



Ancient History: What for? The Possibilities between Teaching and Entertainment through Digital Games

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ABSTRACT. There are several visions and proposals concerning the ways – and the content – to approach teaching History in schools, although it is possible to assert that there is one important consensus among the specialists: Teaching History is much more than simply teach ‘dates’ and ‘events’ expecting students to memorize them, but rather it is about working towards the development of the critical-analytical tools of the students, as well as other different transferable skills and abilities, useful in different situations of quotidian life. Based on this understanding, it is possible to see how History and its processes of learning open themselves to a myriad of possibilities and tools, especially those made available by the advances and the development of digital technologies, increasingly ubiquitous. In this sense, the present article aims at, specifically, discussing the possibilities of teaching Ancient History through digital games. Bearing that in mind, two discussions are presented concerning, first, the theoretical discussions on historical literacy – and the concepts of historicity, temporality and historical conscience – and second, the role of the entertainment industry in relation to these discussions. Concerning this last element, it will be sought to present a commentary on the articulation of the possibilities of working towards a historical education, starting from an analysis of textual and graphical narratives of games, such as *Assassin's Creed Origins*, developed by Ubisoft.

Keywords: history teaching; ancient history; entertainment; basic education; historicity; historical literacy; gamification.

História Antiga para quê? Possibilidades entre Ensino e Entretenimento por meio de jogos digitais

RESUMO. Há uma série de visões e propostas sobre as formas – e o conteúdo – para se abordar o ensino de História nas escolas, embora possamos afirmar que existe já um ponto pacífico / consensual entre os mais diversos especialistas: Ensinar história é muito mais do que passar ‘datas’ e ‘fatos’ para os estudantes decorarem, mas sim sobre se trabalhar a construção do ferramental crítico-analítico dos estudantes, bem como uma série de outras habilidades, transferíveis também para outros momentos de sua vida cotidiana. A partir deste entendimento, observamos que a História e seus processos de ensino-aprendizagem se abrem para uma miríade de possibilidades e ferramentas, sobretudo, aquelas disponibilizadas pelos avanços e desenvolvimento das tecnologias digitais, cada vez mais onipresentes. Nesse sentido, o presente artigo tem como objetivo específico discutir as possibilidades de ensino de História Antiga por meio de jogos digitais. Para tanto, apresentamos duas argumentações que se pautam, primeiro nas discussões conceituais de literacia histórica – e os conceitos de historicidade, temporalidade e consciência histórica – e segundo sobre o papel da indústria do entretenimento junto a essas discussões. Nesse último quesito, buscaremos comentar a articulação entre as possibilidades de desenvolvimento de uma educação histórica, a partir de uma análise das narrativas textuais e gráficas de jogos como, por exemplo, *Assassin's Creed Origins*, desenvolvido pela Ubisoft.

Palavras-chave: ensino de história; história antiga; entretenimento; historicidade; literacia histórica; gamificação.

¿Historia antigua para qué? Posibilidades entre la enseñanza y el entretenimiento a través de juegos digitales

RESUMEN. Hay varias visiones y propuestas sobre las formas – y los contenidos – de abordar la enseñanza de la Historia en las escuelas, aunque es posible afirmar que hay un consenso importante entre los especialistas: la enseñanza de la Historia es mucho más que simplemente enseñar ‘fechas’ y ‘eventos’ esperando que los estudiantes los memoricen, sino que se trata de trabajar por el desarrollo de las herramientas crítico-analíticas de los estudiantes, así como otras diferentes habilidades y destrezas transferibles, útiles en diferentes situaciones de la vida cotidiana. A partir de esta comprensión, es posible

ver cómo la Historia y sus procesos de aprendizaje se abren a un sinfín de posibilidades y herramientas, especialmente las puestas a disposición debido los avances y el desarrollo de las tecnologías digitales, cada vez más omnipresentes. En este sentido, el presente trabajo tiene como objetivo, específicamente, discutir las posibilidades de enseñar Historia Antigua a través de juegos digitales. Teniendo esto en cuenta, se presentan dos discusiones sobre, primero, las discusiones teóricas sobre alfabetización histórica - y los conceptos de historicidad, temporalidades y conciencia histórica - y segundo, el papel de la industria del entretenimiento en relación a estas discusiones. En cuanto a este último elemento, se buscará presentar un comentario sobre la articulación de las posibilidades de trabajar una educación histórica, a partir de un análisis de narrativas textuales y gráficas de juegos, como *Assassin's Creed Origins*, desarrollado por Ubisoft.

Palabras-clave: enseñanza de la historia; historia antigua; entretenimiento; historicidad; alfabetización histórica; gamificación.

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Introduction

The necessity for an assessment of teaching history in Brazil, from primary to high schools, is becoming more and more necessary. Not only because of the importance of teaching history – understood as the disciplinary field –, but also because of the crucial need to examine different concepts that are inherent to historical knowledge, such as the problematization of the present through the historicity of current debates and issues, as well as the importance of understanding a History of Concepts. And, most importantly, the promotion of historical literacy in the process of formation of historical subjects. These are just some of the considerations that can be mentioned to show the importance of teaching history, be it formal or informal, as long as there is a proper definition of what is being understood as historical education.

Peter Lee provides a definition for this matter:

An historical education should not only confirm the ways of thinking that students already possess: it must develop and expand their conceptual apparatus, aiding students to see the importance of different argumentation and knowledge modes, and therefore, enable them to decide about the importance of the dispositions that made them acting norms. It must develop a certain type of historical consciousness – a form of historical literacy – becoming possible to the student to experience different ways of approaching the past (including history), including oneself as an object of historical investigation. History can be understood, as other public forms of knowledge, as a metacognitive tradition that people have been struggling for a long time to make a possible practice (Lee, 2016, p. 140)¹.

From the quotation above, it becomes necessary to clarify and discuss the concept of Historical Consciousness. However, it is not possible to make an in-depth approach of such complex concept with just a few lines on an article, therefore, this discussion will be intermediated by the work of Maria Auxiliadora Schmidt that facilitates the comprehension of Jörn Rüsen's proposal (2014, p. 42):

The category of historical culture theorized by Rüsen points to historical consciousness as a general and elementary reality of human explanation of the world and the self, with unquestionable practical meaning for life, proposing that historical awareness is only one small step away from historical culture. If one examines the role that the historical consciousness plays in the life of a certain society, it appears as a specific fundamental cultural contribution that affects and influences almost all the areas of praxis of human life².

The distinction between historical consciousness and historical culture, starting from the quotidian practice is fundamental in the school environment, especially when a process of historical literacy is identified through various didactic resources. The development of games by the entertainment industry employing elements that reflect both the historical consciousness and culture of the present time is a reality that is part of the everyday life of millions of people in the contemporary world. Several historical elements accompany those games' narratives – as well as their graphical presentation – enabling history teachers, and specifically gamers, to make historical inferences about these narratives. For this article, considering the areas of specialization of the authors, the specific temporality referred to as Ancient History was selected. However,

¹ In the original: A Educação Histórica não deve apenas confirmar formas de pensar que os alunos já têm: ela deve desenvolver e expandir seu aparato conceitual, ajudar os alunos a verem a importância das formas de argumentação e conhecimento e assim permitir que decidam sobre a importância das disposições que fazem essas normas atuantes. Ela deve desenvolver um determinado tipo de consciência histórica – uma forma de literacia histórica – tornando possível ao aluno experimentar diferentes maneiras de abordar o passado (incluindo a história) incluindo a si mesmo como objeto de investigação histórica. A história pode ser entendida, como outras formas públicas de conhecimento, como uma tradição metacognitiva, na qual pessoas têm lutado há tempos para torná-la uma prática possível.

² In the original: a categoria da cultura histórica teorizada por Rüsen aponta a consciência histórica como uma realidade elementar e geral da explicação humana do mundo e de si mesmo, com um significado inquestionável prático para a vida, propondo que da consciência histórica há somente um pequeno passo à cultura histórica. Se se examina o papel que tem a consciência histórica na vida de uma sociedade, aparece como uma contribuição cultural fundamentalmente específica que afeta e influi e quase todas as áreas da *praxis* da vida humana.

the same exercise could be – and in fact is – applied to different temporalities or games' narratives that bring historical elements either as a central motif or background as a form of entertainment.

It is also important to highlight that this type of discussion is only possible considering the current historiographical context and the different theoretical debates concerning the aforementioned concepts, for they are part of the historical and didactical processes and debates of the last decades. In fact, it is not possible to say that these concerns about historical education have always been a part of the academic debate or of the academic production, quite the opposite. These concerns are recent, and, in Brazil, they started during the 1980's, and only since then, the academy has been taking Teaching History in Basic Education as an object of research. This process was prompted by the changes in the academic training of history teachers, shifting from the courses on Education and their own specificities, to an internal evaluation within the disciplinary field of History, similarly to what happened in the areas of the Philosophy and Theory of History.

According to Marcos Antônio da Silva and Selva Guimarães Fonseca (2010, p. 15-16), two of the most referenced researchers on these topics in Brazil:

[...] The texts of the curricular documents 'prescribed' reveal the goals, political positions, and theoretical questions that configure not only the formative role of History as a school discipline, but also the strategies of constructing / manipulating historical knowledge in schools. That alone leads us to these initial questions: 'Is everything History? If everything is History, why do the schools of Basic Education address only certain content, chosen and elaborated in different places of production? Why, in different school realities, in the quotidian curricular construction, are other sets of knowledge selected and taught? In which ways do the History curricula 'prescribed and lived' operate in the sense of selecting why, what and how to teach History?'³.

The discussions and problematizations present in this article are thus based on these very questions about what History is, as well as how and why one teaches History. From this perspective, it becomes central to highlight that history, as a school discipline, takes on specific characteristics that diverge from those of teaching history in higher education, and that the practice of teaching history in Basic Education is a political, cultural and social issue. Such practice must not be understood as a mere reproduction or replication of curricular proposals and institutional guidelines. Then, still in accordance with the aforementioned authors, it is necessary to highlight that the teacher of history in Basic Education may take on multiple functions that go well beyond that of replicating content according to curricular documents:

Historical teaching has an educative, formative, cultural, political role or roles, and its relation to the construction of citizenship permeates different spaces of historical knowledge production. Therefore, in the current debate of the area, there is a clear concern to locate, in the field of History, problematizing questions that refer to the time in which we live and to other times, in a critical dialogue between the multiplicity of subjects, periods, places and cultures. Consequently, the configuration(s) of the lived and taught histories by the teachers, within the four walls of the classroom and, also, outside the schools' territories, as well as the histories that the students learn in those and different spaces, is much more complex than many suppose. The curricular dimensions are sometimes close, sometimes distanced, sometimes they counter each other in real movements, dynamic, dialectical and, as a consequence, historic. (Silva & Fonseca, 2010, p. 24-25)⁴.

Therefore, while proposing an assessment of historical literacy for the specific period of ancient history, it is not the issue related to 'content' that needs to be analyzed, but rather, the examination of the use of students and teachers' everyday elements, making them the object of analysis and the means to stimulate historical-critical thinking about the present. Besides that, another question that comes to the central stage is the one concerning the use of an object that, traditionally, is not identified as an historical document or historical source, one that is able to provide an historical education and a discussion on historical knowledge and narratives: digital games and their visual and textual narratives.

The studies on using digital games, identified henceforth only as 'games', in the school environment, is still a space that needs to be conquered, especially in relation to the teaching of history. Although there is a

³ In the original: [...] Os textos dos documentos curriculares 'prescritos' são reveladores de objetivos, posições políticas, questões teóricas que configuram não apenas o papel formativo da História como disciplina escolar, mas também estratégias de construção/manipulação do conhecimento histórico escolar. Isso nos remete às primeiras perguntas: 'Tudo é História? Se tudo é História, por que às escolas de Educação básica são endereçados determinados conteúdos específicos, selecionados, elaborados em diferentes lugares de produção? Por que, nas diferentes realidades escolares, na construção curricular cotidiana, outros conhecimentos são selecionados e ensinados? De quais formas os currículos de História, 'prescritos e vividos' operam no sentido de selecionar para quê, o quê e como ensinar em História?.'

⁴ In the original: Ao Ensino de História cabe um papel educativo, formativo, cultural e político, e sua relação com a construção da cidadania perpassa diferentes espaços de produção de saberes históricos. Desse modo, no atual debate da área, fica evidente a preocupação em localizar, no campo da História, questões problematizadoras que remetam ao tempo em que vivemos e a outros tempos, num diálogo crítico entre a multiplicidade de sujeitos, tempos, lugares e culturas. Portanto, a(s) configuração(ões) da(s) história(s) vivida(s) e ensinada(s) pelos professores, entre as quatro paredes da sala de aula e, também, fora dos limites dos territórios escolares, bem como das histórias que os alunos aprendem nesses e noutros espaços, é bem mais complexa do que muitos supõem. As dimensões curriculares ora se aproximam, se mantêm, ora se distanciam, ora se contrapõem num movimento real, dinâmico, dialético, logo, histórico.

good number of different studies and publications from other areas, it is still a topic hardly looked at in the field of history at Brazilian universities.

One of the studies about the use of games in the teaching of history reports the experience from researchers affiliated to the State University of Bahia, UNEB. In their work, it is possible to identify several important topics such as the insertion and diffusion of games in contemporary society, and the success of games among certain social segments and age groups. The studies stress the following characteristics:

All these developments in digital games are drawing a lot of attention, which is not passing unnoticed by some parts of our society, especially by research and teaching centers.

Only now, digital games have become important and their enthusiasts are being heard by the academy because this subject is no longer seen as childish nonsense, but rather, it is now understood as a propeller of the technological materiality of contemporary society.

According to Xavier [2010], the perceptions about this cultural element started changing in the academic environment when researchers started to see it beyond the conception of a mere lighthearted technological artifact, used as temporary occupation of leisure time and aimed only at recreational activity with an end on itself, that is, in the act of [playing]. (Neves, Alves, Fuentes, & Flores, 2010, p. 104)⁵.

In the last decade, there were considerable advances on the research of this topic. However, it is still necessary to improve some of the discussions that lead to more advanced and profound approaches in terms of theories of historical knowledge and its teaching and learning within the scope of basic education.

One noticeable premise derived from these discussions and studies is the conclusion that the field of study of 'games', in its relation to culture and human behavior, is of interdisciplinary nature and hybrid genres.

The evident interdisciplinarity of games has attracted to its study areas of knowledge as diverse as philosophy, semiotics, psychology, anthropology, computer science, electrical engineering, telecommunications, cognitive science, advertisement, marketing, communication, design, computer graphics, animation, literary and art criticism, narratology, ludology, education, all of them in direct relation to multiple and integrated characteristics of games. There is, indeed, a hybrid, poly- and metamorphic field that changes itself at a surprising speed, not allowing itself to be caught in fixed categories or classifications, seeing that it is moved by technological innovation. The topicality of a game rarely surpasses six months and can be measured by the disappearance of mentions of it in news groups (discussion groups on themes of interest on the internet). Games are hybrids because they involve coding, navigation scripting, interface design, animation techniques, usability, soundscapes (Santaella & Feitoza, 2009, p. xii)⁶.

In view of the conceptual and introductory elements concerning the teaching of history and the use of 'games' as a means of reflection on historical knowledge, this article is focused on answering the following question: what is the purpose of teaching and learning history? To answer this question, the concept of historicity within 'games' and the relations between past, present and future will be analyzed.

Historicity in Games: The Present, the past and the construction of meaning

There are some preliminary concepts that need to be better understood before coming to the object of analysis of this article, that is, the analysis of historicity and the historical narratives in 'games'.

Peter Lee, in a different article that proposes a reflection on the reasoning for learning and teaching history, discusses ideas that foster the analysis of historical concepts and their meaning. In his approach, it becomes possible to understand the temporal dynamic inherent to historical knowledge and the construction of meaning. According to Lee, the construction of the past occurs from the relations with the present that in turn attributes meaning to concepts that are 'encapsulated' according to certain temporalities.

⁵ In the original: Todo esse desenvolvimento dos jogos digitais vem chamando muita atenção e não passa despercebido por algumas instâncias da nossa sociedade, principalmente pelos centros propulsores de ensino e pesquisa.

Somente agora os jogos digitais se tornaram importantes e seus entusiastas estão sendo ouvidos nas academias por que esse assunto deixou de ser encarado como tolice infantil e passou a ser entendido como propulsor da materialidade tecnológica da sociedade contemporânea.

Conforme afirma Xavier [2010], as percepções sobre esse elemento cultural começaram a mudar no âmbito acadêmico, quando os pesquisadores passaram a visualizá-lo para além da concepção de mero artefato tecnológico não sério, utilizado como ocupação temporária de tempos livres e voltado apenas para atividades lúdicas que se encerram em si mesmo, isto é, no seu próprio ato

⁶ In the original: A interdisciplinaridade evidente dos games tem atraído para seu estudo áreas diversas do conhecimento como a filosofia, a semiótica, a psicologia, a antropologia, as ciências da computação, a engenharia elétrica, as telecomunicações, as ciências cognitivas, a publicidade, o marketing, as comunicações, o design, a computação gráfica, a animação, a crítica literária e da arte, a narratologia, a ludologia, a educação, todas elas em relação direta com as múltiplas e integradas características dos games. Tem-se aí, de fato, um campo híbrido, poli e metamórfico, que se transforma a uma velocidade surpreendente, não se deixando agarrar em categorias e classificações fixas, uma vez que é movido pela inovação tecnológica. A atualidade de um game raras vezes passa de seis meses e pode ser medida pelo desaparecimento das menções que são feitas a eles nos news groups (grupos de discussão sobre temas de interesse nas redes). Games são híbridos porque envolvem programação, roteiro de navegação, design de interface, técnicas de animação, usabilidade, paisagem sonora.

One does not escape the past. It is constructed from concepts that we employ to deal with the day-to-day activities of the physical and social world. Sometimes the concepts encapsulate the past in the form of causal processes (e.g. 'tree', 'mother', 'bombs'). At other times, it is wrapped in an institutional past – in the case of talking about a government or an illegal child, or in cases where some criteria of legitimacy were not found. However, the control of the past is always less formal (Lee, 2011, p. 20)⁷.

The present time, which is surrounded by quotidian social elements, is what attributes meaning to the words and concepts created with specific connotations and linked to lived historical moments. It is due to this dynamic that the textual and graphic languages present in the 'games' bring elements of historical nature and attract the audience to which it is intended. Even if these elements do not bring theoretical methodologies for the construction of a scientific and academic historical knowledge, they still generate meaning and senses, for they are inserted in social environments that receive institutionalized concepts, which, in turn, are culturally normalized. This is only possible because social and cultural knowledge is already full of historical meaning from a collective memory.

Therefore, teaching and learning history brings a dynamic that aims to promote a process of reflection on the issues of the present. It is precisely this present that produces elements for the historicity of each lived temporality as proposed by François Hartog (2014, p. 11 – 12):

[...] A historicity regime is only a way to interlock the past, the present and the future or to compose a mixture of these three categories, [...] the term expresses the manner of a historical condition, the way that an individual or a collective establishes and develops itself over time⁸.

The concept of historicity is established in regimes that construct meanings from each one of its temporalities. It is, thus, important to return to what Hartog (2013, p. 13) explains:

The use that I propose of historicity's regime may be rather ample or restrictive: macro or micro-historical. It may be an artifact to clarify the biography of an historical character [...] or that of an ordinary man; with it, one can traverse a great masterpiece (literary or otherwise) [...] one can question the architecture of a given city, yesterday and today, or else compare the great scissions of the relationship with time of different societies, close to us or distant. And, each time, by means of particular attention given to moments of crisis throughout time and to its expressions, one aims to achieve greater intelligibility⁹.

The notion of time and temporality is inherent to the process of conceptual constitution proposed by Hartog. The French author's proposal affords an understanding of the rupture with a linear concept of time and that historical and social crises enable changes in both historical conceptions and memory. These crises provide the means to break with established dynamics between past, present and future. It is exactly the relation between past and present that allow us to understand and differentiate history and historicity because the latter, based on the present, promotes meaning and comprehension of the past.

To better define the concept of historicity, Hartog addresses the concept of historical time elaborated by Koselleck and enables the understanding of the relationship that needs to be established between the present, the past and the future, considering the possibility of constituting several types of history.

With [the concept of] historicity's regime, we touch, in this way, on one of the conditions of possibility for the production of histories: according to the respective relations of present, past and future, certain types of history are possible, and others are not.

Historical time, if we follow Reinhart Koselleck, is produced by the distance created between the field of experience, on the one hand, and the horizon of expectation, on the other: it is generated by the tension between these two sides. It is this tension that the regime of historicity sets out to clarify [...]. Even more precisely, to clarify about the types of distance and modes of tension. (Hartog, 2013, p. 39)¹⁰.

⁷ In the original: Não se escapa do passado. Ele é construído a partir de conceitos que nós empregamos para lidar com o dia a dia do mundo físico e social. Algumas vezes os conceitos encapsulam o passado sob a forma de processos causais (ex. 'árvore', 'mãe', 'bombas'). Algumas vezes, é envolvido um passado institucional – no caso de se falar em um governo ou uma criança ilegal, ou em casos que alguns critérios de legitimidade não foram encontrados. Mas, o controle do passado é sempre menos formal

⁸ In the original: [...] um regime de historicidade é apenas uma maneira de engrenar passado, presente e futuro ou de compor um misto das três categoriais, [...] o termo expressa a forma da condição histórica, a maneira como um indivíduo ou uma coletividade se instaura e se desenvolve no tempo.=

⁹ In the original: O uso que proponho do regime de historicidade pode ser tanto amplo, como restrito: macro ou micro-histórico. Ele pode ser um artefato para esclarecer a biografia de um personagem histórico [...] ou a de um homem comum; com ele, pode-se atravessar uma grande obra (literária ou outra) [...] pode-se questionar a arquitetura de uma cidade, ontem e hoje, ou então comparar as grandes escissões da relação com o tempo de diferentes sociedades, próximas ou distantes. E, a cada vez, por meio da atenção muito particular dada aos momentos de crise do tempo e às suas expressões, visa-se a produzir mais inteligibilidade.

¹⁰ In the original: Com o regime de historicidade, tocamos, dessa forma, em uma das condições de possibilidade da produção de histórias: de acordo com as relações respectivas do presente, do passado e do futuro, determinados tipos de história são possíveis e outros não.

O tempo histórico, se seguirmos Reinhart Koselleck, é produzido pela distância criada entre o campo da experiência, de um lado, e o horizonte da expectativa, de outro: ele é gerado pela tensão entre os dois lados. É essa tensão que o regime de historicidade propõe-se a esclarecer [...]. Mais precisamente ainda, dos tipos de distância e modos de tensão.

In view of these discussions, the present article intends to champion a view that the historical narratives made possible through 'games' cannot be related or compared to the historical narratives that are based on traditional methodologies that aim at producing scientific, academic knowledge. Rather, that in assessing the different possibilities to promote historical literacy, 'games' have an important role, considering how historical knowledge always presents different meaning and senses. Having said that, it becomes clear that historical knowledge based on 'facts' and 'contents' defined and defended as premises of the teaching of history in basic education must be refuted in favor of promoting cognitive processes that lead to the understanding that history and the knowledge produced about it are not tight narratives created by rigid structures.

Based on these concepts and discussions, in the following section the intention is to analyze some 'games' and their use in teaching history, specifically games concerned with ancient history.

Games, Historical Literacy and the narratives about Ancient History

There is no doubt that it has become a truism to assert that antiquity, and here it is well worth it to emphasize that this relates to the different places the term denotes, be it in the Classical World or to the commonly referred 'Near East', is quite present in today's world. It is necessary then, to leave this commonplace observation, to understand and analyze who is using it, for what purpose and how this presence is being sought, as well as which historical meanings are being produced and identified.

In this article, the specific guiding question, as aforementioned, 'ancient history, what for?' The answer provided here is partially given by analyzing the uses and the consumption of antiquity by contemporary cultural industry, considering that, on the one hand, antiquity is now an influential niche of 'pop' culture, especially in the world of videogames, and, on the other hand, the role historians may perform in the development of these popular culture products which are not considered to be scientific historical narratives.

Initially, contemplating the relationship between antiquity and pop culture industry, it is easily observable how motifs, characters, stories and narratives from and about the past are continually and repeatedly coopted, reimagined and retold in different products. This range of meaning, in the present, by the present and for the present, refers to elements that are historically constituted by the past.

In the universe of 'games', examples of these narratives about the past are the most diverse, both in terms of genre and theme: from games that simulate great ancient battles such as 'Rome Total War' (2003) and its sequel 'Rome Total War II' (2013); to games that are inspired by ancient mythology, such as the original 'God of War' trilogy (2005-2010), 'Age of Mythology' (2002); to more recent games similar to 'civilization', such as 'Aggressors: Ancient Rome' (2018), and 'Imperator: Rome' (2019). There are also two games to which we call special attention, belonging to the same franchise that, since 2007, has sought a 'special' relationship with history and the past: 'Assassin's Creed Origins' (2017) and 'Assassin's Creed Odyssey' (2018). The first takes place in Egypt between the years of 49 and 44 BCE; the second during the period of the Peloponnesian War.

From this list alone – which is in no way exhaustive – one thing becomes quite clear: regardless of the quality or criticism concerning these products, the audience reach, their media specificities, or even the amount of historical research involved in their development, today ancient history and its themes are, first and foremost, important means of entertainment. Antiquity is alive and well in our present, an everyday occurrence that is teeming with symbols of the past.

The importance of the past as a form of entertainment in today's culture cannot and should not be underestimated. For the large majority, the entertainment industry is not only the gateway to other temporalities, but also the most pervasive and solid connection to the past, and on a scale that is practically unimaginable to the common historian.

Let us take, as an example, the game 'Assassin's Creed Origins.' According to the specialized website VGChartz¹¹, the game has sold more than four million copies for the console PlayStation 4 alone. The website TECHSPOT¹², in turn, reports that its sales for PC through the Steam platform has sold somewhere between one to two million copies.

In other words, without taking into consideration sales on the second most important console of the time, namely Xbox One, the sales of physical media or PC through different platforms, the number of copies sold is somewhere between five to six million, meaning five to six million players around the world. It would be

¹¹ <http://www.vgchartz.com/game/181687/assassins-creed-origins/>

¹² <https://www.techspot.com/news/76858-assassin-creed-odyssey-hits-62k-concurrent-players-steam.html>

terribly unfair to compare these numbers, for example, with the circulation of a book or scientific article produced by an historian dealing with the same period or theme – the power struggle between Cleopatra and Ptolemy, and the role of Rome and Julius Caesar in Egypt's conflicts.

Today's public experiences antiquity primarily as a product that is enjoyable and represents an important part of the entertainment industry. Antiquity has a well-defined and relevant space in this industry, as is evident, given that each year several products relating to it are developed and published. Antiquity is voraciously consumed by a legion of players around the world, and considering this reality, it is more than fair to ask: What is the role of ancient history as a field, and the professional historian in and for this industry?

Answering these questions is considerably complex, as it necessarily goes through certain conceptual discussions as seen above. Bearing in mind those concepts, it becomes essential to understand that it is possible to identify different discourses about the past, or even, that there are different ways of producing narratives about it.

In this sense, the problematization and differentiation of historiographical work from different types of narratives about the past is reinforced. The former thus understood as a form of writing about the past supported by a set of theoretical and methodological processes of analysis and circumscribed to a series of requirements that, ultimately, attribute to it a scientific nature (Barros, 2014), and the latter based on a very different set of assumptions and therefore may be granted a fictional or, as an example, a metafictional historiographical nature (Hutcheon, 1991).

This distinction between historiography and the other narratives about the past in the cultural industry's products shows, in the most basic form, that the latter, based on a regime of knowledge that is not necessarily scientific, does not need to be guided by the same parameters as that of the historian's writing about the past. As a direct consequence, the criticism or judgement that is made taking historiography as the measure ends up being insipid.

However, it has been increasingly observed that these same products have, in the last decade, sought to present to their audience a certain idea of 'historicity', even as a characteristic that would raise the monetary value, an element that brings a new set of issues.

Once again, let us return to the game 'Assassin's Creed Origins'. During its development by the company Ubisoft Montreal, developers were able to discuss ideas with a team of historians – a team that is in fact a permanent group within the company – as well as other professionals such as philologists and even the French archaeologist Jean-Claude Golvin, responsible for creating a series of paintings reconstructing archeological sites that were then modelled in 3D for the game¹³.

At the same time that there is this 'investment' in the historical-scientific direction of the game's development, it is the head of the team of historians, Maxime Durand, who himself points to the fact that there are other elements that need to be considered: "[...] we researched encyclopedias, then other books, then we watched films and TV series to see how the entertainment industry has approached the subject" (The Guardian, 10/09/2017).

In other words, the historian shows that there is a real concern in dealing with the public's expectations about a given historical theme and characters; expectations that are negotiated not only with historiography, but also with prior productions of pop culture's narratives.

In this exact sense, both Durand and Ashraf Ismail, the game's general director, are unanimous in highlighting the primarily fictional character of the product, stressing that it is a work of entertainment, even if it has a historical basis:

We have guys like Maxime who are part of the team, who are involved in the early concept discussions. They're there when we're talking about the narrative, they are always there to be a bit critical on the credibility side – it's a back and forth that for us creates a happy medium where we can still create a pure fiction, but one grounded in history (Ismail, The Guardian, 10/09/2017).

I think some historians will never see the value of this, or they'll only see the value as an entertainment product, and that's okay, because that's what we built it for at first (Durand, The Guardian, 10/09/2017).

The question here, however, should not be minimized to a discussion concerning the role of the historian or ancient history as some sort of 'quality control' for historical accuracy of a determined product, as if it were

¹³ This information about the development team was taken from a set of interviews conducted by the developers for the newspapers. The Guardian (2017/09/10) and The New York Times (2018/05/16).

possible to hand out an equivalent of a 'seal of quality' about the past. Ultimately, this type of discussion rests on the assumption that there is a 'right' and 'wrong' about the past and about different narratives, or even a return to the idea of the 'fact as they truly happened'.

Here is proposed that the role of the historian, and of ancient history as far as its themes are concerned, is to provide consumers with these non-professional narratives, and from them, an idea of historical literacy.

As Schmidt points out, a concept of historical literacy involves:

The construction of historically literate subjects that are minimally able [...] to accomplish certain things, such as:

- Having an image of the past that enables them to orient themselves in time which requires mastery of certain historical content or a coherent, substantive understanding of the past;
- The knowledge of how to develop an explanation and narrative of the past which presupposes mastery of substantive and second-order ideas that collaborate to organize the past, making knowledge about the past possible. (Schmidt, 2009, p. 17-18)¹⁴.

Although Schmidt is mainly dealing with an issue of teaching history, it seems reasonable to extrapolate these guidelines well beyond the school environment to our own community.

The idea of historical literacy emerges intrinsically with the concept already discussed by Rösen (1992) of creating a 'historical consciousness', that is, a 'specific mode of orientation' that enables the understanding of a past reality in order to understand the present reality.

While articulating the concepts of historical literacy and historical consciousness, we observe that there is a specific concern with the ability to read the different narratives of the past, the result, or even the aim, of which, would be to enable the subjects to problematize themselves (Schmidt & Garcia, 2005), and through themselves look for answers in the relationship between past and present.

The conscious and historically literate individual, therefore, is capable of orienting himself in time, using his knowledge to make a series of decisions in his own present, so that what is important when dealing with narratives of the past is not their accuracy, but rather the ability to problematize them.

In this regard, McCall (2016) presents a similar view concerning simulation games such as 'Assassin's Creed':

If history, however, is primarily the record of the past, an accurate master narrative of sorts that needs to be transmitted to students, the open-ended flexibility of simulation games essentially undermines the enterprise. [...] If one understands history in any way to have been pre-determined, the historical game—open ended and allowing for a variety of outcomes—has little place. In return for playing with the past, however, one can gain a much richer understanding of why certain possibilities were more likely than others and why actors ultimately did what they did. (McCall, 2016, p. 528).

By removing the concern of the historical narrative solely as a record and focusing instead on the universe of questions of thinking historically, or even of temporal orientation as previously stated, one can see the importance of historians working with game developers for the sake of the community as a whole.

On the one hand, it is easier to think about this issue in relation to the school environment, where games can be problematized in the classroom, their narratives can be questioned, and students can be provided with activities that enable them to form their historical awareness and historical literacy. As such, the role of the teacher in the classroom becomes crucial as the mediator of knowledge, for, following McCall (2016), playing with the past becomes less an activity about the transmitting information – such as dates and events –, and more an activity to open up a considerably larger range of questions and concepts to students. Therefore, the teaching activity must be understood, among other aspects, as the one that stimulates creative imagination, constructs knowledge and a historical awareness and, finally, introduces them to a determined historical culture (Parisoto & Telles, 2016).

On the other hand, for those outside the school system, the role of the historian would perhaps be in the development of the game itself. As observed, historicity is increasingly gaining ground in the game industry, with several companies already hiring teams of specialists to be part of their development teams. Although a greater part of these teams' attention was initially focused on being critical support for historical 'credibility'

¹⁴ In the original: A construção de sujeitos historicamente letrados, que sejam minimamente capazes de [...] realizar algumas coisas, como:

- ter uma imagem do passado que lhes permita orientarem-se no tempo, a qual exige o domínio de determinados conteúdos históricos ou uma compreensão substantiva coerente do passado;
- um conhecimento de como desenvolver uma explicação e narrativa do passado, o que pressupõe o domínio de ideias substantivas e de ideias de segunda ordem que colaborem para organizar o passado, fazendo com que o conhecimento do passado possível

– of what did or did not happen – , their role is evolving to one of making the historical contexts involved more explicit, developing products that are even more specific to this goal.

On this subject, it would be amiss not to draw attention to the ‘Discovery Tours’ mode, developed for ‘Assassin’s Creed Origins’, that was envisioned by the producers as a ‘teaching tool’ and a ‘virtual museum’¹⁵, allowing players to interact in different ways with elements of life in Ancient Egypt.

Although there are severe criticisms of this game mode, which has already been discussed elsewhere (cf. Bondioli & Lima, 2019), it is certainly a commendable initiative that a so-called AAA game company took the time to develop a product that has the direct objective to lead to historical reflection.

Final considerations

From the discussions above, the following observations can be made. Firstly, to restate that is not part of the historian’s role to judge narratives about the past that do not fit historiography, for they are conceived by a different set of theories and methodologies that are outside the scope of scientific methodology and the disciplinary field of history, and are not created as an alternative to it.

Similarly, it does not seem to be the role of the historian, or of history itself, to serve as a gauge of historical authenticity or veracity of the different narratives about the past. As stated previously, that cannot be the goal when teaching history, or of any form of reflection about historical knowledge.

The role of the historian, as this article proposes, is to create bridges between these narratives about the past in the diverse products of the cultural industry, and the creation of a historical literacy, that is, the ability of individuals to orient themselves in time and to think historically and critically.

In this specific sense, ‘games’ have an important role to play: they are massively consumed around the world, and have great appeal among teenagers and young adults, and so they may serve as a reference point to understand different temporalities. It is up to the historian to act on two fronts: both in the consumption of these products and their use in the classroom, and on the process of creating these products as part of the development team.

Finally, antiquity and its themes are enjoyable and entertaining, and ancient history has a role under these circumstances, not to be a ‘killjoy’ censor of different narratives, but rather to serve as a mediator between the subject, its entertainment, and the construction of historical knowledge.

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¹⁵ Afirmações essas retiradas do site oficial do modo *Discovery Tours*

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