

Reconfiguring History beyond Disciplinarity. Emerging Interdisciplinary Research Fields and Their Approaches Towards History

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What do the Beatles and interdisciplinary research have in common? Possibly more than seems obvious at first. Interdisciplinarity should be imagined as a musical band, THORSTEN LOGGE (Hamburg) observed in his introductory statement to the workshop. The metaphor of the band was one that would come up again and again in discussions during the following two days. At some point possibly every participant had imagined what instrument they played (or would like to play) in the workshop-band. It therefore only seems logical to continue with the metaphor in this review – despite its flaws that will be discussed below.

The founders of the workshop-band were JULIANE TOMANN (Jena), JOANNA WAWRZYŃIAK (Warsaw) and STÉPHANE VAN DAMME (Florence). Their motivation was the observation that interdisciplinarity has „evolved from a trendy catch phrase and a standard buzz word in grant applications [...] to an established research practice“ (quoted from the call for papers). For numerous new disciplines, such as public history, memory studies, or performance studies, interdisciplinary research has become standard practice. The workshop aimed therefore at discussing, first, how historical research is reshaped once it is taken out of the discipline of history and, secondly, how methods and theories from other disciplines influence historical research within the discipline of history. The call attracted researchers from disciplines as diverse as ethnology, literary studies, film studies, criminology, cultural studies, Holocaust studies and of course history and public history.

At the origin of the foundation of every

band, there is the choice or casting of the different band members and the band leader. The question of who is allowed to take part in interdisciplinary research (and consequently who is not) and what disciplines call the tune was addressed by many participants and often came up in the discussions. VITALI TAICHRIB (Berlin) demonstrated that, sometimes, the interdisciplinary researcher acts like a DJ, borrowing from other disciplines, but creating their own sample. He related how he goes back to insights and theories from biology, psychology or sensory studies for his research on the changing perception of reality of the rural population in Russia between 1914 and 1924. This interdisciplinary outlook allows him to adopt a multisensory approach towards what he calls the „sensescape“ of everyday life. Thus, the destruction of church bells following the Russian Revolution lead not only to a new soundscape but more generally to changed perceptions: the vibrations due to the chiming could not be felt anymore and the inhabitants could no longer rely on an acoustic calendar. However, while borrowing from other disciplines, he always has to fall back on history for his methodology, Taichrib observed.

Other bands have only recently welcomed new band members, which has induced them to play a different kind of music. Thus, AURELIA KALINSKY (Berlin) showed how skepticism towards other disciplines led to the omission of important sources in historical research. Until recently, the manuscripts hidden in Auschwitz-Birkenau by members of the so-called Sonderkommando were largely ignored by historians. They only received full attention from literary studies. Mere historical research does not do full justice to the manuscripts, which have often been written in a literary form, Kalinsky argued. They are more than mere written sources and thereby basically unarchivable. An analysis of the manuscripts requires hybrid methodologies that treat them, *inter alia*, as historical sources, as literary texts, as material remains, as anticipated archives, and as part of a collective effort under the most adverse of conditions.

Several presenters discussed whether and how interdisciplinary research should and can involve individuals outside of academia.

Thus, SERGE NOIRET (Florence) pointed towards the distinction between applied versus public history. Whereas the latter is merely addressed towards the public, the former actively involves the public. He also observed that the question of participation in and access to research is still very much a question of language. So far the BASE¹ search engine for academic web resources will only find texts in a limited number of languages for example.

TOMASZ RAKOWSKI (Warsaw) demonstrated what an inclusive form of historical research can look like. Analysing individual and communal building activities in late socialist and post-socialist societies in rural Poland, he pleaded for a „historical affective ontology“ that closely integrates the rural population as research subjects into the construction of the historical text. Such an ontology would treat ethnographic knowledge and oral history including memories, affects and subjectivities as historical facts and not, like a conventional historical ontology, as un-historical or, like a social-memory ontology, as mere objects of investigation.

NANCY ROSE HUNT (Gainesville), who is currently working on a historical ethnography of madness in the Congolese border city of Bukavu, reflected on what it means to „work the border“ in African studies and in mad studies. She observed that both not only cross the borders between disciplines such as history, anthropology, ethnology, psychology, psychiatry, and medicine, but also between academic and non-academic actors, like the local population or (ex)-patients.

SANJA PEROVIC (London) showed how questions of leadership and citizen involvement can become an issue of controversy when border-crossing is considered a threat to social conventions. She analysed British performance artist Stuart Brisley's Peterlee project (1967-1977). In this project, Brisley set out to develop historical awareness amongst the local population through community action aiming at collecting and analysing historical material concerning Peterlee, a mining town newly built in 1948. The final stage, during which the artist was to step down, was supposed to be an open workshop allowing the local community to discuss issues of interest to them. Eventually the project failed ex-

actly because of questions of leadership and the local authorities turned it into a mere heritage project. The collected material is now stored in one of the bulwarks of high culture: the Tate Modern.

KATARZYNA GŁĄB (Warsaw) proposed that also objects can become actors. Using the example of the Indonesian island of Buru, that was the location of a prison camp during the 1960s and 1970s, she showed how natural features such as swamps and marches were co-agents in incarceration and in killing. She therefore pleaded for a more-than-human approach in genocide and memory studies. This allocation of agency to nature was met with skepticism amongst several workshop participants who pointed out the danger of shifting responsibility for atrocities away from the human actors. Głab responded that historical research needs to pay attention to local discourses and that Indonesians tend to consider nature as a crucial actor in everyday life.

The outcome of every band formation will, ideally, be new songs, but sometimes also the formation of new musical subgenres, as DAVID CHURCHILL and HENRY YEOMANS (Leeds) exemplified. They propose „historical criminology“ as a new subdiscipline of criminology. For Churchill and Yeomans such a subdiscipline is not merely characterised by researching past events, but by taking „historical time“ as a theoretical basis. Historical time, for them, is a time of change, a time connected to specific events, a time that is constantly in flow, a time that is tensed in that it connects past and present and a time that is embodied in and by things. Such a historical approach to criminology would, they argued, best be achieved by applying ethnographic methodologies stressing the characteristics of flow and change of historical time; and narratological methodologies stressing eventfulness, change and embodiment.

Every band needs an audience. How that audience receives the music often remains unknown though. In this respect, RASMUS GREINER (Bremen) proposed a theoretical framework for analysing the reception of one product of public history – historical films.

¹ The database can be accessed via <https://www.base-search.net/>.

He argued that what happens when watching a historical film is a shift from a *mise-en-scène* to a *mise-en-histoire*. For Greiner, feature films present histospheres that can be physically experienced by the viewers. He pointed towards film's immersive qualities and argued that by reminding audiences of their own past experiences and of other medially transmitted images of the past, film makes them physically experience history by making them experience themselves.

The metaphor of the band has its limits of course. Some participants pointed out that the band is maybe too positive an image as many people will never be given the opportunity to play in the band and as interdisciplinary research often involves frictions: the base only rarely plays the melody. Thus, EVA-CLARITA PETTAI (Jena) pointed out that in the truth and reconciliation commissions that she analyses, history and law always have the upper hand. Disciplines are still very much an institutional prerequisite. The competition between related research areas like public history and memory studies and their striving to be given the status of discipline is also a consequence of the harsh academic grant allocation system and job market. Finally, participation in (interdisciplinary) academic research is still a question of race, class and gender. Academia is – as was also exemplified by this workshop – still mostly white. The Beatles might also in this sense be a fitting analogy.

All in all, the workshop can be considered a successful example of a rehearsal that allowed room for improvisation. Not all band members were always in agreement, but the discussion was fruitful. This overall harmony was possibly due to the fact that all participants were versed in similar musical genres: they came from related disciplines in the humanities. Representatives from disciplines using completely different methodologies and theories such as sociology, political science, psychology, psychotherapy, the neurosciences or archaeology, were, at the most, only referred to, but did not themselves take part in the rehearsal. However, since participants agreed that the discussion should be continued, we can look forward to further rehearsals with, possibly, new band members bringing in harmony or dissonance.

Conference overview:

Juliane Tomann (Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena) and Joanna Wawrzyniak (University of Warsaw): Introduction

Keynote Roundtable: History and its Relation to other Disciplines in the 21st Century. Key Issues and Challenges

Chair: Joachim von Puttkamer (Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena)

Key Note Speakers: Thorsten Logge (University of Hamburg), Serge Noiret (European University Institute, Florence), Eva-Clarita Pettai (Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena)

History beyond Narrative: Senses and Affects

Chair: Joanna Wawrzyniak (University of Warsaw)

Vitali Taichrib (Freie University Berlin): Reconstructing Sensespaces. The Interdisciplinary Findings of the Sensory History Perspective

Tomasz Rakowski (University of Warsaw): Towards the Extra-Textual Historical Method. Researching Vernacular Building in Late Socialist and Post-socialist Poland

Reimagining History in Performative Art and Film

Chair: Juliane Tomann (Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena)

Sanja Perovic (King's College, London): Dead History / Live Art. The Revolutionary Time of Stuart Brisley

Rasmus Greiner (University of Bremen): Histospheres. Reconfiguring Historical Awareness Through Historical Film

History in Emerging Transdisciplinary Fields

Chair: Stéphane van Damme (European University Institute, Florence)

Nancy Rose Hunt (University of Florida, Gainesville): Whither Madness Studies?

David Churchill and Henry Yeomans (University of Leeds): Reconfiguring History in the Social Sciences. Time and Method in His-

torical Criminology

Transdisciplinary Challenges and „New“ Sources

Chair: Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (German Historical Institute, Warsaw)

Katarzyna Głab (University of Warsaw) Researching More-than-human in Genocide and Memory Studies

Aurelia Kalisky (Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin) Problematic Sources and Hybrid Methodologies. The Case of the Sonderkommando Manuscripts

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