

PhD thesis:***Aspects of Historical Knowledge: from Leopold von Ranke to Michel Foucault and Hayden White***

Key-concepts: critical theory of historical knowledge, political and historical thought, Ranke's ten rules of writing histories, Hermeneutics, Semiotics, *Linguistic Turn*, Psychoanalysis, critics to Foucault's ideas, Metahistory, Hayden White's theory, de Certeau's theory and critics of history and of psychoanalysis, LaCapra's theory etc.

In my PhD thesis, I proposed a critical theory of historical knowledge, as I sketched in *Introduction*, for new paths in dealing with history and humanities. For this purpose, I investigated the rapprochements between disciplines of modern language and of human behavior (Linguistics, Hermeneutics, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis) and History.

The entire PhD thesis is structured in 8 chapters, questioning the fundamentals of these domains of knowledge in relationship with history. For my perspective on historical knowledge "the meaning" (Hermeneutics), "the progress" (modern sciences), "the signs" (Semiotics), "the desire and the sex" (Psychoanalysis) are a kind of Dogmas with *epistemological virtue for elaborating these universal disciplines*. I coined these four social sciences as "intellectual religions" not for intriguing an academic audience, but for understanding that history influenced and restructured by this modern language cannot be better than their "internal" regimes of knowing. Religion from their epistemological structure is a form of solving their unthought/unexpected problems or self-sufficient issues of its *theoretical insights*. In this *incomplete* or *imperfect* way of doing with humanist knowledge works their *unspoken credos*, their self-convenient beliefs, and their weak and unstructured *epistemic layers*.

My first chapter is entitled *Perfect History: Every Historian and Every Theorist have the Universal Right to Illusions* and presents, in a critical mood, the Western secular preoccupation of writing a... *perfect history*. And this 'perfect history' is a Western theoretical insight for studying and for composing "perennial" books of history. This kind of historical knowledge, sketched in Renaissance, made

possible, during the years, the development of Linguistics, Philology, Modern Logic and Hermeneutics. ‘Perfect History’ is a *dynamic metaphor* for a new Western knowledge, which made from the linguistic principle of difference a kind of “motor” for its function (evolution, progress, humanities and societies).

Perfect History is also a metaphor revealed by all Western modern philosophical and *historiographical motifs*: “the meaning” for hermeneutists; *perfect coherence of historical enounces* for French classical school of historiography (16th-18th centuries); *comprehensive study of documents and their ‘internal structure’* for *Göttingen School*, for Ranke and his followers; the necessity of problem-oriented method for Marx, Febvre and *Annales School*; Danto’s obsessions for perfecting ‘historical knowledge’ through logical-positivist procedures and reasoning; the investigation of the dynamic and changes of concepts for Koselleck; the analyze of “discourses” as “strategies” for *maintaining the power* (Foucault); the depiction of “ideological positions” and of “linguistic protocol” for Hayden White; LaCapra’s psychoanalyses for “reductive forms” of criticism (*Sounding in Critical Theory*) a. s. o. ‘Perfect History’ is a scriptural reality of Western thought for improving human knowledge from a generation to other in order to have a “better” life.

In the second chapter, *The “Better” World and the Principle of Social Utility: Two Antinomies in the Formation of the Modern World*, I debated this disparity between a world “better” (as Renaissance thinkers want) and the principle of social utility (as British utilitarianism has thought), evidencing this incongruence between *a better future world and this economic and political principle* in the order of things. The world in which we are living is not a contradictory one only because human contradictory actions and facts, but also because all those British utilitarians have thought different this principle of social utility. If in the Renaissance a work of art, a book, or a spiritual object have *a value through its originality and innovation*, due to formation of a modern utilitarian world, spiritual value is conditioned and transformed by material aspects and social functionality.

If the history would be perfect the world would be *better*, and if we have *a better world* as a lived reality, then, would be a convergence between history and the modern language, which expresses this history, always, in a dual way of saying. The third chapter, *Modern Language and History: Through its “Science” and its “Literature”* problem-izing this duplicity and this divergence between a language, which expresses real things and actions, and a language, which expresses formal

tropes, metaphors, symbols, ‘scientific’ conventions, abstract relations into an imaginary world of creation. The first condition of creation is this abstract thought, which creates an opaque framework of expressing the real relations and things. This chapter, understood as counter-weight to *Linguistic Turn*, targets a world of languages (for modern science and literature) in contrast with a world of actions, of facts and of historical events – as an object of study for the majority of historians.

In the fourth chapter, *Hermeneutics and History: The Time of Intellectual Religions (I)*, I presented, in a problem-oriented discourse, the confuse reports between a hermeneutical mode of thought – common for Göttingen’s historians and hermeneutists, after Schleiermacher – and the incomplete epistemological development of history as a modern discipline, shaped by Politics and by the Public Discourse. In this ‘incompleteness of History-as-Modern Discipline’ we have a sure place for Hermeneutics as well as for Semiotics, and for all kind of linguistic derivations. If the hermeneutists use the modern language with its double functions (*proper* and *figurative*), historians, in their majority, use this problematic modern language for its proper function of expressing real things and real relationships through evidence. I also sketched the possibility of making history beyond Language, using images (photographs, paintings etc.). I mean that Language is only one tool for historians, not the only one. Histories without words are possible for future generations of historians.

In the fifth chapter, *Modern Progress and History: Time of Intellectual Religions (II)* I presented the disjunctive reports between this Idol (the Modern Progress) of Societies and the attempts to rationalize history through positivistic-analytical ways of doing philosophy and history. I exposed in a critical way Comte’s conception on knowledge, on history and on society, evidencing a cardinal detail from his theory. The French philosopher has never ask for history to be a science, arguing that “history is entire different from the dogmatic study of science” (quotation). However, history is not a social science, nor a natural science, and cannot be approached with the *scientific methods* and *methodologies*. I also described Ranke’s ten rules of writing history, revealing that Comte and Ranke have their own positivism, totally different from *the positivism of their followers*. Between Comte (philosophy), Ranke (history) and, the so-called, *German Neopositivists* (Simmel, Dilthey, Windelband, Rickert etc.) are more disparities of ideas and preoccupations than similarities. My systematic critics on Hempel’s theory of general laws in history

I presented in the last pages of the chapter. This analytical theory can be understood as a reminiscence of *distorted positivism from Comte and Ranke*. Vienna's Circle and Anglo-Saxons Logical Positivism are different versions of positivism, which has never been thought by Comte. History because has, as an object of study, the particularities of past life, the essential of this historical past cannot be governed by 'laws' at the level of discourse (writings), nor at the level of socio-dynamics (history-lived).

The sixth chapter, *Semiotics and History: Time of Intellectual Religions (III)* is a rapprochement between Semiotics as a theory of language and of communication and some ideas of Barthes (*Discourse of History*), of Lévi-Strauss (*La Pensée Sauvage*), counter-arguing their conceptions on history and the so-called 'linguistic existence of historical fact'. I also defined what a 'historical fact' and what not a 'historical fact' is. We are speaking about historical facts only if we have micro- or macro-changes at the level of both individual and society. Historical fact is only what changes a micro- or macro-reality. And historical facts are very, very rare in the modern and contemporary world. We have an amount of historical interpretations due to the modern writing, but not 'historical facts'. We also have an amount of semiotic approaches, but not an Infinity of signs. In the last pages of this chapter I expressed my objections and skepticism concerning *a European Crisis* of historical consciousness, counter-arguing that we rather have a **European Crisis of Linguistic Awareness** – diffused and implemented in the modern historical thought. So, crises of epistemological incompleteness of Linguistics, of Hermeneutics, of Semiotics, of Semantics a. s. o., but not compulsory 'a crisis' of history, only a German crisis of their philosophers (since Herder, Hegel) concerning history.

The seventh chapter, *Psychoanalysis and History: Time of Intellectual Religions (IV)*, made a radical critique to Freud's ideas, his 'hegemony' in the field of humanities, his weakness of his 'psychoanalytical method', especially for psychohistory, for the theory of imaginary and of writing, for all kind of psychoanalytical precepts, which have been introduced in historical knowledge in the 20th century. I also presented and criticized LaCapra's theory of *transference*, *working-through* and *acting-out*.

My last chapter, *Metahistory and History: Time of Historical Thinking and of Dissolution of Intellectual-Political Religiosity* presents, of course, from my perspective of founding a critical theory of historical knowledge, Hayden White's

theoretical achievements, and, somehow, conciliates a false Western historiographical conflict between “fiction” and “history”, “science” and “art”. For sure, modern science is the most inextricable medium of fiction. I didn’t repeat my critics to some Hayden White’s ideas, formulated in my previous books on historical knowledge (*Historical Knowledge in Western Civilization: Studies beyond Sovereign View*, Romanian edition, 2008, English edition, 2009), advancing new hypotheses and new ideas for humanities. The chapter is also a homage for Hayden White’s career and work.

My PhD work – which will have a different title as a book – proposes a new domain in the world wide historical research – *critical theory of historical knowledge*. Unlike philosophy and theory of history, which do not have a convergent and coherent object of study, only Western individualities, my critical theory of historical knowledge is focused not in types of arguments or stylistic parts of humanist knowledge (tropes), but it is preoccupied to describe *how* a historical and a humanist knowledge is instrumented and politicized through norms and academic programs for gaining effects of power in social-political relationships. And this ‘modern phenomenon’ of politicizing humanist knowledge (history, philosophy and literature) is not made in ‘one-way route’. It represents a circular, diffused and an entrenched and unexpected social-political movement of power between political class and civil societies. If Hermeneutics, some Linguistic Tools, Semiotics, Psychoanalysis have had a standardized impact in the Government of the Souls – setting ‘norms’, ‘forms’ ‘canons of thought’, especially in those obedient societies, characterized by weak Culture of Criticism, this PhD thesis provides the insights and some personal intellectual tools for de-politicizing the entire modern humanist knowledge.

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