

The new cultural history as a methodology proposed for research in the nursing history field

A nova história cultural como proposta metodológica para pesquisas no campo da história da enfermagem

Nueva historia cultural como la investigación metodológica propuesta en el campo de la historia de la enfermería

Erika Bicalho Almeida¹; Aline dos Santos da Silva²; Julieta Brites Figueiredo³; Wellington Mendonça de Amorim⁴; Luiz Henrique Chad Pellon⁵

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study's goal has been to discuss the use of the New Cultural History as a methodology for analysis of nursing practices and behaviors related to printed materials. **Methods:** It is descriptive research with qualitative approach, which is derived from the reflection on the theoretical and methodological advances defended by the historian Roger Chartier in the Cultural History field. In order to establish links between the New Cultural History, which was proposed by the historian, and the Nursing History, it was reviewed 2 Doctoral Theses and 3 Master Theses produced at the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History. **Results:** The studies showed that the methodological approach proposed by Chartier is based on the intimate relationship between representations and the effects produced by its appropriations. **Conclusion:** The printed text can suit different forms, and then may gain status of a document-object for the study of cultural history by allowing them to bring back an object, concept or missing person by replacing it with an image capable of representing them adequately.

Descriptors: Nursing History, New Cultural History, Roger Chartier.

¹ Doctor's student enrolled in the Nursing Postgraduate Program at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Alfredo Pinto Nursing School, Member of the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History (LACENF), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Email: ebicalhoenf@hotmail.com.

² Master's student enrolled in the Nursing Postgraduate Program at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Alfredo Pinto Nursing School, Member of the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History (LACENF), Member of the Research Laboratory in Nursing History (LAPHE), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Email: line-enf@hotmail.com.

³ Doctor's student enrolled in the Nursing Postgraduate Program at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Alfredo Pinto Nursing School, Member of the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History (LACENF), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Email: juliabrites@ig.com.br.

⁴ Doctor's Degree in Nursing, Adjunct Professor of the Nursing Department in Public Health at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Alfredo Pinto Nursing School, Member of the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History (LACENF), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Email: amorimw@gmail.com.

⁵ Doctor's Degree in Science by the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Adjunct Professor of the Nursing Department in Public Health at UNIRIO, Alfredo Pinto Nursing School, Member of the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History (LACENF), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Email: luiz.pellon@unirio.br.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Discutir a utilização da Nova História Cultural como método para análise dos usos e costumes da enfermagem relacionados aos materiais impressos. **Método:** Pesquisa descritiva de natureza qualitativa, a partir da reflexão sobre os avanços teórico-metodológicos defendidos pelo historiador Chartier no campo da História Cultural. Para estabelecer nexos entre a Nova História Cultural, proposta pelo historiador, e a História da Enfermagem foram levantadas 02 teses e 03 dissertações produzidas no Laboratório de Abordagens Científicas na História da Enfermagem- LACENF/UNIRIO. **Resultado:** Os estudos apontaram que a metodologia proposta por Chartier está pautada na íntima relação entre representações e os efeitos produzidos pelas suas apropriações. **Conclusão:** As diferentes formas que adquirem o texto impresso ganham status de documento-objeto para os estudos da história cultural por permitirem que se tornem presentes um objeto, conceito ou pessoa ausente mediante sua substituição por uma imagem, capaz de representá-los adequadamente.

Descritores: História da Enfermagem, Nova História Cultural, Roger Chartier.

RESUMEN

Meta: Discutir el uso de la nueva historia cultural como un método para el análisis de las prácticas de enfermería y costumbres relacionadas con los materiales impresos. **Método:** Cualitativa descriptiva, a partir de la reflexión sobre los avances teóricos y metodológicos defendidas por Chartier en el campo de la historia cultural. Establecer vínculos entre la nueva historia cultural, propuesto por el historiador, y la Historia de la Enfermería se plantearon 02 tesis y 03 disertaciones producidas por Laboratorio de Ciencia de abordaje en la historia Enfermagem – LACENF/UNIRIO. **Resultado:** Los estudios apuntaron que la metodología propuesta por Chartier está pautada en la íntima relación entre representaciones y los efectos producidos por sus apropiaciones. **Conclusión:** Las diferentes formas de obtener el documento de estado de ganancia objeto de texto impreso para el estudio de la historia cultural para permitir que se conviertan presente un objeto, concepto o una persona desaparecida reemplazándolo con una imagen capaz de representar adecuadamente.

Descriptores: Historia de la Enfermería, Nueva Historia Cultural, Roger Chartier.

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to study the New Cultural History as a method to analyze the uses and customs of nursing related to printed materials.

There is a broad consensus that documents constitute the privileged link of the present with the phenomena of the past. The past does not exist as an organized and ready thing waiting to be unveiled, but as a reality of multiple senses that is vivified in the present thanks to its mediation by historical documents.¹

Nonetheless, it is not because they are in the documents that the facts occurred exactly as they were described. The role of the researcher is to see the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of their problems; in other words, their main work is not to register, but to evaluate anchored on a theoretical basis.²

The construction of nursing as a profession has a history that is recovered thanks to the mediation of the present with the past through the documents. Some documents have the potential to be used as sources for nursing history studies, namely: photographs, films, newspapers, books, scientific journals, non-scientific journals, service manuals, folders, serials, posters, service reports, almanacs, among others.

Among all types of documents, those produced by the written press have gained special relevance in the context of nursing history research, because it favors the diffusion of the signic element endowed with greater communication power in Western Society: the written word.

The idea of the written press is used to designate newspapers and periodically printed newspapers, which are endowed with a constant editorial structure and directed to a particular readership that has a cultural, ideological and social identity. In this perspective, the recording of the written press, as the production of meanings, can be understood as discursive productions in the communication produced by the ruling class, or by the alliance that makes possible some social interest or strategy, which, in most cases, verbal and non-verbal messages offered to a given society, present in the social phenomena.³

However, in order to support the explanations contained in this article, we consider that the productions of the written press are not restricted to those that bear the mark of journalistic or cultural journalism, but also include those that have benefited in some way from the technological advances promoted by the typographic revolution of Gutenberg, which gained greater agility to the processes of production and circulation of printed products making them the focus of the Western consumer culture.

As aforementioned, the productions of the written press have been used primarily as sources of historical research for the capacity to provide the greatest amount of elements decipherable by Western culture. Nevertheless, sociological-based methodologies used to analyze the cultural phenomena involved in the relationship between print materials and reading have not been able to move beyond the interpretations that universalize the idea of production as an attribute of dominant groups seen under this perspective, as holders of the power to impose their interests and values on readers through the representations of reality, thus organizing all social life.

Against this perspective, the New Cultural History arose, as postulated by Roger Chartier. Currently, the New Cultural History presents itself as the set of historiographical practices based on the theoretical-conceptual and methodological procedures originated from the critical reflection carried out by the historian and some of his contemporaries belonging to the third generation of the Annales School, on the primacy conferred upon the social, statistical and demographic clipping applied to studies of French cultural history flourished in the late 1960s, also known as the history of mentalities.

By the Chartier's interpretive vision, the goal of the New Cultural History is to "identify how, in different places and at different times, a social reality is constructed, thought, given to read." In this sense, the author incorporates to the objective the processes of language giving prominence to reading.^{4,5}

Given the above, the objective is to discuss the use of the New Cultural History as a method to analyze the nursing uses and behaviors related to printed materials.

METHODS

It is descriptive research with qualitative approach, which is derived from the reflection on the theoretical and methodological advances defended by the French historian Roger Chartier in the Cultural History field. Aiming to achieve the proposed goal, a narrative review of the author's main works was carried out in order to extract the necessary elements to promote an interlocution of his central ideas with the requirements of studies in the field of Nursing History.

In order to establish links between the New Cultural History and the Nursing History, it was reviewed 2 Doctoral Thesis and 3 Master Thesis produced at the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History in the Alfredo Pinto Nursing School from the *Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (LACENF/UNIRIO)*. It was used the concepts of representation and appropriation defended by Roger Chartier to analyze the relations of production, circulation and consumption of printed materials produced and consumed by and for Nursing.

Nonetheless, it was not intended to go into more detailed analyzes of the researches presented, but rather to take them as a basis for the reflection on the theoretical-methodological application of the New Cultural History in Nursing History research and other health areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the search for nursing productions that used as theoretical and methodological reference the central ideas of the New Cultural History, as defended by Chartier, no studies were found in virtual collections of scientific productions, nor in the thesis and dissertation bank available online. Considering the pioneering nature of researches that used Chartier's theoretical-methodological framework to analyze the relationships between nursing and other health professions with printed materials - whether they were didactic, scientific or even paradidactic - it was considered pertinent to consider the productions developed in the Laboratory of Scientific Approaches in the Nursing History - *LACENF/UNIRIO*, belonging to the Alfredo Pinto Nursing School (*UNIRIO*).

The following productions were taken to support the reflections: a) the Doctoral Theses: Moraes (2014),

whose object was the representations of the technique for nursing, by Zaira Cintra Vidal; Pellon (2013), who used the paper *Ceará Médico* as the document-object of analysis, discussing the implications of the readings of the eugenic scientific representations for the configuration of a sanitary practices field in *Ceará* State; b) the Master Theses: Mesquita (2015), who studied the representations of nursing in the Waleska Paixão's Pages of Nursing History book.⁶⁻⁸ Also noteworthy is Silveira (2012), who discussed the representations contained in the texts published in the Periodical of the Public Health Special Service; Vidal (2012), who studied the main representations related to nursing in the Medical Magazine from the *Guanabara* State.^{9,10}

Although Chartier links the origin of this recent branch of historiography to the anxieties of French historians in the face of the founding principles of the so-called History of Mentalities, we must point out the existence of another segment of historians who defend the New Cultural History as heir and at the same time questioning a cultural history that has roots in the 18th century and comprises four phases of this historiographical movement, as follows: the classical, during the 19th century with the humanists of the Renaissance, who studied language and literature; the social history of art in the 1930s; the history of the 1960s focused on popular culture and the new cultural history that emerged after the 1970s.¹¹

Without denying the importance of both theoretical currents for the construction of what can now be conceived as New Cultural History, the attention of the lines that will be constructed in this study will seek to divert, if not to avoid, the commitment to approach the points that delimit the opposition and even the complementarity between both intellectual segments, in the stealthy attempt to avoid obstacles to the design of the trajectory traversed by Roger Chartier to build the conceptual and methodological bases on which he built his intellectual project.

Roger Chartier points to the New Cultural History as a historiographical strand, supported by him in the pillars of Literary Theory and Anthropology and no longer in Sociology. This fact provoked a rupture between the idea of culture and the sociological and Marxist models of the third generation of the *Annales* Magazine. For Chartier culture is presented as a dimension of human behavior, representing the meaning that man attributes to his reality, which can be attributed to his social and economic determinations. In order to accomplish it, the historian uses language as a great representative of human reality.¹²

The studies developed within the scope of the *LACENF* have pointed to the importance and meaning of language as a message that combine different signic elements of material, typographic and aesthetic order with the objective of reaching a restricted niche of reception with specific competence to read the codes embedded

in it. It is in this encounter between competent reader and printed product that representation is shaped, with the power to produce changes in social reality, implicitly organizing the hierarchies that must inhabit it.

Chartier maintains an intense dialogue with Bourdieu, when he points out that “representations are not neutral discourses: they produce strategies and practices aimed at imposing authority, deference, and even legitimizing choices.” Therefore, the concept of representation is constructed by the historian as a result of “classifications, divisions and delimitations that organize the apprehension of the social world,” as categories of perception of the real.^{4,5}

On-screen studies have advanced the idea that representations are diffused in society and consolidate over time, through the work of identifying the collective with the values and practices shared in the cultural products that convey social meanings. The results have shown that, like sacred images, what is worshiped by the faithful is not the image but what it represents, the meanings it produces, its symbology, as an “illusion of being there, what is actually not there.”¹²

By following these concepts, representations are capable of internalizing the symbolic form of struggles for power and social domination that exist independently of the individual consciousness and wills that produced them within a given social field.¹³ In the methodological field of the use of representations as a tool for analysis of the Nursing Cultural History, the research developed at the *LACENF* has shown that representational struggles are as important as economic struggles to understand the mechanisms by which a group imposes, or attempts to impose, its conception of the social world, also its values and domain.

In this direction, Moraes exemplifies how the first initiatives of production of didactic materials by nurses in Brazil had as background the construction of a social identity of the profession, capable of detaching it from the knowledge produced by physicians for the nursing profession. This venture required investments in the formation of a group of leaders by the Ana Nery Nursing School at the time, which was done by linking their names to the printed products that took the founding principles of the profession to the main training spaces, consigning a reading niche with force to contribute to the desired project of projection of the profession to high levels of social recognition. Therefore, the study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between representations and the effects produced by their appropriations.⁶

For Chartier, appropriation is the way to historically produce meaning and differentiate meaning through different processes.⁵ Still in the field of appropriations Chartier demonstrates how readers appropriate the texts and how they affect them, neglected by the Cultural Sociology of the third generation of the *Annales*.¹⁴ Chartier stands in the face of this vast field of history, which at the same time integrated as a participant and questioner, as opposed to the corollary of the notion of

culture that reduces it to a symbolic system, incapable of revealing the divisions and/or deviations in the ways of thinking and acting among the members of the same social unit.

In this sense, Pellon’s study of a scientific journal produced by a medical association from the *Ceará* in the 1930s showed that there had been a split within the same group due to the divergences surrounding a federal health reform during the Provisional Government of Getúlio Vargas. Through the analysis of the materiality and aesthetics of the document-object, the author verified that the group not included in the reform work was embedded in the editorial body of the journal, thus commanding all of its publications that started to restrict the themes related to the advances in the field of public health, despite its widespread dissemination in the local news media. Among the provision of public services, one could highlight the training of health visitors and the creation of a health center and other institutions linked to it.⁷

The editorial group of the journal is attuned to the eugenic scientific ideology that found in gynecology and obstetrics a way to control the reproduction of beings with characteristics undesirable to society. In order to consolidate the domain project in the health ideological field, it reinforces the investment in the training of midwives, adds the term to the visitors and starts to publish the didactic material used in its training. The study demonstrates that, through representations competition, the editorial segment of the journal seeks to demonstrate the high level of scientific investment employed by this medical society in the training of these nurses in *Ceará* State and the high degree of independence in relation to government projects.⁷

Given the above, the studies presented have sought to demonstrate a methodological rupture with the reader’s operational inertia in the production of meaning, by treating the purposes of reading practice in determining its relation to the text, with itself and with the other. These relations, often ambiguous, also point to the possession and/or use of the printed text as a modality of struggle against the symbolic domination that the text itself can embed in the lines of its materiality and aesthetics.

The location of the form, its layout within a library and its public ownership may indicate a certain level of power over other people, such as the conduct of religious books in public spaces. Inevitably, this act gives to its holder a distinction between him and the others, for even though he is illiterate he shares a reading practice that influences his way of thinking and acting out of his relation to a printed material. In the same way, the screen studies have shown that the appropriation of books and other scientific texts produces their results in the form of a group or person’s distinction, from the strength that their representations convey.

The appropriation in the Chartier's view takes place "as meaning-producing practices, dependent on the relations between text, print, and modes of reading, always differentiated by social determinations."⁴ In order to correlate representation and appropriation, it is necessary, thus, the enterprise in the analysis of how the text is organized in its materiality and aesthetics, since they command the sense that is sought to reach by means of its consumption in cultural niches that share specific reading skills.¹⁴

In analyzing the representations of the printed documents that served as research object, the authors of the cited studies commune with Chartier in arguing that, based on the analysis of the structures contained in the book and the reading skills of the social groups appropriating it, "A number of propositions can be formulated that articulate new social and cultural practices."¹⁵ Illustrating this assertion, Chartier promotes a dialogue between two great writers and playwrights who permeated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with their works. They are the English William Shakespeare (1564-1616) with Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet, and the Spaniard Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) with his work Don Quixote de la Mancha, who became known and consecrated until Modernity in spaces and social groups differentiated by their reading competence, when they are published in different material and aesthetic forms.¹⁵

Consequently, the *LACENF* researchers have verified in their studies that the sense of reality operates in an intrinsic relation between the modalities that govern the production and circulation of the printed text, which combines from writing, publishing, graphics and censorship, to the forms of appropriations by means of distinct reading practices which, as it has been observed, may prove to be "ungoverned" from those intended by the author community when they think of adapting the materiality and aesthetics of literary works to the skills of their potential readers.⁶⁻¹⁰

The studies have reoriented the *modus operandi* of the analysis in the field of the history of nursing when breaking with the social cuts taken in advance to reach the cultural productions. By inverting the logic of analysis, it seeks to identify between the lines of cultural productions the vestiges of social divisions, their cuts, and elements used to maintain the force of enunciation of certain groups over others, breaking with the theoretical-methodological orientation of the mentalities that the book dealt with as a symbolic system, as a form of representation existing in itself and unrelated to the readings that govern the production of meaning.

The initiatives that dealt with the analyzes of the relations between readers and singular works in this perspective, in turn, failed to advance to the understanding of the meaning produced by them, by implicitly universalizing the process of

reading as a similar act, conditioned by the sign systems that govern the reception of the text among members belonging to the same classes, groups and/or professional layers.¹⁶

One point, however, is at the heart of the questions about research procedures that seek to point out the encounters and deviations that exist in the intentions registered in the printed material and in the appropriations made by its readers: it is a matter of elucidating the criteria that make of the printed text object of this enterprise.

The researches pointed out that the materiality of the printed text makes it possible to capture elements capable of supporting their studies on the meanings thought by the authors of the documents, the commentator and the editor, when they judge the reader as subject to a single meaning, in other words, an authorized reading.

Nevertheless, reading practices do not always operate in the manner desired by the editorial staff, showing that the reader has a creative freedom that influences the meaning produced by the text. The traces of these practices may reside in some form, in written or iconographic sources that are able to translate them or otherwise, in obtaining reports extracted from readers on their readings. At this point, it is precisely where the possibility of reducing the analysis to the particular dimension of practices that has as a mark the diversity of possible ways of executing itself, running the risk of conveying it to an attempt to build a personal identity and history from the memories of reading or even from answers about what seems legitimate to the deponent in what happened to him to have read or heard.

Put another way, the statements people make about their own reading are very unsafe because of what Pierre Bourdieu called the "legitimacy effect" in addressing the issue with Chartier. On the other hand, the exploitation of texts or images that convey data about reading practices is a possible criterion to be adopted, however, it is not very feasible insofar as the existence of these sources are historically very few.¹⁷

According to Chartier, the answer to this dilemma is to reinterpret the objects in all their structures, playing on one side with the reading protocols inscribed in the texts themselves, "being careful, however, against the incorrect use of the category text, (ordinary or ritual) whose tactics and procedures are in no way similar to the strategies that produce the speeches."¹⁷ On the other hand, it is a question of playing with the printing dispositions that can translate global evolutions that affect all printed production and its rules at a given time, but also, to instill manifestations of an intention to manipulate reception.⁷

In this sense, the studies produced in the *LACENF* have been guided by the three principles of analysis proposed by Chartier. After submission to the rigorous documentary critique, Chartier proposes that the analysis of the object document of the study obey to three methodological principles.⁵ The first one aims to situate

the construction of the meaning of the texts between the limits transgressed and controlled freedoms. The historian points out, on the one hand, the existence of a force to be observed by the researchers in the relation between the material forms of writing and the cultural competences of the readers in the delimitation of the frontiers of the understanding of the meaning of texts and their forms of publication. On the other hand, it stresses the need to list for analysis, appropriation as a creative act, producing a difference and an unexpected meaning and directly dependent on the skills that each community of interpretation has with the written culture.

With the aforesaid in mind, it is possible to situate, on the one hand, the inventive capacities of individuals or communities and, on the other, the restrictions and conventions that limit - in a more or less clear way and according to the position they occupy in relations of domination - what is possible for them to think, to say, or to do.¹⁸ In order to give scope to the analysis, Chartier proposes the crossing of disciplines that did not match up to that moment, such as the textual criticism, the book history, and the cultural sociology.⁵

As a second principle, or “method requirement,” Chartier proposes that the researcher strive to undo the “weak idea” that representations are a translation of the real, simple, truthful or deceptive images of a reality that would be external to them. It recommends, therefore, that the force of representations, whether internalized or objectified, be taken as the guiding axis of this principle of analysis, which presupposes allying the power of the written texts through which they will be read or heard, with the mental categories, socially differentiated, imposed by them as the matrices of classifications and judgments.⁵

Regarding the third principle of analysis, the author proposes that the singular works or texts that are object of work to be positioned at the intersection of two axes that organize every methodology of history or cultural sociology, as follows: a synchronic axis and another diachronic. The synchronic axis allows situating each written production in its field or its time putting the document-object in relation to other productions that are contemporary to them. The diachronic axis, in turn, seeks to situate the relation that each new work develops with the past of the genre or of the discipline when giving focus on the consumption that is inscribed in the production of its authors, in the form of imitation, quotation, return to old thinkers, or even rupture.⁵

Given the above, the New Cultural History assumes theoretical and methodological relevance with the potential of reorienting research in the area of Nursing History and related areas as well. Then, considering the variables set for the interpretation of the meaning production capacity, the printed material, which is

the main consumer product produced by the Western societies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the criteria of analysis of the printed texts presented by the New Cultural History, the different forms they acquire (book, periodical, leaflet, among others) have the potential to assume document-object status by becoming central to the research process of the social divisions, hierarchies, conflicts and forces from their recognition as a product of the intentions of different authors who act in the purpose of diffusing certain worldviews.

Taking the printed scientific representations as a document-object of analysis of the Nursing Cultural History shows a revealing potentiality of the way the groups involved in their production perceived and perceived the others, circumscribing an intentionality that aimed at a “correct” reading and expected of their moral values, the social dimension of their performance and their practices, the criticisms directed to others and the limits that demarcated the impenetrability of other agents in the health field, mediated by the inventive capacity of editors and authors to manipulate information using typographic conventions and literary books available at the time of its existence.

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Author responsible for correspondence:
Érika Bicalho de Almeida
Rua Jose Lourenço, 489, casa 8, São Pedro
Juiz de Fora/MG, Brazil
ZIP-code: 36037-460