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## Embodied historical consciousness: From nationalist entanglements to the affective embodiment of a concept

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**ABSTRACT:** Given the popularity of historical consciousness within history education (Anderson, 2017; Seixas, 2006, 2017), there is a need to pause for reflection to consider the stakes, tenets, and presuppositions in taking on, continuing, and teaching, a traditional historical consciousness in disciplinary history. Drawing on Seixas' (2006) definition of historical consciousness, that being the intersection between public memory, history education and citizenship, we argue these underlying principles maintain and sustain oppressive, exclusionary practices. Such an understanding of historical consciousness fails to account for the ways in which histories are embodied, living in/through bodies, and cannot be separated from daily realities. Further, a disembodied historical consciousness does not allow for understanding histories as co-constitutive processes, which interweave and assemble in relational flows. In turn, we seek to work through an embodied historical consciousness, arguing this is necessary for an intra-relational assemblage of the past within the present, moving away from "rival histories" and their disciplinary boundaries that are inextricably tied to the state (Barad, 2007; Elmersjo, Clark, & Vinterek, 2017). This means not only being attentive to bodies in-and-as history, but making an overt space for working through affective elements, the trauma of being compared to the somatic norm (Puwar, 2004), and the national grand narratives that creates a limited and exclusionary version of "common memory" to critically theorize historical consciousness.

**KEYWORDS:** Historical consciousness; onto-epistemology; embodiment; nation

### **(Re)theorizing historical consciousness: Disrupting the nature of truth and reality**

"We all have been marinated in Eurocentrism."

Marie Battiste.

In a 2017 piece for *Public History Weekly*, Canadian history educator Stéphane Lévesque opens his writing saying, "created in the height of nationalism, public schooling continues to educate 'a public' - to shape the national consciousness of its people," - yet, he continues, "the use of history for nation-building is a growing source of tension" (2017, Mar 16, para. 1). With this Lévesque asks, "should history promote national identification," in light of the seeming increase in cosmopolitan outlooks of young people, from "global" cultures and interactions of the internet age (Lévesque, 2017, Mar. 16)? Lévesque succinctly (re)opens the theoretical debate regarding continued entanglements of history education and the building of a national citizenry, or a "nationalized" public as a sort of common collectivity, advocating that educators "can no longer indoctrinate students to identify with the nation" (para. 15). He argues, "we simply cannot ignore the role of national identification on people's ways of knowing. School history

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needs to play a more productive role in helping students develop more complex and serviceable identities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (para. 5). As an attempt to develop more “complex [student] identities for the 21st century” should these two elements, “history” and “nation,” continue to be entangled as the means of understanding experiences with the past in the present? Further, why is the “nation” the space that marks the boundary of common history and memory, instead of a living, collective engagement with the past outside of a nationalist or institutionalized framing? These questions guide our exploration into an embodied historical consciousness.

In our view, Lévesque’s article points to the need to think through normalized relations of history as a form of knowing, the collectives created and assumed in historicity, and the practical and conceptual effects of these relations. As the epigraph from Battiste hints, that “we are marinated in Eurocentrism,” perhaps there are deeper patterns of knowing and being that are continually knotting “the nation” to dominant historical narratives. Such processes need to be brought to light in order to understand how the nation is used as a normalizing entity upon and through which knowledge of the past is constructed, and how these processes carry consequences for coming to terms with collective pasts in the present.

This discussion is especially timely, as Conrad et al. (2013) and Tupper (2014) explain, conversations surrounding collective historical identity/ies and reconciliation have encouraged ongoing and arguably renewed investigations into processes of remembrance in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Seixas’ (2006) theorization of historical consciousness has held particular purchase with education scholars (see for example, Duquette (2015) and Thorp (2014)), broadly defined as the intersection between public memory, citizenship, and history education (Seixas, 2006, p. 15). Even in the brief definition, the containers of memory, collectivity, and knowing, carry normalized relations and need critical unpacking. Seixas’ theorization of historical consciousness becomes a grounding point in order to parse out some of the tensions deployed in his version of historical consciousness, particularly in its relation to the somatic (bodies, embodiment), the ontological (nature of being), and the epistemological (forms of knowing). This is not to suggest that Seixas’ historical consciousness is “bad” or “wrong,” but rather to work through its entanglement with culturally-embedded historical values and norms that carry pedagogical consequences in its current conceptualization. With such engagement, we further the potential of an embodied historical consciousness as a reparative practice, and for attending to Lévesque’s critique above, by engaging with theoretical insights of feminist, post-colonial, decolonizing, and anti-racist perspectives. These perspectives strategically “raise an epistemological challenge” that critiques and “questions the ‘nature of truth and reality’” (Pillow, 2003, p. 187), in an unquestioned historical consciousness. These critical questions are paired with postcolonial and decolonizing theoretical insights, following similar tracts as Andreotti (2011), who argues for an engagement with ideas of adaptation and multiplicity within some Indigenous epistemologies, “that should be deployed in healing the trauma of colonization,” recognizing and taking seriously “the power of Indigenous metaphors to offer strategies for healing of the ‘soul wounds’ of both aboriginal and nonaboriginal communities” (p. 70). Such questions and insights provoke the ontological and epistemic foundations of historical consciousness (Seixas, 2006): to unravel common sense theoretical linkages and their effects, particularly the exclusionary and not-so-common normalization of particular bodies and identities, highlighting tethers to the nation-state. With this, we are conscious of our positionalities as privileged settler-academics living within a settler-colonial state, and follow Kerr (2014) in attempting to be(come) “unsettled settlers” who engage “with others in critical self-questioning” of real places in real ways (p. 102).

In turn, we take up the “challenge” and critically question the “nature of truth and reality” of historical consciousness, arguing that an *embodied* historical consciousness is needed: one that is not tied to nation or nation-building, but connects with affective, lived-experiences in the present; that allows for a relational understanding of being that is more concerned with

perhaps attending to the “cosmopolitan outlook of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” as Lévesque suggests. In particular, this means not only being attentive to living bodies in-and-as history and separating history and “the past” from the body as a rational discipline, but making an overt space for working through ontological and affective elements, such as the trauma of being excluded from historically “somatic norms”<sup>2</sup> in nation-building narratives (Puar, 2004), in order to heal “soul wounds” as Andreotti advocates. This also means untethering national grand narratives as the space of “common” past, to critically construct an historical consciousness, differently.

In what follows, we offer a brief definition of historical consciousness as it has been developed by Peter Seixas (2004; 2006; 2017). This discussion provides a conceptual grounding for engaging in critical tensions where histories are contained and compared through a subtle reliance on Western hierarchical positions. We then show how these positions encourage and prop up the entanglements of historical consciousness and nation, and the possible negative effects of such relations in the present. With this, we argue that Seixas’ current historical consciousness, as he admits, requires an engagement with the ontological components of historicity more specifically, particularly the ways bodies are somatically living the effects of what is contained in “the past.” It is in such attention we then advocate for an embodied historical consciousness as a means of foregrounding the critical and ontological, in hopes of opening a space for more complex and hybrid understandings of history, particularly in light of reconciliation. Finally, we theorize and argue for an embodied historical consciousness as a way forward through more affective, interdisciplinary, and complex engagements with “the past” in relation with lived realities in the present.

## **Seixas’ Historical Consciousness**

Though historical consciousness has varied definitions, we draw from the work of Seixas (2004; 2006; 2017), as these texts have been most prominent in discussions of historical consciousness in Canada. Seixas’ work in historical consciousness arrives out of a distinctly European understanding of the past, following German theorists Gadamer and Rüsen. Gadamer (1975) explains historical consciousness as not simply relating to the past by an everyday person, but “the full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of opinions” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 8). Seixas (2004) uses Gadamer as one possible way of relating the turn to “awareness” as “a specific cultural development located in the modern era” (p. 8), becoming a “privilege, perhaps even a burden” of “post-modern” generations (Gadamer, 1975, p. 8). To work through such “burden,” Seixas references Rüsen (2004), who theorizes historical consciousness as a moral orientation from the past towards present and future action, and a “prerequisite” to dealing with historicity. Yet, Rüsen (2004) positions historical “orientation” for historical consciousness as a decidedly teleological, linear, and narrative framework, where historical consciousness can be understood as a sort of temporal narrative competence, or “synthesis of moral and temporal consciousness” (p. 79). Rüsen (2004) argues it is the “orientation” of historical consciousness that reaffirms moral values of “togetherness” and “common life,” and notions of identity and difference are enfolded with a “competent” understanding of the past - such as those of the nation state as a form of “commons” (Rüsen, 2007; Seixas, 2004; 2006). In turn, for Rüsen, historical consciousness has a “practical function” as a guide for living together well. Rüsen’s and Gadamer’s historical consciousness then, acknowledge the social construction of reality and moral “burden” within historicity, and provides an argument for its importance for present and future collective action.

Seixas pulls from Gadamer’s and Rüsen’s theorizations when suggesting that historical consciousness entails “individual and collective understandings of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors that shape those understandings, as well as the relations of historical understanding to those of the present and the future” (Seixas, 2004, p. 10). Yet, Seixas (2004,

2006) also sees the “burden” of history as a decidedly nation-state and educational project, through the three intersections of public memory, citizenship, and history education. This version of historical consciousness also connects national belonging, and formalized educational processes of remembrance through and with history education (Seixas, 2006, p. 15). This is not to suggest that historical consciousness should or should not be cultivated in formal schooling, nor are we critiquing the relative merit of Seixas’ theorizations, particularly as it is important work that has gained uptake and interest for historical inquiry and the teaching of history within Canada.<sup>3</sup> Instead, what we are interested in is better understanding the possible consequences of defining historical consciousness as a national and public education project in a nation that is grappling with its historical “moral burdens” and multiplicity of experiences of living difficult pasts in the present.

### **Postmodern “burdens”: “Rival histories” and comparative historical containers**

Seixas recently (2012b; 2017) acknowledged that current iterations of historical consciousness are still restraining, falling short of thinking through what he calls a more “postmodernist understanding” of history: one that confronts that all knowledge is imbued with power, including historical narratives in their production, methods, and Western epistemological presuppositions (Foucault, 1972; Munro, 1998). What types of power, then, are upheld within a historical narrative intricately tied to the building of the Canadian nation-state, and what type of historicity is encouraged in this type of historical thinking?

In Seixas’ “postmodernist understanding” of history, power becomes a comparative tension in a relativist framework: one historical “interpretation” positioned against “other” interpretations of history, often leading to conflicting perspectives. Yet, paying closer attention to historical “difference” through an epistemological lens shows the potential for understanding such postmodern burdens, and all their complexity, as not simply a matter of rivalry or historical comparison, but a deeper look into the way historical meaning is created in historical consciousness. As an example, Andreotti (2011) argues that attempts at “dialogue” between Indigenous and Western epistemologies continue to be plagued by dominant and subordinate relationships, becoming what Battiste (1998) calls problematic “add and stir models of education” (p. 21). Working under the premise that history is comprised of comparative, even contrasting perspectives, “other” (non-Euro dominant) histories are relegated to a comparative periphery, not as potentially viable ontological or epistemic perspectives in their own right. In other words, interpretations are siloed, and historical understanding is limited to a correlational or comparative politics, where non-normative ways of knowing and being related to the past become in tension with, or opposition to, dominant ones. This is similar to Byrd’s (2007) suggestion that comparative historical configurations have the troubling tendency of leading from comparison to *equation*; comparison slips into the hierarchical, when Western conceptions of the past continue as unproblematically centered and normalized histories through which “other” interpretations are positioned.

This is particularly the case in historical narratives of nation-building as “the” normalized means of interpreting a collective past. As Lévesque’s (2017) comments remind, history education has long been dominated by nation-building histories. Further, Seixas (2012b) conflates the “human story” of the past into “national stories” as if they are the same historical “stories” that are common sense, and for all peoples (p. 863). Like Lévesque above, we do not deny that national identification affects peoples’ ways of knowing the past, as Conrad et al. (2013) have also shown in their Canadian study, but it is vital to acknowledge that these “ways of knowing” and the identifications that they engender, are not a unilateral experience. Nations carry value judgements for making the distinctions of “us vs them” that are not only imagined, but felt and lived *in* people, somatically, and affectively.

Sociologist Max Weber (2009) explains that the nation does not arrive from an economic origin, but from an emotional one. The nation is about “exacting a sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups. Thus the concept belongs in the sphere of values” (p. 172). In this way, Weber speaks with Anderson’s (1991) oft-cited remark that nations are “imagined communities.” As such, the promotion of the nation as “the” space of collective history, presumes that the collective will develop a value-orientation based on a type of affective historical consciousness. In other words, positioning the nation as the space through which to build historical consciousness can continually recenter an affective orientation built from dominant cultural values to collective understandings of the past. Left unquestioned, the nation-building narrative “orients,” to use Rüsén’s term, the “historicity of everything and relativity of opinions” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 8), which at first glance allows space for multiple historical narratives, however, working within the “burden” of postmodern perspectives, historical rivalries work to reposition dominant tellings of the past, leaving us to grapple with the leftovers from such comparative, limited, and competing historical orientations. Goldberg (2015) recently critiqued such a comparativist analysis, seeing it as “hiding as much as it reveals” (p. 252); by continuing to see nation-states as common sense separate entities, rather than seen as *relational* to each other. This is the work that critical scholars and activists continue to advocate for, through the foregrounding of processes of power production in their very “reality.” What comparative or rivalry histories hide, then, are the ways in which they support and allow traces of power to continue through banal constructions of history, surviving through buried assumptions in the reproduction of a type of uncritical historical consciousness.

These epistemological and ontological comparative separations are compounded as historical narratives - as units of interpretive orientation - as they become containers for comparison, and analysis becomes about working through “*rival histories*” (Elmertsjo, Clark, & Vinterek, 2017; Seixas, 2017), or dialogues *between* differing narratives as a means of gathering an “awareness of historicity” (Rüsén, 2007). The power in the production and possible effects of these narratives as separate containers is often obscured and difficult to analyze as points of collectivity, if their separateness as narratives is assumed in advance. As Seixas (2004) states, the narrative “defines the boundary between members who share the common past and those who do not” (p. 6). Such a formulation, where boundaries are drawn between historical narratives, carries consequences for individuals and their relations to the past, but also for present understandings and relations for those narrative collectives. This is evident in the separations of particularized histories placed within “history” *en totum*.

Historical narratives as separate, comparable narratives imbued with their own meanings, not only breaks these narratives into national stories but further into particular segments of the population, such as Indigenous, African Canadian, Francophone, or women’s histories. In identity demarcations, like “women’s history” for instance, not only is “women’s history” particularized as a possessive subject, it is often manifested in histories of familial or “private” spaces as narratives, fracturing spaces and gendered bodies from an unnamed norm of “men’s history.” Or, in racialized terms, having “Black history month” embodies and racializes the subject of history in particular ways which separate historical narratives, but also contains these narratives to a specific temporal space - a month. The politics of the particularities of experiences of “the past” that have created these separations of identity collectives along, nationalized, racialized, gendered terms for instance, are not actively or specifically engaged in historical consciousness, but continue unproblematically. In other words, why are such demarcations necessary in the first place, and what do such separations have to do with historical consciousness? Continuing to see histories and historical inquiry through a comparative configuration *creates* power-laden collisions as historical approaches and the narratives they generate as distinct containers, denying a means of thinking more relationally as Goldberg (2015) suggests. So, the power/knowledge dynamics of historical consciousness,



its “nature of truth and reality,” continue relatively unquestioned and normalized in its epistemological and ontological foundations of how we live and know our pasts.

### **Historical consciousness as intra-actional: Attending to relationality**

One way to foreground processes of power in historical consciousness is to conceptually pair with an embodied understanding, through the idea of history as an “intra-relational assemblage” (Barad, 2007). Barad’s (2007) work allows for a type of ontological and epistemological plasticity, since intra-relation is a take on Barad’s (2007) notion of “intra-action,” where connection (to the “past” or “others”) is not about privileging two or more distinct entities and engaging them comparatively, as in *inter*-action, or dialogue, but rather that the specificity of any entity comes out of and through its connections, as an “assemblage” of those connections in all their tensions (what Goldberg calls “relational” above). Assemblage therefore describes the complex and temporary wholes that come together through intra-actions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; see also Delanda, 2006). This process highlights the importance of power *in* and *as* pieces of connection themselves - such as the ways in which nationhood or nationalism are powerfully braided into histories and history education, where these connections are not assumed in advance, but entwined with(in) historical inquiry itself.<sup>4</sup> In turn, historical understandings are emergent, entangled and embodied, and “containers” of nation or otherwise are active aspects of the development of an orientational awareness of historicity as historical consciousness. An embodied “intra-relational assemblage” is a concept that shifts historical consciousness to an emerging and relational process, moving away from linear, “rival histories,” with their enclosed boundaries and their tendency towards centre-periphery relations. It keeps the connections of past-present-future in dynamic flux, and in direct relational connection with the living body in the present, where the past can live in active tension with the present. The insights within the concept of an embodied intra-actional assemblage process for historical consciousness allow us to unpack further the effects in the epistemological and ontological assumptions Seixas’ relies on to position an “orientation” for awareness of historicity as described above, namely, the notion of a “finished” past, and a nation-state as historical ontological narrative container, and the somatic normalizations that come with a privileging of the nation-building historical narrative to collective understandings of history. It is to these dynamics we now turn in the next section.

### **Untethering the nation-state: Understanding historical processes of somatic normalization**

Working through the stickiness of deploying “postmodern understandings” in history, Seixas (2017) concludes by stating: “History education scholars have aimed at the abilities of students to analyze, evaluate, and construct narratives about the past. But what if narrative has not only an epistemological but an ontological dimension?” (Seixas, 2017, p. 264). While Seixas admits to an ontological “dimension” to historical education, we argue more direct engagement is exactly what is needed for historical consciousness to work through complex histories, and attend to the powerful effects of this ontological element.

The effects of privileging the nation as an ontological container for history are reproduced and reinforced in the continuing articulation of nationalist history as connected to certain bodies (and identities) over others. These are bodies of particular kinds, mostly cis-gendered, male, racialized white, with European (particularly Anglo and Francophone) heritages. For those who identify with some or all of these identity positions, the notion of a collective space like “nation” is more common than not, unproblematic.<sup>5</sup> It creates, as Puwar (2004) puts it, “a palace of

mirrors” (p. 17) - where normalized somatic identities in terms like “Canadian” are reflected back in positive ways, reinforcing those identities as part of the collective, historically, and in the present, and others as “space invaders” into the national norm (Puwar, 2004). Stanley (2011) makes this point in an anti-racist analysis of the continued legacies of disenfranchisement of Chinese Canadians. These legacies have encouraged a grammar of Chinese Canadians as being forever “foreigners” or “recent immigrants” rather than as having deep, complex relations to the development of Canada in its nation-building historical narrative (see also Coloma, 2013). Normalized “reflections” then, create and reproduce an invisible “somatic norm” that is imbued with power, and if not understood critically, and taken apart, repeat the same patterns of normalized inclusions and exclusions of certain bodies as a palace of mirrors (Puwar, 2004). This is particularly poignant in settler-colonial nation-states like Canada, where the dominance of grand narratives of nation-building, and settler neutrality continue to position “other” bodies and the histories they may link to, not even as rivals, but as “add ons” or side-narratives to the central story, if they are present at all (Rogers & Grant, 2017; Stanley, 2011), what Puwar (2004) calls a conceptual and representative “straight-jacket.” We see this with many historical narratives and representations of Indigenous peoples within the broader nation-building narratives, as they are reflecting historical representations that are misconstrued (or completed absent) from legacies of colonialism and racism (see for example, Paul, 2006).

With this, not all bodies do or wish to reflect the somatic norm of “Canadian.” An historical consciousness not attuned to these complexities takes these processes of certain bodies as the privileged and positively related subjects of historical narrative for granted, assuming a collective and neutral common understanding of peoples’ connections to the past and to the nation in which they live. What about bodies who do not feel a solidarity with “Canada,” but continue to live in the proscribed boundaries of Canada, the nation-state? What if the mirror as somatic norm reflects a body that one cannot feel or see as themselves, does that mean they must “fit” into an already assumed somatic slot, even if this slot is exclusionary and limited?<sup>6</sup> How does one attempt to understand differing historical contexts, and develop a complex understanding of time, if the histories one is continually encountering exclude, silence, deny or misconstrue *present* identities that one inhabits?

As such, we argue that positioning historical consciousness as a nationalized comparative endeavour for settler-colonial nation-states like Canada, closes historical understanding in exclusionary ways continuing power politics that critical understandings question, deconstruct and bring to light. At the same time, how would a potentially embodied historical consciousness that at the very least “imagines” but more feels and experiences as solidarities not tethered to nations and nation-building narratives, *work*? In engaging the ontological components of historicity specifically, we find hope for a complex and reparative historical understanding as an embodied intra-actional assemblage.

### **Historical consciousness or historical embodiment?: Questioning ontological containment**

Historical consciousness, must promote ways of thinking that do not side-step somatic and ontological aspects of collectivity,<sup>7</sup> remaining critical of what it means to work and teach for a collective that is not reliant on nation or dichotomous essentialisms for identification. For Seixas (2012a; 2012b; 2017), ontological components of history and history education involve an understanding of the self as an “historical agent,” which relies on the interpretation and contextualization of the past as a “finished” entity and engaged through historical traces outside the body in the present moment. Seixas’ (2012a) remark, that “the past is a foreign country”

(p. 127), which is “finished” (Seixas, 2006), exemplifies the continued separations of the past from the present and the future within Western conceptions of history (Marker, 2011).

Historical consciousness from the perspective of a “foreign” and “finished” past assumes and therefore makes unproblematic the very separation of past/present/future and its orientation as a teleological procession: the individual and collective are contained and separate entities from the past and future. In other words, one cannot “know” the past in the present if it is “foreign,” and cannot actively disentangle this history if it is “finished.” In this way, there is little conceptual room for “historical agents” to work through the powerful effects of the somatic norm to which they are asked to relate in the present. Further, as Marker (2011) shows, Indigenous ways of understanding the past are “different” in that “the past” is not past at all, but circular and relational; it is contingent and entangled with living bodies in the present, where local land, flora and fauna, including people, are *living* historical beings with meanings. This is a means of enacting an orientation to the past as always connected in complex relation to a living body, not as something to be engaged from the distance of something “foreign.” One does not have to “pick” a conception of the past, as this would continue a comparative analysis, but rather, an intra-actional approach sees the relational, power-laden effects within the ontological and epistemological assumptions of these analyses in the conception of the past. By assuming the Western epistemological understanding that time is a finished place, and the ontological position of the past as “foreign” for historical consciousness, Seixas closes down potential engagement of an Indigenous understanding of an embodied historical knowing and its relations for those who identify with it.

More deeply, when viewing the past as finished, the historical “traces” are also distanced from the embodied and living present. Traces are petrified and disembodied “artefacts” from the past (Seixas, 2006), to be objectively engaged from a distance, ontologically splitting an awareness of historicity from the body (including the head), and the enduring connections in and with individuals and/or collectives in the present are not directly engaged. In so doing, it takes for granted (and dismisses) that bodies are themselves historical traces in the sense that we all “wear” historical and contemporary understandings of racial/settler-colonial thinking as somatic markings.

Yet, experiences like those related in a recent CBC article (Fenn, 2018, May 14), where four Inuit women were “reunited” with artefacts of their ancestors kept at the Smithsonian in Washington, USA, become tension-filled reminders of “other” ways of relating to the past and that “traces” are not so distant from the bodies assembling them for historical orientation. As one of the women, Manitok Thompson, recounts upon seeing the enclosed clothing of her great-grandmother behind an artefact drawer, “It seems my bones, somewhere, my spirit had a connection and it seemed like it was shouting out, ‘We’ve been lonely for so many years. We want to go back home now’” (Fenn, May 14, para. 10). Seeing the past in traces outside of the body and as “finished” elements continues the common sense that obscures that past is lived *in* bodies, in “the bones,” “in the spirit” in the present and into the future. Historical consciousness’ definitional separations of “the past” and the living body seem to exacerbate tensions of comparative space that it struggles to work through in the first place: It continues the “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 1986) of Western epistemologies in Canadian history education which denies the living human bodies as sites of knowledge making and knowing, and awareness of historicity. The centrality of the living body and spaces for/of these bodies and identities as they are produced through intra-actions of what is understood as “the past,” seems to be a pivotal, missing element within Seixas’ current historical consciousness. As such, an attention to *embodiment* for historical consciousness is an element we highlight in Seixas’ current conception to encourage the contingency and relationality of historicity and embody historical consciousness in practice. It requires critical understanding of bodies as part of history, living history, and troubling of the notion of the past as disembodied, traceable

“finished” artefacts without powerful and tension-laden connections to living bodies, both individuals and collectives.

### **Towards an embodied historical consciousness: Re-membering history**

A shift in historical understanding to include notions of “bodies” (the ontological), into an engagement with the past as an intra-actional assemblage can attend to some of the realities of ongoing racism, misogyny, and/or colonization through critical engagement of somatic, embodied elements and orientations of past/present/future. It forces a recognition of the “containers” of history, and has the possibility of making the politics of embodiment - whose/which bodies, when and where - part of discussions of the past from its foundation. In particular, this means not only being attentive to bodies in-and-as history, but making space for working through embodied elements of history, how bodies and consciousness are not only interconnected, but how bodies are made through common-sense and violent distinctions that make this living and any attempt at a “common” historical consciousness difficult to work through as evidenced in our discussion of national narratives above. The national grand narrative creates a limited and exclusionary version of “common memory,” where an embodied historical consciousness offers an understanding the past *in the present* and *through the somatic*, to work on “re-membering” history and “recovering” collective notions from the past to be pulled into the present (Munro, 1998).

As Laforteza (2015) argues, re-membering “ensures that the body is continually remade by ‘breaking the silence’ against white supremacy and oppression” (Laforteza, 2015, p. 143; Lorde, 1983, p. 97). As a continual “breaking” of the naturalized denial of the body, re-membering “allows for a new way of examining these forms of power and privilege, thus engendering a different relationship to them” (Laforteza, 2015, p. 143), that an embodied historical consciousness may reveal. Munro (1998) furthers this point saying that for those who have been denied, excluded or silenced in history, “to recover from history is in part dependant on reconceptualising, re-member-ing, the suppression, the contradiction, the pain, the fiction that is history” (p. 267). History education, as an integral aspect of historical consciousness, needs then to be open to multiple ways of knowing *and* being, but also work through affective trauma from exclusionary and linear constructions of history, and “the past.” An embodied historical consciousness must give space to multiple, complex, embodied ways of being as a collective in any space, nation or otherwise, but also requires attending to the affects and “soul wounds” of the somatic norm as a historical construct in its denial and silencing, as well as its privileging, in the past and present (Andreotti, 2011).

### **Taking up affect, collective memory, and collective healing**

An embodied history is one that is lived in the present, and the “body” of that living can shift and change with context; it does not presuppose the nation, or a universal body, but points to the need to better understand embodied elements of history, such as affect. One option is to look to the reparative work of post-colonial and decolonizing scholars to engage with critical postmodern and ontological understandings of how “we” have come to our present moments. Laforteza’s (2015) notions of re-membering becomes an affective reflexive analysis through what she calls “somatechnics.” These analyses aim to make “the colonial and imperial economies of race, gender, sexuality, disability, class and religion accountable for their corporeal consequences” (p. 147), therefore providing a possible analytical framework for a relational, and embodied historical orientation that does not neglect power, but makes its very “corporeal” engagement a foundational element. There is also possibility, for example, in the work by Rothenburg (2009) on multidirectional memory that “considers a series of

interventions through which social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present” (p. 4). Such interventions allow for an attention to epistemic hybridism (Andreotti, 2011), where epistemological positions are not merged (as an add and stir formulation), but held in productive tension, as we see in the possibility of an intra-actional assemblages. Such a “hybrid” position then foregrounds tensions of multiple and shifting understandings of the past that can work through trauma, as the very “tensions” become the analysis, rather than contained and separate positions for comparative analyses.

Yet, there is also powerful hope to integrate new methods into the discipline of history, towards more affective meaning-making in the arts (as one example), which have repeatedly shown to work through the “soul wounds” of the past in ways that bring the world and the individual’s body together in complex assemblages. Steele’s (2000) work in trauma theory, for instance, “illuminates our connections to the past, and how the past connects to us...[and] makes visible the problem and possibilities of our connections to each other” (p. 4). In openly working with(in) affective realms in relation to the past, like notions of trauma and artistic means of expression, new collectivities are possible, new forms of reparation in the form of witnessing also become more seriously plausible. The poetry of witnessing, according to Steele (2000), is:

. . . written for the people on the other side of desks, professors, and politicians and social workers and all those who are in a position of power, a position to witness. To witness means to decide to participate, not only with the head but with the heart- in the experience of another, an experience so painful that it must be shared in order to be confronted. (pp. 1-2)

Sharing is a form of solidarity that does not rely upon an “other” in the sense of exclusion or comparison, but as the foundational means of creating, maintaining, and expanding solidarity. To witness is to acknowledge power, not ignore its effects, and work towards healing. Further, it means choosing the collective with which one associates historically and in the present, drawing strength from the activity of “confronting” what such a collective means now and for potential futures. What would be the point of historical consciousness, or even, historical embodiment, if not to heal and find deeper more connective understandings of “our” histories? By healing, we mean healing from collective trauma, inflicted on peoples historically, in the recent past, and in the present. Working in affective domains, with people’s somatic and emotional lived experiences, means working in healing, in a very broad sense of the word. So, we have worked our thinking about historical consciousness, towards collectivity as healing, reparation, and embodied knowledge that is then “awake” (Greene, 1995) to the past in the present moment. How then, can historical consciousness, help in the process of collective healing, or healing as/through solidarity by bringing out and working through the ontological elements of history?

### **By way of conclusion**

What we suggest is no simple task, and as Battiste reminds us again, we are *all* marinating in Eurocentrism, making the process of finding different historical relations especially difficult to provoke and continue. For this reason, there seems to be a shying away from these sticky spots or a tendency to defer troubling realities to a future problem. Even as Seixas (2017) openly hints to the “ontological dimension” of history education and historical narrative, his response is endemic of side-stepping trouble spots saying: “the ontological dimension of narrative competence is potentially a conceptualization for a more expansive and ambitious history education (perhaps, admittedly, at such an abstract level that it has little use, practically)” (p. 264). So as much as the ontological may be present, it is something for a more “expansive and ambitious history education,” one that is perhaps not “practical.” Further, at present, any historical inquiry has to exist in the space of the nation, in educational institutions, in a

discipline guided by scientific, “objective” methodologies, in the rationalized space of the “head,” and in sparse curricular “real estate” (Rothberg, 2009). This is difficult work! And yet, if we make no effort, as people, as educators, what happens to historical consciousness? How “conscious” of the past can any one body be if this consciousness is marred with blinders, cooked from restrictive and exclusionary spaces that deny that the past is not so common, not straight-forward or even “rival”? Indeed, our understandings of history will always be limited, and our positionalities partial to our own lived experiences, however, thinking through ways in which we construct the past, and how we live with it in the present is not a futile exercise. Instead of thinking of this type of history education as “impractical,” we can think of it as being necessary, and through that necessity for collective work (healing and solidarity) we can find a way through. Our envisioning of an embodied historical consciousness as an intra-actional assemblage seeks to do just that.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Since the recent publication from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), along with the flurry of celebrations for Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there has been increasing engagement in practices of collective remembrance and national historical narratives. See also Nijhawan, Winland, & Wüstenberg (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Puwar (2004) defines the somatic norm as the effect of connection between "bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time" where it is "certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the 'natural' occupants of specific positions" (p. 8).

<sup>3</sup> Seixas' (2004) theorizing of historical consciousness inspired discussions within disciplinary history education in Canada, and has been significant for the pedagogical reasoning of specific "historical thinking concepts" to encourage students to "become more competent as historical thinkers" (The Historical Thinking Project, n.d.). While the historical thinking concepts have been taken up in several provincial social studies and history curricula (for e.g., Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba), historical consciousness is not explicitly utilized, and, we argue, has been undertheorized in the Canadian context.

<sup>4</sup> See McDonough and Cormier (2013) for example discussions of the distinction of teaching nationalism (or not) or teaching processes of nationalism in schooling.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of collective, tension-laden understandings of the past, see research on tensions with collective remembrance across Canada from Conrad et al. (2013).

<sup>6</sup> This process is exemplified in Ibrahim (2014) in the tensions of African migrant youth coming to Canada having to "racially fit" in the already contained space of Western, and particularly North American representations of Blackness.

<sup>7</sup> By 'ontological aspects of collectivity' we mean to suggest that ontology - the engagement with the 'nature of being' - and the "underlying beliefs about existence that shape everyday relationships to ourselves, others, and to the world" (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 5), are important to bring to focus in understandings of 'collectivity' for historical consciousness. As White (2000) suggests, ontological commitments, "are entangled with questions of identity and history, with how we articulate the meaning of our lives, both individually and collectively" (p. 4).



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## Inquiring into the political dimension of History classroom practices: Suggestions for epistemological criteria and analytical concepts

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, three epistemological criteria are suggested against which analytical frameworks for studying the political dimension of history classroom practices can be deemed viable. The suggested criteria - (I) the primacy of practice, (II) the primacy of empirical openness and (III) the primacy of the political - are articulated by conducting critical and affirmative readings of previously established concepts, primarily historical consciousness. To clarify their application, the criteria are positioned in relation to the premises and concepts of a potential framework; namely, the logics of critical explanation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), the viability of which is argued for theoretically and empirically.

**KEYWORDS:** History Education; History Wars; Politics; Classroom Practice.

### Introduction

Research on the political dimension of teaching and learning about the past is, by now, a well-established feature in the scholarly field of history education. Itself a multifaceted term, *the political dimension* can refer to educators teaching political history as a subject content or it may denote the political orientations that students of history develop over the course of their education. More often, however, the term is used to describe the multitude of *public debates, contestations and conflicts* that surround the aims and contents of history education in many national settings (Parkes, 2011; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). Although such contestations (collectively labelled as the history wars) ultimately remain specific to their respective contexts, they are commonly enacted in the form of clashes between progressive and conservative educational forces who champion competing and profoundly different visions of what constitutes a desirable history curriculum.

For example, the public contestations have, in the past, (at least in many Western societies, such as Australia, Canada and the Nordic countries) focused on the issue of whether factual knowledge or critical competencies should be the priority in history education (Elgström & Hellstenius, 2011; Samuelsson, 2017; Sheehan, 2012). In other instances, the contentious issue has been whether unifying national narratives or multicultural perspectives that take the

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history of ethnic minorities into consideration should be promoted (Clark, 2009; Parkes, 2007). Drawing on this extensive literature, the present paper departs from an understanding of history as a fundamentally contested issue. Specifically, it follows Robert Parkes's (2011) post-structuralist understanding of history curriculum as containing *the discursively contested signifiers around which antagonistic or adversarial relationships are articulated*. In a broad sense, the political dimension of history education is here defined as a term that denotes the *conflicts* that surround and permeate the subject in school, as well as in society.

Despite the recent wealth of studies investigating the history wars at the level of public debate, comparatively little is known about how conflicts about history are played out in the actual classroom practices of teachers and students. In fact, scholars have only to a limited extent investigated the political dimension of history classrooms *in-situ*; that is, by observing and analysing student-teacher interactions with this dimension in mind. Although few and far between, such studies are essential if the research community is to facilitate history educators to reflect on and respond to the contestations that may arise in their professional practices (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that studies of history classroom practices in general are uncommon. Such studies are, on the contrary, plentiful, and often provide detailed analyses of students' learning in terms of their historical thinking (e.g. Demers et al, 2015; Havekes et al, 2017; Stoel et al, 2015). However, such studies largely depart from the assumption that teaching and learning history is an exclusively congenial or consensus orientated activity. Consequently, they less often investigate the classroom practices from the point of view of the subject's political dimension. A potential explanation for this shortcoming could be that scholars (through the use of the historical thinking framework) possess the adequate analytical tools, such as first order substantive and second order metahistorical concepts (Lee 1983; 2004), for grasping students' learning, but lack an equally adequate vocabulary for inquiring into the controversies enacted in the classroom. Thus, before the scholarly community can engage fully with the empirical research gap outlined above, there is a need to identify feasible analytical frameworks for the task and, more importantly, to clarify the epistemological requirements that such frameworks ought to meet.

With these considerations in mind, the purpose of this paper is to suggest three criteria against which analytical frameworks for studying the political dimension of history classroom practices can be deemed viable. To clarify their usefulness, the criteria are applied to a potential framework, namely the logics of critical explanation (LCE), developed by post-structuralist scholars Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007), the viability of which is illustrated theoretically and empirically throughout the paper.

In short, the argument offered here is that, by considering the suggested criteria and framework, scholars can begin to engage with conflicts about history as they are enacted and dealt with by students and teachers. Or, put differently, the paper aspires to contribute to research on history education by *initiating a methodological discussion* about how researchers can approach the political dimension of history classroom practices. To be clear, the term classroom practice is here broadly defined as any enactment of teaching and learning wherein educators and students jointly and *purposefully* engage with a given curricular content in the context of *institutionalised* schooling (Öhman, 2014). This means that classroom practices are understood to encompass the multitude of actions and experiences that make up the fabric of everyday life in school. For instance, teachers giving lectures or conducting discussions and students writing essays or taking tests, are all examples of activities understood as classroom practices.

Following this introduction, the paper proceeds in several sub-sections. Initially, the suggested criteria – (I) the primacy of practice, (II) the primacy of empirical openness and

(III) the primacy of the political – are articulated by presenting critical and affirmative readings of previously utilised concepts, primarily historical consciousness as formulated by Jörn Rüsen (2005, 2017).<sup>2</sup> Next, and against the background of the first criterion, the paper offers a theoretical argument that relates the premises of the LCE framework to the recent ‘practice turn’ in education and in theory of history curriculum. The second criterion is illustrated by applying the analytical concept of social logics to an empirical excerpt of history classroom practice enacted in the context of Swedish upper secondary education. As the paper draws to a close, the third criterion is exemplified in relation to the concept of political logics, as well as two fictitious but plausible classroom scenarios. The paper concludes with some remarks that outline suggestions for future research.

### Three epistemological criteria

#### *I – The primacy of practice*

At present, it is safe to say that the theoretical concept of historical consciousness provides many scholars of history education with an analytical guidance in their empirical endeavours. As it has been defined by Rüsen (2005), this concept essentially denotes the mental operations through which humans establish relational links between the past, the present and the future. In this way, historical consciousness is understood as vital to the human condition and as essential to our ability to establish identities that span more than one temporal dimension. Furthermore, historical consciousness constitutes an integral part of people’s moral deliberations. This is especially evident in Rüsen’s positioning of narration as the primary mode of historical consciousness:

The linguistic form within which historical consciousness realizes its function of orientation is that of the narrative. In this view, the operations by which the human mind realizes the historical synthesis of the dimensions of time simultaneous with those of value and experience lie in narration: the telling of a story. (Rüsen, 2005 p. 26).

From this, Rüsen (2005; 2012) goes on to argue that historical narratives grant us coherence and meaning in what may otherwise be an incomprehensible existence, although the narratives, themselves, may have different content and purposes. For instance, they can serve an *exemplary* role by establishing the continuity of certain codes of moral conduct over time, or they can function as *critiques* of traditions and generally accepted historical truths. Furthermore, they can also be of a *genetic* type that acknowledges the very historicity and temporally changing character of morality. Partly because of this emphasis on history’s moral dimension, historical consciousness has gained wide recognition by scholars as it moves history education beyond issues of teaching certain skillsets and into the realm of identity and ethics (Seixas, 2012).

For the argument of this paper, however, it is important to acknowledge that the concept also has been claimed difficult to operationalise for empirical research purposes. According to Niklas Ammert (2017), this is due to the challenge inherent in the fact that consciousness can only be investigated *indirectly*, through its manifestations. As such, a scholar who makes use of historical consciousness in an empirical study ultimately faces the task of deciding how one or another form of historical consciousness is discernible in his or her empirical data.

In response to this challenge, Robert Thorp (2014a, 2014b), has moved to articulate an epistemological theory of historical consciousness by outlining some of the manifestations that can be said to represent this mental operation. By building on Rüsen’s theory, Thorp argues that historical consciousness not only manifests itself through narratives, but also

through the *artefacts of historical cultures* and the ways in which *history is used or abused* for various purposes. In considering history textbooks as an example of empirical data, Thorp (2014b) subsequently argues that they are artefacts of an historical culture, while the narratives that they contain represent how and for what ends history has been used. From this, he suggests that historical consciousness stands in a *causal relationship* to its manifestations and claims that “How an individual uses history is determined by what kind of historical consciousness she has” and that “it can be possible to show how a certain use of history *emanates* from a certain historical consciousness” (Thorp, 2014a p. 24, emphasis added).

While such an argument is compelling in relation to history textbooks, this paper posits that an alternative approach is necessary when it comes to in-situ studies of history classroom practices. Because, if such inquiries were to use the concept of historical consciousness, they would, from the outset, observe one phenomenon, i.e. practices, with the intention of drawing conclusions about another, that is, teachers’ and students’ mental operations. This, consequently, implies that the classroom practices are not viable objects of inquiry *in their own right*. More importantly, the potential discrepancy between that which is observed and that to which conclusions are drawn would also make the analysis greatly *dependent* on the scholar’s ability to argue why a given pattern of student-teacher interaction accurately corresponds to one form of historical consciousness but not another.

However, the epistemological challenge identified above can arguably be avoided if the researcher restrains his or her conclusions to concern only that which is directly observable, i.e. the actual classroom practices in which history is articulated (and occasionally contested) by teachers and students. In a word, although the concerns raised by Ammert (2017) and Thorp (20014a; 20014b) are warranted, the solution to the problem they present could be conceived differently. Instead of trying to articulate epistemological theories that would work to ‘translate’ what is observed in classroom practices into historical consciousness, it may be more reasonable for history education research to simply start drawing conclusions about the practices, themselves.<sup>3</sup> Of course, empirical research on students’ historical consciousnesses is already a common feature in the field of history didactics. Often, however, such research is conducted through interviews and questionnaires or via analysis of written examinations for the purpose of determining what type of historical consciousness students possess and how this intersects with their conceptions about ethnicity, culture and the nation (see Angier, 2017; Holmberg, 2017 and Lévesque, 2017 for some recent studies that exemplify this tendency). By comparison, the analytical use of historical consciousness in classroom studies is relatively limited, which speaks in favour of the argument that it is somewhat challenging to reconcile this concept with practice-oriented research interests.

As such, it is perhaps symptomatic that while arguments for placing analytical emphasis on practice and action have been put forth in other educational research fields, such as sports pedagogy (e.g. Quennerstedt et al, 2011) and education for sustainable development (e.g. Rudsberg & Öhman, 2010), similar propositions have yet to be made a serious topic of discussion in history education research. Against this background, I find it both possible and desirable to articulate the first criterion that frameworks for the study of the political dimension of history classroom practices ought to meet; namely, that a framework is viable if it not only facilitates the inquiry of practices but also encourage conclusions to be drawn about that very same object. In the present paper, this criterion is labelled as *the primacy of practice*.

## ***II – The primacy of empirical openness***

Despite the above-mentioned issues, Rüsen's (2005; 2012) concept of historical consciousness does not give the impression of a theoretically closed totality. Rather, he can be read as suggesting an open-ended theory through which the researcher can treat the fundamental elements of history education as issues in need of empirical investigation. This is evident in the way he stresses the contingent interplay between the temporal dimensions of the past, the present and the future. In essence, Rüsen's (2005) account positions these dimensions as simultaneously present and mutually constitutive of each other, meaning that none can be given precedence over another on theoretical grounds alone. How the actual relationship between them is configured, and whether one temporal dimension dominates the others at a given time, appear instead to be questions that are contextually dependant and, hence, best settled empirically.

Given this tendency in Rüsen's account, it becomes possible to articulate the second epistemological criterion, which is that an analytical framework is viable if it regards the fundamental elements of history education (such as the interplay of temporal dimensions) as radically open-ended and empirical issues. In the present paper, this criterion is labelled as the *primacy of empirical openness*.

## ***III – The primacy of the political***

Returning to a critical reading of historical consciousness, it is worth reiterating that Rüsen (2005) establishes the relevance of the concept in relation to *moral orientation*. This is made clear by the quote given previously, and by the great number of recent publications that investigate how moral and historical consciousness intersect (e.g. Ammert, 2017; Ammert et al, 2017; Körber, 2017). As such, historical consciousness is undoubtedly a useful concept when morality constitutes the researcher's main interest. This, however, does not mean that it is of equal significance in every study concerned with history education. After all, the educative practices of this school subject do not deal exclusively with the morality of remembering and forgetting, but also address the political conflicts involved in the articulation of history (Parkes, 2011).

To be fair, Rüsen (2017) has in his latter works positioned his theory of historical consciousness in closer proximity to an understanding of historical culture and its politics. Most notably, he asserts that "*Historical culture is the product of our historical consciousness*" (Rüsen, 2017 p. 168, emphasis in the original), and goes on to state that every such culture contains five ideal typical dimensions – the cognitive, the aesthetic, the political, the moral and the religious dimensions – which each correspond to different functions in the human process of creating meaning. For Rüsen, the moral dimension pertains to the normative judgements presently made to distinguish between good and evil elements of the past, whereas the political dimension is largely about the societal *legitimacy* created and upheld via (ab)uses of the past in present schooling. He writes:

Historical thinking plays an essential role in [the] process of legitimation. It organizes the experience of the past, which is always an experience of (often inhumane) power and authority. It happens in such a way that legitimacy, and the need for legitimacy, represents the innate meaning of political action from the past, making the events of the past plausible and even obvious in the present. The legitimizing efforts that power relations must expend in order to persist are formidable. Without the temporal dimension of continuity, authority is vulnerable (Rüsen, 2017 p. 180).

Judging by this quote, Rüsen primarily conceptualises the political dimension of historical culture and consciousness in terms of maintenance of authority. Or put differently, the

political dimension is in Rösen's theoretical construct mainly understood in terms of the *absence or suppression* of contestation. From this, it follows that an empirical study that makes use of Rösen's typology will direct its attention towards the *legitimising function* of history education but will not necessarily delve deeper into the conflicts that precede the establishment of legitimacy or work to destabilise authority. Thus, if departing from an understanding of history as a fundamentally contested issue, as I and much of the literature on the history wars do (Parkes 2011; Samuelsson, 2017; Taylor & Guyver, 2012), then Rösen's typology may not be the most adequate conceptual framework for grasping the conflicts or controversies that may arise in history classroom practices.

More importantly, the critical reader could argue that any discrepancy established between the moral and political dimensions of history education (however defined) is difficult to uphold beyond heuristic purposes. Nevertheless, political theorists like Chantal Mouffe (2005) emphasise the need to preserve such distinctions in post-political societies, where conflicts are increasingly played out between *moral enemies* in the register of absolute good and evil, rather than between opponents that, although disagreeing, acknowledge each other as legitimate *adversaries*. Following in the steps of Mouffe, Claudia Ruitenberg (2009) has argued that the political dimension of education, as opposed to the moral equivalent, involves the production of collective identities, as well as emotional attachments that centre around *societal issues* rather than personal ones: "That is to say, one may feel angry with one's cheating brother's moral transgression and one may feel angry with the reduction in civil liberties as a result of anti-terror legislation [...] the [latter] object is political in the sense in which Mouffe has defined it, as necessarily bound up with the power relations in a society and with a substantive vision of a just society" (Ruitenberg, 2009 p. 277).

In short, placing analytical emphasis on the political dimension of history classroom practices entails regarding the contestations enacted there not as moral deliberations nor exclusively as acts of legitimation but as *struggles between adversaries articulating fundamentally opposing visions of the past*. Thus, by critiquing Rösen and building on Mouffe and Ruitenberg, it becomes possible to articulate the third and final epistemological criterion, which is that an analytical framework is viable if it facilitates the investigation of the political contestations that situate elements of history or history education as societal issues. In the present paper, this criterion is labelled as the *primacy of the political*.

With the three epistemological criteria now laid bare, the remaining sections of this paper will be dedicated to detailing their applicability. Throughout the rest of the paper, this is accomplished by successively introducing the LCE framework and discussing the extent to which its premises and central concepts can be said to illustrate and meet the requirements outlined above.

## **The logics of critical explanation - a viable framework for history education research**

### ***The primacy of practice and the concept of logics***

The application of the first criterion, the primacy of practice, is best illustrated in relation to the ontological and epistemological rudiments of the LCE framework. In the following, I will therefore demonstrate in what way the framework can be understood to exemplify, as well as meet, this criterion by being fundamentally oriented towards practice.

Mainly, the framework can be understood as such because it stems from the ontology of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985/2014) political discourse theory, which positions articulatory practices as *the* constitutive element of social relations and of society as such.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, all human practices are articulatory in the sense that they render disparate elements of language relational to each other, thereby establishing temporary totalities, i.e. discourses. Articulatory practices are, however, also contingent in that they are not pre-determined to be carried out in only one way. Rather, practices are marked by a pluralism of meaning and are thus susceptible to both continuity and change through the subjects' actions and use of language. Put differently, articulatory practices do not rest on any ontological essence, but are instead, themselves, the very contingent foundations on which society is discursively made and re-made.

Building on this post-structuralist ontology, Glynos and Howarth (2007) have developed the LCE analytical framework to be used when a researcher wishes to explain *the articulatory workings* of a set of practices, be they social, political or educational. In a pertinent manner, they define the framework's most central concept, i.e. logics, accordingly: "[...] *the logic of a practice comprises the rules or grammar of the practice, as well as the conditions which makes the practice both possible and vulnerable.*" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007 p. 136, emphasis in the original). In this way, analysing practices with the aid of the LCE framework does not mean that the researcher aspires to establish some causal laws or external determinants. Rather, logics is a concept that the researcher uses in order to grasp *the guiding principles of discourse* that make a specific practice work the way that it does.

The concept of logics will of course be further specified in the coming sections. However, at this point, and in relation to the paper's first criterion, it is important to emphasise that it is with reference to the constitutive function of practices that the LCE framework positions them as a primary object of inquiry, as well as that which the researcher should attempt to explain (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). From this, it follows that practices are regarded as an explanandum in its own right and not as a mediating manifestation in the study of some other phenomenon, such as peoples' consciousness or conceptual thinking. Simply put, using the LCE framework requires that the researcher not only observe and analyse practices but also manages to strictly keep his or her conclusions situated in proximity to the investigated practices.

In an educational context, the framework could be well suited for grasping the workings of a classroom, considering that contemporary educational theories following 'the practice turn' regard teaching and learning as what is carried out through the individual and collective speech-acts of educators and students. In a general sense, the practice turn entails a critique of essentialism and dualisms (such as the rationalistic body-mind dualism) coupled with the re-evaluation of human *action* and language as the foremost constitutive elements of reality. From this point of view, empirical research in education tends to focus on that which is both constitutive and directly observable, i.e. teachers' and students' actions and their consequences. In a word, the turn to practice in educational theory means that it is what teachers and students *do*, as well as the experiences that follow from the doing, that counts as valid objects of empirical inquiry (Öhman, 2014).

To be fair, the constitutive function practice has not gone unnoticed in theoretical research on history curriculum. Parkes (2011), for one, has asserted that following 'The End of History' and the death of the grand narratives, history education needs to incorporate historiographic perspectives and accentuate the way historical representations are continuously de-constructed and reconstructed by teachers, students and the public. Naturally, this has consequences for history education scholars because, as Parkes (2011) puts it, "[...] it leaves us with only the *practices* and forms of historiographic representation." (p. 130, emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> Given the argument offered here, such a statement should not be seen as problematic, but could instead be regarded as an opportunity for researchers to acknowledge the concrete practices of teaching and learning history as their most central object of inquiry.



To a certain extent then, history education and the analytical concept of logics can be said to *converge* on the primacy of practice, which effectively makes the latter suitable for studying the former. In this respect, LCE constitutes an example of a framework that not only illustrates the application of the first criterion, but also meets it. Departing from this conclusion, the following sections will turn to engage with the two remaining criteria and the framework's analytical concepts of social and political logics.

### ***The primacy of empirical openness and the concept of logics***

In contrast to the theoretical argument given above, the application of the second suggested criteria, i.e. the primacy of empirical openness, is best illustrated with the help of a small-scale analysis of a student-teacher interaction. As such, this part of the paper will exemplify how the LCE framework can aid the researcher in approaching history classroom practices in an open-ended manner.

In their work, Glynos and Howarth (2007) break down the concept of logics into three types: social logics, which are used to outline the discursive coherence of practices; political logics, which are employed to investigate the moments where conflictual frontiers between adversaries are drawn, potentially causing practices to change direction; and fantasmatic logics, which are used to analyse the ideological rationales that convince individuals to immerse themselves in the practices at hand. In this paper, however, only the first and second concepts are discussed in detail. This is because, although fantasmatic logics constitute an important element of the LCE framework, it is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to offer a thorough account of the concept of ideology.<sup>5</sup> In fact, an epistemological discussion on this dimension of history education warrants a paper of its own and it would be unsound to treat its theoretical complexity in an all too abbreviated form.

For the purpose of the paper it is, however, important to acknowledge that, while the analytical purpose and function of the logics remain the same, they are ultimately re-articulated by the researcher into *case-specific logics* when used in the concrete analysis of a set of practices (Glynos & Howarth 2007). For example, a study of classroom practices that articulate gender history will most likely result in the naming of a set of social, political and fantasmatic logics that are specific to these practices, whereas inquiries investigating intercultural aspects of history education may find such practices underpinned by a different set of logics (consequently named differently). In short, logics are *content- and context sensitive concepts* that are re-articulated into empirically grounded results when applied by the researcher to his or her data. Thus, there is a measure of empirical openness to the LCE framework.

In further addressing the second epistemological criterion, the concept of social logics becomes relevant, in that it enables research questions like “what counts as valid history or historical knowledge in classroom practices?” to be addressed empirically as open-ended questions. This is because the concept is designed to characterise the overall coherence of a practice in terms of the *articulatory regularities and assumptions* that furnish it with consistency and stability (Glynos & Howarth 2007). In short, social logics help the researcher to seek out and define that which is commonly taken for granted in a set of practices. In the excerpt provided below, we will see exactly what kind of insights this concept can generate and how it relates to the criterion of empirical openness.

Before continuing this line of thought, it is necessary to make a short methodological note, given that the excerpt presented has been generated through video recordings of history classroom practices. The data encompasses 90 minutes of recorded classroom interactions and

is, as such, somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the data can be said to speak in favour of the LCE framework, in that its viability can be illustrated using a rather small sample. Furthermore, the choice of which excerpt to present was made primarily through a purpose-related selection process, meaning that it is the recorded segment most relevant for addressing the research problem of this paper that has been reproduced below (Patton 2002).

The following transcript represents a student-teacher conversation about the Swedish novel *Hertha*, written in 1856 by women's emancipation activist Fredrika Bremer. The lesson in question was part of a larger curricula segment that positioned the social and political movements of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe as the main educational content. However, the lesson was distinct in that it contained a classroom discussion that specifically focused on gender equality and gender history. As is evident below, the teacher and students come to discuss why women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to marry in order to lead financially stable lives but do so mainly in the light of present-day notions of love and marriage.

- Robert (teacher): [...] in some sense we have made such progress in Sweden that we would find it difficult to imagine a marriage in which love is not involved.
- Agnes (student): I would feel worthless if I only married someone for their money.
- Robert: Aha! Then we return to what Hertha is saying. She says that you end up in a subordinate position and feel inferior if you only marry for money. Even if you love your spouse you would feel inferior because much of our society is controlled by money. And this was precisely the problem in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. [...] Do you now understand the connection to today? [Several students nod and mumble “mmm” affirmatively] Is it all right to have children and not be married in today's society...
- Students: Yes.
- Robert: ... or do you give those people funny looks?
- Students: No.
- Robert: Is it all right to marry if you don't want children?
- Students: Yes.
- Robert: Do you give them funny looks?
- Students: No.
- Robert: Is a marriage between two men or two women okay?
- Students: Yes. [Some students giggle]
- Robert: We've talked about this several times before. It was absolutely not okay in this country only a few years ago. This is also one of the things that has changed gradually because our perceptions of each other have changed.

By grasping this excerpt with the concept of social logics, it becomes clear that several *shared assumptions* constitute the coherence of the teacher-student interaction. To begin with, a general acceptance of same sex marriage is present, as is the notion of marrying for love rather than money which, taken together, establishes a shared base of values between the teacher and his students. The sharedness of these values is especially evident from the fact that the teacher asks several “Is it all right to”-questions, to which the students respond in unison.

More importantly, however, the use of social logics makes it possible to analyse the relationship between the temporal dimensions (i.e. the past, the present and the future) that are essential to the practice of teaching history. As seen throughout the excerpt, the teacher mainly makes gender history intelligible by referring to the progress that has been achieved during the last two centuries. Most notably, he takes his point of departure in *contemporary*

gender relations by stating that “in some sense we have made such progress in Sweden that we would find it difficult to imagine a marriage in which love is not involved”. Next to this, he also mentions some of the similarities that present Swedish society shares with its 19<sup>th</sup> century counterpart. This is particularly well illustrated by his statement “this was precisely the problem in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well [...] Do you now understand the connection to today?” to which the students respond affirmatively. As such, the past is interchangeably articulated as being different and like the present, which consistently makes the latter temporal dimension the *point of reference* against which the former is understood. By contrast, the future is scarcely discussed at all by the teacher and the students, which relegates this temporal dimension to the fringes of the practice.

The conclusion that the present constitutes the referential and dominating temporal dimension is thus a consequence of me, the researcher, applying the concept of social logics to highlight that which is taken for granted within the practice. To be clear, this conclusion is not reached by having presentism built into the analytical framework. On the contrary, the use of social logics enables me to *empirically* determine which temporal dimension is prioritised by focusing on the shared assumptions of the practice, meaning that the analysis is conducted in an open-ended manner. Of course, the concept of social logics is not limited to highlight only shared values or the interplay of temporal dimensions but can also help to direct analytical efforts towards other articulatory regularities, such as teachers’ and students’ epistemological convictions (cf. Chhabra, 2017). However, for the purpose of this paper and given the illustration offered above, it is sufficient enough to say that the LCE framework meets and exemplifies the applicability of the second suggested criterion, i.e. the primacy of empirical openness.

### ***The primacy of the political and the concept of logics***

In this final section, the paper returns to the third criterion and clarifies how the LCE framework can be said to meet its requirements through the concept of political logics. In contrast to its social counterpart, which is employed to describe the stability of a practice, political logics help the researcher to explain how moments of contestation bring about changes in its operation. According to Glynos & Howarth (2007), such moments are understood as dislocatory, meaning that the stability of a practice is disrupted when adversarial relationships are articulated.

Also according to Glynos & Howarth (2007), such moments of contestation entail a signifying simplification of a practice, meaning that the multitude of participants’ identities, demands and arguments are downplayed and *arranged* into only two opposing camps, consequently establishing a political frontier between an ‘us’ and a ‘them’. In these instances, the otherwise disparate discursive elements (e.g. the participants’ varied identities, demands and arguments) in one of the camps are linked together and made equivalent with regard to their common negation, i.e. the identities, demands and arguments that are found on the other side of the frontier. Thus, practices are politicised when equivalence dominates its discourse and, vice-versa, when difference rules the practice moves towards becoming de-politicised.

Concretely, using the analytical concept of political logics means that the researcher accounts for changes in a practice’s operation by paying attention to the interplay between *equivalence* and *difference*, or put differently, that he or she pays attention to the way in which discursive elements are alternately linked together and separated with the consequence of either strengthening or weakening the distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In short, its use entails that the scholar first pinpoints the societal issue that evokes contestation, then

determines which case-specific adversarial camps are (dis)established and, finally, answers the question of how the political conflict alters the direction of the practice.

When arguing for the utilisation of this concept in the context of history education, we can imagine two plausible (and not uncommon) classroom scenarios in which adversarial relations are present. First, political logics can be useful for analysing moments when the educator *teaches politically*, either by reflected design or by habit. This refers to those instances in which the teacher opposes certain historical representations made by textbooks, external agents or by his or her own students. In these situations, political logics can be used to comprehend the teacher's discursive actions in terms of how he or she establishes equivalence between some historical representations while simultaneously juxtaposes these with another set of representations. In short, political logics can be useful for understanding *how* the teacher conducts his or her professional practice in an adversarial way.

Secondly, the analytical concept in question can be used to grasp those moments where *the educational content carries political connotations*, specifically focusing on how societal conflicts of the past play over into and continue in present educational practices. For instance, history lessons may very well review historical injustices enacted against a society's cultural or ethnical minorities, or they may examine unequal power relations in terms of gender or class hierarchies. As such, old conflicts can be reactivated in the history classroom and become a site of renewed contestation between students, to which the teacher must respond. Here, political logics can help the scholar to explain how, for example, disparate historical injustices and demands for reparations are articulated as equivalent and linked together on each side of an adversarial frontier. The concept in question is, thus, a tool that considers that practices of history education are not always stable or directed towards consensus but are instead marked by a measure of contingency and conflict (Edling, 2017). In sum, by fundamentally regarding issues, such as historical truth and justice, as not primarily individual and moral concerns, but as societal ones, political logics can be said to illustrate and meet the third epistemological criterion suggested in this paper.

## Concluding remarks

To conclude, this paper has argued the present need to articulate criteria against which potential frameworks for analysing the political dimension of history classroom practices can be identified and deemed viable. More specifically, the paper outlines three such criteria (the primacy of practice, the primacy of empirical openness and the primacy of the political) and exemplifies their applicability in relation to the premises and central concepts of the LCE framework.

However, the argument provided here only constitutes an initial foray into the epistemological domain of history education research and much remains to be done. For instance, although the empirical excerpt and plausible classroom scenarios presented in this paper exemplify the feasibility of the concept of logics, they are only small-scale illustrations. The conclusion that the LCE framework could be regarded as viable is therefore tentative and in need of further testing, preferably by using it in one or several large-scale empirical inquiries. Additionally, evaluating and possibly revising the suggested epistemological criteria in relation to frameworks other than the one addressed here would be another way in which future research could continue the discussion introduced in this paper.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Here, a caveat is necessary. It is, of course, possible to gain insights into the political dimension of history classroom practices by interviewing its main agents (i.e. teachers and students), as Clark (2009) does in her study.

<sup>2</sup> I am, of course, aware that competing (and competing) definitions of historical consciousness exist, most notably between European and North American theoretical traditions. Although sharing many similarities, these traditions tend to place varying emphasis on the empirical and philosophical dimensions of history education. Also, they differ somewhat on the issue of how historical consciousness relates to other concepts in history education research, such as collective memory (Seixas, 2004). For the sake of consistency, however, this paper follows only the European tradition as exemplified in Rösen's (2005, 2017) theoretical construct.

<sup>3</sup> To be clear, my argument is not an ontological one that denies the existence or the philosophical and pedagogical importance of historical consciousness. Rather, the objection is much more practical and questions its analytical value.

<sup>4</sup> In similar vein, Silvia Edling (2017) provides a philosophical account to argue that the dominance of consciousness in history education can be questioned on the grounds that its practices also involve teachers and students interacting ethically with both past and present *embodied* Others.

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of clarity, a brief definition of fantasmatic logics must, nonetheless, be provided. In short, the concept refer to the *ideological grip* that a practice holds in its discourse and it is, as such, often employed to answer research questions relating to *why* individuals continuously invest themselves in a given practice. This ideological grip is exercised through the articulation of beatific or horrific narratives that respectively make utopian promises or threaten with dystopian scenarios if a certain challenge is left unaddressed (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). As such, and in the context of history education, fantasmatic logics could aid the researcher in determining the rationales by which educators and students continuously engage in teaching and studying the past.

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## Extending historical consciousness: Past futures and future pasts

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**ABSTRACT:** The concept of Historical Consciousness which played a prominent role in modernising history education in many countries was introduced into the debate of history education in the mid 1970s. The fact that after 40 years, no single definition is unanimously agreed upon, need not be a drawback for the concept's further fruitfully instigating research and discussion. In a first part, this article exemplifies the productive challenge which can be exerted onto the conceptualisation of historical learning processes and tasks by a specific version of Historical Consciousness, being a psychological corollary of theoretical insights into the orientating function of history in individuals' and groups' life by interlinking interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present and expectations for the future (Jeismann). In a second part, then, the concept of Historical Consciousness itself is focused. It is argued that its understanding as a mental disposition for historical thinking, however fruitful, still does not meet the full extent of the requirements to temporal orientation. An extension of the presented tri-partite formula to integrating both 'past' expectations for 'the future' as well as anticipations of retrospective views of us as part of a past is recommended, drawing, *inter alia*, on reflections from psychoanalysis and current essay writing. An effort to reflect on possible consequences of such an extension for history education and learning tasks completes the argumentation.

**KEYWORDS:** Historical Consciousness; History Education; Learning Tasks; Past/Future.

### Historical consciousness and historical thinking as orientation for the future

In traditional history teaching, the focus is mostly on chronology, causes and consequences – presented firmly from a – mostly national – retro-perspective. Even though traditional lectures and mere reading of textual narratives have been replaced or at least supplemented by activities of historical thinking – including exercises in extracting information from primary and other documents, concluding and judging – in general they are placed within a rather secured framework of solutions and interpretations.

In a lesson model on a Hamburg Harbour workers' strike (Henke-Bockschatz, 2015), e.g., tasks are given as follows:

1. Describe the picture and name the different types and groups of people.
2. Discuss the attitudes of the different people or groups of people to the imminent strike.
3. Formulate questions and assumptions about how a strike could have taken place at the end of the 19th century and what it could have meant for those involved.
4. Read the info text about the strike [2] and clarify comprehension difficulties in partner work or in class discussions.



5. Analyze the materials [3] to see how work in the port was organized around 1895 and which groups of workers in the port had a relatively regular and good income and which did not.
6. Gather information from the sources you consider particularly relevant to the analysis of the strike.
7. Now add a few sentences summarising the social situation of the dockworkers to the info text D at appropriate places. (Henke-Bockschatz, 2015, p. 28, my translations)

Recent research in the nature of history, however, stresses that historical thinking is not only nor even primarily about knowing the past and recognizing it as fundamentally different from today (overcoming 'presentism'; cf. Lee & Ashby, 2001, p. 27; Wineburg, 1999, p. 492; Wineburg, 2001; Lévesque, 2016), but that it performs a function of orientating us members of today's generation in the temporal dimension of our existence, that is our identities, possibilities of acting and suffering, and expectations (Rüsen, 2015, [29]; Rüsen, 2017, p. 52). In one of the many different efforts to define "historical consciousness",<sup>1</sup> especially influential in Germany, "historical consciousness", accordingly, has been defined as combining and integrating "interpretation of the past, present understanding and future perspective" (cf. Jeismann, Jacobmeyer, & Kosthorst, 1985), and its main operating principle as "making sense of the experience of time" (Rüsen, 2015, [44]; "Sinnsbildung über Zeiterfahrung"; Rüsen, 1983, p. 52) – by linking past, present and future into mental constructions of temporal connections ("concepts of continuity" or "continuity concepts"; Rüsen, 2015, [49]<sup>2</sup>). It thus strives to answer the question: "In light of the past: who are we and what can / should we (not) do?" Within this framework, one of the main functions of history education in schools would be not to merely invest students with given distant narratives of the past, but rather to enable them to perform the necessary operations of *historical thinking* required for such orientation in responsible ways.

Students need to learn both – to (1) actively and responsibly reflect on the historical preconditions of their current identities, situations, and their possibilities of acting, and to (2) reflectively relate to similar concepts and identities of other members of their society, including (3) to critically comprehend and evaluate narratives present in their societies. History education, then, would be a preparation of the (young) members of society to participate in the societal exchange on history, its relevance and meaning. It is to be considered a strength of this concept of historical consciousness and historical thinking that it is focused on the students' own (individual and collective) situation, challenges, and opportunities in the light of the past, rendering history learning not a mainly detached gathering of information, but rather a tool of societal and cultural empowerment.

In the example given above, this aspect is taken up in the last two tasks presented:

1. "Summarize how labour disputes are fought in Germany today."
2. "Discuss how strikes around 1900 differed from today's strikes." (Henke-Bockschatz, 2015, p. 28, my translations)

In quite traditional manner, this relation to the present ("Gegenwartsbezug") – almost routinely requested for lesson plans because of the referred theoretical insights – is saved for the end of the teaching sequence, rendering it fundamentally inductive with narrow spectrums of solutions up front and comparative conclusions with present conditions, which are also quite constricted not only because of the present not having been addressed in a similar way before, but also because of the common understanding ensured beforehand. The historical thinking made possible for the pupils through this task does not include the requirement to recognize and formulate their own relationship to the object. What has become known as "problem based" history education (e.g. Uffelmann, Andresen, & Burkard, 1990; Hensel-

Grobe, 2012), namely, to enter into historical learning processes by prompting students to formulate questions to the past, is not implemented here.

Accordingly, questions in history education should rather take the form of complex tasks, directing the students' attention and reflections towards the past not for the sake of the past, but for the sake of orientation – of reflecting on identities and possibilities

Consider this framing of the same subject:

Collective bargaining is currently taking place between employers and employees for many professions. The latter are also threatening to stop working. Again and again there is a dispute as to whether under current law the workers are allowed to do so. That's up to the courts. But people are also discussing whether strikes will become dysfunctional or obsolete in the future or whether they need to be preserved as worker's instrument in labour disputes. A look at past examples may help to answer the questions of this kind. The Hamburg strike of 1896/97 – a model or a cautionary example of 'labour dispute'?

Such questions are something quite different from the traditional textbook questions: they confront the students with tasks of temporal orientation, for which they need to apply historical thinking. For not merely answering this question offhand, but rather working them as a task, the students must be able to discuss a complex context, connecting topical challenges to knowledge about the past. Furthermore, the students must reason about possible future situations, based on the past and the present. Such time-connecting perspectives are frequent in everyday contexts.

Such profiling of history education as enabling students to think historically when faced with novel situations of temporal orientation, is to be regarded as a great step forward, turning away from mere endowing students with traditional information, interpretation and pre-formed judgements of the past towards empowering them to critical and sustainable historical thinking.

## Challenges to the concept of historical consciousness

In this article, however, I'd like to go one step further beyond the traditional notion and challenge the above cited notion of historical consciousness as being the integration of "interpretation of the past, present understanding and future perspective" (cf. Jeismann et al., 1985) as having its limitations, too – not by being too complex, but rather as still neglecting specific perspectives and challenges necessary for such orientation. I will suggest to extend of the "tripartite" concept of "historical consciousness" in two ways: by integrating reflected concepts of (1) "past futures" and (2) "future pasts".

### *First challenge: Integrating "past futures"*

When we look into the past, the people in the past do not really look at us, just as we can't see them and as we are not able to see the people of the future. But by analysing own own "projected intentionality", the "dichotomy between time as intentions and time as experience" (Rüsen, 2015, [43]; cf. Rüsen, 1983, p. 49), we can try to understand our predecessors' expectations (hopes, plans, expectations, fears) for their own distant future (part of which is our present). But we are not confined to assuming *that* these people before us indeed had such expectations. By way of research we can try to elaborate on their possible or even likely nature, thus constructing meaning not only from our past and present, but their present and future, too.

A few years ago already, Jörn Rüsen pointed out that the historical meaning we construct is *not* only a result and effect of a historically unaffected and thus "neutral" historical thinking

(Rüsen, 2003, p. 38). According to him, we all are coined by history *before we even begin* to think historically. Our "ancestors'" "unheeded" expectations for the future, their hopes, fears, plans, etc. are working within us.

These "ancestors" of ours (and not only our family or national ancestors but all people of former times) constitute more than just objects of our historical thinking – we are obliged to them in a kind of "historical responsibility". This stance may be exaggerated and also exacerbated insofar as these past people's expectations of their future can not simply grow unnoticed within ourselves, but rather have to be constructed by way of our historical thinking. But that does not mean that we are totally free in both our perceptions of present and past and in our expectations. In as far as our present society is not a blank sheet but a product of actions and expectations of our ancestors, we are all unconsciously influenced by the past.

Even more important, however, is that these past futures, the unsubstantiated parts of the past, may also be relevant for our own orientation. Even though specifically these unsubstantiated plans and expectations are devalued as inferior – especially if history is evaluated by the criterion of "success" only – they do belong to the great spectrum of possibilities relevant for our historical orientation. Unredeemed expectations of the past are implementations of what Rüsen calls the human "projected intentionality" (Rüsen, 2015, [43]; cf. Rüsen, 1983, p. 49), which our ancestors exhibited just like we do.

Sure, these "past futures" are not easy to detect. Aiming at orientation in a real world, speculation about our past fellow-humans' fears, hopes and expectations is not advisable. Many of them will have relinquished not a single trace. But even the few we can re-construct from the sources and tradition give hints to the expectations we could be measured by. And they may give some historical grounding to our own expectations and hints to their chances of success. Thus, the component of the "past" that it is to perceive, explore, and interpret to construct and rebuild the consciousness of history should be extended to include the explicit dimension of the "past future."

### ***Second challenge: Integrating "future pasts"***

Similarly, people in the future (not to be seen by us) will look back onto us – and if there was something like a "conversation of human spirit across the centuries" (cf. the title of Goebel, 1990), they would not only tell us about their own times, but also question us about our handling of their expectations. It is not only "future historians" – as Arthur Chapman just stated – who "have the same rights to cognitive self-determination as historians in the present" (Chapman, 2018) – people in the future in general are entitled to their perspectives and their (possibly sceptical) questions to their pasts (again including our present) as we are to ours.

Considering the extent of consequences which present actions not only by people of power but by many of us can have for our private and public lives in the present, it may well be asked whether the sketched conceptualization of Historical Consciousness really suffices. It may turn out as ultimately self-centered in approaching the past as the substratum for answering our own questions and the future as a real, of our own actions, only – neglecting the fact that in both the past and the future other people not only with their own lives and actions, but also with expectations, hopes, fears and plans undertake the same venture.

How, could the well-known formula that Historical Consciousness encompasses "interpretation of the past, present understanding and future perspective" (as in the subtitle of Jeismann et al., 1985) be upgraded to reflect on this accordingly? Hints may not only be found within our own discipline, but also in psychoanalysis and public discourse.

### *A Psychoanalytical Perspective*

A passage from the work of the well-known psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan reads:

What realizes itself in my history is not the past definite of what was since it is no longer, nor even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future perfect of what I will have been for what I am in the process of becoming. (Lacan, 1956, p. 144; translated by Gallop, 1986, 81f)<sup>3</sup>

Even though this, clearly refers to the individual story of a person's (patient's) life, the idea of orientation through an anticipated retrospective, rooted in prolonged contingency is, interesting for historical thinking, too. In his Berlin medico-historical dissertation on Lacan, Nicolas Langlitz, for example, asserts:

If anticipation had previously been primarily about images that the subject made of itself, another form of pre-emption came to the fore: the anticipation of meaning in speech, and its linguistic correlate should be in the grammar of the future. In this temporal form, Lacan saw a characteristic of the unconscious, whose 'pre-ontological' status signifies that it has no present, that it is not 'in the present tense, but by virtue of the symbolic process in the Analysis, will have been. Its ontologisation or implementation is still pending and yet always anticipated (Langlitz, 2003, p. 150, referring to Lacan, 1978, my transl.).<sup>4</sup>

Langlitz states:

To recognize the subject as a subject means not to reduce it to its past or to its state (its internal state, so to speak), but to accept it as desiring, aspiring certain goals, nascent and emerging ("im Werden begriffen"). The confirmation it requires does not concern what it was and is, but what it is about to become (Langlitz, 2003, p. 167, my transl.).

A related thought has been recently formulated by Michael Uebel in an article on psychoanalysis and Medieval Culture, commenting a letter by Sigmund Freud, in which the famous psychoanalyst expressed a fantasy that "someday" one would "read on a marble tablet" on his house about the success of his work:

History involves and identification with what one will have been, as for example when Freud writes to Wilhelm Fliess in 1900 [...]. "This expression of a wish or an ideal ego reads, indeed works, backward from a time in the future when Freud's discovery will have been publicly acclaimed. The retroactive (*nachträglich*) temporal structure of the fantasy here amounts to not to a memorializing of the (future) past, but to a manipulation of it, along with the present, in relation to the future. To put this another way, the past momentarily suspends the present so that the future becomes an open question, a possibility. The present is in effect left for another time. (Uebel, 2016, 274f).

This can be transferred to historical thinking, as well. It is not only our personal identity, but also our historical identity which needs not only to be conceived of from who we are (in the light of past and present), but also in the light of what we are about to become – in our own perspective and that of others.

### *A public intellectuals' concern*

Uebel's interpretation of Freud's fantasy still stresses the concept of the future as an open *possibility*, to be rather freely manipulated by the individual itself. The concept of a future past, of a retrospective sense-making about the self, anticipated in the present, however, has a much stronger potential. A recent reflection of the late German essayist Roger Willemsen in his last public lecture:

Sparing myself the tedious question of how we are likely to be in the future, and using the future rather as the perspective of my contemplation of the present, I'm not going to ask who we are, but who we're going to be. Retrospectively, I will look, from the perspective of him, who wants to deprive himself of his future because it horrifies him, looking back while moving forward in order to be able to better recognise myself, -- in the eyes of those whom will have disappointed. In virtually unlimited ways we have learnt in all the media of the historical reconstruction to look

through the eyes of those who have been and who have left. Comparatively rarely, however, we try to find ourselves in the eyes of those who will come and despair of us (Willemsen, 2016, p. 24, my transl.).<sup>5</sup>

Willemsen recognizes our time as primarily marked by a media-generated simultaneity of our activities, and the resulting loss of discrimination between original and simulation. (Willemsen, 2016, pp. 20–22). The "time of reality" was "over, that of the realities" "entering its first heyday". The "substantiality of the classical reality, however" was not only dismissed "by counterfeiting and simulations". It also "died in all those archetypes that would degrade coming events to *Déjà-vus*." The "last major events of the reality-description", the Gulf War as the first computer war, the Yugoslav war as the "last craft war" (Willemsen, 2016, p. 23). were moulded "by forgeries and exaggerations and deprived of their rank as real originals." The "only, at least largely non-simulated life" is "the one the viewer leads with himself." (Willemsen, 2016, p. 23) According to his analysis, after the revolution which signified the emergence of consciousness, we as a species reached a point in our evolution, at which it can only be saved by "mindfulness."

The imperative of today, he writes, demands of us to "present ourselves in the literal sense of being here, arriving at this time – not in the distance of the displays" or of other parallel forms: "To be conscious would be to arrive in the present *which once was ours*." (Willemsen, 2016, p. 31; my emphasis). It is this last part, emphasized by me, which suggests the idea that this awareness in and of the present requires a historical thinking including the perspectives of the future and the past.

In as far as our historical thinking, in order to orientate our own hopes, fears and plans, is directed to the past only, an important corrective is missing. It is our need not only to discern who we are and what we can or want to achieve in the light of the past, but also who we want to have been and what we want to have accomplished in the eyes of posterity. It is not only our imminent future and subsequent future times, but also the "futur antérieur", which need to be integrated into our formula of historical consciousness, into the list of those perspectives onto our identity and intentions to act, which need to be constructed into a "conception of time". In line with a popular slogan it could be said that it is not only the earth we have borrowed from our children and grandchildren, but also our present and future. Thus, historical thinking promises not only to orientate us on our possibilities and opportunities, but also to integrate a sense of responsibility. Accordingly, historical thinking is not only about what we can do and who we can be and become, but about who we want, can and will have been in the future, about the perspective our successors in some distant times will have on our present times – and what future interpretation of our times we hold both likely and desirable.

In the light of this line of reflection, our identity not only as individuals, but also as societies is not fully reflected by looking to the past only and by doing so only in order to determine our own outlook towards the future. It is the future retrospective we also have to consider in order to be really "ourselves".

### **Conclusion: Orientation – not only one-directional**

"Orientation" in time as the function of historical thinking then does not simply refer to current expectations and possibilities. It leads us not only to ask about what to expect, fear, hope for and plan, to do and to omit in the light of past experiences. Instead, it requires of us to inquire about past experiences with such hopes and expectations themselves, with their success and failure. To focus not only on what has been the case in the past but also on the interrelation of expectations, hopes and fears and their outcomes in later, but still past times, can inform our own expecting, hoping and planning and in a certain way ground them.

Similarly, Historical thinking involving anticipated retrospective not only processes simple contingency of human action between determination and complete indeterminacy – the former of which would deprive us of both necessity and opportunity, the latter of all chance to act – it also takes into account the residual contingency after contingency has been contemplated.

And thus, a circle is being closed: In all our historical reflections, we must consider at least four temporal perspectives, each of which has a normative dimension:

1. the perspective(s) of the past time to be considered at of the time we have considered, their own horizon of perception and values,
2. the perspective which the past protagonists may have assumed and anticipated for the future,
3. our own horizon of perception and value, which we can and should not invalidate in relation to the actions and sufferings of people in the past, from our different times, but which we can and should not override, and
4. possible future considerations not only of our own present, but also of that past we have turned to – then addressed under new circumstances.

What the people in some near or distant future really will think of us, how they will interpret and judge our present action and thinking, is, of course, inaccessible to us. But we should take into account the fact that there will be future perspectives onto us – even in our historical thinking, which is not only about determining our own possibilities but also about the possible effects and criteria we will be considered with.

Historical consciousness, then, should no longer be conceptualized by interlinking three constitutive elements, like in Jeismann's formula, but rather five: (1) perception of the past, (2) recognition of past expectations for the future(s), (3) perception of the present, (4) expectations for the future and (5) recognition of future retrospectives onto the past(s).

The addition of "past futures" and "future pasts" to Jeismann's tripartite-time formula of what constitutes "historical consciousness" therefore promises to inform a more responsibility-based profiling of historical thinking. It should also be explicitly taken into account in history education – and specifically so in times and societies whose present and future actions (both small and large) can have significant consequences for posterity.

With regard to the exemplary subject of labour disputes, the consideration of the suggested dimensions can complete our historical consciousness in (a) helping us to reflect, in how far the efforts to learn about labour disputes in the past, their conditions, the instruments applied, their course and their outcomes cannot only orientate us with regard to assessing our own chances of improving social conditions (or of fencing of unjust aspirations, for that matter) – they can also help us reflect on the question in how far the results of labour disputes and strikes should be upheld not only because they represent current living standards, but also because they represent what our forefathers did not only strive for in their own interest but also with regard to posterity. Even though we should not perceive them as absolute obligations, these past future perspectives can provide valuable aspects to consider. Similarly, then (b), the reflection on how our own decisions about labour disputes and their instruments may affect not only our own future options, but also those of generations past us. To reflect that whatever we do cannot be judged from the present perspective only, but will be judged upon in later times which we partake in shaping, is necessary. And lastly, (c) a combination of both perspectives will help us to face the obligation to determine whether we should sacrifice accomplishments of our forefathers, even if in our present condition they might seem obsolete.

## Consequences

What, then, can be the consequence of such an augmented formula of historical consciousness for historical thinking and history education? Firstly, it may help in conceptualizing our questions to the past not only to refer to who we are today because of the past and to our possibilities of acting in the light of the past, but also to taking into account the consequences of our actions in the future and for the past of those coming after us. Coming back to the question of the Israel-Palestinian conflict referred to in the question put to students by the Swedish Textbook quoted in the introduction, it may help us take into account not only the probability and feasibility of different developments under current conditions ("what is going to happen"), but also the question of what our own stance in this question should be – and what it should have been if we were asked about it in a few decades' time.

And what is more: In this future-reflective perspective, it may direct our view not only to the immediate past of the conflict in question, but also to further examples of similar conflicts in the past which we should then analyse not only with regard to what the chances of different solutions were in those cases and under what conditions, but also what their effects had been.

And thirdly, in leading our historical inquiry not only to a past but to more complex historical development, it should also remind us to take into view not only the perspectives explicitly addressed in the initial concerns or question, but also to ask about other stakeholders. In the current example, then, the question should not be only about the Palestinian refugees' future, but about that of all people implied in the context.

To take into account future perspectives onto the extended past which includes our present as well as our immediate future in which our actions become manifest, then, could instigate efforts of narrative construction of "concepts of continuity" (cf. above) ) which are not artificially cut off, but more complete in their orientating power – as long as different scenarios are considered.

As for history education, this understanding of historical consciousness might also turn out to be a prerequisite for addressing historical thinking and narrative competence (most recently van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018, p. 155) in a more complete form. If historical thinking is not only about being able to address the alterity of the past (by transgressing presentist stances) but about constructing meaningful "Zeitverlaufsvorstellungen" (see above)) in a responsible way, it also requires to address the chances of our own expectations for the future (Jeismann) to stand the test of time in form of future retrospective evaluations. For this, comparisons of past people's expectations for their future with later (including our own) retrospective evaluations will prove instructive. It is not only what past people have done and how we perceive their deeds and omissions, which will help us orientate ourselves, but also the comparison of what they expected to be remembered as with how they are indeed remembered. Several instances of such comparisons might somehow "ground" our own (and students') ideas as to what our own chances are to be seen from the future the way we would like it to be. This would complete

Thus, e. g., historical thinking (Lévesque & Clarke, 2018) requires to interpret not only the differences between past peoples' and today's norms and insights with regard to questions of societal progress (cf. e.g. the contributions in "Historical and Moral Consciousness," 2017), but also with regard to the distinction between past peoples' expectations and planning in their own view and in retrospective.

This would complete "narrative competence" (a.o. Barricelli, 2015; cf. van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018, p. 155) beyond not only as a somewhat artificial 'finger exercises' in telling stories about the past, into to meaningful questions of orientation.

And again, with regard to the example, tasks for students learning about labour disputes in the past could ask them to reflect on the impact of current decisions from future perspectives. To ask students, e.g. how they as retired seniors would tell their grandchildren about today's perspectives, might initiate such reflections.

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## Endnotes

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1 For an overview over the great spectrum of definitions and usages of the term cf. Thorp (2013); as well as Seixas (2015); Körber (2016, p. 444).

2 The term is not intended to stress a lack of change. Rösen also uses "concept of continuous flow of time" (Rösen (2015, [59])); German: "Zeitverlaufsvorstellung"; Rösen (1983, p. 65), and more often in a succeeding volume of the project, Rösen (1989)) as a more abstract form.

3 Original: «Ce qui se réalise dans mon histoire, n'est pas le passé défini de ce qui fut puisqu'il n'est plus, ni même le parfait de ce qui a été dans ce que je suis, mais le futur antérieur de ce que j'aurai été pour ce que je suis en train de devenir.»

4 Langlitz (2003, p. 150): "War es bei der Antizipation bis dahin primär um Bilder gegangen, die sich das Subjekt von sich machte, so trat nun eine weitere Form des Vorgriffs in den Mittelpunkt: die Antizipation von Sinn beim Sprechen. Ihr linguistisches Korrelat sollte sie in der Grammatik des Futur II, der Vorzukunft oder *futur antérieur* finden. In dieser Zeitform sah Lacan ein Charakteristikum des Unbewussten. Dessen 'präontologischer' Status bedeutet, dass ihm keine Gegenwart zukommt, dass es nicht 'ist' im Präsens, sondern, 'vermöge des symbolischen Prozesses in der Analyse, gewesen sein wird.' Seine Ontologisierung oder Verwirklichung steht also stets noch aus und wird doch immer schon vorweggenommen."

5 "Erspare ich mir die müßige Frage danach, wie wir wohl künftig sein werden, und nutze die Zukunft vielmehr als die Perspektive meiner Betrachtung der Gegenwart, dann werde ich nicht mehr fragen, wer wir sind, sondern wer wir gewesen sein werden. Nachzeitig werde ich schauen, aus der Perspektive dessen, der sich seiner Zukunft berauben will, weil sie ihn schauert, im Vorauslaufen zurückblickend, um sich so besser erkennen zu können, und zwar in den Blicken derer, die man enttäuscht haben wird. Geradezu grenzenlos haben wir ja in allen Medien der historischen Rekonstruktion durch die Augen jener blicken gelernt, die waren und gingen. Vergleichsweise selten aber versuchen wir, uns im Blick jener zu identifizieren, die kommen und an uns verzweifeln werden." Willemsen (2016, p. 24).

## About the Author

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## The language of power: Science, civilization, and words

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper considers how concepts drawn from scientific inquiry inform our understanding of history, and more specifically, the discourse of civilization. Its intent is to explore how terms with origins in Early Modern and Enlightenment era scientific thought became part of the lexicon which we still use to describe social, political and economic conditions. Words like Power, Force, Mass, and Energy are integral to our understanding of the world and the idea of civilization that frames our impressions of it. Similarly, concepts like Order and Chaos also have a profound impact on our worldview, and are fundamental to our perception of civilization as a concept. By exploring how these words came to be used to describe society as it was developing in the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, we can better appreciate how our present understanding of the world is shaped by the historical forces that were unleashed during this important period. Through an examination of the words we use to explain the world we live in, and inquiring as to how their origins inform and shape our perspectives of it, we can begin to appreciate how truly subjective our understanding of the world really is. In doing so, we can more fully understand a historical past before such language was prevalent, and also begin to conceive of a future which moves beyond it.

**KEYWORDS:** Civilization; language; energy; power; force; mass; entropy; chaos; order

### Introduction

Words mattered to Thomas Hobbes. In Part I of his 1651 treatise *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, the author complained that much of the intellectual discourse of his day confused everyday terms in ways that obfuscated or otherwise negated meaning:

When a man upon the hearing of any Speech, hath those thoughts which the words of that Speech, and their connexion, were ordained and constituted to signifie; Then he is said to understand it...but when we Reason in Words of general signification, and fall upon a general inference which is false; though it be commonly called Error, it is indeed an ABSURDITY of senseless Speech.' (Hobbes, 1651/1914, pp. 17-20.)

My interest in invoking Hobbes' complaint is twofold. Firstly, it provides us with an intellectual precedent to examine the words we use to describe historical and contemporary circumstances. Secondly, his alternative title invokes the very concepts I seek to explore in hopes of advancing an understanding of those past and present conditions. *The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* combines the language of physics and statecraft in a way that has historically served to mutually reinforce the legitimacy of each other.

This paper is about the words we use to describe history. Certain words in the historical vocabulary carry scientific connotations, and it's hard not to wonder how that came to be. We use words like 'power,' 'energy,' 'force,' and 'mass' quite a bit when we're explaining historical conditions, circumstances, and events. They appear early in the professionalization

of the discipline. Hegel, Marx, and Von Ranke used the words recurrently in their analyses of historical conditions. Did science influence history, or did statecraft influence science? When we use these words, do they legitimize our observations because we appropriate the factual nature of scientific inquiry, or do they obfuscate or otherwise misrepresent the very things we're trying to explain?

Science, and more specifically physics, became a popular and authoritative means of inquiry in the age of Enlightenment. Its language and terminology, borrowed from ancient Greek and Latin, served to underscore and legitimize the emergent political structures, economic theories, and social hierarchies of the era. Ultimately, the language of physics became knotted with the language of civilization itself as the concepts contemporaneously emerged alongside each other. Their reciprocal terminology and conceptual frames: energy, power, force, and mass; order and chaos, became transposable and mutually reinforcing. By examining the origins of their connections, we can better understand the historical conditions in which these terms and understandings derived, and their implications for us in the present.

History, as an emergent discourse during this period, was largely an instrument for elites to explain, rationalize, and justify their beliefs and actions. To that point, their stadial view of history placed civilization as the pinnacle of human development and achievement, while their writing on the subject sought to institutionalize that view as factual and absolute (McCoy, 1980). Political economists, philosophers, and politicians wrote history in a way that tracked a linear progression of human social, political, and economic endeavor that they perceived as increasingly sophisticated, refined, productive, and purposeful. Writers like Adam Ferguson, Mirabeau, David Hume, Jean-Francois Melon, and Voltaire framed these concepts as justifications for new structures and institutions that enforced the interests of civilized society. To that end, history was a device with which the emergent commercial ruling classes imposed the ascendancy of civilization as a concept and as an organizing principle upon those subject to their increasingly comprehensive authority.

These issues are bound up in a larger question worth considering: 'what is civilization?' These terms: energy, power, force, and mass; order and chaos, are woven into the intellectual fabric of our present day concept of civilization. Therein lie all the necessary features for a preliminary conversation of the subject: We rely on these concepts to understand and express the complexities of cities, agriculture, the arts, technology, religion, economy, and politics. Most articulations of civilization as a definition include these elements in some form or another. Still, the concept remains a vague one. Even Lord Kenneth Clark, whose 1969 BBC documentary on the subject was broadcast in sixty countries, conceded in his accompanying book: *What is civilization? I don't know* (Clark, 1969).

## What Is Civilization?

But what is this thing that, like Saint Augustine's reflection on time, we know until we are asked to describe it? The term civilization appears as a noun in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Mirabeau first used the term as we understand it currently in his economic treatise *L'ami Des Hommes ou, Traite de la Population* (1759-62), and the philosopher Adam Ferguson followed shortly thereafter with an English application of the term in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Both Mirabeau and Ferguson applied the concept of civilization to a progressive or stadial view of history, viewing it in an ideal frame consistent with Enlightenment models of social, political and economic improvement over time. From its inception, the idea of civilization has been held up as the apotheosis of human endeavor, something to aspire to, achieve and uphold at all costs.

Definitions are often bound up with agendas. Lord Kenneth Clark (like Mirabeau and Ferguson before him) was preoccupied with validating Western Civilization as an ideal; something preferable to ‘barbarism.’ Others since have articulated a more inclusive worldview, but still hold the concept of civilization up as something model, aspirational and exemplary. Susan Wise Bauer suggests that in the wake of the Neolithic Revolution, where nomadic hunter-gatherer models of social organization gave way to more permanent agricultural settlements, life became so complicated, society needed a hierarchy. From this need arose a fundamental aspect of civilization: order, as something distinct from chaos previous to its inception. Chaos, among people or the natural world they inhabit, then required management which imposed order, resulting in a civilized condition (Bauer, 2007).

Others have taken exception to the congratulatory tone of writers like Mirabeau, Ferguson, Clark and Wise-Bauer. Fredy Perlman argued that civilization is an inherently destructive entity, a beast. Directing his ire toward ‘The Western Spirit’ in particular, he argued that civilization takes away our freedom rather than protecting it, and renders us subservient to systems that exploit us and rob us of our essential nature as human beings (Perlman, 1983). John Zerzan maintains that everything we’ve been taught to fear about primitivism, Hobbesian ideas of a ‘war of each against all’ in which life is ‘short, nasty and brutish’ are in fact manifestations of civilized life (Zerzan, 2002). Derrick Jensen contends that civilization is neither sustainable nor redeemable, and that its entire existence is a result of systematic violence and privation (Jensen, 2006).

Whether congratulatory or critical, most analyses of civilization as a concept agree on basic elements. Modern scholars generally affirm an urban axis of some sort. The root of the word comes from the Latin *civitas*; city. From this geographical concentration of people and resources, the academic concept of civilization expands to include patterns of intellectual, social, political and economic interaction. Chester Starr suggests that civilization is ‘the presence of firmly organized states which had defined boundaries and systematic political institutions, under political and religious leaders who also maintained society; the distinction of social classes; the economic specialization of men as farmer, trader, or artisan, each dependent upon his fellows; and the conscious development of the arts and intellectual attitudes’ not the least of which included the development of writing (Starr, 1991). The multiple authors of the eleventh edition of the Pearson textbook *Civilization: Past & Present* echo Starr’s assertions:

...civilization is a culture that has attained a degree of complexity, characterized by urban life and the interdependence of those urban residents. In other words, a civilization is a culture capable of sustaining a great number of specialists to furnish the economic, social, political and religious needs of a large social unit. Other components of a civilization are a system of writing (originating from the need to keep records); monumental, permanent architecture in place of simple buildings; and art that is not merely decorative, like that of Neolithic pottery, but representative of people and their activities (Brummett, Edgar, Hackett, Jewsbury, & Molony, 2006, p. 10).

J.M. Roberts is in agreement, though somewhat more indirect, using ‘complexity’ as a litmus in contrast to ‘primitive’ communities, and citing writing, cities, monumental architecture, technological achievement, agricultural surpluses and a human capacity ‘to take advantage of an environment or rise to a challenge’ as elements which mark out a particular society as civilized (Roberts, 2003). This idea of complexity, a term with implications in physics, offers a bridge between the two disciplines that may offer us some insight as to what it is we are considering.

## Hypothesis, Thesis, Exegesis

Most considerations of civilization as a subject of inquiry contain some arrangement of these elements: Cities, religion, hierarchy, trade and commerce, technology, intellectual progress, and so forth. What this inquiry seeks to address is: what are the underlying factors that drive these patterns? What does critical analysis of the concept of civilization expose beneath these recognizable, oft repeated conditions? Not necessarily criticism in the sense of disapproval or condemnation, but a critical approach driven by inquiry and a search for a fuller understanding of civilization as an overarching concept. It is a term that adorns course catalogs, library keywords, political speeches and social dictates. Beyond a vague and general understanding, there is little attention to what the word actually means or represents.

Underneath the constants and variables that comprise its myriad definitions, at its core, civilization is really a process which transforms energy in to power. Over the course of history, civilization became the catch all term that describes the appropriation and consolidation of various forms of energy from the ecological biosphere in to hierarchical structures which transform these myriad energies into both physical and metaphysical power. These power structures seek to enforce and reinforce the hierarchical ordering of everything animate and inanimate, through a comprehensive and expansive framework that includes religion and science, politics and law, the military and police, economy and culture. All of these are ordered in a way that promotes the transformation of biological and biospheric energies into an increasingly comprehensive power structure, which over time has become simultaneously comprehensive and exclusive.

The language and laws of physics help to make the point. Energy, by definition, is life itself. While Aristotle first applied the term to philosophical concepts such as happiness and pleasure in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Gottfried Leibniz considered its applicability to the physical world in terms of mass and force in his 1686 treatise *A Brief Demonstration of a Notable Error of Descartes and Others Concerning a Natural Law* (Leibniz, *Brief Demonstration of a Notable Error in Descartes and Others Concerning a Natural Law*, 1989). Mass and energy are closely related concepts in the history of civilization. Hierarchical structures over the course of history have looked to counter the insurgent energies of the masses, which (like in physics) have transformative properties, through the use of force. Force, another term of physics which carries over to analyses of political economy, is another fundamental aspect of civilization. Force only exists with an interaction, and results in a push or pull effect dependent on the relative mass and energy of the two interactive bodies. Newton's observations in his 1687 masterwork *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*), first articulated these concepts in the three laws of motion (Newton, 1687/1995). Throughout the history of civilization, hierarchical power structures have sought to transform and absorb the chaotic energies of the planet and its inhabitants into its framework through the use of force.

As Arthur Iberall wrote in his essay 'A Physics for Studies of Civilizations:' 'Comparing the dynamics of humans with those of atoms or molecules in a statistical thermodynamic ensemble does not trivialize man's endeavors; rather it illuminates or explains them' (Iberall, 1987). Where Iberall's work explores early settlement patterns in Mesopotamia and Egypt and their subsequent trade networks to compare them to matter condensation and macroscopic convection processes respectively, the concept of applying the language of physics to historical phenomena opens the possibility of developing broader understandings of our subject and the conditions in which it has developed over time. Iberall concludes in another of his essays that, "Whenever a complex system is studied at its own organizational level from a physical point of view, one finds a commonality of operating principles" (Iberall, 1987, p. 281).

With this understanding in place, consider how the following concepts in physics came to become integral to the discourse of history and represent the conditions of civilization: Energy, Power, Force, and Mass.

### Energy (Chaos)

The Proto-Indo-European root of the word ‘energy’ is ‘*werg*,’ meaning ‘to do,’ or its phonetic descendent ‘to work.’ There are three forms of the root in Ancient Greek vocabularies: *Energeia*, *Energos*, and *Ergon*. All share a common indication of activity and action. Aristotle used the concept of *Energeia* in his 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE works *Metaphysics* and *Nichomechean Ethics* as a manifestation of being in the philosophical sense and activity in the physical sense. It was a comprehensive, open-ended term with existential and metaphysical implications.

Etymological dictionaries suggest the term comes to signify ‘power’ in England during the 1660’s. The political context in which this usage manifested is interesting. 1660 was the year of Restoration in England. Charles II reclaimed the throne after the English Revolution, and it would make sense that in the aftermath, the term moves from a philosophical/metaphysical to a political/physical meaning. Indeed, this was in this context that Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*, articulating a concept of a ‘body politic,’ which applied his corporeal allegory to an otherwise abstract idea (Harvey, 2007).

The 1660’s also saw Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz beginning his work which would ultimately result in his articulation of the *vis viva* or ‘life force,’ a prototype for the scientific concept of energy. While Leibniz did not formally articulate his formula for the *vis viva* as an object’s mass and its velocity squared,  $mv^2$ , until 1695, its roots in his 1666 work *De Arte Combinatoria* are evident in his argument that there exists a universal way to represent and analyze ideas and relationships by breaking down their component pieces (Leibniz, 1969).

It wasn’t until 1807, as the Industrial Revolution began to sweep the English midlands, that physicist Thomas Young specifically applied the term ‘energy’ to scientific use. In his ‘Course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy and the Mechanical Arts,’ he posited that ‘The product of the mass of a body into the square of its velocity may properly be termed its energy’ (Young, 1807). It wasn’t long after that energy was linked to the concept of ‘work’ in the physical sense. Gustave Gaspard de Coriolis connected the two in 1829, in his paper ‘Du Calcul de l’effet des machines,’ arguing that units of work could be standardized and measured. Therefore, a certain amount of energy input would result in a proportional amount of work output (Coriolis, 1829).

The nineteenth century is marked by an inherent tension between human and machine that has come to define much of the modern experience. It was also an age of imperialist expansion into parts of the world rich in resources that would fuel much of the industrial revolution in the metropolitan centers of Europe. It was in these circumstances that Julius von Mayer, James Prescott Joule, and Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz first articulated the concepts that would eventually result in the law of conservation of energy: ‘Energy cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be transferred from one form to another.’ At the time they were working, Karl Marx was busy challenging the work of classical economists with regard to the nature of wealth and value; specifically whether or not its transfer (appropriation) from nature and the working classes was moral and ethical.

And so we see that the term ‘Energy,’ initially an open ended, metaphysical concept, came to take on distinctly political, economic, and cultural meanings during the Ages of Enlightenment, Industrialization, and Empire. Here, scientific observations, recognized as ‘immutable laws,’ reinforced and authorized systems of exploitation and control which defined much of the modern condition. Energy, once an indicator of activity and action (both physical and mental), came to represent standardized and measurable units of work. The transfer of

energy from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, from the colony to the metropolitan center, was legitimized in the process. In doing so, civilization applied the language of science to its own mission, and began to remake the world in its own image.

What physics considers energy, civilization largely regards as chaos. The energy of people, unless properly channeled within the bounds of civilized interaction, results in disorder. Over the course of history, institutions have developed to channel these energies in an orderly fashion: schools, prisons, corporations, nation-states. Collective resistance to these institutions is often resonant with the ideas of freedom and liberty. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker demonstrated in their 1999 book *The Many Headed Hydra* that a combination of sailors, slaves and commoners in the transatlantic 17th and 18th century Atlantic World were responsible for the revolutionary character of the period. It was only after the practice of revolution was halted while the theory was coopted by the ruling classes that order was restored (Linebaugh & Rediker, 1999). To that point, it would seem that Will Durant's observation in his 1957 book *The Story of Civilization* that "Order is the mother of civilization and liberty; chaos is the midwife of dictatorship" might warrant reconsideration and revision. (Durant, 1957, p. 145)

Civilization regards the ideological energy of human beings and the physical energy of the biosphere as equally chaotic. Certainly, much of the history of civilization involves the willful separation and subjugation of nature. Early perceptions of nature are bound up with concepts of chaos. Much of the intellectual effort concerned with establishing a concept of civilization is something inherently antithetical to the nature; civilization stands in sharp contrast to the natural world. From the walls of Uruk which first insulated civilization from nature, to the system of enclosures in early modern England, the emergent political hierarchies of the ruling classes sought to insulate themselves from the chaotic energies of nature, and subjugate the masses on the eve of the Age of Revolution.

## Power (Order)

The Proto-Indo-European root of the word power is *poti-s*, which arguably stood to mean 'owner, host, master, husband' (Pokorny, 1959). This root manifest in Latin as *potis*, which meant 'powerful,' and as *posse* which meant 'to be able.' In Old French, the variant *pouvoir* meant 'to be able,' and by 1300 in English the word Power carried martial connotation: 'ability; ability to act or do; strength, vigor, might; efficacy; control, mastery, lordship, dominion; legal power or authority; authorization; military force, an army.'

Beginning with the onset of conditions we generally associate with modernity, the meaning of the word became more complex. Like 'energy,' it became representative of conditions that were manifesting in both statecraft and science, as the two mutually reinforced each other. The idea of someone having power in the political sense comes from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, but was associated with individual persons. The word came to mean 'a state or nation with regard to international authority or influence' in 1726. A year later, in 1727, it was used to suggest 'energy available for work.' Power became associated with 'electrical supply' in 1896 (Harper, 2017).

We can see from its root that power as a concept is connected to both ability and authority. In physics, energy becomes power through work in the mechanical sense. In statecraft, energy becomes power through work in the political economy. In science and in society, power is generated by *harnessing* energy. The conversion of energy in physics is measured in terms of horsepower. James Watt applied the idea in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, to compare the output of steam engines with the work rate of horses.

The concept of power is closely linked to energy. Power comes from the conversion of energy in the physical sense, and is associated with control in the metaphysical sense. Over the



course of history, technology has played an integral role in the conversion of energy into power, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. It is roundly regarded as a vanguard achievement of civilized minds. One technology in particular, the harness, serves as a useful model for examining the development of power as a civilized idea.

Harnessed animals provided early Neolithic communities with both a way to provide surplus and a way to transport it to markets for the burgeoning trade networks that would become a primary characteristic of civilization. There is evidence of harness use in Chaldea and Minoan Crete dating back to the third millennium BC; in Mesopotamia, New Kingdom Egypt, Shang Dynasty China in the second millennium BC; and in Classical Greece and Ancient Rome in the first millennium BC (Needham, 1986). The harness is ultimately a burden, and served to reinforce the new hierarchical arrangement with nature that civilized people would impose on the natural world. Similarly, civilization is built on slave labor, and humans were harnessed so that their energy would serve to reinforce the newfound hierarchical power of their masters.

Like animals, humans were harnessed and put to the task of transforming energy into power. Rare among hunter-gatherer societies, slavery has existed in some form or another in every civilized society. As hierarchy was imposed by humans on the animal world with which it previously held a symbiotic relationship, so too was it imposed by humans on other humans as social stratification, a fundamental tenet of civilization, became more and more institutional. The literal harnessing of humans, with shackles, chains, and increasingly elaborate devices for controlling the human body became an industry in and of itself relatively quickly, as did the political, legal and economic means for controlling other human beings. The Sumerian code of Ur-Nammu, written in the later part of the third millennium BC, was foundational in its accounting for the institution of slavery (Roth, 1995).

Not only the living things of the planet were harnessed in the pursuit of converting energy into power, but so too was the planet itself. Irrigation, another fundamental aspect of civilization, harnessed the free flowing waters of rivers in Africa and Asia between the sixth and third millennia BC. Energy became power, and civilization developed independently on the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, Indus, Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, with the attendant political, economic, and cultural institutions that comprise a civilized condition. With earth and water enclosed and harnessed, their energies became sources of power. Similarly, the harnessing of fire brought the institutions of war and industry, and the harnessing of the winds brought the age of global capital.

What initially appears as productive progression gives way to a larger pattern of destructive regression in a longer view. It is not an anachronistic perspective. The Babylonian poet Kabti-Ilani-Marduk, who lived during Hammurabi's reign, reflected on the fact that any progress, advance or development often came in the wake of destruction, and often wrought even more destruction over time. This cycle, which Kabti-Ilani-Marduk relayed in religious symbolism in 'The Myth of the Pest-God Irra,' reflects a broad understanding of what civilization ultimately is. Irra, the god of fire, pestilence and death, was 'interested in change and destruction only as a necessary prerequisite to the building of a new order,' and sent his servant to explain the process to Marduk (Kriwaczek, 2012). Irra promises a return to a golden age when his plan of destruction has been carried out, but it never comes. Once harnessed, power is superficially productive (the trappings of civilization are indeed impressive), but inherently and ultimately destructive (the biosphere is straining under the load of the harness). This is because it is inherently dependent on the use of another physical and metaphysical property: Force.

## **Force (Oppression)**

In political economies, the conversion of energy in to power is maintained through the use of force. The term, as with power, seems to have manifest in its English form around 1300, and was used as a noun to signify physical strength. Like the word power, it was borrowed directly from Old French, where from the 12<sup>th</sup> century it conveyed the meanings of strength, courage, and fortitude, and also of violence, power and compulsion. Its Latin root, *fortis*, meant strong, mighty; firm, steadfast; brave, and bold. The word manifest as a verb roughly around the same time, *forcen* or *forsen*, and was used to convey both martial and sexual violence (Harper, 2017). In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the word appears on record to describe the use of violence against an adversary, and the raping of women.

Force as a concept in physics comes with the Scientific Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Concepts like the *vis viva* predated the term, but Isaac Newton articulated the present scientific theory of force in the field of physics with the Second Law of Motion in 1686 which states that motion is the rate of change of momentum of a body is directly proportional to the force applied, and this change in momentum takes place in the direction of the applied force. Force can be applied either through linear push or pull, or circular centrifugal or centripetal motion (Newton, 1687/1995). The absence of force, or an equal amount of it from either direction results in either static or dynamic equilibrium. Based on Newton's work, physicists have since argued that all the forces in the universe are based on four fundamental interactions at the subatomic level: strong and weak nuclear forces, electromagnetic force, and gravitational force.

While force can be measured, studied and controlled; otherwise put: ordered; the term still suggests uncontrollable conditions that create chaos and challenge the hegemonic principles of power. Force of Nature as a concept is a term that applies to environmental conditions which wreak havoc on the social, political and economic order of everyday life. As William Shakespeare so artfully showed in 'The Tempest,' written as the Scientific Revolution began to take hold, a force of nature can turn the world upside down.

In statecraft, the use of force is paramount to the maintenance and expansion of power. Domestic police forces and the international application of force of arms are much of the story of history itself. The term 'police force' came in to use in the 1820's, as immigration resulted in the rise of urban communities that threatened the established power structures (Mason, 2004). The military concept of a force of arms predates this by five hundred years. It is interesting to note that both were applied using concepts of 'the other' in the political and socio-economic sense. In physics, force depends on two separate and distinct bodies to manifest. In statecraft, the same rule applies.

In physics, force is calculated by measuring mass plus velocity. Mass is the measure of an object's resistance to acceleration when force is applied, and velocity is the amount of space a moving object covers in a particular amount of time. Force is any interaction that, when unopposed, will change the motion of an object. In civilization, power maintains itself through the use of force. Economic, political and social institutions, resist change by reacting with force. The history of revolutionary movements is entangled in this physics. Those seeking to change the direction of an institutional power often fail; energies from below meets power from above. When both use force, the institutional nature of power within the framework of civilization is often too massive to overcome. When revolutions are successful, they often promote the very conditions they sought to undo; their energies become power and their interests become institutional. The French Revolution produced Napoleon, the American Revolution produced the largest empire the world has ever seen.

Force can be applied by push or pull: centrifugal or centripetal. In civilization, centrifugal force pushes energy outward. Centripetal forces pull energy inward, where their energies become part of the mass that generates power. Geographically, this is the history of the core and peripheries of civilizations. Dynastic realms would project power outward, until it bumped

against another realm projecting its power outward. As Kenneth Clark observed in *Civilisation*, “All great civilisations, in their early stages, are based on success in war’ (Clark, 1969, p. 18). Those Centrifugal forces pushing out would then become centripetal, pulling in the energies of a rival and assimilating them into the existing power structure of the dynastic center, establishing a new order within the framework of the old. This is the history of empires, from Ur and Uruk to Persia, Athens, Rome, Tenochtitlan, Cahokia, Peking, Kyoto, Paris, London, and Washington DC.

Civilization justifies the use of force which turns energy in to power by denying the obfuscation, or altogether denying the equation. Pre-civilized peoples tended to practice animism, recognizing the fundamental energy of the biosphere. The creation myths of civilized religions largely acknowledge a primeval chaos, but problematize it rather than venerate it, and quickly move to validate its subjugation through the use of force. The Sumerian *Enuma Elish* and the Hebrew story of Genesis both begin with the creation and subjugation of nature within a ‘dominion’ of humankind. First subjugating the earth, then the animals, and then other people, civilization converts energy into power through the use of force. These forces need not necessarily be physical; they can be ideological, extending to law, religion, and customs. Speciesism, racism and the general belief of man’s ‘dominion’ over the earth are all examples of powers exercised by civilization through the use of force.

In politics, when a body with less power rises up against one with more power, we call it a mass movement. There is no equivalent for this phenomenon in physics.

### **Mass (Revolution)**

Of all the words in this consideration so far, mass has maybe the most disparate meanings and origins. The word works as a noun, verb, and an adjective. As a noun, two forms exist. The first form, from the Proto-Indo-European root, *mag* meant ‘to knead, fashion, or fit.’ The Greek word *maza* signified ‘barley cake, lump, mass, ball,’ which became *massa* in Latin, referring to ‘kneaded dough, lump, that which adheres together like dough.’ The term *masse* appears in Old French beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, meaning ‘lump, heap, pile; crowd, large amount; ingot, bar,’ and finally in English in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as ‘lump, quantity, size.’

The second meaning as a noun derives from the Late Latin root *missa*, a term for ‘dismissal’ (Harper, 2017). The Vulgar Latin *messa*, referring to the Christian Eucharistic Ritual, is a reference to the last words of the service: ‘*Ite, missa est*’ (Go, it is the dismissal). From those origins, the term *mæsse* appears in Old English, leading to its current form, mass. So, in its two original noun meanings, we have elements of food and religiosity.

In 16<sup>th</sup> century English, the word took on the properties of a verb, and its noun meaning evolved. As a verb, it identifies the action of ‘gathering in a mass’ beginning in the 1560’s. In the 1580’s, its noun form comes to signify ‘a large quantity, amount, or number.’ For context, this term evolves in between The Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549 and the Treasons Act of 1571. Group association and group action were evolving in ways that language had to adapt to. In 1586, a famine in England gave rise to the Poor Law System. Religion and Food were on the minds of the people who would come to be known as ‘the masses.’

As an adjective, the idea of mass took on proportional properties in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as the industrial revolution laid a foundation for the exponential scale of production and population that would define the modern era. Like industry, knowledge became more incremental and specified, and the new academic discipline of sociology applied the concept to its subject writ large in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Weber, 1930/2005). The economic phenomenon of mass production, along the biological phenomenon of mass reproduction, had cultural dimensions, producing mass movements, mass actions, mass communications, mass layoffs,

mass hysteria, mass murder, and the like. The concept of ‘massification’ has profound implications for civilization, as its impact spread more widely and deeply as its capabilities grew.

Arguably, the result of these capabilities is a trend toward standardization and homogeneity, somewhat discernable when considered through the processes of globalization. Mass, therefore, returns to its initial meaning: ‘to knead, fashion, or fit.’ The roots of modern globalization in its previous forms of colonialism and imperialism were early bound up with changing and fashioning the landscape and its inhabitants to make a uniform, consistent condition and erase any difference between place and people. As one of its earliest critics, J. A. Hobson, observed: “Colonialism, in its best sense, is a natural overflow of nationality; its test is the power of colonists to transplant the civilization they represent to the new natural and social environment in which they find themselves” (Hobson, 1905, p. 13).

The concept that makes mass a tool rather than a threat to civilization as an overarching construct is control. While energy, power, force, and mass are words that would eventually come to explain natural law and physics, control is a term of economics and engineering. Its origins as a word and a concept lie in late medieval accounting, but by the nineteenth century, control came to signify the imposition of authority to “regulate, dominate and direct action” (Harper, 2017). Its objective, scientific standard served as justification for the imposition of hierarchical order on the increasingly chaotic and disorderly masses. With regard to such arrangement in educational institutions, Adam Smith complained that “an extraneous jurisdiction of this kind...is liable to be exercised both ignorantly and capriciously,” summarizing that “external control is ignorant and capricious” (Smith, 1776/1937, p. 718). Karl Marx observed more directly and comprehensively in Volume One of Capital that “Moreover, in respect to form, capitalist guidance and control are despotic” (Marx, 1867/1942, p. 348). Still, the assertion of control as a means to shape the masses became an increasingly comprehensive feature of civilization as the modern age took shape, and continues through today.

Isaac Newton first applied the concept of mass to physics in 1687 with the publication of *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*. The term appears in two different ways in the work: as an informal reference to a body of unspecified shape, or as a body comprised of an aggregate of particles (Roche, 2005). Attempts to refine the scientific concept of mass by Ernest Mach in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Albert Einstein and Hermann Bondi in the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a more dynamic concept of mass that included inertia, gravitational attraction and weight control. The result of such considerations brought physicist Max Jammer to conclude in 1999 that, “in spite of all the strenuous efforts of physicists and philosophers, the notion of mass, although fundamental to physics, is...still shrouded in mystery” (Jammer, 1999, p. 167).

### **An Aside: Entropy (Apocalypse)**

When force is unable to convert energy into power within a system, the second law of thermodynamics states that the result will be a decline in order and increasing chaos. The physical process of entropy is one that civilizations have reckoned for millennia in terms of their own existence. Preachers predict future apocalypses, historians wonder why civilizations fall. Behind the variables lies the physical law of entropy: a process in which energy is lost by dissipation and friction, which results in a particular system no longer being able to function. The Roman philosopher Seneca pitched of the concept of decline outpacing growth in 65 AD when he wrote, “It would be some consolation for the feebleness of our selves and our works if all things should perish as slowly as they come into being; but as it is, increases are of sluggish growth, but the way to ruin is rapid.”

The physical concept of entropy, first articulated by Rudolf Clausius in 1854, was first applied to questions of political economy by Sergei Podolinsky in the 1880's. Friedrich Engels argued it was "totally impossible to try to express economic relationships in physical terms," and Marx, who wasn't so much concerned with the ecological effects of modern industrialism as he was the distribution of its economic spoils, dismissed the applicability of the Second Law of Thermodynamics to matters of economy altogether. Scholars have debated the physics of entropy and its applicability to Marxism ever since. What has become an increasingly academic argument is ultimately at the expense of the question itself. Is a civilization sustainable if it no longer has the energy to sustain its power?

In 2012, an ominous year to study questions of collapse (as it coincided with a widespread belief that the Mayan Calendar predicted the end of the world), the journal *Ecological Economics* published an interdisciplinary research paper titled 'Human and nature dynamics (HANDY): Modeling inequality and use of resources in the collapse or sustainability of societies.' Funded by NASA, its authors: Safa Motesharrei, Jorge Rivas, and Eugenia Kalnay argued that "Two important features seem to appear across societies that have collapsed: (1) Ecological Strain and (2) Economic Stratification." Historically, economic stratification and ecological strain are interdependent systems, and lay at the foundations of civilized societies. The question then becomes whether or not modern civilization is susceptible to the same patterns. On this question, the authors conclude that "the ubiquity of the phenomenon," combined with "the fact that advanced, sophisticated, complex, and creative civilizations can be both fragile and impermanent," collapse is all but inevitable. Of the three social models they base calculations on: Unequal society, Egalitarian Society and Equitable Society (with Workers and Non-Workers), only the third model proves itself mathematically sustainable over time (Motesharrei, Rivas, & Kalnay, 2014, p. 91). Energy and Power, both in the economic and ecological senses of the term, need to be balanced within the carrying capacity of the planet, otherwise entropy will lead to a breakdown of the system.

## **Conclusion**

The words we use to describe our reality are neither arbitrary nor ahistorical. They come from specific circumstances and reflect a particular view and understanding of the world. In this case, the words I've chosen to examine: power, energy, force, and mass are intertwined with the evolution of statecraft and science in the early modern era. Their claim to scientific objectivism is complicated by their history and evolution, as tools of imperialism and warfare with roots in violence and oppression. By understanding the origins of these words and the historical conditions in which they became common and widespread, we can better appreciate the comprehensive nature of the modern worldview we inherit: martial aggression posing as rational scientism.

These words are used frequently to describe and question past and present conditions, yet their use arguably reinforces the very conditions and ideas they are to challenge. Arguably, 'power' seems the most pernicious. Can we describe history without using a word like 'power?' If so, what other words would we use? How would that history read? If we find a way to reframe this concept, to the other words in question take on new meaning or disappear altogether, making way for another vocabulary to take their place? Does knowing the roots of these words challenge us to find better ones, or does it strengthen our commitment to using them in historical writing? Even critics of hegemonic, Western, "top-down" history rely on the language embedded therein to respond and reframe their subject. Hobbes concluded in *Leviathan* that "No discourse whatsoever can end in absolute knowledge of fact, past or to come." (Hobbes, 1651/1914, p. 30) Was he right in this assessment?

Ultimately, the history of civilization as it is written is the transformation of energy in to power. Politics, economics, and culture are products of this process. In his book *Civilization: The West and The Rest*, celebrity historian and champion of neoliberalism Niall Ferguson makes the anachronistic argument that ‘six killer apps’ set the West apart from the rest of the world, and led the West’s rise to global dominance. He lists competition, science, property, modern medicine, consumerism, and work ethic as unique products of Western Civilization, which provided the foundation of western ascendancy for the better part of the modern historical epoch. While this argument resonates with notes of self-congratulatory triumphalism, and ignores the histories of the places subject to Western hegemony during the period in question, it does indirectly help to support the thesis of this inquiry. Those six qualities, which exist in civilization writ large are all the product of converting energy into power in the physical and/or metaphysical sense. Competition produces hierarchy, science produces technology, property produces class division, medicine produces treatments and cures, consumerism produces material culture, and work ethic produces a labor force. The resulting order of things that comes out of the process can be administered and imposed by force if necessary, until an imbalance of power and energy, or a lack of the latter entirely result in a comprehensive breakdown of the system that is civilization.

In conclusion, civilization’s main flaw appears to be a dependence on destruction for survival, development and even advancement. That destruction comes at great cost, which grows exponentially with the systematic advance of civilization in spatial and temporal terms, broadly considered ‘progress’ from within its own lexicon. Studying the past should give us a sense of urgency to change this pattern, as with each destructive phase the conditions appear to be more dire than at the onset of the last. The scale with which energy is converted into power in this process is unprecedented. In borrowing from physiocratic principles, the energy of the biosphere is being converted to produce physical power, and at the same time, produces political, economic and cultural power. As scientists and economists are both observing, the result of ecological and humanitarian crises that undermine the stated intent of these very systems. Rather than viewing civilization as the most advanced form of human endeavor, we might do well to reconsider its more egregious injustices, and seek to reframe the human condition in greater balance: with each other and with the biosphere. To disarm the power structures, and return energy to a more symbiotic relationship with its primary carriers: the people and the earth we inhabit.

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## Why study history? An examination of undergraduate students' notions and perceptions about history

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**ABSTRACT:** History was once prized in public education but, over time, has slowly fallen to the fringes of the curriculum. Many institutions have struggled to solicit and maintain student interest in history majors and many students merely take “history” as a general education or liberal arts elective. The reasons explored here for why students should study history are myriad and include acquiring knowledge and critical thinking skills, developing citizenship, and providing “lessons” for the present. The literature on “Why Study History?” almost exclusively focuses on secondary education resulting in a gap in the literature exploring students’ attitudes and beliefs about the subject. This article examines a sample of 26 undergraduate students’ notions and perceptions about history through a survey questionnaire and open-ended questions. The most significant themes were “Lessons of History” and “History has Questionable Value.” The findings are discussed within the conceptual frameworks of McNeill (1985) and Stearns (1998). Recommendations for future research are also explored.

**KEYWORDS:** Why study history; purpose of history; citizenship; distance learning; history education; social studies education

“Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history”  
—Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, Dec. 1, 1862

“There is nothing to be learned from history any more. We’re in science fiction now.”  
—Allen Ginsberg, qtd. in *After the Wake* (1980)

### Introduction

A feature titled, “Major Renovations: Reviving Undergraduate History at Sam Houston State University” ran in the November 2017 edition of the American Historical Association’s *Perspectives on History*. The author, Brian Domitrovic, was former Chair of the history department and, coincidentally, my former professor who served as an examiner on my comprehensive committee. The challenge that Sam Houston State University (USA) experienced was one felt by history departments across the country—a noticeable decline in history majors. But the tide could shift back in their favor, they imagined, if they “engaged their [students’] sheer fascination with history” (para. 5). The key Domitrovic and his colleagues in the history department found was connecting with “students at their level of [historical] interest” and showing, rather than telling, why history is a worthy academic pursuit (para. 13). By

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opening lines of communication and dialogue through public outreach, redefining history education, and recalibrating the department to align with evolving student interests and needs led to increased enrollment figures. “It’s a great time to be involved in a history department,” Domitrovic observed, “because there is a beautiful problem to solve: how to restore history to its rightful, sturdy position among majors at our many institutions of higher learning” (para. 15).

Concern about one institution’s enrollment figures is, in and of itself, unremarkable, but, in the above case, it is symptomatic of a larger problem—what value does history hold for twenty-first-century students? This question—why study history?—is not new nor is it unique to the United States. The study of history can be contentious and controversial, and, in a postmodern age, historical matters are of the greatest importance as they infiltrate every nook and cranny of public and private life (Evans, 2009; MacIntyre, Clark, & Mason, 2004; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). History matters but it is our duty and obligation to make the merits and virtues of historical study accessible to students today. The problem is that history has slowly moved to the periphery of the curriculum and, in many cases, is no longer a general education college requirement. In some cases, history is listed as an elective and, often, a course in history is not required for a college degree (Anderson, 2016; Belkin, 2014; Markowicz, 2017). This trend is alarming because, as Sam Wineburg argued in *Why Learn History? (When it’s Already on Your Phone)* (2018), critical thinking is conspicuously absent “in our Google-drenched society” where information is passively accepted with a click rather than investigated or questioned (p. 3). The purpose of this article is to consider the scholarship on “why study history?” and explore the beliefs and notions of a sample of undergraduate history students in light of the literature.

The research questions that guided this study were:

Q1: What learning outcomes or skills do students value in a historical education?

Q2: How does studying history facilitate effective citizenship?

## Conceptual framework

The American Historical Association (AHA) commissioned two recognized historians to ponder and reflect on why history is a viable course of study and a useful apparatus for the public good. So profound and timely were their explorations on the subject that they have been archived on the AHA’s website and are readily accessible through a general Google search. William McNeill’s (1985) and Peter Stearns’ (1998) frameworks illustrate two complementary perspectives. There is some overlap in how each historian categorizes their choices in each respective framework, e.g., “collective identity” and “provides identity,” and “historical understanding” and “moral understanding,” but, there are subtle differences in phrasing leading to different emphases (micro- versus macro-historical scales, for example) and, potentially, different conclusions and interpretations. Taken together, these frameworks provide a well-rounded lens for analyzing and understanding scholars’ and students’ justifications and rationales for studying history. Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of both frameworks.

## Literature review

The documentation used in this review was retrieved from specific searches of JSTOR, SAGE, and Taylor & Francis databases as they house journals dedicated to history and social studies education. Several articles were accessed via Inter-Library Loan. A general Google search was conducted for any open access articles that might be available but, unfortunately, none were located. Descriptors and key phrases used in database searches included “why study history,” “purpose of history,” “why history,” and “study history.” Two seminal texts that have become

classics in the philosophy of history are R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* (1946) and E. H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961). A discussion on the methods, purpose, and rationales for studying history would be incomplete without their consideration.

McNeill (1985)	Stearns (1998)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collective memory</li> <li>2. Historical knowledge and understanding</li> <li>3. Level I: Personal-local</li> <li>4. Level II: National History</li> <li>5. Level III: Global                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical wisdom</li> <li>• History for its own sake</li> <li>• Novice to Expert</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand people/societies importance in our own lives                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History is beautiful</li> <li>• Storytelling</li> <li>• Reconstruct the past</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Moral understanding</li> <li>3. Provides identity</li> <li>4. Essential for good citizenship</li> <li>5. Skill acquisition                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess evidence</li> <li>• Assess conflicting interpretations</li> <li>• Experience in assessing past examples of change</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Transferable skills</li> </ol>

Table 1. McNeill-Stearns Framework

### The American context: History, the Social Studies, and the politicization of history

Within the American context, the literature on why one should study history can be traced back to the 1930s, often, following national crises, such as the post-Depression, World War II, and the Vietnam War (Berg & Christou, 2017). The literature, especially from the mid- and late-twentieth century, reveals that much of the debate concerned justifying the study of history against its nemesis, the social studies, and reaffirming history's preeminence in the public-school curriculum (Berg & Christou, 2017; Evans, 2006; 2009; Kreider, 1937). The debate between history and the social studies has spilled over into the political arena and the court of public opinion. History's purpose and substance is no longer a purely academic question relating to classroom studies; rather, a firm understanding of history is deemed essential in deciphering political discourse on the misappropriation of history by private interests, redefining what history is for political purposes, and the threat they pose to public education (Loewen, 2007; 2009; Wineburg, 2018).

Textbook controversies accompanied the History Wars in the United States since the infamous Rugg controversy in the 1930s (Evans, 2006). History textbooks have garnered more critical attention in recent years (Lee, 2013; Loewen, 2009; Martell & Hashimoto, 2012; Percy, 2011). Two influential studies, Anyon's *Ideology and United States History Textbooks* (1979) and Apple's *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age* (1993), revealed the ideological framing and influence of American history textbooks. Several significant studies followed Anyon's and Apple's lead and found the inescapable influence of ideology (Neumann, 2012; Roberts, 2014), political propaganda (Lachmann & Mitchell, 2014), and corporate influence (Neumann, 2014) has continued unabated in the content of history

textbooks. Some critics have called for the removal of textbooks from the history curriculum. The language used in the titles of two of Loewen's popular books - *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (2007), and *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited about Doing History Again* (2009) - are an overt attempt to politicize the flawed content of history textbooks and create a grassroots movement for their removal.

In recent years, organizations such as the American Historical Association (AHA) have made a concerted effort to address the importance and value of history as a school subject and in practical life (McNeill, 1985; Stearns, 1998). Because the debate has taken on a significant political dimension, understanding the purpose of history as a school subject and as a means for living a good life have become more important. "Strange that an activity [history] receiving such broad recognition as being fundamental should need such constant buttressing!" (Nicoll, 1969, p. 193). In recent years, educational governing bodies began recognizing the significance of primary sources in history and social studies education by establishing historical thinking benchmarks (NCSS, 2013) and Common Core literacy standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) directly tied to exploring historical documents.

### **Virtues of historical study**

Scholars have written widely on the various attributes and factors they feel make history a worthy subject of study as well as hindrances to untapping history's potential. One reason most scholars agree on is the importance of history for promoting citizenship (Bentley, 2007; Fumat, 1997; McCully, 1978; Stricker, 1992). Cultivating and promoting an ethical and moral system, whether as an individual or a corporate member of society, is another reason to study history (Bentley, 2007; Andress, 1997; Kreider, 1937). The study of history as a means for providing relevance in the present was noted in much of the literature (Carr, 1961; Gray, 2005; Nicoll, 1969; Teaford, 1971) as was history's ability to teach students lessons (Durant, 2014; Glassie, 1992; Stricker, 1994) or analogies to "illuminate the present and guide the future" (Andress, 1997, p. 312).

History is an effective mechanism for promoting personal and collective/national identity (Bohnstedt, 1971; Low, 1948; Hunt, 2011; McCully, 1978). Collingwood (1946) observed that "history is 'for' human self-knowledge" (p. 10) and cultivating and nurturing good judgment, understanding, and wisdom are a natural outcome of studying the past (Bentley, 2007; Kreider, 1937; Sloan, 1993). The revelatory outcome Collingwood noted requires an "imaginative understanding," as Carr (1961) described it, of the historical past (p. 20). "History cannot be written," Carr concludes, "unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing" (p. 21). The study of the past should help us to live better in the present and prepare for the future: "The function of the historian [or student of history] is...to master and understand it [history] as the key to the understanding of the present" (p. 29). The pinnacle of historical inquiry is "when [our] vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present" (Carr, 1961, p. 44).

What is more, a student's creative center—their imagination—is exercised as they engage in historical study (Carr, 1961; Collingwood, 1946; Low, 1948; McCully, 1978; Teaford, 1971). As the medievalist Norman Cantor (1967) observed, "history is worth studying because it is a creative act" that "demands...the exercise of a creative imagination" (p. 3). The study of history is also fun, providing a sophisticated venue for entertainment (Glassie, 1992; Kreider, 1937; Teaford, 1971). And, as many scholars argued, history is worthy of study for its own sake (Bohnstedt, 1971; Gray, 2005; Sloan, 1993).

## **Barriers to history**

Teaching methods and curricular choices have long been identified by many scholars as barriers to the study of history (Collingwood, 1946). While there are exemplars of good history teaching (Hunt, 2011), the literature suggests that history teaching is problematic (Berg & Christou, 2017). The emphasis upon rote memorization of dates and facts have led many to conclude that history has little practical value outside of test-taking (Durant, 2014; Nicoll, 1969). A secondary, but no less important, barrier is the history academy. Teaford (1971) recognized that today's students are tomorrow's leaders and failing to inspire and model the merits of historical study in meaningful ways only alienates an educated citizenry (Wineburg, 1991; 2018).

While historical organizations, such as the AHA, have heeded Teaford's ominous warning by establishing collaborative partnerships with teacher-training programs throughout the United States, and government-sponsored initiatives, such as the discontinued Teaching American History grant program providing professional development opportunities for K-12 teachers, we are in jeopardy of, once again, sliding into a position of complacency and indifference (Berg & Christou, 2017; Ragland, 2015). This is especially the case in higher education where, as Nicoll (1969) observed, "the professor in the school of higher learning...has a significant place in the scheme" of promoting historical appreciation and literacy (p. 244).

According to Nicoll (1969), instructors and professors alike are "indispensable" (p. 244) as gatekeepers of historical knowledge, entrusted with unpacking the historical past in a way that resonates with today's student that, hopefully, extends beyond their time in the classroom (Fogo, 2015; Hong & Hamot, 2015; Levy, 2016). A third barrier is the Internet and its ubiquitous role in teaching and learning today (Wineburg, 2018). With information only a click away, students are confronted with an overwhelming amount of information but lack the critical thinking apparatus to distinguish credible from questionable sources. "The Internet...presents challenges so daunting," Wineburg (2018) argues, "that...it can spin trained historians in circles and make talented undergraduates look downright silly" (p. 175).

There is a gap in the literature looking at the higher education (post-secondary) setting and why students should study history. The majority of the studies examined in this review pertained to secondary education (grades 6-12) in the United States with only a few that considered the higher education context (college/university). Furthermore, while there were some studies that explored student perspectives from a secondary education perspective there are no studies that this author is aware of exploring higher education students' perspectives of why they should study history. In order to become effective history teachers and empower an educated citizenry to see the value of history in and outside of the classroom, we must understand the evolving needs of our audience.

## **Methods**

A qualitative design was used to explore the experiences and perspectives of college students through an anonymous survey. Several questions of the survey collected background data on respondents. Building on the contextual data gleaned from respondents' background, the remaining questions explored student perceptions and understanding of the value of history in and outside of the classroom. Response data were analyzed and thematized using the McNeill-Stearns framework on "Why study history?" listed in Table 1. Survey data and open-ended questions were used to "provide meaningful additional detail to help make sense out of and interpret survey results" (Patton, 2014, p. 230). The questions used in the survey were field-tested by five experts in the fields of history, history education, and social studies education.

The survey consisted of eleven questions. The first six questions (Q) of the survey requested background data on respondents, such as how many online courses have been taken, gender, age, traditional or non-traditional (adult) student, and current year in college. The last five were semi-structured, and open-ended:

Q7: What comes to mind when you think of "History?"

Q8: To what extent does knowing history play a role (e.g. as a frame of reference) in everyday life (when you watch the news, meet new people, encounter new experiences)? Likert scale response.

Q9: Why should we (i.e., human beings) study history? What benefit(s) do we gain, if any?

Q10: Does the study of "History" prepare you for citizenship? If so, how?

Q11: What value does the study of "History" hold for you: a) in your studies? Please explain.; b) in your personal life? Likert scale response. Please explain.

## Setting and procedures

Participants were drawn from two public state colleges in the southeastern United States. These institutions grant associate and bachelor's degrees and serve approximately 50,000 students on-ground and online. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received from both institutions before students were recruited in July 2018. The IRB boards approved the recruitment letter used as a Canvas (the learning management system) course announcement and the form of an incentive to interested participants—ten bonus points applied to a discussion forum of their choosing.

The recruitment sites were chosen because of the diversity and representation of online students in the region as well as using my own classroom to conduct the surveys. The survey was administered using SurveyMonkey. The Canvas course announcement of the recruitment letter was posted in the following four online course sections in July 2018: one section of "U.S. history until 1865" and three sections of "History of World Civilizations, ca. 1815-Present" were sampled. These were all general survey courses and met the general education requirements from both institutions. The U.S. history survey had approximately 30 students enrolled whereas the rest had approximately 25 students for an approximate total of 80 initially-registered students with a 32.5% response rate. The survey was closed during mid-July 2018.

## Findings and discussion

For students to be considered for this study, they had to meet the following criteria: are 18 years of age or older, affirmed Informed Consent, and participated in at least one online course. When reviewing the data, one respondent's responses were duplicated and only the first series of responses were included in data analysis. All responses, aside from the duplication, were used as data in the analysis stage.

### *What comes to mind when you think of "History?"*

Student responses to this question were scattered. The most responses ( $n = 6$ ) were themed as the "Distant/Remote Past." Responses ranged from "old times" to "the past." The themes of "Peoples/Cultures" ( $n = 3$ ), "Great Man Theory" ( $n = 2$ ), and "Miscellaneous" ( $n = 4$ ) did not reveal any substantive content and were often generic or one-word responses, such as Student 1's "storytelling" and Student 16's "wars." The majority of students did not touch on factors discussed in the literature or reference concepts from McNeill's (1985) or Stearns' (1998) frameworks.

### *Traditional history*

One interesting, but minor, finding was the theme of “Traditional History” ( $n = 2$ ) where Student 14 noted “long readings” and Student 15 commented “dates, people, events, knowledge” as representative of “history.” Traditional history has been the source of considerable scholarly critique and debate and is often seen as a barrier to good history teaching (Berg & Christou, 2017; Martell, 2013; Schul, 2015; Virgin, 2014). Pulitzer-prize winning author Will Durant (2014) eloquently argued:

History as it is typically studied in schools—history as a dreary succession of dates and kings, of politics and wars, of the rise and fall of states—this kind of history is verily weariness of the flesh, stale and flat and unprofitable. No wonder so few students in school are drawn to it; no wonder so few of us learn any lessons from the past. (p. 156).

### *Lessons of history*

Several students touched on “Lessons of History” ( $n = 3$ ) as well as “Relevance” ( $n = 3$ ) and “Historical Understanding” ( $n = 3$ ). These three themes corroborate those found in the literature. Further, student responses tended to be more developed; for example, Student 3 said “Usually WWII is the first thing that comes to mind, but also just life in general from the past, and how much it’s changed now.” When some students thought about “history,” they often thought about how history is a tool for learning from past experiences and/or mistakes and learning from them (Andress, 1997; Durant, 1968/2010; Glassie, 1994; Stricker, 1992). A few students observed that the purpose of the past is to inform the present (Carr, 1961; Gray, 2005; Nicoll, 1969). As Student 6 offered, “When I think of the word “History,” I think of past events that affected my present-day life” or, as Student 8 shared, “things that make us who we are today.” For these students, history’s purpose is to help them better understand the world they live in and prepare for the future (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Sheehan, 2011). This finding aligns with a national online survey facilitated by the Historical Association (UK) which queried 544 teachers about a proposed revision of the national curriculum and a shared concern amongst many respondents was the relevance of material for students (Harris & Burn, 2016). Teachers are interested in making history accessible and students, as this present study illustrates, are interested in learning the means for appropriating history in relevant ways (Schul, 2015). A few responses hinted at historical understanding, but one student showed mature historical reasoning: when they thought of “History,” they thought about “everything in the past that has contributed to the Earth and how it has evolved” (Student 9). Though each response themed as “Historical Understanding” varied in its language, each of the responses demonstrated a heightened sense of historical consciousness (Bentley, 2007; Carr, 1961; McNeill, 1985; Stearns, 1998).

Here, it is important to clarify certain terms that are commonplace in history education: historical thinking, historical understanding, and historical consciousness. Laville (2004) suggests that historical thinking “is a set of thought processes and attitudes, that taken together, recreate the intellectual apparatus of the historian” (p. 173). Historical understanding, meanwhile, is the process by which meaning and value are discovered and extracted from a given historical artefact and are contextualized within the larger historical narrative (Laville, 2004). The term “historical consciousness,” however, has a “diversity of conceptual usages” that are influenced by academic traditions and national contexts (Körber, 2016, p. 442). Seixas (2006) could not “imagine a better definition” than the following: “the intersection among public memory, citizenship, and history education” (p. 15). A broader definition is provided by Wineburg (2007) and his colleagues who suggest historical consciousness is a result “of a complex interplay between home, community, school, and the historicizing forces of popular culture” (Wineburg, Mosberg, Porat, & Duncan, 2007, p. 44). We should seek to better understand these various strands of historical consciousness rather than try to oversimplify them

in a quest to neatly define the concept in universal terms, according to Körber (2016). In North America, for example, historical consciousness diverges from its German counterpart:

Anglo-Saxon research and discussion about history teaching, however, is not based so strongly on a complex theoretical concept as the German historical consciousness, but is rather pragmatically focused on different aspects of student's own historical thinking and on the question of progression in historical learning. (Körber, 2016, p. 444).

What Körber (2016) is describing above is a concept articulated by Wineburg (2001) in *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, as “mature historical thought” (p. 5), “mature historical understanding” (p. 7) and “mature historical knowing” (p. 24). “Achieving mature historical thought,” Wineburg concludes, “depends precisely on our ability to navigate the uneven landscape of history, to traverse the rugged terrain that lies between the poles of familiarity and distance from the past” (p. 5).

***To what extent does knowing history play a role (e.g. as a frame of reference) in everyday life (when you watch the news, meet new people, encounter new experiences)?***

This question was framed as a five-point Likert scale ranging from “none at all” at one end, to a great deal” at the other end. The responses were evenly distributed between “a great deal” ( $n = 13$ ) and “a lot” ( $n = 13$ ).

### *Relevance*

All responses heavily acknowledged history's pivotal role in everyday life. Stricker (1992) argued that “the value of historical study must be an enduring question...” and the findings in this study support that claim (p. 293). Responses recognized the importance of history in everyday life, because, as Gray (2005) concluded, “knowledge of the past is an essential part of our attempts to understand the present” (p. 155). The relationship between the “present” and the “past” is reciprocal, according to Carr (1961), because “the past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past” (p. 69). The data suggest that knowledge of history is a practical asset in twenty-first-century living.

***Why should we (i.e., human beings) study history? What benefit(s) do we gain, if any?***

### *Lessons of history*

In response to this question, respondents ( $n = 13$ ) believed that history's primary benefit was providing lessons for living in the present. Student responses evidenced patterns in specific key words, such as “learn”, which was used seven times, and “mistakes,” which was cited ten times. Several responses transcended simple classification and were cross-listed, as appropriate. For example, Student 22 commented, “We study history to learn from the past to help shape the future and to have an understanding of self and where the society is coming from.” This response was themed under “Self-Knowledge” and “Lessons of History.” The data revealed that students found the theme of “Lessons of History” to be the most powerful benefit and rationale for studying history. This finding aligns with the literature (Andress, 1997; Carr, 1961; Rösen, 2004; 2007). But, as one scholar has noted, gleaning lessons from the past can be problematic: “The search for lessons from history is almost as frustrating a task as seeking to find the Holy Grail or Camelot” (Gray, 2005, p. 156). Teachers should be mindful of the potential pitfalls and unforeseen challenges associated with using the past as an interpretive matrix or model for meaning-making in the present. Rösen's (2004; 2007) “disciplinary matrix” is arguably the most promising model, as Retz (2015) argued, for exploring traditional historical consciousness, with its comprehensive set of criteria. The complexity and focus of the model coupled with theoretical rigor and scientific presuppositions might put it out of reach of ordinary college instructors who require a model that is accessible and



user-friendly (Berg, 2017). Promoting disciplined historical thinking and developing a conscious recognition of the threat of presentism are two strategies for applying historical lessons in context (Counsell, 2004; Fogo, 2015; Lowenthal, 2000).

### *Does the study of “History” prepare you for citizenship? If so, how?*

Stearns' (1998) conceptual framework draws attention to the role history plays in fostering and sustaining citizenship. Responses from the survey, however, were a mixture revealing a diversity of beliefs about history's connection to facilitating citizenship. A considerable portion of responses ( $n = 11$ ) agreed that history plays a role in effecting citizenship. Several responses ( $n = 5$ ) misunderstood the question and a percentage ( $n = 4$ ) provided neither a direct “yes” or “no” to the question. Three responses used the phraseology “in a way...” to preface their remarks, while two respondents believed that history did not produce tangible results in citizenship and another response was uncertain.

#### *History promotes active and engaged citizenship*

One sophisticated response provided contextualization and a rationale for history's communicative power relative to citizenship:

The study of history does prepare me for citizenship because history taught me a lot about what it means to be a good citizen. For example, woman [sic] back then couldn't vote, but now woman [sic] can. This shows me I should never be lazy when voting—that I always should because woman [sic] back then fought for the right for me to vote. (Student 6).

Like Student 6, another showed a remarkable grasp of the interconnectedness of citizenship and historical consciousness: “Yes, history prepares us to learn more about the past in the country we live in,” Student 16 reflected, but, more importantly, “Citizens understand that we are a product of a past but, at the same time, that we are building, from the present, our future.” A deeper understanding of the interplay between historical study and citizenship, according to Hunt (2001), is important because “If students are to mature into citizens, they need to know their past...” (p. 263). Our understanding of the relationship between citizenship and historical consciousness, however, remains unexplored and undertheorized in North American contexts, e.g., the United States (Seixas, 2016). Seixas (2016) attributes this to a possible incompatibility between the positionalities of German and Anglophone historical consciousness. In response to Seixas' (2016) claim, Körber (2016) argued that variants of historical consciousness are peculiar to certain academic traditions, linguistics, and national contexts. These different incarnations reveal, rather than obscure, emergent historical consciousness in diverse settings.

The scholarly literature is filled with admonitions for historical instruction to inculcate effective citizenship training (Bentley, 2007; Fumat, 1997; Teaford, 1973). “What should concern us more than the failure of school history,” McCully (1978) warned, “is the failure of schools to educate and civilize our children” (p. 499). The primary function of history instruction, for many scholars, is the development of engaged and educated citizens. Nicoll (1969) concurred, noting, “Most Americans know that the goal of teaching history in our schools is ‘the good citizen’” (p. 193). A “good citizen” is a desirable consequence of a good historical education, Nicoll believed, but how should we define or recognize such an individual? One suggestion, offered by Bohnstedt (1971), describes the culmination of a sound historical education leading to the individual becoming a “Sophisticated thinker and citizen—a truly educated person” (p. 65). The findings suggest that a notable percentage of respondents believed there was a connection between studying history and citizenship, while a significant percentage were less certain of that relationship or misunderstood the question altogether.

***What value does the study of “History” hold for you in your studies? Please explain.***

This question, made up of Likert scale responses and elaborations on those initial Likert responses, considered the value of history in students' education, in general. A five-point Likert scale ranging from “none at all” at one end to “a great deal” at the other end was used. Close to half of the responses noted “a great deal” ( $n = 7$ ) and “a lot” ( $n = 5$ ) relative to value but the largest claim among respondents was “a moderate amount” in terms of the value that history provided them ( $n = 9$ ). A smaller percentage observed that historical study provided “a little” ( $n = 4$ ) value and one response noted “none at all.” Themes included lessons of history and history has questionable value with associated themes of understanding, relevance, and perspective.

*Lessons of history*

A significant number of responses ( $n = 10$ ) demonstrated the power of learning lessons from the past and their value in the present. Many of these lessons, too, were professionally relevant for students outside of history, including students studying criminal justice, public management, and nursing. Student 24, for instance, said, “It helps me greatly because it will tell me things that I never knew happened to law enforcement or criminal justice at those different times” and “In my criminal classes, it is good to know the background of criminalities in my region and others” (Student 19). Several students who were in the medical field commented that the study of history was valuable to their understanding of medical developments over time. “I love learning about the past and the events that have brought us to where we are now,” noted Student 15. They continued: “Medicine itself has a fascinating history which has taught us many things over the centuries”. The applications include emergency management and disaster planning, as Student 17 argued, “emergency management involves learning a lot from past disasters and how to prepare better.” The literature contends that history is essential to educated citizens from all walks of life and the eclectic responses to this question confirm that lessons can be culled from all forms of life experience (Kreider, 1937; McCully, 1978). One of history's myriad purposes, therefore, is “for the development of a well-balanced individual” (Low, 1948, p. 271).

*History has questionable value*

This was a significant finding as a good portion of responses ( $n = 6$ ) saw little practical value in the study of history for their chosen major and/or profession. Several responses were apathetic towards the value of history for their studies. One student, who was a marketing major, felt history provided no real value, arguing, “I do not feel like I need to study history...” (Student 10). Similarly, Student 6 agreed, noting, “In my studies, I don't really see history affecting it that much.” Some responses noted the benefits of knowing certain aspects of history, such as Student 20, who observed, “I will need to know certain times when antiseptic techniques were started, but not much” while others derived a passing degree of amusement: “I find it interesting to learn about the past, but I do not feel like it is higher in my studies” (Student 12).

In the “Lessons of History” theme, several students found history applicable and, arguably, necessary to their studies (e.g., criminal justice, medicine, and public administration) but several of their peers in the present study found history's value questionable (Students 12 and 20) or nonexistent (Students 3, 6, 9, and 10). The findings of “History has Questionable Value” theme contrast sharply with the literature which argues that historical study can help students refine their critical thinking skills (Bentley, 2007; Glassie, 1994; Low, 1948), deepen disciplinary literacy (Bain, 2012; Girard & Harris, 2012), stimulate their creative energies and imaginations (Collingwood, 1946; Carr, 1961), acquire transferable skills (Kreider, 1937), and improve their communication (Sloan, 1993) and reading and writing skills (Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012; Monte-Sano, 2011; Morgan & Rasinski, 2012). Historical study provides

substantial practical benefits to students that extend beyond the history classroom into other disciplines and everyday life.

### ***What value does the study of “History” hold for you in your personal life?***

Themes included history facilitates personal identity and growth, learning history provides relevance and entertainment, and, lastly, history has questionable value.

#### *History facilitates personal identity and growth*

Half of all responses ( $n = 13$ ) identified personal connections or interest and identity as valuable benefits in their everyday lives. One student explained the personal significance of understanding specific wars to know more about their family history: “I have relatives who have fought in war and knowing the demographics of where they were and what was going on during that time is important to me” (Student 14). Student 15 found similar value for making sense of their identity, remarking, “It teaches me about where I come from, and creates connections to the past.” Student 22, on the contrary, was candid when they shared how history shapes their evolving understanding of personal identity through the lens of race:

History in my personal life as a biracial person plays a huge factor. By learning about the past history of my family it's interesting because before I was born the different sides of my family hated each other because of there [sic] physical differences. After learning that I don't take anything for granted.

The data support the scholarly literature on the connections between historical study and increasing levels of identity and personal growth. Bentley (2007) persuasively argued that the study of history “enables human beings to understand themselves and their place in the world” (para 2) while Fumat (1997) claimed that historical study led to “a better, more controlled, understanding of his [sic] own culture” (p. 158). “Students should be introduced to the study of history,” McCully (1978) suggested, “by introducing them to the empirical study of their own experiences, of their immediate, personal interest” (p. 501). History is important, but it takes on new significance when viewed through a personal lens.

#### *Learning history provides entertainment and relevance*

Several responses ( $n = 6$ ) saw value in studying history as a means for providing enjoyment, entertainment, and relevance. Student 9 revealed, “I enjoy learning about history and what has happened throughout history. It intrigues me and I always catch myself researching past events.” Relatedly, Student 8 observed, “I like to learn about history very much and would look up certain things and where it started and where it came from.” One effusive response confessed, “I just really enjoy learning about history.” The literature confirms the connection between historical study and its entertainment value (Glassie, 1994; Kreider, 1937). Teaford (1973) likened historical study to detective work reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes (p. 168). The study of history, Teaford continued, is dynamic: “Despite its human shortcomings, history can serve a vital role in the modern world, a role aimed both at enlightening and entertaining the vast body of mankind” (p. 165). Though history is often considered a serious and solitary discipline, Glassie (1994) reminds us that “entertainment is not the least of history's purposes” (p. 966). Relevance has been noted by scholars as a significant reason for studying history (Carr, 1961; Gray, 2005; Nicoll, 1969; Teaford, 1973). Student 10 responded, “I like to learn about the past. I feel that it helps you understand why the world is the way it is today.” Another response mirrored those of Student 10, commenting, “I feel history is very interesting. I enjoy learning about previous events that have happened and how we conquered the problems, bringing us to who we are today” (Student 20). These responses demonstrate the value history brings to the

present, because, as one historian argued, “understanding the present is impossible without history” (Stricker, 1992, p. 302).

### *History has questionable value*

A number of responses ( $n = 4$ ) questioned history's significance in their personal lives. Student 12, for instance, remarked, “I don't use history in my everyday life, so I don't feel like it is valued as high for me, but I know that there are some that highly value it and use it.” Even though this student admitted that history held some value, they recognized that others valued it “highly.” Student 13 expressed the same sentiment, noting, “i [sic] think it does play a role but a very minimal role.” One response was specific in history's limited conversational value, saying it held “Small value since i [sic] dont [sic] refer to history very often in regular conversation” (Student 7). This finding is problematic because it is not supported by the general consensus of the findings of this present study nor by the literature (Bentley, 2007; Carr, 1961; Collingwood, 1946; Gray, 2005; Hunt, 2011). The scholarly literature is unequivocal in its support of efficacious effects of historical study. Scholars have imagined a world where history was not studied or valued, sometimes in grim terms: “For a world without history is a world of narrow-minded intolerance and stifled imagination. It is a world without knowledge of itself, a world of ignorance” (Teaford, 1973, p. 169). In his book, *The Lessons of History*, Will Durant (1968/2010) and his spouse, Ariel, concluded by offering this haunting, sage, and timeless admonition to future generations:

To those of us who study history not merely as a warning reminder of man's follies and crimes, but also as an encouraging remembrance of generative souls, the past ceases to be a depressing chamber of horrors; it becomes a celestial city, a spacious country of the mind, wherein a thousand saints, statesmen, investors, scientists, poets, artists, musicians, lovers, and philosophers still live and speak, teach and carve and sing...If a man is fortunate he will, before he dies, gather up as much as he can of his civilized heritage and transmit it to his children. And to his final breath he will be grateful for this inexhaustible legacy, knowing that it is our nourishing mother and our lasting life. (p. 102).

## **Conclusions**

Historians and students share common conceptions about why we should study history (McNeill, 1985; Stearns, 1998). These include the study of history acting as a change agent in our lives, that is, teaching us life lessons, encouraging active citizenship, learning more about ourselves, who we are, and where we come from, and growing as individuals (Carr, 1961; Glassie, 1994; Stricker, 1992). Several factors discussed in the literature, such as moral understanding, historical imagination, and history for its own sake, for example, did not resonate with students in this study (Bentley, 2007; Bohnstedt, 1971; Collingwood, 1946; Gray, 2005). Students overwhelmingly appreciated history as a means for transmitting past lessons, in relevant ways, to inform the present and guide actions and preparations for the future. The findings of the present study showed an appreciation and recognition of history's purpose in academic and public settings. The literature suggests that history is an excellent teacher inculcating lessons and wisdom from the past but, within the school setting, traditional history could be a potential barrier (Berg & Christou, 2017; Martell, 2013; Virgin, 2014). The study of history enables students to live more purposeful lives through greater self-understanding and personal growth, a finding supported by the literature (Bentley, 2007; McCully, 1978). There is a certain fascination with the past that, according to scholars, is fundamental to the human experience (Carr, 1961; Glassie, 1994; Kreider, 1937). The present study revealed the hidden joys and entertainments modern-day students found in historical study and the enduring value of historical relevance in an increasingly interconnected world.

Though the theme of traditional history was only noted by a handful of respondents, it is a potential barrier to good teaching emphasizing passive, rather than active, learning through rote memorization, which could adversely affect student learning and achievement (Martell, 2014;

Schul, 2014). Another barrier to good history teaching noted in the literature is the rift between the history academy and colleges/faculties of education (Teaford, 1971; Wineburg, 1991; 2018). The Teaching American History grant program, for example, helped address this problem for a time but focused on K-12 professional development opportunities (Berg & Christou, 2017). What about academics in higher education, conversely, who might benefit from pedagogical training to reach an evolving, diverse student body? Then there is the matter of technology in the classroom and the disruptive role of the Internet in accessing information and appropriating it with a prudent eye to credibility and truthfulness (Wineburg, 2018). The implications of ignoring these potential barriers to good history teaching could affect the future health and prosperity of history departments across the country and lead to waning public and student interest. But, more importantly, it would be a disservice to the present generation of students who are deprived of the transformational experience of a historical education. One recurring theme was the questionable value of history as an academic study or for practical living—a finding the literature does not support (Durant, 1968/2010; Hunt, 2011; Sloan, 1993; Teaford, 1973). This troubling finding is cause for concern as a percentage of respondents in this study found history to be of marginal importance. But, as Domitrovic (2017) reminds us, we have a “beautiful problem to solve” so let us make good on this opportunity because our present, and futures, depend on it (para. 15). Recommendations for future research include increasing the sample size and scope by including several institutions from different regions of the United States, surveying on-ground students relative to online students in a replication study, and conducting a comparative, international study examining student attitudes and beliefs about history in competing national contexts.

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## What do we know about the pedagogical content knowledge of history teachers: A review of empirical research

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**ABSTRACT:** PCK is seen as the knowledge that is needed for the transformation of content knowledge to pedagogical products and teaching strategies for specific students. To explore research on history teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in secondary education, 34 empirical studies, published between 1987 and 2015, are systematically reviewed. The conceptualization and operationalization of PCK and sources for PCK development are analysed. Results show that most studies use qualitative methods with small sample sizes. Research often lacks a systematic definition of PCK. Most of the analyzed articles discuss the PCK about disciplinary strategies and focus on knowledge of instructional strategies. PCK of novice history teachers appears to be influenced by other sources than the PCK of experienced teachers. We conclude by suggesting further research and possibilities for teacher training.

**KEYWORDS:** Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK); History Teaching; History Teachers.

### Introduction

When a bunch of sweaty teenagers barges into the history classroom, an experienced history teacher can choose a strategy that simultaneously addresses students' needs and subject related goals. He or she transforms content knowledge to pedagogical products and teaching strategies

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for a specific student or group of students. The transformative nature of this knowledge makes it difficult to describe, conceptualize and teach it to beginning history teachers. For example, it may seem effective to explain hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic by showing students piles of banknotes. But this ‘teaching-trick’ quickly falls apart if the teacher subsequently does not know how to react effectively to students’ questions and fails to see opportunities to trigger their historical thinking.

Many history teachers know how to teach the concepts in an existing curriculum to facilitate the understanding of their students. They choose and develop examples, representations, assignments, strategies, and tests to explain these concepts to a specific group of students. This requires certain context specific knowledge (Friedrichsen, 2015; Henze & Van Driel, 2015; Van Driel & Berry, 2010).

Shulman (1987) introduced the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) for this specific knowledge and drew attention to the fact that teachers need to transform content knowledge for their teaching practice (Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2006; Shulman, 1986; Shulman, 1987). There has been much debate on the definition, nature, and meaning of the concept PCK (Kind, 2009; Lee & Luft, 2008; Van Driel & Berry, 2010). PCK could be seen as a toolkit of suitable teaching tricks or as a rich repertoire based on student knowledge linked to a teaching orientation (Tuithof, 2017). Educational researchers have been inspired by this concept of PCK, resulting in much domain specific research into teaching and teacher knowledge (Achinstein & Fogo, 2015; Depaepe, Verschaffel & Kelchtermans, 2013; Evens, Elen & Depaepe, 2015). In her review on PCK and the natural sciences, Kind (2009) describes PCK as useful concept and tool for describing and understanding teaching practices. Furthermore, several studies have shown that teachers’ PCK positively impacts student learning (Depaepe et al., 2013; Evens et al., 2015; Kunter et al., 2013).

Until now, our understanding of teachers’ PCK has been mainly informed by research on science teachers’ knowledge. In comparison, research into the PCK of history teachers is limited (Cunningham, 2007; Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Depaepe et al. 2013; Evens et al., 2015; Kind, 2009). In this study, we review this research on the PCK of history teachers and the different ways in which to examine it. We also look into sources that contribute to PCK development according to empirical research on history teachers’ knowledge. Our review study could produce practical insights for teacher educators in history. Moreover, we will attempt to identify gaps in research on history teachers’ PCK.

We will first discuss research into history teaching. Subsequently, we will discuss the conceptualization and operationalization of PCK and PCK development in existing PCK research on science teachers and modern languages teachers in order to guide our empirical review study (Depaepe et al., 2013; Evens et al., 2016; Kind, 2009; Van Driel, & Verloop, 1998).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Research on History Teaching***

The learning and teaching of history has been the subject of recent research in the USA, Great Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Achinstein & Fogo, 2015; Van Drie & Van Riessen, 2010; Van Sledright & Limón, 2006). In the domain of history, content knowledge can be divided into first-order knowledge (e.g., historical phenomena and turning points), second-order knowledge (e.g., change, causation, significance) and strategic knowledge (knowing how to do history) (Van Sledright & Limón, 2006). This type of knowledge is needed to develop expertise within a domain (e.g., Stoel, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2015) and to teach disciplinary

thinking to students. Cunningham reflected in 2007 on the importance of the concept PCK in history. She observed that research into history teachers had mainly focussed on content knowledge (first-order knowledge) and related knowledge of disciplinary strategies (second-order knowledge and strategic knowledge) (Cunningham, 2007).

Many researchers on history learning examine knowledge of disciplinary strategies such as investigating historical questions, analysing and interpreting historical sources, and comparing historical periods (Lee, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2011; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008). Researchers use several concepts when examining knowledge of disciplinary strategies, such as historical thinking, historical reasoning, historical enquiry, historical interpretation, and the analysis of historical sources (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Lee, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2011; Monte-Sano & Cochran, 2009; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2013; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008; Voet & De Wever, 2016; Wilson & Wineburg, 1991; Wineburg, 2007). The concept of historical reasoning has recently been used more often when examining knowledge of disciplinary strategies. However, the concept is not always defined and frequently focuses on working with sources and evidence (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2018). Van Drie & Van Boxtel (2013) present a broader definition of historical reasoning that is related to historical understanding, concerning one of three things: “the evaluation or construction of a description of processes of change and continuity, an explanation of a historical phenomenon or a comparison of historical phenomena or periods” (p. 44). Also, they designed a framework for historical reasoning that consists of six components: asking historical questions; using sources; contextualization; argumentation; using substantive concepts; using meta-concepts (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2013; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008).

The underlying tenet of most research on disciplinary strategies and historical reasoning is that history teachers themselves should have knowledge of disciplinary strategies and an associated epistemological perspective on the interpretative nature of history to be able to promote students’ disciplinary strategies in the classroom. In practice that does not always seem to be the case (Baron, 2013; Burn, 2007; Fehn & Koeppen, 1998; McCrum, 2013). Moreover, teachers who have knowledge of disciplinary strategies and epistemological perspectives are not always able to teach these strategies because of the pedagogical problems they create in the classroom: students and teachers have difficulties in dealing with the uncertainty that is created by the interpretative nature of these disciplinary strategies (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Wansink, Akkerman & Wubbels, 2016). History teachers not only need to have first-order, second-order, and strategic knowledge themselves, but they also need to develop PCK about disciplinary strategies to adequately teach their students. For example, in order to teach historical sourcing skills you need to know what kind of questions and sources are needed to promote historical reasoning.

We will now discuss the conceptualization and operationalization of PCK and PCK development in existing PCK research in other domains. This discussion will guide the empirical review study that follows.

### ***The Conceptualization of PCK***

In order to relate the content knowledge of teachers more specifically to the context of teaching practice, Shulman proposed the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge as a specific and unique form of teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001). PCK gives a teacher “the flexibility to select a teaching method that does justice to the topic” (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987, p. 69). Shulman’s emphasis on teachers’ PCK closely connects with older, European traditions on subject related pedagogy, which is commonly referred to as ‘Fachdidaktik’ in German, ‘didactique spéciale’ in French, and ‘vakdidactiek’ in

Dutch (Depaepe et al., 2013, Van Driel & Berry, 2010). In these traditions, researchers also look into subject related questions about learning and teaching without using the concept PCK (Van Driel & Berry, 2010).

Two key PCK elements in Shulman's model are (1) instructional strategies and representations, i.e. the ways in which the teacher transforms subject matter knowledge, and (2) knowledge of students' understanding, i.e. the learning process and the content related problems of students (Jung, Park, Jang, & Chen, 2011; Shulman, 1987). Researchers have used these two key elements as starting points, subsequently adding new PCK elements.

A much-cited model of the PCK of science teachers was developed by Magnusson, Krajcik, and Borko (1999) building on Shulman (1987), Grossman (1990), and Tamir (1988). This model contains five PCK elements. Magnusson and colleagues (1999) added three PCK elements to Shulman's key elements. Element (3) knowledge of assessment pertains to the knowledge that teachers use to establish what students have learned. The fourth element (4) contains the knowledge about the curriculum and corresponding curricular goals prescribed by the educational authorities, and the knowledge that a teacher needs to implement and plan this curriculum. Element (5) teaching orientation represents "a general way of viewing or conceptualizing science teaching" (1999, p. 97) in the words of Magnusson and colleagues. They argue that this component is significant because "these knowledge and beliefs serve as a 'conceptual map' that guides instructional decisions" (Magnusson et al. 1999, p. 97). The role of teaching orientation is still under discussion: Gess-Newsome has for example questioned the straightforward impact of teaching orientation (Gess-Newsome, 2015).

Although Shulman's key elements and Magnusson's model mentioned above have been widely cited and used (Evens, Elen, & Depaepe, 2016, 2015; Gess-Newsome, 2015), the debate about the specific role of content or subject matter knowledge in PCK itself continues. Shulman describes content knowledge as a source but not as part of PCK (Shulman, 1987), as PCK is the transformation of content and pedagogical knowledge. In this spirit we use the definition of the leading PCK researchers in Gess-Newsome (2015) in our review. These researchers view PCK as: "the knowledge of, reasoning behind, and planning for teaching a particular topic in a particular way for a particular purpose to particular students for enhanced student outcomes" (Gess-Newsome, 2015, p. 36).

## **The Operationalization of PCK (Research Design and Participants)**

PCK is not only conceptualized in different ways, but its operationalization is also quite varied, as shown by review studies on PCK and mathematics, PCK and science, PCK and languages, and intervention studies to stimulate PCK (Depaepe et al. 2013; Evens, et al., 2015; Evens et al., 2016; Van Driel & Verloop, 1998). Depaepe and her colleagues (2013) argue that the operationalization in PCK research is closely connected to theoretical assumptions on PCK. They distinguish two theoretical perspectives on PCK: a situated and a cognitive perspective. The situated perspective has dominated PCK research until recently. Researchers with a situated perspective assume that PCK can only be captured and investigated in the context in which the knowledge is used (a classroom with specific students in most cases). They typically employ qualitative approaches such as observations, interviews, and analyses of pedagogical products (Depaepe et al., 2013). For example, Nilsson (2008) explores the development of student-teachers' PCK during pre-service education. Four student-teachers in mathematics and science participated in a project teaching physics over a 12-month period. This empirical study is based on analyses of video-taped lessons and student interviews and emphasizes the role of teaching experience and reflection in teacher education. It argues that the latter two contribute to the development of teachers' PCK.

Researchers using a cognitive perspective assume that PCK can be measured independently from the context in which it is used. In the past decade, the cognitive perspective has increasingly become more influential in the literature on science teachers' PCK, with publications reporting correlational studies with larger samples, in which questionnaires are used as measurement instruments (Depaepe et al., 2013; Kunter et al., 2013; Park & Chen, 2012; Wongsopawiro, 2012). PCK researchers using a cognitive perspective measure and discuss relations between for instance PCK and content knowledge, PCK and general pedagogical knowledge, and PCK and student achievement (cf. Depaepe et al., 2013).

Across domains and perspectives, relatively more research has been conducted among student or novice teachers (Kind, 2009), as the reviews on PCK for mathematics teaching by Depaepe and colleagues (2013) and for science teaching by Van Driel and Verloop (1998) show. Similarly, Evens and colleagues have shown that the majority of intervention studies focus on student teachers' and novices' PCK (Evens et al., 2015). This might be explained by the fact that student teachers are a convenient sample, as they are often inclined to participate when their university tutors are linked to the research project (Kind, 2009). One might question the use of these groups in research on PCK, because of their limited experience with teaching while PCK is widely assumed to develop over time and through experience.

### ***PCK Development***

To develop PCK, teachers have to develop a profound understanding of their students, their subject, and teaching strategies (Calderhead, 1996; Loughran et al., 2006). Experienced teachers have more PCK than novice teachers who tend to have "vague notions of what might be interesting or relevant to students" (Harris & Girard, 2014, p. 221). In addition to PCK element (2) knowledge about students' understanding, experienced teachers have more pedagogical flexibility and an elaborate repertoire. They are able to choose strategies that simultaneously addresses students' needs and subject related goals as well (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987).

The importance of experience as a source for the development of PCK is undisputed (Gess-Newsome, 2015; Kind, 2009; Van Driel & Berry, 2010). Teachers need sufficient confidence and basic classroom skills to develop PCK, and teaching a subject or topic more often is an important PCK source eventually (Henze & Van Driel, 2015; Van Driel & Berry, 2010). Van Driel and Berry (2010) emphasize that *teaching experience* and *content knowledge* are important PCK sources. They also show that contextual and personal factors may lead to quite different processes of PCK development (Van Driel & Berry, 2010). In their review on intervention studies aiming at PCK development, Evens and colleagues (2015) also show that *teaching experience* and *content knowledge* are important. They add four additional sources for PCK development that are distinguished in PCK research: *PCK courses* that aim at improving teachers' PCK in a programme for teacher training or professional development; *apprenticeship of observation* refers to the ways in which teachers' past experiences as students influence their current teaching models; *contact with cooperating colleagues* as in collaboration with colleagues; and *reflection* of teachers on their educational practice (Evens et al., 2015; Henze & Van Driel, 2015; Henze, Van Driel, & Verloop, 2008; Kind, 2009; Van Driel & Berry, 2010). In this review, we use the six sources mentioned above to compare 34 empirical research articles on the PCK development of history teachers.

### **Method**

Our literature review aims to map the current empirical research on history teachers' PCK. Our review addresses three research questions:

- (1) How is PCK conceptualized in empirical educational research on history teachers in secondary education?;
- (2) How is PCK operationalized in empirical educational research on history teachers in secondary education?;
- (3) What sources are related to the PCK development of history teachers in empirical educational research?

The next paragraph details our selection and analysis of the articles, followed by our results. In the conclusion and discussion section, we will compare these results with PCK research in other disciplinary domains and discuss the implications of the results for PCK research, and for educators and researchers in the field of history.

### **Data collection**

We searched several databases such as *Web of Science* and *ERIC* using the search terms 'PCK' AND 'history' and 'Pedagogical content knowledge' AND 'History', 'Curriculum knowledge AND History' and 'Teaching Orientation AND History'. Furthermore, articles were used in a "snowball procedure"; we traced references in the selected articles for potentially relevant earlier research as well as subsequent citing of the selected articles for potentially later research (see also Evens et al., 2016). The abstracts of the resulting publications were inspected using the following criteria, which were derived from our research questions (see Evens et al., 2015):

1. A publication had to report on at least one empirical study and describe a research methodology (excluding conceptual or argumentative articles);
2. A publication had to focus on history teachers;
3. Publications that only reported on the content knowledge of history teachers were excluded;
4. A publication had to report on research about history teachers in secondary education, because teachers in primary education are likely to have only limited subject specific experience and training;
5. Book chapters and conference papers were excluded because we wanted only peer-reviewed studies, as we were looking for high-quality, empirical studies;
6. Publications had to be in English.

A total of 93 articles was found and inspected by two researchers, using the criteria specified above. When disagreement ensued between the two researchers (as was the case for approximately ten percent of the articles), these cases were discussed until consensus was reached about including or excluding the articles. In total 34 articles about the subject specific pedagogical knowledge of history teachers in secondary education were selected and reviewed. These articles are listed in Tables 1 and 2..

### **Analysis**

To explore the conceptualization of PCK, we categorized: (1) which type of PCK was examined, for example PCK of world history or PCK of historical reasoning, (2) if and how the concept PCK was used and (3) which of the five PCK elements (Magnusson et al., 1999) was



explored. Subsequently, to explore how PCK was operationalized, we categorized (4) the type and number of participants under discussion, and (5) the research method used. We also determined (6) which instruments were used to make the PCK (element) visible. Finally, we analysed (7) what sources were related to the development of history teachers' PCK. For the last category, we use the six sources mentioned by Evens and colleagues (2015) as an analytical framework: (1) teaching experience; (2) PCK courses; (3) content knowledge; (4) apprenticeship of observation (influence of past experiences as a student); (5) contact with cooperating colleagues; (6) reflection on educational practice.

The first author coded all the articles on these categories, which were verified by the second author. Again, in case of doubt these codes were discussed until consensus was reached.

## Results

### *Origin of the studies*

The majority of the reviewed articles (22 out of 34) were written by American authors. Most American authors examine the subject specific pedagogical knowledge of a small group of history teachers (see Table 1). Three articles are from the United Kingdom and two articles are from the same Taiwanese authors. Authors from Zimbabwe, Australia, Sweden, Germany, The Netherlands, and Finland all contributed one article. One article is about teachers from Kenya and its authors work in South Africa. These articles written outside the USA or UK are typically about history teachers in a national curriculum innovation.

Our search generated articles published between 1987 and 2015 and the majority of the articles (26) were published in 2007 or after (see Table 1). It is interesting to note that this is also the year of Cunningham's (2007) observation that hardly any PCK research into history teachers was available. Thus, research on history teaching and PCK has grown from 2007 onwards.

Number	Author(s), year	Which Type of PCK (or PCK related subject)	PCK elements				
			1	2	3	4	5
1	Achinstein & Fogo (2014)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X			
2	Baron (2013)	Disciplinary Strategies	X				
3	Burn (2007)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X		X	X
4	Cunningham (2007)	Historical empathy <sup>a</sup>	X	X		X	X
5	De La Paz, Malkus, Monte-Sano, & Montanaro (2011)	Disciplinary Strategies	X				
6	Duffield, Wageman & Hodge (2013)	US history	X				
7	Evans (1990) <sup>b</sup>	Teachers' conceptions	X	X		X	X
8	Fehn & Koeppen (1998) <sup>b</sup>	Disciplinary Strategies	X				X
9	Fogo (2014)	Core practices <sup>a</sup>	X	X	X		

10	Gudmundsdottir & Shulman (1987) <sup>b</sup>	General PCK history	X	X	X	X	X
11	Harris & Bain (2011)	World history	X				
12	Harris & Girard (2014)	World history	X	X		X	
13	Klein (2010)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X		X	X
14	Ledman, (2015)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X		X	X
15	Leinhardt, Stainton, & Virji (1994) <sup>b</sup>	Teachers' conceptions history		X			X
16	Martell (2014)	Constructivist practices	X				X
17	McCrum (2013)	Beliefs nature subject	X				X
18	Monte-Sano (2011)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X			X
19	Monte-Sano & Budano (2013)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X		X	X
20	Monte-Sano & Cochran (2009)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X			X
21	Monte-Sano, De la Paz, & Felton (2014)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X		X	
22	Moyo & Modiba (2014)	General PCK	X			X	X
23	Reitano & Green (2013)	Disciplinary Strategies		X		X	
24	Salinas, Bellows, & Liaw (2011)	Disciplinary Strategies	X				
25	Saye, Kohlmeier, Brush, Mitchell & Farmer (2009)	Disciplinary Strategies	X			X	X
26	Simwa & Modiba (2015)	Lesson plan as source PCK	X			X	
27	Stoddard (2010)	Disciplinary Strategies	X				X
28	Sung & Yang (2009)	General PCK	X				X
29	Sung & Yang (2013)	General PCK	X				X
30	Van Hover & Yeager (2007)	Disciplinary Strategies	X	X		X	X
31	Virta (2002) <sup>b</sup>	Teachers' Beliefs					X
32	Waschle, Lehman, Brauch, & Nuckles (2015)	General PCK	X				
33	Wilson & Wineburg (1993) <sup>b</sup>	General PCK	X	X	X	X	X
34	Wilson & Wineburg (1991) <sup>b</sup>	General PCK	X	X		X	X

Table 1: Type of PCK and PCK elements<sup>1</sup>**Conceptualization of PCK**

Which type of PCK? (Table 1).

In terms of which PCK is studied, 16 of the 34 studies examine PCK about disciplinary strategies in all its manifestations, for example how teachers teach the use of historical sources. Two more studies touch upon a theme that is connected with disciplinary strategies (Cunningham, 2007; Fogo, 2014). Articles were all published after 2007 (Table 1) except one. In these articles, different concepts are used: historical reasoning; historical thinking; historical enquiry and interpretation; disciplinary literacy, and document-based instruction. For example, Ledman (2015) describes a curriculum innovation in Swedish vocational secondary education. The new history curriculum sets advanced standards for the development of disciplinary strategies, in this case denoted as historical thinking and presents the teachers with a new situation. These teachers consequently navigated between the curriculum standards and their knowledge of their students and tried to develop a strategy so their students could succeed in achieving these curriculum goals (Ledman, 2015). In this process, these teachers had to develop and adjust their PCK.

As can be seen in Table 1, the seven articles that were published before 2007 describe PCK of history teachers in general (e.g., Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987; Wilson & Wineburg, 1991; Wilson & Wineburg, 1993), or teacher conceptions and beliefs (Evans, 1990; Leinhardt, Stainton & Virji, 1994; Virta, 2002). As mentioned before, one article before 2007 describes the PCK about disciplinary strategies (Fehn & Koeppen, 1998), namely the response of student teachers to a history intensive methods course and their subsequent use of document-based instruction. One, more recent, article describes PCK that is related to general US history courses (Duffield, Wageman, & Hodge, 2013) and two articles describe the concrete PCK about World History (Harris & Bain, 2011; Harris & Girard, 2014). These last authors make clear that content knowledge was not sufficient in thinking about a world history task and that experienced teachers improved their ability to make coherent and flexible connections based on their experience with students (Harris & Bain, 2011).

### *The Concept PCK*

In nine articles PCK is used as a central concept and is also defined by PCK elements (such as knowledge of instructional strategies). Of these articles, two formulate new PCK elements (Cunningham, 2007; Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013). Seven articles use known PCK elements that are related to Shulman (1987), Van Driel, Verloop, and de Vos (1998) or Monte-Sano and Budano (2013). For example, Simwa and Modiba (2015) explicitly refer to Shulman and mention content knowledge, knowledge of curricular material, knowledge of learners, and knowledge of educational objectives as PCK elements. This example shows that PCK researchers have different interpretations and perspectives, as content knowledge is not a part of PCK in Shulman's view.

Although the authors of another nine other articles use PCK as a central concept, they do not use a systematic definition including particular PCK elements. Furthermore, in nine articles PCK or Shulman are only mentioned in passing and PCK is not defined or used as a central concept. Seven articles do not use the concept PCK explicitly, but refer to subject related teacher knowledge and use more general concepts such as teacher knowledge, content knowledge, (teacher) professional development, teacher perspectives, teacher thinking, teacher conceptions, and teacher beliefs.

### *The PCK Elements (Table 1)*

In terms of PCK elements, 31 of the 34 articles describe (1) *knowledge of instructional strategies*. (2) *Knowledge of students' understanding* is studied less frequently, namely 18 times; knowledge of the curriculum occurs 16 times. PCK element (3) *Knowledge of assessment*

is only addressed in three articles and the PCK element teaching orientation is addressed in more than half of the articles (22) (Table 1).

In two articles, new PCK elements are distinguished (Cunningham, 2007; Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013). Monte-Sano and Budano (2013) identified PCK elements that are linked to historical reasoning. In their analysis of the literature, they refer to four subject related components of PCK: (1) representing history (the ways in which teachers communicate the nature and structure of historical knowledge to students); (2) transforming history (how teachers transform historical content in lessons and materials that target development of historical understanding and thinking); (3) attending to students' ideas about history' (identifying and responding to students' thinking about history, including misconceptions and prior knowledge); (4) framing history (selecting and arranging topics into a coherent story thereby framing a history curriculum that illustrates significance, connections, and interrelationships) (Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013, p.174). They use these subject related components to analyse the PCK development of novice teachers. These components are related to Shulman (1987) and the model of Magnusson and colleagues (1999), but they are tailored to the disciplinary nature of history.

In her article on historical empathy, Cunningham (2007) refers to thirteen elements of subject related teacher knowledge which include factors concerning students (their capacities; preconceptions; eagerness; ways of reacting; general behaviour), structures (time; resources; curricular and exam specifications) and the teachers themselves (their knowledge; confidence; beliefs; energy levels; moods). The history teachers in Cunningham's study use these types in combination as "knowledge packages" which are responsive to changing circumstances (Cunningham, 2007). The PCK elements that Cunningham defines are not specific for history teachers and some are related to Magnusson's model, but she includes more factors than just teacher knowledge. It is interesting that only Monte-Sano and Budano (2013) formulate specific subject related PCK elements.

### ***The Operationalization of PCK***

#### *Participants (Table 2)*

Sixteen articles examine experienced history teachers and 12 articles analyse the knowledge and development of novice or student teachers. Two articles compare a novice or student teacher with an experienced teacher (Gudsmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987; Wilson & Wineburg, 1993). Achinstein and Fogo (2015) examine the PCK of a mentor of two novice history teachers. Burn (2007) analyses the cooperation between a university and a school and examines educators, experienced teachers, and student-teachers.

	Reference	Participants: teachers	Instruments	Method
1	Achinstein & Fogo (2014)	1 experienced teacher/mentor;2 novices	interviews, observations, conversations, document analysis	Qualitative
2	Baron (2013)	15 experienced teachers	think-aloud protocols, discussions, lesson plans	Qualitative
3	Burn (2007)	2 teacher educators;3 experienced mentors;5 preservice	conversations, assignments, interviews, observations, questionnaires	Qualitative

4	Cunningham (2007)	4 experienced teachers	interviews, observations, curricular documents	Qualitative
5	De La Paz, Malkus, Monte Sano & Montanaro (2011)	45 experienced teachers; 525/611/948 students	logs, observations, student work, questionnaires	Mixed
6	Duffield, Wageman & Hodge (2013)	38 experienced teachers, interview with 27	interviews, observations, student work, logs, questionnaires performance data	Mixed
7	Evans (1990)	5 experienced teachers	observations, interviews with teachers + students	Qualitative
8	Fehn & Koeppen (1998)	11 preservice teachers	interviews, lesson plans, written reflection	Qualitative
9	Fogo (2014)	11 experienced teachers; 16 teacher educators	Delphi study	Qualitative
10	Gudmundsdottir & Shulman (1987)	1 experienced teacher; 1 preservice teacher	interviews, observations, documents collected during field work	Qualitative
11	Harris & Bain (2010)	6 experienced teachers; 4 preservice	sorting task in part 1 + log in part 2 + assignment	Qualitative
12	Harris & Girard (2014)	5 experienced teachers; 4 preservice	interviews, card-sorting data	Qualitative
13	Klein (2010)	2 experienced teachers	interviews + two assignments: cards with statements + historical case	Qualitative
14	Ledman (2015)	5 experienced teachers	interviews	Qualitative
15	Leinhardt & Stainton (1994)	2 experienced teachers; 7 historians	interviews, observations	Qualitative
16	Martell (2014)	4 novice teachers	interviews, observations, field notes, all classroom artefacts	Qualitative
17	McCrum (2013)	11 novice teachers	interviews	Qualitative
18	Monte-Sano (2011)	3 novice teachers	assignments, observations, assessments of disciplinary knowledge	Qualitative
19	Monte-Sano & Budano (2013)	2 novice teachers	observations, interviews, classroom artefacts	Qualitative
20	Monte-Sano & Cochran (2009)	2 novice teachers	pre-tests + post-test, interviews, observations	Qualitative

21	Monte-Sano, et al. (2014)	2 experienced teachers	observations, interviews, student work	Qualitative
22	Moyo & Modiba (2014)	3 experienced teachers	observations, interviews	Qualitative
23	Reitano & Green (2013)	7 preservice teachers	concept maps	Qualitative
24	Salinas, Bellows, & Liaw (2011)	22 preservice teachers	observations in course, interviews	Qualitative
25	Saye, Kohlmeier, Brush, Mitchell & Farmer (2009)	6 experienced teachers	lesson plans, observations, interviews, conversations, journal, surveys	Qualitative
26	Simwa & Modiba (2015)	5 preservice teachers	lesson observations, interviews, document analysis	Qualitative
27	Stoddard (2010)	2 experienced teachers	observations, interviews, class materials	Qualitative
28	Sung & Yang (2009)	716 social studies teachers	questionnaires	Quantitative
29	Sung & Yang (2013)	2492 social studies teachers	questionnaires	Quantitative
30	Van Hover & Yeager (2007)	1 novice teacher	observations, reflective journal, lesson documents, interviews, group interview	Qualitative
31	Virta (2002)	18 preservice teachers essays, 5 interviews	essays, interviews	Qualitative
32	Wasche, Lehman, Brauch & Nuckles, 2015	52 preservice teachers	assignment with three texts, learning journal, three subtests	Quantitative
33	Wilson & Wineburg (1993)	1 experienced teacher; 1 novice teacher	assessment student products, design task with sources, textbook analysis	Qualitative
34	Wilson & Wineburg (1991)	11 experienced teachers, focus on 2 teachers	interviews, observations	Qualitative

Table 2: Participants, instruments, method

*Research Method and Instruments (Table 2)*

Nearly all articles (29) use qualitative methods, the majority of which are case studies. In these qualitative and situative studies (Depaepe et al., 2013) the following instruments are used: interviews; document analyses of lesson plans or pedagogical products; written assignments by student teachers; observations of lessons; audio recordings of conversations, for example between student teachers and teacher educators; video recordings of lessons or conversations; think-a-loud protocols; field notes; concept map; surveys. Some researchers use vignettes or a summary to reduce the data. In most of the articles interviews and observations are used, but class materials or written assignments by student teachers are also often used.

One example of an instrument is the card sorting task of Harris and Bain (2011) which asks history teachers to structure events from world history. This instrument is interesting because it compels the teachers to make their PCK (*knowledge of instructional strategies*) visible and enables a comparison between experienced and inexperienced world history teachers. The experienced teachers constructed concept maps with multiple and more fluid connections between events than the inexperienced world history teachers did. Also, the experienced teachers classified events as global, cross-regional, or regional to explain connections among these events, although they were not instructed to do so (Harris & Bain, 2011).

Only three articles use quantitative methods (Sun & Yang, 2009; Sun & Yang, 2013; Wäschle, Lehman, Brauch, & Nückles, 2015), representing the cognitive perspective on PCK (assuming PCK can be measured independently from the context in which it is used). In the quantitative studies, surveys and analyses of student products are used. Two articles relate student outcomes to teacher knowledge and use qualitative as well as quantitative methods (De La Paz, Malkus, Monte-Sano & Montanaro, 2011; Duffield et al., 2013). In these two articles the cognitive and situated perspective are combined, because PCK is captured and measured in a specific context. The student outcomes are analysed and connected to the professional development of their teachers. For example, De La Paz and colleagues (2011) examined 45 experienced teachers and 2084 students through logs, observations, student work, and questionnaires. The authors draw conclusions about the relationship between teachers' PCK (*knowledge of instructional strategies*) and the performance of the students. Their findings show that fifth and eleventh grade students, whose teachers were involved in ongoing networking activities on working with primary documents for at least 30 hours in one year, improved their written responses to document-based questions. A large-scale project such as this is rare in the field of PCK and history (see Table 2).

### ***PCK development***

In 20 of the 34 reviewed articles, the authors examine PCK development (see Table 3). In most cases it is the type of PCK development resulting from an intervention (e.g., a PCK course) or a context that functions as an intervention (e.g., a curriculum innovation). In terms of specific sources that are related to PCK development, our results show that teaching experience, PCK courses, and content knowledge are the main sources for PCK development of history teachers according to the authors of the reviewed articles.

Some authors draw attention to the influence of students. Teachers adjust their lessons or an entire new curriculum to the capabilities of their students and develop and adjust their PCK accordingly (Klein, 2010; Ledman, 2015; Leinhardt et al., 1994; Monte-Sano, De La Paz, & Felton, 2014). For example, Monte-Sano and colleagues (2014) show that teachers' adaptations to a disciplinary literacy curriculum were driven by their desire to fit the curriculum to students' needs. The two teachers in their research continuously reflected on what was working for their students; when they found that students were struggling, they made changes to help those students reach the curricular goals (Monte-Sano et al., 2014). This could be conceived as part of the PCK source experience. However, in the cases mentioned above, the interaction with the students is not part of this PCK source experience but the direct source of PCK development. Thus, in our perspective the interaction with the students can be regarded as an additional source for PCK development.

The reviewed articles describe all PCK sources regarding novices (i.e. all sources of the Evens inventory). However, in the case of the experienced teachers, not all PCK sources seem relevant (only teaching experience; PCK courses; content knowledge; contact with cooperating colleagues, and interaction with the students are relevant). Only one of the articles on

experienced teachers<sup>2</sup> suggests that contact with cooperating colleagues is a PCK source for experienced teachers (Saye, Kohlmeier, Brush, Mitchell & Farmer, 2009, p.6). This can be regarded an indication that PCK development works differently for experienced teachers than for novice teachers.

	Experience	PCK Course	C K	Past experiences	Contact and cooperation	Reflection	Students	Intervention
Achinstein & Fogo (2014)		X						X
Baron (2013)		X						X
Burn (2007)		X		X	X			Context <sup>a</sup>
Cunningham (2007)								
DeLaPaz, Malkus, MonteSano & Montanaro (2011)		X						X
Duffield, Wageman & Hodge (2013)		X						X
Evans (1990)								
Fehn & Koeppen (1998)					X			X
Fogo (2014)								
Gudmundsdottir & Shulman (1987)	X							
Harris & Bain (2011)	X							
Harris & Girard (2014)	X							
Klein (2010)							X	
Ledman (2015)	X						X	Context <sup>a</sup>
Leinhardt & Stainton (1994)	X						X	
Martell (2014)	X			X				Context <sup>a</sup>
McCrum (2013)			X					Context <sup>a</sup>



Monte-Sano (2011)		X	X	X	X			
Monte-Sano & Budano (2013)		X	X		X	X		
Monte-Sano & Cochran (2009)		X	X	X	X			
Monte-Sano, De la Paz & Felton (2014)	X						X	X
Moyo & Modiba (2014)	X	X						X
Reitano & Green (2013)		X						
Salinas, Bellows, & Liaw (2011)			X					X
Saye, Kohlmeier, Brush, Mitchell & Farmer (2009)	X			X				X
Simwa & Modiba (2015)		X						X
Stoddard (2010)			X					
Sung & Yang (2009)			X					
Sung & Yang (2013)			X					
Van Hover & Yeager, (2007)								
Virta (2002)				X				
Waschle, Lehman, Brauch & Nuckles (2015)		X						
Wilson & Wineburg(1993)								
Wison & Wineburg (1991)	X		X					

Table 3: Sources of PCK development<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion and Discussion

Emerging PCK research in domains outside science education can inform our understanding of PCK and PCK development. We conducted a systematic literature review to document the status quo of research on PCK of history teachers in secondary education. Most research on PCK and history teachers has been conducted by American researchers after 2007. Our first research question concerned *the conceptualization of PCK in empirical educational research on history teachers in secondary education*.

Most research on history teachers analyzes PCK about disciplinary strategies. These researchers use different concepts such as historical reasoning; historical thinking; document-based analysis, and disciplinary literacy. The variety in disciplinary concepts makes it harder to characterize and analyze the research in this review. Currently, researchers and teachers have reached a broad consensus regarding the importance of learning disciplinary strategies for students (Wansink, 2017). However, there seems to be less consensus on the teaching of disciplinary strategies. History teaching would benefit from describing concrete examples of PCK about disciplinary strategies. It would be helpful when researchers in the domain of history use the concept of PCK and, therefore, make it possible to link to the PCK research in other domains.

Most articles mainly relate PCK to the PCK element (1) *knowledge of instructional strategies* (one of the two key elements in Shulman's original concept). The other key element, (2) *knowledge of students' understanding*, is less frequently addressed. That is remarkable since (1) *knowledge of instructional strategies* and (2) *knowledge of students' understanding* are widely considered to be the core elements of PCK. Moreover, knowledge of assessment is almost non-existent in the reviewed articles, although assessment is a crucial part of the educational process. That is why Tamir (1988) and Magnusson and colleagues (1999) added this PCK element.

All PCK elements of the Magnusson model seem prerequisites for effective teaching (Kind, 2015). Unfortunately, not all PCK elements are used in the articles on PCK and history teaching. In contrast, we would like to argue that it is important to use and connect all the five PCK elements and not to exclude any (Tuithof, 2017). Using all the five PCK elements could inform teacher educators and researchers better. Instead of viewing PCK as a toolkit of good teaching tricks, it can be seen as a rich repertoire that is based on knowledge of the students and is linked to teaching orientation. Four articles cover four out of five PCK elements (except knowledge of assessment) and show the connection between these PCK elements. These four case-studies provide interesting perspectives on the influence of the goals of the teachers (related to PCK element (5) *teacher orientation*), the context of the school, the interaction with the students, and the insight that experienced teachers could still be learners when it comes to disciplinary strategies (Burn, 2007; Van Hover & Yeager, 2007; Ledman, 2015; Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013).

Monte-Sano and Budano (2013) are also the only authors who formulated subject related components of PCK. We would have expected more subject related elaborations, since PCK is

highly content related. On the other hand, the use of general models does of course enable comparisons across domains.

Our second research question asked *how PCK is operationalized in empirical educational research on history teachers in secondary education*. Only three articles use a quantitative method and two articles use mixed methods. All other 29 articles use qualitative methods: a case study, interviews and observations, as well as class materials or written assignments by student teachers.

PCK research on science and mathematics teachers appears to contain more variety in topics, instruments, design, and methods. The percentage of studies using a cognitive perspective and quantitative research methods, as described by Depaepe and colleagues (2013), is growing in the science domain, but studies taking this perspective are hardly present in the PCK research on history teachers (see last column of Table 2). As Depaepe and colleagues (2013) demonstrate, the cognitive perspective has provided empirical evidence for the positive connection between PCK and student learning outcomes. However, because of its contextual focus, the situated perspective is more appropriate for understanding what happens in the classroom and what really matters in teaching (Depaepe et al., 2013). Therefore, it seems worthwhile to use variation in instruments, designs, and methods, because this could provide more knowledge about PCK and its development.

Although the size of PCK research on history teachers is small in comparison to research on science and mathematics teachers, it is truly diverse in one respect: more articles examine the PCK of experienced teachers while research on science teachers focusses more on novice or student teachers.

Our third research question asked *what sources are related to PCK development*. Our findings support the distinction of the six sources of PCK proposed by Evens and colleagues (2015). The articles we reviewed mainly discuss teaching experience, PCK courses, and content knowledge as sources of PCK. Some authors call our attention to the influence of the students on the development of PCK (Ledman, 2015; Leinhardt et al., 1994; Monte-Sano et al., 2014). In our view, this particular source could also be seen as an additional source of PCK development; therefore, we add it as a potential source for the development of experienced history teachers' PCK. The reviewed articles describe different sources for the PCK development of experienced teachers and beginning teachers, suggesting that PCK development might work differently for experienced teachers than for novice teachers. The articles about novice history teachers do mention the PCK sources past experiences and reflection whereas the articles about the PCK development of experienced teachers do not. Recent research by Jansen in de Wal (2016) suggests that, in general, experienced teachers tend to reflect less than novices. Researchers and teacher educators could take the differences between novices and experienced teachers into consideration when designing teacher training and future PCK studies. PCK should not only be seen as a toolkit of good teaching tricks but as a rich repertoire that is based on knowledge of the students and is linked to a specific teaching orientation. Novices do not connect the several PCK elements yet. In order to do so and to develop a rich PCK, they need to obtain knowledge on all the separate PCK elements (Tuithof, 2017).

We have to take into account that the results of our review might be limited or biased because of our selection criteria. First, we excluded book chapters and conference papers from our dataset and only included articles reporting about empirical studies. Therefore, we might have missed the more conceptual and theoretical studies. Second, our decision to include only journals in English may have influenced our finding that the majority of the PCK articles were written in the USA. Third, we decided to work with the five PCK elements of Magnusson in

our selection of the articles and also selected articles that did not have a clear conceptualization of PCK. Our goal was to broaden our scope on the PCK of history teachers.

Summarizing, PCK is rarely conceptualized in empirical research on history teachers and most research that does use PCK is qualitative, very specific, and often based on a small group of participants. Because this kind of research is so context specific, it is difficult to generate general conclusions regarding PCK and history. However, if we do execute large scale research, it might capture or measure PCK out of context at the risk of neglecting the strong context specific nature of PCK in that case. In order to reduce this tension, we want to recommend and advocate the use of the Content Representation-format of Loughran and colleagues (2006). It is used in professionalization programmes for teachers and in PCK research. The CoRe questionnaire has also been used by several science education teachers and researchers on relatively large samples (Bertram, 2012; Bertram & Loughran, 2012; Kind, 2009; Loughran & Nilsson, 2012; Nilsson, 2008). The CoRe questionnaire captures PCK by asking several questions about teachers' goals, examples and instructional strategies. The CoRe questionnaire could be used for making visible the PCK of a topic or a first-order concept or a second-order concepts. In the research of the first author, the CoRe questionnaire is used to describe concrete examples of the PCK of history teachers. It is an interesting example of an instrument that integrates the situative and cognitive perspectives and, thus, values the context specific character of PCK and also provides researchers with the opportunity to generate more general knowledge about PCK (Tuithof, 2017). The CoRe questionnaire could also be used in professionalization programmes and in teacher training to make PCK visible. Finally, we would advocate the use of the concept PCK and the five PCK elements of Magnusson et al. (1999) in research and teacher training of history teachers.

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## Endnotes

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1 PCK elements 1= knowledge of instructional strategies; 2= knowledge of students' understanding; 3= knowledge of assessment; 4= knowledge of curriculum; 5= teaching orientation.

aRelated to PCK about Disciplinary Strategies. bPublished before 2007

2 For the sake of clarity, we excluded those articles that address both novice and experienced teachers

3 Note. a The context of the study functions as an intervention.

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## The bearing of historical consciousness

Ann Chinnery

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2015, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* released a list of 94 Calls to Action as a framework for Canadian society to begin to address and take collective responsibility for the harm done to generations of Aboriginal children, families, and communities by the Indian Residential School system and related governmental policies. The Calls include several items specifically addressing education, including a call to all levels of government to make curriculum about the residential schools, treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' history mandatory for students from kindergarten to grade twelve. Obviously, within such a context, history education cannot be about the construction and transmission of a coherent national narrative and national identity; rather, it requires getting to grips with what Britzman calls "difficult knowledge" about Canada's past. My purpose in this paper is two-fold: in the first section I provide a brief introduction to the two main conceptions of historical consciousness informing Anglophone history education in Canada; and in the second section I take up recent discussions about the distinction between historical consciousness as the possession of historical knowledge and historical consciousness as a life-orienting, or life-bearing praxis. Taking the latter term quite literally, I explore three potential meanings of the phrase, "the bearing of historical consciousness": 1) as a burden or weight that one bears; 2) as a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past; and 3) as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today.

**KEYWORDS:** Historical Consciousness; Difficult Knowledge; Epistemic Humility; Ethical Indebtedness; Roger Simon; Peter Seixas.

### Introduction

In 2015, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) released a list of 94 Calls to Action as a framework for Canadian society to begin to address and take collective responsibility for the harm done to generations of Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> children, families, and communities by the Indian Residential School system and related governmental policies. The document includes several items specifically addressing education, including a call to all levels of government to make curriculum about the residential schools, treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' history mandatory for students from kindergarten to grade twelve (p. 7). Within such a context, traditional models of Canadian history education that focus on the transmission of a coherent narrative about Canada's past and the cultivation of a national identity will no longer suffice. This is not to say that the traditional "single story" approach to history and history education serves no purpose. In fact, it works very well for developing a collective consciousness and shared sense of national identity, but those benefits come at the cost of a fuller and more nuanced understanding of history that includes the perspectives of those whose experiences did not make it into the official record. However, the shift in Canadian history education in the early 2000s from the traditional approach to a multiple perspective approach was not welcomed by all. In his frequently cited, *Who killed Canadian history?* for instance, the historian J.L. Granatstein (1998) wrote:

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If Canada is to be worthy of its envied standing in the world, if it is to offer something to its own people and to humanity, it will have to forge a national spirit that can unite its increasingly diverse people. We cannot achieve this unanimity unless we teach our national history, celebrate our founders, establish new symbols, and strengthen the terms of our citizenship . . . We have a nation to save and a future to build. (pp. 148-149)

The popular narrative of Canada as a progressive, tolerant, and welcoming multicultural mosaic is indeed part of our story, but it is certainly not all of it; and taking up the TRC Calls to Action means that we must help students get to grips with the neglected and silenced stories, and the “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998) that is also part of our past. More recently, the debate in Canadian history education has shifted to what role Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous historical consciousness (Marker, 2011)—which is based on Indigenous conceptions of knowledge, time, and relationships with the natural world—ought to play in history education (Anderson, 2017). While the focus of the debates has changed over the past 20 years, history education in Canada remains contested terrain, with educators, historians, and politicians all wanting a say in determining what historical knowledge is of most worth, and therefore what knowledge and narratives ought to be in the curriculum (see Seixas, 2004, pp. 3-20 for a fuller discussion of these debates).

My aim in this paper is two-fold: in the first section I provide a brief introduction to the two main conceptions of historical consciousness currently informing Anglophone history education in Canada;<sup>2</sup> and in the second section I take up recent discussions about the distinction between historical consciousness as the possession of historical knowledge and historical consciousness as a life-orienting, or life-bearing, praxis (Seixas, 2016; Körber, 2016; Zanzanian & Nordgren, 2017). Taking the latter term quite literally, I explore three potential meanings of the phrase, “the bearing of historical consciousness”: 1) as a burden or weight that one bears; 2) as a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past; and 3) as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today. In keeping with the primarily Canadian focus of the paper, I have not addressed the important body of European scholarship on historical consciousness that emerged in large part as an attempt to respond to, and get to grips with, the horrors of the Holocaust. Many scholars cite Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Le problème de la conscience historique* (1963) as inaugurating the field of historical consciousness in Europe, followed and built on by Jörn Rüsen, Andreas Körber, Arie Wilschut, and others. Amongst the European scholars, it is Rüsen (2005; 2017), and, in particular, his work on narrative competence and memory, that has had the most impact on the field in Canada. Let us return then to the Canadian context.

## Historical consciousness and the Canadian educational scene

A review of the literature on historical consciousness reveals that the term itself means different things to different people. While the scholarly conversation has most often been collegial, there has also been some tension in the field, most evident, perhaps, in the 2001 dialogue between Roger Simon and Jörn Rüsen (with Peter Seixas, James Wertsch and others weighing in), transcribed in Seixas’s *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (Simon, Rüsen, & Others, pp. 202-211). The disagreement that surfaced there was not over *whether* history education and cultivating the capacity for historical consciousness are important—all are committed to that view—but rather over what historical consciousness itself means and how we ought to be teaching students to engage with the past. Even though considerable time has passed since that dialogue, the divergence in perspectives remains.

In the Anglophone Canadian scholarship on historical consciousness, there are two main, contrasting approaches. I do not intend to argue that one is better than the other, since both work well, but for different educational ends. The first approach, spearheaded by Peter Seixas in his

Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia, is based on an understanding of historical consciousness as a cognitive and epistemological project, and the Centre's major focus, the *Historical Thinking Project* (2006-2014), was designed to promote critical historical literacy.

Framing the *Historical Thinking Project* are six capacities that students need in order to think historically—specifically, the capacity to:

1. Establish historical significance
2. Use primary source evidence
3. Identify continuity and change
4. Analyze cause and consequence
5. Take historical perspectives, and
6. Understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

(Available online: <http://historybenchmarks.ca/historical-thinking-concepts>)

Seixas's historical thinking approach is much more "hands-on" than the traditional, textbook-driven curriculum typical of Canadian history education up to that point. Historical thinking requires students to weigh competing narratives about the past and to ask critical questions concerning the authenticity of the primary source documents and the validity of the interpretations in secondary source analyses. For example, ... Who created the source? For what purpose was it created? What perspective is taken? How does this impact the interpretation? Whose perspectives are omitted? ... What kinds of evidence are used in each case?" and so on (Bryant and Clark, 2006, p. 1058). Students learn that it is not simply a matter of believing the most compelling story, but of weighing the evidence and learning to think like an historian.

But what we know about the past is not just an epistemological concern; it goes a long way to shaping our identities as individuals, communities, societies, and nations. Therefore, in addition to content knowledge, Seixas includes the cultivation of certain moral dispositions as essential to historical literacy. In particular, he emphasizes "historical empathy." As Bryant and Clark (2006) explain, historical empathy is not empathy in its purely emotive sense (i.e., feeling what another feels), but rather a cognitive capacity for perspective-taking that enables one to understand how and why certain decisions and actions may have been taken in the past and how those decisions and actions have impacted the way things are today (see concept 5 above; also Lee and Ashby, 2001). Seixas's conception of historical consciousness is not about judging the lives and actions of those who came before us through the lens of our 21<sup>st</sup>-century knowledge, beliefs, and values, but about learning from those past lives in order to work toward the kind of society we want now and in the future. Seixas's work has been taken up and expanded across Canada by Penney Clark, Kent den Heyer, Carla Peck, and many others, with the common thread being a commitment to cultivating historically literate citizens.

The second approach is Roger Simon's conception of historical consciousness as a fundamentally existential and ethical project. Simon's *Testimony and Historical Memory Project*, at the University of Toronto, is sometimes referred to as critical historical consciousness in order to distinguish it from the epistemological conception. For Simon, the past is not a set of artefacts, narratives, or documents that we can come to know and understand, but rather something that always exceeds our grasp, but which nonetheless makes ethical demands on us here and now. In contrast to Seixas's epistemological approach, Simon draws on continental philosophers Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as psychoanalytic theory, to develop a conception of historical consciousness as a recognition of our inescapable indebtedness to the past. Historical consciousness, as Simon (2005) describes it, is inherently

social; it is “not...an individual awareness and attitude but...a commitment to, and participation in, an organized practice of remembrance and learning” (p. 101).

At the core of Simon’s approach is Levinas’s (1987) conception of the ethical responsibility we are called to in encounters with the past in which “I am thrown back toward what has never been my fault or my deed, toward what has never been in my power or freedom, toward what has never been my presence, and has never come into memory” (p. 111). An admittedly counterintuitive stance, Levinas insists that we are responsible to and for the past, whether or not we, or even anyone we know, played a part in it, and whether or not we can ever know what really happened. Simon’s historical consciousness and public memory project was developed in collaboration with his then graduate students Sharon Rosenberg, Claudia Eppert, Laura Beres, Mark Clamen, Mario Di Paolantonio, and others, and his work has been continued and expanded since Simon’s passing in 2012. Of particular note is Di Paolantonio’s work on the importance of forgetting as well as remembering (2011; 2018).

Put simply, the main difference between the two approaches is that Seixas emphasizes historical thinking as a way to develop *historically literate citizens* and Simon emphasizes public memory as a way to cultivate *historical witnesses*; and the key point of departure is in the role that knowledge is seen to play in the development of historical consciousness. In the dialogue I mentioned above, from the 2001 symposium, Simon claimed that he and Rösen (as well as Seixas and several of the other participants) were engaged in fundamentally different projects, albeit under the same name of historical consciousness. Speaking to Rösen, Simon said:

The way I understand your work, it’s about the way in which historical knowledge gets mediated into historical consciousness; historical knowledge not being the same as historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is how, as you put it, people mediate in a variety of complex ways how the past becomes meaningful to them. I am interested in . . . *spaces of remembering* that have the possibility for opening up . . . ways of engaging representations of the past, significations of the past, open[ing] up the possibilities for thinking about how we are to live our lives as human beings and what prospects for hope . . . might exist in the present. They [your concerns and mine] are complementary, but they are not the same . . . (Simon, Rösen, and Others, 2004, p. 206, ellipses and italics in original)

Seixas replied that he was puzzled by Simon’s insistence that the differences in emphasis constitute different projects, suggesting that it is more about “different sets of terms being brought to bear” on what is fundamentally the same project of how we ought to engage with the past (Seixas, 2004, p. 207), but Simon resisted Seixas’s characterization. I tend to think Simon is right on this point, that the projects are fundamentally different. For Simon, the epistemological strand’s focus on knowing about and understanding the past reflects a desire to master the past by bringing it into the realm of understanding (which he considers problematic), and he cites Sam Wineberg’s paper, which was part of the symposium but does not appear in the printed volume, as sharing some features with his own view. The crucial point for Simon is where Wineberg says:

[O]ur *inability* to perceive the experiences of others is a reason why the study of history is so crucial. Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the others side of the millennium, requires the education of our sensibilities. This is what history when taught well gives us practice in doing. What allows us to come to know others is our distrust of our capacity to know them, our skepticism towards the extraordinary sense-making abilities that allow us to construct the world around us. (Cited in Simon, Rösen, and Others, 2004, p. 205, italics added)

For Simon, our inability to ever really know what went on in other times and places is not a weakness to be overcome, but rather a defining feature of historical consciousness that goes hand in hand with our relation to the past as one of indebtedness and ethical responsibility.

Obviously, there is much more that needs to be said about all this, and this brief sketch does not do justice to the complexities of either Seixas's or Simon's work, nor to the many curricular innovations their research has sparked. In my view, both Seixas's cognitive/epistemological conception of historical consciousness and Simon's existential/ethical conception are compatible with the description of historical consciousness as a life-orienting, or life-bearing praxis; but, beyond that, I would agree with Simon that he and Seixas are engaged in quite different projects. Perhaps not surprisingly, while both conceptions have been well theorized, it is Seixas's approach that has had the most traction in Canadian schools. One of the reasons, I suspect, is that, like Levinas's and Derrida's thought on which it stands, Simon's approach does not readily lend itself to application in classrooms; but, as we shall see below, this does not mean it has no relevance for education.

## The bearing of historical consciousness

Taking up the idea of historical consciousness as a life-orienting praxis, but, more specifically, Zanazanian and Nordgren's (2017) term, 'life-bearing,' in this second section of the paper, I explore three potential meanings of the phrase, "the bearing of historical consciousness." I look at historical consciousness as: 1) a burden or weight that one bears; 2) a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past; and 3) a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today. I will draw on both Seixas's and Simon's frameworks; however, because of my own background and ongoing interest in Levinasian ethics, I will rely more heavily on Simon in some parts. I will also ground the discussion in concrete educational examples, paying particular attention to the implications for Canadian history education in light of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action* for education (TRC, 2015, pp. 1-2, 7-8).

### *Historical consciousness as a burden or weight that one bears*

In his recent book, *Not in My Family: German Memory and Responsibility after the Holocaust*, Roger Frie (2017) offers a deeply personal account of wrestling with the discovery that his grandfather had been a member of the Nazi Party. The book is in part an attempt to fill in the gaps in his own family narrative, and in part a more theoretical argument that we all bear an ethical responsibility to remember the past. A psychoanalyst and philosopher by training, Frie makes the case that, as individuals, and as communities and countries, there is no escaping our history. We are all indelibly shaped by the actions of those who came before us, whether we realize it or not.

In a section on the moral obligations of memory (pp. 158-161), Frie cites former West German president Richard von Weizsäcker's speech to the German Parliament in 1985, 40 years after the end of World War II. Von Weizsäcker spoke not only about the guilt of the first generation (both those who had participated actively in the Holocaust and those who had played no active role but, by virtue of being German, bore a collective guilt); he also spoke of the responsibility of future generations to remember:

The vast majority of today's population were either children then or had not been born. They cannot profess a guilt of their own for crimes they did not commit. No discerning person can expect them to wear a penitential robe simply because they are Germans. But their forefathers have left a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it. The young and old generations must and can help each other to understand why it is vital to keep alive the memories. (Frie, 2017, p. 159)

In so doing, Frie says, Weizsäcker distinguished the *guilt* of the first generation from the *responsibility* of those who have come after.

Indeed, just as Canadians who played no active part in the Indian Residential School system are not personally guilty for causing harm, we all bear the burden of that difficult history—a history for which we are called to respond here and now. The burden subsequent generations carry is thus in part an epistemological burden that comes in the form of a responsibility to learn as much as we can about the past; but it is also, perhaps more importantly, a moral burden that we bear beyond any choice or decision to take it on (see also Blustein, 2008). In Frie’s case, the actions of his grandfather, although hidden from the younger generations of his family, inevitably shaped them in unseen and unknowable ways. As Frie explains, drawing on Levinas, bearing the burden of responsibility to and for the past means recognizing that we all inherit an ethical debt to the past, a debt that no amount of knowledge can repay (2017, (pp. 156-157). In thinking this through, I find Geoffrey Bennington’s conception of ‘difficult inheritance’ helpful. The very structure of inheritance, Bennington claims, “commits us to a view of the here and now as a moment when the past always still remains before us as an endless task” (2000, p. 140). Marianne Hirsch’s (2008) work on “postmemory” addresses similar themes. She describes postmemory as “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (p. 103), and the questions guiding her work resonate with both Frie’s and Bennington’s concerns. As Hirsch (2008) writes:

How, in our present, do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag (2003) has described as ‘the pain of others’? What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the crimes? Can the memory of genocide be transformed into action and resistance? (p. 104)

In Levinasian terms, the difficult inheritance of the past comes to us as an ethical debt we have done nothing to incur, but neither which can we refuse. What we *do* with that difficult inheritance, however, is both our moral burden and the possibility of hope.

Frie’s account of German memory and responsibility after the Holocaust is autobiographical, but there are also countless literary examples of characters who are destined to bear the weight of the past, either for things they themselves have done or left undone, or for the inherited burden of acts committed by others. A poignant fictional example can be found in Sebastian Faulk’s novel, *Charlotte Gray*. Throughout the book, the title character, Charlotte, carries an unnamable, yet inescapable, pain from her past. This pain has shaped her life, her emotions, and her responses to others, and while she has no clear memory of the actual event, Charlotte is convinced that her pain comes from her father having sexually abused her in her childhood. Only towards the end of the novel does she find out that the trauma and suffering her father had inflicted on her was not sexual abuse, but rather a violent outpouring of memories of his own actions during the First World War: “Suddenly, he had been unable to contain his guilt any longer at permitting the murder of German prisoners and ordering his own men to certain death, and [in pouring out his pain] ‘asked a child to bear the weight of those unspeakable things, a weight that drove men mad’” (Faulks, 1999, p. 483 in Middleton & Wood, 2000, p. 19).

I include this example because it serves not only to illustrate what it might mean to bear the weight of the past, but as a cautionary reminder to those of us who advocate historical consciousness as an educational aim: What, and how much, of the weight of the past should we ask children to bear? How much of a psychological burden is it pedagogically and ethically justifiable to place on children?

Michael Hand raises this question explicitly in his preface to David Aldridge’s (2014) *How Ought War to be Remembered in Schools?*. Aldridge’s paper (written for the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain’s IMPACT series of papers intended to contribute to wider public and policy conversations) is a response to David Cameron’s (2012) speech at the



Imperial War Museum, in which he announced plans for Britain's commemorations of the upcoming World War I centenary. With regard to the pedagogical aspects, Hand (in Aldridge, 2014) states:

In this centenary year of its outbreak, few would deny that the First World War should be remembered. But exactly why and how it should be remembered are vexed questions. Is there room for celebration as well as commemoration? Should we take pride in Britain's victory? Do we owe gratitude to those who fought and died? Is the purpose of remembrance to bind ourselves to the national community, to strengthen our commitment to British values, to fix our eyes on ideals of courage and self-sacrifice, to inspire in ourselves an abhorrence of war?

Most of us find it hard enough to answer these questions for ourselves; it is more difficult still to answer them on behalf of others. If...children are to be expected to participate in commemorative events and rituals, it is not enough for us to be clear about our personal reasons for remembering. We need a good justification for foisting remembrance on others. And we need to ensure that the commemorative events and rituals in which children are expected to participate are appropriate to that justification (p. 2).

Hand's preface anticipates the main, and contentious, point of Aldridge's (2014) argument that the only justifiable reason to involve schools in war remembrance is to teach students about the horror of war, not to cultivate a sense of gratitude to the fallen, or to use remembrance rituals as a way to encourage children to uphold a set of shared values, even those for which the country went to war in the first place (p. 7). Aldridge (2014) writes:

The only sentiment that ought to be commended or encouraged in relation to the war dead is horror. This encompasses all those who die and not just those who fell on 'our side'. Furthermore, while the media, charitable bodies and the political and public sphere will continue to reproduce the observance of the event of remembrance, educational institutions ought to be safe spaces in which critical questions can be raised about this event and dissenting views can be expressed with confidence. (pp. 37-38)

I agree with Aldridge that, "Whatever else war is, it is always horrific" (2014, p. 5). I also agree that there is no glory in war and we ought not to teach as if there were (see also <http://noglory.org/>). However, I have concerns about his suggestion that teachers ought to foster the sentiment of horror by replacing the usual associations of war, such as bright red flowers, pristine stone memorials, and elderly men wearing medals, with images of children whose lives have been cut short by war (p. 38). My concern with Aldridge's recommendation comes not from a belief that children ought to remain ignorant of the horror of war. Rather, I question the pedagogical value of using images and narratives of war violence perpetrated on children insofar as those images and narratives risk asking children to, in Faulks's (1999) words, "bear the weight of those unspeakable things, a weight that drove men mad" (p. 483).

Shifting back to the Canadian context, *Project of Heart: Illuminating the Hidden History of Indian Residential Schools in BC*, a curriculum resource published by the British Columbia Teachers Federation, begins with the following from Marie Wilson, one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners:

Imagine that you are five years old. A stranger comes to your home village and seizes you from your mother's arms. Imagine he takes you hundreds of miles away to a place where white people in black robes cut off your hair and take away your clothes, the ones your mother made especially for you.

They also take away your name—you get a number instead. They separate you from your brothers and sisters, and forbid you to speak to one another in your native language. Imagine being silenced with shouts.

Imagine toiling in field and kitchen yet going hungry all the time. Imagine being hit or strapped for breaking rules you don't know or understand. Imagine learning that your family traditions and culture are evil and barbaric, while the Christian God is the only true Creator, the God of love. Imagine a heavy hand on your shoulder pulling you away from the dormitory in the night.

Imagine you're sick, feverish, and alone. Other children also coughing, gasping. Some are dying and you know it, even though they try to cover it up.

Imagine running away from it all, desperate to be safe and loved back home. Imagine being hunted and caught, then returned to even harsher punishments. ... [This narrative is followed by a similar imaginative exercise from an Indigenous parent's perspective.]

'Think of that. *Bear that*. Imagine that' (BC Teachers' Federation, 2015, p. 2, emphasis added).

As the testimonies of survivors of the Indian Residential Schools have revealed, Wilson's depiction is a disturbingly common account of that experience (with some variations from school to school, and survivor to survivor), and the residential schools are an inescapable part of the difficult history all Canadians have inherited. In teaching about the history of Canada's relations with Indigenous peoples, some educators advocate engaging students in imaginative exercises along the lines of Wilson's words above, as a way to begin to cultivate historical empathy and an understanding of the past. But, in my view, this approach is not without risk. I have heard anecdotally from parents and colleagues that some elementary-aged children who are asked to engage in such activities come out of the experience not with a sense of responsibility to learn more about the past and a commitment to work toward righting historical wrongs and repairing relations, but instead become anxious, unable to sleep, and afraid of being separated from their own parents. Admittedly, their fears will most likely not come to fruition, and they pale alongside the actual horrors of the Indian Residential Schools; but, even though some degree of trauma may be inevitable in the kind of transformative learning that will be required to get to grips with Canada's historical and ongoing unjust relations with Indigenous people, teaching such difficult knowledge must be accompanied by careful attention to the pedagogical approaches employed.

Contrary to the imaginative exercise in the *Project of Heart* described above and Aldridge's recommendation that students be exposed to "stories of children their own age who have become casualties in war, or who have been mutilated by it" (2014, p. 38), I am not convinced that intentionally setting the conditions for a traumatic learning experience is the best way to cultivate historical consciousness (see also Erickson, 2004). Rather, I believe a more productive approach is for teachers to help students interrogate and critically deconstruct the dominant national narratives, paying particular attention to the ways in which those narratives have been constructed as historical knowledge, and to offer counter-narratives that disrupt or decenter the dominant stories about what went on in other times and places (see, for example, Anderson, 2017; Province of British Columbia, 2019). In a similar vein, but going beyond the intellectual domain, Alison Landsberg (2015) argues that we need to cultivate an embodied affective engagement with the past. She proposes encounters with contemporary visual media, such as films, television dramas, and virtual museum exhibits, as a way for students to develop a "felt connection to the past" that not only helps them to imaginatively go back in time to learn about the past in an intellectual way, but to be touched, moved, and provoked (p. 3). Such experiences of affective engagement with the past, she argues, "can and do produce new forms of historical knowledge" (p. 2). I will return to pedagogical and curricular questions below in looking the bearing of historical consciousness as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today. For now, however, let us move on to the second potential meaning of the phrase.

### ***The bearing of historical consciousness as a stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past***

If we think of someone's bearing as their physical stance, comportment, or way of walking in the world, the "bearing of historical consciousness" comes to signify a particular way of carrying oneself in relation to the past. The bearing of historical consciousness on this account

becomes, in Simon's words, a "question of what it could mean to live historically, to live within an upright attentiveness to traces of those who have inhabited times and places other than one's own... to live as though the lives of other people mattered" (Simon, Di Paolantonio, and Clamen, 2005, p. 133). Living historically, as Simon sees it, is not a matter of acquiring knowledge *about* the past, but about allowing ourselves to be "touched by the past" (p. 133; see also Landsberg, 2015). The affective experience of being touched by the past is about positioning ourselves in relation to the past, and asking ourselves, "Whose and what memories matter—not abstractly—but to me, to you? To what practices of memory am I obligated, what memories require my attention and vigilance, viscerally implicating me—touching me—so that I must respond, rethinking my present?" (p. 89). Being touched by the past in this way, I would argue, calls first and foremost for the virtue of epistemic humility.

In the broadest terms, epistemic humility is a disposition that requires us to acknowledge our inevitable partiality and fallibility as knowers; it is a disposition related to our ability to know anything with certainty. This conception of epistemic humility is based on Jonathan Adler's argument for open-mindedness as a "second-order (or 'meta') attitude toward one's beliefs *as believed*—it is about humility with regard to *one's capacity to know*" (2004, p. 130). Adler's conception complements the more common, content-focused understanding of open-mindedness as the disposition to regard the ideas or positions one holds as subject to revision in the light of critical reflection and/or further evidence (see, e.g., Hare, 1979).

Returning to the bearing of historical consciousness as a stance, or way of walking in the world in relation to the past, I find Adler's conception of second-order open-mindedness helpful because it does not put too much faith in what any of us can ever reliably know about the past (see also Wineburg, quoted in Seixas, 2004, p. 205). It acknowledges that whatever we claim to know today is inevitably partial and incomplete, and, in some cases, may turn out to be just plain wrong. But this does not mean that we should throw up our hands and abandon history and history education as impossible projects. Rather, the disposition of epistemic humility calls us to a different stance toward archival documents, narratives, and other artefacts—a stance characterized not by a desire to master the past, but by an acknowledgement of our inescapable indebtedness to that which we can never fully know or understand, but for which we are responsible nonetheless.

Connected to the disposition of epistemic humility, the bearing of historical consciousness as a way of walking with the past also requires a kind of vulnerability and passivity wherein, as Simon (2005) puts it, we receive the past as teacher, learning not just *about* the past, but *from* it. Positioning oneself as a student in relation to the past-as-teacher—which is different from the typical understanding of being a student of history—is thus not just about seeking the truth about what went on in other times and places; it means being open to questions we did not even know we had, and to learning not only what we seek to learn, but also that which might shatter our knowledge, our identities, and our very self-understanding as knowing subjects. When we receive the past as teacher we are no longer the masters of our own learning; we risk being changed—perhaps profoundly—by our engagement with ideas and people we might otherwise seek to avoid (Simon, 2005, p. 146). As Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert (2000) write:

Such an endeavour engages us fundamentally in the difficult problems of hearing, understanding, and knowing... This means remembrance must find a way to initiate a continual unsettling and an interminable asking of pedagogical questions regarding what it means to be taught by the experience of others. Taking this unsettling seriously creates an ongoing problem of how to attend to and hold on to remembrance of the past without foreclosing the possibility that this attempt to remember will rupture the adequacy of the very terms on which a memory is being held. (p. 6)

In my view, this is precisely the situation we find ourselves in with much of the work to be done in Canadian education toward truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. How do we remember and take responsibility for a past we can never really know or understand? Rather

than starting from a position of the knowing subject who acquires knowledge about the past, learning *from* Canada's past puts us on the back foot, so to speak. As a way of walking in the world in relation to the past, historical consciousness—on both Seixas's and Simon's accounts—requires us to surrender many of the comforting national narratives we have inherited and to commit ourselves instead to taking responsibility, here and now, for the difficult inheritance that is Canada's past, so that the future may be one of hope and reconciliation. And this brings us to the third meaning of the bearing of historical consciousness.

***The bearing of historical consciousness as a measure of the relevance and significance of the past for our lives today***

Of the three meanings of the phrase, this last one—the relevance of the past for our lives today—has received the most attention in the literature on historical consciousness (see, for example, Körber, 2016; Rösen, 2005; Seixas, 2004, 2006; Zanazanian, 2015, 2016). In fact, it is a cornerstone of Körber's definition of historical consciousness as life-orienting, and one of the key reasons for promoting historical consciousness is a belief that a life lacking deep engagement with the past is a life that is diminished in significant ways.

While it almost goes without saying that who we are today, both individually and collectively, is shaped in large part by those who came before us, there are times we all wish we could leave the past behind and simply get on with our lives. This sentiment is captured well in Blustein's recollection of questions put to him by a friend one afternoon as they were walking through the Jewish quarter in Prague. "What good does all this remembering do, anyway?" his friend asked. "Shouldn't we stop dwelling on the past? What is done is done, what's past is past. Why keep exposing oneself, in this masochistic fashion, to what can only be intensely painful memories? To what end?" (2008, p. xii).

One obvious answer is that, since we are largely products of the ideas, values, beliefs and actions of those who came before us, if we are ever going to know anything about ourselves, we have to engage with and learn about our past. In a similar vein, popular arguments for the importance of history education often cite George Santayana's (1905) claim that, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284). Santayana's claim is not merely descriptive; it is a moral imperative: we *must* remember and learn from the past so that we never allow the wrongs of the past to happen again.

For Seixas and others working in the epistemological strand of historical consciousness, the more we know about what went on in the past, the better equipped we will be to make decisions about the kind of society we want, and our own role as citizens, now and in the future. So, in addition to learning about historical wrongs such as slavery, the Holocaust, Indian Residential Schools, Apartheid, Jim Crow, and so on, an implicit aim of educating for historical consciousness is to create in students a desire to become better people than those who committed those past wrongs. Conversely, in working with artefacts and narratives of moral exemplars, such as civil rights activists and rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, students are exposed to the kind of positive moral commitment we hope will guide their own lives.

In the Canadian context, in addition to the moral and relational repair that needs to happen between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, a significant part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's forward-looking project is a call to create a different narrative of Canada and a new Canadian identity. In rendering his final report in June 2015, Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC emphasized the important work to come:

'Reconciliation is achieved only through acting different,' said Sinclair. 'Each of you in this room, and each of you in this country [has] a role to play.'

Sinclair said personal, political and cultural action was necessary to continue the path of reconciliation so its true rewards would be reaped by the country's children.

'I challenge all of you who are here. While we may not share a past, we certainly share a future. We are bound to each other'. (APTN National News, 2015)

Acknowledging the significance of the past for our lives today and for the future means that, as citizens and educators, we need find a way to direct our energies toward both remembrance and responsibility. We need to focus on remembrance by learning about and from the past, acknowledging the ethical claim the past has on us here and now, and we need to focus on responsibility by asking ourselves, "What decisions and actions will I, as an individual—and what will we, collectively—undertake so that we might move toward a future as Canadians where the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities is no longer characterized by the unequal distribution of harms and benefits, and where all children have a genuine chance at the best life possible?"

### Concluding comments

Teaching for the bearing of historical consciousness is no easy task. In Canadian classrooms where Indian students sit next to Pakistani students, Palestinians next to Israelis, Bosnians next to Serbs, and Indigenous students next to non-Indigenous students, history education cannot be about the pursuit of a shared story about what went on in the past. Rather, it is about learning to live together in the tension of the differences that often divide us, acknowledging the "difficult inheritance" of the past (Bennington, 2000). Teachers thus need to make space in classrooms for dissent, contestation, and critical engagement with the historical narratives students receive in the official curriculum, popular media, and around their dinner tables. When taken up in classrooms that do not seek to gloss over national, cultural, and religious differences, the hope of historical consciousness is that we might come to recognize the ethical significance of our relationship to the past as, in Derrida's (1996) words, "a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (p. 36).

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In Canada, 'Indigenous' is the currently preferred term for referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as a collective. 'Aboriginal' is also acceptable. 'Indian' is an outdated term referring to a particular political status granted by earlier acts of government. In this paper, I will use 'Indigenous' except when citing documents that use other terms.

<sup>2</sup> There is also a considerable body of Francophone Canadian scholarship on history education and historical consciousness. See, for example, the work of Catherine Duquette, Jocelyn Létourneau, and Stéphane Lévesque.

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## Presentism, alterity and historical thinking

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**ABSTRACT:** "Presentism" as the non-recognition of fundamental otherness of the past ("historical alterity") is often regarded as ultimately flawed, but at the same time as a kind of innate form of historical thought (Wineburg's "unnatural act"), which must be overcome through history education. The premise of the otherness of the past does however, also have its pitfalls and limitations. Using an example of a problematic diagnosis of historical thought as "presentistic", the article outlines the challenge of a more comprehensive concept of historical thinking and learning.

**KEYWORDS:** Historical Thinking; History Education; presentism; Jörn Rüsen; Sam Wineburg; Stéphane Lévesque;

### Introduction

Among the core concepts discriminating proper and improper forms of what recently constitutes a common goal of history education on both sides of the Atlantic (cf. Wineburg, 1999; Wineburg, 2001; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Seixas, 2016; Körber, Schreiber, & Schöner, 2007), "presentism" is a prominent one (cf. Sandkühler, 2017). It is based on a specific premise of the general relation between the past and present. In older as well as in recent examples of addressing this subject however, a problematic over-generalization of the concept and the premise can be found. This article reflects on this usage of the concept and its premise with the aim of arriving at a different understanding of historical thinking beyond merely avoiding presentism and of historical learning to curb that bias.

In an article in the Australian History Teachers' Journal *Agora*, Stéphane Lévesque refers to two decidedly different epistemologic stances towards the nature of history. The first one – in the form Lévesque uses it – reads: "History is the past for the sake of the past. What the historian is interested in is a dead past; a past unlike the present" (Oakeshott, 1993, p. 81; cf. Lévesque, 2016, p. 4). The other one reads: "History is a meaningful nexus between past, present and future – not merely a perspective on what has been ... It is a translation of past into present." (Rüsen, 2005, p. 25).

Starting with the quote from Oakeshott, Lévesque elaborates on how historians have to be careful not to view the past with their "presentist" glasses, which would hinder them to understand the past in its alterity. He underpins these reflections with two different assertions:

- An elaboration on Oakeshott's stance referring to our predecessors living in a different historical context, "with distinctive values, attitudes and behavioural that might appear completely foreign to us", and
- An even stronger assertion by David Lowenthal – famous for his "The Past is a Foreign Country" – that "the past [...] was not only weirder than we realize; it was weirder than we can imagine" (Lowenthal, 2000, p. 74; cf. Lowenthal, 2015).

All in all this amounts to what in German historiography would be referred to as a position of "Historismus," often illustrated with a quotation by Leopold von Ranke, that it was the historian's task to find out "wie es eigentlich gewesen" (neglecting the philosophical position in the Term "eigentlich"). The consequence drawn (or rather reproduced) by Lévesque is, of course, a warning against "presentist" glasses, which hinder the cognition of the true, the real past, as it were.

There are, however, some points debatable in the way "presentism" has been both conceptualized, and used in research and debate on History Education in the past decades. The current article ventures to address some of these by taking up Lévesque's (and other researchers') examples.

### **A student's non-understanding of Primo Levi – An Example of Presentism?**

In his article, Lévesque illustrates the problem of presentist dis-insight into the alterity (to use a term by Jörn Rüsen, the author of the other position) of the past, by recounting a situation in a school which was reported by Primo Levi in his "The Drowned and the Saved" (Levi, 1989, p. 4). After a witness account on his experiences in the extermination camps, covering among other aspects also about the complete de-humanization of the inmates which deprived the inmates not only of their human grace, but also of their very abilities to muster energy and will to withstand and fight or even flee, a young student did not grasp or accept these explanations and asked Levi to outline the surroundings of the camps and the fences, after which the boy explained to him and the class how an escape could have been operated. Lévesque's (2016) interpretation on this is that:

this school encounter illustrates remarkably well the complexities of understanding the 'dead past'. We are clearly visitors in a 'foreign country' [...] We carry our own cultural luggage, full of commodities ill-adapted to this strange world, and that we use to make judgements about our predecessors. (p. 5)

This interpretation is, however, only valid at first glance. Sure enough, the young student projects his own youthful confidence and his "contemporary views on survival and escaping as a moral duty" into the scene and situation, and he in fact misunderstands all circumstances. But is it really a good example of the situation being weird, totally alien and incomprehensible to him *because of it being "past"* – as Lowenthal and Oakeshott suggested?

Lévesque's application of Oakeshott's and Lowenthal's concept of the past being incomprehensible to this example would be valid only if we supposed that to the people in those days, the situation was not weird at all in the way that it is weird to us. But is that supportable? Was the total dehumanization in the camps normal to the people in those days? Surely not. It is weird not only to us later-born because of it belonging to some other time and culture, but also in general. Its weirdness is not due to effluxion of time, but to intentional dehumanization within that past time. Lévesque's interpretation therefore misreads the situation, too. The Holocaust is surely the wrong example to illustrate Oakeshott's and Lowenthal's assertion of the fundamental alterity of the past. There is a difference between the weirdness we perceive of the treatment Levi experienced, and for example, the premodern practice of applying torture as a means of collecting evidence and proof and its consideration as being not only an improvement but also a kind of progress over earlier practices of trials by ordeal in continental Europe (cf. Langbein, 2006).

However, the mistaken application of the concept of presentism does not originate from Lévesque. In 2001, Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby already made this connection (Lee & Ashby, 2001, p. 27), referring to an early article of what eventually would constitute Sam Wineburg's

seminal "Historical Thinking and other unnatural acts" – an article under the same title in *Phi Delta Kappan* (Wineburg, 1999; 2001).

Surely enough, Wineburg does discuss the concept of presentism, however not in the context of the Levi incident (p. 498), but some pages earlier (Wineburg, 1999, p. 492; cf. also Wineburg, 2001, pp. 12, 30 and 90; the Levi-incident on p. 23). What Levi's experience provides, is a quite different lesson to the historian than to avoid presentism. It calls upon us not to 'understand' others in the light of one's own experience *only*, but rather to transgress our own horizon of experience. Wineburg writes: "Our 'inability to perceive the experience of others' as he [Levi] put it, applies to the present no less than the past" (Wineburg, 2001, pp. 22–24).

### **The deeper problem behind the usage of "presentism" as a concept**

Is this all just a question of Lee and Ashby, and – in their wake – Lévesque selecting the wrong example for discussing presentism? Oakeshott's and Lowenthal's assertions that the past is a foreign country, as well as Lévesque's reference to it, merit a more general reflection.

It surely is a good and necessary assumption for historians that the past is not just equal to the present, and that there is an "alterity" between the two. But to assert that the past is fundamentally incomprehensible, is equally problematic as the denial of any such difference and alterity. Two reflections may assist this suggestion:

- The past may (and most often does) look weird to us, but it was not to the people living in those times. The past *was* not weird, it *is* weird to us and therefore it must have *become* weird, strange, alien. When and how did this happen?
- The world a second, a minute, an hour, a day ago is also already past. To say that it is equally weird would muster much less support than to claim the same for, say the middle ages. So where is the limit?

'Weirdness' therefore is not a feature of 'the past' in general nor of any randomly taken specific past (although it might be of certain past circumstances), but rather a characteristic of the *relation* between any given past and the present from which it is addressed.

Lévesque's combination of Oakeshott's position that history is "the past for the sake of the past", and Lowenthal's dictum of the past being weird can therefore not be a sound basis for historical research and learning, because they contradict each other. If we acknowledged Oakeshott's position that history as (the study of) the past were for the sake of the past only, we would have to conceptualize, understand, interpret and write this past in the concepts, terms and by application of the criteria of the past itself. However, considering it is fundamentally incomprehensible to us because of its alterity, or 'weirdness', this would be impossible. So, even if we subscribed to Oakeshott's idea of what history is about, and if we conceived ourselves as 'heirs' who are called upon by the past itself, who have to answer to its call by merely "continuing", "keep it alive", unchanged, as a result of responsibility towards the past only (as has been claimed recently by the French philosopher Bérénice Levet; (cf. Levet, 2017)) – we would be doomed to fail, for we could never understand these calls because of its "weirdness".

But then, both Oakeshott's and Levet's claims that the historian's, as well as the layman's sole obligation in his historical thinking were to 'the past' itself, is wrong. 'History' never is 'the past', but an ever-present relation to a spectrum of pasts (in the plural). The criterion for its validity is not its concordance with this past, but its function for today's individuals and society, by providing temporal orientation. This is not to claim that history could be written *ad*

*libitum*, dependent on present free decisions. Temporal orientation in a real world – not a fantasy – is only possibly when reflecting about a real past.

"The past for the sake of the past" then does not provide good guidance for the historian. In addition, the degree of 'Lowenthalism' needs to be contained. The idea of the past being a "foreign country", where people "do things differently", is indeed insightful and a good warning against presentism. The postulation of its total weirdness, however, would amount to rendering every effort of historical understanding and insight pointless.

Therefore: The historian may neither presuppose the structural identity of past times with her/his present, nor their absolute alterity. What she/he has to do is to reflect on their interrelation. Historical thinking must be understood as a *relational* venture, namely the effort to construct a meaningful relation between what we can know about the past and us who carry this knowledge.

Marc Bloch's conceptualization of the relation between past and present is much more apt for historical thinking, e.g. as illustrated by Alex Ford quoting and interpreting him:

He [Bloch] believed it was a necessary prerequisite for history to accept that 'there are states of mind which were formerly common, yet which appear peculiar to us as we no longer share them' (Bloch, 1949/1992, p.67). As such, he believed that historians needed to reconstruct those lost mentalities through evidential reasoning and the use of social sciences (Ford, 2015, p. 19, quoting Bloch, 1992, p. 67).

This is why I take the other of the two disciplinary positions quoted by Lévesque to be far more plausible – the one by Jörn Rüsen: "History is a meaningful nexus between past, present and future – not merely a perspective on what has been ... It is a translation of past into present." (Rüsen, 2005, p. 25).

## Consequences for research and teaching

Supporting Lévesque's classification that his concept of 'disciplinary-history', referring to the teaching of concepts and methods of historical thinking not only to future historians but also to school students as 'necessary', I'd nevertheless like to question one of his further considerations. Paraphrasing Sam Wineburg's classification of historical thinking as "unnatural" (Wineburg, 2001), "because it runs against the practical, intuitive ways we approach the past in our contemporary life," Lévesque asserts that everyday forms of learning about the past "do not in and of themselves represent 'historical thinking' because historical thinking is a disciplinary-specific process of investigating the past through the 'canons of evidence and rules of argument'" (Lévesque, 2016, p. 6).

What is supported in this position is that the standards and criteria of historical thinking are indeed not only elements of "common sense" in general, but disciplinary. It is indeed necessary to stress this point. The specificity of orientation, of identity and motivation of action through temporal argumentation and thorough interpretation needs to be upheld. What needs to be questioned though, is the idea that these concepts, criteria and procedures, which need to be taught to everybody, constitute something unnatural, or alien, because such an opposition would devaluate everyday historical thinking, endangering it of being overruled by 'expert' thinking, knowledge, and methodology.

In my view, it would be much more apt for educational as well as for theoretical reflections to conceive the relation between "everyday" historical thinking and that of expert historians not as two strictly separate modes but rather as a continuum. The terms "discipline" and "disciplinary" then would not refer just to the academic community and its rules, but to a general purpose of accessing, exploring and charting the world – namely the temporal dimension. *Expertise*, then, is not an alternative and superior way of knowledge production within this

discipline, but rather a the mastery of a specific methodical and quality-controlled form of generally available logic of temporal orientation – ‘quality controlled’ by methods and criteria developed and reflected upon in the academic discipline (Körber, 2015, p. 27). I am quite confident that many (if not all) the operations which historians perform in doing history are being performed by ‘laypersons’ also, even though not (necessarily) in a methodically controlled form. If, for example, someone finds a letter of his/her grandmother directed to the grandfather (to be) in the attic, they will surely try to establish the context the letter was written in. We experience the same when showing photographic slides of the old times to family. In this sense, then, historical thinking is a 'natural' act, something people do and have to do in order to understand their life in its temporal situatedness.

Such a conceptualization has at least three advantages:

- To teach history would then neither mean to endow the students with some standard narrative, hoping that it will suffice for the rest of their life, giving them identity, orientation, and motivation, nor to train them in some estranged expertise, but rather as the elaboration of procedures which they perform in their life anyway. It opens up a perspective into a specific logic of progression.
- The relation of academic and the broader ‘history culture’ can be conceptualized in a non-binary and opposing way, marking the place and function of the former within the latter.
- Within democratic societies, especially heterogeneous and pluralist ones, historical debates can be conceived of as encompassing both laymen, witnesses and professionals.

This is the mode in which the German model of competencies of historical thinking by the FUER-Group conceptualizes different ‘niveaus’ of historical thinking (cf. Körber et al., 2007; Körber, 2015, p. 27):

- A basic niveau is defined as historical thinking without being able to refer to accepted and recognized concepts, procedures, methods, etc., which renders the individual thinking and its results compatible with that of other members of society (individuals and groups);
- the intermediate niveau then is defined by being able to perform individual historical thinking (pursuing individual questions as well as such relevant in society, understanding and forming new interpretations) with such reference to conventional standards and criteria, rendering it visible in society but also enabling the thinking person to use other people's ideas, narratives, etc. in the first place;
- an elaborate niveau as the ability to not only use such concepts, categories, methods etc., but also to reflect on them and their conventional nature, that is to be able to actively participate in the reflection on the nature of history and historical narratives.

Such a model enables schools and teachers to formulate aims in history teaching which both address students at their everyday ventures of navigating the history culture of their society, and can define their next level.

Furthermore, such an understanding would allow for putting students to the task of perceiving alterity of past conditions and circumstances, not as relating to cognitive aspects only, but to also include their emotional and affective reactions (abhorrence and distancing as well as fascination) into the (still cognitive) task of clarification. In this sense, ‘disciplinary history’ is and must be the focal point of history education, but neither as an ‘unnatural act’, nor as something which refers to the past for the past's sake, only, but as methodically controlled reflections about our relation(s) to the past.

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### **About the Author**

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## The subjectivity of archives: Learning from, with, and resisting archives and archival sources in teaching and learning history

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I reflect on my experience managing the development of online archives to argue that the subjectivities of the archives and the sources within them need to be at the forefront of how educators and researchers use archived primary sources. I direct my argument toward a critique of historical thinking approach to using primary sources in the study of the past, and instead emphasize the deconstructive possibilities of creating archives, creating metadata, resisting metadata, and being open to artistic interpretations of sources.

**KEYWORDS:** Archives; digital archives; digital humanities; deconstruction; primary sources; history teaching; historical thinking

The current trend on historical thinking in history education has a focus on students using primary, archival sources to develop the skills found in a historian's toolbox. Primary sources are good fodder for teaching and learning history because of how they provide evidence for multiple voices and perspectives on, and in, the past (Britt, Perrfetti, Van Dyke, & Gabrys, 2000). History teachers have been excited to bring primary sources into their classrooms, even if research shows that they can struggle with how to effectively use them in their lessons (Barton, 2005; Barton & Marks, 2000; Friedman, 2006; Patterson, Lucas, & Kithinji, 2012; Woestman & Ragland, 2010). Despite these challenges, the focus on developing students' historical thinking through the examination of primary sources has been advocated as a way for the politics of interpretation and inclusion to stay out of history curriculum (Lee, 1991) and serve the development of a cosmopolitan future through the reasonable and logical skills-based examination of sources from the past (Seixas, 2012).

However, even with a focus on primary source inquiry, we can never escape the power or politics within history. The historical method used by many Western historians is not a neutral schema for coming to a reasoned or logical interpretation of the past. Nor is "reason" or "logic" neutral frames for understanding reality. The historical method, the standards of reason and logic, and much of how we come to understand the past and present in the Western world come from traditions of Western liberalism situated within genealogies of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy (Tuhivai Smith, 2008). Recognising how these ideas operate in our epistemologies is an important part of learning about the past and the ways the past affects the present.

In this way, teaching students how to engage with primary, archival sources, does not mean that power or politics become circumvented in the study of history, but rather,

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sublimated, which may be worse (Brown & Davis-Brown, 1998). My interest in history education is to advocate for *leaning into* the power and politics in our study of history, and embrace them, along with emotionality and affect, in how we teach and learn national narratives (Cutrara, forthcoming). In this, a teaching and learning focus on primary sources, on archival sources, can be more than just fodder for practicing the historical method. Primary sources, and the archives that hold them, can serve as invitations for understanding the ways in which traces of the past are activated through our subjectivities and the stories we bring, and allow to emerge, from the subjectivities within these sources.

While I have been developing history education strategies for the past fifteen years, even working in and with different archives to develop their education programs, it was not until I project managed a Digital Humanities and Social Science (DHSS) project for York University (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) that I began thinking about the impact archival theory could have on teaching and learning history. Before that project I certainly recognized the exclusionary nature of archives, but I often talked about them as something we had to work around and challenge rather than a function and symptom of the archive itself. I still had this idea that archives were an official, and somewhat objective, repositories of old papers and photographs; incomplete and imperfect, but structurally sound.

Through this project though, I came to realize that the power and politics of the archives are reflected in what is excluded from the archives, but also what is *included*: what sources we can and do access, and the technologies and discourses that facilitate the access and use of these sources. With this focus, it also became clear(er) the impossibility of ever thinking of archives, and the materials within them, as objective.

Archives, like anything, are latent with subjective and political decisions that shape and are shaped by processes of knowledge production (Duff & Harris, 2002). Archives thus function as gatekeepers – keeping less useful materials and records out – but also as vaults – securely, keeping useful materials and records in. With a focus on the *inclusions* in archives, we can begin to recognize the layers of subjectivities woven into archival sources and the power, politics, and affect that can be found within them.

In this paper I reflect on my experience managing a team of graduate students developing online archives to highlight the ways in which subjectivity is bound into the creation, and thus subsequent use, of archives and the records within them. From these reflections I expand my thoughts to the K-12 curriculum and argue that the disciplinary, Historical Thinking approach to teaching and learning history fails to use the subjectivities of archiving, creation, use, and interpretation as the bases for a reflective and *affective* approach to history education in ways, I argue, that a poststructural approach to history is able to do. Finally, I end this article by identifying ways educators can use archives to highlight the subjective interpretation for students; specifically by inviting them to create, resist, and interpret the metadata of archival sources. Through these reflections I will argue for the deconstructive and subjective power of archival sources in teaching and learning history and encourage the activation of these ideas in pedagogy and practice.

## Creating (Subjective) Online Archives

In 2018, I was hired as a Curriculum Specialist through the Office of the Vice Provost Academic (VPA) at York University to manage a Digital Humanities and Social Science (DHSS) project that resulted in four online archives and four online exhibits created from materials aligned with four Organized Research Units (ORUs): Centre for Refugee Studies, Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), Harriet Tubman Institute, and York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR). Elements of these works, completed

by graduate students with a background in the topic but not archival or museological theory, were then extrapolated by myself and the Director of Digital Scholarship Infrastructure at York University Library, to create an Instructor's Guide on best pedagogical practices for doing DHSS into the classroom (Cutrara, 2018a).

The co-manager of the project, Anna St. Onge, Director, Digital Scholarship Infrastructure at York University Libraries, who by training is an archivist, worked early on with the ORU directors to select materials for possible digitization. The collection of these materials could be large, but the first task of our Graduate Assistants was to narrow these collections down to 200 unique items for digitization. These 200 items then would serve as the corpus for an online archive and exhibit (for more on this project see Cutrara, 2018b).

At this stage in the project, my role was similar to that of a graduate supervisor: I talked to students about possible organizational frameworks, I provided readings to support different strands of their thinking, and I supported their independent decision-making about how their digital archives and exhibits could be developed and publically presented. Because of this role, the resulting online archives had little to do with my decision-making. In fact, I did not even see the materials the students had used in their archives and exhibits until they presented them at the end of the term. Instead, my role at this stage was to turn the projects, and the conversations leading up to the projects, into an instructors' guide on how to replicate elements of these works in an undergraduate classroom (Cutrara, 2018a). In this, I was an observer of the process and a shaper of how this process could be more explicitly pedagogical. I was coming to this work not from a "history education" perspective, but from the perspective of a general educational strategist who needed to create useful and critical supports for faculty that aligned with different institutional commitments: access and community engagement (the VPA's portfolio), e-learning and experiential learning (elements of funding), and knowledge mobilization and archival organization (interests of ORUs).

The work of the graduate students took place over the course of one term. Both my co-manager and myself estimated that students would take two to four weeks to choose their 200 images for digitization, which would then leave ten to twelve weeks for digitization and curation. However we found that two and a half months into the project and students were still negotiating which records they would choose for their digital archive. While students were not always able to articulate their criteria for decision-making for their archives, the duration of the decision-making suggested a greater negotiation of the task than we expected. Because we would be taking their work and transforming it into best practices for doing DHSS, my co-manager and I felt strongly that we could not rush the GAs' process. We wanted to see, and respect, how future students without archival or DHSS expertise, would handle the work if they were assigned for a course, and so these students were showing us that this work carried a heavier load that we expected.

Thus, to support our students' decision-making, my co-manager and I engaged in more conversations with them archival practice and theory. I, in particular, had to think more directly about how I could frame students' experiences of creating an archive as an assignment a faculty member may want for their undergraduate students and the theory that could best frame this work. I thought the archive would just be the place where students would get materials for their exhibits. Now, I had to begin thinking of the pedagogical possibilities of the archives on their own.

Drawing on research related to creating digital archives, I guided students through thinking of the archives as a *creation*, a piece of work that needed thoughtfulness and documentation to argue for its existence (Bacon, 2013). The archive was not just a large, technical piece of work that needed to be completed, but a creative and subjective representation of a series of decisions about importance and visibility of the record. The archive would "reveal those

decisions, making clear the curatorial process of archive creation” (Whatley, 2013, p. 175). In this way, I discussed with the students, the archive is “a threshold landscape, at once a stage and an underground through which unconscious patterning and conscious reasoning play out” (Bacon, 2013, p. 91). I further emphasized to the students that they should not expect to accurately *reproduce* a moment or moments in time through the “correct” organization of the materials they had. Instead, their work was a *(re)construction* of a moment or moments in time though the *(re)valuation* and *(re)presentation* of materials (Whatley, 2013, p. 175). More specifically, their archive was a *(re)construction* not because they were putting the original meaning back together again – where, perhaps, some of their hesitation lay – but a *(re)construction* because they were constructing meaning *again* (and again and again) through the organization, publication, and ultimate use of these materials.

In our discussions, I also emphasized that in a digital space, archives and archival sources can take on new lives and possibilities that resist or expand traditional archival practice. Because people would not be accessing digital archives in traditional ways – in a reading room, with set viewing hours, wearing white gloves, under the watchful eye of the archivist to ensure materials are kept together in their original order – digital archives could be created with the freedom to explore multiple ways and means of organization and description. Students could imagine the future user in their archive and be aware of, and even empowered by, the uses that we cannot predict and may never know. In this way, argues Sarah Whatley (2013) in reflecting on her process of creating an online dance archive, “digital archives are always to some extent interactive... The user can establish varying relationships with the archive, clicking quickly between screens to view several objects in close succession...” (Whatley, 2013, p. 174). This approach to using, and creating, archives with multiple screens and objects interacting in one place is very much like how we interact with data in our digital lives. Why cannot one’s experience browsing the internet be the starting point for our archival creation? Why must we, in creating our own archives, align to an archival tradition far from our present digital experiences? In an attempt to use these questions to inspire my students, I emphasized that they are bestowing the “gifts” of integration, customization, and accessibility to the materials they were working with (Purdy, 2011), and they should feel excited by this possibility, not fearful.

But still, even being inspired by these ideas, where do you begin? How do you augment the possibilities and recognize the limitations of a (digital) archive? How do you *(re)construct* an archive and what right do you have to do so?

One student, for example, had boxes and boxes of photographic negatives and from these she was to choose 200 images for her archive. How does she begin? Does she go through each set of negatives to find the pictures of the topic she was most interested in? (According to archival practice, the short answer to that is “no”). Does she just pick at random, and then what is random and what if the random is boring? Does the fact that she is a content-matter expert work in her favour, or does her level of knowledge work as an “expert blind spot” (Nathan & Petrosino, 2003) in creating useable work for others?

Another student came to our first meeting with a completely drafted archive before seeing materials. Much of her engagement with the project was wayfinding how to reconcile what she expected to do with the task and format ahead of her. Was her work valid if she was not writing an essay? Was her work academic if she was not identifying a coherent argument? Where could her academic training fit when the materials she was using resisted being organized with the logic of that training?

A third student spent much of her time cross-listing dates and places on photographic slides with a biography written about the creator, to try to uncover a narrative from hundreds of these slides. But there was no “narrative” to uncover; these were just raw materials. How

they were be presented to the public (their “narrative,” however loose) depended on how she framed them. Would this project work better if she knew more about the topic? Would this project be easier if she saw more materials? When should she stop deliberating and begin creating? What right did she have to do that work given that she was not an archivist?

All these students’ questions were valid but also never ending because their questions, and their engagements with the work, kept shifting in ways that were grounded in the materials they had. Rarely did students have overlapping questions even though they were doing the same work. Students’ questions constantly sprung from the unique interaction between the student and the materials they were working with. What happened was that the shape of this work, the ways these works became shaped, became grounded in the primary sources regardless of how students originally intended or wanted to use the materials. It was in the act of (re)constructing a digital archive that made students to take several epistemological steps back and realize that what they knew, and how they engaged in knowing, was bound to a narrative that was abstracted from the materials they had. In other words, in having the “raw” sources in front of them, students had to change their expectation about the established narrative they expected these materials to fit into to, and create something that better reflected the materials in front of them.

Concurrent to this, students also came to see how they were giving rise to narratives within the materials, not (simply) narrating materials. Students were creating new pathways for knowing by virtue of the new materials they were making visible. They were the ones (re)constructing these materials for a future, unknowable, but ever present, user into a narrative that may or may not fit how the user needed them. They were the ones determining how the archive (the materials, the experience(s)) would be (re)constructed – constructed again and again and again because they were creating how they could be accessed (Whatley, 2013, p. 175) even as the materials and the act of organizing them challenged them to confront what they had yet to know.

From my vantage point as a manager of these projects, I saw that students were becoming engaged in an implicit *deconstruction* of knowledge in the ways that made them more conscious of the ways knowledge is constructed. As a manager of these projects, I saw the ways students *witnessed* the deconstruction of how they came to know and be known through their work creating archives (Biesta, 2009; Derrida, 1978). In this way, in ways we did not envision, students encountered “difficult knowledge” in this project – which Roger Simon (2014), drawing on Pitt and Britzman (2003)’s work on the pedagogical encounter with social trauma, defined as “those moments when knowledge appears disturbingly foreign or inconceivable to the self, bringing oneself up against the limits of what one is willing and capable of understanding” (p. 12) – not in the materials themselves, but the task ahead of them.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) wrote that silences enter historical production at four moments: the making of sources, the making of archives, making of narratives, and the retroactive significance of “making” history. Conversely, voices *enter* historical production at these moments too. First, when the sources are being created, by the creator and the individuals represented in the sources. Second, when the sources are being organized, by the creators and/or their designates and/or the archivist (Douglas, 2018). Third, when the sources are organized for use, by the archivist, curator, digitizer, and/or those involved in outreach and promotion (Cutrara, 2016). Finally, voices enter historical production when the sources are used by historians, storytellers, artists, or anyone who views and uses the sources.

Postmodern historians have shown that history is not a canonical narrative of the past, but rather a medium for constantly refashioning, remolding, and retelling what happened in the past (Foucault, 1980; Jenkins, 1997; Scott, 2001). They have highlighted that voices in and

out of the narrative act as “fantasy echoes” of the past, the imperfect and incomplete reverberation of an ideal defined by the imperfections of the present (Scott, 2001). In this way, even with solid historical evidence, history remains a “fantasized narrative that imposes sequential order on otherwise chaotic and contingent occurrences” (Scott, 2001, p. 290). Iain Chambers writes that history is a “re-presentation, a simulation of what has been lost to it.” History is not a series of “raw, bleeding facts,” but rather comes to us as “textual production, in narratives woven by desire (for truth) and a will (for power)” (Chambers, 1997, p. 80). These narratives are woven with evidence, but at the end of the day, even with the best of evidence examined in the most logical way, “all history is a production – a deliberate selection, ordering, and evaluation of past events, experiences and processes” (Harvey Wallace quoted in Kaye, 1991, p. 71).

In creating a digital archive, students recognized and felt the weight of (be)coming one of the voices in the sources that will weave future narratives together. In creating an online archive, students’ voices would be added to a cacophony of other voices in ways that shaped and will shape what others could/would/may hear from these sources in the future. Yet in order to complete this work, students had to humble themselves to the sources and listen to what the sources were already saying. To recognize the pieces of the record that will contribute to the a “fantasy echo” of the stories that could come after (Scott, 2001).

By creating the digital archives in this project, students came to learn how the sources “spoke for themselves.” Yes, a reductive and problematic statement, but also true. The sources “spoke” with the tools available, constraints of the project, and students’ own interests and subject positions, but the sources still “spoke” in ways that *guided* the tools that were available, *guided* the ways the constraints would be negotiated, and *guided* which of the students’ interests and perspectives that came to predominate. Yes, the students shaped and created digital archives, but the shape and creation of their decisions were found by the voices, the subjectivities, of the sources already. Students’ voices in this project added to the cacophony of voices already found within the sources.

## Teaching with Subjective Archives and Archival Documents

I have been a vocal critic of the use of the Historical Thinking framework in elementary and secondary schools because it structures history into a discipline in ways, I have argued, that leaves little room for relationality, affect, politics, and positionality (Cutrara, 2010, 2018c, forthcoming). But I am not a critic of using primary source in the study of the past. This is a key distinction. Examining and responding to primary sources has shown to be an effective ways for challenging students’ understanding of historical construction, since primary sources can provide evidence for histories that may or may not correspond to the textbook version of history and provide students with the multimedia they have come to expect in instruction (Barton, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; Cutrara, 2016; Darling, 2008; Masur, 1998; Moss, 2010; Poyntz, 2008; Sandwell, 2004, 2008).

However, if our approach to using primary sources is based on the rationale that young people need to develop a toolkit for recognizing and wading through competing accounts of the past, then built into this rationale is the implicit belief that students cannot *already* recognize competing accounts in the past. That they cannot *already* see how and why different people would create different accounts of the past and present. Yet young people, especially young people who by virtue of their positioning in a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist world, already understand the differing voices that frame the world (Cutrara, forthcoming; Epstein, 2010). This is why many young people articulate that there are two kinds of history: the kind taught in school and the kind taught in their communities (Waters,

2005). This is also why many racialized students tune out of school-based history: they do not see their lives and stories being recognized and valued in these settings (Dei, 1997).

The Benchmarks of Historical Thinking, conceptualized by Peter Seixas (Seixas, 2017, May 10), came from his early research in which he identified that while young people could use their analytical skills to look critically at textbook or popular portrayals of history, they lost the ability to critique history when working with personal stories told by family or community members (Seixas, 1993, 1994, 1997). Seixas' work evolved to argue that not being able to critically examine all narratives of the past, including one's own, does the same disservice as blindly relying on the opinions of authorities (Seixas, 1999). The Benchmarks of Historical Thinking developed as a way for students to advance a reasoned and critical historical consciousness, rather than simply intensifying a subjective and personal one, by having students learn how to progressively develop the skills of analysis and critique in their study of history (Seixas, 2002). The central thrust of Historical Thinking, therefore, is based on the premise that students' subjective criteria for determining historical significance is uncritical and, if left alone, will remain too personal, too subjective, for the national cohesion could come from focusing on the questions "we all have" about who we are and how we came to be (Seixas, 2006).

Yet the criteria young people use for defining historical significance is no more flawed than any criteria; even the criteria used by archivists (Duff & Harris, 2002). We can never escape subjectivity of critique and interpretation because critique and interpretation is based on subjectivity. Thinking we can move past subjectivity in one's study of history is an exercise in privilege and a denial of power. Rather than identifying a more "objective" way into the past, an impossibility by any measure, what students need is to find ways to navigate dominant narratives, find themselves within them, and challenge how they come to be positioned within these narratives. This knowledge can then guide students to making transformative change for themselves, their communities, and the world. This approach to history education is a *radical* notion of challenging what is known and come to be known, in order to provide greater spaces for equity and justice.

Thus, I too see the value in using primary, archival sources to teach and learn history, but this project has shown how primary sources can invite a rumination of voices within the sources – all the voices, the ones we can hear and the ones we do not – instead of simply being the fodder for assessing the validity of evidence. This project highlights the questions we can ask about ourselves within the sources; questions such as: How come this source has been saved and available for use and not others? What has been gained from this source being saved? What has been lost? Would this source have different meaning(s) if saved in a different context or positioned in different ways? How have others used or challenged this source? How can I add to this work? Who am I in, or because of, this source and others like it?

While some proponents of Historical Thinking may identify that Historical Thinking allows, even invites, these questions into a student's study of history, I argue that a poststructural or postmodern investigation into these questions can allow for greater conversations about power and privilege through and *in* the discipline of history, in ways that the Historical Thinking approach does not do. A focus on the discipline of history fails to account for or invite the voices that have been systematically silenced because of the discipline itself (Cutrara, 2018c; Lerner, 1975; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008). A focus on historians' skills also mirrors what Anderson (2015) refers to as Dewey's "quest for certainty" (p. 83-83); an argument for refining students' application of the historical method to get to the most reasoned, most logical perspective on the past. But the past as a certainty, as a logical and reasoned determination, is an impossibility. Instead, in history education, as well as in other

formal and informal ways we learn about the past, we need to take the opportunity to explore the ways in which our epistemologies determine whose voices and experiences will be heard more than others, in order for us to provide greater space for the voices that have not been heard.

This focus, and these questions, is what Derrida (1978) calls *deconstruction* or, using Gert Biesta (2009)'s definition, the witness to the *affirmation* of what is excluded. Deconstruction is not an act, even if discursively that is how the term is used; but rather a witness to how the centre cannot hold, the *differance* inherent in knowledge, the ways language structures and controls meaning leaving the Other out of what and how we know. Deconstruction is an affirmation of what is excluded and is an opening space for justice by preparing for its coming, giving "voice to what has been systematically silenced" (Crowley, 1989, p. 9).

Poststructural educational theorist Avner Segall (2008) stresses that new ways of viewing the past are not necessarily the result of new findings, but rather new ways of interpreting and exploring what is already available (p. 119). A deconstructive approach to history invites teaching and learning to be conducted with a "critical eye/I" that interrogates what is produced and silenced through history (Segall, 2008, p. 123). Learning with a critical eye/I, invites students to question and evaluate the knowledge they receive and in the process think about who they are within this knowledge. This in turn provides students with the ability to choose how they are going to read and engage with the material and each other (Segall, 2008, p. 126). To witness the ways the stories that are produced limit the spaces available for other stories to thrive.

Thus, working with primary sources does not make teaching learning history more objective or less political. In fact, as Brown and Davis-Brown (1998) note, because of the ways in which the technologies of archival work are obscured from the final, organized results, archival materials have become infused with politics through the affirmation of omission. Instead, thinking of archival primary sources as fragments of the past allows us to witness the deconstruction of knowledge by inviting subjectivities, imagination, affect, power, and politics into how we learn and study history. In this way, sources in the archives, and the archives themselves, should not be understood as objects of objectivity, but rather as evidence of the subjectivities that shape and mold what we can come to know. With an emphasis on their subjectivities, archival documents can invite us to activate our own narratives related to these sources so that we can overtly and explicitly place our subjectivities within them. It is this inclusion and connection with history that makes students most excited about learning about the past (Cutrara, forthcoming; Waters, 2005).

While this work can certainly be done without digital tools, our project showed how engaging in the Digital Humanities and Social Science (DHSS) can invite this work to be done in more public-facing and collaborative ways. With an eye to knowledge mobilization, DHSS invites academic work out of the classroom and encourages students to be cognizant of something larger than just their own processes. What would this archive be like for the creator of the work? For the widow of the work? For community members? Would these people the materials differently? Why and how so? How can we design our archives to invite others into the organization and interpretation of the sources we have digitized? With a focus on immediate, public facing interaction, a DHSS approach can invite and be aware of interactions that go beyond how archived material may have traditionally been organized and how the digital archive provides the gifts of integration, customization, and accessibility (Purdy, 2011).

## **Creating, Resisting, and Activating the Subjectivities of the Archives through Metadata**

Watching the creation of digital archives by non-archivists in our Digital Humanities and Social Science project highlighted the subjectivity of archives and their potential for witnessing the deconstruction of hegemonic knowledge through their creation. In this, the creation of the archives demonstrated the power and politics of archival inclusion as much as it did archival exclusion. However, managing these projects also demonstrated that the subjectivities of the archives could be engaged in without creating a digital archive. In particular, the subjectivity of the archives can be engaged in as pedagogical tasks that focus on the metadata of primary sources.

Metadata is data about data. Metadata are the descriptions,<sup>1</sup> tags, keywords, and/or subject headings that a person – perhaps an archivist, perhaps a creator, perhaps a person who wants to find a photo in their phone quicker – ascribes to a record. Datum tagged to a digital object (a photo, document, video) can allow a digital object to be found, organized, categorized in a systematic way.

Traditionally, it was believed that in archival description, an archivist should “aspire to the role of impartial craftsperson” and “remain out of the hurley-burley of power relations” (Duff & Harris, 2002, p. 264). Metadata standards such as the Dublin Core have developed as an attempt to standardize metadata and extend this impartiality across digital platforms. However, impartiality and standardization of metadata are impossible. Even archival theorists Wendy Duff and Verne Harris have written that archival description and metadata ascription are not objective tags, but a process of storytelling, of “intertwining facts with narratives, observation with interpretation” (p. 276).

In our Digital Humanities and Social Science project for York University, the research team and I engaged heavily with K.J. Rawson (2017)’s article “The Rhetorical Power of Archival Description: Classifying images of gender transgression” to anchor our discussions about the subjectivity inherent in metadata. Through our conversations, we became witness to the *deconstruction* of knowledge found within metadata because Rawson, a non-archivist, shared the complex, subjective, and political process of ascribing metadata to archival objects that illustrated historical evidence of gender transgression. Rawson explored how different investments with records lead to different attributes being seen and tagged, and how a presentist view of what was recorded does not always legitimacy describe what the record was created to portray.

Funnily, even in working in archives, I assumed the metadata was set. I assumed that description and metadata were untouchable bodies of text that those working in the archives had to respect; Or, using Duff and Harris’ metaphor, that metadata was a “cocoon” that could be captured and polished by the archivist, but not designed to be cracked (p. 284). But Rawson’s article highlighted how *a person* cocoons that text; *a person* writes those descriptions; *a person* with subjective criteria defines the terms, and thus ideas, that framed the sources. *A person* makes these documents come to light. And so I question, how can we engage in this conversation if we are not aware that a conversation even took place?

In writing the main body of this paper, I kept wanting to be drawn back on reflecting how our students demonstrated the subjectivities of the archives through the creation of their metadata, however, in all honesty, although our students were drawn to and intrigued with the subjectivity of metadata, none of them explicitly engaged in the intellectual or creative engagements with metadata that explored this argument *in situ*. Their archival descriptions were fairly straightforward and their reflection on metadata came in later articulations of their projects (Challenger, 2018; De Loera, 2018). However, one of the reasons why the students did not actively engage in the creative, transgressive, and/or critical creation of metadata is because, by the end of the project, they just did not have the temporal or mental space for



engaging in this added layer of critical investment. In one term, they had created an archive and an exhibit, so developing critical metadata was beyond the scope of what the students could complete. Instead, however, in reflecting on students' completed work, I have also identified three ways to engaging with metadata that can bring the discussion of the subjectivities of the archives into the classroom: through metadata creation, metadata resistance, and arts-based activations of metadata.

The first way that students could engage in the subjectivities of the archives is for students to create metadata for an already archived source. Using any archival document, one could ask their students to assign the document a title, a description, and corresponding keywords. Student could then compare their title, description, and keywords to another student's or to the officially ascribed metadata. By looking at similarities and differences amongst the metadata, the class could engage in a discussion of the ways metadata are contingent on subjectivities of the archivist and that this then shapes how and what stories can be told.

For example, one could ask students if the description and keywords they assigned to a document would be sufficient if that was the only way one could search for and find that document. One could ask their students if the description and keywords they assigned to the document honoured the past or opened up space for the future? Drawing on Rawson (2017) who demonstrates the past/futureness of metadata creation for gender and sexuality, are we ascribing metadata to archival records that demonstrates the ways in which people in the past understood themselves, or the ways that people in the future will come to understand them? What are the potentials, possibilities, and limitations of either approach?

Inviting students into this process, opening the gates of the archival description to them, allowing them to know that things like metadata are available for their intervention, is work that can invite an empowered and deconstructive way into understanding the creation of history and historical narratives. In this way, understanding and creating metadata can be a pedagogical strategy for understanding the subjectivities of archives.

Secondly, in understanding the subjectivity of metadata there are also opportunities to *resist* metadata; to leave metadata behind and explore primary, archival sources without metadata to guide this work. In thinking about and discussing metadata throughout the project, the arbitrariness of metadata came to light. The students in the project were from history, political science, geography, and anthology; the managers of the project included an archivist working in a library and a K-12 education specialist working in higher education. We all saw, used, and looked for different things in a single archived source, and all of the things we saw and the uses we envisioned were correct.

Thus, to resist metadata, encourage students to forgo official metadata and *browse*, rather than *search*, the archives. This can allow student to see, to witness, the stories outside the metadata sources had been assigned. Ask students to articulate what they found through browsing the archive, to articulate the "serendipity" of their archival research (Bishop, 2017), when they were not (as) bound to the metadata and search criteria that traditionally predetermined the routes to those sources.

I have engaged in this activity as an outreach strategy for identifying the ordinariness of people in photographic archives – an activity I have identified as a social justice method for increasing representation and visibility in the archives (Cutrara, 2018a), something that is particularly important for marginalized communities (Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, & Cifor, 2017). Remembering that records exist separate from the metadata that has been ascribed to them, outside the stories the archivists told (Duff & Harris, 2002, p. 267), can find new sources, or new ways into the sources, that can result in powerful stories being found.

The final avenue for understanding the subjectivities of archives is the potential for art – for performance, fiction, and creative nonfiction, for the explicit invitation for affect, emotion,

narrative, and story – in how archives and archival sources are used and organized. While we had limited artistic imaginings in our project, readings from dance and performance archives inspired excitement from our students to be further embrace these possibilities. Emma Willis (2013), for example, writes of performances based on archival material from the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Cambodia, formerly Khmer Rouge prison S21, and that “the archive may be powerfully activated through performed responses which use fiction, play, voice, movement and so on.” “These” she continues, “do not undermine the integrity of the archive, but *deepen* the ways in which we might engage with what it represents” (Willis, 2013, p. 111 my emphasis). This underscores Bacon (2013)’s argument that the ways forward for archival practice is the “renewed relationship with creatively and the collective [which] undoubtedly lie within the practice of performative space in art, as field that invites us to value and explore our imagination and grasp its essential role in the organizing of historical and social space” (p. 91). All histories are fictions, perhaps some less fictitious than others, but to invite imagination and affect into our study of the past opens up new layers of understanding that are unavailable with a reverence for sources that the traditional use of archives may bring (Purdy, 2011). As we discussed with digital archives, a person could be working at home clicking through multiple screens and developing a path through the records in ways the creator (of the records, of the archive, of the digital portal) would never be able to predict (Whatley, 2013, p. 174). What kind of story can those (different) records tell?

The intersection between art, possibility, subjectivity, affect, in our study of, and with, archives may better enable us work to through the voices we find in the past in ways we cannot (yet) imagine and in ways that invite readings beyond the records themselves. In this way, activating the subjectivities of the past within archived sources through performance, fiction, creative non-fiction may allow us to hear a multidimensional and subjective past better than the records alone. And perhaps this is what embracing the subjectivity of the archives can allow us to do in our teaching and learning: to hear voices that push us outside of our own subjective ways of understanding the past and to a more empathetic ear to who and what else has been possible in the past and could be possible for the future. By giving “voice to what has been systematically silenced,” we open up space for the other by preparing for its coming (Crowley, 1989, p. 9).

## Final Thoughts

In managing the DHSS project, I wanted the students to get to creating an exhibit as fast as possible: Quickly choose the images/documents for the archive and move on to developing an aesthetically pleasing exhibit that married raw materials with argument and story. However, in the project, it was the archive itself that took time. It was the archive itself that challenged and pushed. It was the archive itself that acted, and will continue to act, as a sponge for the subjectivities of those who created it, the reasons why it was created, and ways it will be used. Archives can highlight the archaeology of knowledge (Foucault, 1972), but also the *architecture* of knowledge: the ways words and ideas build meaning into records of the past. Archives can help witness the deconstruction of knowledge and the (re)construction of justice: the ways words and ideas obfuscate Otherness and the ways we can reveal the coming of the Other by being open to how and in what ways we come to know (Biesta, 2009; Derrida, 1978). This is not something to be feared, but to be embraced. To be embraced as a teaching practice, a learning practice, and a practice for research. It is in this embracing of deconstruction in teaching and learning history, that subjectivity of the past, of history, of the archive can emerge, and it is by embracing the subjectivities of archives that primary sources can invite us to teach and learn new ways through the past.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionally archivists write archival *descriptions* of archival records, but with the growth of digital records the discourse of *metadata* is often conflated with description, especially for a non-archivist audience. In this paper, especially because we were working in a digital space, I blend the concept of archival description with that of metadata to acknowledge that this work does blur the tradition of archival description and the new work of metadata.

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### **About the Author**

Dr. Samantha Cutrara has a PhD from York University in Education (2012). Her work has focused on meaningful learning in Canadian history education, and she has become an expert in her field of teaching and learning history in both traditional and non-traditional sites of education. Dr. Cutrara is currently a Curriculum Specialist in the Office of the Vice Provost Academic at York University.