

# Chapter I

## History and Theory

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In a 2006 article entitled ‘The History of Theory’ the historian Ian Hunter began his diagnosis of the present predicament of theory with the following opening line: ‘One of the most striking features of recent discussions of the moment of theory in the humanities is the lack of even proximate agreement about what the object of such theory might be and about the language in which it has been or should be conducted.’ Alluding to a diversity of ‘rivalrous theoretical vernaculars’ ranging from Jameson and Eagleton to Chomsky, Habermas, Althusser, and Derrida, he argues that ‘it is fruitless to begin a history of theory by trying to identify its common object or shared language’ *because there is none*.<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, one of the theorists under attack, responded to Hunter’s critique. In his polemically entitled ‘How Not to Historicize Theory’, he blamed Hunter for being ‘anti-theoretical’, and for clinging to ‘empiricism’ and to a low-level version of ‘positivist censorship’.<sup>2</sup>

Although this exchange between Hunter and Jameson probably will not be seen as an ‘historical’ debate, the *kind* of debate and the theoretical positions which both represent is also representative for theory in history. The discussion in the early 1980s between Perry Anderson and E. P. Thompson is just one example.<sup>3</sup> On closer analysis, the debate about the role of theory in history has been accompanying history as an academic discipline since its beginning. But before going further I first need to clarify the notions of theory and history.

### ABOUT HISTORY

As is well known, history as a discipline has traditionally developed into specializations, the standard subdivision of which has been blocs of time and space. The spatial frames have ranged from the local to the global—with regional, national,

<sup>1</sup> Ian Hunter, ‘The History of Theory’, *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2006), 78–112.

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘How Not to Historicize Theory’, *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (2008), 563–82.

<sup>3</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978); and Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London, 1980).

imperial, and continental frames in between. And the temporal frames have ranged from one day (one hour?) in the past back to the Big Bang—with the year, the decade, the century, the period, and so on, in between. Historiography—as the history of history-writing—has developed in the same way.

When specializations have developed in history which appear *not* to be based on explicit differentiations of space and time—as they in fact did, as in the case of ecclesiastical, legal, economic, gender, and environmental history—these specializations are still defined by *implicit* temporal and spatial characteristics. All subject-specific histories are also histories of specific chunks of space and time. For instance, the social history of the 1960s and 1970s usually remained within a national framework. In other words, history as a discipline defines its object, explicitly or implicitly, as being located in space and in time.

#### ABOUT THEORY IN HISTORY (1)

Now what about theory and history? What about Hunter's rather hopeless conclusion about the impossibility of a history of theory?

On 'the question of theory' Hunter is both wrong and right, and I will limit myself to theory of history from now on. Hunter is right in his observation that there is no unified 'common object' of theory, and he is also right in his observation that there is no unified 'shared language' of theory. However, he is wrong in his conclusion that this lack of a unified object and of a shared language of theory is a *problem*, because theory of history consists exactly of the *philosophical* or *reflexive discussions* about what the object(s) and language(s) of history is (are) or should be. Theory of history consists of 'the philosophical examination of all the aspects of our descriptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the past' and is both descriptive and normative.<sup>4</sup> Theory of history poses (epistemological) questions concerning the characteristics of our knowledge of the past, (methodological) questions concerning how this knowledge is achieved and what counts as 'quality' and as 'progress' of historical knowledge, (ontological or metaphysical) questions concerning the mode of being of 'the past', and (ethical, legal, and political) questions concerning the uses of the past. Many historians touch on, or pose, 'theoretical' questions without being aware of it.

The descriptive/normative double character of theory can only be expected given the sheer variety of ideas concerning the identifying characteristics of 'the' discipline and given the variety of historical practices. Both this variety and the normative character of epistemological ideals also pertains to other disciplines, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have recently argued in their Foucauldian

<sup>4</sup> Aviezer Tucker, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *A Companion to Philosophy of History and Historiography* (Oxford, 2009), 4; and Frank Ankersmit *et al.*, 'The Philosophy of History: An Agenda', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 1–9.

history of the sciences: 'As long as knowledge posits a knower, and the knower is seen as a potential help or hindrance to the acquisition of knowledge, the self of the knower will be an epistemological issue. The self, in turn, can be modified only with ethical warrant.'<sup>5</sup> This had been the case since Kant had defined epistemology as the 'battlefield' between the will of the scientist against *itself* and 'objectivity' as what Schopenhauer had called 'the will to willessness'.<sup>6</sup> Subjectivity had since turned into 'the enemy from within', which had to be 'tamed' by 'objective' procedures and rules.<sup>7</sup>

Striving after 'objectivity' is thus simultaneously an *epistemic* and an *ethical* ideal.<sup>8</sup> In this light it is not accidental that many great minds in the natural sciences became reflexive (philosophical) in periods when a former consensus broke down under the influence of new ideas, new languages, or new 'paradigms', as Thomas Kuhn famously labelled them. Therefore Jameson was right in criticizing Hunter for his 'empiricism' and for his lack of understanding of what theory is about.

Theoretical reflection about the 'true nature' of history fulfils three interrelated practical *functions*. First, theory *legitimizes* a specific historical practice—a specific way of 'doing history'—as the best one from an epistemological and a methodological point of view. For instance, Fernand Braudel's reflections on *la longue durée* aimed to legitimize Annales history in the 1960s as 'best practice'. Similarly Eric Hobsbawm's reflections on 'history of society' in the 1960s and 1970s aimed to legitimize his kind of Marxist history in the same way.<sup>9</sup>

Second, theory usually sketches a specific *programme* of doing history. Again Braudel and Hobsbawm can serve as examples, because both argued how 'doing history' would become more 'scientific' when more historians take the notions of *model* and *structure* more seriously and become more aware of the three time-layers of history and of their hierarchy.

Next to its legitimizing and to its programmatic functions, theory has a third function: *demarcation*. Theoretical reflections usually demarcate a specific way of 'doing history' from other ways of 'doing history', which are *excluded* or *degraded*. So the third function of theory is the *drawing of borders* to determine who is included within and who is excluded from the community of 'real' historians. Again Braudel furnishes a simple example in his exclusion of the *histoire événementielle* from the domain of 'scientific' history, and in his embrace of the social sciences as a necessary precondition of 'scientific', 'structural' history.

<sup>5</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York, 2007), 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 198, 234–46.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 174, 210.

<sup>9</sup> See Fernand Braudel, *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris, 1969); and Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, 1998).

## ABOUT THE PLACE OF THEORY IN HISTORY

The institutional place of theory in history has always been marginal at best, and many practising historians with empiricist leanings (like Hunter) have had mixed feelings about theory.<sup>10</sup> This resistance to theory is historically rooted in the opposition that Ranke himself constructed between the methods of history and of philosophy.<sup>11</sup> In this view, theory is something like an uninvited visitor who is always asking the wrong questions at the wrong time *and* at the wrong place and, perhaps worse in the eyes of empiricist historians, too often offering bad answers.

There are historical reasons for this ‘bad news’ view of theory, because since history turned into an academic discipline in the nineteenth century and since it claimed a privileged epistemological status *vis-à-vis* non-professional approaches to history, debates about the role of theory in history have followed a clear pattern. In periods of relative uncertainty about the disciplinary status of history, debates about theory tended to be heated and widespread. In those periods, *Theoriedebatten* and *Methodenstreit* were visible even in the centre of the disciplinary stage, while in periods of relative certainty and of academic recognition, this type of debate usually receded to the margins of the discipline (or beyond).

Seen from an historical point of view, widespread discussion on the role of theory in history is in a sense a symptom of challenge, of epistemological uncertainty, or even of ‘crisis’. Since Kuhn has suggested a direct connection between ‘crises’ and ‘scientific revolutions’—and since challengers of dominant paradigms have been paraded as Kuhnian revolutionaries—there has been an extra sensitivity of historians to diagnoses of ‘crisis’.<sup>12</sup>

This direct connection between theoretical discussions and (un)certainly within the discipline makes sense because discussions of this sort concern the discipline’s epistemological foundations and—based on its epistemological claims—its societal functions.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, debates about theory in history always involve history’s disciplinary credentials. Because the discipline’s status is dependent on its claims to epistemological superiority, claims and challenges to history’s ‘objectivity’—as the fundamental concept underpinning all scientific disciplines since the mid-nineteenth century—have usually been central, directly or indirectly, to the theoretical debates.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See John Zammito, ‘Historians and Philosophy of Historiography’, in Tucker (ed.), *Companion*, 64.

<sup>11</sup> See Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, ‘Introduction’, in Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History* (Indianapolis, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> See Zammito, ‘Historians and Philosophy of Historiography’, 63–84.

<sup>13</sup> See Chris Lorenz, ‘History, Forms of Representation and Functions’, in Neil Smelser and Paul Baltus (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 10 (Oxford, 2001), 6835–42.

<sup>14</sup> See Allan Megill (ed.), *Rethinking Objectivity* (Durham, 1994); and Peter Kosso, ‘Philosophy of Historiography’, in Tucker (ed.), *Companion*, 11.

Seen from the point of view of the sociology of science, debates about the role of theory have usually been directly linked to battles waged by the proponents of different conceptions of history for scientific legitimacy and supremacy, that is, for academic recognition and reputation. In periods of serious competition for 'intellectual capital' between several competing factions in the same 'disciplinary field', debates about theory have been intense. This not only holds true for history, but also for the (other?) social sciences such as sociology, economics, and psychology. Therefore, this type of debate is especially a characteristic of pluralistic or polyparadigmatic disciplines.<sup>15</sup>

Typical for the periods of increased interest in theory is usually also an increased interest in the history of the discipline in question. This interest in disciplinary history is usually motivated by a desire to locate the preferred conception in the origins—preferably in its 'founding fathers'—of the discipline in order to increase its academic credentials. Therefore, in history an increased interest in historiography can usually be observed alongside an increased interest in theory. The remarkable growth of interest in historiography of the last decade is thus not unrelated to the uncertainty following the flowering of postmodern theory within the confines of disciplinary history.<sup>16</sup>

Seen from a philosophical point of view, debates about theory in history also have been marginal at best. Although there have been quite a few philosophers—from Kant and Hegel over Nietzsche and Heidegger to Foucault and Habermas—who have philosophized about the nature of history, in most parts of the world the philosophy of history did *not* develop into one of the recognized philosophical specializations, and remained a reserve of the happy (and hardly institutionalized) few. Theory in history has therefore largely remained a specialization of a small number of philosophers and of 'reflexive practitioners' of history.

## THEORY IN PRACTICE: HISTORIANS DEFINING HISTORY

Because theory of history consists of the *reflexive discussions* about what the object(s) and language(s) of history—including its method—is and should be, we can expect theory in action when historians define their discipline. As the question 'What is history?' usually pops up more frequently in times of disciplinary uncertainty, we can expect the definitions to pop up in the same periods. In the post-Second World War era, the 1960s and 1970s were such a period,

<sup>15</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Specificity of the Scientific Field', in Ch. Lemert (ed.), *French Sociology: Renewal and Rupture since 1968* (New York, 1981), 257–93; and Christopher Lloyd, 'Historiographic Schools', in Tucker (ed.), *Companion*, 371–81.

<sup>16</sup> See Beverley Southgate, 'Postmodernism', in Tucker (ed.), *Companion*, 540–50; and Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (eds.), *Manifestos for History* (London, 2007).

producing a rich harvest of definitions which tried to establish history's *genus proximum* and its *differentia specifica*.

In Germany, Karl-Georg Faber did his best to find solid ground in the definitional swamps. The conclusion of his broad stocktaking of definitions was, however, that the object of history comprises 'human activities and suffering in the past'.<sup>17</sup> Faber thus remained ambivalent on the relationship between history and the social sciences. Although he claimed to be able to see 'qualitative differences' between them, based on the focus on particularity—on the *Einmaligkeit*—of history and on generality of the social sciences, elsewhere he described this difference as 'relative'. This relationship remained, in his words, 'a difficult problem' because the social sciences were also interested in human comings and goings, which did not help a great deal in establishing history's identity.<sup>18</sup>

The English historian G. R. Elton fundamentally disagreed with all such ambivalent designations. While he accepted that history and social sciences such as sociology share the same object, namely 'everything that men have said, thought, done or suffered', he argued that they differ in the way they approach this object. History, according to Elton, is characterized by its concern with *events*, its concern with *change*, and its concern with the *particular*.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, turning to France, it is—again—difficult to avoid Fernand Braudel, but we will seek in vain for a clear definition of the object and method of history from him. That is so because, in his view, all the social sciences cover the same ground, which is 'the actions of human beings in the past, present and future'. Braudel expresses regret that this terrain had, in the past, been parcelled out among the different social sciences, as a consequence of which, each of these disciplines had felt the need to defend its boundaries if necessary by annexing the neighbouring territory: 'Every social science is imperialist, even if they deny it: they are in the habit of presenting their insights as a global vision of humanity', observed Braudel.<sup>20</sup> To restore the unity of the social sciences and put an end to pointless border disputes, it was in his view necessary to reintegrate all the social sciences. Braudel argued that evidence for the possibility of this can be found in the common language used by all the social sciences, at the heart of which are the concepts of *structure* and *model*. The idea that history can be distinguished from the social sciences because historians focus on events and social scientists on structures (as Elton argued) was, therefore, according to Braudel, absolutely wrong. The same could be said of the questioning of the use of models by historians. The main difference between history and the (other) social sciences is not that history addresses particular aspects of phenomena, while the (other) social sciences are said only to be concerned with general aspects. Both branches

<sup>17</sup> Karl-Georg Faber, *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Munich, 1974), 23–44.

<sup>18</sup> On the social sciences, see Ch. 10 by Kevin Passmore in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (London, 1967), 8, 20–4.

<sup>20</sup> Braudel, *Écrits sur l'histoire*, 86.

of the social-scientific family are interested in *both* aspects, according to him. The difference is that they have concerned themselves with different time frames. That, however, is an historical difference rather than one of principle. When history and, for instance, sociology are working with the same time frame, not only do they meet, they converge.<sup>21</sup> Braudel's definition of history is, for this reason, particularly broad: 'the sum of all possible histories—a collection of specialisms and viewpoints, from the past, present and future'.<sup>22</sup>

A fellow French historian, Paul Veyne, offered a fine illustration of the academic imperialism that Braudel warned against. Veyne argued that history has neither a clearly defined object nor a specific historical method. Historians study not only people, but *everything* that happened in the past, and they are concerned with both particular and general aspects. The only restriction historians impose upon themselves is that they do not search for laws, as they leave that to the social scientists. If they are doing anything other than searching for laws, then according to Veyne they are directly entering the terrain belonging to history. Veyne, in other words, lays claim to almost the whole field of the social sciences for history.<sup>23</sup>

Surveying the battleground of definitions of history outlined above can lead to only one conclusion, and this is that there is not even the slightest appearance of an agreement among historians about the *object* of their research, about its *method*, or about its '*scientific*' credentials *vis-à-vis* the social sciences. Nor is there much clarity about what is supposedly the 'core business' of history: specificity as to the dimensions of time and place. The spatial dimension of history even appears to be pretty absent from all definitions. There is not even a consensus about the most minimal definition of history as a discipline concerned with 'mankind in the past', so this surely looks like a battlefield of theory in the disciplinary field of history, even to the most staunch empiricist. This is so because Veyne considers humanity to be too narrow an object—the climate also has a history and so do the forests—while Braudel cannot see any way to separate the present from the past fairly. While Elton regards change—that is, event—as the characteristic of history, Braudel regards the 'un-eventful' alias 'structures' as history's object *par excellence*.

That definitions of history elevate a particular way of 'doing history' to 'the real' or the 'best thing'—like Coca-Cola—becomes abundantly clear when one runs through any list of definitions. All definitions are descriptive and normative at the same time. In the Netherlands, Frank R. Ankersmit made no bones about this normative character of definitions when arguing in favour of a privileged position for cultural history. In his view, no other historical specialization beats

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 107–8, 114.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 55, 97.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris, 1978), 21.

cultural history in terms of ‘methodological soundness’.<sup>24</sup> As all definitions of history rest, in the final analysis, on these kinds of normative judgement—based on the mix of the legitimizing, programmatic, and demarcating functions of theory—controversy about definitions is inextricably bound up with the competition between different schools or paradigms. As Daston and Galison have also argued, notions of ‘objectivity’ in the natural sciences are based on a mix of epistemological ideals and of normative ideals about the ‘scientific self’.<sup>25</sup> It is not only the theoretical claims as to the nature of the discipline that are at stake here, but also the associated reputations, and financial and institutional resources.<sup>26</sup> This entanglement of ideal and material investments in theoretical positions in a discipline—theorized by Bourdieu in his sociology of ‘disciplinary fields’ and by Foucault in his theory of ‘power/knowledge’—may explain why theoretical struggles never concern *only* theory.

#### ABOUT THEORY IN HISTORY (2)

Before discussing the role of theory in history since 1945 it is necessary to present some further conceptual clarification. Due to the double meaning of history as *res gestae* and as *historia rerum gestarum*, theory in history can refer both to *history as an object* and to the *knowledge of that object*. Therefore the first basic distinction to make is the distinction between (a) theories that deal with characteristics of history as an object (such as, for instance, Marx’s theory of history as a process of class struggles, or Herder’s theory of history as a process of nation-formation), and (b) theories that deal with the characteristics of knowledge of history (such as, for instance, that knowledge of history is empirical and has the form of law-like knowledge, or that knowledge of history is based on hermeneutical understanding and has the form of narrative). Theories of type a can be called *material* or *ontological* theories of history because they posit some mode of being of history, while theories of type b can be called *epistemological* in a broad sense because they posit characteristics of historical knowledge. Ontological and epistemological theories are interrelated, because presuppositions about *what* history consists of (ontology or metaphysics) are linked to presuppositions of what historical *knowledge* is (historical epistemology) and to *how* historical knowledge can be achieved (historical methodology).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Frank R. Ankersmit, ‘Éloge voor de cultuurgeschiedenis’, *Theoretische Geschiedenis*, 5 (1978), 3–16.

<sup>25</sup> Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*.

<sup>26</sup> Irmline Veit-Brause, ‘Paradigms, Schools, Traditions: Conceptualizing Shifts and Changes in the History of Historiography’, *Storia della Storiografia*, II (1990), 50–66; and Rolf Thorstendahl and Irmline Veit-Brause (eds.), *History-Making: The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline* (Stockholm, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> See Lorenz, ‘History, Theories and Methods’, 6869–76.



Ontological theories, for instance, that present history as determined or conditioned by underlying mechanisms (for example, of nation-formation or of class struggle or of some other evolutionary principle, producing developmental stages in history) have been interrelated with epistemological theories that posit that knowledge of history implies empirical knowledge of the general (generalizations, theories, or even of law-like statements), and with methodological theories that elucidate how this type of (law-like) explanatory knowledge can be achieved. In the practice of history this kind of theory can be recognized in a strong explanatory emphasis on causal 'factors'.

In contrast with these 'mechanistic' theories, there also are ontological theories of history that posit intentionality, contingency, and meaningful human action (instead of causal mechanisms), which have been interrelated with theories about knowledge of meaning of (intentional) actions and of linguistic expressions, and also with methodological theories that elucidate how this type of (hermeneutic) understanding of meaningful action and of linguistic expression can be achieved. In the practice of history this kind of theory can be recognized in a strong explanatory emphasis on intentional action. It has not been unusual to see the competition between the 'social scientific history' dominating the 1960s and 1970s, and the 'new cultural history' dominating from the 1980s in terms of a change from explanation on basis of causal factors to interpretation on basis of meaningful actors.

Now, since 1945 *all* explicit ontological questions of history have been put under serious suspicion (beginning with Karl Popper) and have no longer been taken seriously. Holistic 'metaphysics' of history, presupposing supra-individual social entities such as 'races' and 'classes', were criticized as the conceptual foundation of totalitarian (Nazi and communist) politics. 'Substantial' philosophy of history was proclaimed dead academically both by logical positivism and by Popper's falsificationism. During the Cold War, historians and philosophers who made their holistic presuppositions explicit, like Marxists and the non-Marxist Arnold Toynbee, were criticized as 'ideologues' or worse, and ontological individualism was dominant.<sup>28</sup> Since the 1980s the anti-essentialist critique of 'grand narratives' in history by postmodernism (starting with Lyotard) renewed this line of critique. The connection between ontological or metaphysical and epistemological problems of history subsequently disappeared from the agenda of theory of history—until, very recently, the ontology of history made its return under the influence of the surge of 'memory',<sup>29</sup> leading to a renewal of interest in ontological questions related to the 'presence' of the past and to the ontology of social objects.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Lars Udehn, 'The Ontology of the Objects of Historiography', in Tucker (ed.), *Companion*, 209–19; Murray Murphey, 'Realism about the Past', *ibid.*, 181–9; and Fabrice Pataut, 'Anti-Realism about the Past', *ibid.*, 190–8.

<sup>29</sup> See Ch. 2 by Alon Confino in this volume.

Although there is little consensus in the domain of theory of history there at least appears to be considerable agreement as to its history since 1945. Most recent overviews agree on a threefold periodization.<sup>30</sup> Between approximately 1945 and 1970 analytical philosophy of history was dominant, to be superseded by narrative philosophy of history from the 1970s to approximately 1990. This latter shift is often seen as a consequence of the ‘linguistic turn’ in history and is also called ‘representationalism’. Since somewhere in the late 1980s a third period has begun in which the themes of ‘memory’, ‘trauma’, ‘the sublime’, and ‘the presence of the past’ are the most salient topics. There is no agreed-upon philosophical label as yet for this tendency, although recently the label of ‘presence’ has been suggested.<sup>31</sup>

### ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY FROM 1945 TO 1970

In the period between 1945 and 1970 the agenda of theory of history was heavily dominated by analytical philosophy of science with its focus on the epistemological problem of verification and the methodological problem of scientific explanation. Carl Hempel’s 1942 article arguing that all ‘scientific’ explanations are based on ‘covering laws’ was without doubt the most important point of reference of most reflections on the disciplinary status of history for some three decades (at least in the English-speaking world).<sup>32</sup> This held both for Hempel’s positivist allies and for his hermeneutic or historicist opponents—such as W. H. Walsh, William H. Dray, Louis O. Mink, and Michael Scriven. Given its origin in (philosophy of) science, this debate in theory of history had strong prescriptive overtones, while its descriptive contents as to the practice of history were weak. The whole discussion centred on epistemological and methodological questions derived from the analytical agenda. How could explanatory claims by historians be justified if not by referring to general laws or law-like general statements? If they could not, did they have a logical form of their own? If historians did not comply with the positivist ‘unity of scientific method’, how and in what sense could history then claim to be ‘objective’?

This debate had already run out of steam in the late 1950s, although it also developed into a new edition of the ‘explanation versus understanding’ debate in the 1960s and 1970s. Analytical philosophy was now put to use in order to explicate the logic of ‘understanding’ human action. ‘Colligatory’, ‘rational’, and

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Brian Fay, Richard Vann, and Philip Pomper (eds.), *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings* (London/New York, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Eelco Runia, ‘Presence’, *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), 1–20.

<sup>32</sup> The fundamental contributions are collected in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History: Readings from Classic and Contemporary Sources* (New York, 1959).

'teleological' explanations were presented by Mink, Walsh, Dray, F. A. Olafson, and G. H. von Wright as the alternative explanatory models for Hempel's covering law model in history. Thus their focus was still on epistemology and on methodology.

Characteristic for this period is that the debates among philosophers and those among historians were hardly connected. Those historians who championed the ideal of 'history as a social science' in the 1970s—such as Charles Tilly and David Landes—hardly ever referred to the debate on the role of general laws in historical explanation, and the philosophers hardly ever referred to debates among historians about history and social science.<sup>33</sup>

On the European continent the situation was different because neo-Kantian, phenomenological, and hermeneutical philosophy of history did not give way to analytical philosophy. In both Germany and France, Max Weber's (neo-Kantian) theory of history was defended and elaborated upon by philosophers such as Raymond Aron, Henri Marrou, and, partly, by Paul Ricoeur. Following the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert, Weber had made a distinction between 'individualizing' and 'generalizing' methods and had characterized history as an 'individualizing' discipline.

When from the 1960s onwards the dominance of logical positivism came to an end in philosophy of science and when Karl Popper and, shortly thereafter, Thomas Kuhn took centre stage, the philosophical contours of the central notions of this whole period, 'science', 'explanation', and 'objectivity' became blurred. Since Kuhn, the (philosophical) idea that science can be characterized in terms of *one* (global) 'method' and of *one* (global) rationality has been undermined.<sup>34</sup> It was replaced by the (historical) presupposition of history of science that science consists of a variety of (local) disciplinary practices with their own (local) logics. From that 'post-positivistic' time onwards 'science' and 'objectivity' turned from 'givens' into new historical and conceptual problems. In this contextualizing and historicizing spirit, disciplinary practices—again the plural—were turned into an object of anthropological study by social studies in science, so it was also about time for theory of history to change. And change did come to theory in history in the early 1970s.

#### NARRATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

In hindsight, Arthur C. Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965) can be seen as the transition between the 'analytical' and the narrative period. Starting

<sup>33</sup> David S. Landes and Charles Tilly (eds.), *History as Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, 1971).

<sup>34</sup> See Ch. 9 by Seymour Maukopf and Alex Roland in this volume.

from the analytical agenda, Danto nevertheless developed a position in which ‘narrative explanation’ was analyzed as an autonomous and legitimate way to explain phenomena in history. He was the first analytical philosopher who took the dimension of *time* seriously because he emphasized that historical explanation is retrospective by definition. Nevertheless, ‘narrative explanation’ in Danto’s view was still a variety of causal explanations, and narrative still a composite of singular statements—and this connection to causal explanation still tied him to positivism and its methodological agenda.

This direct connection to positivism was finally cut by Hayden White in his *Metahistory* (1973). With the benefit of hindsight this book is regarded as the beginning of a new phase in theory of history and of a new agenda. Although White claimed—just as Danto had—that narrative is an autonomous mode of explaining phenomena, he did not defend this claim *vis-à-vis* positivism, nor did he develop any kind of formal ‘proof’ (or deduction) for it. And no longer did White subscribe to the (analytical) idea of narrative as a composite of singular statements. The idea of narrative as a textual whole apart from the singular statements it contains—as a linguistic entity generating a specific viewpoint—first acquired a philosophical foundation in Frank R. Ankersmit’s fundamental *Narrative Logic* in 1981. While in the phase dominated by analytical philosophy the idea of ‘objectivity’ and ‘getting closer to the truth’ had been the leading epistemological virtues, in the phase of narrative philosophy these virtues receded into the background (or were completely given up).

When most theoreticians of history lost their faith in the possibility of ‘objectively’ reconstructing The Past, their interest shifted to the *modes of representation* of the past—to the ‘clothing of Clio’, to use Stephen Bann’s phrase.<sup>35</sup> Characteristic of ‘representationalism’ was that the traditional trust in the ‘transparency’ of narrative had vanished, including the ‘uncritical faith of historians in the neutrality of historical narrative, a faith whose bedrock was fact’.<sup>36</sup>

White suggested that historians, just like novelists, have the freedom to choose between different kinds of narrative ordering or ‘emplotment’ (he discussed four: romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire), and thus between different kinds of explanation. Moreover, he claimed that the facts of history do not limit the historian’s freedom to ‘narrativize’ them. Therefore White argues that in history we are facing ‘the fictions of factual representation’.<sup>37</sup> Historians do not choose a narrative ordering of the facts that they report on *epistemological* grounds,

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1984); and Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Hutton, ‘Recent Scholarship on Memory and History’, *The History Teacher*, 33 (2000), 535.

<sup>37</sup> Hayden White, ‘The Fictions of Factual Representation’, in id., *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), 121–34.

according to White, but rather on *aesthetic* and *political* grounds. So as far as there is methodology in *Metahistory*, it is Paul Feyerabend's anarchistic methodology of 'anything goes'.<sup>38</sup> Feyerabend's arguments 'against method' turned into a starting point of the postmodern critique of the methodical 'disciplinization' of both science (including the humanities) and society. Thus, although it appears at first sight that White's ideas about narrative have simply bypassed positivism as being irrelevant to history, it can be argued that many of his central arguments are actually directed squarely *against* positivism and even represent its inversion.<sup>39</sup>

However this may be, there can be little doubt that White cleared the ground for a new type of theory of history while setting its new agenda, centred around 'the question of narrative' and spreading into new and intensive discussions about the old question of how the object and the method of history and the humanities could be defined. Discussions about interpretation, hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer), deconstruction (Jacques Derrida), 'thick description' (Clifford Geertz), New Historicism (Stephen Greenblatt), and Critical Theory (Jürgen Habermas) dominated the agenda of philosophy of the human sciences for some time to come, although usually outside the walls of history departments.<sup>40</sup>

After White, other philosophers of narrative picked up his lead but used other sources of philosophical inspiration. Ankersmit used Leibniz to turn analytical philosophy against itself in order to arrive at an holistic view of narrative in his 'narrative logic'. Ricoeur combined phenomenology and analytical philosophy to arrive at a narrative philosophy in which temporality is presented as the hallmark not only of narratives, but of social life as such—which Ricoeur viewed as itself narratively structured. Along this path, ontology (of time) also made its way back into theory of history. Jörn Rüsen followed a similar phenomenological philosophical trail, although his narrative philosophy also incorporated the basic Enlightenment ideas of Jürgen Habermas.<sup>41</sup>

Although in the period of narrative philosophy there was much more communication between the historians' and the philosophers' discourses than before—most discussants at this time were also trained as historians—the rich proliferation of narrative positions and their focus on the notion of representation in the course of the 1980s came at a price. The staunch linguistic predilections, especially of White and Ankersmit—both of whom argued that narratives

<sup>38</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: An Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1975).

<sup>39</sup> I have argued for this view in 'Narrativism, Positivism and the "Metaphorical Turn"', *History and Theory*, 37 (1998), 309–29.

<sup>40</sup> For overviews of this post-empiricist philosophy see, for instance, Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Historische Vernunft: Die Grundlagen der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1983).

are *just* linguistic constructs without controllable referential strings attached to 'the real'—collided with the realistic presuppositions of most practising historians who clung to the presupposition that history aims to reconstruct the past, not merely to 'tell a story' about it. Although the ideals of 'resurrecting' the past and 'reenactment' in past persons 'objectively' have been given up for good epistemological reasons this does not imply that the idea of reconstructing the past is dubious or unsound. In defence of this idea, historians like Allan Megill and Anthony Grafton have argued that 'doing history' consists not only of constructing narratives, but also of doing research and of constructing a bridge between the two which anchors narratives in the evidence of the past. Both ingredients of 'doing history' belong inextricably together. The epistemological questions of narrativism, thrown out by White and Ankersmit through the front door, thus have reappeared at the back.<sup>42</sup>

This point of view experienced a considerable tailwind by an unexpected 'return of the past' itself in the guise of 'memory' after the political earthquake of 1989/1990.<sup>43</sup> This leads me to the third and last phase of the history of theory, in which new approaches in history have tended to become explicitly self-reflexive and theoretically self-conscious.

#### THE 'PRESENCE' OF HISTORY SINCE 1990

Broadly speaking, one can observe around 1990 a new agenda emerging in theory of history, primarily connected to the rise of memory studies. Next to the central issues of the former two periods—that is the issue of historical explanation and the issue of historical representation—(1) the issue of 'The Other', (2) the issue of the traumatic past, and (3) the issue of the use of language as a form of action, made it on to the agenda of theory.

First, attention has been directed to the *subjects*—in the *plural*—of representation and their different representational codes. Under the influence of multiculturalism and postmodernism, the unitary Self of epistemology was 'de-centred' and fell apart into a variety of contesting Collective Selves—such as gender, race, ethnicity, colonial, and class ('*who* are representing the past and *why* are they doing it the way they do?'). Even the 'Scientific Self' is no longer seen as unitary: it has a history of its own. Since the idea of a subjectless 'objectivity' was given up, and the problem of 'subjectivity' entered the discipline of history through the front door, the problem of perspectivity had to be faced (as several earlier theorists since Nietzsche had argued). As a consequence, historical narratives can no longer be written without reflecting on the problem of the

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

<sup>43</sup> See Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, 2002).

perspectivity of both the actors in the text *and* of the author(s) of the text. Narratives can only be written in an ‘up-to-date’ manner by integrating this plurality of perspectives somehow.<sup>44</sup>

Second, under the influence of memory studies, the focus has changed to traumatic experiences in the past, otherwise known as the presence of the traumatic past. On the trail of Holocaust studies, memory studies have been overwhelmingly devoted to traumatic memories and thus to victim perspectives.<sup>45</sup> This emphasis on the victims of history was also an extension of the ‘history from below’ approaches which were developed predominantly in social, gender, subaltern, and microhistory from the 1970s onwards, and which focused on the repressed and silenced voices in the past.

The third change of focus is exemplified, first, in the interest in Foucauldian discourse analysis and, second, in the interest in the performative character of language (the so-called performative turn, based on J. L. Austin and John Searle). Both lines of analysis are based on the insight that the use of language is not just a medium of representation, but also a form of *social action* alias of *practice*—an insight that Charles Taylor traces back to Wilhelm von Humboldt.<sup>46</sup>

I shall elaborate on these three changes in the reverse order because I want to conclude my analysis by returning to the ‘objectivity question’.

*The third change.* Foucault’s approach to the past can best be understood on the basis of his use of Clausewitz because he turned the statement of the latter that ‘war is an extension of politics by other means’ into the insight that ‘all politics is an extension of war by other means’. Warfare by linguistic means is crucial because language is not only a carrier of meaning, but also ‘goes out to do battle’. Combined with the view that all history is past politics and all politics is present history, Foucault started a critical ‘history of the present’ into the ways in which ‘language does battle’, and into the ‘microphysics of power’ (‘*how* and under which power relations were the subjects and objects of history constructed in practices?’). According to Foucault’s social constructivist theory of ‘power/knowledge’, a discipline imposes its own set of rules for the distinction of ‘the normal’ and ‘the abnormal’ and for the distinction of the truth and falsity of statements. He coined those sets of rules ‘truth regimes’ which regulate the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (of legitimate statements and forms of acceptable behaviour) in specific societal domains. This holds not only for the disciplines and disciplinary practices Foucault himself has analyzed—like

<sup>44</sup> See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond The Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

<sup>45</sup> See Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner, ‘The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History’, in Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, 2006), 284–310, 286.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1985), 215–48.

psychiatry, criminology, and sexology—but for all disciplines in the human sciences.<sup>47</sup>

Edward Said famously applied Foucault's theory of 'power/knowledge' to the discourse of 'orientalism', thereby contributing to the spectacular rise of postcolonial theory. Said argued that orientalism was a product of Western imperialism, which it was intended to further from the very start. As a geographical and as a cultural notion 'the Orient' was little else than a product of 'Othering' by 'the Occident'. The characteristics projected on 'the Orient'—its mysteriousness, irrationality, and sexuality, for instance—resulted from the inversion of the characteristics which were used for the description of the West.<sup>48</sup> Said argued that in this manner there is a 'politics of space' at work in the humanities—already present in the geographical labels (like 'Lebensraum', 'unreclaimed land', and 'buffer state'). In *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) Nancy Todorova argued that the same mechanisms are at work in the description of Europe's own marginal zones.

A similar interest in the constructive and performative function of language can be found in Anglo-Saxon speech act theory and the so-called Cambridge School of the History of Political Thought, of which J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner are the best-known representatives. Building on Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Austin and Searle have analyzed the so-called performative function of language, meaning forms of speech that are at the same time forms of action. The point of a performative utterance is that the utterance itself constitutes *doing* something in the world. When US President George W. Bush said to his generals in 2003, 'I order you to conquer [or: liberate] Iraq', Bush was not merely speaking, he was also performing or acting: he was giving an order. The same applies to summoning, greeting, warning, making promises and contracts, marrying, signing peace treaties, and so on. To understand the performative meaning of utterances, therefore, we need to know their context of action, or the 'language game' of which they form a part and within which they are being used (just as we can only understand chess moves in the context of a game of chess).

Skinner went on from this view of the use of language as a form of social action to attach to it the consequence that the meaning of a text is formed by what the author 'intended in *doing*' in the context: 'To understand any serious utterance, we need to grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but at the same time the intended force with which the utterance is issued. We need, that is, to grasp not merely what people are saying but also what they are *doing* in saying it'.<sup>49</sup> To understand the meaning of an historical utterance or text, therefore, it is

<sup>47</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, 1980).

<sup>48</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth, 1985). See Ch. 4 by Gyan Prakash in this volume.

<sup>49</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1: *Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 82.



not sufficient to read the utterance or text itself. The context of the text must also be studied. Skinner argues that this means that the distinction between text and context becomes relative.<sup>50</sup>

In a similar vein, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999) analyzed the distinction between (gender-)identity and action in performative terms, arguing that (gender-)identities are the *result* of specific performances—of specific ways of social action—and not individually ‘pregiven’ and then *expressed* in social action. As a consequence of this new ‘social’ line of argument, the ontology of social objects—like groups, discourses, and the *Zeitgeist*—has resurfaced on theory’s agenda again, challenging the former hegemony of ontological and of methodological individualism.<sup>51</sup>

*The second change.* While discourse analysis, historical semantics, or conceptual history in the fashions of Foucault, Said, and Skinner, could be interpreted as subspecies of the ‘new cultural history’, trauma as a new topic is posing a more fundamental challenge to history as a discipline because it questions the very distinction between the present and the past.<sup>52</sup> In trauma the past refuses to become history—‘to go away’—because it remains somehow present. Therefore this phenomenon does not fit into the irreversible, linear time conception of the discipline of history, according to which the present transforms into the past automatically just by the passage of time. Traumatic experience unsettles history’s basic temporal distinction between the present and the past by denying the presupposition of ‘the pastness of the past’ and its underlying conception of linear and irreversible time. It also unsettles the fundamental presupposition of representationalism *à la* White and Ankersmit that the past is *only* present in the form of representations. If it makes sense to discuss ‘the return of the repressed’ in, for instance, German or Holocaust history, then surely the repressed past must exist in some form in the present. In this vein, Eelco Runia has argued that in contrast to what representationalism posits, the past is exactly present in what is *not* represented: it is, for instance, present in our *mémoire involuntaire*. Therefore it is possible to be ‘overwhelmed’ by the past and to remember things later on we did not know before.<sup>53</sup>

It is no accident that the Holocaust, especially, has stimulated philosophical reflection on the time conception of history because irreversible time cannot account for the presence of the traumatic past as exemplified in Holocaust survivors like Yitzhak (Ante) Zuckerman, who told his interviewer Claude Lanzmann in ‘Shoah’ in 1985: ‘If you could lick my heart, it would poison you’. In order to account for this sort of experience, Lawrence Langer has

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> For the pitfalls of trauma, see Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Genealogy of a Category Mistake: A Critical Intellectual History of the Cultural Trauma Metaphor’, *Rethinking History*, 8 (2004), 193–221.

<sup>53</sup> Eelco Runia, ‘Spots of Time’, *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), 305–6.

proposed the distinction between *chronological time* and *durational time*. ‘Chronological time is the “normal” flowing, passing time of “normal” history’ while ‘durational time resists precisely the closure—the putting an end to the past—that chronological time necessarily effects; durational time persists as a past that will not pass, hence as a past always present’, as Gabrielle Spiegel phrased it.<sup>54</sup>

Following the ontological trail, Berber Bevernage recently called for a renewed reflection on the relation between history and *justice*, and their implicit notions of irreversible and of reversible time respectively.<sup>55</sup> He argues that history’s conception of irreversible time is in a sense *amoral*, because it does not account for the experience of trauma—of continuing suffering—of those who have been victims of historical injustices in the past. He seeks to overcome this problem by adopting Derrida’s notion of spectral time, which goes beyond the dichotomy of absence and presence (of the past), and which is still used by Runia. At the same time he interprets the difference between the past and the present not as a ‘given’, but as a *performative* distinction: that is, as the result of speech acts. The past does not somehow automatically ‘break off’ the present, as Ankersmit posits, but only results from the *performative act* of ‘breaking up’.<sup>56</sup> Bevernage’s analysis of the political struggles and debates of the truth commissions in Argentina, South Africa, and Sierra Leone in demarcating the past from the present offers telling insights into the contested, political aspects of ‘breaking up’. At the same time his case studies show what fundamental insights the ‘performative turn’ in history may yield.<sup>57</sup> This renewed interest in the *philosophy* of historical time is also inspired by the renewed interest in the *history* of historical time, as exemplified in the publications of Reinhart Koselleck, François Hartog, Peter Fritzsche, Lynn Hunt, and Lucian Hölscher in particular.<sup>58</sup>

In the context of postcolonial theory Dipesh Chakrabarty has proposed the concept of *historical wounds* in order to make sense of traumatic experience due to injustices in the past. ‘Historical wounds’ are the result of historical injustices caused by past actions of states which have not been recognized as injustices. The genocidal treatment of the ‘First Nations’ by the colonial states in the former white settler colonies represents a clear historical example of this category. Using Charles Taylor’s analysis of ‘the politics of recognition’, Chakrabarty argues that ‘misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous

<sup>54</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, ‘Memory and History: Liturgical Time and Historical Time’, *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), 159.

<sup>55</sup> Berber Bevernage, ‘Time, Presence, and Historical Injustice’, *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 149–67.

<sup>56</sup> Frank Ankersmit, *The Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, 2006), 265.

<sup>57</sup> See Frank van Vree, Karin Tilmans, and Jay Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past: History, Memory, and Identity* (Amsterdam, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> François Hartog, *Régimes d’historicité: Presentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2003); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Times and the Melancholy of History* (Harvard, 2004); Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest/New York, 2008); and Lucian Hölscher, *Semantik der Leere: Grenzfragen der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen 2009).

wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred'. Here it makes good sense to speak with Chakrabarty of a 'particular mix of history and memory':

Historical wounds are not the same as historical truths but the latter constitute a condition of possibility of the former. Historical truths are broad, synthetic generalizations based on researched collections of individual historical facts. They could be wrong but they are always amenable to verification by methods of historical research. Historical wounds, on the other hand, are a mix of history and memory and hence their truth is not verifiable by historians. Historical wounds cannot come into being, however, without the prior existence of historical truths.<sup>59</sup>

Because 'historical wounds' are dependent on the (political) recognition of the perpetrator groups—usually at the level of 'their' state—they are 'dialogically formed' and not 'permanent formations'. Since this recognition of 'historical injustices' also depends on the recognition of universal human rights, the phenomenon of 'historical wounds' illustrates the interdependency of history, politics, law, and ethics.

*The first change.* With the problem of 'historical wounds' and of 'durational time' the very notion of 'objectivity' of history as a discipline is turning into an urgent problem—not only in practice but also in theory—because since Ranke *distance in time* has been regarded as a necessary condition of 'objectivity' in history.<sup>60</sup> Temporal distance and 'objectivity' were actually *identified* with each other because interested 'partisanship' (and interested actors)—religious, political, or otherwise—needed time in order to disappear and to give way to 'supra-partisan' perspectives alias 'objectivity'. As Mark Phillips argued, in historicism (*Historismus*) the notions of distance and of history were practically indistinguishable.<sup>61</sup>

Temporal distance between the past and the present was also seen as necessary because in historicism the consequences of events and developments—their future-dimension or *Nachgeschichte*, so to speak—must be known before historians can judge and explain them 'objectively'. This is another ground why the idea of irreversible 'flowing' linear time formed and forms the very basis of history as a discipline.

This view on the relation between time and 'objectivity' explains the very late birth of *contemporary* history as a specialization within academic history. Only in the 1960s in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust did contemporary history slowly gain recognition as a specialization of academic history, manifesting itself in chairs, journals, and so on. From Ranke's days

<sup>59</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'History and the Politics of Recognition', in Jenkins, Morgan, and Munslow (eds.), *Manifestos for History*, 77–8.

<sup>60</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, Wolfgang Justin Mommsen, and Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit* (Munich, 1977).

<sup>61</sup> Mark Phillips, 'Distance and Historical Representation', *History Workshop Journal*, 57 (2004), 123–41.

contemporary history was primarily seen as an impossible mix of ‘the past’ and ‘the present’—as a *contradictio in adiecto*—signalling the unreflected and un-theorized status of time within history as a discipline.

For space and spatial differentiations in history a basically similar story can be told as for time, including its direct and fundamental connection to the discipline’s idea of ‘objectivity’. Although history from its beginning claimed to be a discipline specific to *both* time and space, its conception of space was not reflected upon and taken for granted. Karl Schlögl’s recent analysis of the ‘spatial atrophy’ of history and of ‘the disappearance’ of space in history certainly comes timely.<sup>62</sup>

The explanation of this ‘disappearance’ is that in much history the spatial framework of the nation-state was implicitly taken for granted and larger spatial units, like empires, were conceived as composites of nations and nation-states. This ‘special connection’ between academic history and the nation/state has recently been emphasized by a number of experts in historiography.<sup>63</sup>

For most academic historians of the nineteenth century, identification with their state and nation (or ‘people’, ‘race’, ‘tribe’, which terms were used as synonyms of ‘nation’) came naturally, because they identified the historical process *itself* with the genesis and development of nations and ‘their’ states.<sup>64</sup> On the basis of this (Herderian) ontology of history, *national* history appeared as *the* adequate representation of the historical process—as its ‘natural mode of being’ in Daniel Woolf’s phrasing.<sup>65</sup> As far as world or universal history was concerned, it was primarily conceived of as a ‘sum’ of national histories and therefore typically as a project for the *future*.

This ontology of history also explains why historians of the nation regarded their nationalistic narratives as ‘true’ and/or as ‘objective’. ‘Objectivity’ was basically conceived as leaving partisanship behind—in terms of religious and political affiliations—*within* the space of the nation. This connection explains why historians well into the twentieth century regarded ‘the’ point of view of ‘the’ nation as the ‘objective’ point of view, and why they did not experience a tension between their striving after ‘objectivity’ and their role as ‘half-priests and half-soldiers’ of their nation. Telling for the continuing hold of the national

<sup>62</sup> Karl Schlögl, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Georg G. Iggers, ‘The Professionalization of Historical Studies’, Lloyd Kramer and Sarah C. Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2007), 234; and Stefan Berger (ed.), *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (Houndmills, 2007), 1–30.

<sup>64</sup> See Joep Leersen, ‘Nation and Ethnicity’, in Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds.), *The Contested Nation: Religion, Ethnicity, Class and Gender in National Histories* (Houndmills, 2008), 75–104.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Woolf, ‘Of Nations, Nationalism, and National Identity: Reflections on the Historiographic Organization of the Past’, in Q. Edward Wang and Franz Fillafer (eds.), *Many Faces of Clío: Cross-cultural Approaches to Historiography in Honour of Georg G. Iggers* (New York, 2007), 73.

framework on history is that many of its fundamental critics since the 1970s—in the name of class, ethnicity, or gender—have also remained within this spatial framework. Only with the recent debates about postcolonial, transnational, comparative, global, world, and big history has the spatial framing of history been turned into an explicit problem and object of discussion. The same holds true for the ‘spatialization of time’ and for the ‘waiting hall’ idea of history: that is, for the identification of the ‘Western’ parts of the world as being ‘ahead’ in time and of the ‘non-Western’ parts as ‘not yet there’.<sup>66</sup>

All in all, at the beginning of the twenty-first century in theory of history we can observe, first, a remarkable return to the problems of historical ontology—especially concerning the discipline’s presuppositions with respect to time and space and with respect to the ontology of social objects. Remarkable, too, is the return of the problem of the relationship of history to politics, law, and ethics—and thereby the distinction between what Michael Oakeshott called the ‘historical’ and the ‘practical’ past.<sup>67</sup> Both problems of ontology and of politics, justice, and ethics in relation to history had been rigorously ‘skipped’ in the agenda of theory of history as ‘pseudo problems’ during the reign of empiricism, so it makes good sense to interpret this fact as ‘the return of the repressed’.

Simultaneously the problems of historical epistemology and of historical methodology have not disappeared from theory’s agenda since the rise of the memory boom after the mid-1980s. The methodological discussions about how to compare in a transnational and a transfer context are heated.<sup>68</sup> And although the problems of historical ‘objectivity’, of historical method, and of historical explanation/interpretation have also been historicized and contextualized, they are also still being discussed in epistemic and in logical terms.<sup>69</sup> This looks like the lasting legacy of the period 1945–70 and of analytical philosophy in theory of history, although the former idea of both the ‘unity’ of ‘scientific’ and of ‘historical method’ has usually been replaced by the idea of a fundamental variety.<sup>70</sup> Even the classical question whether there is an explanatory role for ‘laws’ and ‘mechanisms’ in history—reflecting the conditioning influences of, for instance, ecological, social, and political structures—has recently returned, especially through global and ‘big’ history.<sup>71</sup> A similar return can be observed

<sup>66</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), 104–12.

<sup>68</sup> See Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Geschichte und Vergleich* (Frankfurt, 1996); and Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), 30–50.

<sup>69</sup> Raymond Martin, *The Past within Us: An Empirical Approach to the Philosophy of History* (Princeton, 1989); and Jonathan Gorman, *Historical Judgement: The Limits of Historiographical Choice* (Toronto, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Christian Meier and Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Methode* (Munich, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> See Stephan Berry, ‘The Laws of History’, in Tucker (ed.), *Companion*, 162–71.

concerning the classical question of what ‘understanding the past’ means and how this is possible.<sup>72</sup>

The lasting legacy of the period 1970–90 and of narrativism appears to be the awareness of the theoretical impossibility of a ‘God’s eye point of view’ and thus of the circumstance that all our knowledge of the past is mediated by representations and perspectives. Traditionally these are textual representations, but there is a growing awareness that audio and visual representations are becoming increasingly important at the expense of the textual type. The latter change is often indicated as the ‘iconical’ or the ‘visual turn’. Connected with this ‘turn’ is the recognition that each medium of representation—text, interview, photograph, documentary, film, and interactive videogame—follows its own rules and own logic. The same goes for the digitization of information and the use of the Internet, which are now beginning to become objects of theoretical reflection in history.<sup>73</sup> Given our inescapable representational predicament in history, the historicization of, and the reflection on, the competing representational forms of history are often mentioned as the best rational way of dealing with this predicament.<sup>74</sup>

Where the period beginning around 1990 is leading theory of history is impossible to foretell. One thing, however, may be clear already: given the increasing theoretical awareness of the ‘new approaches’ to history, and given the increasing self-reflexivity of its practitioners, we can safely conclude that, in the debate over ‘theory’ in history, Jameson was right and Hunter was definitely wrong.

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<sup>72</sup> Hans H. Kögler and Karsten R. Stueber (eds.), *Empathy and Agency: The Problem of Understanding in the Human Sciences* (Boulder, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Alternate Worlds and Invented Communities: History and Historical Consciousness in the Age of Interactive Media’, in Jenkins, Morgan, and Munslow (eds.), *Manifestos for History*, 131–49.

<sup>74</sup> Werner and Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison’; Arif Dirlik, ‘Performing the World: Reality and Representation in the Making of World History(ies)’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington D.C.*, 37 (2005), 9–27; and Chris Lorenz, ‘Towards a Theoretical Framework for Comparing Historiographies: Some Preliminary Considerations’, in Seixas (ed.) *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, 25–49.

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