

**The Archaeology of Historical and Political Thinking:  
A Hypercritical Theory of Modern Society and Knowledge**

*Tell your children not to hear my words  
What they mean, what they say.*

Glenn Danzig

*The invention of theories depends on our talents and other fortuitous  
circumstances, such as a satisfactory sex life.*

Paul K. Feyerabend

*Ideally, you show you can do it better than the conventional way.*

Hayden White

*We can regret together with R. Chartier 'the failed meeting' between Hayden  
White, Paul Veyne, and Michel Foucault, his contemporaries from the '70.  
The idea of profound structure of imagination has an indisputable fecundity  
in the link which it establishes between creativity and codification.*

Paul Ricoeur

*The fascination of a theory consists not in little measure in the fact that it is  
contestable.*

Nietzsche

*To historians and theorists*

*Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit, Alun Munslow, Allan Megill*

**Abbreviations**

AHR = *American Historical Review*

CI = *Critical Inquiry*

HT = *History and Theory*

JCH = *Journal of Contemporary History*

JHI = *Journal of the History of Ideas*

JMH = *Journal of Modern History*

JP = *Journal of Philosophy*

NLH = *New Literary History*

RH = *Rethinking History: A Journal of Theory and Practice*

**Introduction:****Historical Knowledge, Humanist Writing, Political Thinking: Content, Autonomy, Forms**

In this work I am presenting the idea of structure of the modern historical knowledge and in the same time a hypercritical theory of modern society and knowledge. This structure of modern historical knowledge formed around five important disciplines such as Hermeneutics, Modern Linguistics, Political History, Semiotics and Psychoanalysis. Of course that these five modern disciplines have as guide the Western theory of progress with his motors for social-political life: Utilitarianism and Pragmatism.

Unlike written history and historical knowledge which are very transitive and changeable domains, Linguistics, Hermeneutics, and Semiotics have intransitive functions for the idea of history. They are much more formalized and applied to historical knowledge due to the Modern Formal Logic. Linguistics, Hermeneutics, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis are inter-posing in the idea of historical knowledge for inventing new forms of political thinking and new forms of intellectual expression.

Beliefs and ideas have a secondary place in humanist knowledge in relationship with the emergence of historical facts. The historical facts which are very rare in the modern world change a reality and give birth to new ideas and new forms of expression. It is a wrong perception to see in every aspect of the past historical facts and events. These can only have place from a time to time, and only when people are forced to change the social and political conditions of a certain society.

This historical knowledge is complementary with the intellectual desire of “waking up from the dogmatic sleep”<sup>1</sup>, especially because “a truthful rationalist does not want to impose a belief”<sup>2</sup>. These dominant beliefs taken as absolute or ultimate truths are only fabrications of a social-political system, and these beliefs really “govern”<sup>3</sup> under their lucrative aspect of convincing and manipulating people’s mind.

Historical knowledge is invented at the interference of three essential elements or tropes (history, politics, and language) which are indistinctive at the level of practical life, but can be observed in texts. The figurative feature of every text can dissociate what is historical, what is political, and what is linguistically in a whole mindful construction (book, narrative, essay, article, film, painting etc.). These constructions became representations for themselves distanced from authors, and this autonomy of creation of X, Y Z work is somehow used by politicians and intellectuals in their social-political agendas.

Disciplinary forms of thinking and behaving and the need of security of every political and national state function thanks to this autonomy of text or work of art. So arts are conditions for

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<sup>1</sup> K. R. Popper, *In Search for a Better World*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1998, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> R. Koselleck, *Critics and Crisis: A Contribution to the Pathogenesis of Bourgeoisie World*, Cluj, TACT, 2013, p. 206.

political agendas not only decorative forms of seeing the things. Writing as art and original creation invents Reality while contemporary virtual culture 'washes' and negative uses these structural and coherent inventions. Much more authentic art and writings in daily life is equivalent to better politics and social conditions for mankind.

I consider these three tropes (history, linguistics and politics) as essential in any development of historical knowledge as we know it in the modern Western world. This knowledge belongs to figurative and written images. The actual virtual images (filmed and televised images) which invaded our life can not produce a future Reality at the level of authentic content. These images only repeat and multiplies the semiotic layers of an authentic image appeared from a particular original thinking.

Historical knowledge can be understood as an autonomous domain of thinking and being which has little to do with 'proper history' and in the same time little to do with 'abstract linguistics'. In other words, historical knowledge is not derived from history as well as it is not interfered with linguistic strategies of categorising and understanding the real things of mankind. Historical knowledge is a particular way of thinking through 'what the texts say' in their very different nuances and through 'what people do' in their much nuanced actions and facts. In this sense, historical knowledge is a way of approaching things and words using historical data, linguistic procedures, political actions and facts.

In my understanding of seeing history joined to philosophy and to linguistic theories, trans-textuality presupposes a creative way of analyzing what is historical, political and linguistically from the Outside and from Above. This is a particular mode of interrelating Objectivity (Outside) to Subjectivity (Above). Of course, this point of view is different from what literary theorists understood by trans-textuality. For hermeneutists, text is regarded as a system of interpretations. For specialists in Semiotics, text is seen as a structure of signs and messages. For historians interested in actions and facts, text does not exist in the utterances of literary historians and theorists. For these historians text is an anti-text which means that historical text can not be valuable for generations at the level of arguments, ideas, meanings and whole structure.

The development of written and printed culture in Modern Europe imposed the idea of Logic as a Universal Domain of setting rules and understandings for mankind. The principles of Logic exist because we have this written heritage, and every text can be approached by Logical Tools. But life is not text. Text is not life. This fundamental difference between what is figural and what is dynamic, action and living state beyond words split history from Logic. This Modern Logic shaped the idea of history, ordering facts and events by a Christian chronology, understanding Time due to a universal system of measurement perfected by Western science. Only in this Western printed and historical culture, seriously affected by nowadays media, could be developed and

conserved the universal principles of Logic. This exclusivity of principles of Logic can not see them as something which gives birth to high creativity and originality. These principles are formal and formalizing, and “the exclusivity of the laws of Logic is derived from this unilateral of function, and, in the last instance, from restricting character of self-conservation”<sup>4</sup>. Modern Logic was hijacked from a Progress of Mankind to a totalitarian route of creating a hermetic political system where *the truth* and *the established truth* are no longer together. These categories (different versions of truth) are much separated and very isolated each other.

Logic also divided things and people in categories such as “truth” and “false”, “white” and “black” “good” and “evil”, “non-contradiction” and “contradiction”. These categories which are rather moral than mental, which are rather axiological than thoughtful can not provide creativity and originality in thinking. What they really formed is a social-political universal system of exclusion, somehow described and criticized by Michel Foucault in the '70. Modern Logic was and it is used by totalitarian political systems for attacking and discrediting an inconvenient person, an opponent of the regime! So I do not believe the idea that Logic is only an objective and formal system which identifies errors and incoherencies in things and daily situations. Why universities and centres of advanced research are politicized and used in political platforms?

Totalitarianism *official knowledge-political power* manifest in some of Raymond Aron's considerations about the problematical report between a political state and a humanist knowledge: “Every totalitarian state puts some facts into an illegal space because these do not fit in official scheme. Every totalitarian state pushes till absurd the solidarity between fact and interpretation.”<sup>5</sup> This solidarity between what a historian knows and what a historian offers as valid interpretation and truthful expression is always to investigate by historical epistemologists.

Until nowadays this historical knowledge as concept and content is not something clear and without contradictory interpretations. Different meanings became from different sub-disciplines of history have made by this concept something very incoherent and evasive at the level of understanding. What is anyway historical knowledge? Historical knowledge became an ambiguous concept which is oddly placed in a category of analytic philosophy of history or hermeneutically approached as bunch of interpretations. Would be essential and utile to understood historical knowledge not like an auxiliary domain of history, not like a “product” of theories of history, not like an hyper-abstract “elaboration” of analytical philosophy of history from the '50 and '60 of the last century.

Historical knowledge is an autonomous domain especially when it deals with general history, Linguistics, Hermeneutics, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis. This domain, which I have tried

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<sup>4</sup> M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Iasi, Polirom, 2012, pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> R. Aron, Preface to Max Weber, *Man of Science and Political Man*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2011, p. 20.

to gave an identity in this book, constructs and deconstructs the learning of these five modern disciplines, maybe too modern for understanding an eclectic and original discourse. This historical knowledge uses historical data, but in the same time it analyzes the arguments depicted from the internal structure of these five important disciplines. As mode of viewing and thinking historical knowledge is something different than any analytical domain.

Historical knowledge is oriented on how some ideas and in which conditions some political and historical facts are combined in new forms of thinking which becomes historical and have political impact. This new domain and its new identity targets the way in which words and politics transform the public mind, control this collective memory for gaining more power among the so-called... subjects. We are not subjects placed into an abstract and elitist discourse. We are individuals with needs, subjectivities, expectations, and hopes. We want to see personal humanity, not impersonal inhumanity and arbitrary-objective politics.

History and historical knowledge are not the same. History is what historians and others think and write about subjects of the past. Historical knowledge is only in those points which emerge for a new theory and a new political Reality. This is not a domain of knowing without political weight. We have historical knowledge only and only if diverse and different important theories from the past and present emerge into a new Reality which sensitive a new universal order. This knowledge imposes new social-political practices, offers solutions, problemize a conformist and restrictive order from an ideological past-present, depoliticizes some narrow-minded practices and ideas. This historical knowledge is itself not only a reflexive thinking, but an original way of leading the things.

At the origins the idea of thinking is in the human desire of understanding the order of things. This is an Ancient Greek and Naturalist point of view. But also this idea of thinking and expressing knowledge is in the human motivation of leading the business of mankind. It is in the human desire of exercising power for greater purposes of Humanity. Any healthy and efficient thinking is not a purpose in itself, but it subsumes to social and political scope. Freedom of thinking is only an ideal not a reality, and political powers always try to control how people think, why they think in certain way, how could be controlled these general and particular thoughts.

For the identity of historical knowledge time is a certain function of space in a continuous movement. So time is something visualised and virtualized. It is also a function between souls and politics. And these souls and politics have in common the idea of communicating through words. In Modernity words and the rules of using them are not innocent. These rules are forms of expressing politics. Linguistics is politics in a very abstract level. Certainly, this kind of politics is not for masses.

Historical knowledge has in view the immense terrain of nuances of what is true and false without emphasizing what is true or false. It is a deconstructive and reconstructive discipline beyond what is axiological modern, and beyond good and evil. This domain is focused on unreason and in the same time in what is problematic in rationalist thinking. This historical knowledge combines different techniques from sciences, arts, different learning from humanities into an original and fruitful thinking.

History is still alive in this informational society due to its unclassified and indestructible particular way of thinking. History is a vanity still alive. We can speak about autonomy of thinking using history and philosophy, emancipating the people through a critical mode of perceiving the things and the relationships from society. At the level of writing history and at the level of proposing a new theory of history we can not speak about autonomy. Politics still want to control historical productions and it still want to propose what is good history. From historical knowledge point of view we can not speak about “good” or “bad” history. We are interested in targeting some ideas and political practices for achieving personal power in relationship with political institutions/political personalities. History ‘must’ be in power and for power in private and public life.

Unlike history which is not autonomous at the level of writing and function for society, historical knowledge is independent by politics, by a modern way of understanding and making politics. This historical knowledge is not dependent by huge production of written history and it is not linked by dominant theories of society. Historical knowledge is a transversal and trans-disciplinary mode of approaching society, politics, arts, cultures. This domain exists only if we have original and important theories which deal with politics and society. It recomposes the series of identities and lost differences and pluralizes them in other way of knowing and thinking. Historical knowledge is linked by practicality, not in the old idea of *exemplar opera*.

Historical knowledge is intersecting different historiographies and theories, extracting and recomposing from them similarities and differences for new plural ways of thinking. The world of historical knowledge is structurally composed by integral systems of knowing from different places and authors. This new knowledge of the same old concept is not built “on the backs of its subjects”<sup>6</sup>, as de Certeau emphasized referring to the uses of people by humanities. As humanists we are not interested of making from people from the past or present ‘subjects’, but to force politics to change its ways of acting on people’s life. These ways are to investigate in a problematic mode. Freedom and power become *content-problems of historical knowledge*. These concepts are not anymore privileges of political establishments and intellocracy.

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<sup>6</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1988, Volume 1, p. 140.

If in the world of Western modern realism(s) the tropes *historical*, *political* and *linguistically* are homogenous and not so visible divided, in writings we can see these tropes as different points of view, composing discourses and political practices. These could be dissociated and analyzed for depoliticizing and de-dogmatizing that official knowledge which until yesterday regarded itself as “sovereign” on Human Mind and Spirit, as a tool for governing people. A culture of criticism in an intelligent mode is very important for the domain in debate: *historical knowledge*.

Historical knowledge has a hard task, that of dispersing the anarchy of meanings and significations which do not fit in the universal chronological historical order. The process of metaphorization could take in account the real features of historical personalities and things. In historical writings we can not create metaphors which are not proper to features of real people. We can not say: “Hitler was a lamb.” This “metaphor” does not fit with Reality. Metaphor is life. Metaphor is effective truthful power, not only symbolic power of imaginary literature. Metaphor has a different understanding for historical writings as function and content.

What is political, what is linguistically, and what is historical in the modern societies for us are “tropes” which could be deconstructed for establishing *their value* and cultural functions for tomorrow’s creative thinking. These tropes (History, Linguistics, Politics) could be treated as well as Hayden White had treated European historiography and philosophy. If you are aware by these figurative tropes and if you have the skills for identifying in very different and disparate materials of historical knowledge you can create other original thinking and new social and political functionalities.

These identifying elements are reported not to human subjectivities and affectivities, but to social and political conditions and conditionals. Because scientific experiments are much more metaphorical than literary writings, we can see a Man or a Group (Society, Political Party, or other Institution etc.) caught in *these conditions and political conditionals*. In other words, we are not properly interested in *how a subject of History lived in the past*, but *how these conditions and conditionals determined him to live and to take actions*. Human subjectivities are the repressed and irruptive sides of the some political conditions and conditionals. Modern science and literature are also tropes of how our societies are in the present. Their social impact and their progress could be valued and measured.

In another way looking true and through historical knowledge we can ask if it is possible an articulate knowledge beyond Subjects. Does knowledge exist beyond Subjects? If we are tempting to consider the series of Western-Structuralism we could answer yes. We can argue that knowledge could exist beyond subjects and human dramatic and tragic conditions. But this is not a knowledge which can have a sense for human and humanity. In this abstract and impersonal knowledge which has little to do with humanity, our souls would be in bad health. Any knowledge could be founded

as knowledge only by human and mental representations of thoughts. These representations which are in the same time subjective and analytical are the “products” of a double-bind: the mentality of the author and the society. These political and historical representations are not only the products of the author(s), but also they are the products of external conditions, of a particular reality of the past and present time.

“Linguistic elements” or more proper discursive elements became “wreckages of politics” in the public space of virtualised and isolated humanity. Definitely these elements compose politics and arbitrary political conditions! If we are looking in this mode then we will understand why historical discourses are the main vehicle for colonizing human power, for enslaving people’s mind by a subtle-intellectual control of books and the general public opinion around the world. If we view discursive elements as mainstreams of Global and Local Politics we will understand why historical phenomena such as the Holocaust, *Historikerstreit* or the Romanian Revolution of 1989 are politically instrumentalized for different and contradictory interests. We regard this globalised humanity as the fishes in the seas, and the fisherman, interested in capturing *people’s minds*, is the media and political establishments. For this dialectical global situation the only solution is sharpening your own cultural and social criticism, understanding what is false and subsidiary and what is true and essential in a non-conventional mode, but necessary to be an original and creative view for humanity and humanities.

What I am proposing in this book is a rethinking of the European thought(s) from the Renaissance to nowadays in a highly-extensive synthesis. I had transversally approached some Western ideas which made career and organized the businesses of mankind. I propose a different archaeological relationship between past and present from the West than those of Foucault and Hayden White. You can understand why historical knowledge is power not only disparate elements of structuring power. I rewrote a different way for a classical theme of European thinking (*the thinking of thinking*) which is only an open space for other thoughts. These eight chapters are like a working-place in which could be added new interpretations and new thoughts.

The unity of a novel and the unity of a historical book are only cultural illusions for creativity. They do not exist in Reality. We can do things almost “perfect” but we can not achieve a perfect unity of historical writing. This unity is a fictional one. It belongs to European classicism when writers and thinkers were haunted by writing a perfect book as composition, style, structure, metaphors etc. I wrote in a problematical-cultural way, and this personal way could be passed by other authors around the world. I do not think that what I wrote here will last for decades. This is an unsaid condition for any writing – to be passed by future writings.

Concerning my using of “archaeology” and “archaeologization” I own some explanations. From the origins point of view the concept “archaeology” became from Ancient Greek language

and has different meanings. First sense of this concept refers to that of making “a science of origins”. The second meaning of “archaeology” designates the idea of self-promise, of an order to do, or a commandment. I kept inside the narrative structure of my book the same meanings. I am looking forward to a discipline of origins and their different meanings, but in the same time I introduce my own personal thoughts on famous concepts, ideas and personalities. It’s about thinking with history and humanities for the present order, and the present order is shaped by political conditions and conditionals.

By “archaeologization” I mean to establish a concrete relationship between the world of historical and political facts and the world of ideas, concepts, and values in an understandable manner of thinking and writing. I am not an abstract thinker and I am not interested in geometrical forms of thinking with humanities. The concept of “archaeologization” with the meaning that I conferred in this book is *a dangerous one*. Why? Because this term opens new paths for humanities and in the same time put in question some hegemonic concepts and ideas of the Western mind. Could they forever do the same shapes of living and thinking? Could they forever do the same inequalities and social conflicts? These are important questions for a historian and humanist. There is no place for comfortable thinkers.

The idea of a “closed system” or a “round masterpiece” invented and promoted by Western thinkers of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries imposed for mankind an exhausting and disharmonic way of being in Knowledge and Politics, of making knowledge and politics. I do not think that their *forma mentis* is the best that we can have. In this epistemological process is a place for new investigations, for new concepts, for new ideas which can be applied on a large scale in humanities. The Enlightenment consolidated this exhausting way of thinking having as results the birth of Hermeneutics, of Positivism, of Progressivism and Utilitarianism, of German phenomenology. This original theory of historical knowledge investigates the consequences of the dominant concepts and ideas which organized the modern world as we know it, and gave credit to laic religions such as Western Theory of Progress, Scientism, Hermeneutics, Positivism, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis. And if we carefully look at these consequences we can see that all important European and global conflicts from 1850 to 1945 have their intellectual and epistemological origins in these intellectual religions.

I do not think that what German, English, French, Italian, Austrian thinkers did and what politicians of these countries did are something truly separated and without consequences for mankind. Could be seen that what Adam Smith had thought and setting the mankind like a global machine for profit is something accidental, but for us is hardly to accept that there were no epistemological relationships between thinkers and politicians from these countries and many others. These global conflicts (Modern Revolutions, World War One and Two) have obscure and

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unsaid philosophical origins. They are not from the skies. The flavour of a theory is that of being contested as to paraphrase Nietzsche. But you can not contest the evidence of History, the really fact that these conflicts existed and exists as a philosophical background of modern Western societies.

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