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Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives

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## FORUM ON COMPARATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

### 1.

#### COMPARATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

CHRIS LORENZ

#### ABSTRACT

Just like history, historiography is usually written and analyzed within one spatio-temporal setting, traditionally that of a particular nation-state. As a consequence, historiography tends to localize explanations for historiographical developments within national contexts and to neglect international dimensions. As long as that is the case, it is impossible to assess the general and specific aspects of historiographical case studies. This forum, therefore, represents a sustained argument for comparative approaches to historiography.

First, my introduction takes a recent study in Canadian historiography as a point of departure in order to illustrate the problems of *non*-comparative historiography. These problems point to strong arguments in favor of comparative approaches. Second, I place comparative historiography as a genre in relation to a typology that orders theories of historiography on a continuum ranging from general and philosophical to particular and empirical. Third, I put recent debates on the “fragmentation” of historiography in a comparative perspective. Worries among historians about this fragmentation—usually associated with the fragmentation of the nation and the advent of multiculturalism and/or postmodernism—are legitimate when they concern the epistemological foundations of history as a discipline. As soon as the “fragmentation” of historiography leads to—and is legitimated by—epistemological skepticism, a healthy pluralism has given way to an unhealthy relativism. As comparison puts relativism in perspective by revealing its socio-historical foundations, at the same time it creates its rational antidote.

Fourth, I summarize the contributions to this forum; all deal—directly or indirectly—with the historiography of the Second World War. Jürgen Kocka’s “Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German *Sonderweg*” examines the so-called “special path” of Germany’s history. Daniel Levy’s “The Future of the Past: Historiographical Disputes and Competing Memories in Germany and Israel” offers a comparative analysis of recent historiographical debates in Germany and Israel. Sebastian Conrad’s “What Time is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography” analyzes the conceptual linkage between Japanese historiography and specific interpretations of European history. Richard Bosworth’s “Explaining ‘Auschwitz’ after the End of History: The Case of Italy” charts in a comparative perspective the changes since 1989 in Italian historiography concerning fascism. All four articles support the conclusion that next to the *method* of historical comparison is the *politics* of comparison, which is hidden in the choice of the parameters. Analyses of both method and politics are essential for an understanding of (comparative) historiography.

1. The articles in this forum were originally presented as papers at the second *European Social Science History Conference*, held in March 1998 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Very recently J. L. Granatstein, a well-known emeritus professor from York University in Toronto, Canada, published a small book. Although this fact in itself was not unusual—he has published forty-five books or so—the title and the content were: *Who Killed Canadian History?*<sup>2</sup>

Granatstein argues in this book that since the 1960s Canada has been heading for disintegration because Canadians are no longer familiar with the basic facts of their history. Canadian professors, teachers, educational theorists, and politicians are to blame, although probably not in that order. Since “multicultural mania” has become a new political and intellectual religion, to all appearances *the* Canadian people have ceased to exist. Canada has gone to pieces and is fragmenting into a multitude of regions, provinces, classes, cultural and linguistic ethnicities, and even genders—and Canada’s historians are accomplices to this development by dissolving national history in regional history, gender history, and so on. Québec separatism is only the most visible symptom of Canada’s fatal predilection for “limited identities.”<sup>3</sup> The danger for Canada’s identity as a nation is grave and a national disaster is imminent. “History is memory, inspiration and commonality and a nation without memory is every bit as adrift as an amnesiac wandering the streets. History matters, and we forget this truth at our peril. . . . If we have no past, then surely it must follow that we have no future.” “For incomprehensible reasons, we have not passed this knowledge on to our children and to those who have recently arrived in Canada.”<sup>4</sup>

The situation Canadians face since Canadian history has been killed is even more pitiful compared to other countries with which Granatstein is familiar, such as the US and the Netherlands. In the US—which used to regard itself as a “melting pot” in contrast to Canada’s “mosaic”—leading intellectuals such as Robert Hughes, Arthur Schlesinger, and Richard Rorty have criticized the excesses of multiculturalism and have pleaded for a return to a healthy dose of identification with the nation.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the Netherlands Granatstein informs his readers

2. J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998). Cf. K. Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (New York, 1997), which covers the whole Western world.

3. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, 72: “Limited identities were almost openly anti-nationalist: it was not the nation that mattered, but smaller, differentiated provincial or regional societies; not Canadians as a whole, but the components of the ethnic mosaic; not Canadians as a society, but Canadians in their social classes. Canadians formed a complex pluralist society, and in that lay our strength. The result of this perspective, as Michael Bliss put it in 1991, was the ‘sundering’ of Canadian history, a sundering that mirrored the fragmentation of the nation.” For a far more balanced view on the recent state of Canadian historiography, see Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900*, 2nd. ed. (Toronto, 1986), esp. 259-320.

4. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, xviii, 6. Cf. 5: “History is important because it helps people to know themselves. It tells them who they were and who they are; it is the collective memory of humanity that situates them in their time and place; and it provides newcomers with some understanding of the society in which they have chosen to live. Of course, the collective memory undergoes constant revision, restructuring, and rewriting, but whatever its form it reveals anew to each generation a common fund of knowledge, traditions, values, and ideas that help to explain our existence and the mistakes and successes.”

5. *Ibid.*, 89-92.

about his experiences in 1995 when he was in Holland for the commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the German capitulation. The Dutch have not forgotten their wartime history as a nation nor their liberators, the Canadian military. No collective amnesia in the Dutch case, as far as Granatstein can tell, because "every house was decorated in the colours of the House of Orange [the Dutch royal family] and with Canadian flags." "The Dutch remember. They teach their children about the war in their schools; they teach that freedom is everything and that, if not defended, it can be lost."<sup>6</sup> And all of that, of course, is in stark contrast to Canadians, who have forgotten about their "D-Day," "Flanders Fields" and their "Vimy Ridge," where—of all places!—"the Canadian nation" was born.<sup>7</sup>

For readers familiar with some of the international historiographical literature since the 1970s—for instance on Germany or the US—Granatstein's diagnosis of Canada's historiography contains several well-known elements, although none of his arguments is based on empirical comparisons with other countries.<sup>8</sup> First is the diagnosis of a crisis of the nation-state and the linkage of this nation-state with the historical awareness of national identity. In the same move historiography is identified as the locus of historical consciousness of the nation; therefore, the crisis of the nation-state is equated with a crisis of national historiography. Second is the explanation of this crisis as an internal process of fragmentation, that is, the disintegration into parts of what used to be a whole. This whole—the nation—is conceptualized as an essence and not as an "imagined community." Thus the *definition* of nationhood is taken for granted. In Granatstein's case, as we observed, Canadian nationality is essentially English-Canadian nationality to the exclusion of French-Canadian nationality, which is

6. *Ibid.*, 114. Granatstein's observations on Holland in 1995 are remarkable, to say the least. Most Dutch historians hold quite a different view on Dutch historical consciousness before, during, and after 1995; cf. the report on *Youth and History in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam, 1997).

7. *Ibid.*, 132: "The immigrant colonials found themselves transformed into Canadians. Many veterans recalled attacking at Vimy Ridge in April 1917 as soldiers of the Empire, but waking up the day of their great victory as Canadians, full of pride at their maple leaf badges. The war mattered to Canadians, and it gave them a sense of nationhood that has helped to define this country ever since." On 88, however, Granatstein had stated that "it would have been more correct to say that *English-Canadian* nationalism was born on Vimy Ridge" followed by the succinct observation: "The simple, if regrettable, truth was that French and English-speaking Canadians had differing interpretations of the country's past, present and future." The past tense is obviously misplaced. See for recent French-Canadian (Québec) perspectives on Canadian history: J.-P. Bernard, "L'historiographie canadienne récente (1964–94) et l'histoire des peuples du Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (1995), 320–353, and G. Bouchard, *Populations neuves, cultures fondatrices et conscience nationale en Amérique latine et au Québec* (Chicoutoumi, 1996).

Consistency, by the way, is not Granatstein's most salient characteristic in this book, because apart from his circumvention of the central issue—that is, the different definitions of Canadian nationhood—Canada's birth certificate at Vimy Ridge excludes half its population: women.

8. For the US see, among others, J. Scott, "History in Crisis? The Other Side in History," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989), 680–692; A. Megill, "Fragmentation and the Future of Historiography," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991), 693–698; and D. Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), 651–677. For Germany, see M. Geyer and K. Jarausch, "The Future of the German Past: Transatlantic Reflections for the 1990s," *Central European History* 22 (1989), 229–259; *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie: Eine Diskussion*, ed. W. Schulze (Göttingen, 1994); and *Kulturgeschichte heute*, ed. W. Hardtwig and H.-U. Wehler (Göttingen, 1996).

not taken seriously for one moment. No wonder even Charles Taylor's internationally renowned *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* doesn't even make it to his footnotes.<sup>9</sup> Third are the usual suspects in the murder of the unitary nation: the well-known "champions of difference and alterity," such as social historians, ethnic historians, and gender historians. Fourth are the comparisons—implicit and explicit—with times and places when and where the "wholeness" of the nation and its history were duly respected and its fragmentation resisted. These comparison-situations function as a kind of foil and as "counter-history" to the history presented; they may have a positive, exemplary function or a negative, critical one. In Granatstein's gloomy analysis Canada itself before the 1960s functions as a positive "counter-history," together with the Netherlands. Fifth is the presupposition that history in itself is an integrating and uniting rather than a dispersing and divisive force. As the heir to universal history national history too is conceptualized as a benign force or a *Heilsgeschichte*.

I have taken Granatstein's recent book on Canadian historiography as a point of departure for this forum on comparative historiography because it exemplifies the problems of *non-comparative* historiography so well. By systematically omitting the international context and thus by leaving the question of what is particular and general in his case aside, Granatstein highlights the prospects and promises of comparative historiography in an indirect way. Because his analysis sticks to the national framework, it creates the inevitable illusion that national—in this case, Canadian—problems must have national causes. If we accept Marc Bloch's view that *all* history is comparative history—implicit or explicit—then it is easy to see why comparative historiography is even more needed than comparative history: in historiography historians are confronted with comparative judgments at *two* levels instead of one, as is the case in normal historical practice. In normal historical practice historians face comparative judgments in both temporal and spatial dimensions, even when they are not recognized as such. Characterizations of the US as "the first new nation" or of Imperial Germany as

9. For Granatstein's treatment of French-Canadian nationalism see for instance his sketch of Québec history-teaching on 34: "To judge by the curricular materials, Canadian history is merely the alien backdrop against which events in francophone Quebec occur. Scarcely any attempt is made to compare life, issues, and events in Quebec with those elsewhere in Canada. If it happened in Quebec, in other words, it's important; if it didn't, it's not—unless *les maudits Anglais* humiliated *les pauvres Québécois* yet again."

For Taylor, see C. Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, 1992). Characteristic of discussions on national identity seems to be the apparent unwillingness or inability of many involved to regard the view of "the other side" as legitimate and serious. In the Canadian debate, for instance, in both the English-Canadian and the French-Canadian discourses on national identity the premises of arguments are often identical to their conclusions. Authors such as Granatstein just *define* the political ambitions of the Québécois as an infringement on Canadian national identity just as Québécois such as Gérard Bouchard *define* the very idea of Canadian national identity as a chimera. Cf. Levy's analysis of the debate between Zionist and post-Zionist views on Israeli identity in part 3 of this forum, pages 50-65.

Ramsay Cook—another famous history professor from York—has developed a far better argued view on the problem of Canadian nationality than Granatstein, but they share the crucial presupposition that there *is* a national Canadian identity and that the Québécois are causing its fragmentation. See his *Canada, Quebec and the Uses of Nationalism* (Toronto, 1995), esp. 85-98, 159-196, and 237-247.

“the belated nation” (“die verspätete Nation”) or as “the empire in the middle” (“das Reich in der Mitte”) represent well-known paradigm cases. Because historiography is the history of history writing—and thus a reconstruction of reconstructions—we encounter the problem of comparison in historiography *twice*. The historiographer is not only confronted with comparative judgments related to the historical reconstructions themselves, but also related to the—historiographical—reconstructions of those historical reconstructions. The weight of the arguments that have been brought forward in favor of comparison in history in general therefore count double for historiography.

Seen in this light, for historiographers there is no reason for complacency. Just as with “normal” history, historiography is typically analyzed predominantly within the framework of the national state and not in a comparative cross-national framework; and as with “normal” history, attempts to detach historiography from its national context and to relate the national to cross-national contexts are the exceptions to the rule. The simple and sorry fact is that international comparison of national historiographical traditions is still fairly rare.

This state of affairs is, of course, explicable from a historical and institutional point of view. The tight historical bonds between the rise of the modern nation-state and history as an academic discipline cannot be easily overlooked. From an intellectual point of view, nevertheless, this state of affairs is very unsatisfactory, because just like other academic disciplines, history too is a mixture of general (international) and specific (national) ingredients. Since comparison is the only way to identify and explain both differences and similarities between national historiographical traditions, the comparative approach is the logical (though laborious) path to follow in historiography (see Kocka’s article in this issue).<sup>10</sup>

Especially in light of striking similarities in historiographical developments in the postwar Western world, the relationship between national and international aspects is on the research agenda, because in our “global age” similarities in “intellectual fields” usually are the product of intellectual *transfers*. As the major

10. Cf. the argument in my review of Bosworth’s book *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War 1945–1990* in *History and Theory* 35 (1996), 234–252. For recent overviews of comparative approaches in history see C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, 1987); N. Christie, “From Intellectual to Cultural History: The Comparative Catalyst,” in *Intellectual History: New Perspectives*, ed. D. R. Woolf (theme issue of the *Journal of History and Politics*, vol. 6) (Lewiston, N.Y., 1989), 79–100; A. van den Braembussche, “Historical Explanation and Comparative Method: Towards a Theory of the History of Society,” *History and Theory* 28 (1989), 2–24; R. Grew, “On the Current State of Comparative Studies,” in *Marc Bloch aujourd’hui: Histoire comparée et sciences sociales*, ed. H. Aitma *et al.* (Paris, 1992), 323–334; J. Kocka, “Comparative Historical Research: German Examples,” *International Review of Social History* 38 (1993), 369–379; G. M. Frederickson, “From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History,” *Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 339–367; *Geschichte und Vergleich: Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. H.-G. Haupt and J. Kocka (Frankfurt am Main, 1996); H. Jansen, “Voorwerpen van vergelijking: Op zoek naar een nieuwe vergelijkingstypologie,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 110 (1997), 329–357; G. Frederickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (Berkeley, 1997); H. Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich: Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998).

intellectual and ideological currents have acquired “global” currency, their national variants have both nationally specific and crosscultural aspects. They often represent ideas with international currency adapted to fit local cultural and structural circumstances, as George Frederickson recently emphasized.<sup>11</sup> Because comparison is the only procedure to disentangle the general from the specific in each particular national context, comparative and transfer historiography are necessarily complementary and therefore constitute one and the same project. Before elaborating on it I will first localize this project on the map of recent theories of historiography.

# I. TYPES OF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL THEORY

Because thinking about historiography takes on so many different forms, it may be useful to map these forms on a continuum from particular and concrete to general and abstract and to classify them into a few types. In this manner we can develop a rudimentary typology in order to localize comparative historiography with the help of more familiar coordinates.<sup>12</sup>

At the abstract pole on this continuum are the more or less pure philosophies of historiography, such as Hayden White’s and Frank Ankersmit’s. I take it that they don’t need to be summarized here.<sup>13</sup> These philosophies consist of a conceptual explication of what historiography essentially is about, what forms it may take and how it develops over time. The philosophical argument is usually based on other disciplines—in White’s case on literary theory, and in Ankersmit’s case also on aesthetics—and is illustrated and backed up by historiographical *examples*. Characteristic of this type of philosophy of historiography is that spatio-temporal considerations usually play a minor role.

Raymond Martin’s approach to philosophy of history represents the most empirical variant of this type.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the other representatives of philosophy of historiography, he consistently takes actual—empirical—historiographical controversies as his point of departure. Therefore he stays as close to historical practice as is possible without ceasing to be a philosopher (his interest is, after all, philosophical and not historiographical). Martin is interested in the *logic* and not in the *history* of historiography: he is looking for the implicit epistemo-

11. Frederickson, “From Exceptionalism to Variability,” 600.

12. Because other typologies of historiography have been developed for different purposes, they are not useful in this context. See for overviews: E. Schulin, “Synthesen der Historiographieggeschichte,” in *Geschichtswissenschaft vor 2000: Festschrift fuer Georg G. Iggers, zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Jarausch *et al.* (Hagen, 1991), 151-163, and H.-W. Blanke, “Typen und Funktionen der Historiographieggeschichte: Eine Bilanz und ein Forschungsprogramm,” in *Geschichtsdiskurs. Band 1: Methoden der Historiographieggeschichte*, ed. W. Küttler *et al.* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), 191-212.

13. H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973); F. R. Ankersmit, “The Reality Effect in the Writing of History: The Dynamics of Historical Tropology,” *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (Berkeley, 1994), 125-162.

14. R. Martin, *The Past within Us: An Empirical Approach to Philosophy of History* (Princeton, 1989); R. Martin, “Progress in Historical Studies,” *History and Theory* 37 (1998), 14-40.

logical criteria used by historians when they judge competing interpretations. These criteria—such as accuracy, comprehensiveness, and empirical justification—according to Martin explain why the better interpretations win out in the long run and why, as a consequence, historiography shows progress.<sup>15</sup>

At the concrete pole of the continuum lie the traditional, empirical overviews of historiography. They usually deal with specific spatio-temporal chunks and with specific sub-disciplines of historiography or traditions, such as the Enlightenment historians in eighteenth-century Germany, or the history the *Annales* school in twentieth-century France.<sup>16</sup> Some kind of chronology or periodization is usually the organizational principle of empirical historiography, which is most akin to “normal,” traditional history. Correspondingly, usually little or no theoretical reflection is contained in it.

Between the two poles of the continuum and the corresponding “pure” types are the many *hybrids* of philosophy and historiography. In the neighborhood of the philosophical pole Jörn Rüsen’s well-known theory of disciplinary matrices may be located, because its basic conceptual apparatus is derived from philosophy of science, that is, from Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm theory.<sup>17</sup> A similar position may be assigned to Rüsen’s recent theory about intercultural historiographical comparison, because it implicitly parallels historiography with science by presupposing the existence of a universal, cognitive, and “progressive” dynamic along with a practical dynamic in the direction of universal values<sup>18</sup> (compare Conrad’s contribution to this forum, in which he explicitly warns against the presupposition of a universal dynamic or logic).

At some distance from Rüsen—further down the continuum in the direction of the empirical pole—are Horst-Walter Blanke’s voluminous historiographical writings, in which he has tried to implement Rüsen’s theory in German historiography from the Enlightenment to the present.<sup>19</sup>

15. Martin, *The Past within Us*, 14-15: “The empirical approach does not do away with the tension between scientific and humanistic approaches. Rather, it expresses this tension within the framework of a new set of categories and a new research program, both of which take their point of departure from an examination of the evidential structure of actual historical interpretation.”

16. See, for instance, P. H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), and P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929-1989* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

17. See esp. J. Rüsen, *Historische Vernunft: Grundzüge einer Historik*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1983-1989), and J. Rüsen, *Essays in Metahistory* (Providence, 1997). For a different view on Rüsen see A. Megill, “Jörn Rüsen’s Theory of Historiography between Modernism and Rhetoric of Inquiry,” *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 39-61.

18. J. Rüsen, “Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparative Historiography,” *History and Theory* 35 (1996), 5-23, esp. 21: “Modernization is, of course, one of the most important perspectives of diachronic comparison. It should be concretized as an internal process of rationalization in dealing with the past.” As Rüsen’s *Aufklärungs* theory of history is at the same time a theory of cognitive and normative rationalization, this feature comes as no surprise.

19. H.-W. Blanke, *Historiographieggeschichte als Historik* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1991).



Somewhere in the same region of the continuum is Irmeline Veit-Brause's sociological theory of historiography.<sup>20</sup> In a number of articles she has analyzed recent conceptualizations of the history of historiography and has proposed a theory that owes as much to sociology of science—such as Pierre Bourdieu's—as to philosophy of science. She explicitly rejects the use of Thomas Kuhn's paradigm theory for historiographical purposes, because—among other things—of its suggestion that the dynamics of historiography have an internal rather than external motor. Transfer is not adequately accounted for in the Kuhnian frame, according to her argument. While she is more concerned with the social and institutional conditions of the “disciplining” of history, in her case too there is little use of comparative historiographical arguments. As with Rüsen, in Veit-Brause's theory spatio-temporal coordinates don't play a significant role; and as Rüsen does, she highlights the double character of historical knowledge as both *Wissenschaft* and as *Orientierungswissen* (baptized as the disciplinary identity model and the memory model of history).<sup>21</sup>

A similar trajectory between historiography, sociology of science, and philosophy of science is traveled by Lutz Raphael in Germany, who—in contrast to Veit-Brause—did apply his theoretical notions to a major historiographical case-study, that is, the *Annales* school.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, however, Raphael's book also remains within the parameters of the “one nation-approach” (in his case France) although he draws general conclusions from the international reception of the *Annales* school. One of them amounts also to a critique of Kuhn's paradigm theory for historiographical purposes: according to Raphael it blacks out essential continuities in historiographical traditions over time. Also relevant in our context is Raphael's conclusion that even where the *Annales* historians loudly propounded the transcendence of the nation-state in history-writing, at a subterranean level their own program of “structural” history remained firmly tied to the historical problematic of France. The remarkable opposition of a “deep,” “structural” history to a “superficial” and *événementiel* political history, to name the most obvious example, is only explicable within the French intellectual context of the 1940s and 1950s.

Similar observations have recently been made regarding the postwar German brands of “structural” history, the *Strukturgeschichte* and the *historische Sozialwissenschaft*. While representing international trends in historiography, these programs at the same time are subterraneously hooked onto specific national intellectual contexts, such as the debate on the *Sonderweg* in the German case.<sup>23</sup>

20. I. Veit-Brause, “Paradigms, Schools, Traditions: Conceptualizing Shifts and Changes in the History of Historiography,” *Storia della Storiografia/Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung* 11 (1990), 50-65; I. Veit-Brause, “Historiographical Progress: Its Theory and Practice. Introductory Note,” *Storia della Storiografia/Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung* 22 (1992), 79-84; I. Veit-Brause, “The Disciplining of History: Perspectives on a Configurational Analysis of its Disciplinary History,” in *History-Making: The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline*, ed. R. Torstendahl and I. Veit-Brause (Stockholm, 1996), 7-31.

21. Veit-Brause, “The Disciplining of History.”

22. L. Raphael, *Die Erben von Bloch und Febvre: Annales-Geschichtsschreibung und nouvelle histoire in Frankreich 1945–1980* (Stuttgart, 1994).

23. *Ibid.*, 467-502. For Germany, see T. Welskopp, “Die Sozialgeschichte der Väter: Grenzen und Perspektiven der Historischen Sozialwissenschaft,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998), 173-198.

Halfway along the continuum are books like *Telling the Truth about History* by Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, or Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*.<sup>24</sup> This type of approach consists of a mixture of traditional empirical historiography of one nation—US historiography in both cases—and philosophy of history proper. Therefore this hybrid genre obviously differs from plain empirical historiography, because a representation of a particular piece of historiography basically functions as a vehicle for a philosophical argument. The historiographical overview, consequently, is at the same time a defense of and an attack on a particular philosophical position. In Novick's case the attack is directed against realism while relativism is defended: the blossoming of pluralism in historiography since the 1960s is interpreted as an argument in favor of relativism. In Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob's case it is just the other way around: recent pluralism is interpreted as an argument in favor of (practical) realism, and relativism is rejected as inconsistent with two basic presuppositions of history as a discipline: the "reality-rule," based on the facticity of the past, and the "rule of truth," presupposed in the very notion of empirical research.<sup>25</sup> Along the way Novick and Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob also distinguish between history as *Wissenschaft* and as *Orientierungswissen*.

A historiographical type closer to comparative historiography is represented by Fritz Ringer's comparative historiography of academic cultures in France and Germany around the turn of the last century. Although Ringer's book *Fields of Knowledge: French Academic Culture in Comparative Perspective* resembles what Jürgen Kocka calls "asymmetrical comparison"—because the "comparison-situation" of Germany is not so much in this book as in his earlier one on the German mandarins—it is thoroughly comparative in the structure of its arguments. At the same time it is explicitly intended as an example of comparative historiography based on sociology of science, that is, Bourdieu's theory of "academic fields."

Another recent position in the field of historiographical theory relevant for comparative historiography is Ann Rigney's communicative theory of historiography, based on her comparative analysis of French Romantic historiography.<sup>26</sup> Her starting point is a very basic observation: "When historians like other mortals use language, they engage in a communicative activity, i.e., an activity designed to convey coherent information about the world to someone else. History is written to be read,"<sup>27</sup> and, therefore, at the level of theory historio-

24. J. Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth about History* (New York and London, 1994); P. Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Eng., 1988). See also the forum on *Telling the Truth in History and Theory* 34 (1995), 320-340; the forum on *That Noble Dream in the American Historical Review* 96 (1991); and T. Haskell, "Objectivity is Not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*," *History and Theory* 29 (1990), 129-156.

25. See also my article "Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A Plea for Internal Realism," *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 310.

26. See A. Rigney, "Time for Visions and Revisions: Interpretative Conflict from a Communicative Perspective," *Storia della Storiografia* 22 (1992), 85-92; A. Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

27. Rigney, "Visions and Revisions," 85.

graphy needs to be analyzed as a form of communication. This implies that in history, as a communicative activity, factual information is only interesting as far as it is relevant for a topic under consideration and as far as this topic is relevant for our present-day concerns, that is, a present “system of relevance.”<sup>28</sup> As there are always *multiple* versions of any topic and *multiple* “systems of relevance”—there is no History, only histories—factual information can only be judged in relation to *multiple* texts and in relationship to the difference it makes in this context of multiple texts. In this sense historiography is always intertextual and at the same time related to “the expectations and interests of those who read it.” Therefore, historiographical developments must be analyzed in relationship to the “*horizon of expectation*” of the public addressed.<sup>29</sup>

Because “the starting point [of historiography] is not silence (by now irretrievable), but what has been said already,” “revisionist works are intertextually linked to the alternative accounts they seek to displace.” As a consequence of this critical drive behind much historiography, varying from critical distance to downright antagonism, historiographical representation possesses an “*agonistic dimension*” according to Rigney: “historians, contrary to what much theoretical reflection might lead one to believe, do write regularly in the *negative mode*, the assertion of what happened going hand in glove with the denial of what did not happen, what was certainly not the case or only partially so.”<sup>30</sup> For exactly this reason Louis Althusser used to label *all* human sciences as “critical” sciences. It is this “agonistic dimension” that may clarify the fact that “normal” histories may contain implicit “*subtext*” *histories* that function as foil or contrast history for the history presented (as is the case with Dutch history in Granatstein’s history of Canadian historiography). In the debate on the “special path” of German history—its alleged *Sonderweg*—this dimension was made explicit when David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley pointed out that the “peculiarity” of German history depended on the implied “normality” of European history (see Jürgen Kocka’s article in this issue). Similar remarks are in place for the alleged *exceptionalism* of US history, where French history in its Tocquevillian guise functioned as the model of “normal” European history from which American history would “deviate.”<sup>31</sup>

Still further down the continuum to the empirical pole sits Georg Iggers’s longstanding historiographical project, which brings us closer to comparative historiography than all the other positions reviewed so far. Here,—beginning with his *New Directions in European Historiography* (1975), continued in its revised edition (1984), and ending with his *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (1997)—is a truly cross-national historiography. We could attach the label “parallel cross-national historiography” to this type of project, because it basically consists of a

28. *Ibid.*, 86. The concept is Veit-Brause’s.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, 86-91.

31. See Frederickson, “From Exceptionalism to Variability,” 592.

parallel analysis of national historiographies.<sup>32</sup> With a focus on Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States, Iggers's historiographical studies comprise an international panorama of erudition informed by a modicum of Kuhnian philosophy of science.

The role of Kuhn has, however, gradually dwindled to the vanishing point between 1975 and 1997. In Iggers's 1975 book the concept of paradigm was the main organizing principle, for he distinguished a French *Annales*, a German post-historicist, and an Anglo-Saxon Marxist paradigm in modern European historiography. In his new postscript to the 1984 edition, however, he aired doubts about this organizing idea. Now he put more emphasis on the influence of ideology on historiographical developments and changes in perspectives. He explicitly denied that these could be "understood in terms of the internal development of the discipline of history alone" because they also reflect "the impact of the collective experience of the twentieth century." And in 1997 his conclusion is that "all this points not to a new paradigm but to an expanded pluralism." Iggers, however, does not interpret this extended pluralism as an "anything goes" pluralism—as some postmodernists would have it—but a pluralism that remains within the parameters of historiographical rationality.<sup>33</sup> Thus, as in the case of Rüsen, Martin, and Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, Iggers's brand of comparative historiography combines a defense of realism, rationality, and a faith in historiographical progress. Realism, to all appearances, seems to offer the most effective defense against the Granatstein type of skepticism with respect to the recent state of historiographical pluralism.

A similar position on the continuum is occupied by Richard Bosworth's parallel cross-national historiography of the Second World War. His *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War 1945–1990* sketches historiographical developments related to World War II in England, France, Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union, and Japan.<sup>34</sup> Bosworth too has tried to structure historiographical developments with the help of Kuhn's paradigm theory. Also in his case, comparison is not really built into the research design, because national historiographies are predominantly analyzed within national contexts. To all appearances, therefore, even in cross-national historiography the national context is still treated as more important than the international one.

32. G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* [1975] (London, 1984); G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, N.H., and London, 1997).

33. See especially G. Iggers, "Rationality and History," in *Developments in Modern Historiography*, ed. H. Kozicki (London, 1993), 19–40, and esp. 28: "In a fundamental way, the problem of history is not different from that of science, even natural science. As Thomas Kuhn has argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, an historical and cultural element enters into scientific work too," and 36: "[But] history, like every intellectual discipline, is an ongoing process guided by certain criteria of what constitutes reasonable communication." Cf. my article "Can Histories Be True? Narrativism, Positivism and the 'Metaphorical Turn'," *History and Theory* 37 (1998), 324–329.

34. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima*. See my review of Bosworth in *History and Theory* 35 (1996), 234–252.

## II. THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE NATION AND COMPARATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY

At the most general level, comparison is the only effective antidote to the “only the lonely” complex that is still rampant in historiography. It is basically the only methodological procedure to prevent *empirically unjustified* attributions of particular (local or national) characteristics and problems of historiography to particular (local or national) causes. Comparative designs do so by separating the particular from the general characteristics relative to the question(s) asked.<sup>35</sup> So, to return to our Canadian case, a historiographical inquiry *across* the Canadian borders would have taught Granatstein that the relatively disintegrated state of historiography since the 1960s is not at all specific to Canada, but a feature of the Western world at large.<sup>36</sup> Although there are of course important national differences to be noticed—for instance between federal and unitary states, and between relatively stable and unstable political systems—one of the most salient features of Western historiography since the 1960s is the *common* demise of the nation-state as the central focus and the simultaneous *common* rise of social, ethnic, gender, regional, and local identities. This change of historiographical focus reflects a change in the dominant modes of individual and collective self-representation in the Western world—and *not* just in Canada. The fragmentation of national identity into a number of sub- and supra-national identities has surely been the dominant trend during the last four decades, although countercurrents cannot be overlooked—such as the case of Germany after reunification.<sup>37</sup>

Granatstein is by no means the only historian in the Western world who feels ill at ease with the fragmented state of modern historiography. In the US the recent foundation of the Historical Society comes to mind, but when we stick to the Canadian example, J. Careless is the token celebrity. He had personally advocated the concept of “limited identities” and historiographical pluralism back in the 1960s, but spoke for many when he wrote in 1980 that in the meantime he felt like a farmer in the midst of a flood when he declared: “Lord, I know I prayed for rain but this is ridiculous.”<sup>38</sup> The shift of interest from the problems of “scientific,” “objective” history into the issues of “collective memory”—connected to specific *milieux de mémoires* and thus being particular and subjective by defi-

35. For the methodological aspects of comparison see especially Ragin, *The Comparative Method*, and Haupt and Kocka's introduction to *Geschichte und Vergleich*.

36. In Granatstein's case historiographical myopia is not without dangers, because he lists all the villains he holds responsible for the “killing” of Canadian history—among them “the university professors”—and suggests all types of policy measures, such as cutting down subsidies for academic publications. See Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, 139–149.

37. For the relationship of history and identity in general see my book *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 1997), 400–437. For the German case see S. Berger, “Historians and Nation-Building in Germany after Reunification,” *Past and Present* 18 (1995), 187–222, and K. Jarausch, “Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung? Zur Umdeutung der deutschen Vergangenheit,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995), 459–478.

38. Cited in G. Kealy, “The Writing of Social History in English Canada 1970–1984,” *Social History* 10 (1985), 349. The Historical Society was founded in 1997 with the aim of rescuing American historical scholarship from the fragmenting tendencies rampant in the American Historical Association.

nition—can easily and plausibly be interpreted as a consequence (and carrier!) of this development towards fragmentation of history and historical consciousness.

Now this fear of fragmentation is not only a matter of the psychology of individual historians, but also a matter of the epistemology of history as such. At stake is the fear that there is no real borderline between pluralism on the one side and relativism (“there is no king in Israel”) and skepticism (“anything goes”) on the other. This epistemological problem easily acquires an existential dimension for professional historians who realize that relativism and skepticism constitute fundamental threats to the foundation of historical business as such, that is, the idea of professional, scientific history. Probably this is one of the main reasons why the discussion about the “fragmentation of identities” in the human sciences so often is not conducted *sotto voce*, but in overheated and hysterical overtones.

Though comparison may have many merits, it definitely is no panacea for existential *Angst* nor for hysteria caused by fear of fragmentation of the nation. Whoever is susceptible to those ills is better advised to look somewhere else for help. Nor is comparison a guarantee against empirically false judgments, because just like politicians, historians may try to prove anything by comparison. Ernst Nolte in the *Historikersstreit* and Daniel Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, among others, testify to that troublesome fact.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, when comparison is properly conducted, it accomplishes something very important: it cuts worries and problems down to the *justified*, right size by rational and empirical means. It does so by putting them in a general perspective and by “relatively” assessing their factual grounds. Comparison thus puts relativism in a context and thereby provides a critical and reflective perspective. By revealing the sociohistorical foundations of skepticism, it at the same time creates its antidote.

### III. ON THIS FORUM

Although this forum consists of four articles on four different historiographical cases, they do have a common frame of reference both in their subject matter—the historiographical ways of dealing with the Second World War—and in their focus on comparison.

Jürgen Kocka's article, “Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German *Sonderweg*,” deals with the famous debate on the presumably “special path” of Germany's history which has haunted historians dealing with

39. For a more serious recent debate on the merits and risks of historical comparison applied to the history of the labor movements see C. Eisenberg, “Die Arbeiterbewegungen der Welt im Vergleich. Methodenkritische Bemerkungen zu einem Projekt des Internationalen Instituts für Sozialgeschichte in Amsterdam,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 34 (1994), 397-410; M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn, “Methodologische Probleme vergleichender Sozialgeschichte: Eine Erwiderung auf Christiane Eisenberg's ‘Methodenkritische Bemerkungen’ zu einem IISG-Projekt,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 35 (1995), 369-377; T. Welskopp, “Stolpersteine auf dem Königsweg: Methodenkritische Anmerkungen zum internationalen Vergleich in der Gesellschaftsgeschichte,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 35 (1995), 339-367. Nolte's comparative claims are more explicit than Goldhagen's, while the latter are often clothed in general appeals to “social science methodology.”

Germany for several decades. Kocka analyzes the several stages the debate has gone through and shows what parts of the *Sonderweg* thesis, in his view, have survived the empirical and methodological criticisms of recent years. He explores the historical context from which this thesis emerged, and he analyzes the presuppositions involved, especially the problematic foil of a “normal European/North American history” which underlies the debate. He uses the case of the German *Sonderweg* to discuss the characteristics and difficulties, the risks and the opportunities of asymmetrical comparison. Using the German case as a point of departure he explores the logic of a variant of historical comparison frequent in other areas of historical research as well.

Daniel Levy’s article, “The Future of the Past: Historiographical Disputes and Competing Memories in Germany and Israel,” is directly connected to Kocka’s, for it offers a full-blown comparative analysis of recent historiographical debates in Germany and Israel as well as their (inter)relationship with definitions of national identity. Levy’s article shows that the methodological device of comparison itself is intimately linked to “horizons of expectation” and is implicated in broader political-cultural issues. Levy reveals how the civil and ethnic definitions of German and Israeli national identity are related to different political agendas.

Sebastian Conrad’s article, “What Time Is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography,” also deals with the construction of national—in this case Japanese—identity through historiography. In a detailed analysis of postwar Japanese historiography Conrad argues that a conceptual linkage exists between Japanese and European historiography—interpreted as a periodization of world history—and he shows that the latter has been functioning as a model for the first. Postwar Japanese historiography according to Conrad remains essentially a “derivative discourse.” Next to Kocka’s, Conrad’s article is another neat illustration of the “agonistic dimension” in historiography (Rigney), and a convincing analysis of the ways in which the conceptual tools of a particular historiographical tradition—or of a “historiographical discourse,” to put it in Conrad’s more up-to-date terminology—are linked to another “historiographical discourse” which functions as its foil. The phenomenon of intertextuality in historiography is thus illustrated in a concrete way.

Richard Bosworth’s article, “Explaining ‘Auschwitz’ after the End of History: The Case of Italy,” is a continuation of his previous project in comparative historiography. Although this article deals only with Italy—and therefore is an example of “asymmetrical comparison”—Italian historiography is regularly compared to German and French historiography. Bosworth connects “paradigm changes” in Italian historiography to changes in identity politics—of the Italian Left and Right, and of what is left of Left and Right since 1989. Just as Levy does, he emphasizes the political relevance of what remains *unsaid* in historiographical discourse—its “symptomatic silences.” By comparing the silences in Italian and in German historiography Bosworth comes to the conclusion that German historians have shown a far greater willingness to face the darker sides

of their “fascist” legacy than their Italian counterparts. In this way comparative historiography may help to redress false impressions and prejudices, for Bosworth’s conclusion most likely also holds for German historiography compared to French or Dutch historiography on World War II.

All four articles support the conclusion that next to or behind the *method* of historical comparison is a *politics* of historical comparison, which is hidden in the choice of the parameters. These parameters of comparison constitute the so-called *contrast class* or the *comparison situation*, and all four articles offer fine illustrations of how these comparison situations determine the results of the comparison.<sup>40</sup> This circumstance may explain why comparisons *without* explicit contrast classes (and thus clear-cut questions) so often lead to inconclusive or even misleading results. To translate Lenin’s political principle “Trust is good, but control is better” to our context: “trust in comparison is good, but control over the comparison situation is better.”

In national histories the comparison situations usually consist of the histories of *other* nations—idealized or not, as illustrated by Granatstein—leading to different interpretations of the national history according to different comparison situations. The *Sonderweg* debate as analyzed by Kocka, and Japanese historiography as analyzed by Conrad, offer clear illustrations of this direct connection between histories and their implied comparisons. Or the comparison situations may consist of *other interpretations of what it is to be the nation* under study. Bosworth’s article highlights this problem as he charts the changing representations of “the Italian people” under fascism from a collective of victims and resisters to a variety of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. And Levy’s article goes into the different interpretations of what it means to be Israeli in Zionist and post-Zionist historiography and what it means to be German in nationalistic and post-nationalistic historiography. By deconstructing essentialist notions of nationhood, comparative historiography may contribute to the acceptance of difference and the promotion of tolerance. There are worse things historians can do.

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40. For the crucial function of the contrast class in comparison see my *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit*, 86, 193-194, 217-219.