest of the discipline's own identity in the curriculum of the old primary school. Parallel to the institutional recovery of the legitimacy lost and/or threatened, it became increasingly clear that it was not enough to only recover the place of history in the curriculum. What also – and most especially – mattered was to discuss and interrogate the concept of history(ies) that were intended to be taught. The curricular reforms which emerged in the second half of the 1980s involved various attempts to look for solutions to this type of questioning. The third and final movement, of a more general type, was the crisis of historicity which interpolated this disciplinary field – from the second half of the 1990s onwards – especially in relation to its cultural and political function, reinforcing the pertinence of the diagnostics of the crisis of the discipline.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that, to the contrary of what occurred with historiographic research, where this traditional matrix has been strongly questioned since the 1930s and has lost its hegemony in the field, in the scope of school historiography it tended to remain hegemonic for much longer, opening interesting clues to think about the autonomy among the different spheres of the problematization of knowledge.

<sup>15</sup> BITTENCOURT, Circe Maria F. Propostas curriculares de História: continuidade e transformações, In: BARRETO, Elba (Org.). *Currículo no ensino fundamental*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Free translation of the term *Désyncretisation*. This is a neologism used by Chevallard (1991) to convey the idea opposed to the fusion, integration, syncretism of knowledge. As Chevallard states (1991, p.59), knowledge in acts (*les savoir en acte*) is presented in a syncretic form.

<sup>17</sup> MIRANDA, Sonia Regina; LUCA, Tania Regina. O livro didático de história hoje: um panorama a partir do PNLD. *Revista Brasileira de História*, São Paulo, v.24, n.48, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> The statements of the teachers and students used in this text were produced in group research under my coordination.

<sup>19</sup> KOSELLECK, Reinhart. *Le futur passé: contribution à la semantique des temps historiques*. Paris: Ed. de L'École des Hautes Études Sociales, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Ricoeur identifies three modalities of thinking about the past: the past under the sign of the Self; under the sign of the Other; and under the sign of the Analogue. The first tends to eclipse the distance between past and present, merging the two temporalities in the present of the historian; the second starts with the opposite assumption and reinforces the distancing between past and present; the third operates with the dialectic of the Self and the Other, continuity and change, familiarity and strangeness in the permanent search for meaning.

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