

«The History Manifesto»: a discussion

introduction by Serge Noiret, with contributions by
Ramses Delafontaine (editor), Quentin Verreycken, Eric Arnesen

Introduction

by Serge Noiret

There is a widespread feeling that public funds and private sponsorship should be used for what – many people think – matters in society. Economists, for example, enjoy broad acceptance as public mediators and interpreters of our contemporary world. University programs in the Humanities, by contrast, are facing a worldwide crisis. In Japan departments are closing and this also means that the Humanities are facing an identity crisis. Such a crisis is acute in the USA where, in order to maintain university programmes, you have to provide an answer to the «What for?» question and prove immediate relevance for the job market and society at large. The academic intellectual market is structured around metrics monitoring the impact and relevance of scholarship being produced so as to attract public and private funds, notwithstanding metrical forms of peerage don't apply properly in the humanities.

Digital Humanities are, partially, an answer to this identity crisis. New or renewed methods or, even more, a brand new discipline¹, is effectively addressing the digital turn that has deeply affected our societies as a whole. Indeed, Digital History overhauls the field of history, revamping traditional ways of dealing with archives and producing academic scholarship. Historians should take note of these global transformations in their discipline and raise their voices vigorously worldwide. Using the appropriate arguments they should explain why they must continue to receive financial support for research and teaching. In addition to Economics, History too is a relevant discipline for interpreting our societies globally.

This is what *The History Manifesto* wants to say, aiming for a global mobilization of the profession². Armitage and Guldi ask historians to move on, adapt their methods and skills to fight for a better recognized and more effective public role: one which they have lost, entrenched as they are in their academic certainties and

¹ S. Noiret, *Digital public history: bringing the public back in*, in «Public History Weekly», 3 (2015), n. 13, DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2014-2647](https://doi.org/10.1515/phw-2014-2647). On Digital Humanities see, S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, digitalhumanities.org/companion/; C. Warwick, *Digital Humanities in Practice*, London, Facet Publishing, 2012; M. Terras, J. Nyhan and E. Vanhoutte, *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, London, Ashgate, 2013; *Read/Write Book 2. Une introduction aux humanités numériques*, ed. Pierre Mounier, Marseille, OpenEdition Press, 2012, books.openedition.org/oep/226.

² J. Guldi, D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, historymanifesto.cambridge.org/files/9814/2788/1923/historymanifesto_5Feb2015.pdf.

petty low range historiography, and trapped in a dialogue with few peers, ignored by the wider public. Whether the idealistic and ideological statements provided in the *Manifesto* are offering new solutions to this crisis is challenged by critics. The amount of criticism received is both an answer to the inadequacy of the contents and, on the contrary, it also proves that the *Manifesto* came at the right moment and has some powerful strengths.

But if these reasons adding to the growing public debate about the *Manifesto*, were not enough, what decided me to really look for the book, was an email correspondence I had at the end of 2014 with Arnita Jones, former executive director of the *American Historical Association* and IFPH secretary until December 2015³. As a public historian interested in history and policy issues, Arnita raised strong criticisms of the *Manifesto*:

The History Manifesto [...] has had high visibility in the US «Chronicle of Higher Education» [...]. It's about the future of the discipline, the role of academics in public culture, and the larger role in advising policy and decision makers that historians should play. Digital history plays a very big role in their arguments. But in the 125 or so pages there is not a word about «public history». It is as if the field does not exist⁴. To some degree this may reflect a shift in the public history conversation to include museums, memory studies, etc., but still, «The History Manifesto» ignores the community of policy historians whose work appears in the «Journal of Policy History», the «Federal History Journal» as well as *The Public Historian*⁵.

Publicizing the *Manifesto* Georg G. Iggers write it is «an important attempt to make history relevant to a broad public...»⁶. But total blindness towards the many settings in which public historians are working outside universities and influencing the public sphere and public debates about the past today affects the whole structure of the *Manifesto*. The absence of public history as an academic discipline existing for more than forty years in the USA is a critical issue with this book. What would

³ *International Federation for Public History*, ifph.hypotheses.org.

⁴ Claire Lemerrier (CNRS in Paris) commented critically the *Manifesto*. She argues that the «longue durée» has never disappeared in historical research in the last decades. She reviewed A. and G.'s pamphlet looking at how open access to scholarship and blogs contributed to widen historians public presence worldwide. I added a specific comment about the absence of any reference to the public history discipline and to the role of public historians especially within the context the *Manifesto* was written: the US academic system. (C. Lemerrier: *L'histoire et ses publics: une question d'historiographie ou de modes de diffusion?*, in «Devenir Historien» devhist.hypotheses.org/2763 and *La longue durée: une histoire sans histoire?*; See also «Devenir Historien», devhist.hypotheses.org/2729.)

⁵ Arnita Jones email to Serge Noiret, Thursday November 13, 2014 and Saturday October 24, 2015, when, in a further conversation she added to the former email that «a particularly egregious point of neglect is that of the impact of Harvard historian Earnest May, whose influential *Thinking in Time* was widely circulated in the US federal government and whose work as senior historian on the 9/11 Commission informed a report read by millions».

⁶ historymanifesto.cambridge.org/#sthash.aqBLV36G.dpuf.

be the mission of public historians working outside academic settings and engaging with who's, sometimes, is dealing very successfully with the past in public?

In January 2015, few weeks after my conversation with Arnita Jones, my wife, Susanna Mancini, professor of comparative constitutional law, participated in a symposium at the University of Texas Law School about «*Popular Sovereignty, Self-determination and Secession*». David Armitage, Lloyd C. Blankin Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History at Harvard University, is studying «secession»⁷. In Austin, Armitage delivered a lecture entitled *Three Concepts of Civil War: Succession, Supersession, Secession*⁸. She came back home telling me she had met a «very interesting historian» dealing with multidisciplinary approaches. Some months later, Armitage delivered two lectures in May 2015 in the History Department of my university, the European University Institute⁹.

For all these reasons, my curiosity was high also because of the bombastically short, declarative title of the book, *The History Manifesto*. This is clearly the kind of statement no historian should ignore! Other Manifestoes came to my mind: Carl Marx's 1848 *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the «non-communist manifesto» written by Walt Whitman Rostow about the stages of economic growth¹⁰ and also, because it was an important moment in my family history, the André Breton 1924 *Manifeste du Surréalisme*¹¹ and, the 1948 *CoBrA manifesto* «La cause était entendue» written by Christian Dotremont, close friend and one of the co-founder, with my father Joseph Noiret, of CoBrA, this last 20th Century Avant-Garde Movement¹².

⁷ D. Armitage, *Secession and Civil War*, in *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, ed. D.H. Doyle, Athens, Ga, University of Georgia Press, 2010, p. 37-55; «*Cosmopolitanism and Civil War*», in *Cosmopolitanism and the Enlightenment*, ed. J.-P. Rubiés and N. Safer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016 and *Civil War: A History in Ideas*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

⁸ law.utexas.edu/news/2015/01/21/popular-sovereignty-self-determination-secession-symposium/.

⁹ *Worlds of Civil War: Globalizing Civil War in the Late Twentieth Century* ([eui.eu/SeminarsAndEvents/Events/2015/May/OccasionalTalkDavidArmitageHarvardUniversityWorldsofCivilWarGlobalizingCivilWarintheLateTwentie\(1\).aspx](http://eui.eu/SeminarsAndEvents/Events/2015/May/OccasionalTalkDavidArmitageHarvardUniversityWorldsofCivilWarGlobalizingCivilWarintheLateTwentie(1).aspx)) and *Horizons of History, Space, Time and the Future of the Past* (www.eui.eu/SeminarsAndEvents/Events/2015/May/HorizonsofHistorySpaceTimeandtheFutureofthePast.aspx). Armitage had been already invited at the EUI a first time to speak about *Republicanism and Federalism: European Pasts and Futures Republican conceptions of international relations and European federalism in the eighteenth century* in 2006. David Armitage research seminar on *Republicanism and Federalism: European Pasts and Futures Republican conceptions of international relations and European federalism in the eighteenth century: Wolff, Vattel, Kant* in 2006 (www.eui.eu/SeminarsAndEvents/Events/2006/November/RepublicanismandFederalismEuropeanPastsandFutures.aspx).

¹⁰ W. Whitman Rostow, *The stages of economic growth: a non-communist manifesto*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

¹¹ A. Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Paris, Éditions du Sagittaire, 1924.

¹² C. Dotremont, *La cause était entendue*, first version of the CoBrA group's manifesto, 8 November 1948, Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3558757). On CoBrA movement see W. Stokvis, *Cobra: The Last Avant-Garde Movement*, Aldershot, Lund Humphries, 2004.

Google Books Ngram Viewer



FIG. 1. Ricerca della parola «M/manifesto» nei libri in inglese pubblicati tra 1800 e 2000 in Google Ngram Viewer - books.google.com/ngrams/.

But, what is a «manifesto» as such? A *Manifesto* is «a public declaration of intentions, opinions, objectives, or motives, as one issued by a government, sovereign, or organization»¹³. The word «manifesto» – as a substantive – derives from Italian. In Niccolò Tommaseo's *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, for «manifesto» we read: «scrittura fatta da chicchessia per fare pubbliche le sue ragioni, una sua impresa, un libro...»¹⁴. In Italian, «manifesto» was used for the first time between 1640 and 1650¹⁵ in declarations during the Franco-Spanish wars¹⁶. Today, thanks

¹³ «Manifesto» in *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, Random House, dictionary.reference.com/browse/manifesto (accessed: October 24, 2015).

¹⁴ In *Tommaseo Online*, www.tommaseobellini.it/#/items.

¹⁵ «Scrittura o dichiarazione pubblica, annunzio, avviso» in O. Pianigiani, *Vocabolario Etimologico della lingua italiana*, Roma-Milano, Società Editrice Dante Alighieri di Albrighi & Segati, 1907, 2 vols now available online as searchable database: www.etimo.it/?term=manifesto and also scannerised, archive.org/details/vocabolarioetim00piangoog.

¹⁶ In the *Encyclopédie*, a «manifeste» is a «déclaration que font les Princes, & autres puissances, par un écrit public, des raisons & moyens sur lesquels ils fondent leurs droits & leurs prétentions, en commençant quelque guerre, ou autre entreprise; c'est en deux mots l'apologie de leur conduite». MANIFESTE, s. m. (*Droit polit.*) dans The Project for American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language (ARTFL): *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, University of Chicago, 2001, portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject_?a.72:116./var/artfla/encyclopedie/textdata/IMAGE/ and also the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres. Mis en ordre & publié par M. Diderot ... & quant a la partie mathématique, par M. d'Alembert*, volume 19, Genève [Paris & Neufchâstel], 1772; 1754-72 available through *The Making Of The Modern*

to *Google Ngram Viewer* – also described by Armitage and Guldi in chapter 4 –¹⁷ we can access the content of millions of books published between 1800 and 2000¹⁸. Searching inside English texts, we can discover many pamphlets and declarations issued by sovereigns and nations. These pamphlets are proclaiming independence, declaring wars and mostly dealing with foreign affairs. This is related to Diderot's definition of what a «manifesto» was up to his own time. With the entering of «m(M)anifesto» as a keyword in *Ngram Viewer*, important literary works for the 19th and 20th Centuries can also be retrieved¹⁹.

Because of the digital context framing A. and G.'s reflections, the Paris 2010 *Manifeste des Digital Humanities* must be mentioned too. It's a significant declaration that takes into account what changed in the Humanities after the digital turn. It briefly defines some guidelines for a new cultural order dominated by the digital turn, new technologies and open access to scholarship we now have to cope with²⁰. The «Manifeste» has many things to do with *The History Manifesto's* aims. Asking themselves what the historian's role in societies today is, A. and G. actively face the challenge of the digital turn that transformed the way historians work with archives, produce knowledge about the past and communicate such knowledge. When the authors talk about Big digital Data, they do not scratch the surface of this digital revolution, they offer examples of how historians can transform their methods when applying them to enormous corpora of digital documents, the kind of work over four centuries that has been done by Patrick Manning in the field of World History²¹.

Jo Guldi at Brown University influenced the writing of Chapter 4 on how to deal today with Big Data and the management – through new digital techniques – of what they call «dark archives» or invisible archives that governments do not want

World, find.galegroup.com/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=europeo&tabID=T001&docId=U3608170180&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

¹⁷ They argue that «*Google Ngrams offers a rough guide to the rise and fall of ideas [...] the software produced reliable timelines of the textual dominance of certain words from generation to generation...*», historymanifesto.cambridge.org/files/9814/2788/1923/historymanifesto_5Feb2015.pdf, cit., p. 93.

¹⁸ *Ngram Viewer*, books.google.com/ngrams.

¹⁹ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs: *Report Or, Manifesto of the Causes and Reasons of War with Great Britain, Presented to the House of Representatives by the Committee on Foreign Relations, June 3, 1812*, Éditeur: A. & G. Way, Printers, 1812; A. Mordella y Spotorno, *Manifesto Addressed to Europe on the Atrocities Perpetrated by Napoleon Bonaparte, the Tyrant of France and Italy*, Editeur J. Murray, 1808; *The Late King James's second manifesto, directed to the Protestant princes, answered paragraph by paragraph*, London, 1697. *The Making Of The Modern World*, Web. 24 Document: find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.eui.eu/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=europeo&tabID=T001&docId=U3600371167&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

²⁰ M. Dacos: *Manifeste des Digital humanities, à THATCamp Paris, May, 18 and 19, 2010*, tcp.hypotheses.org/318.

²¹ Manning uses Big Data when building a world-historical archive about the history of the last four centuries. See P. Manning: *Big data in History*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

to let us discover until they are «declassified»²² or, without their permission, made available through *Wikileaks*²³. Guldi launched *Paper Machines: A Text Analysis and Visualization Toolkit for Zotero Libraries*²⁴ which adds text-mining capacities applied to large text corpora²⁵. «With Paper Machines, scholars can create visual representations of a multitude of patterns within a text corpus using a simple, easy-to-use graphical interface»²⁶. *Paper Machine* takes care of research with big digital data and is useful for producing significant findings in the long run²⁷. For example, the *Old Bailey* digital project in the United Kingdom fosters *long termism* (or «longue durée») as opposed to the heavily criticised *short termism* from a research perspective with archival corpora²⁸.

In order to remain important actors and intellectual interpreters of contemporary societies, historians must understand the impact of the digital. This is why A and G. look at new tools and techniques capable of intelligently exploiting primary sources. They used Franco Moretti's *distant reading* text-mining capacities when engaging with Big Data²⁹, a very different approach from *close reading* of single primary sources which leads instead to forms of *short-termism* in historical research³⁰. Distant reading of sources allows researchers to answer «big questions». Both ways of looking at our documentation are needed but A. and G. refer only to Moretti's distant reading and text-mining concepts we briefly described here³¹.

²² *Manifesto*, cit., p. 100, historymanifesto.cambridge.org/files/9814/2788/1923/historymanifesto_5Feb2015.pdf.

²³ Ivi, p. 101. *Wikileaks*, wikileaks.org/index.en.html.

²⁴ *Paper Machines*, lasa.international.pitt.edu/forum/files/vol44-issue1/OntheProfession2.pdf. Review of the software in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, journalofdigitalhumanities.org/2-1/review-papermachines-by-adam-crymble/.

²⁵ *Zotero*, www.zotero.org.

²⁶ This plugin completed Zotero discussed in that same chapter 4. See *Manifesto*, cit., pp. 90-91, historymanifesto.cambridge.org/files/9814/2788/1923/historymanifesto_5Feb2015.pdf.

²⁷ «Applying Paper Machines to text corpora allows scholars to accumulate hypotheses about longue-durée patterns in the influence of ideas, individuals, and professional cohorts», *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 91. Guldi applied her software to global land reforms corpora from the twentieth century. See Jo Guldi, www.joguldi.com/vita.

²⁸ *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, London's central criminal court, 1674-1913*, www.oldbaileyonline.org. The project is quoted in *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 94, historymanifesto.cambridge.org/files/9814/2788/1923/historymanifesto_5Feb2015.pdf.

²⁹ F. Moretti, *Distant reading*, London, Verso, 2013.

³⁰ «The academic discipline is invaluable in detecting and debunking myths about the past and future, say Jo Guldi and David Armitage», in *Times Higher Education*, www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/history-the-key-to-decoding-big-data/2016026.article

³¹ «Humanists like Franco Moretti and historians like Ben Schmidt have been crucial collaborators in the design of tools for visualisation over time, in Moretti's case collaborating with IBM to produce the ManyEyes software for 'distant reading' of large bodies of text...», in *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 93, historymanifesto.cambridge.org/files/9814/2788/1923/historymanifesto_5Feb2015.pdf. They quote in p. 153, n. 11, F. Moretti, *Graphs, maps, trees: abstract models for a literary history*, New York, Verso, 2007. For understanding differences between close and distant reading from a historian viewpoint see: F. Clavert: *Lecture des sources historiques à l'ère numérique*, histnum.hypotheses.org/1061.

Although the public they want to engage with their findings consists of history professors, writing a «manifesto» is about making a public statement disseminating it in the most effective way possible using modern web communication technology and hoping to be heard by as many people as possible, especially outside academic milieux and traditional university professors communities. «We want to hear from you!», loudly and globally, the authors are saying³². The pamphlet engaged communities beyond peers in the discussion and the many comments became an essential online part of the book itself, «because we want to get the word out». It is important that everybody enters the discussion quoting the Manifesto³³.

What is undoubtedly successful in this book, is this global message brought by Armitage and Guldi to a community who, far from ignoring it, have instead in many languages tried to address the omissions of what is, certainly, a short and stimulating pamphlet³⁴. Because one of its authors is Head of the History Department at Harvard, and because the book is written in English and is available in Open Access thanks to an important publisher like Cambridge, global reading of its contents is facilitated. And the message is clear: historians should deeply rethink their profession to remain qualified interpreters of our societies and embrace the challenges of our times. Historians should be better aware of their capacity to dig deeply into the past and explain contemporary issues by answering Serge Gruzinski's question «*l'histoire pour quoi faire?*»³⁵.

In the roundtable edited by Ramses Delafontaine which follows this short introduction, three authors review the *Manifesto* from different perspectives. Bringing history to the world as the authors of the *Manifesto* want to do, is not a matter of macro v. micro history nor is it only about playing with big data in a digital context. Nevertheless, the queries brought to the discussion by the *Manifesto* are important and legitimate. In the roundtable, Delafontaine engages with Public History and Forensic history to further question the future of the historical profession; Quentin Verreycken questions A. and G.'s conception of micro-history and denies the fact that the digital turn and big-data would exempt historians from looking at single documents and physical archives; finally, Eric Arnesen focuses on the relationship between historians, the public sphere and public policies.

³² historymanifesto.cambridge.org/forum/open-access-publishing/we-want-hear-you/.

³³ *Media, Reviews, Blog Posts, Discussions*, historymanifesto.cambridge.org/media/.

³⁴ References to reviews are listed as a complement in the website of the book itself so, writing for an Italian journal, I am quoting only a recent roundtable available online: *Historians of the world, unite! Tavola rotonda su «The History Manifesto», di Jo Guldi e David Armitage*, in «Ricerche di Storia Politica», ottobre 13, 2015, www.ricerchedistoriapolitica.it/tavole-rotonde-e-convegni/historians-of-the-world-unite-tavola-rotonda-su-the-history-manifesto-di-jo-guldi-e-david-armitage-2/ and two Italian reviews by G. Bernardini, *Una storia che serve alla politica (senza esserne serva)*, in «Mente Politica», 13 December 2014, www.mentepolitica.it/articolo/una-storia-che-serva-alla-politica-senza-esserne-serva/310 and by R. Balzani, *Storici, fate grandi domande*, in «Il Sole 24 Ore: Domenica», February 22, 2015, p. 25.

³⁵ S. Gruzinski, *L'Histoire pour quoi faire?*, Paris, Fayard, 2012, available only in French up to now.

For the first time, the journal «*Memoria e Ricerca*» has decided to publish a roundtable in the printed version of the journal with the new publisher il Mulino, without translating the texts into Italian. This policy is in line with new trends in Italian academic publishing fostered by the *Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca* (Anvur)³⁶. We hope our readers will appreciate this editorial board decision.

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Beyond *The History Manifesto*: On Public and Forensic History by Ramses Delafontaine

1. The Polemical Reception of *The History Manifesto*

David Armitage, chair of the history department at Harvard and Jo Guldi, an assistant professor at Brown University, are intent on restoring historians as policy advisors instead of economists. Armitage and Guldi call upon historians to return to the study of longer time scales to overcome a moral crisis in the historical discipline caused by micro historians. Their efforts culminated in October 2014 in the publication of *The History Manifesto* in open access with Cambridge University Press³⁷. Initially, the Manifesto garnered critical acclaim. The blurbs on the first pages of *The History Manifesto* offer praise and endorsement from historians of the calibre of Georg Iggers, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Craig Calhoun, and economist Thomas Piketty. Yet, it was not before long when a current of pejorative reactions culminated in a devastating critique in the April 2015 issue of the *American Historical Review* authored by historians Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler. «When the underpinnings of their manifesto are examined, the supporting evidence either is non-existent or mandates just the opposite conclusion», Cohen and Mandler noted³⁸. Armitage and Guldi replied that Cohen and Mandler wrote like «hanging judges»³⁹. A similar roundtable was published in the June 2015 issue of «*Annales, Histoire, Sciences*

³⁶ Anvur, www.anvur.org/index.php?lang=it.

³⁷ J. Guldi and D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014. I would like to thank David Armitage and Jo Guldi, Deborah Cohen and David Mandler, and Lynn Hunt for responding to my questions.

³⁸ For these and similar reproaches see: D. Cohen and P. Mandler, *The History Manifesto: A Critique*, in «*American Historical Review*», a. CXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 530, 531, 534, 535, 536, 538, 540, 541.

³⁹ D. Armitage and J. Guldi, *The History Manifesto: A Reply to Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler*, in «*American Historical Review*», a. CXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 544.

Sociales» in which Armitage and Guldi discussed their ideas and countered several critiques authored by Lynn Hunt, Claudia Moatti, Francesca Trivellato, Claire Lemerrier, and Christian Lamouroux. Hunt called the effort by Armitage and Guldi an example of time-worn rhetoric with arguments based on little or no proof⁴⁰. Moatti accused Armitage and Guldi of auto-promotion through a peremptory and oracular discourse that does not convince⁴¹. While Trivellato noted that Armitage and Guldi forged an artificial and negligent connection with Braudel's *longue durée*⁴². The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg referred to *the History Manifesto* during his lectures in May 2014 at the Collège de France. While he thanked the authors of the Manifesto for naming his own work as the single good exception in micro history, Ginzburg invited Armitage and Guldi to consider that microhistory itself might be the solution for the supposed or real crisis historians are faced with⁴³.

In this article, I firstly discuss three main problems in *the History Manifesto*. After which I introduce two topics to this discussion on the future of the discipline of history: namely public and forensic history.

2. Which Crisis?

Armitage and Guldi focus on two presumptions: contemporary science and politics miss the big picture by being too concerned with short term issues; and historians have followed this trend by abandoning the *longue durée* in favour of microhistory thus ensuring a crisis in historical research⁴⁴. Armitage and Guldi proclaim that historians have seen their social influence diminish because of short-termism⁴⁵. This marginalization can be overcome by returning to the study of longer time scales⁴⁶. Armitage and Guldi are keen on dethroning economists as they go to social scientists for policy decision-making⁴⁷. They call upon historians to use big data and digital methods to retrieve their status as critical social scientists and engaged policy advisors on subjects such as climate change in the Anthropocene, international governance, and inequality in and amongst nations⁴⁸.

⁴⁰ L. Hunt, *Faut-il réinitialiser l'histoire*, in «Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales», a. 70, No. 2, 2015, p. 319-320.

⁴¹ C. Moatti, *L'e-story ou le nouveau mythe hollywoodien*, in «Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales», a. LXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 327.

⁴² F. Trivellato, *Un nouveau combat pour l'histoire au XXIe siècle?*, in «Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales», a. LXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 339.

⁴³ C. Ginzburg, *La longue durée, à la loupe*, Guest Lecture Series at the Collège de France, 4 May 2015, www.college-de-france.fr/site/roger-chartier/guestlecturer-2015-05-04-17h00.htm, transcription from 10:35-11:49 and 54:43-56:19.

⁴⁴ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 41-42, 51, 53, 84.

⁴⁵ Ivi, pp. 51, 83-84.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 37.

⁴⁷ Ivi, pp. 10, 17-20, 37.

⁴⁸ Ivi, pp. 64-73, 73-79, 79-85.

Yet, as Hunt eloquently stated at the beginning of her contribution in the *Annales*, many programmatic writings have used the notion of a crisis to further their own ideas⁴⁹. Cohen and Mandler, Hunt, Moatti, Trivellato, and Lemerrier did not recognize this moral crisis envisioned by Armitage and Guldi. Hunt acknowledged a different crisis which she associated with the increasing inequality between the budget of different universities, the decline of public universities, and the challenges assistant professors face in the institutions of higher education in the United States of America⁵⁰. Trivellato identified the crisis as the demise of public relevance of social scientists which she attributes to the dominance of the financial sector and of mathematical perspectives in the public sphere during the last three decades⁵¹. I concur with Hunt who concluded that Armitage's and Guldi's subsequent arguments are based on the foundational hypothesis that there is a crisis in historical research while they do not offer much or even any proof for such a crisis⁵². Cohen and Mandler similarly remarked that Armitage and Guldi need a crisis of short-termism to point historians to the *longue durée*⁵³.

3. What is a *longue durée*? Semantic Confusions

The Manifesto presumes that a return to the *longue durée* will reinstate history as the king of the social sciences. But what do Armitage and Guldi mean with the *longue durée*? Moatti noted that Armitage and Guldi failed to produce a definition of the *longue durée*⁵⁴. There is no definition of the sort in *the History Manifesto*, nor in the roundtable in the *American Historical Review*, nor in their contribution in the *Annales*. It is only when we turn to the recording of a panel discussion on *the History Manifesto* at the Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University from November 17, 2014 that we are able to find a definition. At Columbia Armitage declared:

What we are trying to do is to repurpose the *longue durée* and say it does not have to be non-dynamic, static, merely a backdrop in the classic sense of Braudel... So we're throwing out his *longue durée*, repurposing it as something which is longer than a human time scale, it can go from eighty years ... to fourteen billion years. How long is a *longue durée* ... [Armitage asks looking at Guldi]»⁵⁵.

⁴⁹ Hunt, *Faut-il réinitialiser l'histoire*, cit., p. 319.

⁵⁰ Ivi, pp. 322, 324.

⁵¹ Trivellato, *Un nouveau combat pour l'histoire au XXI^e siècle?*, cit., pp. 333, 335-336.

⁵² Hunt, *Faut-il réinitialiser l'histoire*, cit., p. 320.

⁵³ Cohen and Mandler, *The History Manifesto: A Critique*, cit., p. 535.

⁵⁴ Moatti, *L'e-story ou le nouveau mythe hollywoodien*, cit., p. 328.

⁵⁵ *A Roundtable on The History Manifesto: The Role of History and the Humanities in a Digital Age*, The Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University, video, 17 November 2014, vimeo.com/113299618, transcription from 1:17:49 to 1:18:22.

Guldi followed suit with her definition: «I think the form of the *longue durée* that we privilege is the *longue durée* of the middle term. So the middle range, the range of the life of institutions from 80 to 200 years»⁵⁶. In contrast, Braudel's *longue durée* is a causal system of dialectic interaction of three layers of time: that of the *longue durée*, the *durée moyenne des conjonctures*, and the *histoire événementielle*⁵⁷. Armitage and Guldi simply argue for the study of longer time scales without any theory on comparative history or causal relations. Nota bene that despite these differences and despite their unwritten commitment to repurpose the *longue durée*, Armitage and Guldi are using the terms «the *longue durée*» and «longer time scales» or «long term history» throughout *the History Manifesto* as if they were one and the same thing.

4. A Tenuous Dichotomy

Ultimately the question for historians is not about long or short time scales, it is one of appropriate time scales. The choice of a suitable period of time for research is determined by the research questions and the available sources. This dichotomy between longer time scales and shorter ones proposed by Armitage and Guldi makes no sense, i.e. where does short term end and long term start? It depends on the research. The true holistic form of history is a study that combines diachronical and dialectical causal explanation in a true Braudelian manner. Armitage himself wrote in an article published in 2012 that historical research is a combination of distant reading and close reading and that «‘distant reading’ of large accumulations of sources now supplements close reading but cannot replace it»⁵⁸.

5. Engaged and Critical Historians in Public History and Forensic History

What remains of *the History Manifesto* is a case for the study of longer time scales to arrive at more engaged and more critical historical research. Armitage and Guldi do not arrive at praising engaged and critical historical research beyond the borders of quotable rhetoric because they spend the better part of their book on an alleged crisis while trying to strengthen their narrative with data that is not in support of their claims. I now select two topics through which this discussion on the future of the historical discipline can continue: the first is public history and the second is forensic history.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, transcription from 1:19:14 to 1:19:35.

⁵⁷ F. Braudel, *Histoire et Sciences sociales: la longue durée*, in «Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations», a. XIII, n. 4, 1958, p. 725-753.

⁵⁸ D. Armitage, *What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Durée*, in «History of European Ideas», a. XXXVIII, n. 4, 2012, p. 497-498, 506.

6. Public History

«Public history refers to the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, even in private practice»⁵⁹. As graduate students in history in the United States realized during the job crisis of the 1970s that there would be no positions available to them at the institutions they studied at, they moved into the public realm. Historians found their way into government, cultural and social organizations, non-profit organization, businesses as in house historians, and litigation-related work to do historical research.

The University of California, Santa Barbara became the first to institutionalize public history through a masterclass and a journal entitled *The Public Historian*. After its first publication in 1978 it was swiftly supported by the newly established *National Council on Public History* [NCPH]. Since public history has found its way to multiple history departments all over the world with programs in Canada, Australia, England, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and France. Italy's first master in public history started in September 2015 at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. In October 2014 the inaugural conference of the *International Federation for Public History* [IFPH] was held in Amsterdam. Public history has become a global field in history.

These new contexts for historical research demanded new answers to familiar challenges for historians: how to cope with more invasive restrictions on freedom of research, impartiality and advocacy, funding third parties and special interests, limitations on publications, issues concerning confidentiality, codes of ethics, etc. But the most returned-to issue was that of objectivity. Historian Peter Novick noted in 1988 that defensiveness on objectivity with public historians was induced «as much by professional status-anxiety as by epistemological scruples»⁶⁰. Little remains of such a professional status-anxiety with public historians today. But historians working on oral history projects, local history and community projects, and digital projects that try to reach broader audiences still have to find answers to traditional questions for researchers as mentioned above. Thinking about how historians research history – i.e. philosophy of history – is an essential part of historical research as it empowers historians to understand and thus change the borders of our own research and understanding of history.

The rise and significance of public history is a strong argument against the notion of a moral crisis in the historical discipline. *The History Manifesto* misses an opportunity to elaborate on its idea of an engaged and critical historical profession by neglecting the movement of public history. Hereafter I select an example of public

⁵⁹ R. Kelley, *Public History: Its Origins, Nature and Prospects*, in «The Public Historian», a. I, n. 1, 1978, p. 16.

⁶⁰ P. Novick, *That Noble Dream. The «Objectivity Question» and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 517.

engagement by historians which briefly entered the debate on *the History Manifesto*: namely that of litigation empowered history and forensic history.

7. Litigation Empowered History and Forensic History

One of the venues historians engage in and where their critical ability is tested is the courtroom. In the *American Historical Review*, Cohen and Mandler and Armitage and Guldi assign great value to the work of historians intervening in legal proceedings as *amici curiae* to inform the court of a certain historical aspect of importance to the case⁶¹. This is but one example of litigation empowered history where historians assist counsel through historical research as *amici curiae* or as independent or in-house consultants for historical consultancy firms and law firms.

Forensic history is more narrower defined as the activities of a historian as an expert witness. The expert witness gives testimony in court which becomes part of the court's proceedings and public records. The most well-known European examples are the testimony given by Robert Paxton in the Vichy trial of Maurice Papon in France as well as the testimony given by Richard Evans in *Irving v. Lipstadt* concerning holocaust denial and defamation. American historians have been experts in litigation concerning creationism, industrial pollution, land and water rights of indigenous peoples, superfund site research, voting rights, historical jurisdiction over rivers, lead paint poisoning and asbestos toxic tort litigation, tobacco tort litigation, and many more issues. Armitage and Guldi are familiar with the work of historians in forensic history as they praise Harvard historian Allan Brandt and Stanford Historian Robert Proctor for their work on tobacco and health in American history⁶². Brandt and Proctor have served as expert witnesses for the Department of Justice in the federal landmark case *US v. Philip Morris et al.* In tobacco litigation alone over 50 American historians have been active in over 314 cases during the period 1986-2014⁶³. Historians testify on the knowledge of the tobacco industry of the harmful nature of its product, the industry's commitment to continue selling and marketing its product especially to adolescents despite of their insider knowledge of the addictiveness of nicotine as well as the deadly health dangers related to smoking cigarettes, the industry's lobbying network to continue to evade regulation, the industry sponsored research programs and institutions to fund bogus-research which only had the intent to confuse and destroy scientific consensus on the topic

⁶¹ Amicus Briefs are literally briefs from friends of the court. For example but certainly not limited to: historians submitted briefs in *Lawrence v. Texas*, *Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharm. Inc.*, *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, etc. Cases pertaining to sodomy laws, expert testimony in court, abortion rights, and same-sex marriage rights.

⁶² D. Armitage and J. Guldi, *Le retour de la longue durée: une perspective anglo-américaine*, in «Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales», a. LXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 313.

⁶³ R. Delafontaine, *Historians as Expert Judicial Witnesses in Tobacco Litigation: A Controversial Legal Practice*, New York, Springer, 2015.

of health hazards, etc. Expert witnesses assist the trier of fact by testifying in court. Their expertise helps the judge and the jury to ascertain whether the tobacco industry handled in a negligent manner. Basing herself on the historical arguments brought before her by Brandt and Proctor, Judge Kessler Harris concluded in her final verdict in the federal case mentioned above that «over the course of more than 50 years, Defendants [the tobacco industry] lied, misrepresented, and deceived the American public, including smokers and the young people they avidly sought as «replacement smokers», about the devastating health effects of smoking and environmental tobacco smoke»⁶⁴.

Engagement in legal proceedings by historians is a clear example of historians involved in important social issues. In tobacco litigation historians mingle in debates on public health and questions of negligence and personal responsibility for the consumption of liable products. A role historians could also have in future asbestos litigation as well as litigation on other tortious products. The challenges involved in legal involvement are ethics, remunerations by lawyers, collaboration with lawyers, objectivity, publication of research and peer review, declaration of third party funding of research, transparency of consultancy and expert witnessing by historians, etc. Considering the following asymmetry that of those historians who have testified in court 46 have been retained by the tobacco industry and only 4 have testified for the plaintiffs and that in addition to remunerations as high as hundreds of thousands of dollars there are no peer-reviewed publications or almost no communication on the part of the 46 historians hired by the tobacco companies; the alarming fact arises that some historians working for the tobacco industry are willing to trade their reputation and that of their university for the benefit of an interested party. Does the historian's social responsibility end at the threshold of the courtroom to leave history in the hands of lawyers and judges, or should historians cross it despite of the legal constraints on their testimony when their expertise is wanted? These are the true challenges critical engagement offers, and those are not considered by *the History Manifesto*.

8. Conclusion

Choosing appropriate time scales for historical study depends on the research questions and the availability of sources. But the influence of historians on policy issues or the appraisal by public opinion will not only depend on the chosen time scale of study and the excellence of the research. The answers that historians are going to come up with on traditional questions such as impartiality, freedom of research, publication methods and other methods of dissemination of their work, transparency of sponsorship and other budgetary resources, interdisciplinary work, rigorousness of peer review, and the limits of advocacy and civic responsibility in new and chal-

⁶⁴ *United States of America v. Philip Morris USA Inc. Final Opinion*, 2006, www.library.ucsf.edu/sites/all/files/ucsf_assets/FinalOpinion_full_version.pdf, p. 1500-1501.

lenging contexts such as public history, forensic history, digital history, international cooperation, raising inequality amongst institutions of higher learning are going to determine the future of the historical discipline and its ability to aid and fulfil its civic responsibility. History's mission is not to predict the future as *the History Manifesto* would have historians do, but to alert the public of past experience relevant to contemporary challenges in order to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated today and that we become aware of other possibilities of action through old examples and better understanding of contemporary contexts. History's mission is to enable humans to act with historical understanding and through that let mankind fulfil its destiny unbound by history.

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The Digital Humanities as a new form of positivism? What *The History Manifesto* says about the use of computing data in history⁶⁵ by Quentin Verreycken

Il y a crise générale des sciences de l'homme: elles sont toutes accablées sous leurs propres progrès, ne serait-ce qu'en raison de l'accumulation des connaissances nouvelles et de la nécessité d'un travail collectif, dont l'organisation intelligente reste à mettre sur pied⁶⁶.

The publication in October 2014 of a 160 pages book by Jo Guldi (Brown University) and David Armitage (Harvard University) provoked a certain effervescence in the academic world of historians. The numerous reactions and critiques written in the following months included scientific blog posts, a severe evaluation in the «American Historical Review», a special issue of the French journal «Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales» and now the present roundtable in «Memoria e Ricerca»⁶⁷. A well-organized publicity campaign before the diffusion of the book in open-access is an important factor of explanation for its success. But marketing only cannot explain such agitation. When so many scholars react to *The History Manifesto*, it is

⁶⁵ I would like to thank my colleague Ramses Delafontaine for his close (but also distant in terms of geography!) reading of this paper and his precious remarks and suggestions.

⁶⁶ F. Braudel, *Histoire et Sciences sociales: la longue durée*, in «Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations», a. XIII, n. 4, 1958, p. 725.

⁶⁷ D. Cohen and P. Mandler, *The History Manifesto: A Critique*, in «American Historical Review», a. CXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 527-542; *La longue durée en débat*, in «Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales», a. LXX, n. 2, 2015. For a selection of the reviews published on the internet, see: historymanifesto.cambridge.org/media.

because its content arouse several tensions among historians about their role in the contemporary society.

The argumentation of the book is that over the last fifty years historians have lost their position as public scientific experts and advisors of politicians and governments. The responsible for this demise? He is immediately designated in the first line of *The History Manifesto*: «the spectre of the short term». Between 1975 and 2005, the success of the micro-history provoked a retreat of the long-term perspective in training and thinking in history departments. Instead of «grand narrative», the historian's source mastery became the measure of his competency and specialization. The profusion of case-studies, limited in time and scale, took the historian away from public debates on climate change, international governance and social inequalities. According to the authors, we are now in «a crisis of short-termism». The only solution for history to regain its position as a critical science is to come back to the *longue durée*. The new tools provided by the Digital Humanities would allow historians to elaborate long-term and large-scale studies based on historical «big data»⁶⁸.

Raising debates is the destiny of each manifesto. As I mentioned above, *The History Manifesto* is no exception. Among several critics the authors' main argument, namely their diagnosis of a retreat of the *longue durée* since the 70s and the necessity to come back to a long term perspective, has been widely discussed including in the present roundtable. My contribution here, for its part, will focus on what I consider as two major weaknesses of Guldi's and Armitage's reasoning. First, their conception of micro-history and the historian's relationships with his sources it implies. Secondly, their vision of the Digital Humanities as a means to exempt historians of looking at these archives.

1. A terminological confusion?

As Guldi and Armitage explain in the first chapter of their book, the concept of *longue durée* has been initially developed by French historian Fernand Braudel in a 1958 seminal article published in the *Annales* journal. Unlike nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history, characterized by its focus on short-term political events (event history or *histoire événementielle*), *l'histoire de longue durée* concentrates on long-term historical structures: states, societies, economy, and civilizations. Because the phenomena it investigates take place during several centuries, the *longue durée* requires historians to develop theoretical models, as sociologists, economists, and mathematicians do. Braudel sought a better collaboration between history, social sciences, and mathematics. Social models, he wrote, could be converted in mathe-

⁶⁸ J. Guldi and D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 7. Most of their arguments are summarized in D. Armitage and J. Guldi, *Le retour de la longue durée: une perspective Anglo-Saxonne*, in «Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales», a. LXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 289-318.

matic formulas, and new technologies (like, at this time, calculators) would make this method possible⁶⁹.

In the second chapter of *The History Manifesto*, the authors argue that even though Braudel's conception of long-term history flourished in the early 60s, the success of the *longue durée* in the academic world was ironically short: at the beginning of the 70s, most historians privileged biological time scales of between five and fifty years in their studies. The responsible for this was the Italian school of micro-history (*microstoria*) developed by famous historians like Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, Edoardo Grendi, or Carlo Poni, and diffused in the Anglo-Saxon world by Natalie Zemon Davis and Robert Darnton⁷⁰. The three dominant characteristics of micro-history as practiced by these late medievalists and early modernists were its intensive use of primary sources; its synchronic approach of its subject; and its interest for the relationships between the center and the margins in rural societies⁷¹. For Guldi and Armitage, it is precisely these characteristics that led history to a crisis of short-termism, as they assert on page 54:

The combination of archival mastery, micro-history, and an emphasis on contingency and context, powered by a suspicion of grand narratives, a hostility to whiggish teleologies, and an ever advancing anti-essentialism, determined an increasing focus on the synchronic and the short-term across wide swathes of the historical profession.

Here lies what I consider as an important mistake of the authors of *The History Manifesto*: their confusion between micro-history and short-termism. The term «micro-history» characterizes a specific kind of history, with its own methodology and interests, focusing essentially on a local scale. On the contrary, the «short-term perspective» of an historical study designates the choice of a limited chronological period of a few decades. Thereby this perspective could be applied in large geographical scales like the history of international relations, which is definitely not micro-history. The veritable issue is that, as Gabriel Galvez-Behar remarks on his blog, there is no strict contradiction between micro-history and long-term perspective⁷². If Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, a precursor in climate history, the father of the concept of «unmoving history» (*histoire immobile*), and the faithful disciple of Fernand Braudel, also wrote one of the most famous works of micro-history, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324*, it is precisely because he considered this slice-of-life

⁶⁹ F. Braudel, *Histoire et Sciences sociales: la longue durée*, cit., p. 27.

⁷⁰ D. Tomich, *El orden del tiempo histórico. La Longue Durée y la microhistoria*, in «Pasajes: Revista de pensamiento contemporáneo», a. XXXV, 2011, p. 79-93.

⁷¹ R.D. Brown, *Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge*, in «Journal of the Early Republic», a. XXIII, n. 1, 2003, p. 11; F. Trivellato, *Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?*, in «California Italian Studies», a. II, n. 1, 2011.

⁷² G. Galvez-Behar, *La longue durée, arme de l'historien?*, in «Gabriel Galvez-Behar. Un site semi-professionnel et semi-personnel», 2014: ggb.ouvaton.org/spip.php?article51. For a similar opinion, see also N.R. Lamoreaux, *Rethinking Microhistory: A Comment*, in «Journal of the Early Republic», a. XXVI, n. 4, 2006, p. 555-561.

work as a part of the long-term (and almost unchanging) history of peasantry⁷³. Micro-history was initially developed as a reaction against the neo-positivist quantification of the 60s-70s and its purpose was to test general theories by applying them to a local context. Thereby, to quote Francesca Trivellato, the major virtue of micro-history is to provide «a healthy dose of critical self-reflexivity into the practice of global history»⁷⁴. It is indeed a paradox to observe that while Guldi and Armitage insist on the role of historians in global governance, the word «global history» itself appears only a few times in the text of *The History Manifesto*, even though it is probably more appropriate than «long-term history» to characterize the new form of general history practiced in universities nowadays. This could be explained by the fact that, in the *History Manifesto*, the opposition between micro-history and *longue durée* is only terminological and artificial. Speaking of global history would make the absence of fundamental contradiction apparent between micro-history and long-term perspective.

The authors' terminological confusion between micro-history and short-term history leads them to an even more important mistake. In the second chapter of their book, Guldi and Armitage repeatedly argue that the rise of short-termism in the 70s, caused by the success of micro-history, forced historians to focus only on their archival sources, which prevented them to access the «Big Picture». While «exploiting archives became a coming-of-age ritual for a historian», they say on page 44, the «familiarity with documents» also implied «theoretical sophistication» and «a saturation in historiographical context». Later, in chapter three, the authors insist on the «hermeneutics of suspicion» provided by the «critical history» born in the 70s, whose purpose is to «unmasking institutional corruption – finding toxic discourses with laden or implicit meanings; unveiling supposed saviours as frauds; disrobing would-be emperors» (page 72). This passage of *The History Manifesto* has been denounced by Belgian medievalist Paul Bertrand as «an astonishing statement»⁷⁵. Indeed, historians' «archival mastery», their ability to analyze and criticize archival documents, is not the product of 70s short-termism. It did not appear at the same time as micro-history because it is ultimately the most basic characteristic of the historian's methodology called «historical criticism», which was initiated by seventeenth-century scholars and was intrinsically bound with the birth of history as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century⁷⁶.

⁷³ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975; Id., *L'histoire immobile*, in «Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations», a. XXIX, n. 3, 1974, p. 673-692; Id., *Histoire du climat depuis l'an mil*, Paris, Flammarion, 1967.

⁷⁴ Trivellato, *Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?*, cit.

⁷⁵ P. Bertrand, *Autour de «History Manifesto» - 3. Les données sont-elles «le pain de l'histoire» ?*, in «Médiévismes», 2014: www.medievizmes.org/document642.php.

⁷⁶ For the connection between history, erudition, and historical criticism, see A. Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997; B. Neveu, *Érudition et religion aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1994; P. Chevallier, *Religion, érudition et critique à la fin du XVIIe siècle et au début du XVIIIe*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1968.

2. Something is rotten in the state of data

The History Manifesto displays its authors' disdain for the archives because they consider them as an obstacle that keeps historians away from grand narrative. According to Guldi and Armitage, overlooking details and missing the big questions are the product of archival mastery, short-termism, and micro-history⁷⁷. To regain its status as a critical science, history has to step back from documents, which is now possible thanks to the revolution of the Digital Humanities. Defined as the use of computer related and other digital tools in the field of humanities, Digital Humanities have conquered a major position in the academic landscape over the past two decades, as it is demonstrated by the dramatic increase of Digital Humanities projects and funding in history departments⁷⁸. However, the fact that some of these projects are conducted by computer experts rather than humanistic scholars or archivists could be problematic. This is why developing new archival theories and historical methodologies based on computer science certainly are the major challenges from the Digital Humanities⁷⁹.

In chapter four of their book, Guldi and Armitage advocate the use of new digital tools provided by the Digital Humanities to analyze large data collections or «big data» collected from sources by other researchers. This method, they say, would release historians from the archives: «Compellingly, many of these tools have the power of reducing to a small visualization an archive of data otherwise too big to read» (page 89). While the digitalization of documents and the elaboration of databases would be the task of data collectors, historians would become the analysts «trained in comparing discrete sets of incompatible data, quantitative and qualitative» (page 110). Nowadays, it is common that within a same research project, some historians collect information while others analyze them, which is a valuable method when the conditions of the work on primary sources by the firsts is transparent and controlled by the seconds. What this proposal seems to suggest, however, is a strong and definitive methodological divorce: archival skills and historical criticism would remain up to data collectors, whereas historians are to be reduced to analysts. Thereby, big data will become historians' main source and their interpretation via digital tools will replace the critical reading of texts or images. If we follow Guldi's and Armitage's view, it is perfectly acceptable that historians could become dependent of private enterprises of digitalization like *Google Books* because its tools allow

⁷⁷ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 40-46.

⁷⁸ J.J. O'Donnell, *Engaging the Humanities: The Digital Humanities*, in «Daedalus», a. CXXXVIII, n. 1, 2009, p. 99-104; R. Scholes and C. Wulfman, *Humanities Computing and Digital Humanities*, in «South Atlantic Review», a. LXXIII, n. 4, 2008, p. 50-66; M. Ullyot, *Digital Humanities Projects*, in «Renaissance Quarterly», a. LXVI, n. 3, 2013, p. 937-947.

⁷⁹ T. Clement, W. Hagenmaier and J. Levine Knies, *Toward a Notion of the Archive of the Future: Impressions of Practice by Librarians*, in «The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy», a. LXXXIII, n. 2, 2013, p. 112-130; J. Sternfeld, *Archival Theory and Digital Historiography: Selection, Search, and Metadata as Archival Processes for Assessing Historical Contextualization*, in «The American Archivist», a. LXXIV, n. 2, 2011, p. 544-575.

historians to have a distant reading of their data⁸⁰. Yet, a close reading of the process of selection of the source material is fundamental to understand how the data were collected.

According to Emma Rothschild, there is in contemporary history a «growing distance between the users of easily downloadable statistical series, and the archival and other historians who understand the circumstances in which the series were arrived at»⁸¹. In some respects, Guldi's and Armitage's vision of Digital Humanities is symptomatic of this tendency. When they state that «reducing the big picture to a visualization is made newly possible by the increasing availability of big data» (page 89), the confidence of the authors of *The History Manifesto* in digital tools and big data leads them to a certain form of methodological neo-positivism similar to that of quantitative history and cliometric historians as originally denounced by micro-historians⁸². Relying on databases and computer programs, their approach pretends to give access to long-term trends in history while it is in fact disconnected from historical documents⁸³.

Since the development of digital tools in historical research, historians had to rethink their relation with their documentation⁸⁴. The use of databases does not dispense historians from basic historical criticism and to refrain them from asking questions as: what is the data I am analyzing? Where does it come from? By who and in which context has it been produced? Once all the information has been extracted from the sources, databases themselves become «meta-sources» that have to be analyzed carefully⁸⁵. The positive paradox of the success of the Digital Humanities over the past two decades is that it encourages new debates on the notions of «sources», «documents», and «texts»⁸⁶. Contrary to Guldi's and Armitage's view, other historians equipped with recent digital tools, have worked in the archives

⁸⁰ D. Armitage and J. Guldi, *La longue durée en débat*, in «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», a. LXX, n. 2, p. 291.

⁸¹ E. Rothschild, «The Future of History», in K. Grandin (ed.), *Going Digital. Evolutionary and Revolutionary Aspects of Digitization*, Stockholm, The Nobel Foundation, 2011, p. 285.

⁸² Dan Edelstein was the first to underline the cliometric tone of the *History Manifesto: A Roundtable on The History Manifesto: The Role of History and the Humanities in a Digital Age*. The Heyman Center for the Humanities video. 1:38:16. Roundtable at the Heyman Center at Columbia University November 17, 2014: vimeo.com/113299618. Transcription from 27:45 to 27:54. For a definition of positivism, see for example H. Ritter, *Dictionary of Concepts in History*, New York-London, Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 327-329.

⁸³ For another example of the faith in data as the only answer to methodological questions, see R. Heuser and L. Le-Khac, *Learning to Read Data: Bringing out the Humanistic in the Digital Humanities*, «Victorian Studies», a. LIV, n. 1, 2011, p. 84, when the authors argue that «we may fear that gathering more quantitative data only moves us farther from the qualitative meaning we seek, but we're suggesting that having more kinds of data actually moves us closer to finding meaning».

⁸⁴ See, for example J. Sternfeld, *Archival Theory and Digital Historiography*, cit., p. 552.

⁸⁵ J.-P. Genet, *Histoire, Informatique, Mesure*, in «Histoire & Mesure», a. I, n. 1, 1986, p. 7-18.

⁸⁶ P. Bertrand, *Digital Humanities et critique historique documentaire: Digital ou Critical turn?*, in J.-P. Genet and A. Zorzi (ed.), *Les Historiens et l'Informatique. Un métier à réinventer. Actes de l'atelier ATHIS VII organisé par l'École française de Rome, avec le concours de l'ANR, Rome, 4-6*

and have produced new interpretations of documents and have published critical editions.

The purpose of this contribution was not to compose a systematic attack against the Digital Humanities or a violent review of *The History Manifesto*, without any consideration for the talent or the intelligence of its authors. What I tried to demonstrate here is that the unbound faith expressed by Jo Guldi and David Armitage in «big data» as a snake oil reflects a certain tendency in recent historiography. A tendency which professes an unmoderated enthusiasm for the Digital Humanities as a scientific revolution without basic considerations about historical-critical method.

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On Golden Ages and History's Power: The Misleading Claims of The History Manifesto

by Eric Arnesen

The participants in this roundtable, as its contributors make clear, are hardly the first to engage in a conversation about *The History Manifesto*. There has been considerable discussion about this provocative book over the past year. Google *The History Manifesto* and you will instantly find discussion in articles and on blogs. As it turns out, the book's detractors are many. From the keyboards of critics come questions about the silent changes in the on-line text after the identification of problems and errors, charges of the misreading of secondary sources, and challenges to its quantitative data on what historians have been doing over the past decades. These are not my concern in this brief essay. Rather, I focus on one broad issue pervading the book: historians and their relationship to the broader public and to public policy.

Among its many claims, *The History Manifesto* argues that decades ago historians spoke to large public audiences and exercised influence on public debates and public policy but, since the 1970s, they have retreated from that role, ceding the ground to economists. That withdrawal, authors Jo Guldi and David Armitage assert, can be attributed to the profession's turning away from the *longue durée* and toward micro-history. That was unfortunate for several reasons, they believe. First, while these scholars «did much for the ability of historians to understand the world», they «did so at the cost of the ability of historians to speak back to the institutions of governance». Their «inward-looking retreat from commenting on contemporary

global issues and alternative futures» was accompanied by their inflicting «upon their discipline habits of microscopic attention that culminated in a sense of practical irrelevance». Historians, they suggest, should have assumed the «role of advising citizens and policy-makers on the utopian possibilities of long-term change» but instead tragically distanced themselves «from a political and economic landscape»⁸⁷. In the eyes of Guldi and Armitage, their doing so is «evidence of a moral crisis». The world burns while historians fiddle or at least keep their noses in the archives.

Why does this matter? Because, they tell us on the first page of *The History Manifesto*, the world is falling apart, experiencing an «accelerating crisis» characterized by «rising sea-levels», the poisoning of the environment, and «rising economic inequality»⁸⁸. On the last page, they bemoan the «crisis of global governance», note «that we are all at the mercy of unregulated financial markets», and warn that «anthropogenic climate change threatens our political stability and the survival of species»⁸⁹.

Where do historians fit into this dismal picture? The «world around us is hungry for long-term thinking»⁹⁰, Guldi and Armitage argue, but no one is providing it. Historians could – and should. «[I]n a crisis of short-termism, our world needs somewhere to turn to for information about the relationship between past and future», they write. «Our argument is that History – the discipline and its subject-matter – can be just the arbiter we need at this critical time»,⁹¹ they insist, for historians are uniquely positioned to cut through falsehoods, connect the past to the future, demonstrate that «previously accepted» truths are «no more than unexamined bias[es]»⁹², and instruct policy makers and the public alike on how to solve huge problems like inequality and climate change. Having turned their back on earlier influence and abdicated their responsibilities, historians now need to throw themselves back into the political trenches. But a renewal of historians' influence will require changes in how they do business. What is needed, they explain, is an embrace of «big data» and a return to *longue durée* history, developments they believe are already (but insufficiently) underway.

Guldi and Armitage's call to arms is premised on a number of assumptions about disciplinary practices, scholarship and policy, and the power of historians to rise to the occasion and provide answers that people may or may not be waiting for. These are, in many instances, misleading and the utility of its recommendations is limited at best. *Did*, for instance, historians once exercise the powerful influence Guldi and Armitage claim they did? Did they then retreat from an engagement with a broader public and turn away from policy influence? Does a renewal of influence necessarily

⁸⁷ J. Guldi and D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 83-84. The notion that intellectuals – and not just historians – have retreated from the public sphere has been in circulation for decades. See, for instance, R. Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, New York, Noonday Press, 1987.

⁸⁸ Guldi and D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 1.

⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 125.

⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 4.

⁹¹ Ivi, p. 7.

⁹² Ivi, p. 81.

involve an embrace of «big data» and the *long durée*? And, finally, are historians uniquely positioned to instruct policy makers on how to solve large problems? This essay suggests that the answers to the above questions are largely negative and their assumptions range from the exaggerated to the false. *The History Manifesto* overstates historians' earlier public role and power, underestimates historians' desire and efforts to reach larger non-academic audiences and bigger larger questions, and makes largely unwarranted claims for the power of «big data» and the *long durée*. While I appreciate the effort of scholars to analyze their place in the larger world and welcome their desire to address social problems, *The History Manifesto* misdiagnoses the problems confronting historians and puts forward recommendations that would do little to address the real problems that do exist.

Was there the golden age before the 1960s when «[p]rofessional historians could expect an influence on policy that few historians today enjoy?»⁹³ Did historians once speak to larger publics and influence public policy? Have they retreated to their academic cocoons? The *History Manifesto*'s underlying propositions are debatable and are, I would suggest, more wrong than right. Of course, some historians in earlier eras – Richard Hofstadter immediately comes to mind – *did* have a large readership⁹⁴. But Hofstadter was hardly representative of his generation: there simply weren't many Hofstadters. (Curiously, Armitage and Guldi do not even mention Hofstadter). His contemporaries included countless professors who toiled away in academic obscurity and whose readership consisted of only fellow academics. For the U.S. scene, Guldi and Armitage cite only Arthur Schlesinger and William Appleman Williams, the former for his service to President John F. Kennedy, the latter for writing essays «urging Americans to take political action» in magazines like «The Nation»⁹⁵. But it was less Schlesinger's history writing than his distinct political activism – he was a moving force behind the creation of the liberal anticommunist Americans for Democratic Action and he published an influential non-history book, *The Vital Center* (1949) – that got him the house historian's job under JFK. One can pick up «The Nation» today and find more than a few historians issuing calls to the barricades over this issue or that. At a minimum, making the case of influence lost requires far more than two questionable examples.

Asserting that historians once spoke to big issues and broad audiences – and no longer do – is not unique to Guldi and Armitage. When Arthur Schlesinger passed away at the age of 89 in 2007, Sam Tanenhaus, the editor of the «New York Times Book Review» and himself a non-academic historian, took the occasion to proclaim that «America [had] lost its last great public historian», a man who «stood at the forefront of a remarkable generation of academic historians» – a conclusion that the authors of *The History Manifesto* might agree with in general terms. Tanenhaus also raised a «troubling question»: «Why do current historians seem unable to engage

⁹³ Ivi, p. 26.

⁹⁴ On Hofstadter, see D. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006.

⁹⁵ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 27.

the world as confidently as Mr. Schlesinger did?»⁹⁶. Recent works of history, he lamented, do not affect «how many of us think about current issues».

In publishing an obituary for late, great public-focused historians of influence, Tanenhaus wasn't stating a fact but merely advancing one perspective. His essay immediately elicited a rash of rebuttals. To legal historian Mary Dudziak, to take one example, his remarks made her «wonder what Tanenhaus has been reading», for there «have been so many works of history that speak directly to 'how many of us think about current issues,' that it is difficult to name only a few». Acknowledging that «[a]ll of this work may not have captured the national consciousness», she suggested that the decisions of people like Tanenhaus himself, a gatekeeper at the «New York Times», «about which books to feature» in his influential book review section played a «role in determining which historians break through to a broader audience». If he found the «current generation wanting, it may be that he needs to broaden his range». Nor have historians «shrunk from a national stage», she countered⁹⁷. I added my own two cents in the journal «Historically Speaking». «Are academic historians guilty of not writing with Schlesinger's authority or engaging issues of contemporary relevance? Have we wholly abandoned that 'broader population of informed readers' for which we once wrote?» I asked. My answer was different – and more nuanced – than Guldi and Armitage's: some have, others have not. In defense of those today who, like Schlesinger's many more obscure colleagues, toil in the archival vineyards and produce specialized monographs based on careful and solid scholarship, I suggested that their work «continually informs and revises our view of the past» and simultaneously constitutes the very «building blocks», the «interpretive and evidentiary base» that allows non-academic and popular historians to write their readable books. It is «no shame to say: this is our job. We should do it well. And we shouldn't feel obliged to apologize for it», I insisted⁹⁸.

What of the oft-repeated claim that historians have retreated from public engagement? «Once called upon to offer their advice on political development and land-reform, the creation of the welfare state and post-conflict settlement», Guldi and Armitage contend, «historians, along with other humanists, effectively ceded the public arena, nationally as well as globally, to the economists and occasionally lawyers and political scientists»⁹⁹. This too is open to question. Take a number of Armitage's Harvard colleagues: in the 1970s and 1980s (long before Armitage joined the Harvard History Department), Soviet historian Richard Pipes was a vocal critic of détente between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and proved influential among those calling for a new Cold War and a massive arms build-up under the Reagan Administration. Today, Niall Ferguson turns out book after book with trade

⁹⁶ S. Tanenhaus, *History, Written in the Present Tense*, in «New York Times», March 4, 2007.

⁹⁷ M. Dudziak, *Tanenhaus Dumps on Historians for the State of Public Discourse: but Is He Part of the Problem?*, in «Legal History Blog», March 4, 2007, at legalhistoryblog.blogspot.com/2007/03/tanenhaus-dumps-on-historians-for-state.html, accessed 30 September 2015.

⁹⁸ E. Arnesen, *Historians and the Public: Premature Obituaries, Abiding Laments*, in «Historically Speaking», a. IX, n. 2, 2007, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 125.

presses on subjects pertaining to finance and empire and contributes a seemingly endless stream of articles in such outlets as the «Financial Times», the «Wall Street Journal», the «New York Times», «Newsweek», and «Vanity Fair» (among others). *The History Manifesto* has neither Pipes nor Ferguson in mind for its model of the engaged historian, for both occupy political spaces on the conservative end of the spectrum that Guldi and Armitage neither appreciate nor even acknowledge. But for their politics, both could serve as prime examples of public-focused historians aiming for policy influence¹⁰⁰.

The *Manifesto*'s authors are looking for engaged historians in the wrong places or they aren't looking very hard. In fact, many historians have been busy – very busy – trying to reach larger audiences and influence policy makers. Many (if hardly all) craft their scholarship to appeal to trade presses with potentially large readerships. The *American Historical Association's* National History Center sponsors regular congressional briefings on Capitol Hill for legislators and their staffers on such subjects as immigration, oversight of intelligence activities, the West African Ebola crisis, global competition and comprehensive tax reform, and the history of incarceration¹⁰¹. The Washington History Seminar, which I co-chair at the *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* in Washington, DC, features weekly sessions with historians, many of whose works touch on public and foreign policy related issues; participants in the seminar include some academics but a greater number who work in government agencies. The historians at the *National Security Archive* – housed on the *George Washington University* campus – doggedly pursue classified government information; committed to its widespread dissemination, they intervene regularly in public debates and produce myth-busting books based on that information. The claim of retreat from policy engagement that Guldi and Armitage make might come as a surprise to the significant number of historians working in U.S. government agencies today (the *State Department* and even the *Central Intelligence Agency*, to name but two). To be sure, the historical profession does not have the equivalent of economist Paul Krugman writing a regular column in a leading daily newspaper. But the number of historians appearing in op-ed pages in newspapers these days is considerable, as is the number who regularly offer their informed views on policy matters in magazines, blogs, and Internet forums. (For example, the on-line *History*

¹⁰⁰ On Richard Pipes's political role on national security issues, see J. Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 21-23. On the other end of the political spectrum, historians who could easily be included in this category (with varying degrees of impact) are Doris Kearns Goodwin, Sean Wilentz, Jill Lepore, Eric Foner, and Dana Frank.

¹⁰¹ For videos of *National History Center Congressional Briefings*, see www.c-span.org/video/?319837-1/congressional-oversight-intelligence-activities and www.c-span.org/video/?31937-1/congressional-staff-receive-briefing-history-immigration; for videos of Washington History Seminar sessions at the *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* focusing on the history the Republican Party, U.S. relations with Cuba, and the history of the secret ballot, see www.c-span.org/video/?324575-1/discussion-history-republican-party; www.c-span.org/video/?324806-1/discussion-history-uscuba-relations; and www.c-span.org/video/?318705-1/act-voting, accessed September 30, 2015.

News Network, which features writing by younger and more established historians who often address contemporary political issues, has over 900,000 page views each month)¹⁰². If individual historians do not have the same market share of the reading public as Hofstadter or Schlesinger, that does not mean they would not be delighted to have it. One might add that public engagement by historians does not automatically translate into influence or power. For historians called upon by *The History Manifesto* to change the world, a lack of impact in the policy sphere has not been for want of trying. What the *Manifesto* ignores is broader changes in our culture – in the publishing industry, in literacy and reading habits, in the larger political culture, and the like – that make that job an uphill one. The *Manifesto* blames the historians and does not for a moment thoughtfully consider what they are actually doing or, crucially, what they are up against.

What of the claim that an embrace of «big data» and a return to *longue durée* history will equip historians to recover public access and influence? Guldi and Armitage are uncritically taken with the potential power of «big data». «Once one starts to look», they tell us, «the untapped sources of historical data are everywhere», for «quantitative data have begun to superabound»¹⁰³. Let us accept, as the *Manifesto* does, that «we are awash in data»¹⁰⁴. (It's hard to argue with the point). Will «Big

¹⁰² To take only a small sample from the «New York Times», the premiere newspaper in the United States, in recent years, see: H. Thompson, *The Lingering Injustice of Attica*, September 9, 2011; T. Sugrue, *A Dream Still Deferred*, March 26, 2011; J. Grossman, *The New History Wars*, September 1, 2014; H. Richardson, *Bring Back the Party of Lincoln*, September 3, 2014; K. Kruse, *A Christian Nation? Since When?* March 14, 2015; S. Wilentz, *Constitutionally, Slavery is No National Institution*, September 20, 2015; N.D.B. Connolly, *Black Culture is Not the Problem*, May 1, 2015; E. Foner, *Why Reconstruction Matters*, March 28, 2015; Timothy Snyder, *The Next Genocide*, September 12, 2015. With regard to the «Times», Guldi and Armitage argue that «[c]itations of historians in the newspaper's pages consistently outnumbered those of economists until the mid-1960s, when citations from economists took off. There was a brief resurgence among historians in the early 2000s, but in the aftermath of the financial crisis, economists have returned to prominence». The rise of economists to positions of policy prominence is a distinct phenomenon from the alleged retreat of historians from the public sphere. Guldi and Armitage seem to briefly acknowledge as much when they write that the greater number of citations of economists over historians in the citations of historians in the «New York Times» probably «says more about the success of economists in riding the waves of economic cycles than it does about any failure by historians to move with the times». J. Guldi and D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto: A Reply to Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler*, in «American Historical Review», a. CXX, n. 2, 2015, p. 426. One can also ask if their «three-year average mention of economists, historians and other social scientists» in the «Times» is a reliable or useful measure of historians' engagement or prominence. A chart provided by Guldi and Armitage does show economists overtaking historians – but they did so *around 1929*, retaining their lead in subsequent years (with the exception of several years around the turn of the twenty-first century). The chart also shows that an early high of three-year averages of mentions of historians occurred shortly after 1900, only to be exceeded in the late 1960s. Since that time, the average number of mentions of historians has always, despite fluctuations, been higher – in some cases substantially higher – than it was before the late 1960s. Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto: A Reply to Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler*, cit., p. 547.

¹⁰³ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., 96-97.

¹⁰⁴ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 100. I would add a caution: Perhaps we *are* «awash in data». But who is the «we» in the sentence? The valuable databases that I

Data» give us better history with more impact? It is possible, but this is a question that will be answered by evidence, not assertion. I would caution, however, that the answer depends in part on what historians do with that data and how they present it. As every historian knows, data is not something that in and of itself constitutes truth; like all evidence, it informs our arguments and our arguments shape how we read and present it. The hype surrounding «big data» and the wonderful things that can be done with it should leave historians skeptical. «Aggregated historically across time and space», Guldi and Armitage exclaim, «big data can mark out the hazards of inequality, and the reality of systems of governance and market that sustain life for all»¹⁰⁵. The fate of the world, it seems, now rests on historians' shoulders.

As for the *longue durée* – who can argue against it as one legitimate time frame among others? If, as Guldi noted in a public presentation, that the *longue durée* can range from 80 to 200 years, then at least some of my own scholarship constitutes *longue durée* history. My second book covered just under two centuries, my first a mere sixty years. What I value is not the time-frame *per se*; it is the questions that I pose that lead me to longer or shorter spans. There are undoubtedly some excellent *longue durée* works and some bad *longue durée* works, just as there are good and bad books operating on a shorter time span. I would suggest, as one of my seventeen-ye-

depend on heavily for my own research on are paid for by my university. There are many more databases to which I would appreciate having access. My institution's budget, unfortunately, does not permit that access. Harvard University may purchase almost everything, but few other colleges and universities do. In the hierarchy of American higher education, far more historians work in institutions without access to the many databases available to the *Manifesto's* authors. Data is often not free. Beyond what governments may provide *gratis*, data is often a commodity that wealthy institutions can purchase access to but less wealthy institutions must do without. No cash, no access. That remains a fundamental economic reality for scholars – and the public.

¹⁰⁵ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 100. The hype that surrounds the *Manifesto's* injunctions is continually undermined by the examples it offers. Is, for instance, «big data» necessary to «demonstrate the wide variability in the experience of men and women, blacks and whites, migrants and stationary people across large time-scales»? (*The History Manifesto*, p. 100) These were simple and fundamental points that historians arrived at decades ago the old fashioned way. Take another example: «We live in an age where big data seem to suggest that we are locked into our history, our path dependent on larger structures that arrived before we did», Guldi and Armitage write. (*The History Manifesto*, p. 109) As an example they cite an economist's article, «Women and the Plough», which «tells us that modern gender roles have structured our genes and our preferences since the institution of agriculture»? That was the wording on page 110 of the page proofs of *The History Manifesto*; in the current downloadable edition used in this article, the wording is altered to read that the article «tells us that modern gender roles have structured our preferences since the institution of agriculture»? There are two problems with the two formulations: First, on the level of logical exposition, it is not clear how *modern* gender roles could work backwards in time to structure either genes or preferences at the moment of agriculture's origins. Second, the article in question does not argue that what they say it argues. Rather, it focuses on the enduring power of cultural assumptions linked to specific forms of agriculture, not on genes or preferences working backward in time. If the «arbitration of data» (*The History Manifesto*, p. 107) is a task for historians, then the first step, which requires neither the *longue durée* nor «big data», is a close and careful reading. Once that is lost, as it is in this example from the book, it is hard to make a case for history's utility in critiquing «received mythology» (*The History Manifesto*, p. 108).

ar-old sons pointed out – he likes reading sweeping studies – that the good ones are built on the work of countless scholars whose smaller-scale works constitute the building blocks that allow the *longue durée* folks to write with some degree of authority and accuracy. So let's agree: *longue durée* history is a good thing – provided it is done *carefully* and is grounded in a wealth of solid scholarship. To suggest that those who do *longue durée* history are daring, courageous, and desperately needed by society, as Guldi and Armitage do, is going too far.

The *Manifesto*'s authors place considerable weight on historians' shoulders when they cry out that the magnitude of the present crises demands our intervention. «The immensity of the material in front of us begs for arbitrators who can help make sense of data that defy the boundaries of expertise», they write¹⁰⁶. «Today, we desperately need an arbiter for these mythological histories, capable of casting out prejudice, reestablishing consensus about the actual boundaries of the possible, and in so doing opening up a wider future and destiny for modern civilization»¹⁰⁷. If this was actually what was at stake and serving as «arbiter» and «arbiter» my chief assignment as an historian, I would likely feel paralyzed by the enormity of the task. They continue their case: «Without historians' theories of multiple causality, fundamentalism and dogmatism could prevail»¹⁰⁸. As it turns out, we *have* theories of multiple causality, but fundamentalism and dogmatism nonetheless have prevailed. It is difficult to imagine a *longue durée* history on the «New York Times» bestseller list that will topple either fundamentalism or dogmatism. (Try to imagine climate change denier Senator James Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma and, incredibly, chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, curled up in a chair in his Senate office, reading the long-awaited and accessible *longue durée* history on climate change, lowering his glasses and declaring: «The scales have fallen from my eyes! I must vote to restrict greenhouse gas emissions».) It is equally doubtful that a long-term perspective on the past, presenting synthesis of «big data», will convince Creationists that the literal interpretation of biblical creation is wrong or convince free marketers like the Koch Brothers to embrace a renewed New Deal state. The likelihood of these things happening, however big the data or however long the *durée*, is near zero. Let me be clear: this is not to say that good history, however it is done, cannot have a positive policy impact; many hope that it does and that very hope prompts them to write accessibly, seek out larger audiences, and address their scholarship to the public. Whether that will change the world in the manner Guldi and Armitage imagine – or change anything – is another matter. We can hope, but we shouldn't hold our breath.

The *Manifesto* presupposes an Enlightenment World behind the world of irrational fundamentalism and dogmatism in which we are currently mired. If only historians as arbiters of data can unveil the truth, the powerful will sit up and listen, or the people will rise up and make those in power listen. We do not live in that world, although I wish we did. So what, then, is the historian's role? Is it to «de-

¹⁰⁶ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 105.

¹⁰⁷ *Ivi*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁸ *Ivi*, p. 111.

stabilise power» or «disrupt the institutions around us»? «[S]hake citizens, policy makers, and the powerful out of their complacency»?¹⁰⁹ Guldi and Armitage think so. And some historians might try to do just that. But I also know more than a few historians who wear their problematic ideologies on their sleeves, convinced that the «data» proves them right, eager to lead the masses to some promised land. That is a vanguardist position, complete with the arrogance of the earlier Leninists and the disdain for the befuddled masse – or their inept political leaders – whose consciousness needs to be raised¹¹⁰.

Historians are *not* the vanguard; we should not want them to be nor trust those who believe they play that role. So yes, historians should, when necessary, use «big data». Yes, they should go *longue durée* if they conclude that longer time frames are appropriate for the subjects they are exploring. But they should not make the mistake of thinking their unique skills and perspectives will necessarily change the world or that their readers will join their revolution. Earlier vanguardists had their illusions; historians, if they know their history, should not.

It is «in the nature of manifestos to be hopeful, forward-looking and somewhat provocative», Guldi and Armitage insist. The one they produced is unquestionably provocative, as is their conclusion: «Historians of the world, unite! There is a world to win – before it's too late»¹¹¹. However much they may wish it to be otherwise, historians won't unite. They shouldn't unite. And the world will not end if they fail to heed Guldi and Armitage's injunction. We have different interests, approaches, and political views. The data we are «awash» in do not point to single conclusions or political solutions to serious problems. Besides, think of the legacy of the most famous manifesto on which their concluding words are borrowed. In its name, countless numbers have died at the hand of dictators and their political parties convinced that history was on their side. That's not a legacy of which to be proud. Nor should we seek to emulate the passions, certitude, dogmatism, or rhetorical tropes of its founding manifesto. If its authors insist on rhetorically modeling their call to the barricades upon the 1848 document, they should not be surprised that the very policy makers and public audiences they seek to reach will continue to ignore them.

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¹⁰⁹ Ivi, pp. 101, 115, 116.

¹¹⁰ On the «vanguardism» of *The History Manifesto* project and the «Leninist consequences in a more general sense», see K. Peden, *What is to be Done?*, in «Los Angeles Review of Books», February 18, 2015 at lareviewofbooks.org/review/done, accessed September 30, 2015.

¹¹¹ Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, cit., p. 125.

