

THE NARRATIVISM QUARREL REVISITED: CAN INQUIRY REVIVE NARRATIVE?¹

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This paper investigates the narrativist debate on the nature of history and presents a review of some of its most significant contributors through the prism of concepts of ‘narration’ and ‘inquiry’. Since the main issue on which narrativist theoreticians and defenders of the historians’ craft disagree is their view on whether language is the source or merely a tool of history, this text investigates the role and importance the two parties ascribe to the layers of critical inquiry and narration. The paper focuses mainly on the writings of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, while also briefly commenting on the crucial theoretical works of Franklin Ankersmit, Hans Kellner, Philippe Carrard, and Ivan Jablonka. While White is often considered to be the main proponent of narrativists, it turns out that his approach to the subject was more nuanced than often thought and that it evolved over time. Paul Ricoeur, on the other hand, tends to view inquiry as a sort of poetic act and narration as an essential part of historical understanding.

Keywords: Narrative; Narrativism; Historical Inquiry; Hayden White; Paul Ricoeur

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Introduction

In the following pages, I will consider the once heated debate over the nature of narrativity in history from the perspective of its core conflict, that is,

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whether narrative is just a supplement to historical inquiry or whether it is the main source of the sense of historical discourse, thus leaving historical inquiry as a mere, although necessary, addendum. My major concern here is how this dilemma was examined by different authors, how it was dealt with, and what solutions were offered. I refer here to the dispute over the role of narrativity in historical discourse, with (mostly) theoreticians, on the one hand, stressing the linguistic nature of historiography and advocating the importance of narrative figuration in the making of history, in accordance with the philosophy of linguistic turn, and (mostly) historians, on the other hand, defending their science-like, evidence-based practice. The debate itself was held among scholars from various disciplines and with diverse backgrounds, spanning from the Anglophone analytical philosophers² through post-structural theorists³ to French historians,⁴ and lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, at least. Indeed, it is much easier to mark its beginning than its end: with the main *personae* of the dispute, such as Hayden White or Frank Ankersmit, still being discussed in dissertations and on the pages of journals (a trend of which this article can serve as an example) and with new contributions to the debate appearing, it rather seems that the discussion has never ceased.

And yet, it appears as though we are no longer talking of a quarrel (in the proper meaning of the word), with fervour and excitement of the exchange among Hayden White, Carlo Ginzburg, and Roger Chartier long past.⁵ As the principal theoretical disagreements were argued some twenty years ago, the current state of the dispute between narrativists and their opponents resembles more

2 PAUL RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, Chicago 1984, pp. 111–161.

3 JEAN-MARIE SCHAEFFER, *Langue, récit, vérité et fiction. Quelques réflexions sur le tournant linguistique en sciences sociales*, in: *L'expérience historiographique*. Autour de Jacques Revel, (edd.) Antoine Lilti, Sabina Loriga, Jean-Frédéric Schaub, Silvia Sebastiani, Paris 2016, pp. 221–236.

4 PAUL VEYNE, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris 1971.

5 The clash of Hayden White and Carlo Ginzburg can be found in the notable anthology edited by SAUL FRIEDLÄNDER (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, Cambridge 1992. For a résumé of this particular episode, see MICHAEL DINTENFASS, *Truth's Other: Ethics, the History of the Holocaust, and Historiographical Theory after the Linguistic Turn*, *History and Theory* 39/2000, pp. 1–20; JAMES E. YOUNG, *Toward a Received History of the Holocaust*, *History and Theory* 36/1997, pp. 21–43. As for the Chartier – White debate, compare ROGER CHARTIER, *Figures rhétoriques et représentation historiques. Quatre questions à Hayden White*, *Storia della Storiografia* 24/1993, pp. 133–142; HAYDEN WHITE, *A Rejoinder. A Response to Professor Chartier's Four Questions*, *Storia della Storiografia* 27/1995, pp. 63–70. I owe my knowledge of this bibliography to SABINA LORIGA, *Au-delà du langage. Politique et récit*, in: *L'expérience historiographique*, pp. 237–251.

of a stalemate: it is not that all the aporias or impasses were resolved, but rather that the debate itself seems somewhat abandoned. A brief look at the current methodological debates proves our suspicion. Nowadays, historians' and theoreticians' foci have shifted towards different, more practically oriented topics. Apart from the pragmatic turn in history, today's scholars are instead occupied with the scope of the historical inquiry, as the advent of the Anthropocene Era, of global history or the return of *longue durée* suggest.⁶ Some historians are even questioning the capability of historical discourse to speak to its readers, to be of any use to postmodern societies, in which different genres and media claim their privileges of interpreting history.⁷

Nevertheless, the fact that the quarrel over the nature of narrative in historiography got a bit side-tracked does not necessarily imply that it has lost its importance for the practice of a historian, nor that the questions posed were ultimately answered or solved. On the contrary, the rift between narrativists and defenders of historical practice does not seem to be healed even at present, despite several attempts to do so.⁸ The schism between narrative conceived as the ruling scheme of a historical writing, imposing its logic and ontology on a historian's work, on the one hand, and the demand for critical inquiry and references to sources, on the other, endures, causing, in my view, the first approach to be abandoned, ignored or even frequently refused by historians. In fact, it may be this impasse, or conflict, that the dispute ran into that caused it to fade. Is there a way out? Can the notion of narrative still be brought back into the limelight of historical debates, or at least to the attention of historians? Or is it destined only to reign over the territory that it had once gained, but that perpetually diminishes its impact and outreach?

To answer these questions, I will focus on the concepts of narration and of scientific explanation/critical inquiry. By narration, I mean non-referential, intra-textual sources or layers of historical writing in the broadest sense, whether different authors call them poetic, literary, linguistic, tropological or simply fic-

- 6 A vast literature covers these topics. For illustrative purposes, I would like to refer to the debate that took place in the *Annales HSS* journal in 2015. For the article and the subsequent discussion, see: DAVID ARMITAGE, JO GULDI, *Le retour de la longue durée: une perspective anglo-américaine*, *Annales HSS* 70/2015, avril-juin, pp. 289–318.
- 7 See FRANÇOIS HARTOG, *Croire en l'histoire*, Paris 2013; SERGE GRUZINSKI, *L'Histoire, pour quoi faire?*, Paris 2014.
- 8 ROGER CHARTIER, *Au bord de la falaise: l'histoire entre certitudes et inquiétude*, Paris 1998, pp. 234–252.

tional.⁹ The common denominator of these terms is the idea that historiography is unable to communicate the past without any intermediation via language, an assumption which eventually, whether deliberately or not, questions and undermines the discipline's claim to tell the truth. Inquiry, for its part, should be what enables history to fulfil this claim (at least in the average historian's eyes), as it stands for the field's methodology and ability to logically or causally explain the phenomena of the past.¹⁰ If the main conflict of the quarrel lies (and has

9 I'm referring here to the wide range of scholars spanning from Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault through Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner to Keith Jenkins or Dominick LaCapra.

10 When speaking of the narration-inquiry pair, I adopt the vocabulary and terms of Paul Ricoeur, as he sketched them in PAUL RICOEUR, *Récit fictif – récit historique*, in *La Narrativité. Phénoménologie et herméneutique*, (edd.) Paul Ricoeur, Dorian Tiffeneau, Paris 1980, pp. 251–271; IDEM, *Time and Narration*, pp. 175–182; IDEM, *Histoire et rhétorique*, Diogenè 1994, pp. 9–26. At the basic level, the term inquiry stands for the historian's craft, i.e. collecting and choosing the proper documents, reading them critically, etc. In critiquing the sources, explanation and the whole methodological apparatus of historiography enters the field. As Ricoeur puts it, "history is born as inquiry – historia, Forschung, recherche – out of the specific use it makes of explanation. [...] For historians, the explanatory form is made autonomous [from narration]; it becomes the distinct object of a process of authentication and justification. In this respect, historians are in the situation of a judge: placed in the real or potential situation of a dispute, they attempt to prove that one given explanation is better than another. They therefore seek 'warrants', the most important of which is documentary proof." IDEM, *Time and Narration*, p. 175. Explanation – the bedrock of inquiry – manifests itself in the "work of conceptualization", or in the use of critical conceptions; in the striving for objectivity, which is reflected by the fact that historical texts are all based on evidence and thus commensurable and mutually falsifiable (which is unimaginable for works of fiction); and in the "critical reflection" of historical inquiry, that is, in the fact that history reflects on its own limits and possible ideological biases.

Inquiry is also what defines historiography as a specific, particular genre of writing and thinking, and also what contests the general conceptions of the world that we have in common. "History, as a narrative aspiring for veracity, goes beyond the general understanding that the logic of a normal narrative offers us. History doesn't go beyond this general understanding through fictional deviations, however, but through deviations in inquiry (*écart d'enquête*). History is inquiry, enquête, Forschung, and it is precisely this that makes the intentionality of history so specific." "A deviation in inquiry, the limitation of an archive, the excess of the real, these are three different ways of saying that history, as an inquiry, forces one to perceive the infinite complexity of the concepts that only reality can offer. These concepts far surpass the finite complexity of the concepts that we logically construct within the framework of our normal, common-sense understanding." IDEM, *Récit fictif – récit historique*, p. 267, 268. In this perspective, history offers us points of view and facts that exceed our general expectations, thus shattering our certainties. Or, in other words, inquiry is a kind of language (or technique) that allows history to mediate the unexpected reality of the past.

always lain) in what role should be acknowledged to each of these essentials, my intention here is to better understand their mutual relationship: are they really opposed to each other? Does either of them ever gain the upper hand? Or may it be that they are actually linked inextricably? The main goal of this text is thus to explore what value or position each of the authors discussed ascribed to them and what particular exchanges they observed or built between inquiry and narration. Because the way they perceived them – either as disjoined elements, as one prevailing over the other, or as two elements existing in concert, both conditioning each other – defines what historical discourse is or ought to be and how a historian's work should be done.

I'll search for the answers mostly in the works of two major protagonists of the debate, Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur and examine how these concepts are dealt with in their respective oeuvres.

Although the authors come from different methodological and theoretical backgrounds, both of their historical thinking deeply concerns the relation between narration and inquiry. Hayden White, as is well known, comes from a structuralist or a post-structuralist standpoint and offers his tropological answer to the question of the role of the narration in the historical discourse. His *Metahistory*, which I will examine here, was one of the major contributions to the quarrel, if not its instigator, and I think it is not far from the truth to say that it has substantially framed the dispute. And yet, even though he was and still is perceived as an exemplary narrativist, his approach to the relation of narration and scientific explanation in historiography varied over the time, and he never espoused a merely two-dimensional view. What I intend to demonstrate here is how he tackled the two concepts and whether he really managed, in his own readings of historical works, to fulfil his theoretical standpoint.

For Hayden White, then, the dilemma of inquiry and narration is not explicitly formulated in these terms, as he frames the debate in his own tropological terminology and uses such concepts as an 'explanation by argument' or an 'emplotment'. Paul Ricoeur, for his part, addresses the schism directly. His major

Nevertheless, as each of the discussed authors offers, explicitly or implicitly, his own understanding of the two concepts, narration and inquiry, I will use them, for most of this article, in their "pre-critical", or basic meaning, with narration standing simply for the linguistic or "literary" sources of history and inquiry standing for the "scientific" parts – research, methodology, critical judgements. I will then try to understand what signification each of the authors ascribes to the two terms and what relationship they build between them, with Ricoeur's definition standing as a point of departure.

commentary can be found in the three-volume *Time and Narration*, which he himself calls a triptych of literary theory, historical methodology, and the philosophy of time. In this triptych, he offers his own hermeneutics of history and historiography, while at the same time trying to reframe the already on-going debate by shifting its attention from narration towards time. Such a rearrangement of the quarrel is no easy task, and Ricoeur had to ponder the relation of the inquiry and narration in a completely new way. However, it seems that this reordering can escape some of the perpetual paradoxes of the whole conflict, as this text aims to prove.

While I won't leave the other important authors and commentators of the debate out, I decided to focus in this text mainly on these two particular thinkers, a theorizing historian and a philosopher concerned with history, and mediate a discussion or exchange between them on the basis of the two key terms: narration and inquiry. As such an articulation of the issue obviously comes from Paul Ricoeur's thinking, I won't conceal the fact that this work is written in the Ricoeurian vein.

Hayden White and the Dilemma of the Power of Language

No overall account of historical narrativism can omit the oeuvre of Hayden White, despite the fact that he was not the first to notice the literary nature of historiography (which was perceived as early as in antiquity), not even the first to reflect on it (Droysen wrote the first part of his *Historik* in 1857, Barthes published *Michelet* in 1954), and his thinking is far from unanimously accepted. However, White left an undeniable legacy, as every reflection on the language element of historical discourse has to take his reasoning into account. This may be thanks to the great range of his writing, spanning from literary and art theory to historical methodology and the philosophy of language, but it is also thanks to the persistence with which he pursued his programme from the late 1960s onwards. One of the important traits of his thinking is that he not only theorized about the figurative nature of historical discourse, but also sought to directly demonstrate it in his readings. That is why, in my opinion, *Metahistory*, a monograph focused on turning theory into a stand-alone interpretive key of historiographical works, stands out in the field of all narrativist literature. And it is precisely White's *mise en pratique* that every account of the narrative in history should return to.

In the first place, let us swiftly resume White's perspective of historical discourse. According to *Metahistory*, its composition springs from two sources: unprocessed historical records and tropes. In order to be comprehensible, un-

processed historical records must first be organized into a chronicle or a temporal series of events, and then further arranged into a story: a sequence with a distinguishable beginning, culmination, and end. Stories are then assembled into greater and more complex units – that is, historical stories that allow readers to understand the preceding elements – or simply the past. However, this understanding is a result of a complex explanatory operation, which proceeds in three ways. As White says: “I call these ways explanation by emplotment, explanation by argument, and explanation by ideological implication.”¹¹ They constitute three explanatory levels or modes of a historian’s discourse and can be further divided into four subcategories: the mode of emplotment into romantic, tragic, comical and satirical mode, the mode of argument into formist, mechanistic, organicist and contextualist mode, etc.¹² These modes are not mere formal operations, as they grant a historical story its signification, its meaning. See an example of explanation by emplotment „If, in the course of narrating his story, the historian provides it with the plot structure of a Tragedy, he has ‘explained’ it in one way; if he has structured it as a Comedy, he has ‘explained’ it in another way. Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.”¹³

However, these modes, according to White, do not emerge from historical records or stories themselves, but from a deeper, ‘precritical’, prefigurative layer, where the human mind structures the world in accordance with four basic tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. The three aforementioned explanatory modes build on this prefigurative level, which creates a kind of metalanguage. This structure stands somewhat independently from historical records, but at the same time, it is also able to shape them into narrative accounts to make a meaningful story. The main question from now on will be whether this interpretational metalanguage controls or dominates the meaning of the records – or of the past itself – or whether it is only a medium, that is, a necessary, yet not predominating device of understanding. This dilemma belongs not only to White, but also to the whole narrativist dispute.

It is important to say that not even White himself gives us an unequivocal answer. His opinions vary, depending on the decade, context, and audience. But unlike some of his successors, he never fully dismisses historical evidence, nor

11 HAYDEN WHITE, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore 1975 [1973], p. 7.

12 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, pp. 7–31.

13 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, p. 7.

discards the past as an unreachable, imperceptible referent. He never relativizes historical knowledge to the point of making it completely subject to language structures, even though his tropological conception sometimes approaches this standpoint.¹⁴ The main tension of his thinking thus lies in the role the tropes should play in the creation of historical sense. Are they entirely responsible for the outcome of a historian's writing, or do they just add to the previously gathered evidence?

In the definition proposed in the introduction to *Metahistory*, the explanatory mode builds on already existing levels of chronicle and story. A chronicle should also be the phase where historical methodology (strictly speaking) applies. As we learn in *The Content of the Form*, at the level of a chronicle, historical discourse is “assessed in terms of truth value of its factual (singular existential) statements taken individually and the logical conjunction of the whole set of such statements taken distributively. For unless a historical discourse acceded to assessment in these terms, it would lose all justification for its claim to represent and provide explanations of specifically real events.”¹⁵

Once a chronicle has been put together and linked into stories, a historian proceeds to explain it through the aforementioned tetradic explanatory grid. The work of a historian thus consists in two parallel activities: writing and researching. “In the research phase of their work, historians are concerned to discover the truth about the past and to recover information either forgotten, suppressed, or obscured, and, of course, to make of it whatever sense they can.”¹⁶ These are White's strongest assertions in favour of what we previously called historical inquiry. But the role of the ‘scientific’ remains limited, as it is never allowed to exist independently in the historical discourse, nor to produce its own meanings and explanations of the historical discourse – at least not in the way the explanatory modes can. The quote continues as follows: “But between this research phase, which is really quite indistinguishable from that of a journalist or a detective, and the completion of a written history, a number of important transformative operations must be performed in which the figurative aspect of the historian's thought is intensified rather than diminished.”¹⁷

14 S. LORIGA, *Au-delà du langage*, pp. 238–240.

15 HAYDEN WHITE, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore 1987, p. 45.

16 H. WHITE, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, Baltimore 2000, pp. 7–8.

17 H. WHITE, *Figural Realism*, p. 8.

Here is where the pendulum starts swinging back. In White's conception, the inquiry has at best an auxiliary function and can provide textual matter for (poetical) explanation, but it is never in the position of adding its own meaning to the historical story. It is a triad of emplotment, argument, and ideological implication that constitutes the sense of historical writing. Thanks to different plots, readers can understand events of the past as, for example, tragedies or farces. Furthermore, various formal arguments can depict them as growing steadily (in an organic motion) or as following inner laws (in a mechanic rhythm), etc. The overall story, eventually, implies a certain worldview, which can either be conservative, liberal, radical, or anarchist. The role of 'inquiry' and of 'narrative', thus, are not equivalent. Nor are they in the relationship of base and superstructure, as *it is the whole of the plot that imposes its meaning upon the historical record*. Indeed, "there can be no proper history" without the structure of interpretative metalanguage that enables the "interpretative strategies necessary for the representation of a given segment of the historical process."¹⁸

In fact, the relation of inquiry and narrative is anything but equivalent, as White suggests in numerous passages. For if narration builds on evidence, then even the evidence itself can become a product of the preceding work of language. If, in *Metahistory*, historical record and tropological level stand side by side, the latter seems to get the upper hand in White's later writings. Gradually, tropes become not only a source of the modes of explanation, but they also structure the evidence itself. This arises from the very fact that even reality first has to be described. "The description is a product of process of linguistic condensation, displacement symbolization, and secondary revision of the kind that inform the production of texts,"¹⁹ and, further, "tropics is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the object which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively."²⁰

Tropology as a source of an entire historical discourse, including the historical record, or tropology as a means of figuring out and making sense of the historical record; these are two extremities between which White balances. In either case, this has already grave consequences for understanding historical writing. Most importantly, a historian's methodological critique applies only on the level of the chronicle. Elsewhere, he resembles more of a fiction writer. "Viewed simply as

18 HAYDEN WHITE, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore 1978, p. 52.

19 H. WHITE, *Figural Realism*, p. 59.

20 H. WHITE, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 2.

verbal artefacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another.”²¹ The worldviews and interpretations historians (and philosophers of history) provide us with are all alike or equal in the sense that there is, according to White, no cognitive tool that could disprove one or the other. “After all, a great historical classic cannot be disconfirmed or nullified either by the discovery of some new datum that might call a specific explanation of some element of the whole account into question or by the generation of new methods of analysis which permit us to deal with questions that earlier historians might not have taken under consideration.”²²

It is suggested that the main message of a historical story is, besides the evidence of chronology, of aesthetic (in a Kantian sense) rather than epistemological value. In this perspective, the discourse and the interpretation floats somewhat over the historical record, and the historical story, despite the fact that it is deeply rooted in chronicle, uses it only as a starting point for aesthetic and moral contemplation. Thus, figurative language or narration gains considerable autonomy from inquiry, which is left only as a service element.

That is how the theory stands. But when we look through White’s writings, this aspiration is not always fulfilled. On many occasions, the retreat of language within itself is only apparent, and the ‘reality’ takes the floor. Here and there, it is the discourse that undergoes changes from the outside, from the extra-textual, for example when a historical story has to conclude. Unlike annals, which work as a “mere sequence without beginning or end,” or a chronicle, which terminates at some point but never really concludes, historical narration has a meaningful end that grants it its signification and purpose. The very gesture of closure, however, is a response to a demand for *moral meaning*, as White puts it.²³ The ending of a story is always something that comes from outside, as there is no ending inherent to the events themselves.²⁴ To endow a story with a meaningful end is to determine its beginning, development, and everything else that leads to that particular ending.²⁵ The story itself can be emploted and given an ideological implication in accordance with White’s tetradic grid, but the particular

21 H. WHITE, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 122.

22 H. WHITE, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 97.

23 H. WHITE, *The Content of the Form*, pp. 21–24.

24 It was ARTHUR C. DANTO, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge 1965, who pointed out that a story cannot be conceived but in a backward look, as we must firstly know the consequences to which events have led before we see these events as episodes of a story.

25 Compare what Ricoeur says about Aristotle’s conception of story – P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, pp. 31–51.

selection of events or of episodes that develop the story cannot be reduced to a mere tropological operation. The fact that the story is narrated is due to the needs of a particular (historical) community. And while the narration can be subject to the modes of explanation, the story itself is delimited by the culture that surrounds it. In this perspective, the tropes seem to be instruments that tell the stories rather than their origins.

Another example goes even further. White often suggests that our imagination is only as broad (or as narrow) as the tropes. In this view, the primary tropological level structures our perception of the world insofar as we even seek to translate everything we do not understand or that appears incomprehensible to us into well-known schemes of metaphor, metonymy, etc. This goes against the perspective that a traditional historian would adopt, as he or she would suppose that the narration (or rather historical explication) adjusts to the events of the 'real world'. "But neither the form nor the explanatory power of narrative derives from the different contents it is presumed to be able to accommodate. In point of fact, history – the real world as it evolves in time – is made sense of in the same way that the poet or the novelist tries to make sense of it, i.e. by endowing what originally appears to be problematical and mysterious with the aspect of a recognizable (...) form."²⁶

In such a perspective, the world cannot really enrich our imagination in the sense that all new experiences and realities are immediately converted into the well-known tropological schemes, into already shared plots. Figurative language thus prefigures our perception of the reality, and the world, conversely, fits in our already prepared categories. In addition to the fact that many philosophers would not agree,²⁷ though, even White himself brings evidence that breaks this vicious circle. Indeed, even history can surprise us to the point that we are struck dumb, our imagination surpassed. The examples of the 20th century totalitarian atrocities speak for themselves. In this case, it is our figural language, our plots and our imagination that have to accommodate reality.²⁸ Such cases prove that history, reality, the 'outside' can penetrate seemingly autonomous language structures and impose its meaning upon them. Is this not proof that even a chronicle (to which inquiry should be limited) carries its own message?

This is a perfect moment for us to get back to *Metahistory* and find out how

26 H. WHITE, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 98.

27 An opposing conception is offered, for example, in PAUL RICOEUR, *La métaphore vive*, Paris 1975.

28 H. WHITE, *Figural Realism*, pp. 40–41.

the theory translates into practice, or, to put it another way, what is left from the claimed tropological dominance in White's own interpretations of historiographic works.

The methodology of *Metahistory* is, in terms of language determinism, modest. Still, it is always the modes of explanation that carry the message, that is, the epistemological, aesthetic, and moral dimensions of the historical work,²⁹ the source of which is the tropological layer. "In the poetic act which precedes the formal analysis of the field, the historian both creates his object of analysis and predetermines the modality of the conceptual strategies he will use to explain."³⁰ Particular interpretations of history carried out by Hegel, Michelet, Marx, de Tocqueville, Vico and others should thus emerge from a governing trope. It follows that certain tropes are in favour of subsequent explanatory choices: irony, for example, implies using the satirical mode of emplotment and the contextualist mode of argument, while synecdoche imports comic plot, organicist argument, and conservative ideological implication (as is the case of Ranke). This conception should allow an interpreter to search for more general traits across a vast corpus of texts, instead of sorting individual historians and philosophers of history into classes of historical (methodological) schools, philosophical thought, or classifying them as partisans of given political movements etc. It is also possible to say that White's approach enables an explanation of the development of each particular work and its inner logic as growing out of one governing trope, thus avoiding a resort to psychological causes, outer biographical influences, etc., and shifting the whole enterprise from intellectual history to the analysis of discourse.

So, how does the practice stand here? One of the most exemplary and finest illustrations of tropological reading is, in my opinion, that of Marx. White starts his interpretation with Marx's conception of value, where he clearly demonstrates how metaphorical relations among objects and their interpretations are set.³¹ Then he addresses Marx's historical 'grammar', that is, theory of historical development, where human figures' approaches to the phenomenon of work

29 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, p. X.

30 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, p. 31. See also the conclusion of the book: "I have suggested that a given historian will be inclined to choose one or another of the different modes of explanation, on the level of argument, emplotment, or ideological implication, in response to the imperatives of the trope which informs the linguistic protocol he has used to prefigure the field of historical occurrence singled out by him for investigation" (p. 427).

31 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, pp. 290–291.

branch into metaphorical and metonymical tropes, only to be grasped in the mechanistic argument of the base-superstructure dialectics.³² With this formal argument employed, figuration, on this higher level of reasoning, turns into the metonymical and the synecdochal and gives ground for the notorious historical determinism. At this point, the ideological implication offers itself a desired outcome of history, as the law of history leads through many tragic episodes to the communist utopia. In this interpretation of Marx, the elementary relations among words and images – the figures – have later stages encoded within themselves, thus implying subsequent development. The most visible part of Marxism, that is, the historical determinism and the utopian conclusion of history, appears to be only the upper layer of the whole system, defined by deeper language structures determining, for example, relations between the whole and the parts, patterns of change, teleological tendencies of the entire ‘story’ and so forth.

Similarly, some passages concerning Burckhardt or de Tocqueville are as exemplary as the one about Marx, proving the same coherence and interconnection of all elements. However, in case of the other personae, it is almost striking how often White resorts to extra-textual *causes* of tropological choices. Burckhardt’s ironic standpoint, for example, is a result of his adherence to Schopenhauer’s thought, with its comprehension for the meaninglessness of the era and its innate passivity towards historical development.³³ De Tocqueville, for his part, tends to switch from the tragic mode of emplotment to the ironic on the basis of his personal disillusion, melancholy, and social affiliation.³⁴ At the end of the book, we learn that Croce’s liberalism is a consequence of his dramatic life, of his struggle to survive a lethal illness, and of many other purely biographical and psychological factors. It must be said that such cases are rather a rule than an exception and are scattered throughout the book. Reading *Metahistory* often feels more like reading an intellectual history (and in the case of Vico even a biographical history of intellectuals) than a discourse analysis.³⁵ But this contrasts fundamentally with the aforementioned tropological program.³⁶

32 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, pp. 306–307.

33 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, pp. 237–238.

34 H. WHITE, *Metahistory*, pp. 224–225.

35 See how Foucault compares intellectual history and discourse analysis – MICHEL FOUCAULT, *L’archéologie du savoir*, Paris 1969, pp. 177–183.

36 It must be stated here that I am not the first one to notice the fact that *Metahistory* does not respond to its tropological program – *in its entirety*. See, in this matter, HERMAN PAUL, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*, Cambridge 2011, especially chapter 3, where the author observes that White’s chef d’œuvre not only follows a narrativist agenda but also pursues

This failure to develop a fully tropological interpretive key is, however, significant. If plots, moral standpoints, and formal arguments cannot be fully derived from the governing trope, from the ‘narration’ in our terms, then it only shows that the inquiry, the ‘outside’ of the language, is an irreducible part of the whole of historical discourse as well. For ideology, argument, and plot seek their sources not only in the tropes, but also in the non-narrative resources (satirical emplotment being a consequence of a philosophical stance; ideological modes resulting from the historical and personal realities of the writers) – and even White’s own reading cannot escape them. When compared to White’s later writings, where he limited inquiry only to the level of chronicle, this conclusion challenges the tropes’ autonomy and shows that the creation of historical stories also draws from epistemological, and not only poetic, layers. Or, in other words, to understand Burckhardt’s ironic standpoint, a historian also has to undertake an intellectual, methodological critique. And to seek for the sources of Croce’s liberalism, one has to do research into his life – which is exactly what Hayden White does.³⁷

‘Dethroning’ the tropes (or rather reenthroning the extra-textual) has further consequences. If, for example, Burckhardt’s satirical interpretation of history is to be a product of a governing trope as well as of a period philosophy, then we can actually disconfirm his worldview, because as much as it is aesthetic in its nature, it also has a rational core that is criticisable and falsifiable. White’s statement that the “great historical classic cannot be disconfirmed or nullified either by the discovery of some new datum that might call a specific explanation of some element of the whole account into question”³⁸ appears, in this light, quite questionable, for even the aesthetic outcome of a great historian’s writing has its ‘explanatory’ heart. In other words, Burckhardt’s satirical worldview may not be falsifiable because of its ironic plot (emplotment), but because of its Schopen-

moral, humanist goals as well. However, I would not be this benevolent with White when it comes to the consistency of *Metahistory*, nor downplay its narrativist ethos. His methodological statements in both introduction and conclusion (see note 30) are unequivocal, thus I find it legitimate to read the book as a narrativist monograph.

37 It should be clarified, at this point, that while the Schopenhauerian philosophical stance clearly belongs among a historian’s intellectual tools, and can (and should) thus be perceived as a part of inquiry, de Tocqueville’s or Croce’s personal experiences can be considered as such only as an example of the “excess of the real” that penetrates the narrative (see note 10). In either case, the point here is only to show that White’s tropological interpretations cannot be entirely deduced from the governing tropes.

38 H. WHITE, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 97.

hauerian root; an argumentation based on critical terms can take place here.

At the same time, we do not have to fully accept that, for example, de Tocqueville's worldview differs from that of Michelet, and that both differ from ours; to just relativistically 'agree to disagree', suggesting that everyone possesses the same amount of truth. As the ideological critique constitutes an internal part of the inquiry, the least we can do is to position these authors (and their worldviews) within the cultural and social background they originate from. And to do so is to say that what they present in their writings is just a *particular perspective* of history, not history itself. Is this not also a falsification of a worldview?

It is nonetheless undeniable that even the intellectual argument has to take figurative form. The epistemological thus translates into the poetic and vice versa. White makes the triad of plot, argument, and ideological implication wholly dependent on the tropological level of the story, not only cutting the *message* and *meaning* of historiography off from the inquiry, but also making any critique of the classics' world views impossible, since their aesthetic visions should neither be subject to inquiry, nor should they be contested, even by the discovery of a new method.

Yet the opposite is true: it is thanks to the achievements of modern thought and critique that we no longer have to accept positivist mechanicism, Hegelian comedy, or Marxist determinism. It is also thanks to a deepened historical understanding that we can defy Spengler's eschatology, Fukuyama's historical comedy, or Huntington's eternal clash. All these standpoints are, in a way, aesthetic, but can be, even as poetic visions, challenged from the rational positions. In other words, *even narration can be questioned by inquiry, and even the poetic worldview offers its own epistemology*. Historical narration, despite White's theoretical presumptions, is always permeated by inquiry, and *one can be translated into another*.

Between Denial and Adoption of Inquiry in Narration

It should be said that White's intention was never to entirely discard the historian's craft, only to prove the irreducibly poetic nature of his or her work. He did so by freeing narration from the reach of inquiry (or by extracting inquiry from the realms of narration), but in this way he also deprived the epistemological of its aesthetic implications. In his own readings of the 19th century history authors, however, he didn't manage to escape the non-poetic sources of their writings, thus proving unintentionally that historical discourse draws inevitably from both narration and inquiry.

However, it is one thing to say that historians research and narrate at the same time and another to describe the delicate relationship between the two processes. But it was a long way to the recognition that narration and inquiry do not necessarily exclude one another, and in fact that they can even act upon or condition each other. I've already outlined the summary of the quarrel in the introduction, so there is no need to repeat it. Although Hayden White stood in the centre of the debate, his own approach was, in its aims, modest, especially when compared to his narrativist counterparts.

Frank Ankersmit took, in his *Narrative Logic*,³⁹ a similar stance. His conception also embraces both inquiry and narration as irreducible parts of historical discourse. But, similarly to White, inquiry is only reduced to playing the role of a service element while the main message and meaning of the historian's work are produced by narration (or, as he would put it, by *historical writing*). As Ankersmit conceives it, the historical enterprise consists of two main parts. There is a set of statements about 'real events', on the one hand, and the *narratio* which arches over the former and provides it with its sense, on the other hand.⁴⁰ *Narratio*, in brief, stands for the whole of the historical account⁴¹ and, most importantly, consists of the 'Narrative substances' (Nss). These Nss, for their part, are manifested in conceptions such as 'romanticism', the 'Middle Ages', etc., thus operating as types of colligatory terms.⁴²

The problem of the historical truth takes place within a set of statements that can be falsified. The decision of whether a story is truthful or false is decided there. Once proven, statements are gathered and arranged into a series that creates, in its entirety, Nss, which then makes up the *narratio*. There, it enters the historical debate and is weighed in terms of its plausibility, whether it is fruitful

39 FRANK ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, The Hague 1983.

40 F. ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic*, p. 12: "a narratio is supposed to develop a thesis on the past, or to propose a certain 'point of view' from which the past should be seen (...) theses, interpretations or 'points of view' always require a narratio for their exposition".

41 F. ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic*, pp. 102–103: "The narratio is a complex structure consisting of different parts. Each narratio has a component devoted to 'historical research' (...); furthermore, some space is usually reserved for a discussion with other historians. Often, still other preoccupations guide the historian's writing. [...] Purely scientific or theoretical considerations may enter [the] narrative. [...] But besides these and other elements not mentioned here, the narratio contains above all a number of statements that a) can be taken to refer – as a statements – to past reality and b) when seen narratively, are used by historians to indicate their view of the past to their readers."

42 See F. ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic*, pp. 99–100.

or not, and so forth.⁴³ The Nss of a *narratio* are supposed to be the main outcome of the historian's work, its meaningful result and the source of its sense, narrative substances being the final thesis or interpretation of the past that functions "as the embodiment of the content or cognitive core of historical narratios."⁴⁴ The inquiry, reduced to operating the set of statements, is thus once again discarded from any participation in creating the sense of the overall narration. "Apparently, the cognitive force of (...) Nss outweighs by far that of statements on actions and characteristics of individual persons. Those statements are merely the material for real historical knowledge and not historical knowledge itself."⁴⁵ Discarding the epistemological from giving sense to the *narratio* makes historical meaning once again an exclusive product of narration, the intra-textual once more gaining the upper hand over inquiry, which is reduced to only an auxiliary component.⁴⁶

One of the most decisive attempts to shake off the burden of inquiry is Hans Kellner's *Language and Historical Representation*.⁴⁷ The common ground for Kellner and the two aforementioned authors is that history is not just a means of communication that transmits information on the past, the language of which should be transparent, neutral, auxiliary. It is only in a 'straightforward reading', as Kellner puts it, where history appears as such. But in a *crooked reading*, in a reading 'against the hair' of the historical works, the discourse reveals its linguistic nature and its literary and rhetorical sources.

Yet while inquiry plays only an auxiliary role in the historical discourse, but nevertheless always remains an irreducible element for White and Ankersmit, Kellner perceives it as just a part of the historical rhetoric – and thus subsumes it entirely under linguistic tools. The traits of a historian's text, such as the sem-

43 F. ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic*, pp. 241–242.

44 F. ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic*, pp. 99–100.

45 F. ANKERSMIT, *Narrative Logic*, p. 168.

46 It could be objected here that Nss actually belong to the realm of inquiry, as they obviously correlate with the aforementioned "work of conceptualization" (see note 10). However, this does not apply to the thinking of Ankersmit, for whom assembling statements about real events into Nss is clearly an act of narrative logic. Also, *narratios* cannot and should not be grouped with their purely literary counterparts (stories, fables etc.), even though they are often referred to as *metaphor*. Nonetheless, the fact that they create a logic of their own, independent from that that work at the level of inquiry, and that they are, for their part, responsible for the main cognitive outcome of the historical writing creates a clear distinction and a hierarchy between the phase of research and that of writing.

47 HANS KELLNER, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked*, Madison 1989.

blance of the past's continuity, of a beginning and end to events,⁴⁸ briefly, "the processes of rhetorical judgements, choices of tone, categorizations, decorum, definition of events, selection of textual boundaries" are all mere linguistic choices, "entirely answerable to rules and constraints that have been conventionally studied through literary texts."⁴⁹ In this view, every rhetorical tool employed in historiographical writing is a work of fiction and every figuration only refers to its figurative nature. But if every account put into the form of language is fiction, then everything is fiction. Paul Ricoeur calls this a 'perverted tropology',⁵⁰ because such an approach removes any criteria that could possibly distinguish between different discourses or hermeneutics, either fictional or veridical. In such a perspective, any attempt to forge a specific hermeneutics of history or to delimit historiography as a specific discourse is futile, everything being interchangeable. The only question that remains is why historians keep on struggling with records and sources and why they insist so obstinately on the fact that their texts strive to represent reality of the past. But these questions cannot be answered within Kellner's narrative determinism.

It is hard to imagine where further narrativism could possibly go; with the explanatory strategies of historical discourse strictly assimilated to rhetoric itself, the case of inquiry is resolutely dismissed. However, few authors, all professional historians, tried to integrate inquiry in its full strength *within* narrative without subjecting it to the rules of tropology. In their view, the inquiry and the narration have an equal role in the creation of historical discourse and in the creation of its meaning. I've already mentioned Roger Chartier in the introduction, and here I want to go through another two attempts to reconcile narration and inquiry before I finally approach Ricoeur's work.

The first work in this line of thinking is *Poetics of the New History* by Philippe Carrard.⁵¹ This book addresses the language of the so-called New History, a movement that took place among French historians roughly between the Second World War and the late 1980s and that is associated with the *Annales* re-

48 Kellner is obviously coping with the same issues that haunted White as well as A. C. Danto or Droysen. For Danto, compare note 24. As for Droysen, see commentary from HANS ROBERT JAUSS, *L'usage de la fiction en histoire*, Le débat 54/1989, mars-avril, pp. 89–113.

49 H. KELLNER, *Language and Historical Representation*, pp. 329–330.

50 PAUL RICOEUR, *Philosophies critiques de l'histoire: recherche, explication, écriture*, Philosophical problems today 1/1994, pp. 139–201.

51 In this article, I work with the second, French edition of the book. PHILIPPE CARRARD, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire: Le discours historique en France de Braudel à Chartier*, Lausanne 1998² (1992¹).

vue.⁵² To put it simply, this historical school was renowned in its time for its efforts to get rid of anything that would resemble narration and to avoid all narrative strategies and techniques, attempting thus to achieve a fully scientific writing.⁵³ Hence, the presupposition of the ‘Annalists’ was completely opposite to the narrativist approach. It follows, then, that Carrad’s point of departure is slightly different from that of post-structuralist theorists, because instead of searching for a tropological order of historical discourse (or of defining its overall narrative nature), the author attempts to prove that even a historical genre that proclaims itself completely non-narrative has to resort to narrative strategies.

Carrard’s definition of narration is somewhat reductive. For him, any temporal sequence of succession constitutes a narration, or rather a narrative, or at least its germ: “[A given] text, to be considered a narration, must include at least two units distributed along the temporal axis, though (...) the first of these units can remain implicit.”⁵⁴ This conception is a bit problematic, because such a succession makes a historical story indistinguishable from a mere chronicle or from a set of annals and effaces any difference between a temporal succession and a meaningful story.⁵⁵ In spite of this argument, Carrard’s reading is still useful, as it clearly demonstrates that even the most scientific history (or history that claims to be centred only on the inquiry) still has to resort to literary techniques (besides narration, Carrard also addresses how the ‘new historians’ employ utterances, addressing, and stylistics, and even how charts and tables narrate in their own way).

Using the example of the least narrative, most descriptive works, the author points out how much these accounts rely on narrative strategies. Even the slowest cycles of history are demonstrations of time and change, and they thus narrate, because they connect two different states of past events, one initial and one resulting. But some historical works limit themselves to only giving a description of an era, or to giving an account of a certain state of things. Even there, Carrard argues, a historian implicitly narrates, as every state of things presupposes a state that was before and a state that follows.⁵⁶ Otherwise, there would be no need to give such an account. The reason for a historian to depict a certain state of things

52 P. CARRARD, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire*, pp. 5–11.

53 Compare to P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, pp. 96–111.

54 P. CARRARD, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire*, p. 45.

55 As for the meaningfulness of a story, compare with what Ricoeur has to say about the topic – P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, pp. 31–51, 132–149, 155–161.

56 P. CARRARD, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire*, pp. 53–54.

is, in the first instance, to show its *otherness*, to show how it differs from now and from before. If a historical work, even the most descriptive one, failed to deliver this hidden aspect, it would cease to be a historical work at all.

A similar rule applies for histories of *longue durée*, describing lengthy changes of structures and their interchanges. Because in human language it is impossible to show these processes simultaneously, as they are supposed to have happened, a historian is always forced to describe them as developing in time, as a temporal succession. In this perspective, they always belong to the realm of narration.⁵⁷ In fact, what narrates here is the 'explication' itself, because to describe an era or to recount the grand cycles and structures of the past are operations that belong among the techniques of inquiry. It turns out, then, that there is a narrative germ even within the non-narrative sources of history.

While Carrard's definition of narrative can be objected, his aim to show that historical discourse has to employ both scientific procedures and literary strategies was, I would say, successful. No historical work can entirely rely on tables, non-narrative descriptions or causal explanations, just as no historical work worth its name can do without inquiry.⁵⁸ Carrard's book is a clear illustration of the restitution of inquiry in historical discourse, while attempting to maintain the full force of narrative in history. Nonetheless, the latter seems to serve as a mere operator of the former, as it is not evident whether narration itself can also serve as a kind of an explanatory power, like White's plots. Both constituents of the historical discourse thus seem only juxtaposed here, rather than logically interwoven.

The second example of the reconciliatory approach is Ivan Jablonka's *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine*. The book itself is meant as a methodological pendant of another work of Jablonka's,⁵⁹ a historical study on the life of his grandparents.⁶⁰ As the author admits, when it comes to writing, the obligation to choose between art (or literature) and history has always been perplexing to him. This is why he decided to understand, at the same time, what distinguishes both genres and what makes them alike. As he is far from subordinating one type of writing to another, he seeks qualities they share and how it is possible that, throughout history, one could substitute for the other.

57 P. CARRARD, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire*, p. 65.

58 P. CARRARD, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire*, pp. 208–211.

59 IVAN JABLONKA, *L'Hisotire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus*, Paris 2013.

60 IVAN JABLONKA, *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine. Manifeste pour les sciences sociales*, Paris 2014, p. 18.

Jablonka points out that many times in the past, history in all its variations and shapes (thus, historiography *avant la lettre*) was considered as a literary genre or a rhetorical tool, sometimes completely subjugated to rhetoric or belles-lettres. Likewise, historical, realist, or naturalist novels often replaced or substituted for history. Jablonka finds this interchangeability of literature and history significant. When one genre disappeared or was marginalized, the other took its place to satisfy the thirst for a certain kind of knowledge: the thirst for the truth. And the truth, veracity, imposes its own rules on whichever discourse that tries to tackle it. See the example of the 19th century novel: authors such as Scott, Balzac, Zola, and others undertook serious studies, visited archives, and lived among the people they attempted to portray; in other words, they did almost exactly what we associate today with historical or ethnographical inquiry.⁶¹

The difference, then, is in fact the intention beneath the writing, leading novelists to write in one way and historians to write in another. The latter resort to fictional or literary strategies only to better grasp the real nature of the world. These strategies are, for example, an estrangement, a distance towards the topic, the usage of concepts and generalizations, a struggle for plausibility, etc. The author calls these techniques 'methodical fictions'. As Jablonka puts it: "How should we then distinguish between 'the novelistic fiction' and 'the methodical fictions'? The main difference lies in the way we make use of them, as there are no purely 'literary fictions' or 'socially-scientific fictions', but rather fictions more or less captured by historical reasoning, employed for the search for truth."⁶²

This statement is, in fact, not far from that of Kellner, according to whom all historical procedures are just rhetorical and thus fictive. Jablonka states something very similar, but from the opposite standpoint: for him, fiction has the ability to enrich our perception of the real world, of the actual past, and widen our horizons. It is because history and fictional writing share the power to suggest and summon up the past. The important point for us is this interconnection of literature and history, or rather their mutual folding and overlaying, where both genres become alike while preserving their own identities. Jablonka does not seek to define precisely what fiction or reality is, his aim being only to encourage certain approach towards the writing of history. And we cannot really blame him for this, as his book is called a *manifesto*. But if we are looking for a more rigorous explanation of the relation of narration and inquiry in historical discourse, we must approach the work of Paul Ricoeur.

61 I. JABLONKA, *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine*, pp. 65–83 *et passim*.

62 I. JABLONKA, *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine*, pp. 210–211.

Paul Ricoeur and the ‘True Narrative’

In the last passage of this article, I want to discuss Ricoeur’s conception of narration in history, especially how it was introduced in his *Time and Narration*. Even though the trilogy is almost forty years old and is not the latest contribution to the discussion, I am deeply convinced that his work offers answers to some of the constantly recurring paradoxes and dilemmas, and also that what the trilogy proposes has not yet been fully appreciated.⁶³

The main distinguishing feature of Ricoeur’s approach lies in the fact that from the very beginning, he insists on the irreducibility and irreplaceability of both inquiry and narration within the historical discourse. In his view, critical research and the methodical approach cannot just be subordinated to the rules of narrativity, as was the case for narrativists, nor can historical storytelling be dismissed as a mere decoration of an otherwise transparent scientific account, as it might have been declared among the *Annales* historians. The fact that the discourse on history consists of both elements is precisely what defines it as a historical discourse. However, unlike Jablonka or Carrard (or, in this context, Chartier), Ricoeur, in his defense of the coexistence of both inquiry and narration, also sought for the ontological reasons of this particular constellation.

First of all, Ricoeur claims that history, in its nature, is a particular genre of narrative in general. But in his view, narratives are not just pure rhetorical fiction, but are also able to refer to something (or to denote something). In fact, their reference is *time*. Therefore, history is a narration, because it communicates the experience of time: “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”⁶⁴ The ability to convey temporal experience is

63 My conviction is based on several factors. First of all, Ricoeur is often classed among narrativists, or at least language determinists, which is not quite correct. See for example the aforementioned J.-M. SCHAEFFER, *Langue, récit, vérité et fiction*, pp. 221–236, who classifies Ricoeur as a ‘meliorative fictionalist’, which means that, in a centuries old romantic dream, he tries to enhance the status of history by assimilating the historical discourse to the fictional, seemingly following the logic that fiction can better grasp the reality than historiography can. As I will show, this is as far from reality as it can be, as Ricoeur never subordinated inquiry to fiction. Other authors dismiss Ricoeur’s contribution to the narrativist debate by claiming that his thought is way too focused on the issues of representing the time etc., and hence has little to say on the quarrel between inquiry and narration. See, for example JOUNI-MATTI KUUKKANEN, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, Houndmills 2015.

64 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, p. 52.

common to fiction and history, but what makes historical narration particularly specific is the nature of the time it indicates – historical time. Historical time is, in Ricoeur's conception, a *third time*, which mediates between the 'lived-time', individual and psychological time, on the one hand, and astronomical time, or the time of nature, impersonal time, on the other. This third time allows an individual to inscribe human events onto the enormous background of astronomical time; human time thus becomes measurable and commensurable, because one can trace the events of his or her life on a temporal axis of linear time and is allowed both to orient and to mark him- or herself in the immensity of inhuman time. In these gestures, we can easily recognize the characteristics of the institution of the calendar. A calendar measures time in accordance with the course of the astral bodies and enables humans to divide their time into days, months, and years. This division of time, which is based on the natural and, by definition, inhuman phenomena, merges with the needs of human societies, allowing them to project their activities in time, to hold festivities, rites, and to determine the exact dates of the foundational events upon which every society is based. A calendar is a manifestation of this merger, of this encounter of the natural and the (human) phenomenal time, which creates something new and different from both times: the third time.⁶⁵

The logic of a calendar can also be found in the term of a *trace*.⁶⁶ A trace is the pivot of the historian's work – activities such as research, inquiry, elaboration of methods, exploration of archives, etc. refer to one basic operation: that of following traces. In a trace, cosmic and human time meet in a very specific way. Not only does a trace mediate between the two times, but it also merges causality with significance, and the present with the past.

A trace is always something that remains, something that endures until the present, thus something present (and in the present). The trace is always a vestige of something else; it is a material remnant (a monument, a ruin, bones, inscriptions, documents) that preserves, in itself, the past, conserves it, and communicates it. Nevertheless, to understand a trace, two operations must be undertaken: firstly, we must follow its physical origin and track the causal series of events that have led to the origin of the trace – to the passage that left it there. However, (human) traces have not only causes, but also reasons: they were made with an intention (or unintentionally, but as the result of a human action) and, at the time of their emergence, they were surrounded by a context or a set of cultural

65 PAUL RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, vol. 3, Chicago 1988, p. 99.

66 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, vol. 3, pp. 105–109; 181–184.

values in which they happened (and to which they testify). “The trace belongs to two types of logic: it is both an effect which refers to its cause and a sign referring to a meaning. [...] It follows that the trace interweaves two modes of thinking. As a mark, it relates to the notion of date, whilst as an immaterial sign, it refers to the absent world of which it is the vestige, the remainder.”⁶⁷

The temporal structure of the third time, interweaving both natural and human time, is thus not only a distinctive characteristic of historical work, but it also has grave epistemological consequences. Its binary nature translates into a calendar or a trace, which invites it to be, for its own part, causally explained as well as understood as a sign. And while the tool of explanation is inquiry, we understand through narration – because what is to be understood is the human experience of the time past, and the narrative is the medium of understanding human actions. *The double nature of historical discourse – the fact that it comprises both inquiry and narration – thus finds its cause in the temporal source of history, in the structure of the historical third time.*

After this digression, we can finally approach historical narration itself. According to Ricoeur, the double nature of history is manifested in the triad of quasi-plot, quasi-character, and quasi-event.⁶⁸ These terms refer to their origins in the realm of narration (see their names: plot, character, event) and point to the fact that history is the telling of stories – even the most anti-narrative history, such as the French structuralist one. Thanks to the plot, we are able to observe how intentions, conditions, causes, chances, motivations, and consequences intertwine and create a significant continuity. The term of character allows us to ask the question of, ‘To whom did all of this happen?’, and the event refers to the ‘what’ of the story, to the subject or main topic of the historical narration; in other words, to what happened or what changes arose (e.g., the decline of the Mediterranean, the institution of certain religious practices, etc.).

But as history is not only a narration, but also an inquiry (because, otherwise, it could handle neither the causal nature of traces nor communicate the time of the nature), the prefix ‘quasi-’ had to be added to all three terms. ‘Quasi’ indicates that we are not operating with just a narration; historical narrative operates differently from fictional narrative. Historical (quasi-)plot contains not only the development of a story, but also its explanation; historical (quasi-)character can be enlarged to the size of social groups, entire nations, or even civilizations; and

67 PAUL RICOEUR, *L'histoire commune des hommes. La question du sens de l'histoire*, Cahiers du Centre Protestant de l'Ouest 49–50/1983 [cyclostyled handout], p. 11.

68 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, pp. 175–225.

a historical (quasi-)event can be as vast as an economic cycle or the life and death of a culture. History quasi-narrates, which means that it not only tells stories, but also explains them. And to be able to explain something, we have to undertake an inquiry.

For Ricoeur, thus, 'to narrate' is equal to 'to inquire', one implying another, both developing together, research being a condition of historical storytelling and narration enabling inquiry to acquire its form and comprehensibility.⁶⁹ With inquiry being part of narration and vice versa,⁷⁰ we can conceive of formal argument (in White's terms) as a poetic act, but without subordinating historical discourse entirely to the logic of tropology. In the same vein, the literary dimension of history can be understood as its methodological part, as a kind of inquiry. In such a perspective, a historian's style can be criticized from epistemological positions (for example as obsolete or as based on out-dated conceptions of time, of progress, of nations, of eternal clashes, etc.) and his methodology can also be seen as a poetic instrument (grand structures of *longue durée* also offering a vision of the world, positivist enumerations representing an ironic standpoint, and the like).

The terms discussed are in fact parts of a broader system of 'the circle of mimesis' which aims to prove how historical narration is deeply integrated in its mimetic sources (or, in the human actions and their records, the traces), and also how the ultimate goal of historical writing is to make sense of the past, to offer its figuration. This sense can be, again, understood within the temporal categories of 'horizon of expectation' and 'space of experience', which Ricoeur borrows from Reinhart Koselleck.⁷¹ The role of quasi-narration is thus to mediate between the two, the temporal and the mimetic sources of history (the level of prefiguration, the mimesis₁) and its refiguration (mimesis₃), or the reconstruction of the past in the minds of readers. Hence, historiography in Ricoeur's conception not only interweaves narration with inquiry, but is also brought beyond the boundaries of

69 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, vol. 3, pp. 184–192.

70 In one of his articles preceding the publication of *Time and Narration* P. RICOEUR, *Récit fictif – récit historique*, pp. 251–271, suggests that inquiry and all of the methodological innovation that history has invented since its emergence are also innovations of historiographical narration. Research, the use of concepts and terms, ideological critiques, etc., can be thus understood as kinds of 'literary strategies', or rather as strategies of historical storytelling, which allow us to explain more and to understand better, and thus to grasp reality more effectively. This view is not far from what Hayden White calls for in his 'Burden of History.'

71 P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narration*, vol. 3, pp. 208–216; REINHART KOSELLECK, *Future Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York 2004² (1979¹)

text and becomes an extra-textual instrument that can even ignite ethical decisions and political actions on the part of its recipients. Thus, inquiry, instead of being left at the gates of the edifice of historical discourse, not only participates in creating the overall sense and meaning of historiographical works, but also develops our world-views and forms our identities.

Conclusion

Although the social or ethical effects of history could be discussed at length,⁷² my goal here was only to demonstrate what different kinds of relationship, according to various authors, both narration and inquiry can maintain within the historical discourse. In Hayden White's conception, inquiry is never allowed to play more than just an auxiliary role. For him, historical records (and the methodological apparatus, critical reasoning, and all that accompany them) only remain at the level of the chronicle, reserving the making of historical understanding to the tropological tetradic grid. In White's writings, it must be noted, inquiry oscillates between relative autonomy and subordination to the tropological logic, which often not only structures the outcome of historians' texts, but also prefigures our perception of historical records. As I hope to have proven, White's own use of his interpretive key somewhat collides with his more radically narrativist stances, as in *Metahistory* it is often the extra-textual, and not the governing tropes, that determines the choice of particular 'modes of understanding'.

For Frank Ankersmit, then, it is again the *narratio* that constitutes the overall sense, or as he puts it, the knowledge or the interpretation of the past, with inquiry reduced only to prove what statements on the real world are false or true. Hans Kellner, for his part, discarded inquiry entirely by placing it among the tools of rhetoric, thus claiming the inevitably fictitious nature of the historian's undertaking.

Philippe Carrard and Ivan Jablonka, for their parts, endeavor to maintain a balanced relationship between the two, showing that even inquiry plays an irreplaceable role in making sense of the past, as it reaches dimensions and layers that narration cannot.

72 PAUL RICOEUR, *L'idéologie et l'utopie: deux expressions de l'imaginaire social*, Autres temps. Les cahiers du christianisme social 2/1984, pp. 53–64; IDEM, *L'identité narrative*, Esprit 1988, juillet–août, pp. 295–304.

However, it is Paul Ricoeur, in my opinion, who proves that both inquiry and narration can exist within historical text *in concert*, and what is more, that historical text reaches only as far as these two remain entangled. With narration conceived as a part of inquiry and with methodology understood as a kind of narration, historians could once more pay attention to the narrative without fear that they would sink into pure rhetoric, into mere fictionality. This is what Ivan Jablonka calls for. In fact, as inquiry participates even in creating our world-views or historical identities, it can be said that it can fulfil exactly the same role that was, in the eyes of the narrativists, reserved only for narration. If post-structuralists then accused historians of ignoring the narrative level of their writing, thus concealing the inevitable ideological nature of every historical account, I would like to take the opportunity to warn narrativists' successors away from downplaying the position of inquiry within the historical discourse, and thus concealing (ironically) the poetic, aesthetic and ethical role it actually plays.

The main advantage of the Ricoeurian approach is that it makes it possible not only to identify a historian's modes of emplotments or to assess the inevitably rhetorical character of every account expressed in language (as is the case for White or Ankersmit), but also to understand explanatory methods – the inquiry – as poetic acts, without resorting to the scepticism of language determinism – the nemesis of the common historian, advocated by Hans Kellner.

The ongoing historical debates mentioned in the introduction and the process of coping with the scope of historical research and with the alleged impossibility of making history in postmodern conditions, are in fact, in a way, attempts to understand the narrative limits of historical inquiry itself. A revived narrativism that takes into account inquiry as a vital and equal part of narration, can lend these discussions some useful vocabulary.