Keynote

Marko Demantowsky
What is Public History

How we communicate is not self-evident. Neither at a meeting of colleagues from different language backgrounds, whatever their nature, because social milieus, regions, religions, clans, and tribal communities also form different linguistic codes and rules, even if they speak "the same language" toward the outside world. This lack of self-evidence applies even more to exchanges between the representatives of national language cultures. This may strike the English-speaking reader as a mere abstract triviality. And yet this situation presents a significant challenge in other settings, for instance, in the multilingual practicing of public history at the editorial office of *Public History Weekly* (ever since its establishment in 2013) or, as is becoming increasingly common, at conferences of the *International Federation for Public History*. This communicative challenge applies in particular to *termini technici* and the content-related metadata to be generated from them.[1] This essay, initially written which in German, endeavors to anticipate (and cater to) the horizon of the English-speaking community already in its footnotes–as far as possible for the author. Nevertheless, its English version, a translation, will necessarily differ from the original.

   Already everyday experience suggests that it is of little help to indicate whatever might *also* be covered by this or that term in such trans-lations, as long as we lack specific rules to explain particular names or designations. Our desired fellow player or teammate does not understand the game in this way. To be perfectly honest, many of our concepts actually function according to such convention-based deixis and association. Even so, they only work as long as we encounter as little diversity as possible, i.e., as long as we are dealing with like-minded people or ones who have been socialized the same way. Thus, it is quite fortunate when Wittgenstein (1953) likens this problem to a party (or "going on holiday," in Anscombe's translation):

> This is connected with the conception of naming as, so to speak, an occult process. Naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object. – And you really get such a queer connexion when the philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by

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staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*.[2]

"Public history," a research and practice-oriented discipline committed to internationalization for good reasons,[3] will therefore do well to intensify its conceptual work, to open up a game whose internal rules are explicit and whose hidden inclusiveness does not prevent other potential players from participation. Thus, what we need is not a more or less and unintended closed society or private club, but an open, and undoubtably pluralistic discipline. Paradoxically, we can achieve this goal by agreeing on the most important rules beforehand. For it is only once we have done so that we may keep trying to celebrate our academic "parties" inclusively and with the prospect of success. This paper seeks to make a small contribution to accomplishing this objective. It does so by offering a substantial clarification of what exactly public history is. This involves considering the rule(s) according to which we decide what public history is, and what it is not.

Since the much-invoked cultural turn in the late 1980s, the historical sciences have also theorized the field of "public history," namely, the public and societal dealings with history. These had previously been studied primarily by social psychology and classical studies, but also, since the 1960s, by German-speaking history didactics,[4] for reasons of their own and with little interdisciplinary contact.

Among European historians, only some few outstanding academic representatives (my list is purely exemplary) – Johann Gustav Droysen (1868),[5] Johann

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2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 19.

3 Serge Noiret, "L'internationalisation de'l Histoire Publique / Internationalizing Public History / Internationalisierung der Public History," *Public History Weekly* 2 (2014) 34, DOI: dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2014-2647; Thomas Cauvin, "Traverser les frontières: une histoire publique internationale / Crossing Barriers: an International Public History / Grenzen überschreiten: eine Internationale Public History," *Public History Weekly* 5 (2017) 13, DOI: dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2017–9018.

4 In the Federal Republic of Germany, the first concept seems to have presented by Rolf Schörken in his "Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtsbewußtsein," *GWU* 23 (1972), 81–89. In the German Democratic Republic, this work began 10 years earlier and was soon conceptualized empirically. The results, however, were published only to a limited extent. Among others, see Marko Demantowsky, "Der Beginn demoskopischer Geschichtsbewusstseins-Forschung in Deutschland: Die Forschungsgruppe 'Sozialistisches Geschichtsbewusstsein' am Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik* 4 (2005), 146–75.

5 Johann Gustav Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik* (Leipzig: Veit, 1868); translated into English by Elisha B. Andrews as *Outlines of the Principles of History* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1897).

Huizinga (1950 [1929]),[6] or Alfred Heuss (1959)[7] – recognized the importance of a second-order history or of a histories of histories early on. Their work, however, long remained largely unnoticed. Nietzsche's early impetus, formulated outside the guild of historians (1873), could long be ignored as a better piece of feuilleton.[8] The long early history of public history thinking in the English-speaking academic world has recently been described by Thomas Cauvin.[9]

These days, once they have gained a certain degree of public acceptance, i.e., have become a *turn* in their own right,[10] scientific turns generate offensively-minded lines of financial support from state and private donors. Correspondingly, the broad-based entry of the historical sciences into the cultural turn, and thus also into public self-reflection on their own practice and societal impact since the late 1980s, was associated with a large number of applications for third-party funding and with the establishment of young researchers' programs. These developments almost inevitably led to competitors clearly dissociating themselves from each other in this new third-party funding and employment market and consequently to a large number of competing concepts. This has not always been helpful for the development of mutually interconnectable broad empirical research on this topic. It is time to once again actively search for possible interconnections and to multiply these.

Preliminaries

In 2015, the readers of *Public History Weekly* were asked whether the term "Public History" might not be suitable to end the meanwhile older and, in my opinion, increasingly fruitless dispute in German-speaking scholarship over the correct terminology for public dealings with history, as well as for its consumption and

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6 Johan Huizinga, "Over een definitie van het begrip geschiedenis," *Verzamelde werken. Deel 7* (Haarlem: Willink & Zoon, 1950), 95–103. German Translation by Werner Kaegi: "Über eine Definition des Begriffs der Geschichte," In *Wege der Kulturgeschichte* (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1930), 78–88.

7 Alfred Heuss, *Verlust der Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben," In *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Walther Linden and Wolfgang Deninger (Kettwig: Phaidon, 1990), 219–20; English translation: *Untimely meditations*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

9 Thomas Cauvin, "The Rise of Public History: An International Perspective," *Historia Critica* 68 (2018), 3-26, esp. 5–7.

10 Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 2018); English version: *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016).

production.[11] At the same time, that article gave English-speaking readers a brief insight into the German debate and sought to enhance mutual understanding between German- and English-speaking scholars and practitioners. In brief, the argument went something like this:

1. The competing terms are so-called umbrella concepts (Jordanova, Grever).[12] Umbrella concepts are characterized by the fact that behind a specific word (denomination) extends a broad and permeable range of terms (range of definition); the latter is so flexible and receptive because it is enabled by weak terminological intensity (inclusion attributes), recognizable as metaphorical formulations. Language gives a party (Wittgenstein). One recognizes that many historical theories are basically umbrella concepts that create a heuristic apparent calming, but they are beyond that suitable for assembling schools behind them as academic loyalty groups.

2. More or less harmful umbrella concepts exist for debate: the less detrimental ones do not serve the establishment of academic schools, but liquefy them instead; besides, they offer no pseudo-answers, but make new questions possible. It is therefore not about an either-or, as the concepts of history culture (*Geschichtskultur*) and culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*) are also negotiable; it is rather about abolishing fruitless scholasticism in favor of interdisciplinary, integrated, and unbridled ("free") research and development on history in the public sphere.

3. The umbrella concept "public history" meets these alternative demands to a certain extent, because it enables both German-speaking historians and cultural scientists as well as history didacticians to pursue joint projects with their colleagues worldwide. Not only does this promote linkages within a multilingual discussion, but it also means that the genuinely didactic aspect of the German tradition might help to enrich the international discussion.

My 2015 paper was intended to pacify, to build bridges, just as I had attempted as early as 2005 (in the same vein, yet often misunderstood since) to limit the false claims to supremacy by those representing the concepts of history culture (*Geschichtskultur*) and culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*). My purpose,

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11 Marko Demantowsky. "Public History – Sublation of a German Debate? / 'Public History' – Aufhebung einer deutschsprachigen Debatte?" *Public History Weekly* 3, 2 (2015), DOI: dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2015-3292.

12 Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London and New York: Hodder Education, 2000), 126–149; Maria Grever, "Fear of Plurality: Historical Culture and Historiographical Canonization in Western Europe," In *Gendering Historiography: Beyond National Canons* ed. by Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus Verlage, 2009), 45–62.

then and now, was differentiation, and thus clarification, rather than discord.[13] As my 2005 and 2015 papers presented the main arguments against the previous versions of the respective concepts, they need not be repeated here in detail. They were also motivated by academic policy, which intended to counter the (generally unspoken) disciplinary dimension of the existing divergent cultures of discussion. This paper, the third one in a series of reflections, seeks to develop an in-depth concept of public history, one that claims to increase its operationalizable explanatory power and its empirical correlation, without, however, jeopardizing the indisputable advantages of its open umbrella character in terms of scientific policy.

Context

However, some more contextualization is first needed. Conceptual offerings abound, alone on the German "menu." They include, by way of a quick reminder, two rather specific and analytical concepts: Norbert Frei's politics of the past (*Vergangenheitspolitik*) and Edgar Wolfrum's politics of history (*Geschichtspolitik*).[14] Both concepts have historically clearly delimited definitions. Thus, while they are actually not typical umbrella concepts, their specific determination is not evident in their denomination. This explains their frequent recurrence in many publications over the past years, even far beyond their original scope of definition. In fact, both concepts have been overgeneralized time and again.

Beyond that, another, colorful spectrum of terms exists. Employed in non-scientific dealings with history, their general meaning and explanatory power, encompassing all phenomena of modern history, have been claimed from the very beginning. One example is Pierre Nora's concept of places of remembrance (lieux de mémoire), which was adapted by Etienne François, Hagen Schulze, Georg Kreis, and others for the German-speaking debate.[15] Another case is Maurice Halbwachs's

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13 Marko Demantowsky, "Geschichtskultur und Erinnerungskultur: Zwei Konzeptionen des einen Gegenstandes," In *Geschichte, Politik und ihre Didaktik* 33 (2005), 11–20.
14 Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: Beck, 1996); Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948 – 1990* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999).
15 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992; Bibliothèque illustrée des histoires); Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds., *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols (Munich: Beck, 2001); Georg Kreis, *Schweizer Erinnerungsorte: Aus dem Speicher der Swissness* (Zurich: Verlag NZZ, 2010).

concept of collective memory (1925),[16] especially as represented and further developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann.[17] Then, of course, the concept of the culture of remembrance: this has made an astonishing career in German historiography over the past 20 years, evident in an enormous number of dissertations and major scientific projects that have prominently promoted this concept,[18] and (last but not least) in its widespread usage in the public and in the media. Based on the writings of Wolfgang Hardtwig[19] and Jörn Rüsen,[20] the concept of history culture (*Geschichtskultur*) subsequently became highly influential, most of all in history didactics, one of several historical subdisciplines. Finally, especially in recent years, the term *public history* gained ground and became formative in the German-speaking community, even if its literal translation ("Öffentliche Geschichte") was considered appropriate from time to time. The main driving force behind this conceptual adaptation was Paul Nolte.[21] Based on his work in particular, a number of degree programs have recently been established in Germany and Switzerland and, associated therewith, the successive establishment of a very

16 Maurice Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

17 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992). Translated into English by the author: *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aleida Assmann, *Cultural memory and Western civilization: functions, media, archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

18 See, for instance, Christoph Cornelißen, "Was heißt Erinnerungskultur? Begriff – Methoden – Perspektiven," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 54 (2003), 548–63. For a critique, see Demantowsky (2005).

19 Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft* (Munich: dtv, 1990), 7–11.

20 Jörn Rüsen, "Was ist Geschichtskultur? Überlegungen zu einer neuen Art, über Geschichte nachzudenken," In *Historische Faszination: Geschichtskultur heute*, ed. Klaus Füssmann et al. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994), 3–26. Rüsen's concept of historical culture as the "practical articulation of historical consciousness" in an aesthetic, cognitive, and political dimension has since been frequently taken up; it is basically also an umbrella concept whose logical consistency has, however, rarely been carefully examined: it tied in all too well with the historical-didactic discussion (historical consciousness), just as its three dimensions were suited too readily to possible further use. One might have noticed that these dimensions lie on completely different levels of logic and therefore fail to produce a coherent system; in addition, clarifying what "political," among other terms, means within each dimension, and what exactly belongs to it, occurs without fixed, and above all without common, logical rules. Even "practical articulation" remains vague. Thus, for instance, does every utterance already constitute historical culture? This view turns everything historical into historical culture and overextends the concept to the point of exhaustion.

21 Paul Nolte, "Öffentliche Geschichte: Die neue Nähe von Fachwissenschaft, Massenmedien und Publikum: Ursachen, Chancen und Grenzen," In *Aufklärung, Bildung, "Histotainment"? Zeitgeschichte in Unterricht und Gesellschaft heute*, eds. Michele Barricelli and Julia Hornig, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 131–46.

small German-speaking public history subdiscipline, which attempts to distinguish itself from the numerous existing disciplinary trends in this field of research and development.[22]

The situation in English-speaking historical academia is clearly different, not least because the corresponding projects and discussions already began emerging from the early 1970s. They were not bound to the cultural turn, but instead to the rise of everyday and social history, although first and foremost and most dominantly to counterstories, so-called "history from below." The term "public history" did not mark out an intra-academic field of competition, but a field of conflict between academic historical research and teaching and non-institutionalized, sometimes non-academic historians, between institutes and a grassroots movement.[23] Incidentally, a similar line of conflict also existed in German-speaking countries at that time, namely, between the "barefoot historians" of history workshops and the academic world.[24] But, and this is the difference, the debate over understanding the exoteric approach to history, addressed to laypersons, was not a genuine part of this conflict. Nor were "history culture" (*Geschichtskultur*), "culture of remembrance" (*Erinnerungskultur*), and "place of remembrance" (*Erinnerungsort*) the banners of a competing approach to the past – rather, they were and still are an integral part of traditional academic discussion.

Public history later became a recognized field of scholarship in the USA and Canada, and more slowly in the UK (under the label "cultural heritage") and Australia. University positions have been created over time, little by little. Nevertheless, university chairs or even institutes of public history are still few and far between. There are, however, literally hundreds of Master's programs, a very powerful American professional association (NCPH), and now also a thriving *International Federation for Public History*. The utterly pragmatic handling of definitions and self-concept declarations may be considered a strongly beneficial prerequisite for the admirable success achieved during this start-up phase. We might perhaps imagine this as an intellectual frontier, which, during a long pioneering period, invited and enticed explorations of this uncharted territory of knowledge and in which, in the movement phase, keeping the treks close together and protecting the early settlements was crucial.

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22 Thorsten Logge, "Public History in Germany: Challenges ans Opportunities," *German Studies Review* 39 (2016), 141–53.

23 Susan Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, "Introduction," *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), XV–XXIV.

24 See, for instance, Hubert Christian Ehalt, *Geschichte von unten: Fragestellungen, Methoden und Projekte einer Geschichte des Alltags* (Kulturstudien 1) (Vienna: Böhlau, 1984).

Benson, Brier, and Rosenzweig (1986) proposed a basic, yet exemplary solution to the problem of defining public history. Their highly readable account suggested the following distinctions:

a. a "slick form" of public history, as found in the media and dominated by commercial and political interests;
b. professional public history;
c. and a radical history from below.[25]

This threefold definition might be called an extensional (denotative) definition, whose elements are determined in purely descriptive nominal or rather functional terms. The definiens is determined by the respective diverse institutional and practical framework: its useful purpose. In fact, this is merely a weakly explicated denotative, sometimes only epidictic definition and certainly not a real definition, which must ground the debate in research making empirical claims, i.e., serve as the constitutive level of discussion: what is it that we are investigating or practicing?[26]

Such weakly pronounced nominality quite obviously explains why this definition and its countless offshoots and forerunners have worked socially and still continue to do so today. It is a compromise formula. Or, to quote Ludmilla Jordanova (2000), it is a kind of umbrella concept,[27] i.e., a concept that brings everyone's needs for conceptual protection under one roof.

The pattern devised by Benson, Brier and Rosenzweig (1986) may be said to have engendered a lengthy series of other public history definitions (using slightly different registers, yet whose logic is equally casual): Robert Kelley's (1978),[28] Jerome de Groot's (2009),[29] Hilda Kean's (2013),[30] Thomas Cauvin's (2016),[31] and most recently Irmgard Zündorf's (2017).[32]

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25 See Benson, Brier, and Rosenzweig, "Introduction," XVI–XVII.

26 For more information on the classification of definitions, see Eike von Savigny, *Grundkurs im wissenschaftlichen Definieren* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1970).

27 Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 130.

28 Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1 (1978), 16–28.

29 Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 1–7.

30 Hilda Kean, "Introduction," *The Public History Reader*, eds. Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), XIII–XXXII.

31 Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 10–11.

32 Irmgard Zündorf, "Contemporary History and Public History," *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (16 March 2017), DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.1017.v2 (last accessed 1 May 2018).

"Public history" in the form of degree programs or institute positions is far less well established in German-speaking academic institutions than in the USA, for instance. Intellectually, however, the fundamental question of the public use and application of references to the past is academically widely accepted, even if only in specific respects, whether as reception histories of historical ideas or events, or as the now readily accepted task of popularizing research findings in the media. Put more succinctly, German-speaking historians have literally inhaled the fundamental concern of public history, in a specific refraction since the cultural turn—and beyond the confines of individual subdisciplines.[33] And perhaps that is just as well, and in the best interests of the cause. Thus, "public history" is neither *de facto* nor *ex ratio* a privileged field of inquiry in contemporary history, as some believe, with any inherited rights or privileges so to speak.[34] Conceptually, however, each subdiscipline approaches this concern differently; also evident is a partial ignorance about neighboring approaches.[35] Besides, no functioning authority exists that might provide a relevant view of good criteria, good procedures, and any ethical aspects whatsoever for practicing and reflecting on public history,[36] for instance, along the lines of those devised by NCPH in the USA.

German-speaking history didactics has taken up the *de facto* heuristics of public history since the 1960s, beginning with the question of how extracurricular factors affect learning in history teaching in different contexts. Based on this question, the concept of historical consciousness, and subsequently also that of historical culture, was developed.[37] If school history education, as a state

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33 Stimulating für this aspect, see Stefanie Samida, "Public History als Historische Kulturwissenschaft. Ein Plädoyer," *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (17 June 2014), DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.575.v1 (last accessed 2 May 2018).

34 See Zündorf, "Contemporary History and Public History."

35 The memory research of medieval scholars tends to be overlooked in this respect; see, for instance, Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Memoria als Kultur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1995).

36 For an interesting approach in this respect, see Cord Arendes and Angela Siebold, "Zwischen akademischer Berufung und privatwirtschaftlichem Beruf. Für eine Debatte um Ethik- und Verhaltenskodizes in der historischen Profession," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 66 (2015), 152–66.

37 Already Jeismann's category of "historical consciousness in society," formulated very much in the spirit of Schörken (1972), systematically conceived of horizons of inquiry for public history; see Karl-Ernst Jeismann, "Didaktik der Geschichte. Die Wissenschaft von Zustand, Funktion und Veränderung geschichtlicher Vorstellungen im Selbstverständnis der Gegenwart," *Geschichtswissenschaft. Didaktik–Forschung–Theorie*, ed. Erich Kosthorst (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 9–33. Jörn Rüsen was able to build on Jeismann's work when he published his groundbreaking essay on "historical culture" in 1994. Bernd Schönemann summarized the debate in a lecture delivered in 1999 at Seeon Monastery and developed it further conceptually; see Bernd Schönemann, "Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtskultur,"

agency, not only seeks to disseminate the dominant ideology of the past, then the history education of young people must at least enable them to build the competencies needed to face such dominant perspectives autonomously.[38] The main question of history didactic teaching and research in the field of public history in the past 40 to 50 years has been the interrelations between school and extracurricular historical education, between formal and non-formal and informal historical education, between intended and unintended history-related learning. In English-speaking countries, history research, public history and history didactics are definitely more clearly distinct disciplines, also institutionally, than in Germany, for example. As a result, only some few scholars cross disciplinary boundaries there. This "compartmenalization" makes the integrated perspective and the anchoring of German history sciences including history didactics interesting for English-speaking public historians. Here, then, lies a specific opportunity for the German-language debate to connect with the international one.

The concept of public history and most of its German equivalents form an umbrella concept, as Jordanova has put it. And indeed, closer scrutiny reveals that these definitions are often only persuasive or at least metaphorically charged, as sometimes happens with the "culture of remembrance"; at best they are extensional definitions. Moreover, they are often incoherent and at least partly mutually exclusive. This leads to a fundamental problem: we have no definition of the phenomenological and practical context of "public history" that could be operationalized (beyond the proclamatory) in specific, especially interdisciplinary research and development projects, and which could not only be donned by way of contextualization, as the king did with his clothes in Hans Christian Andersen's well-known fairy tale.

In what follows, I attempt to explain public history as a process of normative and mutual perception. As such, my explanation itself will not be normative, at least not to begin with, but strictly descriptive. Eventually, however, I will also suggest criteria for good or bad public history – or at least offer some initial ideas in this direction.

There will be no question of defining a discipline, on the contrary. It is (only) about the definition of a transdisciplinary field of non-academic and academic inquiry.

Geschichtskultur. Theorie – Empirie – Pragmatik, ed. Bernd Mütter et al., (Weinheim: Beltz, 2000), 26–58.

38 One exemple is Johannes Meyer-Hamme and Bodo von Borries, "Sinnbildung über Zeiterfahrung? Geschichtslernen im Spannungsfeld von Subjekt- und Institutionsperspektive," *Sinnkonstruktion und Bildungsgang. Zur Bedeutung individueller Sinnzuschreibungen im Kontext schulischer Lehr-Lern-Prozesse*, ed. Hans-Christoph Koller (Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2008), 107–135.

Towards a definition

Fundamental constellation

Take any individual. He or she has many needs, most of which can be satisfied only in a group, i.e., in association with others. And yet properly considered, why do we (so often) not make use of others and their creations, at least by way of relief?[39] Individuals, in everything they desire, feel, think, and above all do (i.e., in their practice), carry within themselves the whole of humanity – at least potentially. This explains why "understanding" or the like can arise in the first place.[40] To become a stable member of a group, we must achieve identification through our clothing, accessories, language, behavior and, last but not least, through speech acts, e.g. stories, that is to say, through history, in the broadest sense of the term.[41] This also applies to the child, after being assigned initial affiliation, through which it also acquires personal identity.[42]

Sometimes, but actually not very often, these (everyday) stories are quite elaborate and complex. Mostly, however, they are far from that. Indeed, how could they be? We must communicate constantly in abbreviations, with immanent metaphors, using coarse symbolic hints.[43] A few words, a gesture, or simply a look sometimes suffices to connect individuals with underlying collective contexts of historical attributions of meaning. This explains why the hopes of teachers or researchers, that their tasks, interview questions, or questionnaire items will prompt individual and original stories, are so often dashed. Frequently, those stories simply cannot be found or only with difficulty, or must

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39 Here, a long line of discussion extends back to Johann Gottfried Herder. The most important reference might be Arnold Gehlen, even if we need not follow all of his further conclusions; see Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*. (Wiesbaden: Aula, 1986), 62–73.
40 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990), 347–48 et iterum.
41 Emil Angehrn, *Geschichte und Identität* (West Berlin, De Gruyter, 1985), 1; more recently, see his "Der Mensch in der Geschichte. Konstellationen historischer Identität," In: *Identität und Geschichte,* eds. Emil Angehrn and Gerd Jüttemann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 2018), 7–52.
42 In this respect, one can follow the positions of so-called narrative psychology, developed in the wake of Paul Ricoeur, for instance, his "Narrative Identität," *Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 31 (1987), 55–67. See also Wolfgang Kraus, *Das erzählte Selbst. Die narrative Konstruktion von Identität in der Spätmoderne* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1996).
43 Jörn Rüsen, Klaus Fröhlich, Hubert Horstkötter, and Hans-Günter Schmidt, "Untersuchungen zum Geschichtsbewusstsein von Abiturienten im Ruhrgebiet," *Geschichtsbewusstsein empirisch*, ed. Bodo v. Borries et al. (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1991), 221–344, esp. 230.

first be produced with great effort. However, the fact that in very many cases no detailed and elaborate narratives are detectable among individuals does not mean that these individuals are not in a position to make historical identifications and to implement these specifically in the various common reference systems (e.g., schools, families, peer groups, football clubs, carnival associations, or even the nation).

We may therefore assume that a relation to the past, a vulgo-historical dimension, exists in every brain that possesses language.[44] Yet despite all neuropsychological imaging, semantically this brain is only ever a black box for us. While we might, then, speak of historical *consciousness*,[45] the term itself presupposes self-reflection on and self-knowledge of this particular dimension of ourselves. Thus, at least in this context, we do well to assume little. Perhaps no more than this: that at least empirically, and very often (and I happily include myself), all that exists are untamed balls of wool, if this allegory is permitted here; or indeed topological,[46] non-verbal, pictorial relationships between elements of object knowledge, norms, loaded meanings, and emotions.[47] My proposal here is to refer to this complex of phenomena cautiously, and quite traditionally, as "views of the past" (*Geschichtsbilder*).[48] Historical consciousness may represent an individual, yet merely sublimated, self-reflected form of this cognitive and emotional "ball of wool." Based on the existing consensus, it seems reasonably safe to assume that historical consciousness is the elaborate,

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44 See Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 387–393.

45 The famous and heavily reflected concept of historical consciousness should be avoided here. For even if (or to the extent that) it is generally accepted, its character is just as umbrella-like as that of many other common concepts. This explains its tremendous success over the past decades. Nevertheless, this term rarely helps to explain and not simply to describe individual and specific historical forms of expression. While the operative concept of historical, or rather history-related thinking, now preferred by many experts of history didactics, is better suited to teaching research in a pragmatic way, it is unable to grasp the complexity of the social events addressed here.

46 Gert Ueding, *Klassische Rhetorik* (Munich: Beck, 2004), 79–83.

47 The question of emotions also looks back on a successful career. See, at first, Chad Berry, Lori A. Schmied, and Josef Chad Schrock, "The Role of Emotion in Teaching and Learning History: A Scholarship of Teaching Exploration," *The History Teacher* 41 (2008), 437–452. See also the many interesting contributions in Juliane Brauer and Martin Lücke, eds., *Emotionen, Geschichte und historisches Lernen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), esp. Jörn Rüsen and Johannes Meyer-Hamme, "Die Macht der Gefühle im Sinn der Geschichte. Theoretische Grundlagen und das Beispiel des Trauerns" (27–44) and ">I never liked history at school<. Identitäen und Emotionen beim historischen Lernen," (125–137).

48 Marko Demantowsky, "Geschichtsbild," *Wörterbuch Geschichtsdidaktik* (Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau, 2006, 82–83).

educated form of wild and idiosyncratic "views of the past." As mentioned, it is a very rare form. Nevertheless, it serves to describe the (rather utopian) goal of all kinds of projects of purposeful dissemination. Those, however, who take the existence of historical consciousness as a prerequisite will easily miss the needs and opportunities of the respective target group – if this business term is permitted here.

Now what can actually be discovered of these really existing idiosyncratic "views of the past" in teaching or research contexts are individual narrative pieces in all possible kinds of human expression. They are literally charged with the symbolic world of their current social environment. However different, they have two common foundations: they always refer consciously or mostly unconsciously to a collective past. That much is clear. Beyond that, however, their sole and genuine essential purpose is collective *recognition*.

This *recognition* is by no means granted automatically, especially if you are young, different, or simply an outsider or a stranger. The collective recognition of an individual historical identification with a group can be considered a valuable prize, an instrument of collective integration, and ultimately also of social (self-)disciplining.[49] This also explains why schoolchildren were once called disciples and why specific scientific communities are still called "disciplines."

In the end, it is about the eternal struggle for social recognition. This varies from situation to another, and time and again involves an obviously utterly superior collective counterpart, who characterizes public history from the perspective of the individual, as Rüsen (1983), has mentioned after all.[50] We all have the need to be recognized, and at best to be loved, not least historically. This turns this redundant imbalance of power into an anthropological experience.

What, however, characterizes the counterpart of this narrative desire for recognition? Beyond such abstract terms as "the group," "the collective," or even "society"? The process of negotiating identity recognition requires at least two complementarities: on the one hand, the participants (here the individual and a group); on the other, the medium. Individual narrative pieces can only be recognized within the framework of collective narratives.

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49 Especially relevant to this kind of thinking is Michel Foucault, especially his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the French Prison* (1975), where he explores the emergence and the characteristics of this modernity. For an exemplary account, see Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Michel Foucault* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004),125–129.

50 Rüsen described this briefly, but did not make it a fundamental element of his theory. See his *Historische Vernunft. Grundzüge einer Historik I: Die Grundlagen der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 78, 131.

Basic narratives vs. master narratives

At this juncture, I need to introduce a term that has suddenly sprung to life in the German-speaking debate in recent years, roughly since the last turn of the millennium: the "basic narrative." On closer inspection, this is perhaps difficult to explain, because at the same time, two other terms, "master narratives" and, almost by default, "narratives," also remained in circulation. Barely any cultural analysis can operate without more or less specific, yet often merely fuzzy references to "narratives." As far as can be seen, the differences between these terms have not yet been explicitly clarified. Not that I shall do so here exhaustively, because for my present argument any such explanation is merely a means to an end.

In a contribution like the present one, written against the background of a German tradition of thought, and aimed at a multinational, mainly English-speaking audience, clarification is probably still necessary at this point, not least because the common German translation of "master narrative" (*Meistererzählung*) seems to miss something essential. Moreover, it might even lead to false associations, as if the dominant narratives in the sense of Glucksmann's *Meisterdenker* (1977)[51] were meant, rather than dominant narratives per se or even more abstract, dominant narrative patterns.

The roots of differentiation are, as usual, heavily ramified and complex. We might, however, note the parallel development in American analytical philosophy, which gradually revealed the narrative logic of historiography and history after the war and perhaps culminated for the first time in "Philosophy and History," a conference held in 1963.[52] The distinction, however, also goes back to the first volume of one of Claude Lévi-Strauss's major works, published just a year later (like many other fundamental insights on closer inspection).[53] In his groundbreaking structuralist study *Mythologiques* (1964–1971), Lévi-Strauss identifies the incommensurability of the narrative structures of indigenous South American mythologies and Western observers and attempts to convey this hiatus methodically. Hayden White's famous "emplotments" (1973),[54] and above

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51 André Glucksmann, *Die Meisterdenker* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1989).

52 Sidney Hook, ed., *Philosophy and history. A symposium* (New York: New York University Press), 1963.

53 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques. Volume 1: The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 1–34. German translation by Eva Moldenhauer: *Mythologica I: Das Rohe und das Gekochte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), 11–53.

54 Hayden White, *Metahistory. Die historische Einbildungskraft im 19. Jahrhundert in Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1991), 15–62.

all Jean-François Lyotard's critique of the "méta récits" (or "grand narratives")
(1979),[55] were subsequently able to build on these models. In the same year 1979,
Lawrence Stone proclaimed the "revivial of the narrative."[56] This laid the founda-
tions for a wide variety of other forms. This theoretical development was accom-
panied by the onset of the "memory boom" in Western societies,[57] and not least
by the gradual establishment of a scientific public history in the USA.[58] The rest
is as legend has it.

Since around 2000, the term "basic narrative" has crept into scholarly dis-
cussion. Several authors have recently used it pragmatically and increasingly fre-
quently, but hardly anyone has defined it specifically.[59] Precisely this, however,
seems imperative: a definition would help to sensibly distinguish the variants out-
lined above, especially the now renowned "master narrative" (*Meistererzählung*)[60]
from the "basic narrative."[61]

Basic narratives

As far as I can tell, three attempts have been since 2006 to define basic narrati-
ves: first, from a communications science perspective (2008/2016); second, from
within the pragmatic discussion on history teaching (2012); third, from the per-
spective of empirical historical-cultural research (2006).

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55 Jean François Lyotard, *Das postmoderne Wissen. Ein Bericht* (Vienna: Passagen-Verlag, 2015).
56 Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a new Old History," *Past and Present* 85 (1979), 3–24.
57 Jay Winter, "Die Generation der Erinnerung. Reflexionen über den Memory-Boom in der zei-thistorischen Forschung," *Werkstatt Geschichte* 10 (2001), 5–16.
58 See Benson, Brier, and Rosenzweig, "Introduction," XV–XXIV.
59 Many other possible examples for this kind of pragmatism might be cited. Recent examples include Wolfgang Müller-Funk, *Die Kultur und ihre Narrative: eine Einführung*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Springer, 2008), 223–247. In history didactics, we might mention Susanne Popp's influen-tial essay "Ein global orientiertes Geschichtsbewusstsein als zukünftige Herausforderung der Geschichtsdidaktik?" *Sowi-Online* 2, 1 (2002), 1–13. Or more recently Andrea Kolpatzik's "History goes Online. Sprachproduktion und medialer Wandel im Spiegel," *Geschichte und Sprache*, eds. Saskia Handro and Bernd Schönemann, *Zeitgeschichte, Zeitverständnis* 21 (Berlin: LIT-Verl, 2010). 162.
60 Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., "Meistererzählung – Zur Karriere eines Begriffs," In *Die historische Meistererzählung. Deutungslinien der deutschen Geschichte nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 9–32.
61 Peter Gautschi, Markus Bernhardt, and Ulrich Mayer, "Guter Geschichtsunterricht - Prinzipien," In *Handbuch Praxis Geschichtsunterricht*, eds. Michele Barricelli and Martin Lücke (Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau, 2012), 326–48, esp. 332–34.

Following Fasulo and Zuccermaglio (2008),[62] Perrin and Wyss (2016) observed:

> Narration not only develops facts or discursive arguments, but combines incommensurable discourses from the context of specific situations by causally linking them and thus making sense for narrators and recipients. These include basic narratives that are part of every culture and are handed down from generation to generation.[63]

Much comes together in this version, but what seems most important – alas, only implicitly – are the references to Lévi-Strauss, especially the relevance of everyday life, tradition, and incommensurability. Nor is the generative imprinting of these communicative frameworks truly executed; a referring to the writing of the ethnologist Jan Vansina (1985)[64] would seem promising; Jan Assmann, as is well known, further developed this approach in his theory of cultural memory a few years later.[65]

Markus Bernhardt, Peter Gautschi, and Ulrich Mayer went about defining "basic narratives" in 2012.[66] Referring to the problems of the school curriculum, as Susanne Popp had done previously (2002), they took a stand in the debate against a national-historical and chronological structure. They use the term "master narrative" in this context for negative characterization. For Bernhardt and his colleagues, "basic narratives," on the other hand, denote topics so relevant to "collective memory" that they must be taught, normatively. Two other fundamental terms are derived by Bernhardt et al. from such a concept of basic narratives: "basic knowledge," as the knowledge aspect of these narratives, and "individual representation". Even if the latter subdivision seems somewhat arbitrary, even if the respective theory is barely contextualized, even if the polemical contrast with what is actually obsolete, and even if, finally, the confining national "master narratives" can be questioned against the background of theory development since 1960, both the attempted differentiation and the cursory reference to the category of "identity" seem to advance the search for definition.

A few years earlier (2006), I had already made a stab at definition. At the time, however, my attempted distinction – between basic narratives and master

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62 Alessandra Fasulo and Cristina Zuccermaglio, "Narratives in the workplace. Facts, fictions, and canonicity," *Text & Talk* 28 (2008), 351–76, esp. 371–72.

63 Daniel Perrin and Vinzenz Wyss, "In die Geschichten erzählen. Die Analyse von Narration in öffentlicher Kommunikation," In *Handbuch nicht-standardisierte Methoden in der Kommunikationswissenschaft*, eds. Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz and Michael Meyer (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), 241–56, esp. 247.

64 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 21–24.

65 See Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (1992).

66 Gautschi, Bernhardt, and Mayer, "Guter Geschichtsunterricht - Prinzipien," 332–34.

narratives – attracted little attention.[67] Twelve years later, I return to it, albeit in a modifying and critical manner. It goes like this: basic narratives are collective narrative patterns. Not only do they involve national-historical symbol formation, but also and above all religious, pseudo-religious, tribal, and occupation-related symbol formation. These formations, however, cannot be attributed to specific authors as a rule. These basic narratives are the semantic vessel of collective views of the past.

Basic narratives are anonymous and profound identification structures of opinion and meaning in societies. They often appear as unspoken preconditions. Moreover, they offer a system of coordinates for every kind of collective self-concept and thus of exercised normality[68] – combined with the usual rewards and of course also with sometimes sublime, sometimes explicit punishments. Basic narratives can have such effects because they are not simply blurred, opaque ideas, but instead institutionalized and socially proven beliefs incarnated in our everyday institutions, which Maurice Halbwachs (1925) described as social frameworks.[69] This idea is particularly obvious when we look at educational institutions, school systems, history lessons and curricula. But these basic narratives also live in museums, archives, memorials, television series, Bollywood movies, in our parliaments, traffic rules, and house numbers, and not least in universities. They are an essential part of our cultural system and understanding. Thus, in this respect, we may indeed encounter basic narratives. They are neither simply a theoretical construct nor an eccentric idea. Each of us is of course invited to give this issue different names, and yet terms are not just words nor a matter of one-upmanship. In the interests of advancing discussion, we would do well to ensure that our statements can be followed up, made coherent, and operationalized.

In this sense, basic narratives are not *méta récits* à la Lyotard; they represent nothing, therefore, which could be brought to a gestalt by a reflective arrangement of a base of measured and appropriate validity and dissolved into quasi-natural, specifically, case-related bound back narratives and be dissolved into

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67 Marko Demantowsky, "Österreichische Schulbücher als Quellen der Geschichtskultur-Forschung. Die Behandlung der 48er Revolution und des magyarisch-habsburgischen Konflikts," *Geschichtsdidaktische Schulbuchforschung*, eds. Saskia Handro and Bernd Schönemann, *Zeitgeschichte - Zeitverständnis* 16 (Berlin: LIT-Verl, 2006), 149–76 (162).

68 Or, as Foucault put it: "Eine Normalisierungsgesellschaft ist der historische Effekt einer auf das Leben gerichteten Machttechnologie"; see *Die Ordnung der Dinge. Eine Archäologie der Humanwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 172. The quote translates as: "A normalizing society is the historical effect of a life-oriented technology of power" (translated by Mark Kyburz).

69 See Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen*.

quasi-natural, locally rootable narratives. Rather, they are related to the implicit theories or "alternative frameworks"[70] that appear individually but are always collectively anchored: they claim validity in the consciousness of group members, yet without these either wanting or even being able to account for them. On the contrary. They have always existed, endowed with tremendous persistence, because their bearers derive a substantial part of their identity from such implicit theories. Typical forms of such theories include personalization, mentalization, personification (as described by Halldén 1997), which would certainly complement, also at different levels, hypostasis and presentism. On closer inspection, the relationship between basic narratives and implicit theories can be seen as one of implication. Implicit theories, in Halldén's sense, form – across groups – the specific form of basic narratives. These acquire their identifying, group-constituting power through reference to content-related provisions. Ideologies of all stripes have their place here. The actors of all basic narratives may be said to shape their material in a set of equal forms. *In substance*, however, they often pit their efforts against each other, for the purposes of self-recognition and distinction. This practice necessarily has recourse to a "limiting structure"[71]; what emerges from this is that basic narratives constitute cultural entities, the vehicles of collective identity.

Narrative differences

The productivity of an analytical perspective on the connection between the categories of "narrative" and "identity" has already been explored by Margret R. Somers (1994)[72]:

> ... we must reject the decoupling of action from ontology, and instead accept the same notion of social being and social identity is, willy-nilly, incorporated into each and every knowledge-statement about action, agency, and behaviour. ... the reframing of narrative allows us to make that enlargement.[73]

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70 Ola Halldén, "Conceptual Change and the Learning of History," *International Journal for Educational Research* 27 (1997), 201–210.

71 Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann, "Ethnogenie und Ethnogenese. Theoretisch-ethnologische und ideokritische Studie," In *Studien zur Ethnogenese*, Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälschen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 72 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1985), 9–27, esp. 19.

72 Margret R. Somers, "The narrative constitution of identity," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), 605–649.

73 Ibid, 615–16.

This approach, Somers argues, means that research does not look for isolated semantic assignments in order to analyze group-specific identities, but instead follows a basic claim:

> ... that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events. Indeed, the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by connecting ... parts to a constructed configuration or a social network of relationships ... composed by symbolic, institutional, and material practices.[74]

The distinction between these practices would need to be questioned, in particular whether the three types exist on a logical level. What is essential, however, is that identity references can only be sufficiently understood in their narrative character. Moreover, they generate group cohesion and manifest themselves subcutaneously in practices.

Importantly, Somers distinguishes four dimensions of group-related narrativity:
– *Ontological narratives*: "These are the stories that social actors use to make sense of – indeed, to act in – their lives. Ontological narratives are used to define who we are; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do."
– *Public Narratives*: "Public narratives are those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro- or macro-stories ..."
– *Metanarrativity*: "This third dimension of narrativity refers to the 'master-narratives' in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history and as social scientists. Our sociological theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of these master narratives – Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment, etc."
– *Conceptual Narrativity*: "These are the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers."[75]

The doubling of "Ontological Narratives," as individual achievements of identification, compared to "Public" and "Metanarratives," as group-related, institutionalized phenomena, provides valuable insights, even if their concrete interaction remains unclear. The distinction between the latter two terms does not seem entirely obvious. Their respective definitions encompass much of what has been discussed above as "basic narratives," and may thus be summarized below. The metanarrative aspect corresponds to the above approach of implicit theories.

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74 Ibid, 616.
75 Ibid., 618–620.

It concerns recurring formal patterns, which are used by different groups and charged differently.

Strikingly, what Somers refers to as "Conceptual Narrativity" lies on a different level than the first three dimensions. This concerns specifically addressable, authorial achievements. Somers's confinement to scientists does not strike me as compelling, because such narrative creations can not only be introduced into discourse by journalists, politicians, artists, etc. Rather, this is often done by persons possessing a higher social efficacy. Here, we are dealing with nameable pressure groups and their narrative offerings. These are influential but not identical with the social framework of collective memory (Halbwachs 2008 [1925]) as they find in the basic narratives their own alternative existence. This is perhaps what the German-speaking discussion collapses into a "master narrative," a category perhaps conceived of by "old white men." Allegorically speaking, they are the flags or banners (visible from afar) of collective historical sense-making and their basic narratives. Given their popularity and personalization, they easily conceal the deep and institutionally ubiquitous system of roots from which they have grown. Master narratives are a case for history politics and value-oriented education or for the recurring celebrations of official holidays. In contrast, basic narratives represent the matrix of our historical thinking, the implicit theories of collectives. They are our everyday historical frame of thought.

To establish the greatest possible clarity for our discussion, I consistently follow Somers's "Conceptual Narratives" in what follows.

The distinction between basic narratives and conceptual narratives seems important for the research methodological distinction and delimitation of scientific public history projects: we need other research methods in order to, on the one hand, understand the origin, life, and possible decline, for instance, of the Treitzschke, Michelet, or McNeill narrative and their respective historical forms; or whether, on the other hand, we are trying to explain the structure of collective historical imputations, the structures of collective memory. For the latter, hermeneutic interpretations of published or archived material are simply not adequate enough; we need serial sources, statistical analyses, qualitative social research, and also the various instruments of cultural anthropology.

Four analytical aspects of basic narratives

For research purposes, it still seems useful to consider the analytical aspects of basic and conceptual narratives. A critical approach based at the least on the

works of Klaus P. Hansen (1995),[76] Jan Assmann (1992), and Bernd Schönemann (2000)[77] is capable of distinguishing four aspects:

a. *Social roles*, for instance, professions and functions, which are determined by basic narratives and their specific recruitment procedures, cultivations, and social situation. Relevant groups include, just for example, priests, museum guides, communist propagandists, and teachers.

b. The *social and linguistic rules* of the basic narratives as limitations of normality and order. Here, it seems particularly fruitful to systematically include research on implicit theories in public history research, and thereby to make metanarratives empirically tangible in Somers's terms.

c. The *media* of the basic narratives as the forces shaping their social interaction. Perhaps this needs no further explanation, other than the hint that we have been emphatically made aware of the mediality of public history through our current generation's experience of the digital revolution. Oftentimes, facts, and circumstances must become non-self-evident in order to render their meaning visible.

d. Finally, the *rituals* of the basic narrative as its social reality. This aspect has not yet been discussed sufficiently here, because claiming that basic narrative practice is essentially ritualistic is admittedly quite daring. I must forgo a detailed discussion for reasons of space, but two hints are possible. On the one hand, in the empirical analysis of the places of public history, be they museums, cinemas, classrooms or even memorials, it is apparent that these places can only be observed through their structural design, architecture, specific paths, communications, consumer actions, etc. This is a fruitful field of research.[78] On the other hand, the limited structure of basic narratives has also been addressed (Mühlmann 1985). This structure is practically and empirically observable in the social actions involved, for instance, with group admission, with proving oneself worthy in groups, and with sanction and exclusion processes: that is to say, socially hazardous rites of passage characterized chiefly by limitality, being challenged to overcome all kinds of boundaries. These ritual processes were originally

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76 Klaus P. Hansen, *Kultur und Kulturwissenchaft. Eine Einführung* (Tübingen: UTB, 1995).

77 See Schönemann, "Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtskultur.".

78 Marko Demantowsky, "Gedenkstätten der 48er Revolution als Historische Lern-Orte. Eine Übersicht," In *Orte historischen Lernens*, eds. Saskia Handro and Bernd Schönemann, *Zeitgeschichte – Zeitverständnis* 18. (Berlin: Lit, 2008), 149–164. See also, Marco Zerwas, "Lernort 'Deutsches Eck'. Zur Variabilität geschichtskultureller Deutungsmuster," *Geschichtsdidaktische Studien* 1 (Berlin: Logos, 2015), 49–73.

investigated by van Gennep (1960 [1909])[79] and later by Victor Turner (1997 [1969]).[80] Put simply, they constitute identity.

"Recognition" as pivotal to identification

At the latest since Hegel, we know that individuals necessarily strive for forms of social recognition.[81] They do this not least with regard to their relationship to the past and their *identity*.[82] While such efforts may succeed or fail, groups and societies are also strongly interested in interrogating young people, foreigners, or

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79 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

80 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick and London: Aldine Transaction 1997).

81 The category of "recognition" is central not only to Hegel's entire early philosophy, but also to his later reflections on social processes. Thus, if we go back behind Rüsen, we need to think of the Herr-Knecht passage in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), and beautifully explained also in the *Philosophy of Law*, § 192 (1820). See G.W.F Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 349; see also *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 150–153. Some contemporary philosophy does not interpret the Herr-Knecht chapter from a social-philosophical point of view, whereas in fact the context also justifies the philosophy of law from a social-philosophical point of view. In any case, the latter became effective in Hegel's political and philosophical reception. Especially important is the young Marx (1844). See his "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte. Drittes Manuskript," In *Marx Engels Werke Ergänzungsband 1* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 530–588.

82 The relationship between history and identity has been discussed for a long time. See, for instance, Hermann Lübbe, "Die Identitätspräsentationsfunktion der Historie," In *Identität*, eds. Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1979) 277–292; see also other contributions to this volume. As it is, schools and parties have emerged within such a broadly developed discussion, sometimes criticizing this concept outright (rightly so, if it is instrumentalized normatively), and sometimes postulating it affirmatively. This contribution does not see itself as belonging to any of these factions. Instead, it employs "identity" as a descriptive category of individually and collectively experienced self-understanding, experienced self-knowledge, i.e., as an empirical fact guiding human behavior. This fact has different facets, of which the time-related one is of interest here. As Rüsen put it, "Sinnbildung über Zeiterfahrung [sense-making over the experience of time]"; see his *Historische Vernunft* (1983), 51–57. Jürgen Straub provides a good overview of the debate in "Identität," *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften*, vol. 1, eds. Friedrich Jaeger and Burkhard Liebsch (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2011), 277–363. This attempt can be based on Samuel's insight, not systematically developed, to link "identity" with public history. See Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Cultures* (London: Verso, 2012), 278.

outsiders. The failure or rejection of identification requests remains the main tool of social disciplining.

The explanation of society's handling of history is not yet complete. There is another process of recognition, one which runs in the opposite direction. As we have seen, individuals seek collective recognition – but no basic narrative group exists without competing alternatives. This may be seen as a market of overbidding, symmetrical and asymmetrical identity offers.

This is particularly evident when one recalls Eastern European dissidents during the Cold War. Their rejection of the communist narrative made them dissidents for the first time. If one considers individual scopes of action and behavioral opportunities in relation to identification offers with a totalitarian claim, then a wide spectrum of different individual non-recognitions of collective meanings opens up. Not only straightforward rejection exists, but so do many types of resilient, resistant, or dissenting behavior.[83] Mind you, however, these options are valid not only in dictatorships, but also in pluralistic societies and in the many, many groups competing for confessors and consumers. Collectives are constituted by their basic narratives and need to worry about their historical capacity for integration, their power of persuasion, and their emotional efficiency. Collectives that lose the ways in which they identify members usually collapse one day in November.

In the true sense, we are talking about a permanent and complex historical and *past-related discourse on identity*.[84] Culturally and historically, it is always newly constituted. It is an actual confrontation of anonymous power, within a power system, with and by the individual; and it is a permanent, yet hazardous option to refute these claims.

It is a complex and more or less continuously circulating system of success, partial success, and failure in the business of mutual acceptance. It is about power, self-determination, and collective integration. The concept of discourse allows us to understand the position of the individual, to determine his or her fragile space of freedom – that is limited by individual needs and the rules of

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83 See the long debate about the resistance against the Nazi dictatorship, for instance, Ian Kershaw's "Widerstand ohne Volk? Dissens und Widerstand im Dritten Reich," In: *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Jürgen Schmädeke and Peter Steinbach (Munich: Piper, 1986), 779–98.
84 The term "discourse" is legendary in itself. While I have referred to Foucault several times, many other relevant contributions to this debate obvious exist, for instance, by Habermas, Bourdieu, or most recently also by Laclau and Mouffe (2000). For an overview, see Achim Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2008), 91–99.

social satisfaction. The handling of history is fixed in the manifold processes of inclusion and exclusion.

And this is now indeed the "pivotal point of identity," as a process of socially uncertain inquiry into the mode of narrative self-reference of individuals and smaller and larger groups.

Definition

In sum, I propose the following definition of public history. It is, somewhat daringly, more than a denotative definition in that it intends to show what public history is, both factually and as what is empirically observable:

Public history is a complex past-related identity discourse. Operated by collectives and individuals, it serves the mutual recognition of narratives. Collectives empower
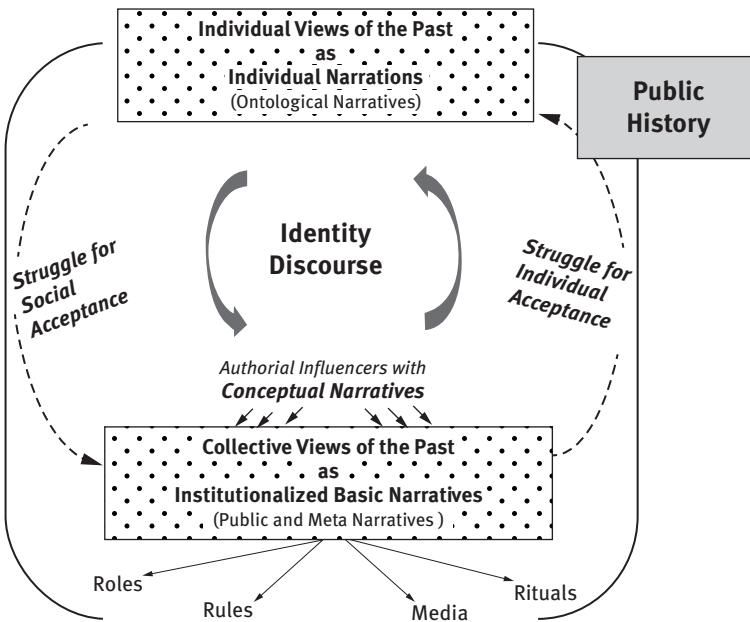

Figure 1.1: The system of Public History

their basic narratives in institutional frameworks through role allocations, rules of sanction and reward, as well as through media design and ritualized practice.

This definition is compatible with all existing pragmatic extensional definitions: this complicated dialectical process of identity discourse may be called "Public History," which in turn restores the ever so useful international umbrella. Pragmatic extensional definitions like those proposed by Rosenzweig et al. can coexist very well with the real definition proposed here. I also assume that this concept of public history can be easily translated into German terms of historical culture or memory culture, depending on the temporal field of application.[85]

Quality criterion

The ethics of public history has become an issue in recent years and is hugely important in view of the enormous conflictuality and social relevance of identity discourses.[86]

A basic criterion for distinguishing between good and bad public history actually arises self-evidently from the previous argumentation: this kind of public history is productive, enables individual reorientation, remains adaptable to new circumstances, which keeps this circular and conflictual process of mutual recognition alive.[87] Pluralism is the elixir of dynamic public history. This, however, only remains possible in a society that guarantees democratic pluralism and makes it possible in everyday conflicts. Defending and developing democratic pluralism in (necessarily historical) identity conflicts must therefore be the primary concern of any public historian.

On the other hand, any public history that either fails to grant individuals the freedom of dissidence or rejection or that no longer makes any binding offers whatsoever, and which individuals who challenge rejection or commitment must deal with, will be unable to function in the long term. The former is the basic difficulty of all forms of dictatorship, open or disguised; it is, as Karl Popper

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85 See Demantowsky, "Public History – Sublation of a German Debate? / ʾPublic Historyʾ – Aufhebung einer deutschsprachigen Debatte?" (2015).

86 See Arendes and Siebold, "Zwischen akademischer Berufung und privatwirtschaftlichem Beruf. Für eine Debatte um Ethik- und Verhaltenskodizes in der historischen Profession" (2015).

87 In view of the countless "History Wars" in the past decades, the fundamental conflictuality could of course also not remain hidden to others. See, for instance, Hilda Kean (2013), XVIII–XX.

observed, the problem of closed societies.[88] The latter, however, is the invisible or at least conveniently hidden risk of pluralistic, open societies.[89]

Research systematics

One last step is needed. I have claimed from the outset that progress in defining public history also needs to prove itself operationally in research and development, and thus also potentially in all efforts of education and dissemination, whether in museums, memorials, mass media, schools, etc.

The scientific field defined above can only be meaningfully researched on an interdisciplinary basis; this has already become clear from the literature cited from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, the historical and educational sciences, including psychology. It is about fundamental questions of human coexistence, of civilization, in the past and the present; it is impossible to advance such questions within one scientific discipline alone. This perspective, along with the above questions and perspectives, enables us to develop an ideal type of interdisciplinary public history research institution.
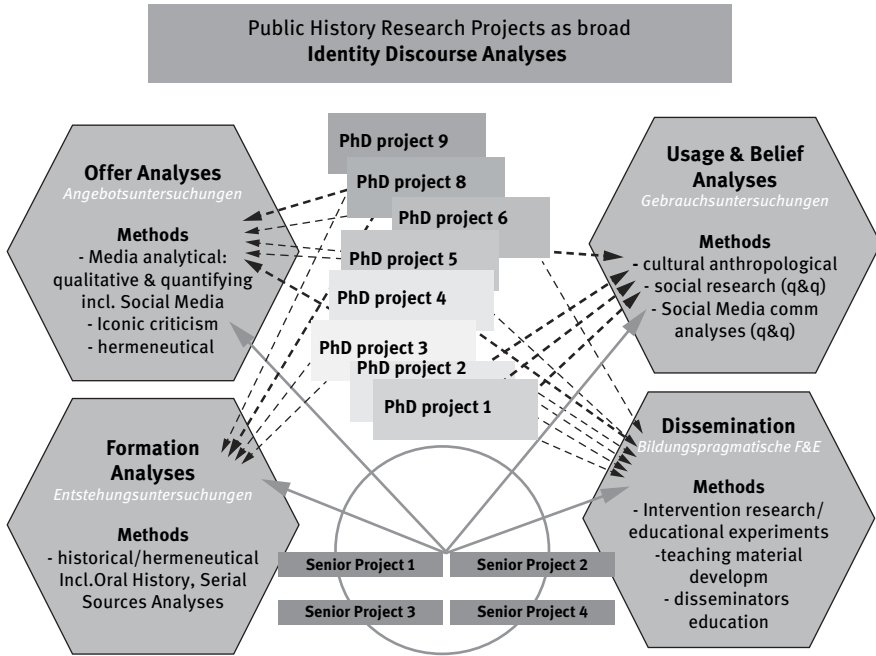
Such an R&D institution would be home to both senior research projects, funded externally, and junior (mostly PhD) projects. Generally, projects would need to satisfy four requirements, although junior ones would obviously not need to fulfill each of these. Consequently, there would be four types of public history projects (R&D):

a. Empirical analyses of offers
b. Empirical analyses of uses and beliefs
c. Empirical analyses of formations
d. Pragmatic application developments accompanied by empirical studies (dissemination & education).

a. *Empirical analyses of offers* are the most common type of public history research, irrespective of label; they are also the most common subject of all available anthologies and monographs. The usual examples (from re-enactments to curricular analyses) need not be rehearsed again here. I am sure that readers will be able to imagine the copious footnotes that would be

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88 Karl R. Popper, *Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde* (Munich: Francke Verlag, 1957/58), 1, 2.
89 One author should be mentioned here who, from a decidedly conservative point of view, is concerned with the basic liberal and democratic order. He provides important impulses and admirably – drawing on Tocqueville – recognizes this decisive dilemma very early. See Joachim Fest, *Die schwierige Freiheit. Über die offene Flanke der offenen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Siedler, 1993), esp. 15–47.

Public History Research Projects as broad
Identity Discourse Analyses

Offer Analyses
Angebotsuntersuchungen

Methods
- Media analytical:
qualitative & quantifying
incl. Social Media
- Iconic criticism
- hermeneutical

PhD project 9
PhD project 8
PhD project 6
PhD project 5
PhD project 4
PhD project 3
PhD project 2
PhD project 1

Usage & Belief Analyses
Gebrauchsuntersuchungen

Methods
- cultural anthropological
- social research (q&q)
- Social Media comm
analyses (q&q)

Formation Analyses
Entstehungsuntersuchungen

Methods
- historical/hermeneutical
Incl.Oral History, Serial
Sources Analyses

Dissemination
Bildungspragmatische F&E

Methods
- Intervention research/
educational experiments
-teaching material
developm
- disseminators
education

Senior Project 1 | Senior Project 2
Senior Project 3 | Senior Project 4

Figure 1.2: Research systematics for Public History

possible here, just as (implicitly addressed) future authors may complete the imaginary apparatus in their own studies. The common research methods in such projects are conventional hermeneutics (no intended devaluation!), but most recently also image and media analyses. Especially the digital opportunities available to public history allow and demand the use of quantifying methods; among others, data mining has provided public history with completely new possibilities for analysis.[90] Perhaps the most requirements to be fulfilled by contemporary analyes of offers are integrating and systematically applying these different methodological approaches and, if possible, not relying and limiting oneself to conventional hermeneutic methods.

b. *Empirical analyses of uses and beliefs* are much rarer. How are specific public history offerings actually used? What outreach and impact do they have? Such questions can be linked on the one hand to museum visitor research, encouraged for decades, to television audience research, to teaching and learning research in the educational sciences, and to the tracking of digital

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90 Christof Schöch, "Quantitative Analyse," In *Digital Humanties. Eine Einführung*, eds. Fotis Jannidis et al. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2017), 279–298.

offerings. Here, too, digitization offers researchers completely new possibilities; they just need to be used consistently. Meaningful usage analysis requires prior in-depth analysis of offers. The characteristics of the product or offering must be well known in order to adequately assess differences in types of use, courses of use, and the actors involved.

c. *Empirical analyses of formations,* into the development and emergence of a product or offer, is a field as well known and as well-proven as analyses of offers. In essence, these are historical projects. This is also an eminently important field of research because it enables one to compare and contextualized the findings of supply and use studies. Paradoxically, only a historical view makes the present understandable. Here, too, however, current historical public history research projects need to meet the requirements of state-of-the art research, especially by including serial source analysis, contemporary witnesses, non-state traditions, and above all by diversifying the heuristic horizon.

For the same reason (i.e., the necessary epistemological contextualization), which makes historical-genetic projects so valuable, it would of course always be a desirable goal, also for the project types listed above, to establish public history research within an *international comparative perspective*. This book is also committed to this idea.

d. Finally, this systematic approach also points to one other field of research and development that has enjoyed great success with many funding institutions under the banner of dissemination, practical application, competence development, and outcome testing. Nevertheless, it should not only be considered an annoying duty, but also the actual fulfilment of scientific public history action: *pragmatic application development accompanied by empirical studies*. Scientific public history practice does not take place primarily at universities, but above all at the numerous institutions doing non-university historical work. "Public history" is one of the rare truly trans-academic disciplines. While it promises much stimulation and knowledge for all those involved, it also involves the risk of remaining politically noncommittal.

This insight seems to be important if we are to understand the unity of our field of inquiry and if we are to prevent disturbing reflexes of demarcation. Alix Green has brought this thinking together in the concept of academic citizenship.[91]

Dissemination is a crucial cornerstone of public history research and development. Non-university institutions are therefore the natural partners of academic research institutions and vice versa. This almost inevitably means that even basic research in the field of public history always, *nolens volens*, remains integrated in a horizon of application. It always does well to reflect on this linkage conceptually.

Public history, and the science of history

In many discussions on this approach, two questions have arisen time and again and will here be discussed briefly.[92]

a. With this approach, "Public History" is not declared to be a kind of historical super-science, quite the opposite: it was precisely not about the proclamation of a new discipline with claims to resources and power in the academia, but rather about the painfully lacking distinction of an interdisciplinary field of work and research, to which every historian in every epoch and specialization can contribute and many have also long contributed. So this is about productive limitation, not thoughtless expansion. This specific field differs systematically from historical research (unless it itself is historicized). Negotiation processes of group affiliations and self-understandings are examined and dealt with in a research-methodologically hybrid way, insofar as they relate to the past.

b. Accordingly, "Public Historian" is also a difficult term, because in this context it does actually not refer to a type of profession, but to a role in a specific practice. Historians or sociologists etc. can be public historians, if they move in the above mentioned field as an actor, but as soon as they pursue another practice, they are no longer. Historian XY, for example, is in the role of a public historian when he takes part in past-related identity discourses, whether at the family table, in a seminar course, with a book, on television or at a demonstration, or when he scientifically investigates corresponding practices. But if a historian, in his history-scientific practice, whether in the archive, at the lecture desk, turns to the past without addressing current identity discourses, then he is in the role of the historian. In this perspective, basic historical research and applied research are conceivable without constituting a practice of public history. They are (simply) different language games.

The roles can be clearly distinguished, but not the people who sometimes play these roles, sometimes those and sometimes a completely different one. However, role awareness and role sovereignty are helpful both for the addressees of communication and for the communicator himself.

Outlook

The international public history scene is lively, richly faceted, and diverse – which is saying a great deal about an interdisciplinary cultural field of inquiry. Is this scene already pluralistic? This question calls for a more skeptical assessment. Hitherto dominant conceptual nominalism, which has enabled a constantly expandable additive consensus on what can be added to "public history," has tended to conceal fundamental differences in content about the orientation, function, and factors of the public uses of history, at least in academic discussions, conferences, and publications. Large public history conferences may therefore strike the outsider as colorful fairs than as platforms for necessary disputes and fruitful controversy.

However, such profound differences may be safely assumed to exist, not least because identity discourses have become increasingly relevant politically and have subsequently been instrumentalized throughout the world, from China through India to the Arab world, Russia, Europe, and so on, in recent years. The much-vaunted return of religion and the clash of cultures determine the agenda of the public sphere, both as domestic and as foreign policy. An international multilingual trans-academic discipline may either mirror this situation or lose itself in mutual backslapping and in historical antiquarianism. Or as Nietzsche famously put it (1874):

> The antiquarian sense of a man, a community, a whole people, always possesses an extremely restricted field of vision; most of what exists it does not perceive at all, and the little it does see it sees much too close up ans isolated; it cannot relate what it sees to anything else and it therefore accords everything it sees equal importance and therefore to each individual thing too great importance. There is a lack of that discrimination of value and that sense of proportion which would distinguish between the things of the past in a way that would do true justice to them; their measure and proportion is always that accorded them by the backward glance of the antiquarian nation or individual.[93]

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93 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely meditations*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 74.

In this horizon, the proposed definition of public history gains further ground: it opens the door to a politically committed trans-academic discipline that is always able to see and comment on its objects in the light of their public instrumentalization. The reflections offered here have identified and substantiated both the guiding principle and the quality criterion: the defense and the development of democratic pluralism.

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